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|  | EUROPEAN COMMISSIONDIRECTORATE-GENERALREGIONAL AND URBAN POLICYDirector-General |



Questions and Answers

Questions and Answers

**Disclaimer:** This file includes answers to Member States’ questions on the provisions relevant to the Funds covered by the CPR. The answers on this file express the view of the Commission services and do not commit the European Commission. Only the Court of Justice of the European Union is competent to authoritatively interpret Union law.

# QA00001 - Can natural persons’ electric car purchases be supported in the next programming period from ERDF/CF under PO2?

  *Relevant Articles:* Article 5 and 7 ERDF/CF regulation

* Member State:*HU

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can natural persons’ electric car purchases be supported in the next programming period from ERDF/CF under PO2?

Hungary has a similar support scheme in place (electric cars for individuals, ~ 3000 EUR / 1M HUF per car), funded from national sources, and would like to involve ESIF sources.

**Answer:**

*This answer was updated on 11 October 2021 to reflect the changes following from the adoption of the ERDF regulation.*

In relation to hybrid electric vehicles, Article 7(1)(h)(iii), ERDF/CF allows supporting clean vehicles as defined in Directive 2009/33/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council for public purposes. As such, it does not provide the possibility to purchase hybrid electric cars by private households.

The purchase of fully electric passenger cars for individuals is not explicitly excluded in the ERDF/CF regulation. However, analogically to the approach agreed by the co-legislators for clean vehicles, the support should target only vehicles used for public purposes.

Cohesion policy is an investment policy and does not support the purchase of electric passenger cars for individuals, which in accounting terms belongs to the category of private consumption. Such support would not improve access to services and would have limited impact on the overall performance of the transport system. Therefore, supporting electro-mobility should focus on publicly accessible charging infrastructure (where there are market failures leading to regional disparities) and on the vehicles and infrastructure providing public transport services. Such investments reinforce the sustainability of the entire system and for all its users.

# QA00002 - Eligibility of VAT under cohesion policy rules in the 2021-2027 programming period

**** *Relevant Article:* Article 64 of the CPR

* Member State* : PL

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

Poland asked for confirmation of their approach for the assessment of the eligibility of VAT in the 2021-2027 period. They consider, as a general rule, that eligibility of VAT is to be assessed in accordance with the right for the beneficiary to ‘deduct’ VAT or to obtain a ‘refund’ of VAT paid on goods and services purchased, based on the rules specific to the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. The proposed approach is as follows:

1) As a general rule, in order to identify the eligibility of VAT, it is necessary to assess its recoverability, i.e. recoverable VAT under national legislation is considered as ineligible, even if the beneficiary (or final recipient in the context of financial instruments, in the case of grant-supported part of the investment) does not recover the VAT.

 2) As an exception to this rule, eligibility of VAT within the operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 million (including VAT) is **not to be assessed** in regard to the right for the beneficiary (or final recipient) to recover the VAT under national legislation. Consequently, in any such a project, VAT is eligible notwithstanding the provisions of Article 63(2) of the CPR (in line with which, expenditure shall be eligible if it has been **incurred** by a beneficiary **and paid** between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2029) or the provisions of Article 53(1)(a) of the CPR (in line with which, grants provided by Member States to beneficiaries may take the form of reimbursement of eligible costs actually **incurred** by a beneficiary **and paid** in implementing operations).

 3) As a consequence of not examining the right to recover the VAT within the operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 million (including VAT), situation where the beneficiary (final recipient) recovers the VAT is not to be qualified as unjustified double financial benefit.

 4) The approach described in 1) – 3) is applicable also for the grants in the form of simplified cost options (Article 53(1)(b-d) of the CPR) or financing not linked to costs (Article 53(1)(f) of the CPR).

 5) In order to ensure common and constant base for converting the amount of total cost of the operation (EUR 5 million, including VAT) into the currency of the Member State (PLN), the applicants and beneficiaries shall use the European Commission’s official monthly accounting rates for the euro

(<http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/inforeuro/index_en.cfm>)

 - of the day of the given call for proposals. This solution (fixing the rates) will avoid the problem of varying exchange rate (situations where the total cost of the operation expressed in EUR exceeds the 5 million threshold during the implementation of the operation, but only as a result of exchange rate fluctuation).

6) Changes of the total cost of operation during the implementation shall be taken into account accordingly, i.e.:– for operations originally below the 5 million threshold – if during the implementation the total cost exceeds the threshold, Article 64(1)(c) (ii) or (iii) applies,– for operations originally above the 5 million threshold – if during the implementation the total cost falls below the threshold, Article 64(1)(c)(i) applies.

 Poland would like Commission confirmation of the proposed approach.

**Answer:**

1) It is in the first instance for the managing authority to ensure compliance with regulatory provisions. Based on the information provided, the proposed approach under points 1 to 3 is correct and corresponds to the provisions of Article 64 of the CPR.

In particular, applicable provisions on grant support apply regardless of the form of support and hence cover simplified costs and financing not linked to costs.

As regards points 5 and 6, the threshold of EUR 5 000 000 is indeed to be verified against the actual costs of the operation, taking into account possible cost overruns during implementation. It is proposed to carry out this assessment on the basis of the amount in the grant agreement, as the actual costs are not known in advance, consistently with the practices applied during the 2014-2020 programming period[[i]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/Selection%20of%20QAs%20for%20semi-public%20platform/QAs%20for%20publication%201%20September/CLEAN_revised_FINAL_QA%20170_eligibility%20of%20VAT.docx#_edn1) and because the grant agreement usually entails a mature estimation of the costs. The conversion into euro should therefore be made on the basis of the amount indicated in the grant agreement, by using the monthly accounting exchange rate of the Commission in the month during which the grant agreement was last amended.

2) As regards implementation of operations using simplified cost options (SCOs):

* It is reminded that SCOs have to be defined in advance and must be included in the call for proposals. This means that once SCOs are established they should not be changed during or after the implementation of an operation to compensate for an increase in costs or underutilisation of the available budget. In an exceptional situation where increase of a budget of an operation implemented based on SCOs is accepted, an assessment should be done in line with the principles described below.
* For operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT), VAT is eligible.
* For operations the total cost of which is at least EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT):
	+ In case of reimbursement of costs based on a flat rate, VAT eligibility is assessed for the basis costs, i.e. the costs to which the flat rate is applied. As regards the “real” costs covered by  flat rate (i.e. costs underlying categories of expenditure reimbursed based on the flat rate), VAT eligibility will not be assessed;
	+ In case of reimbursement of operations based on unit costs and/or lump sums, if the MA applies the same SCO rate for all operations (regardless whether they are above or below EUR 5 000 000), in practice no adjustment is needed.

[[i]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/Selection%20of%20QAs%20for%20semi-public%20platform/QAs%20for%20publication%201%20September/CLEAN_revised_FINAL_QA%20170_eligibility%20of%20VAT.docx#_ednref1) Guidance on sampling methods EGESIF\_16-0014-01 of 20/01/2017, section 7.10.1

# QA00003 - Eligibility of depreciation costs

**** *Relevant Article* *:* Article 67(2)(d) of the CPR

* Member State* : LT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Managing Authority (MA) is asking for an interpretation of Art. 67 (2)(d) draft CPR, which states that

 2. Depreciation costs for which no payment supported by invoices has been made may be considered to be eligible where the following conditions are fulfilled:

(d)     public grants have not contributed towards the acquisition of the depreciated assets.

The MA would like to know if depreciation costs of assets financed from the national or sub-national budgets can be considered eligible. The MA provides following examples of cases:

1. Public school purchases equipment in 2020 from current expenditure and wants to use it in an ESF project;
2. Municipality social support center wants to use in an ESF project transportation purchased by municipality;
3. University purchased equipment from a national grant scheme and wants to use it in an ERDF research project;
4. Limited liability company received in 2020 state aid for purchasing equipment. In 2021, it wants to use this equipment in an ERDF research project.

**Answer:**

It should be pointed out that the depreciation costs referred to in Article 67(2) CPR may only be considered eligible if the conditions set out in points (a) to (d) are cumulatively met.

In accordance with point (d) of Article 67(2) CPR, depreciation costs are eligible where “public grants have not contributed towards the acquisition of the depreciated assets”. “Public grant” should be understood as any public contribution within the meaning of point 28 of Article 2 CPR **in the form of a grant**.

With regard to the specific questions, the condition set out in point (d) of Article 67(2) cannot be considered as fulfilled in cases 3 and 4, for which the equipment had received public grants (respectively national aid scheme and State aid) and thus the depreciation costs cannot be considered eligible.

On the other hand, in the first two examples the source of the purchase of assets cannot be objectively verified on the basis of the information provided (i.e whether a public grant contributed to the purchase of the equipment or not). In case they have been purchased in house, through own budgets (even if (partially) public), without any public grants, then the corresponding depreciation costs could be considered eligible, provided the other conditions are also fulfilled.

# QA00004 - Support to natural persons/individuals for investment in housing linked to climate change adaptation

*****Relevant Articles*:Article 2 of the CPR, Article 73 CPR;

                                  Article 5 and 6 of the ERDF/CF Regulation

* Member State*: HU

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

As part of the preparation of the 2021-2027 energy and environment programme, the Managing Authority is considering supporting climate change adaptation investment by individuals/natural persons. Examples of such projects by households include green roofs, rainwater retention tanks, green walls, bicycle storage facilities in apartment blocks, home composting facilities. As part of the recast of the Drinking Water Directive, domestic lead pipes as well as the utilities networks containing lead pipes will need to be changed.

 According to Article 2(9)(a) CPR: “*beneficiary means:* *a public or private law body, an entity with or without legal personality or* ***a natural person, responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing operations***”. According to the reply to question [QA00001](#scroll-bookmark-2) “The scope of the ERDF and *Cohesion Fund in Article 5 and Article 6 of the ERDF/CF Regulation* ***does not provide for the possibility to subsidise consumption by private households***.”

Based on the above, we would like to ask the following questions:

 Can individuals or individual property benefit from EU cohesion policy support for investment in housing contributing to climate change adaptation directly or indirectly (via local authorities as intermediaries) under 2021-2027 EU cohesion policy rules?

1. If so, what would the consequences be in terms of public procurement and state aid?

**Answer:**

Based on the definition of a beneficiary provided by Article 2(9)(a) of the CPR, natural persons (individuals) or private bodies can benefit from the EU support, if they are responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing an operation.

There is no prohibition set out in the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation preventing a natural person to be a beneficiary.

The replacement of domestic lead pipes could therefore be eligible. However, pursuant to Article 73(2)(c) CPR, the managing authority should ensure that the selected operations present the best relationship between the amount of support and the achievement of objectives. Therefore, such investments would be ineffective if they are not preceded by the replacement of lead pipes on the public water distribution system.

In the case presented, natural persons could benefit for investment in housing, contributing to climate change adaptation directly or indirectly. The individuals could, for example, purchase and install the equipment, based on nominal ceilings or vouchers, or local authorities could act as tendering authorities, through framework contracts.

State aid rules apply only to the extent that the beneficiary is an ‘undertaking’. Undertaking is an entity engaged in an economic activity, regardless of its legal status and the way in which it is financed. Therefore, public support granted to individuals performing economic activities (such as renting activities) will fall under the scope of the State aid rules.

In the same vein, provisions on durability, pursuant to Article 65 CPR shall apply.

Regarding the application of the public procurement rules, it should be noted that if the co-financed operation involves contracting authorities as defined under the public procurement rules, it will be necessary to examine whether the provisions of applicable public procurement directives have been complied with.

# QA00005 - The use of EU funds for the financing of public administration buildings

 *Relevant Article* *: Article 36 of the CPR*

* Member State : RO*

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In their draft programme proposals, Romanian authorities propose to finance with their technical assistance the construction, acquisition or modernisation of the public administration premises. Is it eligible under the 21-27 Regulations?

**Answer:**

Article 36(1) of the CPR on technical assistance (TA) provides that, at the initiative of a Member State (MS), the Funds may support actions that are necessary for the effective administration and use of the Funds. The same provision does not include an exhaustive list of actions that can be supported under the TA of a MS.

Based on the above, the construction, acquisition or modernisation of public administration premises is not expressly excluded from the support of TA of a MS in case it is deemed necessary for the effective administration and use of the Funds and is in line with national eligibility rules. It should be noted that, in cases of using TA of a MS for operations comprising investments in infrastructure, the Member States should ensure the durability of the operation pursuant to Article 65(1) of the CPR.

However, from a policy point of view, it is difficult to justify using TA for supporting the construction, acquisition and modernisation/renovation of public administration buildings. Firstly, it would not bring any EU added value. Secondly, this would reduce the means available for capacity building and for carrying out - among others – activities such as preparation, training, or communication – activities for which the TA is primarily intended to.

In view of the above, using TA for construction, acquisition and modernisation/renovation of public administration buildings should only be considered in exceptional and duly justified cases (e.g. when rental expenses are much higher than the cost for construction or purchase of a new building), and under certain conditions (i.e. eligibility based on a pro rata of the budget linked strictly to the needs of the programme authorities, to the programming period and demonstration of clear savings as compared to rental costs).

# QA00006 - Technical assistance: risk of double funding when using flat-rate technical assistance in 2021-2027

 *Relevant Article* *:*Article 36(5) of the CPR

* Member State* : LT

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Managing Authority sent the following question related to the risk of double funding of expenditure related to TA between two financial periods (2014-2020 and 2021-2027) and how such risk, if present, could be best mitigated.

In 2014-2020 period, the situation related to the TA expenditure is as follows:

* TA expenditure based on **real costs**,
* TA also includes expenditure related to the **preparation** for 2021-2027.
* The last day of **eligibility** **of technical assistance** is 31/12/2023.

In 2021-2027 period, the situation related to the TA expenditure is as follows:
The managing authority intends to use flat-rate TA,

* According to the CPR, expenditure of operations on the basis of which the flat-rate TA is calculated is **eligible from the beginning of 2021.**
* LT will start declaring expenditure once the Management and Control System is set-up and audited. **The first expenditure declarations should be submitted to the Commission approximately in late 2022 or early 2023.** These declarations will include expenditure of operations other than TA incurred in 2021 and the receivable amount of flat-rate TA calculated as a percentage of expenditure of operations.

The Managing Authority is asking, if expenditure incurred by institutions in preparation for the administration of the new financial period is paid from 2014-2020 technical assistance based on real costs, can they still claim a full percentage of the flat-rate TA on 2021-2027 expenditure that will be declared in 2023? Will this not present a double funding?

**Answer:**

Where a Member State decides to use the flat-rate approach for technical assistance for 2021-2027, the relevant flat-rate percentage for the fund concerned provided in Article 36(5)(b) will be applied automatically to each payment application submitted to the Commission.

How the Member State uses the flat-rate payments for technical assistance is the responsibility of the Member State. Given the nature of the flat-rate, there will be no check of the underlying costs of the amounts reimbursed based on the flat rate at EU level.

Thus, it is for each Member State to exclude double funding. Each managing authority will have its own internal system for monitoring implementation of technical assistance and it is for the managing authority to ensure that the same costs of technical assistance operations co-financed under 2014-2020 period are not covered again in 2021-2027 period.

# QA00007 - JTF - Use of pillars 2 and 3 without using pillar 1

 Relevant Article: Article 11 JTF Regulation

****  *Member State:*BE

Question **1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is it possible for (a) region(s), which will not receive JTF money, to apply for pillars 2 and/or 3 of the JTM?

For this purpose, the region(s) would have a territorial plan, in which they would explain how pillars 2 and 3 would contribute to the transition of that/these regions. These regions even envisage, if necessary to include a priority under their OP with an allocation of a “symbolic euro” of the JTF.

**Answer:**

The Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) consists of three pillars, namely the Just Transition Fund (pillar 1), the dedicated just transition scheme under InvestEU to crowd in private investments (pillar 2) and the Public Sector Loan Facility with the EIB to leverage public financing (pillar 3).

The focus of the JTM and its three pillars is and has always been the “territories most negatively affected by the transition process”. Therefore, pillars 2 and 3 of the JTM are to, pursuant to their respective legal acts, benefit the territories most negatively impacted by the transition towards the EU climate neutral economy by 2050, as identified in the territorial just transition plans (TJTPs). Pursuant to paragraphs 1 and 2(b) of Article 11 of the JTF Regulation, these territories will be supported by the JTF. It is therefore not possible for a territory to benefit solely from pillars 2 and 3 without being supported by the JTF. The respective support of the three pillars are therefore complementary. In this regard, the TJTPs have to include a description of the synergies and complementarities with planned support from the other pillars of the JTM.

The respective contribution of the three pillars should be tailored to the development needs of the territories concerned and the type of projects eligible under each instrument. The TJTPs have to include, in particular, a description of the expected contribution of the JTF support pursuant to Article 11(2)(d) JTF Regulation.

Whereas all three pillars have to benefit the territories most negatively affected, as outlined above, the corresponding projects do not necessarily need to be located in these territories. In such cases, it will be necessary to justify that a project benefits the eligible territories by demonstrating that it contributes to meeting the development needs stemming from transition, as set out in the relevant TJTP. To this end, the TJTP has to specify, when support from pillars 2 or 3 is envisaged, the sectors and activities expected to be supported under those pillars.

Therefore, pillars 2 and 3 cannot be used as a “compensation” mechanism for regions not identified as “most negatively affected by the transition” and disconnected from the use of the JTF. Allocating only a symbolic JTF euro to these regions to benefit from pillars 2 and 3 would contradict their identification as “most negatively affected”.

# QA00008 - Revenue generating projects

 *Relevant Article*: Article 73 CPR

 *Member State: RO*

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the explanatory memorandum of the Proposal of the Commission of CPR Regulation and the Simplification handbook (point no 42) is mentioned the fact that, unlike in 2014-2020 programming period, there will no longer be specific rules for revenue generating investments. Does it mean that there is no need for the calculation of funding gap methodology at the level of the projects?

**Answer:**

The Common Provisions Regulation 2021-2027 does not include specific provisions on revenue generating investments.

Therefore, the CPR and the Fund specific regulations do not require the application of a specific methodology for the calculation of funding gap at the level of an operation (i.e. present value of the net revenue does not have to be deducted from the eligible expenditure).

However, Member States should comply with State aid rules and ensure that the operation generating net income is selected in accordance with Article 73 of the CPR (including Article 73(2)(c)) and applicable national rules.

In addition, pursuant to the polluter pays principle set up in the Treaty and user pays principles in sectoral legislations, Member States shall ensure an adequate contribution of the users, through tariff policies, to cover a share of investment costs, notably in the environment sector.

# QA00009 - In 2021-27 period, the purchase of land for an amount exceeding 10 % of the total eligible expenditure for the operation concerned will be ineligible. What does “land” mean in this context?

 *Relevant Article* *:*Article 64(1)(b) of the CPR

 *Member State:*HU

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

 *‘Between 2021-27, the purchase of land for an amount exceeding 10 % of the total eligible expenditure for the operation concerned will be ineligible.*

*In this context, does ‘land’ refer to all kind of plots OR only to empty ones, which do not comprise buildings?’*

 The Hungarian authorities are planning to launch calls for proposals supporting social urban rehabilitation. It is crucial for them to plan with the highest possible flexibility on the eligibility of land purchase. If the 10% limit in the CPR only refers to empty plots, the Hungarian authorities would allow a higher % of eligible cost for plots, which also comprise building(s).

**Answer:**

Pursuant to Article 64(1)(b) of the CPR, purchase of land is eligible up to amount not exceeding 10% of the total eligible expenditure of the operation concerned, which can be increased to 15% for derelict sites and for those formerly in industrial use which comprise buildings.

Whether the purchased land is built-on or not does not affect its eligibility.

# QA00010 - Eligibility of activities to boost the entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP) under specific objective 1.4 of the ERDF regulation 2021 – 2027

 *Relevant Articles*:

* Articles 3(1) point (a) (iv) of the ERDF/CF Regulation
* Article 3(4) point (a) and (b) of the ERDF/CF Regulation

 *Member State*: ES

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Entrepreneurial discovery processes (EDP) are at the heart of smart specialization strategies. Through these processes, public administrations, businesses, universities, research and innovation actors and civil society are involved in the preparation of smart specialization strategies.

Public administration has a key role to play as a driver of innovation and economic and social transformation, through policies aimed at mobilising the knowledge and capacities of a territory to generate new responses to societal challenges. To this end, EDP mechanisms need to be put in place, so that appropriate smart specialisation strategies can be defined as a first step and then the tools and projects to develop them.

Therefore, some Spanish regions propose to create a dedicated EDP programme, which will articulate the involvement of quadruple helix actors in the identification of challenges and opportunities, in the definition of priorities and in the design, implementation and monitoring of research and innovation instruments and projects, helping to accelerate the transition towards more sustainable and inclusive development pathways.

Spanish authorities consider that this EDP programme would fall under the PO 1 specific objective (iv) « developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship” (Article 3(1) point (a) (iv) of ERDF- CF 2021 - 2027 regulation).

The objectives of the EDP Programme would be closely linked to compliance with the requirements of the Enabling Condition, which have to be met throughout the period.

The general objectives of the programme would be:

• Empowering quadruple helix actors to promote smart specialisation

• Providing an effective entrepreneurial discovery process with quadruple helix actors.

This programme would create various working groups/technical offices/innovation laboratories, related to the areas of expertise of RIS3, to articulate, revitalise and coordinate the EDP with the quadruple helix actors. The activities of these working groups/technical offices/innovation laboratories would include:

• Creating spaces and dynamics for dialogue and collaborative work with quadruple helix actors to define shared visions, objectives and strategies.

• Promoting projects that can be funded with European funds that create new opportunities for entrepreneurship in the areas of specialisation.

The type of actions to be financed would be in line with those defined in Article 5 (f) of the ERDF Regulation and the eligible expenditure would be:

• Staff expenditure (establishment plan and new recruitments)

• Expenditure on equipment needed to perform the functions (computers or other)

• Procurement of services to implement planned actions

• International travel (air or train tickets and hotels only)

• Indirect costs

*Would the actions included in the EDP programme, as explained above, be eligible under the specific objective 1.4 « developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship” (Article 3(1) point (a) (iv) of ERDF- CF 2021 - 2027 regulation)?*

**Answer:**

Concerning the planned EDP programme, the activities foreseen could be financed under policy objective 1 - specific objective 1.1 or specific objective 1.4, depending on the focus of the activities.

# QA00011 - Durability of billboards and plaques

 *Relevant Article*: Article 50(1)(c) of the CPR

 *Member State*: FR

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Projects with a significant EU contribution (more than 500 000 euros, and physical investment/equipment), the beneficiary is required to set up a durable billboard or a plaque. **What durability means in terms of timing?**

**Answer:**

In this particular context, durable is to be understood as existing and remaining for the period of time in which the relevant physical object, infrastructure or construction physically exists.

# QA00013 - Data fields 103, 104 and 130, Annex XVII

 *Relevant Article*: Article 98(6) CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The addition ‘(of which amount corrected as a result of an audit)’ does not make it clear whether the audit authority’s audits (Article 127 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013) should be taken into account here, by analogy with the 2014-2020 funding period.

Data field 103

1. Is it correct to indicate in data field 103 the deduction in value of the ground for deduction recorded in data field 102 in accordance with Article 98 (6) of Regulation (EC) No 2021/1060?

Data field 104

1. Is it correct to report in data field 104 the public amount of the value deduction recorded in 103?

Data field 130

1. Is it correct to report in data field 130 the sum of all deductions from data fields 103 of an operation that were deducted during the accounting year concerned by the accounts?

Data fields 103, 104 and 130

1. Is it correct to present the ‘amount corrected as a result of an audit’, by analogy with the 2014-2020 funding period, only in relation to audits carried out by the audit authority under Article 77 or Article 79 of Regulation (EC) No 2021/1060?

**Answer:**

In the data field 103 of Annex XVII to the CPR, the Member State should indicate the amount of the total eligible expenditure deducted from the accounts for each deduction made in accordance with Article 98(6) CPR and presented in data field 102, whereas in the data field 104 the Member State should report the amount of the public contribution corresponding to the deduction presented in the data field 103. The amounts deducted directly from the accounts in accordance with Article 98(6) CPR (which are commented in the reconciliation of expenditure in the accounts in line with the appendix 4 of the template for the accounts set out in Annex XXIV to the CPR) should be indicated in the data field 130. The total amount of the deductions for an operation indicated in the data field 130 should be the sum of all the deductions for an operation presented in the data field 103.

It should be noted that the amounts in the data fields 102, 103, 104 and 130 of Annex XVII to the CPR refer to deductions from the accounts, i.e. to amounts deducted directly from the accounts, and not included in the withdrawals from the payment applications during the accounting year (which are presented in the data field 128 of Annex XVII to the CPR and appendix 2 of the template for the accounts set out in Annex XXIV to the CPR).

Amounts corrected as a result of audit refer to corrections resulting from all the audit work of the audit authority.

# QA00014 - Data field 95 (Annex XVII)

 *Relevant Article*: n/a

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

 We understand the rule that this field is the recording of eligible expenditure for lump sums (for example, flat rates on direct or flat rate expenditure).

For this purpose, the following information shall be collected:

1. The amount of eligible expenditure declared to the Commission; and

2. Indication of the flat rate financing in the documents setting out the conditions for support.

1. What should be recorded: the amount of eligible expenditure declared to the Commission include the total amount of eligible expenditure, including flat-rate financing, or should the amount to which the flat-rate financing relates or only the part of the lump sum declared in a payment claim by the beneficiary?
2. Which unit does the lump sum have, “%” or “EUR”? In other words, is the proportion/flat rate or the resulting amount necessary?

Example:

Flat-rate financing is granted in accordance with Article 56 of Regulation (EC) No 2021/1060 (40 % residual costs). Direct staff expenditure has a value of EUR 100 000. The beneficiary shall account for EUR 50 000 from the managing authority.

 How would the recording be carried out?

1. EUR 50 000 plus 40 % = EUR 70 000 or EUR 50 000 or 40 % of EUR 50 000 = EUR 20 000

2. 40 % or EUR 40 000

**Answer:**

Data field 95 of Annex XVII to the Regulation (EU) 1060/2021 refer to “data on expenditure in payment claim from the beneficiary – only for flat rates.” It requires the recording of: a) the amount declared to the Commission, which corresponds to the costs calculated on the applicable basis and b) the flat rate itself (i.e. the percentage (%)). The eligible expenditure to which the flat rate is applied (the basis that will be used to calculate the SCO amount) is not to be reported in this field: depending on the form of grant provided to the beneficiary, it will be recorded in the respective field. For example, if the basis corresponds to eligible expenditure incurred by the beneficiary and paid (i.e. real costs) it will be recorded in field 79.

 Based on the above and looking at the specific example, what should be recorded in field 95 is the amount of EUR 20.000 and the flat rate 40%.

# QA00015 - Publicity requirements according to Article 50(1)(c) in the context of financial instruments

 *Relevant Article*: Article 50(1)(c), Article 50(2) second sub-paragraph of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is the publicity requirement under Article 50(1)(c) applicable to all kinds of financial instruments, including those financing working capital?

**Answer:**

Second paragraph of Article 50(2) of Regulation 2021/1060[[1]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftn1) (“CPR”) specifies that “*For financial instruments, the beneficiary shall ensure by means of contractual terms that the final recipients comply with the requirements set out in point (c) of paragraph 1*”. This means that in the context of financial instrument, the threshold in Article 50(1)(c) refers to the investment at the final recipient level. Therefore, where operations are supported by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, the final recipients should display durable plaques or billboards clearly visible to the public where the total cost of the  investment exceeds EUR 500 000[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftn2)  as soon as physical investment starts or purchased equipment is installed. In guarantee instruments, the requirement should be respected at the level of the underlying investment. It should be noted that the threshold of EUR 500 000 does not refer only to an expenditure item or items related to the physical investment/purchase of equipment but cover the total cost of an investment at the final recipient level, as explained below in the reply to question 3.

The above-mentioned provisions explicitly stipulate that the requirement concerning the display of durable plaques or billboards concerns only *physical investments* and their *physical implementation* and *installation of purchased equipment.* In this respect, support to working capital is outside of the scope of this provision, as it is intended to strengthen the general activities of a final recipient (e.g. an enterprise) without inducing any defined physical investment or purchase of equipment that would be considered a tangible asset.

 Equally, the provisions of this Article do not apply if the support is provided for acquisition of intangible assets[[3]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftn3) due to the absence of physical substance of these assets.

 It is generally recommended that final recipients recognise the contribution of EU funds by applying the general Operational guidelines for recipients of EU funding[[4]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftn4), i.e. by using the standard visibility tools provided by the Commission.

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is this interpretation also applicable to equity investments, such as provision of growth capital to start-ups?

**Answer:**

In the context of financial instruments providing equity investments, the rules and interpretation explained herewith apply depending on how the provided capital to the company is used for the mixture of its needs. At the moment of making an equity investment it may not be definite how much of the provided capital will be used for a mix of various asset types. However, the investment contract with the final recipient should include the obligations under Article 50(1)(c) of the CPR to be respected, should the total cost of an investment exceed EUR 500 000 and involve physical investment or installation of purchased equipment.

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What is meant by the “total cost of operation” in context of financial instruments?

**Answer:**

Article 50(2) provides that “*final recipients comply with the requirements set out in point (c) of paragraph 1*” as set out in their contractual terms. This clarifies that the total cost should be taken into account at the level of the *investment* of the final recipients receiving support. Therefore, the provision of Article 50(1)(c) CPR should be considered in relation to the total cost of the  investment as set out in the respective contractual terms.

For guarantees, the amount of programme resources set aside in guarantee contracts for the underlying disbursed loans or (quasi-) equity investments is not relevant for the calculation of the total cost of the investment at the level of the final recipient.

**Question 4 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is the calculation of the total cost of operation in any way influenced if the financial instrument is combined with a grant in one or two operations?

**Answer:**

No, the combination with grant does not have any influence. As explained above in the context of FI the provisions of Article 50(1)(c) and Article 50(2) second paragraph apply to the total cost of investment, irrespective of how it is financed.

**Question 5 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Which paragraphs of Article 50 are applicable to financial instruments?

**Answer:**

Article 50(1)(a) and (b), the first sentence of Article 50(1)(d), Article 50(3) apply to beneficiaries and bodies implementing financial instruments as defined respectively in Article 2(9)(e) and Article 2(22) of the Regulation.

Article 50(1)(c) has to be read together with Article 50(2) and it is applicable to final recipients in line with the clarifications above. The second subparagraph of Article 50(2) provides that beneficiaries of financial instruments should, by way of contractual terms, e.g. in loan agreements signed with final recipients, ensure that final recipients comply with the requirements in Article 50(1)(c). In case of breach of their obligations, the contractual terms in this respect apply to final recipients.

The second sentence of Article 50(1)(d) does not apply to financial instruments beneficiaries as this point applies only to natural persons.

Article 50(1)(e) applies to beneficiaries and bodies implementing financial instruments in case of:

- where the FI operation is included in the list of operations of strategic importance; and

- operations whose total cost exceed EUR 10 000 000.

[[1]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftnref1) Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy

[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftnref2) Please note that the threshold is EUR 100 000 for the ESF+, the JTF, the EMFAF, the MAIF, the ISF and the BMVI pursuant to Article 50(1)(c)(ii).

[[3]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftnref3) Intangible asset: an identifiable non-monetary asset **without physical substance**. An asset is a resource that is controlled by the entity as a result of past events (for example, purchase or self-creation) and from which future economic benefits (inflows of cash or other assets) are expected (International Accounting Standard - IAS 38).

[[4]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/192%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_192%20QA%20-%20applicability%20of%20Article%2050%20new%20CPR%20in%20case%20of%20FI.docx#_ftnref4) [THE USE OF THE EU EMBLEM IN THE CONTEXT OF EU PROGRAMMES 2021-2027. Operational guidelines for recipients of EU funding.](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu-emblem-rules_en.pdf)

# QA00016 - Infrastructure operations in the tourism and culture sector: ‘enhancing the role of culture and tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation’ and ‘intervention field dimensions’.

 *Relevant Article*: Article 3 of the ERDF/CF Regulation, Annex I of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can you confirm that, in the absence of dedicated ‘intervention field dimension codes’, operations for investments in culture and tourism infrastructure can be supported under policy objective 4 or have such investments to be included under one or more of the other policy objectives and which conditions have to be fulfilled?

**Answer:**

Investments on these sectors however can be carried out through the existing codes of interventions provided in Annex I of the CPR under PO5, from 165 to 167. These codes are not restricted only to PO5, but could be used also under any other policy objective, therefore there is no need for a new code of intervention related to culture and tourism infrastructure in Annex 1 of the CPR.

# QA00019 - Are SMEs eligible as beneficiaries for supporting tourism and culture under PO5?

 *Relevant Article*: n/a

 *Member State*: RO

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Is it possible to support interventions in tourism and culture under PO5 (Intervention fields 165-167) having SMEs as beneficiaries, alone or in partnership with public beneficiaries?**

 Tourism and eco-tourism is a great engine for local development while cultural and natural heritage sites are assets that can help attract tourists and boost local economies.

As the investments under PO5 must be part of an integrated territorial strategy, developed by the local public authority in partnership with private actors, we consider that by accepting SMEs as beneficiaries, alone or in partnership with public beneficiaries, will contribute to the sustainable exploitation of tourist resources more effectively and deliver better results on the ground.

Therefore, we need to know whether SMEs could be eligible beneficiaries under PO5 (if they contribute to meeting the objectives of these strategies).

**Answer:**

 The SMEs can be the beneficiaries under PO5 as long as the operations from which they are supported are implemented under any of the territorial tools as proposed in Article 28 of the CPR and selected as contributing the territorial strategies according to Article 29 of the CPR.

There is no rule forbidding SMEs being the beneficiaries under PO5.

# QA00023 - Investments in research units of large enterprises

 *Relevant Articles*: 3 and 5 of the ERDF/CF regulation

 *Member State*: RO

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Are the research units of large enterprises eligible for funding through PO1 - SO (i)?

**Answer:**

Under 2021-2027 cohesion policy, the promotion of private research and collaboration between public and private should be given priority. Mainstream funding and technical assistance should be used to reward innovation and support beneficiaries in the preparation of mature, integrated projects, promoting, when possible, cross-sectorial cooperation along the entire value chain.

With this regard, basic research (TRL1-3) should not be a priority for ERDF investment, except where it responds to a need identified in a smart specialisation strategy through the entrepreneurial discovery process, in particular related to demand-driven business and societal needs.

Furthermore, to concentrate the use of limited resources in the most efficient way, when it comes to financing productive investments, the measures should be limited to SMEs only. However,  support to productive investment in large enterprises can be supported under SO (i) of PO1 when the investments involve cooperation with SMEs in research and innovation activities (Article 5(2),ERDF/CF Regulation).

Finally, it is reminded that all investments under this specific objective should be in line with the smart specialisation strategy.

# QA00025 - Combining specific objectives in a priority

 *Relevant Article*: Article 22 of the CPR

 *Member State*: NL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can two or more specific objectives be combined or merged in a priority? For instance, can specific objective 2.2 (sustainable energy) be combined with specific objective 2.3 (smart energy systems)?

Context: Anticipating a compulsory allocation to PO2, Managing Authorities in the Netherlands are exploring possible content of such a priority. In line with Annex D (2019) programming focused on PO1 up to now. The draft ERDF regulation for the 2021-2027 period foresees quite a number of specific objectives under PO 2. The Managing Authority would like to avoid a multiplication of specific objectives in a PO2 priority and, therefore, wants to know if related specific objectives can be combined.

**Answer:**

According to Article 22 of the CPR, a priority corresponding to a policy objective shall consist of one or more specific objectives. Additionally, each priority shall correspond to a single policy objective.

In other words, managing authority can have, in a programme, one priority consisting of one or more specific objectives provided, that these specific objectives belong to the same policy objective. However, different specific objectives cannot be merged into one single specific objective.

# QA00027 - Data field 69 Annex XVII

 *Relevant Article*: n/a

 *Member State*: DE

**Questions (including any relevant facts and information):**

In point (c) it is not clear to what extent all or only part of the assistance provided by the Funds is to be indicated here and the extent to which the word “received” refers to amounts granted or paid.

1. Is it correct that in point (c) the total support from the financial instrument to the final recipient is to be assumed, including, where applicable, the national co-financing (for example, the nominal amount of the loan or the amount of the equity)?
2. Is it correct that the word “received” refers to the amount granted but not to the amount actually paid?
3. Is there a need to adjust the amounts in the event of a change in relation to the final recipient (e.g. Partial cancellation of a loan amount)
4. How is the amount of support determined if a combination with a grant (Article 58 (5) of Regulation (EC) No 2021/1060) takes the form, for example, of a repayment rebate/grant for a loan?

(a) the amount corresponds to the original principal amount of the loan; or

(b) the amount is equal to the sum of the principal amount of the loan and the repayment rebate; or

(c) Amount equal to the difference between the principal amount of the loan and the repayment rebate (remaining capital of the loan)"

**Answer:**

1. Final recipients may receive support from financial instrument (FI) in the form of loans, guaranteed loans and equity and where applicable in combination of programme support in the form of grants in a single financial instrument operation. The amount of support is linked to the support provided by the programme resources. In the case of loans or equity investments the amount of support is the amount of programme resources (support from the Funds as well as national co-financing) effectively paid to a final recipient. In the case of guarantees, amount of support is the amount of e.g. loan paid to the final recipient guaranteed by the programme resources.

2. The amount of (guaranteed) loan effectively paid to the final recipient or an equity investment made into the capital of the final recipient is the “amount of support received” by the final recipient. Where financial instruments are combined with a grant component in a single financial instrument operation in accordance with Article 58(5) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, the grant paid to or for the benefit of the final recipient will also constitute “amount of support received” by the final recipient.

3. If there is a change in the business plan and the initially paid loan to the final recipient is partly cancelled, i.e. the investment for which the loan is requested needs a lower borrowed amount, the amount indicated should be only the amount of support which the final recipient receives.

4. In the case of a capital rebate, the amount of support received from FI initially should be recorded as a loan for investment of, for example, 100. Once the capital rebate clause in the loan contract is triggered and part of the loan is transformed into the grant, the amount in the electronic records should be adjusted presenting the amount of the remaining loan (e.g. 80) and grant (e.g. 20).

In the case of a combination of a loan and a capital grant for the investment of 100, the amount of loan and the grant paid to, or for the benefit of, the final recipient is known from the outset; therefore, it should be recorded as loan e.g. 80 and the capital grant e.g. 20.

# QA00028 - Does including a list of projects in a territorial strategy fulfil the requirement of ensuring the influence of municipal or local authorities on the selection of projects?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 29 of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Polish Ministry of Investment and Economic Development has asked whether including a list of projects in a territorial strategy will fulfil the requirement of ensuring the influence of municipal or local authorities on the selection of projects.

The projects pointed out in the strategy shall be selected in a non-competitive way. Thus, when adopting the strategy together with the list of projects, municipal authorities will be guaranteed an exclusive right to submit projects under the operational programme, while the MA will only assess whether the formal and substantive criteria are met.

The competition mode should be applied only in certain situations, such as a limited allocation in relation to the number of functional areas interested in obtaining support in a given thematic area. The competition organized by the MA in thematic areas relevant for territorial instruments will be restricted to the projects complying with the territorial strategies, while the MA will assess projects in terms of formal and substantive criteria and select the best ones.

In both options, the involvement of municipal authorities on the selection of projects is ensured.

**Answer:**

 Article 29 of the CPR includes content requirements for the territorial strategy, and roles and responsibilities of the relevant territorial authorities or bodies for the strategies and in the selection of operations.

The territorial strategies are under the responsibility of the relevant territorial authorities or bodies in line with Article 29 (2) of the CPR. Where the list of operations to be supported is included in the territorial strategies, it should mean that these authorities or bodies have already been involved in the selection of or have been selecting themselves such operations. Thus, the involvement of these authorities or bodies in the selection of those operations could be considered ensured.

In addition, the general rules and criteria related to the implementation of the funds need to be fulfilled, especially those related to selection of operations in Article 73 of the CPR (including transparency and non-discrimination) for both competitive and non-competitive modes.

# QA00029 - Regional Development Plans 2021-2027 and County Development Strategies as sufficient strategies to frame territorial investments under Policy Objective 5

 *Relevant Article*: Article 29 of the CPR

 *Member State*: RO

**Question (including relevant facts and information):**

Is it sufficient for the tourism/heritage objectives to include the investment object in a regional/national/sectoral strategy or is there a need for an integrated strategy at local level? In this context, the Regional Development Plan 2021-2027 (RDP) and/or the County Development Strategy can be considered strategies based on which investments can be financed for the integrated territorial approach (eg. tourism and culture under PO 5), thus fulfilling the conditions stipulated by the CPR Regulation, art. 29?

In our opinion each RDP respect all the conditions required by the Article 29 Territorial strategies and could be considered as support document for the implementation of the interventions financed under PO5:

–          the geographical area covered by the strategy is represented by the entire region, which is  presented  in the first part of each RDP and cover the description of the region  (Geographic location, natural framework, main natural resources, description of the counties and the localities within the region, etc.)

–          analysis of the development needs and the potential of the area is performed in  the regional socio-economic and SWOT analyses

–          description of an integrated approach to address the identified development needs and the potential is presented in the dedicated  chapter for the Regional Strategy and the estimation of the financing needs

–          description of the involvement of partners in accordance with Article 8 in the preparation and in the implementation of the strategy is also presented in a dedicated chapter in the document

Also, in the context of Article 29 (2) CPR, whereas existing strategic documents concerning the covered areas may be used for territorial strategies, could we consider the County Development Strategy as an integrated strategy?

**Answer:**

The investments in tourism and culture envisaged for support under PO5 need to stem from the integrated territorial or local development strategies that need to fulfil the regulatory requirements, such as Article 29 of the CPR for territorial strategies.

The term “territorial and local development strategies” does not specify, on purpose, the specific territorial level at which these strategies need to be drawn up. This term is used to enable the use of territorial instruments below the regional programme level (i.e. NUTS2, the usual regional programme level). It is understood that “relevant territorial authorities or bodies” comprise levels below NUTS 2 level in function of the territory covered.

Therefore, the Commission, a priori, would not consider the Regional Development Plans in Romania adequate for the purposes of territorial strategies in the meaning of Art. 29 of the CPR. In order to satisfy the requirements under Article 29 of the CPR, the plans would need to cover territories below the level of the territory, which is covered by the regional programme (e.g. county level).

Consequently, the local, urban and territorial strategies under the regional programme level, such as the County Development Strategies in Romania, may be considered, as far as they fulfil the requirements in Art. 29 of the CPR and are justified by the programme intervention logic. The identification of the specific territories targeted and the rationale for the use of territorial tools need to be explained in the programmes.

# QA00030 - In case of support from EU funds according to the CPR and from the RRF (NextGenerationEU), which funding statement has to be used?

 *Relevant Articles*: 47 and 50 of the CPR, Annex IX; Article 34 (2) of the RRF regulation

 *Member State*: LT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

If a project under shared management receives support from EU funds according to the Common Provisions Regulation and from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (NextGenerationEU), which funding statement has to be used in order to acknowledge this EU support?

**Answer:**

The Commission services recommend using “Funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU”. Legally, this satisfies both the rules laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation and in the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation and is a better and simpler option than having distinct funding statements for each source of funding.

# QA00031 - Data field 59, data field 60 Annex XVII

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 42, 72, 92 of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Data field 60 corresponds to the information in the report in accordance with Table 12 of Annex VII and is similar to field 38 of the implementation report for the 2014-2020 funding period, in which the data are to be reported at the level of the final beneficiary.

It is not clear to what extent the information on funds is to be kept at the level of the financial instrument or at the level of final recipients. The information at the level of the Fund could be calculated from the information in field 59.

For financial instruments where national co-financing is provided at the level of final recipients, double counting may occur in fields 59 and 60.

1. To which level does the additional funds in field 60 – financial instrument or final recipients – refer to?
2. Where the information relates to the level of final recipients: Does the data have to be collected in a way that ensures that the programme contribution is allocated to the individual final recipients?
3. How should data be recorded for financial instruments where national co-financing is provided at the level of final recipients?

**Answer:**

Annexes VII and XVII to the CPR have two distinct purposes, nevertheless they should be consistent with each other. Annex VII CPR, including Table 12, provides content for the information which should be transmitted to the Commission according to Article 42 CPR as a reporting exercise. Annex XVII CPR provides the content for the information, which the managing authorities should keep electronically. In order to facilitate easy access to the data on each operation necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verifications and audits, as envisaged in Article 72 CPR.

In relation to:

**CPR Annex XVII, data field 59**

Data field 59 specifies that information recorded should include total programme contribution, i.e. the Funds plus national public and/or private contribution committed in the funding agreement. This means also public and/or private contribution which **is expected** to be provided at the level of the final recipient and which will constitute part of the programme contribution.

Further on, the managing authorities should identify how much of the total programme contribution is the amount of public contribution, including if some of the national public contribution comes at the level of the final recipient. This information will be recorded in the subfield 59(a).

A separate subfield (-s) (59(b)) present breakdown of the amounts by Fund (ERDF, CF, etc) committed to the financial instrument according to the funding agreement.

The data field 59 and its subfields are a replication of the information agreed in the funding agreement and not the progress of the implementation yet, hence the reference in the text of the data field “**committed to a financial instrument and approved in a document** setting out the conditions for support (funding agreement)”.

There is no risk of double recording as the data field 59 presents information of the amounts agreed in the funding agreement between the managing authority and the body implementing FI. The amount of the total programme contribution may be adjusted (upwards or downwards) over time if necessary by means of the amendment of the funding agreement depending on the progress in the implementation of the FI and the respective market conditions. This modification in the funding agreement is to be reflected respectively in the electronically stored data.

**CPR Annex XVII, data field 60**

Data stored in the data field 60 should include all the public and/or private resources attracted to the Funds and invested in final recipients; hence the reference “by product” in the text of the data field. The data kept electronically will demonstrate the progress of the implementation. This data field may contain both programme and non-programme public and/or private resources (except of the own contribution of the final recipients given that own resources cannot be taken into account for the calculation of the leverage) and will be reported subsequently to the Commission in accordance with Article 42(3)(c) and Table 12 of the Annex VII CPR.

# QA00032 - Eligibility of municipal companies under the JTF classified as large enterprises

 *Relevant Articles*: Art.8(2) and 11(2)(h) of the JTF regulation

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The JTF Regulation provides an opportunity to support large enterprises under the condition that their possible investments under JTF should only be supported for job creation in the identified territory. In addition, the regulation requires a justification in a form of a gap analysis demonstrating that the expected job losses would exceed the expected number of jobs created in the absence of the investment is provided.

During the works on the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) of the Wałbrzych subregion in Lower Silesia an issue of the specific status of municipal companies was raised by the Managing Authorities. Municipal companies according to SME definition are qualified as large enterprises as they are controlled by public authorities (Art. 3 para.4 of the Annex to Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises).

The MA argues that while municipal companies are in principle are large enterprises, due to their specific status they should not be excluded from JTF support under the abovementioned requirements of the JTF Regulation. These companies, owned by local government units, serve a role in satisfying socio-economic needs of the region by providing public services and projects for cities and communes. These include local transport, waste treatment and disposal companies, water and sewage companies, heating companies, regional agencies supporting the development of entrepreneurship and the labour market, etc. The activities of these companies relate to the wide range of support indicated in Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation, rather than just productive investments and will not be linked to the employment change. Their activities however are part of the economic, social and spatial objectives of the TJTP under preparation.

Commission was addressed by the Deputy Marshal of Lower Silesia with the following questions:

**1) Can municipal companies, which are in principle large enterprises, be beneficiaries of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) if they do not carry out productive investment having a direct impact on the maintenance/creation of new jobs or on bridging a gap in the job balance?**

**2) In general, will large enterprises be able to implement projects in areas covered by the JTF Regulation, such as waste water treatment and transforming into drinking water, economic and social revitalization of degraded post-mining areas, transition of energy infrastructure related to decarbonisation, investments in RES, measures for development of competencies and skills of employees, creation and development of business incubators and innovation accelerators? These areas play an important role in the case of transition of the Wałbrzych subregion.**

**3) Are the restrictions on support for large enterprises and the requirements for such projects in terms of an analysis of the employment gap to apply only to productive investments in such enterprises and not to other types of investments indicated in the JTF Regulation?**

**Answer:**

**General context:**

The JTF regulation states that “*in order to enhance the economic diversification of territories impacted by the transition, the JTF should provide support to enterprises and economic stakeholders, including through support to productive investments in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises*”. All categories of enterprises regardless of their size are therefore eligible across the different support areas under the JTF. Yet, some important restrictions apply to productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs (‘large enterprises’)[[1]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/208%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_QA208_eligibility%20large%20enterprises%20under%20JTF.docx#_ftn1).

The definition of *productive investments* is given in recital (16) of the JTF. They should be understood as ‘*as investment in fixed capital or immaterial assets of enterprises with a view to producing goods and services, thereby contributing to gross-capital formation and employment.’*

Point (a) of Article 8(2) of the JTF narrows down support to productive investments to SMEs, including microenterprises and start-ups. Such projects should also lead to economic diversification, modernisation and reconversion. Productive investments in large enterprises are possible under the JTF in very limited cases, in areas designated as “assisted areas” in accordance with points (a) and (c) of Article 107(3) of the TFEU. They need to fulfil the four cumulative criteria based on Article 8(2) and point (h) of Article 11(2) of the JTF:

* they are necessary for the implementation of the TJTP,
* they contribute to the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050 and to related environmental targets,
* their support is necessary for job creation in the identified territory. To this end, a gap analysis demonstrating that the expected job losses would exceed the expected number of jobs created in the absence of the investment is required in the territorial just transition plan
* they do not lead to relocation as defined in point (27) of Article 2 CPR.

In the case of productive investments in large enterprises, the relevant territorial just transition plan (TJTP) must include an indicative list of such operations and enterprises that will receive support. It also has to provide a justification of necessity of such support through a gap analysis demonstrating that the expected job losses would exceed the expected number of jobs created in the absence of the investment. The gap analysis should include the estimated difference between the expected job losses and the potential job creation through JTF support (e.g. economic diversification investments for SMEs). This analysis may refer to historical evidence of job creation by SMEs in the territory, analysis of current employment by SMEs in the region, surveys on employment perspectives, or other methodologies.

 In addition, support for productive investments is subject to State aid rules, in particular to the rules applicable to regional aid. According to the Guidelines on regional State aid, regional aid may be granted in ‘a’ areas to support all types of initial investments made by small and medium enterprises or large enterprises. In ‘c’ areas, regional aid may be granted to support all types of initial investments made by small and medium enterprises, while large enterprises can only receive regional aid to support initial investments that create a new economic activity. However, when the conditions of paragraph 14 of the Guidelines on regional State aid[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/208%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_QA208_eligibility%20large%20enterprises%20under%20JTF.docx#_ftn2) are fulfilled, large enterprises can also receive regional aid for their diversification or fundamental change investments in Just Transition areas.

 **Replies to specific questions:**

Question 1:

To determine whether an investment in a large enterprise is eligible under the JTF and under which condition, the distinction should therefore be made between two types of investments:

* *productive investments:*

As per recital (16) of the JTF, productive investments are investments in an enterprise and its growth to produce new goods or services. They lead to a net increase in the value or profitability of a venture. As mentioned above, they are subject to support conditions under Article 8(2) and point (h) of article 11(2) of the JTF, including a positive impact on employment creation. If one of the conditions remains unfulfilled, such investments are considered ineligible under the JTF.

The standard example of such an investment is the installation of a production line for launching a new product according to a company’s new buisness diversification strategy. The investment will lead to a reallocation of labour resources to a new business area to maintain the existing jobs.

* *other kind of investments than productive investments:*

Article 8(2)(b)-(i) lists exhaustively eligible investments that may be other than the productive ones. Yet, a definition in the JTF Regulation or the CPR for such investments is not provided, contrary to the productive investments as stated above.

If a case-by-case analysis leads to the conclusion that such investments are not productive, they are then not subject to the four cumulative  conditions laid down in Article 8, 2nd indent and the requirement laid down in point (h) of Article 11(2) of the JTF.

Such other kind of investments are usually made in infrastructure, equipment and access to services (e.g. in the field of energy, environment, transport, digital connectivity, education, training, social inclusion etc.) that have territorial development as an objective. Their primary aim is not to increase the value or profitability of a venture, unlike productive investments. The standard example of such investments are services of general economic interest. Such investments deliver outcomes in the overall public good that would not be supplied (or would be supplied under the different conditions in terms of objective, quality, safety, affordability or universal access) by the market without public intervention[[3]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/208%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_QA208_eligibility%20large%20enterprises%20under%20JTF.docx#_ftn3). In such a case, municipal companies would not be beneficiaries within the meaning of the CPR, but contactors of the beneficiary (municipality) and would carry out the works/investments. Such companies will help implement and operate the investment if selected in line with applicable rules.

Regardless of being productive or not, all investments under the JTF still need to comply with all applicable provisions under the CPR and JTF Regulations, e.g. compliance with the JTF specific objective and the scope of eligible support under Articles 8 and 9 of the JTF.

Finally, investments reducing GHG emissions from activities listed in the ETS Directive are eligible, subject to specific conditions laid down in the 3rd sub-paragraph of Article 8(2) and point (i) of Article 11(2) of the JTF.

Questions 2 and 3

Productive and other kind of investments can be implemented across the different support areas indicated under Article 8(2) of the JTF.

In this respect however, it is necessary to recall that the eligibility scope of the JTF is detailed in an exclusive manner and does not entail investments in wastewater treatment or drinking / water management, which are therefore ineligible. In duly justified circumstances only, water management can be supported as part of a land restoration project, in line with recital 12 of the JTF.

The other thematic areas listed in your question are compliant with the eligibility scope of the JTF under Article 8(2) of the JTF. Yet, to determine whether future operations that are to be implemented in these thematic areas by large enterprises are subject to the conditions laid down in Article 8, 2nd indent and the requirement laid down in point (h) of Article 11(2) of the JTF, it should first be concluded if these operations fall or not into the definition of productive investments.

Based on the facts provided in the question, there is no sufficient information on the exact nature of the operations planned by the Wałbrzych subregion – e.g. on the objective such operations would contribute to - to identify whether such investments should be considered as productive or not. It is the responsibility of the managing authority to determine if the conditions explained above are fulfilled and the TJTP needs to demonstrate their fulfilment.

Finally, as mentioned above, all other general support conditions under the CPR and JTF apply to productive and other kind of investments.

[[1]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/208%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_QA208_eligibility%20large%20enterprises%20under%20JTF.docx#_ftnref1) All enterprises not falling into the scope of the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises provided in the Commission Recommendation (2003/361/EC) of 6 May 2003 (OJ L 124, 20.5.2003, p. 36).

[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/208%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_QA208_eligibility%20large%20enterprises%20under%20JTF.docx#_ftnref2) OJ C 153 of 29.4.2021, p.1.

[[3]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/208%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_QA208_eligibility%20large%20enterprises%20under%20JTF.docx#_ftnref3) CPR has no definition of public service or service of economic general interest. The concept might therefore apply to different situations and terms, depending on the Member State, except when an obligation to designate formally a task or a service as being of general economic interest is laid out in Union legislation.

# QA00033 - Effective communication and compliance with CPR provisions regarding communication

 *Relevant Articles*:

Chapter I of the CPR – Monitoring

Article 103 of the CPR – Financial corrections by the Member State

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What are the Commission’s recommendations for communicating as effectively as possible, in the event of suspension of funding, as a result of a beneficiary’s failure to comply with its commitments?

What would be the Commission’s assessment of the compliance of the beneficiaries of the funds with their obligation to communicate?

**Answer:**

Communication and visibility will be monitored and evaluated in the same way as the fulfilment of other aspects of the programme by the competent Commission services.

There is no intention to issue the guidelines on the methodology of establishing the scope of violation or the amount of the corrections. When needed, the Member State should proceed with the corrections in the same manner as with any other financial corrections applied in accordance with Article 103 of the CPR.

# QA00037 - Flat-rate financing for indirect costs concerning grants

 *Relevant Article*: Article 54 of the CPR

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We wonder whether it would be possible to use, for the reimbursement of indirect costs (Art. 54 CPR), both the flat rate of 15% of personnel costs when such expenses are present in a project and that of 7% of total eligible expenses when no personnel costs are declared, and this for the whole of the EMFAF.

**Answer:**

In Article 54 CPR, the use of either rate is possible at the level of the operation: "where a flat rate is used to cover the indirect costs of an operation, it may be based on one of the following... ». It is therefore possible to use one of the rates stated therein per operation, depending on, for example, the criterion you propose (existence or not of personnel costs).  The Managing Authority should define the categories of costs and select the appropriate SCOs and rates in a consistent way and in full respect of the principle of equal treatment.

For further information on the calculation of indirect costs, please consult section 3.1.2.1 of the revised [Guidelines on SCOs within ESI](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=3&langId=en&keywords=&langSel=&pubType=580).

The document setting out the conditions for support in accordance with Article 73(3) shall include information on the form of reimbursement for indirect costs (i.e. which flat rate will be applied).

# QA00038 - Selection of operations by the managing authority on infrastructure – climate proofing

 *Relevant Articles*:  Articles 2(42) and73 CPR

 *Member State*: IE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 73 (Selection of operations by the managing authority) of the CPR states in paragraph 2(j) the following:

*2.  In selecting operations, the managing authority shall:*

*……………………*

*(j) ensure the climate proofing of investments in infrastructure with an expected lifespan of at least five years*.

The term ‘infrastructure’ is not defined in the CPR, and there seems to be no standard definition online, so I am wondering does the Commission have a view on its applicability to EMFAF funded capital investments.  It is clear that it would be relevant to harbour infrastructure.  I think we can be sure it does not apply to fishing vessels or aquaculture structures such as trestles, salmon cages etc.  I am less certain about buildings, such as processing factories.  I would welcome a Commission opinion on this, so that we can plan for the necessary assessment procedures.

**Answer:**

The Commission has developed a guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure covering the programming period 2021-2027, which is also deemed a relevant reference for the climate proofing of infrastructure under Article 2(42) and Article 73(2) j) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation (CPR).[[1]](https://myintracomm-collab.ec.europa.eu/dg/REGIO/AdviceAndInterpre21_27/ClosedConsultRegul/MARE%202021-27%2008%20-%20Arts%202%20and%2073%20CPR%20-%20climate%20proofing.docx#_ftn1) Whilst the CPR does not provide a definition of infrastructure, the guidance defines it as a broad concept, which includes[[2]](https://myintracomm-collab.ec.europa.eu/dg/REGIO/AdviceAndInterpre21_27/ClosedConsultRegul/MARE%202021-27%2008%20-%20Arts%202%20and%2073%20CPR%20-%20climate%20proofing.docx#_ftn2):

• **buildings,** from private homes to schools **or industrial facilities**, which are the most common type of infrastructure and the basis for human settlement;

• nature-based infrastructures such as green roofs, walls, spaces, and drainage systems;

• **network infrastructure crucial for the functioning of today's economy and society**, notably energy infrastructure (e.g. grids, power stations, pipelines), **transport** (fixed assets such as roads, railways, **ports**, airports or inland waterways transport infrastructure), information and communication technologies (e.g. mobile phone networks, data cables, data centres), and water (e.g. water supply pipelines, reservoirs, waste water treatment facilities);

• **systems to manage the waste generated by businesses** and households (**collecting points**, sorting and recycling facilities, incinerators and landfills);

• **other physical assets in a wider range of policy areas**, including communications, emergency services, energy, finance, food, government, health, education and training, research, civil protection, **transport, and waste or water**;

• other eligible types of infrastructure may also be laid down in the fund-specific legislation, for instance, the InvestEU Regulation includes a comprehensive list of eligible investments under the sustainable infrastructure policy window.

The guidance further clarifies that, with regard to EU funding for infrastructure in the programming period 2021-2027, the main instruments that may be employed include - under the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) - the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the Just Transition Fund (JTF). Nevertheless, given that Article 73 CPR fully applies to operations selected for support also from the EMFAF, the requirement to comply with the principle of climate proofing is applicable to new infrastructure, as well as renewal, upgrading and extension of existing infrastructure, supported by the EMFAF with an expected lifespan of at least five years.

Based on this, such principle is to be considered **relevant with regard to both harbour infrastructure and processing factories**. Therefore, in addition to supporting activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union, in selecting operations the Managing Authority should ensure the climate proofing of capital investments in both these kinds of infrastructure.

In this respect, the Commission guidance on the climate proofing of investments 2021-2027 may be a useful reference for public authorities as a basis to complement any further national and sectoral considerations and guidance.

[[1]](https://myintracomm-collab.ec.europa.eu/dg/REGIO/AdviceAndInterpre21_27/ClosedConsultRegul/MARE%202021-27%2008%20-%20Arts%202%20and%2073%20CPR%20-%20climate%20proofing.docx#_ftnref1) C(2021) 5430 final

<https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/default/files/adaptation/what/docs/climate_proofing_guidance_en.pdf>

[[2]](https://myintracomm-collab.ec.europa.eu/dg/REGIO/AdviceAndInterpre21_27/ClosedConsultRegul/MARE%202021-27%2008%20-%20Arts%202%20and%2073%20CPR%20-%20climate%20proofing.docx#_ftnref2) C(2021) 5430 final, page 7.

# QA00039 - JTF

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 8 and Article 9 of the JTF

 *Member State*: EE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**1.1.**

Should deploying CCU technologies (Carbon capture and utilization) be considered as fostering the transfer of advanced technologies (c), as investments in the deployment of technology and infrastructures in greenhouse gas emission reduction (d) or as investments in enhancing the circular economy (g)?

Is such an investment considered a productive investment, which in enterprises other than SMEs needs to be approved as part of the territorial just transition plan?

**1.2.**

If capturing carbon in such an investment is related to energy production from oil shale (either 100% shale oil or a mix with biomass), does it mean that the investment is out of scope of JTF according to Art 9? Can such investments receive support from II pillar Under InvestEU?

**Answer:**

**1.1.**

Any investment related to energy production from oil shale is ineligible according to Article 9(d) of the JTF Regulation, prohibiting the production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels.

 Moreover, cost efficient decarbonisation in the power sector is achieved by using renewables. Therefore, from a policy and economic point of view, the JTF should not fund investments for CCU in the power sector.  The objective of the JTF should also be pursued in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development as set out in Article 6a CPR, taking into account the "do no significant harm" principle.

 In principle, investments related to mining or to the extraction, processing, distribution, storage or combustion of solid fossil fuels and oil as well as investments related to the extraction of gas are also not supported under the Just Transition scheme under InvestEU according to annex 5(B)(12) of the InvestEU Regulation. This exclusion does not apply to:

(a) projects where there is no viable alternative technology;

(b) projects related to pollution prevention and control;

(c) projects equipped with carbon capture and storage or carbon capture and utilisation installations; industrial or research projects that lead to substantial reductions of greenhouse gas emissions as compared with the applicable EU Emission Trading System benchmarks.

Any of the investments falling under points (a)-(c) above, which would be eligible under InvestEU, need to be compatible with the lending policies of the implementing partners.

**1.2.**

Pursuant to Article 8(1) of the JTF regulation, the JTF should only support activities directly linked to its specific objective set out in Article 2 JTF, which is about addressing the impacts of the transition towards the Union’s 2030 targets for energy and climate and climate neutral economy by 2050. The JTF should also support activities that do no significant harm to the environmental objectives in line with Article 9(4) of the CPR and that ensure the transition towards a low carbon economy in the pathway to achieve climate neutrality at the latest by 2050.

 Further information on the project, its purpose, future use and technical features would be needed to assess whether an investment in CCU fulfills the aforementioned requirements. Such information would  also be necessary to examine whether the investment in question should be considered a productive investment in enterprises other than SMEs and how to classify it under the typology of eligible activities under Article 8(2) of the JTF.

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Oil shale is not only used as a solid fuel for thermal power-plants but also shale oil is produced from it. Shale oil is mostly used for diesel production but there are also several by-products that are a valuable raw produce for the chemical industry.

Would investments related to extracting and using these by-products or investments related to using oil shale ashes be allowed from JTF or considered also as investments related to the production, processing, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels and thus excluded from the scope? Can such investments receive support from II pillar under InvestEU?

**Answer:**

 The production of shale oil by-products is technically inseparable from oil shale production and extraction, which represent a major source of GHG emissions. Article 9(d) of the JTF regulation prohibits support related to the production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels. Thus, investments related to extracting and using these by-products or investments related to using oil shale ashes are also ineligible.

 In principle, investments related to mining or to the extraction, processing, distribution, storage or combustion of solid fossil fuels and oil, as well as investments related to the extraction of gas are also not supported under the InvestEU pillar II (deployed under the InvestEU programme) according to annex 5(B)(12) of the InvestEU Regulation. This exclusion does not apply to the following cases:

(a) projects where there is no viable alternative technology;

(b) projects related to pollution prevention and control;

(c) projects equipped with carbon capture and storage or carbon capture and utilisation installations; industrial or research projects that lead to substantial reductions of greenhouse gas emissions as compared with the applicable EU Emission Trading System benchmarks”.

 Any of the investments falling under points (a)-(c) above which would be eligible under InvestEU, need to be compatible with the lending policies of the implementing partners.

**Question 3 (including relevant facts and information):**

Investments in smart and sustainable local mobility are within the scope of JTF. In case of Estonia – would the investments in rail connections from Narva to Tallinn be eligible to support along the entire route from Tallinn to Narva or should be limited to the specific territories most negatively affected by the transition process?

 **Answer:**

Based on Article 2, JTF objective is to address economic, social and environmental costs of the transition towards the Union’s 2030 targets for energy and climate and climate neutrality by 2050.

Investments to improve local transportation for better accessibility can be considered eligible under JTF, if it is demonstrated that it contributes to alleviate the social and economic costs triggered by the transition (in Ida-Virumaa for instance)..

In addition, pursuant to Article 8(2), JTF can only support  investments in smart and sustainable local mobility. This railway cannot be considered, due to its scale and objectives, as investment in local mobility.

 **Question 4 (including relevant facts and information):**

What kind of activities can be supported as social inclusion activities (Article 8(2)(o) other activities in the areas of education and social inclusion (…) indicated in territorial just transition plans in accordance with Article 11 of the JTF)? In case of Estonia, Ida-Virumaa will be one of the regions most affected by population changes (both ageing and decrease) and Ida-Viru county had a life expectancy lower by 10 years compared to the rest of Estonia. Would investments in health care infrastructure and social service infrastructure be eligible as part of social inclusion activities from JTF? In case of education – would investments in primary and general education infrastructure be eligible?

 **Answer:**

According to Article 8(2)(o) (Scope of support) of the JTF, activities in the areas of education and social inclusion including, where duly justified, infrastructure for the purposes of child and elderly care facilities could be supported. This provision does not include health infrastructures.

 However, the support to such facilities has to be justified with regard to their capacity to alleviate the social and economic costs stemming from the climate transition. If ageing and depopulation trends are structural and cannot be directly imputable to the transition steps impacting Ida-Virumaa, such facilities could rather be supported under ERDF.

**Question 5 (including relevant facts and information):**

In InvestEU, a financial contribution is required from an implementing partner in the form of own risk-taking capacity that is provided on a pari passu basis with the EU guarantee or in another form that allows an efficient implementation of the InvestEU Programme while ensuring appropriate alignment of interest. In case of the just transition scheme Under InvestEU – is it allowed to use JTF funding as financial contribution of the implementing partner?

 **Answer:**

Under InvestEU, the implementing partners should provide their own resources and under their own risk. The EU Funding under the InvestEU guarantee cannot be used to guarantee another source of EU funding (i.e. JTF).

# QA00040 - Submission of programmes

 *Relevant Article*: Article 21 of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The PA is almost ready to be submitted in autumn 2021. However, there is the possibility that the EMFAF programme would not be ready for formal submission within 3 months from PA submission, as set out in Article 21(2) CPR. PL MA wonders if submitting an informal EMFAF programme via the SFC2021 and/or SFC2014 could fulfil the provision of Article 21(2) CPR.

**Answer:**

Only formal submission of the EMFAF programme via SFC2021 can be said to fulfil the provision in Article 21(2) CPR.

The Managing Authority should take all possible steps to respect the deadline set out in Article 21(2) CPR, submitting the most mature version of the programme possible at that stage.  The Commission will then assess the submitted programme.  The nature and extent of its observations will depend on the programme’s completeness and quality.

# QA00041 - Availability of documents and management verifications and audits of financial instruments

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 81 and 82 of the CPR

 *Member State*: EE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We are currently preparing a national act necessary for the implementation of EMFAF. Among other things, we discussed CPR the provisions with regard of availability of documents.

It seems to me that Art 82 paragraph 1 establishes requirement for MAs not to beneficiaries. Taking into account that we are planning to go digital with EMFAF, it seems reasonable that all documents are kept in digital form in the IT system of IB. To me it seems unnecessary for all the beneficiaries to print out their applications for support and payment and other documents submitted electronically to authorities.

If I look on the elements of audit trail in the Annex XIII of CPR, then it also seems to confirm that such data is already now available in the ARIB IT system.

There is a FI-s specific provision in Art 81 para 4 of CPR and I understand from it that the audits will not be carried out on the level of final beneficiaries either.

Do you share this understanding, that if the documents (both originals and digitally signed copies) related to an operation are available on the level of MA/IB, there is no need to establish requirement for the beneficiaries to keep them?

**Answer:**

**Document availability**:  Article 82 of the CPR 2021-2027 Regulation imposes an obligation to the managing authority on ensuring that all supporting documents related to an operation supported by the Funds are kept at the appropriate level for a 5-year period from 31 December of the year in which the last payment by the managing authority to the beneficiary is made. Implementation of this provision falls fully under the responsibility of the managing authority. In this context, the managing authority should ensure that the relevant actors are informed about the necessity to keep the documents at their level or not.

For audit purposes, the managing authority is responsible to ensure the availability of all necessary documents (in paper or in digital form) at appropriate level. In that sense, the documents can be kept at the level of the beneficiary or at the level of the Intermediate Body or Managing Authority.

**Financial instruments**: On the second question, article 81 of the CPR 2021-2027 provides that audits carried out by the managing authority, or by bodies responsible for the audit of programmes, are at the level of bodies implementing financial instruments, at the level of bodies delivering the underlying new loans (in the context of guarantee funds) or at the managing authority level. The regulation does not provide for derogations for exceptional circumstances to perform the audit at the level of the final recipient, as it is the case under the CPR 2014-2020.

Paragraph 4 of the Article 81 further restricts, putting the circumstances under which the audit can be performed at the level of the body providing the underlying loan, i.e. where documents are not available at the level of the managing authority or at the level of the bodies implementing the financial instrument, or there is evidence that the documents at its level do not represent a true and accurate record of the support provided.

# QA00042 - Flat rate for direct and indirect costs

 *Relevant Articles*: 54 and 56 of the CPR

 *Member State*: AT

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. How is the provision in Article 56 (1) CPR to be understood, according to which *“A flat rate of up to 40 % of eligible direct staff costs may be used in order to cover the remaining eligible costs of an operation”*. Are the remaining costs simply all the remaining costs of the project except for the staff costs or how is that to be understood?
2. Furthermore, the question arises as to whether the provisions above under Article 56 CPR can be combined with the provision in Article 54 CPR “Flat rates for indirect costs concerning grants”, i.e. whether a Member State can apply both provisions to a project at the same time?
3. If Article 56 CPR can be combined with Article 54 CPR, does this mean that the flat rate for indirect costs is part of the expenditure covered by the maximum of 40% of direct costs or can this come as eligible expenditure that comes on top of the direct staff costs + the flat rate of max 40% of eligible direct staff costs (total eligible costs would then be: direct staff costs + 40% of direct staff + flat rate for indirect costs)?

**Answer:**

1. Yes. The 40% would cover all remaining costs for a given operation.

The Managing authority may apply this flat rate to types of operations that require all three of the following categories of costs: direct staff costs, other direct costs and indirect costs. It shall check ex-ante if this condition is fulfilled for the respective type(s) of operation.

Audits would then verify if the methodology was established correctly; i.e. that all three of these categories of costs exist, comply with the eligibility requirements (of the programme and CPR) and are relevant for the respective type(s) of operation.

Audits will check the “basis costs” to which the flat rate is applied (i.e. the direct staff costs of the operation) and the correct calculation of the amount that is reimbursed on the basis of the flat rate. There are, however, no checks on the actual costs incurred by the beneficiary or related (financial) supporting documents for the amounts reimbursed on the basis of the flat rate.

For operations supported by the ERDF, the ESF+, the JTF, the AMIF, the ISF and the BMVI, salaries and allowances paid to participants shall be considered additional eligible costs not included in the flat rate. This is not applicable for the EMFAF.

2. No. Where the beneficiary applies the 40% flat rate on the staff costs, this should cover “the remaining costs” of the project. This would also include any overheads.

3. This question is obsolete, as the two flat rates cannot be combined.

# QA00043 - Payments and management verifications in PPP projects

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 2(39); Art. 53(1a); Art 63(2), Art. 74(1) of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information) - follow up question to the approach described below:**

 Can expenditure incurred by the private partner during the eligibility period be considered as eligible if payments from the escrow account to the private partner are made after 31 December 2029?

**Answer:**

Expenditure incurred by a beneficiary or a private partner in a PPP operation can be considered eligible for a contribution from the Cohesion Funds only if it is also paid during the eligibility period (from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2029), as provided in Article 63(2) of the CPR.

 The PPP agreement sets out the modalities for payment and determining the eligible costs (cf recital 46). It means that the payments to the contractor (private partner) by the public promoter (beneficiary) through the escrow account may be largely decoupled from the actual investment costs incurred by the private contractor. On the other hand, the payment of the different instalments should be conditioned by the effective implementation of the works by the contractor, in accordance with the timetable and technical specifications of the PPP agreement.

 Payments made into the account have to relate to expenditure incurred by the private partner during the eligibility period. In line with Article 74(1)(b) CPR, the beneficiary should receive the amount due in full and no later than 80 days from the date of submission of the payment claim by the beneficiary – and this condition is satisfied if the amount related to incurred expenditure is paid into the escrow account. This is without prejudice to the timing of payments from the escrow accounts, which would follow the agreed timeline and conditions established in the PPP agreement and could be affected after the eligibility period.

 In any event, the definition of escrow account, under Article 2(39), simply aims at describing the genuine functioning of such accounts, releasing payments to private partners over the lifetime of PPP projects, irrespectively of the eligibility period. This definition cannot preclude the application of legal provisions of Article 63(2) regulating the eligibility of expenditure.

*BACKGROUND INFORMATIONM (the original question asked):*

**Question (including relevant facts and information):**

We would like to ask for your confirmation that our approach described below is in line with the CPR.

 Provisions concerned:

 Article 2, point 39:

‘escrow account’ means, in case of a PPP operation, a bank account covered by a written agreement between a public body beneficiary and a private partner approved by the managing authority or an intermediate body used for payments during or after the eligibility period;

* recital 46 [added in reference to Article 53(1)(a)]:

In order to provide the necessary flexibility for implementation of PPPs, the PPP agreement should specify when expenditure is considered eligible, in particular under which conditions it is incurred by the beneficiary or by the private partner of the PPP irrespective of who is carrying out the payments in implementing the PPP operation.

* Article 51(b)

The Union contribution may take any of the following forms:

(b) reimbursement of support provided to beneficiaries in accordance with Chapter II and Chapter III of this Title.

* Article 53(1)(a) :

Grants provided by Member States to beneficiaries may take any of the following forms:

(a)   reimbursement of eligible costs actually incurred by a beneficiary or the private partner of PPP operations and paid in implementing operations, contributions in kind and depreciation;

* Article 63(2)

Expenditure shall be eligible for a contribution from the Funds if it has been incurred by a beneficiary or the private partner of a PPP operation and paid in implementing operations, between the date of submission of the programme to the Commission or from 1 January 2021, whichever date is earlier, and 31 December 2029.

* Article 74

For PPP operations, the managing authority shall make payments to an escrow account set up for that purpose in the name of the beneficiary for use in accordance with the PPP agreement.

**Description of the proposed approach:**

In accordance with the above-mentioned provisions and in order to maximize the advantages of the PPP scheme, we are planning to introduce a scheme for reimbursing costs in PPP operations as follows:

Step 1.

The beneficiary (a public law body) applies to the managing authority (MA) for an advance payment covering all costs of the private partner (de facto: the contractor) indicated in the PPP agreement. The PPP agreement will be one of the annexes to the co-financing agreement.

Step 2.

The MA transfers the advance payment to the escrow account. The advance payment reflects all investment costs of the project as defined in the PPP agreement.

Step 3.

The beneficiary transfers the funds from the escrow account in line with the provisions of the PPP agreement. Important: the transfers of the funds to the private partner may be conducted during or after the eligibility period, depending on the prior arrangements set out in the PPP agreement between the contracting parties (i.e. the beneficiary and the private partner – as it is regulated in the current programming period, specifically in Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Article 64.1-3).

Step 4.

Before the end of the eligibility period the MA verifies, whether all the works that were the basis for the advance payment:

- were actually completed,

- are reflected in the technical documentation and 3

- were carried out in accordance with the PPP agreement and applicable law.

The verification process is analogous to the well-known process of approval of construction investments under the construction law applicable in the EU countries.

The MA will verify the completion of works mainly on the basis of the technical documentation of the investment, but it will do on-the-spot checks as well. (Before the MA does the verification, the documentation is going to be approved and signed by the entities obliged by the construction law, e.g. building inspector, construction manager or chief engineer.)

A successful verification of the works means that the advance payment made to the public entity has been cleared.

To sum up, our main concerns are:

1) Is it possible for the MA to pay the advance payment to the beneficiary (a public law body) that would cover all the investment costs defined in the PPP agreement?

2) Can the advance payment be recognized as settled if the investment works are positively verified by the MA?

3) Can the advance payment be certified to the Commission as soon as it is deposited into the escrow account (i.e. before investment works have started and cost have been incurred by the private partner)?

**Answer:**

The implementation of PPP operations is ruled by the several provisions and principles:

* The managing authority shall carry out payments to an escrow account;
* The beneficiary is either the public body initiating a PPP operation or the private partner selected for its implementation;
* Expenditure shall be incurred by a beneficiary or the private partner of PPP operations and paid in implementing the operations;
* The PPP agreement should specify when expenditure is considered eligible, in particular under which conditions it is incurred by the beneficiary or by the private partner of the PPP, irrespective of who is carrying out the payments in implementing the PPP operation. This principle echoes the practices in implementing PPP operations, whereby the private partner is remunerated by the public body based on arrangements detailed in the PPP agreement including where these payments are decoupled from the actual investment costs incurred by the private partner, pursuant to the construction risk borne by this latter. The PPP agreement should in particular detail the conditions linked to the payments made by the public body to the private partner (on the quality of the construction works and implementation timetable notably).

It stems from the above that the following mechanisms should be followed, replying to the questions raised:

-          There is no rule limiting the capacity of the managing authority to provide advance payment(s) to the beneficiaries, for cash flow purposes. In this regard, the whole amount of the grant can be paid to the public body, as beneficiary, in the escrow account;

-          This advance payment can only be declared for reimbursement to the Commission, if it complies with the conditions set out in Article 91(5) of the CPR.

-          In any case, expenditure incurred by the beneficiary, and the payments made by the beneficiary to private partner for implementing the operation, pursuant to the arrangements detailed in the PPP agreement and within a period between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2029, may be considered as eligible expenditure and can be declared to the Commission by the managing authority after having carried out the necessary verifications provided for in Article 74 1(a)(i)  and (2)) of the CPR.

As any other operation, the PPP operation has to be selected by the managing authority in line with requirements of Article 73 of the CPR.

# QA00045 - The date of eligibility of operations and the collaborative actions

 *Relevant Article*: Article 63(2) of the CPR

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. The French national authorities request confirmation from the Commission that the term “… in implementing operations” in Article 63(2) of the CPR relate to the **payment** of the operation and not to the date at which the beneficiary has incurred the operation (**commitment**).

2. The Frenchnational authorities request confirmation from the Commission that the national provisions concerning “collaborative actions” are in conformity with the EU legislation.

**Answer:**

1. As stated in Article 63(2) of the CPR, the timeframe specified for the eligibility of expenditure concerns both the incurring of the expenditure and the date of the payment. Thus, to be eligible, expenditure must be incurred by the beneficiaries and paid in implementing operations after the submission of the programme or after the 1 January 2021 – whichever is the earlier.
2. It is the responsibility of the national authorities to check that the national regulations and rules taken in addition or when implementing  the EU law are in conformity with the EU law, including with state aid rules.

# QA00046 - Irrecoverable amounts

 *Relevant Article*: Article 98(3) of the CPR

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The appendices on recoveries, outstanding amounts, irrecoverable amounts and advances paid in the context of state aid in the accounts will disappear for the 2021-2027 programming period. Thus, recoveries will only be entered in the accounts using the ‘immediate withdrawal’ method.

We understand that the recovery obligation is only foreseen in the CPR in two specific cases:

* Operations subject to the principle of durability
* State aid operations

Both above covered by Article 65 of the CPR.

Does the Commission confirm that these are the only two cases?

In the execution part of SFC2021 (see fields irrecoverable amounts on SFC2014), will findings of irrecoverable irregularities be declared by the managing authorities to the Commission for the 2021-2027 programming period (see Delegated Regulation (EU) 2016/568)?

**Answer:**

Please, note that there is an appendix for advances paid in the context of state aid – Appendix 7 of Annex XXIV.  Recovery of funds is a Member State responsibility in all cases.  No reporting template on this matter exists anymore.

The Commission is concerned only with regard to withdrawals of amounts, in accordance with Articles 98(3)(b), 98(6) and 98(7) of the CPR, including those related to irregular expenditure linked to Article 65(1) and 65(2) CPR or repayment of such amounts in accordance with Article 88 of the CPR.

Concerning the second question the reply is no, irrecoverable amounts cannot be reported in SFC2021, including in the accounts, as there is no specific field for this.

# QA00047 - Eligibility of operating aid to innovation clusters

 *Relevant Article*: Article 5(1) ERDF Regulation

 *Member State*: DK

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can DK support operating costs of the Innovation clusters within the SO 1.1 of the ERDF OP? The costs foreseen for support would be those pursuant to Article 27 GBER. These sector specific clusters are the corner stone of their Smart specialization strategy.

**Answer:**

As a general rule, operating costs are not included within the scope of support of the ERDF cf. Art. 5 ERDF Regulation (an exception is only provided for in the context of the specific additional allocation for the outermost regions, cf. Art. 14 (2)(b) ERDF Regulation. The notion of “operating cost” is not defined under cohesion policy rules.

The General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)[[1]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/X0DZEZ3C/CLEAN_REVISED_FINAL_QA%20172%20Eligibility%20of%20operating%20aid%20to%20clusters-DK.docx#_ftn1) details, under Article 27(8), the categories of operating costs (personal and administrative costs) eligible to aid for innovative clusters, as follows:

* Animation of the cluster to facilitate collaboration, information sharing and the provision or channelling of specialised and customised business support services;
* Marketing of the cluster to increase participation of new undertakings or organisations and to increase visibility;
* Management of the cluster's facilities; organisation of training programmes, workshops and conferences to support knowledge sharing and networking and transnational cooperation.

Some of these costs may be eligible for the ERDF, where they contribute to the specific objective “*Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies*” and can be considered as falling within the scope of the ERDF such as:

* networking, cooperation, exchange of experience and activities involving innovation clusters including between businesses, research organisations and public authorities;
* information, communication and studies.

This requires a case-by-case assessment.

[[1]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/X0DZEZ3C/CLEAN_REVISED_FINAL_QA%20172%20Eligibility%20of%20operating%20aid%20to%20clusters-DK.docx#_ftnref1) Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014

# QA00048 - Flexibility amount and future transfers of ERDF allocations between programmes

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 18, 22 and 86 of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Background: CZ contemplates to shift parts of the allocations between programmes (within same fund - ERDF) to optimize spending of resources according to abilities of programmes to spend fast in the early years of the period. The sum of the fund allocation remains the same in each year, so that the annual breakdown would be in line with the EC proposal. The result is a non-linear allocation/spending profile in particular financial table/s of programmes affected by this shift (see the proposal in the table attached).

In case of CZ this would apply to parts of the ERDF allocations of OP JAK and OP Transport. Both programmes are composed of two funds, but it should be stressed that the shift would concern just the ERDF part, the other funds will remain absolutely intact in both programmes, all standard provisions and procedures will apply to them regardless of the processes concerning the ERDF.

According to CPR Art. 86 there should be a „flexibility amount“ indicated in a particular financial table/s of a programme. In the model described above, the ERDF resources of one of the programmes are concentrated to the first three years of the period. It implies that there are no ERDF allocations left for the last two years of the period in one of the programmes, at the same time allocations for the last two years of the period in the other programme increasing accordingly.

Q1: Is this solution applicable or there should be allocations different from zero in particular financial table/s of a programme in case of both funds?

Q2: In scenario B, the shifts for 2026 and 2027 would concern only 50% of the allocation for these last two years (i.e. not touching the flexibility amount). Would then only 50 % of the allocation of the last two years be sufficient to fill in the particular financial table/s of a programme?

**Answer:**

Pursuant to Article 22(6) CPR, the financing shall include amounts for 2021 to 2027, including the flexibility amount, with a view to increasing the adaptability of programmes to unforeseen circumstances of policy priorities.

Pursuant to Article 86(1) CPR, the flexibility amount, corresponding to 50% of the allocations for 2026 and 2027, shall be retained and definitively allocated to the programmes after the mid-term review.

Pursuant to Article 86(2) CPR, commitments for each programme shall be made in annual instalments for each Fund during the 2021-2027 period.

While it is clear that the underlying logic of the Regulation and the programming Annexes is that the programme financing consists of yearly financial allocations for the years 2021 to 2027, it is not explicitly excluded that frontloading of annual commitments in one programme could take place (with the corresponding backloading in other programme(s) in order to keep the overall global resources for the ERDF by the Member State under the Investment for jobs and growth goal, i.e: MFF profile), but the following **policy considerations** need to be taken into account:

Cohesion policy is a multiannual policy, designed to be implemented over the course of a decade, and to be adaptable and modifiable so as to address changing circumstances. The multiannual programming perspective also provides visibility to stakeholders, together with a guarantee of available financial support. The frontloading of programme resources in certain programmes would generally run counter to these principles, as it would make programmes unnecessarily time-limited and inflexible, as funding would be used up before the end of the programming period.

In addition, the purpose of the flexibility amount and the intention of the co-legislator when agreeing on this provision was to provide further adaptability in the implementation of cohesion policy, enabling resources to be redirected, if needed, in view of  unforeseen socio-economic challenges or emerging policy priorities. It is therefore important that these amounts are sufficient and available in each programme to effectively provide for the desired adaptability.

In that respect, programming zero amounts for the last years of the period should not be envisaged. However, in order to give Member States flexibility in their programming, if duly justified, at programme level the annual amounts can deviate by up to +/-50% from the Member State’s Fund allocation for the year scaled down in proportion to the programme’s fund allocation within the Member State envelope as defined in the implementing act.

As regards the above mentioned “scenario B”, it is not possible to implement such a construction.  The flexibility amount is always half of whatever amounts are included in a programme for 2026 and 2027.

# QA00050 - Data field 137, Annex XVII

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 64 and 67 of the CPR

 Annex XVII of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Data expected:

1. expenditure on the purchase of land

2. expenditure relating to the purchase of land

3. Reason for exceeding the ceilings

This article limits the eligibility of land acquisition to 10 % and 15 % of the total eligible expenditure of the operation. The last subparagraph of Article 64 (1) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 states that this limitation does not apply to environmental protection measures.

However, as paragraph 1 also lays down rules on eligibility, such as VAT, it is unclear, according to the wording of the box, which reasons should be given for exceeding the ceiling.

1. Which expenditure should be allocated to data 1 and 2?

Data 1: Only purchase price

Data 2: All charges (taxes, notaries, land register, etc.)

1. Is one reason expected for each overshooting of the ceilings, i.e. even if the ceiling is exceeded by 10 %?
2. What are the reasons for exceeding the limits for the acquisition of land? Is it sufficient to refer to the permissible reasons for the exceedance?
3. Is the expression “financing of environmental protection measures” sufficient to justify in cases of exceedances due to environmental protection measures, or, for example, must an appropriate scope of intervention be provided? If so, what scope of intervention is accepted for this purpose?

**Answer:**

1)    The purpose of the field 137 in Annex XVII CPR is to monitor the limits set out in Article 64(1) CPR, in particular under its point (b), related to the purchase of land. The field is to contain the amount of incurred and paid eligible expenditure for land purchase. Such an amount may contain accompanying charges, taxes or fees, when they constitute a cost for beneficiary, depending on detailed eligibility rules set up at national level. In relation to value added tax eligibility rules set out in Article 64(1)(c) apply.

In relation to contributions in kind in the form of provision of land, Article 67(1), CPR stipulates that the value of land as certified by an independent qualified expert or duly authorised official body should not exceed the limit set out in point (b) of Article 64(1)(b) CPR. Valuations of land usually do not take into account related charges or taxes. So in case of contributions in kind data field 137 should contain the value of land without charges or taxes unless there is an established practice in Member State to include them in valuations.

2)    Purchase of land shall not exceed 10% of the total eligible expenditure for the operation concerned. For derelict sites and for those formerly in industrial use which comprise buildings, the limit has been raised to 15%. The amount inserted in field 137 of annex XVII CPR cannot exceed the limits set out in the regulation. Additionally, the second subparagraph of Article 64(1) CPR stipulates that the limits set out in Article 64(1)(b) do not apply to operations concerning environmental conservation.

  a) An operation may exceed the ceilings only if it concerns environmental conservation.

Filed 137 in annex XVII CPR needs this reason.

3)    The main reason could be accompanied by a short reference to the scope of the measure (e.g. restoration of a Natura 2000 site, restoration of a wetland).

# QA00051 - Second-level control in the case of ERDF-funded CLLD, with EAFRD as lead fund

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 3(1)(e)(ii) of the ERDF regulation; Art. 31(4) to (6) of the CPR

 *Member State*: AT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the Austrian ERDF mainstream programme 2021-27, it is foreseen to support CLLD (Community Led Local Development) under specific objective 5.2 (Art. 3(1)(e)(ii) of the ERDF regulation no. 2021/1058 for 2021-27), with the EAFRD as lead-fund (see art. 31(4) of the CPR for 2021-27, regulation no. 2021/1060). Article 31(5) on CLLD in the CPR reads: “While respecting the scope and the eligibility rules of each fund involved in supporting the strategy, the rules of the Lead Fund shall apply to that strategy. The authorities of other funds shall rely on decisions and management verifications made by the competent authority of the Lead Fund.”

 The draft Austrian ERDF mainstream programme for 2021-27 contains the following statement:

 „Die Abwicklung von CLLD erfolgt ausschließlich auf Basis der Vorgaben des ELER als federführender Fonds („Lead-Fonds“) gemäß VO (EU) Nr. XX/20XX unter Berücksichtung allfälliger zusätzlicher EU-Vorgaben des EFRE. **Dies betrifft auch die Kontrolle 2. Ebene**. Die Zahlstelle im EFRE zahlt auf Basis der Prüfergebnisse des „Lead-Fonds“ aus und führt keine zusätzlichen Kontrollschritte durch.“

 “CLLD is implemented solely on the basis of the requirements of the EAFRD as lead fund in accordance with Regulation (EU) No XX/20XX, taking into account any additional EU requirements from the ERDF. **This also concerns the second-level control**. The “body in charge of the accounting function” in the ERDF pays on the basis of the audit results of the ‘lead fund’, and does not carry out any additional control steps.”

 The question is if the second-level control of CLLD-support with the ERDF can be carried out solely on the basis of the requirements of the EAFRD as lead fund in accordance with the Regulation? The sentence in bold above (“This also concerns the second-level control”) could be understood in a way that the audit authority of the lead fund (EAFRD) carries out the second-level control for CLLD, and not the ERDF audit authority. Is this possible?

**Answer:**

The Lead Fund rules applicable to all the operations under the CLLD strategy concern all decisions and management verifications, including checks, grant and payment decisions, controls, as well as possible corrections or penalties. As stated in Article 31(5) CPR, the scope and the eligibility rules of each fund involved in supporting the strategy should be respected. In practice, the Lead Fund approach means that the Lead Fund authorities handle all matters with beneficiaries except for making payments, for which they provide the authorities of other Funds with information necessary to monitor and make payments in accordance with the Fund-specific rules.

Audit work carried out by the competent Lead Fund authority should also apply to all the contributing funds. Following the single audit principle, as specifically set out in Article 80(1) CPR, the audit authority of those Funds can rely on the opinion of the competent Lead Fund authority when issuing assurance on the functioning of the management system and the legality and regularity of expenditure of the CLLD operations.

# QA00052 - Support to all preparatory, management and animation from ERDF for the Local Action Groups in the context of a multi-funded CLLD strategy

 *Relevant Article*: Art 31 of the CPR

 *Member State*: RO

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to Article 31(3) CPR we understand that where support to Community-led local development strategies is available from more than one Fund, the relevant managing authorities may choose one of the Funds concerned to support all preparatory, management and animation costs. In case ESF + is the Lead fund, can the relevant MA choose ERDF to support the above mentioned costs?

**Answer:**

CLLD strategies may be supported by one or several of the Funds covered by the Article 31 CPR directly (i.e. ERDF, the ESF+, the JTF and the EMFAF) and by the EAFRD, which is linked to the CPR through Article 2(2) of the CAP regulation (COM proposal of 1.6.2018).

In case support to a CLLD strategy is available from more than one fund, the relevant Managing Authorities may

* in accordance with paragraph (3) of Article 31 of the CPR, decide to use only one of those funds to cover all preparatory, management and animation costs related to strategies with respect to the conditions set out in Article 34(2) of the CPR;
* in accordance with paragraph (4) of Article 31 of the CPR, choose one of the Funds providing support as the "Lead Fund", which would mean that only the rules of the Lead Fund would apply to the strategy implemented, while respecting the conditions set out in paragraphs (5)-(6) of Article 31 of the CPR.

These are two options provided by the regulation that do not exclude each other. Therefore it is possible to use ERDF resources to cover all preparatory, management and animation costs as referred to in points (a) and (c) of Article 34(1) CPR related to CLLD strategies while at the same time having ESF+ as the Lead Fund.

# QA00054 - Questions on the Accounting function and payment application

 *Relevant Articles:*  Art. 76, 91 and 93 CPR

 *Member State*: LV

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

*In the framework of changes in Management information system for the new EU fund planning period 2021-2027, we (responsible for accounting function (AF)) have several questions about functions of AF and preparation of Payment application and Accounts:*

*Functions*

*1.         Article 76 of CPR does not lay down directly the obligation for AF to account expenditure, which could be declared, and withdrawals in a separate accounting system. Responsibility for accounting expenditure is indirectly mentioned only in point a), c), d) of Article 91 (3) (….as entered in the system of the body carrying out the accounting function) and point a) of Article 98 (3) (…entered into the accounting systems of the body carrying out the accounting function), however accounting of withdrawals is not mentioned at all.*

*In this regard could the Management information system, where all the data on operations are ensured by Intermediate body, and which ensures automatic generation of payment applications and accounts, including records of all deductions and withdrawals performed by AF, be considered as the system mentioned in point 3 a), c), d) of Article 91?*

*2.         Point 2 of Article 76 foresees that AF shall not comprise verifications at the level of beneficiaries. Please confirm, that our understanding is correct and the AF shall not perform any kind of verifications not only at the beneficiary level, but also at the Intermediate body and Managing Authority level, since by signing Payment application and Accounts the AF does not certify eligibility of expenditure, but only confirms technical correctness and completeness of data?*

*3.         In case it will be agreed in the Programme that the Commission will pay Union contribution based on point a), c), d) and e) of Article 51, please clarify or provide some references to documents/guidance which explain:*

*3.1.      how the AF can get such an information on expenditure to be declared;*

*3.2.      whether the AF should in addition to Managing Authority/Intermediate Body controls verify that the conditions for reimbursement from the Commission have been fulfilled;*

*Should this data come from the operations? If the form of grant to beneficiary differs from the form of contribution from the Commission, should the Intermediate body ensure the information about both flows of approved expenditure – one to be paid to beneficiary and another to be declared in Payment application?*

*4.         Comparing to CPR (2014-2020) the new CPR does not imply the obligation for AF to take into account results of management verification and controls performed by Audit Authority. Does it mean that AF can declare expenditure in Payment application without any corrections and additional evaluation of the impact of above-mentioned results on expenditures included in the PA?*

*5. Does the Commission intend to issue some guidance on preparation of PA and Accounts, since in our opinion the requirements are more complicated comparing to the previous planning period.*

**Answer:**

1. Overall, recovery of funds is a Member State responsibility in all cases.  No reporting template on this matter exists anymore. The Commission is concerned only with regard to withdrawals of amounts, in accordance with Articles 98(3)(b),  98(6) and 98(7) of the CPR, including those related to irregular expenditure linked to Article 65(1) and 65(2) CPR or repayment of such amounts in accordance with Article 88 CPR. Article 76(1)(b) CPR sets out that the body fulfilling accounting functions should keep electronic records of all the elements of the accounts, including payment applications. Article 91 of the CPR sets out that the payment application should be based on amounts “as entered in the system of the body carrying out the accounting function”. Commission services at this stage are not in the position to confirm if the system is compliant with these requirements solely based on the provided brief description. In all cases, the system should be under the responsibility of the programme authorities, i.e.: managing authority or the body carrying out the accounting function (AF).  Furthermore, we draw also your attention that the Audit strategy of the audit authority shall, based on a risk assessment, include also system audits of authorities in charge of accounting function.
2. The understanding in the question is correct.
3. Practical arrangements for exchange of information between the bodies at the national level should be agreed by the relevant bodies themselves, including for simplified cost options (SCO) and financing not linked to costs (FNLTC) schemes, as the implementation of the accounting function and underlying reliance on the information provided by the MA or AA should not differ whether COM reimburses based on expenditure incurred or amounts covered by a  SCO/FNLTC scheme. In case when the expenditure declared by the beneficiary is the same as the expenditure declared by the MS to the Commission, declaration of expenditure will follow standard procedures as for operations declaring real costs. In case of differences between the amounts declared by and reimbursed to the beneficiaries and the SCO amounts declared to the Commission, the national authorities are still obliged to keep, among others, proof of payment of the public contribution to the beneficiary and of the date when the payment was made (see section 3 of Annex XIII to CPR presenting obligatory elements of audit trail for reimbursement of the Union contribution by the Commission under Article 94 CPR to be kept at the level of the managing authority/intermediate body).
In accordance with Article 94 (3) CPR, the unit costs, lump sums and flat rates will be subject to management verifications and Commission and MS audits aiming only at verifying that the conditions for reimbursement by the Commission have been fulfilled. The accounting function should limit itself to the functions foreseen by the Article 76 CPR and not duplicate management verifications of the managing authority.
4. Article 98(6) CPR sets out that irregular expenditure and expenditure subject to ongoing assessment should be deducted from the (annual) accounts and the accounts include the amounts withdrawn during the accounting year in line with Article 98(3)(b) and 98(7) CPR. The Article also provides that amounts subject to ongoing assessment may be introduced in the payment applications for subsequent accounting years once their legality and regularity is confirmed. In line with Article 74(1)(d) CPR the managing authority shall prevent, detect and correct irregularities and the Commission may suspend all or part of payments if the expenditure in payment applications is linked to an irregularity that has not been corrected, as provided for in Article 97(1)(c) CPR. The body carrying out the accounting function shall take account of these requirements and have arrangements with the managing authority and the audit authority on these aspects.
5. The Commission does not foresee the adoption of any guidance on this subject.

# QA00057 - Start date of eligibility for the JTF

 *Relevant Articles*:

Articles 22 and 63 of the CPR

Article 10 of the JTF

 *Member State*:  DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The JTF can be integrated as an axis through an amendment in another cohesion policy programme that becomes a multi-funds programme through the amendment.

Is it correct that all intervention types used in the ERDF programme (e.g. 047 or 089) and later in the course of an amendment also in the JTF axis integrated into that ERDF Programme, would be eligible from 1 January 2021, while those not covered by the ERDF but, e.g., by the ESF+ Programme, but included in the JTF (e.g. 134 or 136) would only be eligible as of submission of the amendment?

Moreover, the measures included in a self-standing JTF Programme would be eligible as of 1 January 2021, since it would be a separate programme and not part of an amendment to an existing programme, which risks containing different intervention types than those needed under the JTF.

It seems strange that the integration of a programme into another programme through an amendment (here JTF into ERDF) is treated like a ‘regular’ amendment of the programme, where new intervention types are added and therefore only eligible as from integration, while introducing a separate JTF programme on the same day would mean that all intervention types would be eligible as from 1.1.2021.

This also seems to discourage MSs, most of which intend to include the JTF as an amendment of their ERDF programmes from including ESF+ like interventions in their JTF axis. Moreover, it discourages them from choosing interventions, which are different from their ERDF interventions.

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 63 of the CPR, the eligibility rules for new investments differ according to the programme status:

1. **In the case of expenditure introduced into a programme submitted to the Commission for the first time for adoption, the rules under Article 63(2) of the CPR apply.**

In this case, expenditure would be eligible for a contribution from the Funds if it has been incurred by a beneficiary and paid by a relevant body between the date of submission of the programme to the Commission or from 1 January 2021 (whichever date is earlier) and 31 December 2029. As the Commission has not received any programme prior to 2021, this means in practice that the starting eligibility date for all programmes will be 1 January 2021.

1. **In the case of expenditure introduced into a programme through a request for its amendment, the rules under Article 63(7) of the CPR will apply.**
In this case, expenditure would be eligible for a contribution from the Funds from the date of the submission of the corresponding request to the Commission unless the programme already contains the same code of intervention of those listed in Table 1 of Annex I of the CPR. The latter applies only to the programmes supported by the ERDF, CF and/ or JTF (not to the ESF+ resources). In any case, new expenditure needs to comply with all other support conditions, as laid down in the CPR or Fund-specific regulations.

**These rules have a horizontal character and, in fact, there are no derogations on the starting date of eligibility of expenditure in the Fund-specific regulations: in neither the ERDF/CF Regulation nor the JTF one.**

In line with Article 10(1) of the JTF regulation and Article 22(8) of the CPR,the Member State may freely decide the programming method for the JTF: approval as a stand-alone programme or as part of a programme or as part of a request for a programme amendment. However, this decision will determine the starting date of eligibility for the JTF in accordance with Article 63 of the CPR. The fact thatArticle 10(1) of the JTF Regulation and paragraph 8 of Article 22 of the CPR allows the Member States to have the JTF resources approved as part of a programme submitted for adoption or of a request for amendment, does not alter the rules on the starting date of eligibility, thus does not provide for a derogation from Article 63. Therefore, the starting date of eligibility may differ as follows:

1. **In the case of JTF expenditure introduced into a self-standing programme or as part of a programme submitted to the Commission for the first time for adoption, the rules under Article 63(2) of the CPR apply.**
In this case, JTF expenditure would be eligible if it has been incurred by a beneficiary and paid between the date of submission of the programme to the Commission or from 1 January 2021 (whichever date is earlier) and 31 December 2029.
2. **In the case of  JTF expenditure introduced into an already adopted programme through a formal request for amendment, the rules under Article 63(7) of the CPR will apply.**

In this case, expenditure would be eligible for a contribution from the JTF from the date of the submission of the corresponding request to the Commission unless the programme already contains the same code of intervention of those listed in Table 1 of Annex I of the CPR. Then, the eligibility date will be set to 1 January 2021[[1]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/X0DZEZ3C/198%20QA%20Start%20date%20of%20eligibility%20for%20the%20JTF_EMPL_rev%2027SEPT2021%20FINAL%2008112021.docx#_ftn1). This is regardless of whether the code is associated in the programme to the ERDF, ESF+, CF or JTF specific objective. This could be the case of a multi-fund programme with a broad thematic coverage and thus containing numerous categories of intervention.

In any case, new expenditure under the JTF will still have to comply with all applicable support conditions under the CPR and the JTF Regulations, e.g. expenditure related to operations should contribute to the implementation of the relevant territorial just transition plan etc.

Finally, it should be clarified that the option outlined by the Member State in the question (“*the integration of a programme into another programme through an amendment (here JTF into ERDF)”*) is technically not considered as the merging of programmes. It is understood as the introduction of JTF resources in an adopted programme with ERDF resources via a programme amendment.

[[1]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/X0DZEZ3C/198%20QA%20Start%20date%20of%20eligibility%20for%20the%20JTF_EMPL_rev%2027SEPT2021%20FINAL%2008112021.docx#_ftnref1) Or later depending on when the relevant codes of intervention were introduced into the programme through its amendment.

# QA00058 - 25 % limit linked to the territorial strategy / CLLD

 *Relevant Article*: Article 34 of the CPR

 *Member State*:  FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The question concerns the clarification of provisions of Article 34 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060: “*1. The Member State shall ensure that support from the Funds for community-led local development covers: (a) capacity building and preparatory actions supporting the design and future implementation of the strategy, […] (c) the management, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its animation, including the facilitation of exchanges between stakeholders.* *2.* *[…] The support referred to under point (c) of paragraph 1 shall not exceed 25 % of the total public contribution to the strategy*”.

Should the 25% limit be calculated on the basis of the total public expenditure of all the Funds that are supporting the (multi-funded) CLLD strategy (in this case ERDF and EAFRD) or should the ceiling be calculated on the basis of the total public expenditure of all the Funds that are supporting the (multi-funded) CLLD strategy + any additional public contribution relating to the local development strategy?

**Answer:**

According to the second paragraph of Article 34(2) CPR, the support from the CPR Funds listed in Article 31(1) CPR to a CLLD strategy for the management, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its animation, including the facilitation of exchanges between stakeholders (referred to under point (c) of Article 34(1) CPR) shall not exceed 25 % of the total public contribution to the strategy.

The total public contribution to the strategy should include any public contribution to the strategy - as defined in point 28 of Article 2 CPR – i.e. the source of which is the budget of national, regional or local public authorities, the budget of the Union made available to the Funds, the budget of public law bodies or the budget of associations of public authorities or of public law bodies.

 Consequently, in the example provided in the question, the maximum amount of the support from the ERDF should be calculated on the basis of the total public contribution to the strategy from the ERDF and the EAFRD (EU and national contribution) together with any additional public contribution to the strategy.

# QA00059 - Application of Article 6 of the JTF Regulation to insular territories that do not constitute an entire island

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 6 and Article 11 of the JTF

Article 22 of the CPR

 *Member State*: IT

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Does Article 6 of the JTF Regulation on “Specific allocations for outermost regions and islands” apply when a territory (NUTS 3) included in a territorial just transition plan is part of an island but is not the island in its entirety? The specific case concerned is the Sulcis-Iglesiente area in Southwest Sardinia: Sulcis-Iglesiente is a NUTS3 area that is part of the Sardinia island region, which is a NUTS 2 area.

Secondly, would it be possible to modify the specific allocation to the (part of the) island during programme implementation and if so, should this be done through a programme amendment?

Note that the JTF assistance for Sulcis-Iglesiente and for the other JTF designated NUTS3 area in Italy (Taranto in the Apulia region) will be covered by one single dedicated JTF Programme.

**Answer:**

Question 1:

 Yes, Article 6 JTF applies even if the selected JTF territory is just part of an island as in the current case the Sulcis-Iglesiente area is part of a NUTS 3 area, as requested by Article 11(1) of the JTF Regulation on the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP).

Question 2:

When including such territories in their TJTP, Member States should set out the specific amount allocated for those territories under section 1.3 of the TJTP together with the corresponding justification, reflecting their specific challenges and capacity to finance the necessary investments.

In accordance with Article 22(8) of the Common Provisions Regulation territorial just transition plans are an integral part of the programme. Thus, any modification of the allocation under section 1.3 has to be considered an amendment of the relevant programme(s) triggering the need to notify the amendment and to get it approved by Commission decision, based on Article 24 of the Common Provisions Regulation.

# QA00060 - Possibility of procuring projects

 *Relevant Article*: Article 52 of the CPR

 *Member State*: SE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 52 (Forms of support) in the CRP states “Member States shall use the contribution from the Funds to provide support to beneficiaries in the form of grants, financial instruments or prizes, or a combination thereof.” Does this wording mean that it is not possible to use the contribution from the Funds to procure projects? If procurement of projects is still an option under shared management (like in current FEAD) — where do we find legal support for this?

**Answer:**

Public procurement is not a “form of support to beneficiaries” in accordance with Article 52 of the CPR, however, beneficiaries when receiving support from the Funds should implement operations in accordance with the rules on public procurement where relevant, namely Directives 2014/23, 2014/24 and 2014/25.”.

It should be noted that public procurement was never considered as a form of support for the European Structural and Investment Funds in 2014-2020. This form of support was only provided for the FEAD. The reason for this was because in the case of the FEAD a great part of the support received by beneficiaries (notably for the purchase of food) was subject to public procurement rules.

# QA00062 - Combination of support from FI under shared management with the support from RRF at the level of final recipients

 *Relevant Article*:

Article 58 and Article 63 of the CPR

Article 9 RRF regulation

 *Member State*: FR

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The regional authorities in France responsible for the programme implementation are considering scaling up the support to enterprises (i.e. final recipients) in the form of financial instruments by providing support from a mix of sources of support including Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) resources and programme resources under 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programming periods. The ERDF programme resources are managed by the regional financial instruments set up under the provisions of CPR. The RRF (further in the text referred to as RFF) support distributed to the individual regions will be managed by the national promotional bank.

**Is the combination of the ERDF programme resources and support from Resilience and Recovery Facility possible in one investment if support is provided in the form of financial instruments?**

**Answer**[**[1]**](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/197%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_197%20QA%20-%20Combination%20of%20streams%20of%20support%20ERDF%20and%20RRF.docx#_ftn1)**:**

The reply concerns exclusively the possibility of bringing together the CPR Funds and RRF within the same investment at the level of the final recipient; it does not address possible synergies between parallel or successive management of the Funds and RRF through the same financial instrument structure which was already analysed in the reply available in QA for RRF[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/197%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_197%20QA%20-%20Combination%20of%20streams%20of%20support%20ERDF%20and%20RRF.docx#_ftn2).

While according to Article 58(4) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR), support to final recipients under the financial instrument may be combined with support from any Fund or another Union instrument, other conditions should be also taken into account:

* The CPR contains an explicit prohibition of double support in the sense that the same item of expenditure cannot be supported by the EU budget beyond 100% (Article 58(7) CPR).
* Article 58(4) CPR clarifies that the expenditure related to the financial instrument cannot be declared to the Commission for support under another form, another Fund or another Union instrument.
* To ensure the respect of the above mentioned paragraphs of Article 58 CPR, paragraph 6 of the same article stipulates the obligation of separate records for each source of combined support.
* In addition, funds under CPR are subject to eligibility rules (e.g. national rules, CPR or the Fund-specific Regulations (Article 63(1) CPR)) and management verifications and audits (Title VI CPR).

These CPR requirements aim to ensure that the expenditure which is included in the payment application to the Commission is legal and regular or that the necessary measures are taken in case of irregularities.

The rule of avoiding the double funding is regulated in Article 9 of the RRF Regulation, which also requires that the RRF support does not cover the same costs. In the context of RRF (see recital (18)), payments are not subject to controls on the costs actually incurred by the beneficiary. Instead, the costs are defined in the recovery and resilience plans on the basis of documents submitted by Member States (MS). **It means that all the costs which were covered by the estimates used under the plans, should be excluded from financing under the CPR**.

Section 2 of Part 3 of [working document SWD(2021) 12 final](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/document_travail_service_part1_v2_en.pdf) includes the relevant requirements, such as:

-       since the same cost cannot be financed twice, national authorities should have described in their plans how they will ensure compliance with Article 9 of the RRF Regulation and avoidance of double-funding. MS were required to clearly and strictly differentiate the specific measures, activities and projects funded under the RRF from those financed under other Union programmes and instruments. Moreover, the RRF, as a rule, should not cover mandatory national co-financing rates under other programmes.

-       MS should have provided a dedicated section on financing and costs with granular information identifying for each component, which costs are covered (or are expected to be covered) by other sources of funding as well as the amounts concerned. High granularity is necessary to ensure that there is no double funding for measures benefitting from different sources of Union financing.

In order to be able to differentiate costs within an investment, granularity of information would be very important. Thus, unless such a combination was already envisaged during the preparation of the plan, it could bear a risk of double funding.

If the MS still considers such combination of support, the Commission invites the MS to discuss on a case-by-case basis and demonstrate that the specific costs to be covered by CPR Funds were excluded under the RRF. It should also explain how the management and verification of the operation, the adequate audit trail of the expenditure as well as contractual relationship between the MA, MS authorities responsible for implementation of RRF and the bodies implementing FI would be ensured.

[[1]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/197%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_197%20QA%20-%20Combination%20of%20streams%20of%20support%20ERDF%20and%20RRF.docx#_ftnref1) The reply refers to 2021-2027 programming period. Should the programme authorities of the Member State wish to combine the programme support of 2014-2020 programming period with the support from the RFF in the form of financial instruments (as mentioned in the question above), the same principles discussed in this reply should be respected yet with regard to the provisions in Article 37(8) and (9), Article 65(1) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 (the Common Provisions Regulation for 2014-2020 programming period).

[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/02%20QA%20requests/2021/197%20QA%20REGIO%202021-27/FINAL_197%20QA%20-%20Combination%20of%20streams%20of%20support%20ERDF%20and%20RRF.docx#_ftnref2) Question 619 section ‘Coordination with other EU funds’ [RRF - Frequently asked questions - RECOVER FAQs for Member States - EC Extranet Wiki (europa.eu)](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/pages/viewpage.action?spaceKey=recover&title=RRF+-+Frequently+asked+questions)

# QA00063 - Double financing of VAT

 *Relevant Article*: Article 64 of the CPR

 *Member State*: SE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 64 (Non-eligible costs) of the CRP states

*“- 1. The following costs shall not be eligible for a contribution from the Funds:*

*(c) value added tax (VAT), except:*

(i) for operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT)(ii) for operations the total cost of which is at least EUR 5 000 000 (including VAT) where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation;

The effect is that in projects of less than EUR 5 000 000 VAT is eligible even in cases where VAT costs are recovered under national law — there is therefore double financing because the project owner receives the VAT twice. We expect that national regulation will deal with the issue, but are wondering about the wording.

**Answer:**

According to Article 63(1) CPR eligibility is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in, or on the basis of, this Regulation or the Fund-specific Regulations. With regard to value added tax (VAT), Article 64(1)(c)(i) regulates that for operations for which the total costs is less than 5 000 000, including VAT, value added tax is eligible to contribution from the Funds, regardless of the national rules on recoverability of VAT. The rationale behind is to simplify the rules on eligibility of VAT for small operations as it has been considered that the benefits of reduction of administrative burden outweighed the risks of double financing in these cases (i.e. risks of support to recovered VAT).

# QA00064 - Managing Authority responsibilities and accounting function

 *Relevant Articles*: 72 and 76 of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Germany has a question on the EU legal requirements regarding the structure of authorities in the new funding period in respect of the accounting function of the EMFAF programme.

The CPR Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 2021/1060) makes the following specifications regarding the structure of the authorities:

* The CPR defines the tasks of the programme authorities in Article 72 ff., whereby the original tasks of the managing authority are first outlined in Articles 72 to 75. This is followed in Article 76 by the description of the accounting tasks, which correspond to the previous tasks of the certifying authority.
* - Article 72(2) stipulates that the accounting function may be carried out by the managing authority or by a separate body.
* - Article 71(4) stipulates that the principle of functional independence between and within the programme authorities must be respected.

What exactly does the concept of functional independence now mean in the event that the managing authority takes over the area of responsibility for accounting in the future and the existing certifying authority is cancelled in its previous form?

Option 1:

The original tasks of the managing authority (Articles 72 to 75) and the accounting tasks (Article 76) represent two different roles or functions in the processing of the funding. The requirement that the Member State must ensure functional independence between or within the programme authorities (Article 71 (4)) means that a clear functional separation would have to be ensured in the future handling of the accounting tasks by the managing authority. A staff member who would be entrusted with the accounting function would therefore not be allowed to perform any of the other original tasks of the managing authority.

Option 2:

The requirement to ensure functional independence between or within a programme authority (Article 71 (4)) is to be understood as a fundamental, appropriate and clear separation of functions the between the managing authority and the intermediate body (Article 71 (3)) or between the audit authority and its subordinate bodies (Article 71 (2)). The performance of accounting tasks and other basic tasks of the managing authority by one and the same staff member within the managing authority would therefore not be problematic.

Of course, Article 72 of the EU Financial Regulation, according to which the authorising and accounting functions are separate, would have to be observed in any case. This would be ensured by a clear separation of tasks between the intermediary body (where the authorising power is held) and the managing authority (which will in future be responsible for accounting, among other things).

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 72(2), CPR ‘the Member State may entrust the accounting function referred to in Article 76 to the managing authority or to another body’.

When the accounting function is embedded in the functions to the managing authority, duties of staff performing the accounting function do not need to be separated from other duties of the managing authority.

# QA00066 - Questions on eligibility under JTF

 *Relevant Articles*:

Articles 8 and 9 of JTF regulation

Article 107 of TFEU

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. It is possible to support the productive investment in large enterprises, irrespectively of the concerned sector, if it is in line with article 8 (2) JTF and properly justified in line with the transition needs of the region. It is applicable to any productive investment in large enterprises eligible under JTF,  in areas designated as assisted areas in accordance with points (a) and (c) of Article 107(3) of the TFEU. See the recital no 16 of JTF Regulation proposal “For enterprises other than SMEs, productive investments should only be supported if they are necessary for mitigating job losses resulting from the transition, by creating or protecting a significant number of jobs and they do not lead to or result from relocation. Investments in existing industrial facilities, including those covered by the Union Emissions Trading System, should be allowed if they contribute to the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050 and go substantially below the relevant benchmarks established for free allocation under Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council14 and if they result in the protection of a significant number of jobs. “Can we expect that within the "Country Report on the Czech Republic 2021" (compared to the 2020 report) the investment guidelines for the JTF for the period 2021-2027 will be modified / supplemented in some way (taking into account e.g. the importance of the role of large enterprises in the transformation process)?
2. Do we understand it well that a (large but also smaller) enterprise which operation has a negative impact on climate change and contribute to the production of greenhouse gases cannot be supported from JTF in this particular situation: Such an enterprise has an intention to receive some financial support from JTF for transition to or development of new economic activity in eligible region where former workers could be relocated. Such an activity would be otherwise eligible for support from JTF (do no significant harm) and would preserve jobs in the same time. However, the former climate intensive industry would be moved outside of EU where there are low or no emission limits. Is this the case when the support from JTF is not allowed? And the following question, imagine the same situation of support of productive investment just without relocation of harmful business outside of EU (former business would be closed). For example, such an enterprise would move from the segment of heavy engineering to light engineering using new technologies and would preserve most of jobs from the previous business (but in fact not creating new - additional jobs). Would such an enterprise be supported or under which conditions could be supported from JTF?
3. Please, could you further clarify the support of sustainable tourism as an activity related to economic diversification of coal regions? Should sustainable tourism be associated with mining heritage and “mining tourism” or can be understandable more broadly? Which kind of projects in the sphere of tourism are eligible for JTF? Each of the Czech coal regions has a territory for which the support for tourism could be an interesting alternative to other transformation projects.
4. Article 9(a) JTF excludes support of nuclear power stations. Does it mean that activities related to used nuclear fuel are allowed, i.e. the use of waste heat not directly linked to the nuclear plant? Article 9(d) JTF excluding fossil fuels is much broader, and it is clear that JTF cannot support anything somehow connected to fossil fuels. Unfortunately, Article 9(a) is not that clear.

Example: We have a district heating power plant that can use spent nuclear fuel. It will use its waste heat to produce steam; there is no nuclear fusion. You can find additional technical information here <https://www.teplator.cz/>. (It is a research project which would like to continue into the phase of a pilot project.)

**Answer:**

1. In accordance with Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation, the productive investments in large enterprises could only be supported if:

	* It is necessary for the implementation of the territorial just transition plan
	* It is necessary to create jobs and to offset the job losses stemming from the transition process, at a scale that could not be achieved through the support to SMEs;
	* Such an investment contributes to the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050 and to related environmental targets;
	* Such an investment does not lead to relocation as defined in point (27) of Article 2 of the CPR.

The envisaged productive investment should be included in the indicative list in the approved territorial just transition plan and shall contribute to its implementation. In this respect, it should directly link and contribute to the JTF specific objective, which is about enabling regions and people to address the social, economic and environmental impacts of the transition. It should also not fall into the scope of exclusions under Article 9 of the JTF Regulation. Moreover, productive investments in large enterprises are possible under the JTF in areas designated as “assisted areas” in accordance with points (a) and (c) of Article 107(3) of the TFEU.

Generally, Annexes D to the country reports, issued in the context of the 2020 European Semester, could not emphasize the need to support productive investments in large enterprises due to the fact it was impossible for the Commission to assess whether the large enterprises’ capacity would meet or not the above conditions. Such an assessment should be carried out by competent national authorities and its results should be summarised in the territorial just transition plan. (*The question regarding the investment guidelines in Annex D and if it will be modified does not fall under the merits of the QA as it is not about legal interpretation.)*

In general, the 2020 European Semester has been adapted to adopt national recovery and resilience plans that will replace the country reports. However, it is not expected that the Commission will change its position on the role of large enterprises in the just transition.

Moreover, the European Semester Package lacks the legal quality to amend the JTF Regulation in any regard.

1. Financial support from the JTF for development of new economic activity benefiting the eligible region should correspond to the development needs identified in the territorial just transition plan, in line with Article 11(2)(c) of the JTF Regulation. These development needs should in turn be consistent with the transition process and its key steps, as outlined in the National Energy and Climate Plan and other relevant national, regional or local climate strategies (under section 1.1 of the territorial just transition plan).

Nevertheless, the JTF support shall not substitute the applicable social obligations of the climate intensive industry in terms of reconversion of jobs, when applicable.

In addition, there are strict conditions on the support to productive investments to large enterprises, as laid out in Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation, as well as a requirement to reduce GHG emissions in the European Trading System activities. They shall in particular contribute to the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050. In case the productive investments do not comply with these conditions, they would not be eligible.
2. According to recital 12 of the JTF Regulation, the investments for sustainable tourism financed under JTF should support local economies through stimulating their endogenous growth potential in accordance with the respective smart specialisation strategies. Concrete projects should be in line with the respective just transition plan(s), i.e. they should contribute to the mitigation of the negative social, economic and environmental impacts of the transition, in line with the JTF specific objective explained in Article 2 of the JTF Regulation.

Support to sustainable tourism does not need to be related necessarily to mining heritage.
3. According to Art. 8(2)(g) JTF investments in heat production are only eligible provided that they are supplied exclusively by renewable energy sources, i.e. the proposed project is not eligible.

# QA00073 - Is the construction of accommodation inside castles eligible for financing if the revenue is used for the purpose of financing the maintenance costs of the mentioned buildings?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 3 ERDF Regulation

 *Member State*: HU

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

 We would like to inquire about whether, in general, the construction of accommodation inside castles is eligible for financing if the revenue is used for the purpose of financing the maintenance costs of the mentioned buildings. In this case the operating organization is a non-profit one.

 Based on the available information, Hungary proposes the development of touristic attractions under PO5, which would include inter alia the refurbishment of (state-owned) castles for touristic use by creating accommodation inside. After the renovations, the castles would operate as museums/touristic attractions. The revenue from the accommodation would be used to maintain the castles (further renovations, pay for the staff etc.).

**Answer:**

Investments in tourism and cultural heritage are in principle eligible under all policy objectives.

Such an investment must fall within the scope of the relevant Fund and programme and contributes to the specific objectives concerned, and comply with the relevant enabling conditions or minimum requirements established for the concerned policy objective.

For example, specific objectives referred to in Article 3(1)(a)(iii) ERDF/CF regulation on “enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs,including by productive investments”; Article 3(1)(b)(i) promoting energy efficiency measures and reducing greenhouse gas emissions;  Article 3(1)(d)(vi) on “enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation”; and Article 3(1)(e)(i) and (ii) on “fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security” in either urban or non-urban areas; are particularly relevant in this regard.

If programmed under PO5 specific objectives set out in the Article 3(1)(e) of the ERDF/CF regulation, such a support shall be provided through territorial and local development strategies, through the forms set out in Article 28 of the CPR.

The investment must also comply with the principles for the selection of operations set out by the managing authority (Article 73 of the CPR) and national eligibility rules. The managing authority shall ensure that the investments are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Particular attention should be paid to financial sustainability of tourism investments.

Concerning the revenues issue raised, although, pursuant to CPR 2021-2027, there is no more legal requirement to carry out a quantification of revenues generated by the project, the latter may need to be taken into account in conformity with the applicable State aid rules.

# QA00074 - Eligibility of FUA/metropolitan area investments in rural areas

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 29 of the CPR

Article 4b of Regulation (EU) 1059/2003

 *Member State*: RO

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Investments in functional urban areas/metropolitan areas are envisaged under the integrated urban development approach. Urban functional areas/metropolitan areas are made up of urban municipalities and cities but also administrative-territorial units in rural areas (villages/communes). Within these areas - FUA/metropolitan area- can operations located outside the urban administrative-territorial units (municipalities and cities), respectively in the rural area, be eligible for funding, or are there restrictions in terms of ERDF eligibility?

**Answer:**

The Common Provisions Regulation does not contain any restrictions as regards location of the operations supported by the ERDF in rural areas.

Within the framework of sustainable urban development, the ERDF shall support integrated territorial development based on territorial and local development strategies that are focused on urban areas, including functional urban areas, while taking into account the need to trigger cooperation and strengthen urban-rural linkages. Following the Union territorial typology, functional urban areas (as defined in Article 4b of Regulation (EU) 1059/2003) can include the rural areas that are part of the commuting zone around cities.

The identified functional urban area and the territorial strategy designed for this geographic area constitute the basis for investments to sustainable urban development in the given area. The strategies shall respect the criteria set out in Article29 of the CPR.

The national authorities should ensure coordination, demarcation and complementarities in terms of funding provided to rural areas under ERDF and the one foreseen under the EAFRD.

# QA00075 - Can ERDF programmes support infrastructure for vocational training centres under policy objective 1

 *Relevant Article*: Article 73 of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can ERDF programmes support infrastructure for vocational training infrastructures under policy objective 1?

**Answer:**

Support to vocational training infrastructures is possible under policy objective 1 under specific objective 1.4 “Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship” specifically designed for that purpose provided that, pursuant to Article 73(2) CPR, the operations are consistent with the smart specialisation strategies (S3). It means that investments shall be directly linked to the training activities and/or update of curricula addressing the needs of companies in the smart specialisation priority areas.

Support for vocational training centres may be legally envisaged also under specific objective 1.3**“**Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments” provided that such investments are directly linked to the training activities or update of curricula that address the actual needs of companies. In accordance with Article 73(2)(a) CPR, the managing authority shall ensure, when selecting such operations under this specific objective, that they comply with the programme, including their consistency with the relevant strategies underlying the programme, as well as provide an effective contribution to the achievement of the specific objective 1.3, i.e.,  that they enhance sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs.

For all other cases, the most suitable is policy objective 4, either through ERDF or through ESF+, using cross-financing, pursuant to Article 25(2) CPR. Such investments could as well be supported under policy objective 5, through territorial and local development strategies, as set out in Article 28 CPR.

# QA00076 - Granting state aid by beneficiaries not being part of the management and control system of OP in post-2020

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 2 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LT

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In case a project is financed by the State aid, is the beneficiary able to grant the State aid larger than EUR 200 000 to final recipients (so-called umbrella projects)? If the beneficiary is not a part of the management and control system, does it need the approval from the Managing Authority or any other body which is part of the management and control system?

The question is formulated in the light of the following definitions set out in Art. 2 of the CPR:

(3)'operation' means:
(a) a project, contract, action or group of projects selected under the programmes concerned;
<…>
(8) 'beneficiary' means:
(a) a public or private body, an entity with or without legal personality or a natural person, responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing operations; in the context of de minimis aid provided in accordance with Commission Regulations (EU) No 1407/2013 or (EU) No 717/2014, the body granting the aid, where it is responsible for initiating or for initiating and implementing the operation;
<...>
(c) in the context of State aid schemes, the undertaking which receives the aid, except where State aid per undertaking is less than EUR 200 000, the Member State may decide that the beneficiary for the purposes of this Regulation is the body granting the aid;
<…>
(17) 'final recipient' means a legal or natural person receiving support from the Funds through a beneficiary of a small project fund or from a financial instrument.

We would like to clarify the implementation of operations, which are group of projects and are subject to State aid (not de minimis). Could a beneficiary, which is not an intermediate body, but implements an umbrella project assess and select final recipients and grant them State aid or should such project be selected and the State aid granted by a managing authority/intermediate body?

**Answer:**

The definition of “beneficiary” provided by Article 2(9) of the CPR, particularly under points (a) and (c), is the following:

 (a) a public or private body, an entity with or without legal personality or a natural person, responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing operations;

(c) in the context of State aid schemes, the undertaking which receives the aid.

According to Article 2(9)(c) of the CPR, in the context of State aid schemes the beneficiary is the one who receives the aid. Thus, it cannot at the same time be recipient of aid and select final recipients. Therefore, all projects receiving State aid, regardless of its volume, have to be selected by the managing authority/intermediate body.

 However, according to Article 2(9)(d), in case of de minimis aid provided in accordance with Commission Regulations (EU) No 1407/2013 or (EU) No 717/2014 (which is not considered State aid according to the State aid framework), there is a possibility for the Member State to decide that the beneficiary is the body granting the aid where it is responsible for initiating or for initiating and implementing the operation - not necessarily the undertaking receiving the aid. In such configuration, the beneficiary of the operation – who cannot be the beneficiary of State as the question suggests – would not be able to grant per final recipient an amount higher than the thresholds laid down in the relevant de minimis regulation. Under the 1407/2013 Regulation this threshold is set at EUR 200 000 per undertaking over three fiscal years.

# QA00077 - Territorial strategies and conflict of interest

 *Relevant Articles*: 29, 71 and 73 of the CPR

 *Member State*: SK

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Territorial strategies are prepared by the territorial authorities. Territorial strategies may also include a list of operations to be supported or selected by territorial authorities. Is there a conflict of interest if territorial authorities (their representatives) propose an operation which they subsequently select for support from EU funds and then they will implement it?

 Do we need to ensure separation of functions when territorial authorities are involved in the selection of operations and are at the same time the beneficiary of this operation?

What about if the territorial authority proposes the operations by including them in the strategy from where the Managing Authority will select them with the involvement of territorial authorities?

**Answer:**

When operations under the territorial strategies are selected, the managing authority must ensure that all the requirements of Article 73 of the CPR have been complied with and as well as those of the Article 29(3) and (5) CPR.

In particular, Article 29(2) of the CPR requires that the territorial strategies are prepared under the responsibility of the relevant territorial authorities. Article 29(3) of the CPR further clarifies that in cases when the list of operations is not included in the territorial strategy, the relevant territorial authorities need to select or to be involved in the selection.

Article 29(4) of the CPR clarifies that when the strategies are being prepared, the territorial authorities have to cooperate with relevant managing authorities in order to determine the scope of operations to be supported under a relevant programme.

Therefore, the responsibility for the selection being compliant with the requirements outlined in Articles 29 and 73 of the CPR remains with the managing authority, in spite of the territorial authorities’ involvement in the selection process.

Thus, a potential conflict of interest situation remains limited as long as the territorial authority is only involved in the selection and carries out no other tasks falling under the responsibility of the managing authority. A separation of functions in the meaning of Article 71(4), CPR – mitigating the risk of conflict of interest – may be needed  where, in accordance with Article 29(5) CPR, the territorial authorities perform functions other than selection of operations and are identified as intermediate bodies.

Article 61 of the Financial Regulation on the conflict of interest remains applicable in the context of integrated territorial investments as for any other operations. The provision states that national authorities of any level involved in budget implementation shall take appropriate measures to prevent a conflict of interest from arising in the functions under their responsibility and to address situations which may objectively be perceived as a conflict of interest.

# QA00078 - Evaluations by the Member State

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 36 and 44 of the CPR

 *Member State*: HR

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. *Can we, as an evaluation unit within the Managing Authority for the Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2021-2027, be considered as functionally independent internal experts, as per the CPR Article 44, and therefore in position to conduct ourselves the evaluations provisioned by Article 44?*
2. *Within the Evaluation Plan:*
	1. *Is it acceptable to allocate funds from the Technical Assistance for the policy framework that is wider than ESF funding?* Namely, this question refers to those policy areas in Croatia that are funded from both ESF and national resources, for example, Active Labour Market Measures or Personal assistants that are funded both through ESF and national resources.
	2. *Alongside that, is it acceptable to allocate funds from the Technical Assistance for conducting evaluations planed as part of conditions for fulfilment of thematic enabling conditions, for example for Roma or Gender.* These evaluations will be conducted by national bodies thematically responsible for those policy areas, but their financing would be considered (from the perspective of Technical Assistance) to be part of the assistance provided to the potential beneficiaries and relevant partners (Article 36 CPR).
3. *As an addition to the question 2, are we on a right track to group all the evaluations, directly or indirectly linked to MA activities, in the Evaluation plan?* Respectively, instead of planning all the evaluations in the Evaluation plan, should some evaluations be part of activities in the priority axes / specific objectives? For example, should  evaluation of the whole Active Labour Market Measures (ALMPs) policy framework (ESF and national funding) be considered as an intervention in a specific objective related to labour market or as we have stated above, part of the Evaluation plan and financed through TA.
4. *Is there a stipulation of the highest level of generality (scope) at which the evaluations by the Member State should be conducted?*
5. *Article 44 of the new CPR does not mention impact among the evaluation criteria in the Paragraph 1, but it mentions it in Paragraph 2.*
	1. *Does this mean that these are separate (different) evaluations prescribed in Paragraphs 1 and 2?*
	2. *In Paragraph 1 there is no defined deadline for conducting evaluations, while in Paragraph 2 it is prescribed. Does this mean that the evaluations from the Paragraph 1 are supposed to be planned as mid-term, and the one from the Paragraph 2 as ex-post evaluation?*

**Answer:**

1. Article 44(1) of the CPR, beyond Member States (MS), explicitly mentions Managing Authorities (MAs) as bodies that may be subject to the obligation of carrying out evaluations. Article 44(3) of the CPR requires that “evaluations shall be entrusted to internal or external experts who are functionally independent”. In principle, the explicit reference to internal experts implies entrusting evaluations to evaluation units within Managing Authorities provided that safeguards for independence are in place. Regardless of the organisational setup, the independence of the evaluators is a key principle to be ensured throughout the evaluation process[[1]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/BB7ZRUJV/EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_18%20evaluations%20%28002%29.docx#_ftn1). It is considered good practice to set out the specific safeguards that ensure evaluators’ functional independence in the evaluation plan.
2. Article 36(1) of the CPR formulates two criteria as regards the scope of technical assistance (TA). On the one hand, the TA actions are necessary for the effective administration and use of the Funds, ie. the funds covered by the CPR. On the other hand, “for carrying out, inter alia, functions such as preparation, training, management, monitoring, evaluation, visibility and communication”. As a consequence:
	1. It is not possible to use TA to evaluate policy areas, actions or group of actions that are solely financed from national resources. National resources may only be taken into account to the extent they represent co-financing to EU-funds.
	2. It is possible to finance from TA by the MS evaluations that contributes to the fulfilment of enabling conditions.
3. The evaluation plan is meant to plan the evaluations necessary to evaluate the programme or programmes under its scope. The programme describes the supported actions that contribute to the programme’s specific objectives. In practice, an evaluation may be relevant to one, the other or both documents. For instance, supposed ESF+ will support institutional capacity building in the field of ALMPs within specific objective (b) ‘modernising labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and ensure timely and tailor- made assistance and support for labour market matching, transitions and mobility’. The actions will include creating evaluation capacities, part of which will evaluate ESF co-financed ALMPs. In this case, the evaluations will be relevant both to the programme’s intervention logic, as they will contribute to e.g. assessing skills needs; as well as to the evaluation plan, as it will evaluate ESF co-financed ALMPs.
4. The MS interpretation is correct: the MS has the competence for organising the evaluations of the programmes at the most suitable level. The Commission services do not plan issuing any guidelines for monitoring or evaluation.
5. Article 44(1) of the CPR broadly refers to programme evaluationsto be carried out by the MS or the MAs , while Article 44(2) CPR refers particularly to the evaluation assessing the impact of the programme.
	1. Impact is not considered as an evaluation criterion. The impact evaluation will conclude on the programmes’ contribution to its specific objective. For that, it may use the evaluation criteria set out in Article 44(1) of the CPR (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and Union added value).
	2. The deadline of 30 June 2029 only refers to the evaluation referred to in Article 44(2).[[2]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/BB7ZRUJV/EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_18%20evaluations%20%28002%29.docx#_ftn2)

[[1]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/BB7ZRUJV/EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_18%20evaluations%20%28002%29.docx#_ftnref1) Cf. ’ The New Programming Period 2007-2013 - Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods: Evaluation during the Programming Period - <https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/working/wd5_ongoing_en.pdf>

[[2]](file:///C%3A/Users/zupantj/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/BB7ZRUJV/EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_18%20evaluations%20%28002%29.docx#_ftnref2) It should be noted that Article 44(5) CPR defines a further deadline for a mid-term evaluation for the purpose of the AMIF, the ISF and the BMVI. This mid-term evaluation is to be completed by 31 March 2024.

# QA00079 - Annex D with the specific focus on Policy Objectives (PO) No 1, PO 2 and PO 5

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 5 of the ERDF regulation

Article 73 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**PO1**

**Innovation and competitiveness.**

**1.In ERDF/Cohesion fund regulation compromise, productive investments in small mid-cap companies in research and innovation activities are included. Please clarify what will be the new definition of “small mid-cap companies”.**

**Answer:**

Points (c) and (d) of Article 5(2), ERDF list cases where productive investment in small mid-cap and mid-cap companies can be supported. The definitions of ‘small mid-cap companies’ and ‘mid-cap companies’ are provided respectively in points (6) and (7) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) 2015/1017 of the European Parliament and the Council of 25 June 2015 on the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Portal (OJ L 169, 1.7.2015, p. 1).

According to that regulation:

-       ‘small mid-cap companies’ means entities having up to 499 employees that are not SMEs;

-       ‘mid-cap companies’ means entities having up to 3 000 employees that are not SMEs or small mid-cap companies

**2. Please clarify if support for strengthening innovation, research and entrepreneurial skills for students and academic personnel with particular attention to STEM can be included in PO1.**

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 5(3), ERDF/CF the ERDF may support training, life-long learning, reskilling and education activities under specific objective “Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship”. Pursuant to Article 73(2) CPR, such investment need to be consistent with the smart specialisation strategies (S3) and other relevant strategies underlying the programme.

Under SO 1.4, ERDF priorities for investments can be actions linked to supporting innovation management in SMEs; specific training and reskilling for identified S3 areas at all levels within firms; promotion of entrepreneurship skills at all levels in enterprises; education and training and development of skills in higher education and research institutions to deepen their cooperation with economic actors, increase the commercial viability and market relevance of their research projects.  The intervention logic should be clear on how the suggested interventions under SO 1.4 contribute to the smart economic transformation of the region through the entrepreneurial discovery process. This requires a case-by-case assessment.

# QA00080 - Eligibility of certain forms of support to business founders

 *Relevant Article*: Article 5 ERDF regulation

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

As part of specific objective 1.3 (competitiveness of SMEs), a German region wishes to support the creation of businesses focused on the time period shortly before and after the establishment of the enterprises. Several building blocks are planned:

-       Universities etc. receive a grant. They use the grant to employ founders (e.g. former students) temporarily for a limited period of time, up to the formal establishment of an enterprise. The grant is also used to pay for other expenses linked to the business foundation. (Block “ego.-Gründungstransfer”)

 -       Counties or business promotion agencies receive a grant. They use the grant to coach and train founders for a certain number of hours during several months before and after the establishment of the business. (Block “ego.-Wissen”)

 -       Founders receive a grant. In module one, founders can use the grant for coaching services linked to the foundation. If the future business is technology-oriented, in module two the grant (scholarship) can also be used to pay for (a part of) the cost of living for several months before and after the establishment of the business. (Block „ego.-Start“)

**Draft answer:**

 The described scheme seems to have the characteristics of academic entrepreneurship support programmes that might play important role in influencing university spinoff performance or promoting student start-ups. This type of scheme typically provides funding to activities executed by universities, technology transfer offices, science parks, individual researchers or entrepreneurs. Their success depends on multiple factors, including entrepreneurial environment or managing within the scheme issues related to adverse selection or moral hazards. However, in order to ensure that it contributes to the objectives of a programme the design of the scheme needs to be further detailed and clarified in the related programme.

In principle, it could be supported under policy objective 1, provided the scheme is designed in a way that it effectively contributes to the development of start-ups and it promotes development of innovation capacities, commercialisation, developing skills and entrepreneurship, provision of targeted services for companies. The selection of specific objectives to be supported under the ERDF/CF would depend on the detailed design of the scheme.

Of note that under specific objective 1.3 (Art. 3(1)(a)(iii) of the ERDF/CF Regulation), ERDF supports SMEs through transformation processes, such as creation of new firms, start-up/scale-ups, accelerators, support to investment, internationalization and developing new products and processes, etc. with the aim of increasing their productivity and competitiveness.

 As it concerns the coverage of a part of cost of living for the academic-entrepreneurs for a limited period, it could be justified if it is necessary to achieve the objectives of the scheme and of the programme.

# QA00081 - Climate concentration requirement and technical assistance

 *Relevant Articles*:

Art. 6 of the CPR;

Art. 4.1 of the ERDF;

 *Member State*: IT

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Do the 30% ERDF and 37% Cohesion Fund climate contribution targets of Art. 6 CPR apply to the total ERDF/CF allocation, or to the ERDF/CF allocation excluding technical assistance?

Note in this respect that:

-       the ERDF thematic concentration requirements under Article 4.1 of the ERDF/CF regulation apply to the ERDF amount excluding Technical Assistance ;

**Answer:**

Article 6(2), CPR states that the climate contribution targets (30% for the ERDF and 37% for the Cohesion Fund) are to be established as a percentage of total ERDF and Cohesion Fund allocation, so including the resources for technical assistance. The regulatory thresholds such as climate targets need to be calculated based on the amount actually programmed in ERDF and Cohesion Fund programmes, so the amount after all transfers and contributions.

# QA00082 - Assessment of the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle for ESF+

 *Relevant Article*:

Recital (10) and Article 9(4) of the CPR;

Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852” (“The Taxonomy Regulation”).

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

For ESF+ programmes, once the MA have completed their assessment, the sentence proposed as for the DNSH principle is “The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature”.

How can the MA perform the assessment as for ESF+ (for operations for which a SEA is not compulsory)?

**Answer:**

The ex-ante compatibility with the DNSH principle under cohesion policy is to be ensured at the level of the definition of the types of actions in the programmes. It is therefore essential that the compliance with the DNSH principle shall be assessed and ensured during the process of defining the types of actions in the programme.

Given the scope of the ESF+ and where the section of the programme on types of actions for a certain specific objective is sufficiently detailed and suggests that they have no or an insignificant foreseeable impact on the environmental objectives, the Member State may take a simplified approach in its assessment as below:

The first step of the method may be sufficient to justify DNSH compliance. That comprises namely to perform a screening for all the types actions envisaged covering the six following points[[1]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/Other%20DGs%20Questions/50%20QA_EMPL_2021-27/FINAL_EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_20%20DNSH%20in%20ESF%2B%20programmes%20MR.docx#_ftn1) :

*Is the activity considered to do significant harm*

*1. to climate change mitigation if it leads to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions?*

*2. to climate change adaptation if it leads to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature or assets?*

*3. to the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources if it is detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters?*

*4. to the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling, if it leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm?*

*5. to pollution prevention and control if it leads to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land?*

*6. to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest?*

If the reply is yes to any of the 6 points mentioned above, Member States should use Part 2 of the checklist (see Annex I)[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/Other%20DGs%20Questions/50%20QA_EMPL_2021-27/FINAL_EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_20%20DNSH%20in%20ESF%2B%20programmes%20MR.docx#_ftn2) to perform a substantive DNSH assessment for those environmental objectives selected with a ‘yes’ under Step 1.

In case the reply to all six questions above is “no”, one single brief justification covering all six questions would be sufficient.

This would justify the inclusion of one of the following statements in the programme under the heading *The related types of actions* in section 2.1.1.1.1 *Interventions of the Funds* (within the programme template, Annex V CPR) under each specific objective:

*“The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since:*

-      *they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature, or*

-      *they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF, or*

-      *they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance, or*

-      *they have been assessed as compatible according to Member State’s methodology.”*

If the assessment would lead to identical conclusion in case of all types of actions in all specific objectives of the programme, thus the same statement out of those above applies to the entirety of the programme, it is sufficient to include this statement once into section 1 of the programme on Programme strategy.

The supporting documentation, including the completed and signed checklist with the brief justification, in any case, should be kept by the MA and made available upon request to the Commission services during the informal dialogue with the national authorities.

[[1]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/Other%20DGs%20Questions/50%20QA_EMPL_2021-27/FINAL_EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_20%20DNSH%20in%20ESF%2B%20programmes%20MR.docx#_ftnref1) Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852” (“The Taxonomy Regulation”).

[[2]](file:///U%3A/02%20INTERPRETATION/Post2020/Other%20DGs%20Questions/50%20QA_EMPL_2021-27/FINAL_EMPL%202021-2027%20QA_20%20DNSH%20in%20ESF%2B%20programmes%20MR.docx#_ftnref2) of the Commission notice on Technical guidance on the application of ‘do no significant harm’ under the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation (2021/C 58/01)

# QA00083 - Appendix 1 to Annex XXIII and Appendix 3 to Annex XXIV

 *Relevant Article*: Annexes XXIII and XXIV

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

ANNEX XXIII

Fields A and B shall include information on the amount indicated in the first payment application and paid to the financial instrument in accordance with Article 92 of Regulation (EC) No 2021/1060 (maximum 30 % of the total programme contributions for the financial instrument [s] under the relevant funding agreement).

 Boxes C and D shall contain information on the corresponding amount entered in the accounts in accordance with Article 92(3). In accordance with Article 92 (3), these relate to the clearance of the 30 % advance payment no later than in the final accounting year.

 It is not clear to what extent all programme contributions under Article 92 (2) (b) are to be covered in boxes C and D or only those which have incurred expenditure for the first 30 % payment, which is almost an advance payment (‘winding up’ of the 30 % advance payment). Footnote 1 indicates that boxes C and D are intended to cover only those programme contributions which undercut the 30 % advance on the expenditure side. However, this raises the question of how current payments and administrative costs under Article 92 (2) (b) (reference to Article 68 (1)) are to be settled between the advance payment and the ‘winding up’ of the advance payment.

 1. If in the first payment application a lower proportion than the 30 % (e.g. 20 %) of the programme contributions was paid into the financial instrument, can the difference with the 30 % (e.g. 10 %) still be cleared in another payment application? The same question applies if, in the course of the funding period, it is decided and approved to increase the financial resources of the entire financial instrument, thereby increasing the 30 % share.

 2. If subsequent increases are possible, how should columns A and B of Appendix 1 to Annex XXIII be entered?

 3. In what form and from when is the expenditure declared under Article 92 (2) (b) (eligible expenditure under Article 68 (1))?

 (a)   Do we understand that, as from the second and subsequent payment claims, this eligible expenditure is regularly accounted for under the respective priority axes?

 (b)  Is it correct that the eligible expenditure used to underwrite the 30 % advance payment (usually at the end of the funding period) is not to be included in the payment claims, but must be reported in Appendix 1 (columns C and D)? A contrario: Is it correct that expenditure which is not yet used to support the 30 % advance payment is not to be shown in columns C and D of Appendix 1?

 If the answer to question (b) is yes:

 (c)   Is it correct that, until the 30 % advance payment is underwritten and columns C and D are filled with values > EUR 0,00, no  expenditure under Article 92 (2) (b) (eligible expenditure under Article 68 (1)) must be included in the payment claims?

 ANNEX XXIV

Fields A and B shall include information on the amount specified in the first payment application and paid to the financial instrument in accordance with Article 92 (maximum 30 % of the total programme contributions for the financial instrument [s] under the corresponding funding agreement).

 Box C and D shall contain information on the corresponding amount entered in the accounts in accordance with Article 92(3). In accordance with Article 92 (3), these relate to the accounting of the 30 % advance payment no later than in the final accounting year.

 Accordingly, the same questions arise as for Appendix 1 to Annex XXIII, as the accounts are based on the information relating to the payment claims, assuming that no amount claimed to date in the payment application is disputed.

**Answer:**

1. It would follow from Article 92(2)(a) CPR that there is only one first payment application for each funding agreement under which the programme resources are committed; and the first payment application may include ‘up to 30%’ of the amount when the payment application is submitted.

 Therefore, the managing authority may choose to claim an amount lower than 30% in the first payment application, for example, 20% of the total amount of programme contributions committed under the relevant funding agreement. That  will be the amount to be cleared no later than in the final accounting year in line with Article 92(3) CPR. When this option is chosen, it is not possible to claim the remaining amount in subsequent payment applications (i.e. the difference between the advance amount claimed and the maximum 30%) as an advance.

 Likewise, where the amounts committed in anexisting funding agreement are increased by additional programme resources after submission of the first payment application linked to it, it is not possible to claim the advance for the top-up (i.e.: the difference between the percentage of the initial and the increased programme contributions of the funding agreement).

2. Please see reply to question 1.

 3. In accordance with Article 92(2)(b) CPR the amount included in subsequent payment applications submitted during the eligibility period should include the eligible expenditure as referred to in Article 68(1) CPR.

 a) The first and the subsequent payment applications should be submitted in accordance with template set out in Annex XXIII and in accordance with the relevant priority and category of region, where applicable (Articles 91(3) and 92(2)(a) CPR).

 b) Yes, the eligible expenditure to clear the advance of up to 30% included in the first payment application should be disclosed in the columns C and D of the Appendix 1 of the payment application. These amounts should not be included in the payment application itself, as it would constitute double declaration. This is also clarified in the footnote of the Appendix 1 of the payment claim template (Annex XXIII).

 Expenditure which is not yet used to clear the advance should not be recorded in the Appendix 1 columns C and D.

 c) Once the eligible expenditure referred to in Article 68(1) CPR included in the payment applications has reached at least 70% of the total amount of programme contributions committed in the funding agreement, the managing authority will have to start clearing the advance of up to 30% requested in the first payment application. The amounts of eligible expenditure for clearing the advance should be recorded in columns C and D until the advance is fully cleared but no later than in the final accounting year.

The same principles as for filling in Appendix 1 of the payment claims apply also to filling in the Appendix 3 of annual accounts. Please see replies to the questions above.

# QA00084 - Cross-financing and eligibility

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 25(2) and 50(1)(c) CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Article 25 (2) of CPR states that „the ERDF and ESF+ may finance…….all or part of the operation for which the costs are eligible for support from the other Fund on basis of eligibility rules applied to that Fund…..“.

We would like to get assurance that our interpretation of the term „eligibility rules“ is correct. We are currently assessing this question in relation to the obligations in the visibility and communication area (see Art. 46-50 CPR), especially the rules set out in the Art. 50 (1) (c) CPR where different limits for displaying durable plaques or billboards are set for the ERDF and the ESF+ operations.

In the past we received a reply from the EC stating that the “eligibility rules’ have to be understood as any rule that has an impact on the eligibility of expenditure. In case of cross financing in ESF+ programmes it means that the ESF+ can only finance costs, which are eligible for ERDF support, that is clear.

However is the rule set out in the Art. 50 (1) (c) CPR considered also as a rule that has an impact on the eligibility of expenditure? From our point of view “eligibility rules’ are only the rules set out in the Chapter III, Articles 63-68 CPR and the eligibility rules set out in the Fund specific regulations. Thus we believe that in case of the ESF+ projects using cross financing from ERDF the requirement set up in the Art. 50(1)(c) relates to all operations with total costs exceeding 100 000 EUR.

Could you please confirm our understanding? We would like to get a clear interpretation of how to define the set of rules that has an impact on eligibility of expenditure in relation to the Art. 25 (2) of the CPR.

**Answer:**

In this case (ESF+ support to expenditure that falls under the eligibility rules of the ERDF), reference to eligibility rules “applied to that Fund” in Article 25(2) CPR means all eligibility rules applicable to the ERDF, which are laid down in the CPR and in the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation. Non-compliance with these rules will render (part of) the expenditure ineligible.

 Responsibilities of beneficiaries referred to in Article 50(1) CPR do not fall under eligibility rules but could render underlying expenditure irregular if they are not complied with. Given that these obligations are linked to the specificities of each Fund, the rules of the Fund under which operations are implemented should be respected.

 In conclusion, it is the ceilings for the ESF+ referred to in Article 50(1)(c)(ii) CPR that apply to ESF+ operations, even if it is supporting costs which are eligible under the ERDF rules through cross-financing.

# QA00087 - INTERREG and territorial development

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 28 and 29 of the CPR

Article 20 and 21 of the Interreg Regulation

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**1-Do Interreg Programmes fall under the category c – other territorial instruments? (Art. 28 CPR).**

**Answer:**

Interreg programmes can use all territorial instruments listed in Article 28 of the CPR according to the rules set out in Article 20 and 21 of the Interreg Regulation. It is also noted that programmes, in general, are not considered to be a territorial instrument in the meaning of Article 28 CPR.

**2 Would Interreg Programmes need to define territorial strategies for (parts of) their area as part of the CP document? Are macro-regional strategies (MRS) such strategies? Could instead projects define or relate to such strategies relevant for their specific partnership area? (Art. 23 (1) and (2) Interreg regulation)**

**Answer:**

All operations selected under ITI or other territorial tool have to comply with the territorial strategy that comply with the requirements of Article 29 CPR. The term “territorial strategies” does not specify, on purpose, the specific territorial level at which these strategies need to be drawn up. This term is used to enable the use of territorial instruments below the programme level (i.e. NUTS2, the usual regional programme level). It is understood that “relevant territorial authorities or bodies” comprise levels below NUTS 2 level in function of the territory covered.

In case of cross-border cooperation programmes, where the programmes may cover functionally coherent subregional cross-border areas, it is possible to have a single territorial strategy for the entire programme area, provided that role of the relevant territorial authorities or bodies of the area is ensured.

In case of transnational cooperation programmes, macro-regional strategies as such do not satisfy this requirement, as they are operating at the level of transnational programmes, and decisions are taken by Member States and not by the relevant territorial authorities or bodies. However, the local, urban and territorial strategies under the macro-regional strategic framework may satisfy the requirement if they fulfil the conditions set out in Article 29 of the CPR. This needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis.

**3 - If relevant territorial authorities are to be involved in the selection of projects, could this be the regional level that is represented in Interreg Committees? Otherwise, how can local administration be involved in selection when at the same time they are partners? (Art. 29(3) CPR)**

**Answer:**

Relevant territorial authorities or bodies can be involved in selecting the operations either by drawing up a territorial strategy which would entail a list of operations (Article 29(2) CPR), or at the later stage (Article 29(3) CPR).

According to Article 20 of the Interreg regulation, those relevant territorial authorities or bodies should **represent at least two participating countries, of which at least one is a Member State**.

There should be an agreement between the body managing the integrated territorial development tool and the managing authority on the modalities of the involvement of the former in the project selection.

 In case of community-led local development implemented in Interreg programmes, the relevant local action group is composed of representatives mentioned in Article 21 of the Interreg regulation.

In order to avoid potential conflict of interest, Article 28 of the Interreg regulation requires that the rules of procedure of the monitoring committee and, where applicable, of the steering committee prevent any situation of conflict of interest when selecting Interreg operations.

A declaration of conflict of interest needs to be signed between the MA and the bodies participating in the call launching and the selection process and it has to contain appropriate measures to prevent conflict of interest situations that may arise or that may objectively be perceived as a conflict of interest.

# QA00088 - Reimbursement of Union contribution to the programme based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates

 *Relevant Article*: Article 94(3) and Article 91(4)(b) of the CPR, Appendix 1 to Annex V of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

One German region has a question on the date on which the simplified cost option is applicable to the 2021 – 2027 programme in case it is added in appendix 1 through a request for programme amendment.

 The question is:

 In case a Member State submits a proposal, as part of a request for programme amendment, in order to make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution to the programme based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates, as from when will the reimbursement of the Union contribution in line with appendix 1 to the programme be applicable? Will it be the date of submission of the request for programme amendment (in line with Article 63(7)) or will it be the date of adoption of the request for programme amendment (in line with Article 94(1) and section 8 of Annex V).

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 94(3) CPR, the decision approving the programme or its amendment shall set out, inter alia, the types of operations covered by the reimbursement based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates, the definition and the amounts covered by those unit costs, lump sums and flat rates.

In addition, Article 91(4)(b) CPR specifies that where the Union contribution is made pursuant to points (c), (d) and (e) of Article 51, the amounts included in a payment application are the amounts determined in accordance with the above-mentionned decision pursuant to Article 94(3) [  ]. Therefore, the managing authority can only include the agreed amounts in payment applications after ther determination and  approval in the decision approving the amendment of the programme introducing such form of Union contribution.

The Commission will also start reimbursing the Union contribution to a programme on the basis of unit costs, lump sums and flat rates after their approval in the decision approving the amendment of the programme.

# QA00089 - Use of the EURO

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 87 and 94 of the CPR

 *Member State*: BG

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can we use Bulgarian Leva instead of amounts in euro for the simplified costs according to Article 94 CPR  in a proposal to the Commission in accordance with the templates set out in Annexes V and VI, as part of the programme submission or of a request for its amendment ?

**Answer:**

According to Article 87 CPR all amounts set out in programmes, reported or declared to the Commission by Member States shall be denominated in euro.

As set out in Art. 94 CPR, the proposal submitted by a Member State to the Commission shall be part of the programme submission or of a request for its amendment. It shall be submitted in accordance with the templates set out in Annexes V and VI ie the programmes’ templates. Appendix 1 (Union contribution based on SCOs) is part of Annexes V and VI. Thus, the financial amounts in this proposal (Appendix 1) shall be denominated in euro.

# QA00090 - Where to mention ‘beneficiaries’ in the programme?

 *Relevant Article*: Recital (60) and Articles 22, 38, 40, 73 of the CPR and Annex V progamme template of the CPR

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We understand that there is no specific requirement in CPR to list beneficiaries to whom the MA intends to award grants directly, i.e. without a competitive call.

**Answer:**

Correct. Contrary to the previous programming period, Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 does not require that the MA provides any information regarding the beneficiaries to be supported (i.e types of beneficiaries to be supported under each specific objective) nor the guiding principles for the selection of operations. The objective is to simplify the content of the programme and therefore we would discourage Member States from including this information in the programme.  However, if the MA wants to include information a list of potential (or types of) beneficiaries in the programme, it must make clear in the text that the information is “indicative”.

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We are aware of Recital (60), second sentence, of the CPR that most likely relates to Article 73 CPR “Selection of operations by the managing authority”, in particular its paragraph 1:

“Procedures for the selection of operations can be competitive or non-competitive provided that criteria applied and procedures used are non-discriminatory, inclusive and transparent and the operations selected maximise the contribution of the Union funding and are in line with the horizontal principles defined in this Regulation.”

Could you confirm if this recital relates to Article 73 and to the selection of operations by the managing authority?

**Answer:**

Indeed, as stated in the first sentence of that recital, it concerns selection of operations by the managing authority and provides the rationale for Article 73 CPR .

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 40(2)(a) CPR is about – selection methodology and criteria to be adopted by the monitoring committee. In this context, we refer also to Article 38(2) CPR – the monitoring committee’s rules of procedure must contain provisions on conflict of interests which may arise as “named beneficiaries” are often institutional actors who are likely to be represented on the monitoring committee. Could it also be possible that the selection methodology contains the identification of named beneficiaries, the parts of the programme they will implement as well as the justification compliant with Article 73 CPR as supported by Recital (60)?

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 40 CPR, the monitoring committee approves the selection methodology and the selection criteria. However, in accordance with Article 73 CPR the managing authority is responsible for the selection of operations. Due to the fact, that members of the monitoring committee may be beneficiaries under the programme monitored, the rules of procedure of the monitoring committee, as well as the selection procedures where needed, should provide a practical and transparent solution for these cases

**Question 4 (including any relevant facts and information):**

It has been mentioned that a possible place to list “named beneficiaries” would be the list of types of actions within each SO/priority (the list of types of actions, we also learned, is exhaustive). Is this correct?

**Answer**

Regarding types of actions referred to in Art. 22(3)(d)(i) CPR, the list is exhaustive. As explained under the reply to question 1, Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, in particular Article 22(3) CPR, no longer requires the types of beneficiaries to be identified in the programme. Eventually, if provided, the indicative list of potential beneficiaries could be referred to as examples under the description of the (exhaustive) list of types of actions or wherever else the MA considers it relevant.

# QA00091 - Eligibility of airport infrastructure in Outermost Regions

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 7(e) of the ERDF/CF regulation

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Regulation EU 2021/1058 of 24 June 2021, on the ERDF and on the CF, establishes exclusions from the scope of the ERDF and the CF in Art. 7.

Specifically, in Art 7 e), it determines that the ERDF and CF shall not support “investment in airport infrastructure, except for outermost regions or in existing regional airports (…) in any of the following cases:

 (i)             in environmental impact mitigation measures; or

(ii)           in security, safety, and air traffic management systems resulting from Single European Sky ATM research;”

 The PT authorities ask for confirmation if investment in airport infrastructure in O.R. is eligible for ERDF/CF funding **only if it concerns investments in (i) and (ii)**. They raise this doubt since they believe that the Regulation wording could suggest that *all* investments in O.R. airports are eligible and that it would be investment in existing regional airports to be conditioned to (i) and (ii).

**Answer:**

Article 7(1) (e) ERDF/CF allows for exceptions to the exclusion of scope of support for airport infrastructure in three cases:

-       in outermost regions irrespective of the passenger traffic; or

-       in regional airports in environmental impact mitigation measures; or

-       in regional airports in security, safety and air traffic management systems resulting from SESAR.

In other words,

-          all investment in airports in the outermost regions are eligible;

-          the limitations referred to in letters (i) and (ii) of Article 7(1)(e) of the ERDF/CF Regulation are only applicable to existing regional airports (outside outermost regions).

# QA00092 - 2nd Q&A document on Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) in the 2021-2027 programming period

 *Relevant Article*:

 *Member State*: n/a

**2nd Q&A document on Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) in the 2021-2027 programming period**

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| ***DISCLAIMER: This set of replies was prepared by and expresses the view of the Commission services and does not commit the European Commission. Only the Court of Justice of the European Union is competent to authoritatively interpret Union law.*** |

N.B.: Questions relating to compliance with public procurement and state aid in SCO operations implemented in line with Art.94/53 CPR as well as management verifications and audit in this respect have been taken out of this Q&A document, as they will be the subject of a separate document to be prepared by the COM.

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|  | **Question** | **Answer** |
| **Article 94 CPR** |
| 1 | Is it correct that no delegated act referred to in Article 88(4) exists right now? And consequently the managing authority currently fills Annex V concerning every simplified cost option it would like to use to reimburse expenditure by Commission as it seems to be adequate? | Yes, it is correct. No delegated act exists.Appendix 1 is to be filled out when the Member State wishes to be reimbursed by the COM based on SCOs. The assessment by the audit authority (AA) of the proposals submitted by Member States is a pre-condition for including SCOs in Appendix 1. Submission of Appendix 1 is not needed if SCOs are applied exclusively at beneficiary level in line with Article 53 CPR and Member States declare these amounts to the Commission (see Articles 63(5) and 91(4)(c) CPR). It is also not needed when the Union level SCOs, their amounts and adjustment methods are defined by a delegated act in accordance with Article 94(4) CPR. |
| 2 | Could you please clarify the degree of “binding nature” of the SCO methodology once approved for the purpose of the OP (either Annex V or Art. 48) in relation to the entire OP / priority axis / call?Once the SCO is approved (e.g. unit costs for project management), is it possible that it does not apply to the same type/nature of operation/expenditure within several priority axes of a given OP (so for one priority axis unit cost would be applicable, and for another priority axis real costs based approach? | As regards SCOs approved in a programme, once they are approved, they become mandatory and there is no possibility that the concerned types of operations are reimbursed to the MS by the COM based on actually incurred costs.The modes of reimbursement by the COM based on SCOs concern the specific types of operations, SCOs and amounts approved in the COM decision.For SCOs applied exclusively at the beneficiary level in line with Article 53 CPR: a) Appendix 1 should not be filled in and b) the SCO methodology is not approved by the Commission. If the MS decides to reimburse the beneficiary based on SCOs in line with Article 53 CPR, as SCOs have to be defined in advance, their use should be mentioned in the calls for proposals addressed to the potential beneficiaries in order to ensure respect of the principle of transparency and equal treatment. |
| 3 | Is it possible to start using SCO methodology nationally, if the SCO methodology has not yet been included/accepted in the Annex V of OP? | It is always possible to implement SCOs at the beneficiary level under Article 53 CPR, which does not require any approval by the COM.Concerning SCOs under Article 94 CPR, the COM will start reimbursing the MS based on SCOs once they are approved in a programme through a decision approving the programme or its amendment. Therefore, the managing authority (MA) can only include the agreed amounts in payment applications after their determination and approval in the decision approving the amendment of the programme introducing such form of Union contribution.The Commission will also start reimbursing the Union contribution to a programme on the basis of unit costs, lump sums and flat rates after their approval in the decision approving the amendment of the programme. |
| 4 | What is the minimum amount of EUR to be covered by the specific SCO methodology in order to be included in the Annex V of OP? | CPR does not provide for a minimum amount, therefore, the MS can include SCO in Appendix 1 to the programme regardless of the amount to be covered.However, taking into account the requirements and related work by MA to design the SCO (including any adjustment methods, data collection, etc.) and for the AA to assess it, it is recommended that SCO schemes covering a considerable amount of programme contribution and a considerable number of operations/beneficiaries are submitted for approval in Annex V. |
| 5 | To make it easier for the MSs, would it be possible to create EU level SCOs implemented under art 88? | Article 94(4) CPR foresees for the COM the possibility to establish Union level SCOs through a delegated act. The COM is looking into this possibility and has launched a study in this respect. |
| 6 | How will be dealt with programme amendments which may affect SCOs in practice and lead to a time-consuming process? | As already replied in the previous Q&A document, if SCOs are introduced in a programme with a programme amendment request, the normal procedure for amendment of a programme applies. In order to allow the COM to adopt swiftly the programme amendment, all required documents should be duly completed and include a positive AA assessment. Informal exchanges with the COM prior to submission of a programme or an amendment request could accelerate the process of formal amendment procedure. |
| 7 | Which MS plan to use SCOs under Art. 88 on the upper level (EC-MS) and a different reimbursement method on the lower level (MA-beneficiary)? | We do not dispose of this information. |
| 8 | What would the approval of the Annex 1 look like? Is it a separate approval letter? Or simply a decision on the programme’s approval? In terms of audit trail. | Appendix 1 to a programme will be approved as part of the programme approval or amendment procedure: the decision approving or amending the programme will encompass also SCOs described in Appendix 1. |

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| **SET UP/ADJUSTMENT OF METHODOLOGIES** |
| 9 | Is the draft budget methodology only suitable to create lump sums that cover the whole project?Taking into account the risk that this may entail for community organisations participating in small projects and SPFs, could the draft budget methodology be used to create other SCOs (e.g. unit costs, flat rates, lump sums applied to specific element of the projects, etc.)? | A draft budget is not a type of SCO but a method to establish lump sums, unit costs and flat rates Please refer to the revised Guidance Note on SCOs (EGESIF 14-0017) (section 4.3.).Flat rates, lump sums and unit costs may be based on a draft budget in relation to the whole or part of the budget of the operation/project.As an example, for an operation composed of 5 different activities:-             Activity 1 and 2 of the operation is reimbursed on the basis of real costs or on the basis of another SCO (for example lump sums coming from another EU policy)-             Activity 3, 4 and 5 of the operation is reimbursed as unit costs established on the basis of a draft budget |
| 10 | Using the calculation method of the Draft budget, is it necessary to insert each lump sum in the Annex V of OP, or should the overall Draft budget approach be harmonised with the EC? There can be a situation where 100 different lump sums will have to be added to the Annex V. | It is not clear what is meant by “overall draft budget approach harmonised with EC”. Based on Article) 94(2) CPR, and Appendix 1 to CPR, the Member State should submit the appropriate information/data per type of operation. This means that it is possible to submit a proposal for one single lump sum based on a single draft budget to reimburse all operations of the same type. |
| 11 | In the CPR it is stated that the periodic adjustments are a good practice in the context of multi-annual programme implementation to take into account factors affecting rates and amounts. In our view the best solution is to include the method for the automatic adjustment of the amounts of units or the input costs forming part of the lump sum in the methodology and to avoid periodical change of the SCO methodology.We wonder how to deal with it especially in case of amount or rates that reflect the market prices or are based on the non-statistical data such as the analysis of the historic data. We mean the other adjustment method than the periodical change reflecting the indexation published by the Statistical Office or set by law.Can we set it in the methodology in a general way that e.g. the re-evaluation of the amount will be realized based on the actual market survey done on a yearly basis? Could you please provide us some examples of good practice how such automatic adjustment of amounts or rates can be set in the methodology? | Under part B, section 9 in Appendix 1, the MS may include a description of an adjustment method. If the adjustment method is included in the methodology, applying the adjustment is not considered as a modification of the SCO methodology.The revised Guidance Note on SCOs (EGESIF 14-0017) mentions, as example, linking the adjustment with the inflation, but the MS are free to establish other adjustment methods, as long as they are documented and justified. Annex V should include sufficient details about the adjustment method foreseen to allow to the audit authority and the Commission services to assess the SCO scheme.The MS may decide not to include the adjustment method in the methodology if they consider that the SCO will not need adjustment for the period of its application.A market-survey may be considered as other objective information and thus be used to establish SCOs on the basis of Article 53(3)(a)(i) CPR. It may also be used to periodically re-evaluate the amounts; in that case, the methodology of this market survey should be clearly defined and would be subject to audit.For examples from the ESF (2014-2020 period) please refer to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2195 of 9 July 2015. |
| 12 | When setting up the SCO methodology, cooperation with official "suppliers" of data is advised or it is requested to use statistical, historical or other relevant data (sources).We would like to ask, whether it is presumed to oblige the MA to collect such data and evaluate them in respect to the possibility of submitting updated or new SCOs or for the need of future possibilities for updating Annex V? According to our previous experience, if projects/operations are result-based or output-oriented, it is necessary to define by MA a solid framework for the collection, recording, storage or evaluation of data.Can the AA also assess this process and set up during ex-ante assessment? | When submitting Appendix 1, the MS will need to state in Part C the source of data used to calculate the SCOs providing detailed information on where produced, collected and recorded data come from, where they are stored, any cut-off dates as well as how they are validated.In addition, if the MS wish to adjust methodologies included in Appendix 1, they will need to include a description of the adjustment method. This means that the MA will need to dispose of data in order to be able to adjust methodologies.The AA will assess if the data used are reliable and relevant, as foreseen in part C, section 4 of Appendix 1 to the programme as part of its audit assessment prior to the submission of Annex V to the Commission.  |
| 13 | Does the EC envisage any recommendation for the Member State to create space/platform for the electronisation of the official SCO methodologies, including supporting documentation or its assessment at Member State level, after the adoption by the Regulation? Is it possible to apply such a procedure at national level without recommending it from EC? How to ensure and maintain follow up methodologies? For example, adjustments of the adopted methodologies for the needs of future verification? | There is no such requirement in the existing EU legal framework on SCOs. The COM does not have a general recommendation on this. The Member State may do so, if they deem appropriate.It is reminded, however, that proper audit trail on the setting up of SCO methodologies and their implementation needs to be ensured (see Article 69(6) CPR and Annex XIII, section III to CPR). The MA also has the obligation to record and store electronically the data on each operation (see Article 72(1)(e) CPR and Annex XVII to CPR). |
| 14 | Is it possible to create more universal SCO methodologies, which the MA can update without official “adjustments” of the SCO methodology (e.g. just updating of basic amounts)? Could such an update be without the need for ex-ante assessment?What is the approach towards tailor-made SCO methodologies developed e.g. just for one call? Is it advised to create methodology valid for certain period of time or to create methodology for longer period/even the whole programming period - if so, how to manage their actualisation? | For SCOs under Article 94 CPR, to avoid the need for modifications, Appendix 1 to the programme foresees the possibility to include a description of an adjustment method in part B, section 9. If the MS includes therein such a method, it will be covered by the decision approving the programme and the methodology will not need to be assessed again.As far as SCOs applied exclusively at beneficiary level are concerned, the possibility to use tailor made SCO just for one call is always possible under Article 53 CPR, which does not require COM approval. It is recommended that the MA adapts the SCOs when launching a new call for proposals in order to take account of an indexation or economic changes, e.g. in energy costs, levels of salaries, etc. In addition, it is suggested to enshrine in the methodology some automatic adaptations (based on inflation, or evolution of salaries for instance). It is recommended that SCOs submitted to the Commission for approval under Article 94 CPR cover a considerable amount of programme contribution and a considerable number of operations.See also reply to question 18. |
| 15 | Can there be an overlap of some SCO methodologies within the same program/priority axis or call? How to approach the combination of SCO in case of SCO adopted by delegated act within the meaning of Article 88 and the SCO methodology established and approved by the MA and assessed by AA within the meaning of Article 48? | Methodologies approved in a programme in line with Article 94 CPR can also be used for SCOs applied at the beneficiary level. In such a case, there is no discrepancy between the SCOs used at both levels (COM-MS and MS-beneficiary).It is possible to apply a different SCO under Article 53 CPR to the relation MS-beneficiary than the one applied under Article 94 CPR between COM - MS although not recommended. |
| 16 | We would like to get more detailed explanation (preferable by giving examples of EC approach) how to set the amount of SCO (e.g. unit price) while adhering to the "real proxy" principle (reflecting the real costs of the activity/operation) and at the same time ensuring compliance with the principles of simplification (i.e. how to set the “acceptable amount “of standard deviation when calculating e.g. unit cost, with ensuring the sufficient treatment of the extreme values). | When setting up the SCO, the MA may use one of the methods listed in Articles 53(2) and 94(2) CPR. The calculation of the SCO should be reasonable and prudent, i.e. based on reality, not excessive or extreme, reflecting the market situation. When assessing the data in order to set the SCO, extreme values should be excluded from the calculation to respect the principle of sound financial management.The MA must be able to explain and to justify its choices. The amounts should be adapted to specific conditions or needs. For example, the execution of a project may cost more in a remote region than in a central region because of higher transport costs; this element should be taken into account when deciding on a lump sum or amount to be paid for similar projects in the two regions. |
| 17 | In the programming period 2014-2020 many operations were financed in the form of SCO defined at the national level (in accordance with article 67 1303/2013) that were based on verified historical data from perspective 2007-2013. MS therefore doesn't have any more recent data of verified expenditures. Is it possible that in these cases for defining SCO under article 88 CPR data from operations in 2007-2013 is used and adopted by official inflation rates? The same inflation rate will then be used for adoption of SCO under article 88. | The use of “verified historical data from perspective 2007-2013” may be accepted if it is demonstrated that the amounts are still relevant. This means that the programme authorities should satisfy themselves that this data is still a reliable proxy for the real costs, and adjust it where needed. |
| 18 | In case MS is planning to use the methodology from current (14-20) period, and there are no more historical data stored, what could be used as justification to "prove" that the unit cost/lump sum is still appropriate? | The methodologies from the programming period 2014-2020 can be reused. In this case, the AA should check if the methodology is adapted to the new legislation applicable to the programming period 2021-2027 and if there are changes, which require an adaptation/update of the methodology.See also reply to question 17 above. |
| 19 | We understand that if AA and EC confirms the methodology for SCO under article 88, it can be directly used also under article 48 (for payments to beneficiaries). Or separate methodology should be prepared? Please confirm. | It is possible to apply the same SCO under Article 94 CPR (COM-MS level) to the relation MS-beneficiary (Article 53 CPR). In such a case, no separate methodology needs to be prepared. |
| 20 | We understand that "verified historical data of individual beneficiaries" in article 48.2(a)(ii) refers to historical data from single beneficiary when we want to define SCO for this particular beneficiary from its historical data. If we prepare the methodology for SCO on the basis of historical data from several beneficiaries (e.g. from past calls of proposals) this method can be understood as statistical data or other objective information (article 48.2(a)(i)). Please confirm our understanding. | Article 53(3)(a)(ii) CPR indeed refers to historical data from an individual beneficiary when the MS wants to define SCO for this particular beneficiary from its historical data. If historical data from different beneficiaries are used to establish a SCO amount for future calls, such method of establishing SCO is covered by Article 53(3)(a)(i) CPR.As clarified in section 4.2.2.2 of the revised Guidance Note on SCOs (EGESIF 14-0017), the methods based on verified historical data of individual beneficiaries are in particular simplifications for beneficiaries who will implement many projects over the programming period. |
| 21 | 1)  Data processing: what is the Commission’s view of the minimum number of data needed to calculate a flat-rate average cost?2) Use of national statistics: can an average statistical unit cost based on a population covering all social categories of employees be used on this smaller part of this population whose average cost is different? | 1) There is no minimum data requirement. The sources of the data used for the analysis and the calculations, including an assessment of the relevance of the data to the envisaged operations, and an assessment of the quality of the data need to be documented when setting up SCOs.Please see also reply to question 28.2) The question is unclear. More information is required in order to consider all parameters at stake. |
| 22 | In Luxembourg during the general lockdown but also later when school were kept closed, the state largely financed (via the social security) the staff costs. Special parental leave were granted (one of the two parents was allow to stay home to take care of the kids with cost fully covered by the state, no limitation on the time, until the school were closed, even partially). Taking into account that the SCOs will be applied as from 2022 and not earlier and that we all hope that we will be back to something more similar to normal life by then, we would like just to skip the data of 2020  and rather use the data of 2016-2019 to establish the flat rate. I am sure we are not the only ones having this problem and we are wondering if:1)      The proposed approached would be acceptable from the EC point of view (the auditors in particular)2)      How other are solving this issue. | Data needs to be relevant for the SCO considered. The sources of the data used for the analysis and the calculations, including an assessment of the relevance of the data to the envisaged operations, and an assessment of the quality of the data should be provided. Therefore, when setting up the SCO the MS has the possibility to explain why the data from these years is not relevant and exclude it from the calculation basis.  In the concrete example, the relevance of data from COVID years (2020-2021) for expenditure starting in 2022 depends on how the social and economic reality will be at that moment in time in particular, it could be justified to exclude data from 2020-2021 as not representative for establishing the SCO in question.  |
| 23 | In the event that an SCO is established on the basis of an expert judgement in the absence of historical or statistical data, the AA must verify the competence and independence of the experts but does not verify the amounts. Do you confirm this position? | The AA shall verify not only the competence and independence of the expert but also if the expert judgement is well documented, coherent and specific to the particular circumstances of each case. |
| 24 | Can the methodology for unit cost calculation be based on data from planned budget from application form rather than approved payment claims? | No, the methodology may not be based on data from planned budget, as such data is not certified, their reliability is not ensured.  |
| 25 | How should we ensure similarity of projects in order to use the method copy paste? | There is no indication in the CPR of what is understood by similarity of operations. It is for the MA to assess whether in a particular case the condition of similarity is fulfilled.Please note that all elements of the method that could have an impact on the unit cost / lump sum / flat rate should be taken into consideration. A case-by-case examination is necessary. Please also refer to section 4.4 of the revised Guidance Note on SCOs (EGESIF 14-0017). |
| 26 | Are mean hourly rates based on historical data for f.e. R&D projects be an art 88 SCO with amount of spent hours as indicator/trigger? Are there examples of this | Averages, or median values or other statistically sound methods may be used to calculate SCOs.The indicator triggering reimbursement will be the hours.It is reminded that when setting the SCO the MA may use one of the methods listed in the CPR (Articles 53(2) and/or 94(2) CPR). Sources of the data used for the analysis and the calculations, the relevance of the data to the envisaged operations, and the quality of the data should be assessed. |
| 27 | Examples of good practices of methodologies which are not based on statistics published by the national statistics office but on market research data. | Such examples could be the objective of discussions and exchange of experience between the members of the TN ERDF SCO practitioners. |
| 28 | How can MA/AA be sure that the used data for the methodology is reliable? What is the minimum of data which supports calculated SSCU or lump sums? | There is no minimum data required to calculate SCOs.Data can be taken from many sources. Reliability of data used will depend on the source of data used. For example, data coming from national statistical offices or EUROSTAT can be considered reliable. For some sources of data, more detailed checks could be needed to confirm the reliability of data In some cases, the professional judgement of the AA could be used to decide whether additional checks on a sample basis should be carried out or not (taking into account any information available to AA on the type of data, the way of compilation, internal procedures of bodies for approving the provided information etc.) |
| 29 | Is it possible to use two different flat rates for different categories of costs applied to the same base cost (e.g. staff costs)? | Yes, it is possible. For example, a flat rate of x % of staff costs can be used to calculate the indirect costs and the same basis i.e. the staff costs can be used to calculate the other direct costs of the operation at a flat rate % as well.Attention is drawn to the need for the basis not to include costs that will be covered by the flat rate to avoid double financing. |
| 30 | We would need some more clarification on using historical data in preparing methodologies. Is this applicable only when defining SCOs for a single beneficiary? We understand "historical" data from more than one beneficiary as other objective information or statistical data. | The historical data (both, on projects or operations funded from CPR Fund or from different sources) can be considered as statistical data. |
| 31 | How to make use of already available knowledge on the market prices for (specific) goods/ services? Is such a thing (market maps) available somewhere? | The COM does not have this information. |
| 32 | Can you take a national scheme (not in total, just a part of it), if this part itself will be used in its totality (but not the methodology itself)? For example, the national scheme covers different types of costs (salaries, material costs, etc.) but only the part of the national methodology covering the salaries will be used in the SCO methodology? | In the specific example used it seems you wish to set up a SCO in accordance with the rules for application of corresponding SCOs applied under a scheme funded entirely by the Member State for a similar type of operation). If the national scheme sets up SCOs for several categories of costs but you only wish to use the SCO set up for one of those categories of costs included in the scheme, it is possible to do so.However, when re-using the existing national method you need to ensure that:* the method is re-used in its entirety for this specific SCO established under the national scheme (for instance and where applicable, eligible expenditure, scope) and not only its result (lump sum of EUR X);
* it normally applies to the same geographical area or a smaller one (if a methodology is applied in only one region, it can be re-used by the region concerned but not by another region of this Member State where the national methodology is not applicable);
* the method is applied to a similar type of operation;
* reference is made to the method and justification that it is in use for operations supported from national sources.
 |
| 33 | When setting up the methodology for unit costs, is it correct to include a flat rate within the unit costs calculation, or is it necessary to develop other methodology? | The question is not clear. |
| 34 | What documentation should we have on file of the proposal when we use draft budget? | All supporting documents that relate to the calculation or justification of the costs of all categories of the draft budget. In addition, the document containing the budget itself (i.e. the draft budget) is to be archived by the managing authority as a supporting document to justify the SCO used. |
| 35 | When designing SCOs if we should check all the documents as the primary data sources or it is enough to use the data that will be provided for us by institution that is responsible for such data collection and the correctness of provided data? | In case the AA considers the source of data as reliable (for example, data coming from the national statistical offices), the check will focus on the verification that the data actually inputted in the calculation correspond to the source data and that they are eligible and relevant for the SCO scheme. For some sources of data, more detailed checks could be needed to confirm the reliability/correctness of data.A specific case merits special attention: it is when data coming from reliable sources (for example, published reports and official internet databases) are not used directly as such (automatically generated from the source’s database) but are compiled to a unified form by hand. In such cases, it would be a good practice to compare (on a sample basis) whether the compiled numbers are in line with official reports. As, however, this will not always be practically easy to do, the AAs may use their professional judgement to decide whether additional check on the sample basis should be carried out or not taking into account any information available to AA on the type of data, the way of compilation, internal procedures of such body for approving the provided information, etc. |
| 36 | FEV method: is it ok for the MA to combine different sources of information in order to establish its methodology? For example "expert judgement" and "other objective information". | The objective of the methodology is to set up a SCO. Articles 53(3)(a)(i)] and 94(2)(a)(i) CPR refer to “other objective information” and “expert judgment” next to the use of statistical data.In relation to the example given, if there is data available from a source, which qualifies as objective, and the methodology can be set up using this source, it is not clear why an expert judgment would also be needed to set up the SCO, as an expert judgment can be used when there is no objective information available. Likewise, the same applies for the other methods. However, a combination is not legally excluded. |
| 37 | Considering the data used to create / calculate the SCOs, what is the influence of the ongoing pandemic? For example, costs for traveling differ a lot between the year 2020 and the previous years. The is quite a big deviation. It should be considered to leave out the data of the years after 2019 because they are not representative for an assessment. The scope should be adjusted. | In case the MA considers (and the AA agrees) that certain data is not representative (outlier), they can remove that data from the basis but a sound justification needs to be provided.Please see also reply to question 22. |
| 38 | Can article 50.2 be used even if such historical data under article 50.4 is available (dated 12 months and older)? | The question is not clear. Please be aware that the CPR refers to the calculation of the hourly rate using the ‘latest’ documented annual gross employment cost. The term "latest" in Article 55(2) CPR means that the data used must be recent enough, i.e. indicative of real staff costs. This means that a calculation method based on historical data of the beneficiary is not relevant. |
| 39 | How will the SCO update need to be performed and with whom we should consider this, if indexation is planned, and we change it according to the provided adjustment conditions? | Updates (adjustments, such as indexation) maybe foreseen when establishing the methodology and, for SCOs under Article 94 CPR, described in Appendix 1. The adjustments will then follow the pattern approved with the programme. Any deviation from it will be considered irregular, as long as it is not agreed with COM in a programme amendment, amending the approved SCO scheme. |
| **APPENDIX 1** |
| 40 | Appendix 2 is less taxing than Appendix 1 given that Section C of Appendix 1 is not included in Appendix 2. That being so, will auditors and the Commission be verifying the sources used and the calculation method adopted before approving an SCO based on FNLTC?) | Based on Article 95 CPR the COM will approve the scheme and the overall amount for the implementation of the scheme. In addition, as specified in recital 34 CPR: “the respect of the principle of sound financial management should be ensured. In particular, as regards the appropriateness of the amounts linked to the fulfilment of the respective conditions or the achievement of results, the Commission and the Member State should ensure that resources employed are adequate for the investments undertaken”.This means that the COM should agree with the MS that the overall amount linked to the fulfilment of conditions/results is appropriate. This entails a dialogue with the MS as they both bear responsibility on ensuring the respect of sound financial management. The dialogue will involve presentation and discussion of the calculation method leading to an overall agreement on the resources employed for the implementation of the scheme. |
| 41 | Is it possible to fill in Annex V. Appendix 1 with SCO methods that are planned to be applied between MA and beneficiary? It would help us with legal certainty and of course would be preceded by AA assessment. | Appendix 1 is to be used for SCOs under Article 94 CPR (COM-MS level). However, in case the MA plans to apply the same SCO at the level MS-beneficiary (Article 53 CPR) as well, it surely can.Please see also replies to questions 15 & 19. |
| 42 | 1) Is it acceptable to indicate in appendix 1 Annex V CPR SCOs implemented in accordance with Article 48 CPR, incl. off-the-shelf options or the EU level SCOs from the EC delegated act ?  2. Is it required to indicate in appendix 1 Annex V CPR 7% flat rate in accordance with art. 49(1)(a) CPR, which is considered as a fulfilment of the obligation of the mandatory use of SCOs (Article 48(1) CPR)? | 1) No, SCOs that will be exclusively implemented in line with Article 53 CPR shall not be included in Appendix 1. However, it is possible that the same SCO applied as a mode of reimbursement between COM-MS also applies at the level MS-beneficiary (Article 53 CPR). Moreover, Union level SCOs that will be established by delegated act pursuant to Article 94(4) CPR will not need to be included in Appendix 1, either.2) No, off the shelf options mentioned in Articles 54-56 CPR are absolutely not to be included in Appendix 1. Their legal certainty is ensured by the CPR provisions (the MS is not required to confirm that these rates are reliable proxy of costs for their operations). |
| 43 | Can the same template as used for SCO according to Art. 88 be used also for the SCO methodology according to Article 48? | No, Appendix 1 is only used for SCO under Article 94 CPR as a mode of reimbursement between COM-MS and is not applicable in the case of SCOs under Article 53 CPR (MS-beneficiary), as such SCOs will not be approved within the programme.See also clarification under question 42 above. |
| 44 | Question related to article 88 and articles 49 - 51? Is there any document similar to Annex V- Appendix 1 which the MS has to fill up and send to EC or nothing like that is necessary? | No, SCOs that will be implemented in line with Article 53 CPR are not approved by the COM and consequently there is no template to submit. |
| 45 | LV: regarding projects below 200 k- what COM would expect from MS regarding methodologies in these projects and whether these methodologies should be included in Annex 5, given that there might be a large number of methodologies | See replies to questions 41 to 44 above. |
| 46 | A practical step by step guide/example how Appendix I is completed by a MS. | This exercise has been carried out at several meetings and especially at meetings of TN ERDF SCO practitioners ([Simplified Cost Options - Regional Policy - European Commission (europa.eu)](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/simplified-cost-options/#1)) as well at meetings of the TN on Simplification for ESF authorities. |
| 47 | Should part B of Appendix I be filled in multiple times if the selected methodology applies different rates according to the pertinent project size. | For operations encompassing several SCOs covering different categories of costs, different projects or successive phases of an operation, the fields 3 to 11 of part B of Appendix 1 should be filled in for each indicator triggering reimbursement. |
| 48 | How to fill in the first part of Appendix I with regards to operations that are using different SCOs to meet individual Actions. | In Appendix 1 only the SCOs used for reimbursement by the COM to MS should be included which should be calculated based on the methodology indicated in Article 94(2) CPR. The way beneficiaries will be reimbursed (SCOs or costs actually incurred and paid) is irrelevant for Appendix 1 purposes. For simplification purposes, the Commission recommends the use of the same SCOs as a mode of reimbursement between COM-MS and at the level MS-beneficiary. |

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| **EX ANTE ASSESSMENT OF SCOs** |
| 49 | Are all SCO foreseen for the funding period 2021-2027 to be approved and certified by the audit authority (or only those to be submitted with the operational programme)? | SCOs included in the programme (Article 94 CPR) must be assessed by the AA before the submission of the programme to the COM. The AA is not approving the SCO. The approval is done by the COM, within the adoption of the programme.SCOs under Article 53 CPR are subject to the regular risk assessment of the AA (covering both system audits and audits of operations). Depending on this risk assessment, the AA may envisage an early (ex-ante) assessment, a system audit or include a check of the methodology when auditing its sample for the audits of operations. |
| 50 | Given the voluntary nature of the SCO and the non-binding nature of the ex-ante assessment of the SCO methodology based on the Art. 48 by the AA, is it possible to set up an obligation on the MA to use this tool? | Ex-ante AA assessment of SCOs methodologies developed under Article 53 CPR is not mandatory (it was not mandatory in the programming period 2014-2020, either).With regard to the need for an ex-ante audit assessment of Article 53 CPR, please see the reply to question 49 above. The need of an early audit will be decided with the overall audit risk assessment and audit plan of the AA, which will take into account the characteristics of all measures funded under the programme. |
| 51 | Is it possible to jointly execute the ex-ante assessment of the SCO methodology (outside Annex V) based on Article 48, with the EC representatives/auditors? In such a case, which body carries out the ex-ante assessment “officially”? Is it AA or EC? | Whereas in the programming period 2014-2020 the COM provided this possibility, for the moment no such joint audits focused on SCOs are foreseen for the programming period 2021-2027.For SCOs under Article 94 CPR, COM will approve the programme, including the developed SCOs methodologies. As part of the approval process, SCOs are reviewed, including the ex-ante assessment provided by the AA.COM services are available in case of questions and requests for interpretations, for both MA and AAs. |
| 52 | Where is the border line between the SCO methodology and other supporting documents? Should the AA ex ante assessment be focused only at the methodology or should it also concern the broader context of the operation, for example the content of the operation, target group, beneficiaries, activities, publicity, state aid, data collection, public procurement, personal data protection, etc.? | For SCOs developed under Article 94 CPR, Appendix 1 requires the information necessary to assess the methodology (details on operation, possible perverse incentives or problems etc.). The AA should assess all relevant documentation for the proposed SCO.  |
| 53 | To what extent methodologies already in use should be reassessed? | As required by the CPR, methodologies for the SCOs under Article 94 CPR should be assessed by the AA. Even if methodologies are in use, they should be reconfirmed, as there may be elements that need update so that SCOs still constitute a reliable proxy of real costs. The AA assessment should be submitted together with Appendix 1.As clarified in the COM SCO checklist :“Please note that in line with Article 49 CPR, where a Member State has calculated a flat rate for indirect costs based on eligible direct costs in accordance with Article 67(5)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (fair, equitable and verifiable calculation method), that flat rate may be used for a similar operation for the programming period 2021-2027.In case the MA considers that any other SCO methodology developed for 2014-2020 is also of relevance for 2021-2027 (there are no major developments/legal changes which would require change of the methodology), then the AA can rely on the assurance obtained on that methodology in its previous audits. In such a case, the additional analysis of the AA for the 2021-2027 SCO could be limited (in particular to ensure that the old methodology is in line with the new legal framework and to confirm that there are no major developments which would require change of the methodology).”For the ESF, this applies most notably to unit costs and lump sums adopted by a delegated act (see [Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2195 of 9 July 2015](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2015.313.01.0022.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2015:313:TOC), amended 9 times -   <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=1490&langId=en>) |

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| **AUDIT OF SCOs** |
| 54 | What is the scope of AA's role in the preparation and approval of bespoke SCOs (unit costs, flat rates etc.) and in giving security and reassurance to project partners before incurring costs. In the current programmes the AA's role has focused on auditing the SCOs, however this has created several problems | The decision and responsibility of the development of an SCO scheme lies with the MA, not the AA. As regards SCOs under Article [94 CPR, before programme submission to COM, the AA will perform an assessment of the calculation methodology and amounts and the arrangements to ensure the verification, quality, collection and storage of data. The COM will review this assessment together with the SCO methodology submitted and will approve SCOs as part of the programme.With regard to SCOs under Article 53 CPR, please see the reply to question 49. |
| 55 | Can the Commission present an updated checklist of how audits will be carried out? | COM shared its draft SCO checklist for the programming period 2021-2027 with the AAs on 15/12/2020. The final version was distributed in the meeting with AAs of 12/03/2021. It was also shared with the MAs at the 8th meeting of the Transnational Network of ERDF/CF practitioners (Simplified Cost Options - Regional Policy - European Commission (europa.eu)). |
| 56 | If in the COM's checklist there are minimum requirements of questions for AA to address, what could be the maximum, for example: in case the statistical data are used, AA could - actually should, rely on? | See reply to questions 58 & 59 below. |
| 57 | What are the lessons learned from the technical meeting of the EC Audit Unit and the AAs? | In the technical meetings of 15/12/2020 and 12/03/2021 the AA and COM agreed on the minimum audit work to be performed for SCOs under Article 94 CPR. These technical meetings focused on the methodology-checklist to be applied during the assessment of SCOs under Article 94 CPR (and other audit work for SCOs) and on the assessment template to be included in the programmes for part C, section 5 of Appendix 1. Although the checklist and template are not legally binding/mandatory, the AAs are strongly recommended to use them (or to treat them as a minimum requirements) in order to speed up the SCO assessment and approval by COM. In particular, using the assessment template will result in reduced or no need to request additional confirmations from the AAs related to the scope of the audit work and the conclusions reached. |
| 58 | Are the checklist and template for the audit assessment mandatory for AA to follow? Is it minimum requirements to be followed? Could/ should other questions be added? | The checklist and template for audit assessment were agreed between COM and AAs during the technical meeting of 12/03/2021. They are not legally binding, however, if not followed, COM may require additional information to ensure that all legal requirements have been verified and to be able to approve the SCO scheme under Article 94 CPR.For the remaining two questions, see reply to question 59. |
| 59 | Can the checklist prepared by the COM be supplemented by the MS’s AA during an SCO’s assessment as currently its format is too general | The checklist is agreed between the AAs and the COM as a minimum basis for the assessment. The AAs can further develop it to their needs. |
| 60 | Checklist – section 1.2, (vii) – TA – for Interreg programmes it is mandatory to use flat rate for TA – should the AA still check this (part 1 of the checklist, which is about SCO methodology and not application) | No, it should not. |
| 61 | Does the AA need to prepare a separate assessment report for each SCO method assessed? In case multiple SCOs have been assessed by the AA simultaneously can a single assessment report be submitted | The question does not clarify if the SCOs concerned here are foreseen to be submitted to the Commission for approval under Article 94 CPR or under Article 53 CPR without submission to COM for approval).* For SCOs under Article 94 CPR: AA can prepare one assessment (but include details for each methodology). Checklist questions need to be duplicated per methodology.
* For SCOs under Article 53 CPR: The AA will perform its system audit or audit of operations at a certain moment and can equally issue one report per system/audit of operation covering all SCOs concerned. Here again, if several SCO methods are under assessment, checklist questions need to be duplicated per methodology.
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| 62 | Who will be the recipient of the AA's assessment reports and will the AA be required to submit its assessment reports separately in the SFC? | We expect that the filled template for audit assessment is submitted with the programme document. Therefore, the Managing Authorities will submit the ex-ante assessment of the SCO schemes via SFC at the stage of programme submission. |
| 63 | Is it mandatory to audit all SCO methodologies developed under Art. 48 and/or during the development? | No, it will depend on the risk-assessment of the AA and the resulting audit plan. |
| 64 | What will be the impact if, for example, we use flat rate and the activity will not be implemented, how to calculate the error rate for financial corrections? | It is not clear from the question whether the whole operation or an activity within the operation is not implemented. If the whole operation is not implemented, this will result in a financial correction of the full amount affected. If it is one activity not implemented, the amount corresponding to the activity non implemented will be ineligible.The error rate will be calculated as usual. |
| 65 | How the EC will identify or control that the State declare expenditure as agreed under Article 88? Because in the form of declaration it is not excluded that expenditure is declared under Article 88. | MS and COM will verify the implementation based on the conditions approved within the programme. The control cycle contains first level controls before declaration of expenditure to the COM, second level controls (audits) providing assurance that the expenditure in the accounts is legal and regular, and audits by COM and ECA on the submitted accounts. SCOs under Article 94 CPR will be verified at each of these stages against the above-mentioned conditions. |
| 66 |  If we will have positive feedback on SCOs from AA. What is the probability of COM later to question it. What would be the consequences for the Programme? | Regarding SCOs submitted to the COM in line with Art.94 CPR the COM will assess Appendix 1 based on the information included in it and the AA assessment. The COM will rely on the assessment provided by the AA if it is positive without any reservations and based on the COM review of the documents submitted there are no issues detected with regard to the reliability of the assessment. |
| **SCOs & PUBLIC PROCUREMENT** |
| 67 | As provided in Article 68a CPR, the calculation of direct staff costs of an operation at a flat rate of up to 20% of the direct costs other than staff costs will not require a calculation to determine the methodology unless the operation includes public works contracts which exceed the threshold set out in point (a) of Article 4 of Directive 2014/24/EU. This means, that if the direct costs of the operation are even partially covered by such a public works contract which exceeds the threshold set out in point (a) of Article 4 of Directive 2014/24/EU, the use of the 20% flat rate defined in the Regulation is possible but will require the establishment of a methodology to determine the applicable rate.Could Commission please clarify if, should staff costs calculated on the basis of direct costs covered by such a public works contract were proven NOT to be externalized, does the 20% flat rate still require to establish of a methodology?  In the case for example of an operation that has two types of costs: acquisition of research equipment (some of them exceeding the threshold) and staff costs (people, on the beneficiary’s payroll, in charge of operating and of the maintenance of this equipment). | The provision mentioned concerns CPR for the programming period 2014-2020. However, the rule is the same in CPR for the programming period 2021-2027 (Article 55(1) CPR).Yes, staff costs in the example given should be calculated based on  methodology in line with Article 53(3) CPR, as the provision does not differentiate between direct staff costs externalised or not, but the criterion is rather to ensure that the direct costs of the operation (staff costs excluded) do not include public works contracts which exceed the threshold set out in point (a) of Article 4 of Directive 2014/24/EU 4 of the European Parliament and of the Council (or in Article 15 of Directive 2014/25/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council). |
| 68 | Based on revised Guidance on SCO (14-20), When operations are implemented through public procurement procedures, the price in the contract notice is by definition a unit cost or lump sum constituting the basis of the payments by the beneficiary to the contractor. However, for the purposes of Article 67 CPR, costs determined and paid by the beneficiary based on amounts established through public procurement procedures constitute real costs actually incurred and paid under Article 67(1)(a) CPR. Question: In case an SCO methodology is applied for works contract, it is assumed that the conditions for payment by the MA to the Beneficiary may not be the same as the conditions for payment by the Beneficiary to the Contractor (this specifically applies to unit cost contracts) . | This relates to the programming period 2014-2020 period and not to the programming period 2021-20027. This approach in the revised Guidance Note on SCOs (EGESIF 14-0017) is based on the Joint Statement by the COM and the Council in the CPR for the programming period 2014-2020 on Article 67 and is linked to the prohibition of implementing SCOs in fully procured projects.In the CPR for the programming period 2021-2027, there is no such prohibition, i.e. it is not excluded that the unit cost or lump sum paid to a contractor constitutes a SCO.However, it is not clear what is meant by “conditions for payment”. If it is meant a different form of reimbursement (i.e. reimbursement from the MS to beneficiary based on a lump sum (and from the beneficiary to a contractor based on a unit cost (for example)), this is not excluded but the concept seems against simplification. |
| 69 | Is it reasonable to use contracts, contract addenda (not the whole procurement procedure documents) and BoQ from the Contractor as the basis for assessment of progress of operation (milestones) which serve as basis for reimbursement based on SCO, and not as basis for taking into consideration the real costs (which will be clearly stated in the documents, but should not be relevant for SCO). | It is for the MA to set out the conditions for reimbursement of the operations, the indicators and the milestones/steps. The way mentioned in the question seems reasonable and acceptable. |
| 70 | Article 50, CPR 2021-2027 – is the value of specific contracts or the value of the procurement procedure relevant  with recept to above threshold rule since procurements may be divided into lots, and each lot contracted with different contractor, and those separate contracts may be of value below threshold | Article 55(1) CPR mentions public works contracts or supply or service contracts “which exceed in value the thresholds set out in Article 4 of Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council or in Article 15 of Directive 2014/25/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council”.Article 4 of Directive 2014/24/EU refers to “procurements with a value net of value-added tax (VAT)” being equal to or greater than the specific thresholds stated therein”. The same provision is enshrined in Article 15 of Directive 2014/25/EU.This means that it is the procurement value that will be taken into account irrespective of the lots that a procurement maybe divided in. |
| 71 | For fully procured operations, how to set up the price (e.g., for the unit costs)? What would the process look like? What is acceptable/proportionate in this case (especially in the context of small markets, limited number of offers, inflated prices knowing that the public funds will be financing specific types of operations, very specialised goods for procurement). How can we ensure that the work put into setting up a unit cost for fully procured operations is not for the sake of simply avoiding the public procurement? | This question is under assessment. The COM will reply at a later stage when all elements have been clarified. |

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| **MANDATORY USE OF SCOS** |
| 72 | We suppose the only moment when the mandatory use of SCOs must be checked is at the time of issuing the decision on the support of the project from EU funds. E.g. if initial planned costs of the project are over 200 000 EUR and the support is thus based on the real costs but finally the really incurred total costs decrease below 200 000 EUR, does this situation have any implications toward the assessment of the mode of the financing? We assume that it is in any case possible to change the mode of the financing after the decision is issued but we would like to get the assurance from your side as well.How to deal with the operation whose part of costs is supported by the state aid (e.g. the regional investment aid according to GBER) and the other part of costs is supported by de minimis aid (e.g. in the total amount of 100 000 EUR) and the total cost of the operation does not exceed 200 000 EUR? We suppose that as the operation is provided with the state aid regardless the volume of costs covered by GBER and de minimis aid is provided as well, there is no obligation to use SCOs on this operation | The moment of signature of the document setting out the conditions for support is the moment where the application of Article 53(2), first subparagraph CPR enters into play. The costs actually incurred by a beneficiary are irrelevant as regards the application of this Article.The CPR (2014-2020 and 2021-2027) has not established primacy among the types of aid, when, notably, in the same operation, ERDF comes under the de minimis and the national support comes under a State aid regime (GBER). Where combination of State aid and de minimis in the same operation is possible, subject to conditions under the State aid rules, the most adequate solution is not to impose the use of the SCOs. This solution offers the maximum simplicity and flexibility for the managing authority. |
| 73 | 1 Is the use of SCOs mandatory, if de minimis and state aid (GBER) are combined in 1 operation the total cost of which does not exceed EUR 200.000?2. Is the use of SCOs mandatory, if operation, the total cost of which does not exceed EUR 200.000, is fully procured? How to fulfill the obligation of Article 48(1) CPR, if none of the SCOs in outsourced operation is reasonable and effective? | * 1) No. See reply to question 72 above.

2) a) Yes, it is.b) The purpose of Article 53(2), first subparagraph CPR is that controls of low value (small) operations are not efficient and the application of SCOs would bring simplification. The CPR foresees several possibilities to establish SCOs for small operations to fulfil this requirement; one suitable option is the use of a draft budget. |
| 74 | If the contract of project is above 200 000 EUR, but savings have occurred during implementation and the total amount of the request for final payment is below EUR 200 000, what action the EC is expecting from member state in this case regarding to mandatory use of SCOs? | No action. The obligation to use SCOs is at the moment of signature of the document setting the conditions for support where all costs are taken into account for the application of the threshold. There is no change of this during or after the implementation of the operation irrespective of whether the real costs are lower due to savings made. |
| 75 | At what level the mandatory use of SCOs apply? | Mandatory use of SCOs applies at the level of the operation to be co-financed. Therefore, depending on what the operation is in this scheme, mandatory use will apply at that level. To be able to reply clearer, more details need to be provided on the implementation scheme and what the different levels refer to.As regards ETC, SCOs are mandatory for small projects with total costs below 100 000 EUR implemented under small project funds, Article 25(6) ETC Regulation.  |
| 76 | HU: In case of mandatory use under 200 000 EUR total cost, do we understand correctly that cost can be covered by a combination of SCOs? Of course avoiding double financing. | The mandatory use of SCOs (Article 53(2), first subparagraph CPR) requires that all categories of costs are covered by SCOs except where specific exceptions are provided in this Article.In line with Article 53(1)(e) CPR, the different forms may be combined provided that the combination covers different categories of costs or where they are used for different projects forming a part of an operation or for successive phases of an operation.The above means that a combination of different forms of support (i.e. different SCOs or a combination between real costs and SCOs) is possible. However, it needs to be ensured that no double financing occurs. |
| 77 | Germany and RO: mandatory use of SCOs for projects of less than 200.000 EUR also for De-minimis aid projects? | Yes, in line with Article 53(2) CPR, first subparagraph CPR operations subject to de minimis aid must be implemented by SCOs. |
| 78 | Please, could you confirm that the mandatory use of SCOs to de minimis projects was approved with the legal services of COM?  | It is not clear what is meant by “approved by legal services”. This provision has been interpreted by COM services and in line with this interpretation, mandatory use of SCOs covers operations subject to de minimis aid. |
| 79 | For the projects where the total cost of an operation does not exceed 200kEUR and according to the requirements of Regulation it is mandatory to use a SCO, is it possible allowances and salaries paid to participants may be reimbursed in real costs as an exemption?  | Yes, this is clearly stated in Article 53(2), second subparagraph CPR. |
| 80 | What kind of criteria/arguments can a MA use to exempt some operations in the area of research and innovation; and if the same intervention in the area of research and innovation is supported by different MAs, can one exempt and the other not? | The CPR does not specify criteria for such exemption. It is to the Managing authority to decide on such exemptions based on professional judgement and to ensure they have been approved by the monitoring committee. |
| 81 | In a call for proposal, can we let the choice to the candidate to use or not the SCO proposed by the managing authority and can the MA propose different SCO for a same category of costs? | No, the use of SCOs and what categories of costs they will include should be clearly set out in the call for proposals and applicable for all operations selected for example under the call in order to avoid discrimination.See also reply to question 89. |
| 82 | What is the consequence if there are projects not implemented as SCOs if they should? | The provisions of the CPR must be respected. If this is not the case, depending on the specifics of the issue, the non-use of SCOs may be considered as a systemic weakness of the management and control system  in which case a financial correction may be applied. |
| 83 | Is it sufficient to use the 7% flat rate, in cases where the SCO use is mandatory and when the operation is fully procured? What will happen if the MS does not use the mandatory SCO, when it should have done so? | 1)       Yes.2)       For the second part of the question please see reply to question 82 above. |

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| **STATE AID** |
| 84 | Is correct the conclusion that MAs or AAs are not obliged to do the control or audit of compliance with the state aid rules if the state aid rules are taken into consideration in the methodology on SCOs setting? Is necessary to have the SCOs methodology verified by the AA in such a case?  | The verification of State aid/de minimis rules is required at the stage of the methodology preparation as well as at the stage of selection of operations/implementation, depending on individual cases.See also reply to question 86. |
| 85 | In case the state aid rules are not taken into consideration in the process of setting the SCOs methodology, my understanding is that the MAs should control the compliance with state aid rules before the decision on the EU funds provision is issued and the amount set based on the SCOs methodology (e.g. amount per unit multiplied by the number of units, the lump sum or the amount of costs, which should be reimbursed based on FR) is considered to be the amount of eligible costs, to which the relevant state aid intensity is applied.Is my understanding correct?  | The moment in time when you establish eligible categories of costs to set up the methodology for the application of SCOs and the calculation of the aid intensity is the moment where you should check compliance with State aid rules.In any case, the grant agreement would clearly state the categories of costs (eligible for both State aid and CPR rules) as well as the funding of the project, i.e. the amount to be supported by public co financing to which State aid intensity will be applied.See also reply to question 86. |
| 86 | How the State aid issues can be addressed - assessed, when flat rates and/or off-the shelf methodologies are used? | 1.           At the stage of the SCO methodology:Assess whether the support to be granted is subject to considered State aid/de minimis rules (more clarification in this regard could be found in the Commission Notice on the notion of State aid (OJ C 262, 19.07.2016, p. 1.).a.           In case of de minimis aid check that the thresholds are not exceeded at the stage of selection of operations.b.           In case of state aid verify which rules are applied (GBER, SGEI, notified scheme, etc.). Then check if the categories of costs covered by the flat rate/off the shelf amount are eligible under the State aid rules applied.2.           At the stage of selection and implementation of operationsCheck if the aid does not exceed de minimis thresholds, or that it complies with any aid intensity rules. If relevant, check whether the beneficiary complies with SME status (if required by State aid applicable rules). |

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| **GENERAL QUESTIONS ON SCOs** |
| 87 | How to deal with the case when the VAT is part of eligible costs used for the calculation of the SCOs (e.g. lump sum or unit costs) and in the course of the project implementation or during the sustainability period the beneficiary changes its status from the VAT point of view and becomes the VAT payer with the right of the VAT deduction (i.e. the VAT becomes ineligible).  How to process possible corrective measures especially in case of the lump sum in a case the output of the project was delivered in time and in a quality requested? | • For operations the total cost of which is below EUR 5 mio (including VAT) VAT is eligible.• For operations the total cost of which is at least EUR 5 mio (including VAT):* In case of reimbursement of costs based on a flat rate, VAT eligibility is assessed for the basis costs, i.e. the costs to which the flat rate is applied. As regards the “real” costs covered by the flat rate (i.e. costs underlying categories of expenditure reimbursed based on the flat rate) VAT eligibility will not be assessed,
	+ In case of reimbursement of operations based on unit costs and/or lump sums, if the MA applies the same SCO rate for all operations (regardless whether they are above or below EUR 5 mio), in practice no adjustment is needed.
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| 88 | Are SCOs applicable for RRF support as well? | Please refer to RRF website: [RRF - Frequently asked questions - RECOVER FAQs for Member States - EC Extranet Wiki (europa.eu)](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/pages/viewpage.action?spaceKey=recover&title=RRF+-+Frequently+asked+questions) |
| 89 | How to make sure that the costs are equal between different SCOs (different calculation on same things etc)? | The question is unclear. There is no requirement or need for equality when a SCO method is set up to calculate the costs of an operation. There can be different calculation of the same costs. Different methods do not need to have the same calculations; however, they need to be fair, equitable and verifiable.It is also reminded that if within the same programme/call for proposals the MA applies different amounts/rates to the same types of beneficiaries or operations, it needs to ensure that it does not favour some beneficiaries or operations over others, i.e. equal treatment principle is followed (if different amounts/rates are applied to the same types of beneficiaries or operations, it must be based on objective elements). |
| 90 | Regarding flat rate, what sort of good practices had been identified relating to reckoning basic cost and calculated costs, in order to fulfil the requirement that calculated costs shall always be paid together with basic costs? | There should be due proportionality between basis costs and calculated costs:1. For example in the case of flat rate of direct costs for the calculation of indirect costs:
* No ‘indirect costs’ should be declared to the COM without underlying direct costs having been incurred.
* if for example X % of the direct costs are paid by the beneficiary, around the same percentage of the indirect costs (not exceeding the regulatory % for the direct costs) may be considered as paid.
1. Another example:
* 20 % flat rate for staff cost is used.
* The reimbursement claim by the beneficiary is EUR 50.000 for equipment.
* The MA will reimburse EUR 50.000 for equipment + EUR 10.000 for staff costs (20 %, automatically calculated when basis - real costs are included in the reimbursement claim). Total amount of eligible expenditure subject to reimbursement: EUR 60.000.
 |
| 91 | Art. 53 para.1 subparagraph 2 allows that the managing authority exempts operations from the obligatory implementation of SCO in the case of research and innovation. The monitoring committee has to give its prior approval. As regards the future funding period, when does the monitoring committee has to approve and which monitoring committee (of funding period 2014-2020 or 2021-2027)? | Monitoring committee of the 2021-2027 programme, at the moment assessed as suitable by the MA, e.g. for a whole call of proposals given the specificity of the operations sought or upon closure of submission of proposals to a call and assessment of (some specific) projects (to become operations). |
| 92 | Which categories of sco have to be submitted with the operational programme? How to distinct these sco from other sco?  | Appendix 1 should include all categories of costs that will be covered by unit cost, lump sum or flat rate of a specific type of operation. There is no restriction with regard to which SCOs can be submitted under Article 94 CPR. However, it is strongly recommended to use it for SCO schemes, and not for SCOs targeting a specific operation, e.g. a draft budget for a specific operation.The second question is not clear. For SCOs under Article 53 CPR (MS-beneficiary level), such costs should not be included in Appendix 1. However, as already replied, SCOs in Appendix 1 may be the same as SCOs applied at the level of the beneficiary. |
| 93 | How to ensure that expenses to be covered by simplified cost options and other expenses can be clearly distinguished (especially indirect costs/administrative personnel costs to be distinguished from other personnel costs). Which criteria are appropriate for such a distinction? | The MA needs to define specifically the categories of costs of an operation to be covered by SCOs. This means that the MA should define and clearly separate direct costs from indirect costs by their link to the operation. By clearly separating the categories of costs and the application of different SCOs for each category, the MA will ensure that no double financing occurs. |
| 94 | If I use SCOs between MA-beneficiaries, how the EC will reimburse me at programme level, on which basis.  What about legal certainty? This in the case I do not submit any SCOs under article 88, for instance. | The COM will reimburse the MS based on Article 51(b) CPR. |

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| **SCOs IN PAYMENT APPLICATIONS** |
| 95 | 1.           Could you please indicate and correct if wrong the following understanding of "template for payment applications - Article 85(3)": 1. Column B, corresponding to level Member State - beneficiaries, is the column in which the "real costs" under article 48 (a) and simplified costs options under article 48 (b), ( c) and (d) should be declared.
2. Column B bis, corresponding to level Commission - Member State, is the column in which simplified costs options and financing not linked to costs under article 46, 88 and 89 should be declared.

 Could Commission indicate to what type of costs article 85 (3) (a) and article 46 (b) refer exactly and in which column the costs under 46 (b) should be declared? 2.           Article 88 states that "Member States shall reimburse beneficiaries for the purposes of this article. This reimbursement may take any form of support". So we can have different modes of reimbursement between the two levels.But do both amounts have to appear in the application for payment: the amount Member state has reimbursed to the beneficiary has to appear in column B and the amount the Commission reimburses Member States in column B bis? Or should only the amount that the Commission reimburses Member State appear in column B bis? | 1) a) When no use of Articles 94/95 CPR is made:* If the MA reimbursed the beneficiary based on costs actually incurred by beneficiary and paid, these amounts should be put in column B of the template set out in Annex XXIII, in line with Article 91(3)(a) CPR.
* If the MA reimbursed the beneficiary based on SCOs, the SCO amounts calculated according to Article 53(b),(c) and (d) CPR should be put in column B in line with Article 91(4)(c) CPR.

Both options as above concern reimbursement by the COM in line with Article 51(b) CPR.b) Correct: In line with Article 91(4)(a) and (b) CPR, where use is made of Articles 94/95 CPR (Article 51(a), (c), (d) and (e) CPR), the corresponding amounts (as approved by the COM decision) should be put in column C of the template set out in Annex XXIII.2) Where use is made of Article 94 CPR, the SCO amounts as approved by the COM decision covering the relating categories of costs should be put in column C of the template set out in Annex XXIII, and not the corresponding amounts between the MS and beneficiaries. |
| 96 | Following the answer to question 12 of the Commission's FAQ, we have two questions about the methods of storing data on payment to beneficiaries:1-a) should the data relating to payments to beneficiaries be recorded and stored in the program' single information system in order to satisfying the requirements of article 87-5-b?1-b) is it confirmed that these data will not be auditable by EC or MS audits (in accordance with article 88-3 paragraph 3) even though they are in the same IS of the program?Or conversely:2) Is it not necessary to record these data relating to payments to beneficiaries in the program's single information system because these data cannot be audited in accordance with article 88-3 paragraph 3?  Can the MA satisfying the requirements of article 87-5-b at the closing (of the program) by sending a simple report held outside IS? | 1-a) Yes, they should. The audit trail for SCOs under Article 94 CPR (Annex XIII, section III) and for FNLTC under Article 95 CPR (Annex XIII, section IV) requires proof of payment of the public contribution to the beneficiary and its date. |
| 97 | Presentation of private means in payment requests – If co financing comprises only private means how to deal with the payment request (Draft CPR, Annex XIX, p. 162).  Should column « B » record the amount paid via sco plus the amount of private means? How should the private means be calculated? The amount for sco can be calculated by means of submission of offers. Can the amount of private means cofinancing the operation be calculated on the basis of the offers and the difference to the amount of sco actually paid ? | In column A of the template set out in Annex XXIII, the MS has to indicate whether the calculation basis is total or public and then all information provided follows this scheme.* If the MA reimbursed the beneficiary based on costs actually incurred by beneficiary and paid (public and/or private), these amounts should be put in column B of the template set out in Annex XXIII, in line with Article 91(3)(a) CPR.
* If the MA reimburse the beneficiary based on SCOs, the SCO amounts calculated according to Article 53(b),(c) and (d) CPR should be put in column B, in line with Article 91(4)(c) CPR. The SCO amounts are calculated in line with the methods provided in Article 53(2) CPR.
* In line with Article 91(4)(a) and (b) CPR, where use is made of Articles  94/95 CPR (Article 51(a), (c), (d) and (e) CPR), the corresponding amounts (as approved by the COM decision) should be put in column C of the template set out in Annex XXIII.
 |

N.B.: The questions included in this Q&A document have been sent by Member States when the regulatory framework for the 2021-2027 programmes was still under negotiations. Therefore, the numbering of articles to which they refer differs from the one adopted in the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (hereafter CPR). The correspondence of articles between the draft and final versions of CPR is the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Draft CPR** | **Final CPR** |
| Article 46 | Article 51 |
| Article 48 | Article 53 |
| Article 49 | Article 54 |
| Article 50 | Article 55 |
| Article 51 | Article 56 |
| Article 85 | Article 91 |
| Article 87 | Article 93 |
| Article 88 | Article 94 |
| Article 89 | Article 95 |

# QA00093 - Climate proofing

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

 *Relevant Article*: Article 73 (2)(j) of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Administrative burden caused by climate proofing, documentation and control requirements and especially the resulting consequences for the implementation of the project might be quite high. To illustrate this: E.g. the guidance mentions the requirement of a short summary of 10-20 pages per project – this seems a lot of effort in the case of smaller infrastructural projects which may be easily standardized via technical standards, such as building refurbishment measures, e.g. the replacement of windows or the insulation of public buildings. Would the European Commission agree if the Member states would follow a pragmatic approach to avoid administrative burden, in particular for projects falling only within phase 1 examination? E.g., would it be a practicable approach to reduce climate proofing and documentation effort by setting minimum thresholds, such as minimum energy efficiency standards oriented towards the 2030 and 2050 climate goals for the construction or renovation of buildings, so that project promoters would, with respect to climate change mitigation, only have to proof compliance with the efficiency standard?

**Answer:**

The Technical guidance on the climate proofing of infrastructure in the period 2021-2027, published in the Official Journal OJ C373 of 16.9.21 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2021:373:TOC>), hereafter “the guidance”, divides the climate proofing process in two phases (See e.g. table 1 of the guidance). The detailed analysis (phase 2) is subject to the outcome of the screening phase (phase 1), which helps reduce the administrative burden. Where the outcome of phase 1 would show that phase 2 is not necessary, the summary can be shorter than 10-20 pages (Annex B, B1, pg. 50). As regards mitigation, table 4 of the guidance defines a threshold for greenhouse gas emissions, which – for instance for typical construction or renovation of buildings projects – could substantiate (based on a carbon footprint analysis) that this project category could be added to the top of table 2 of the guidance (for which a carbon footprint assessment will not be required).

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

For phase-1-only-projects, is it sufficient to cover direct GHG emissions or are primary indirect GHG emissions to be covered as well? If primary indirect GHF emissions are to be covered, what does this require/comprise?

***Answer:***

As regards mitigation, Phase 1 is based on the “categories of infrastructure projects” in table 2 of the guidance. The top group of project categories WILL NOT require a carbon footprint assessment, whereas the bottom group will require the detailed Phase 2 analysis (see section 3.2.2 of the guidance).

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Given that the technical instructions on Climate Proofing have been recently published and the informal consultations on the operational programmes with the Commission are in many cases well advanced, would the Commission agree that member states can already start with program implementation without having a fully functioning Climate Proofing installed? Otherwise this would result in a further day delay of programme start as all infrastructure projects falling under this proofing would have to be put on hold until the climate proofing system is working.

***Answer:***

Guidance cannot modify the provisions of the CPR. Therefore, in accordance with Article 73(2)(j), in course of the selection of operations the Managing Authority needs to ensure the climate proofing of investments in infrastructure for operations with an expected lifespan of at least 5 years. In relation to this, the Member States need to ensure the respect of the `energy efficiency first` principle during the selection of operations as stipulated by recital (60) of the CPR.

# QA00094 - Need for EC decision for some types of programme amendments

 *Relevant Articles*:

Articles 22, 24, 40 and 42 of the CPR

Annexes I and V to the CPR

 *Member State*: IT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the 2014-2020 period (Art. 96(10) of Regulation (EU) No 2013/1303) MS can amend some parts of the operational programmes without the need of a Commission decision. These parts include the table with the categories of interventions (corresponding in practice, as for ESF, to the investment priorities): it was then possible to transfer resources within each priority axis without a Commission decision

Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 (art. 24) does not seem to include the possibility to modify the corresponding part (i.e. budget of specific objecives and category of interventions) in the 21-27 programmes. The changes which do not require a Commission decision are limited to

a)    Changes at the level of a priority, within specific thresholds (art. 24(5)), and related changes;

b)    Changes of purely clerical or editorial nature that do not affect the implementation (art. 24(6)).

Is a Commission decision necessary to amend a 21-27 programme as for

-       the budget by specific objectives (within a given priority) and the budget by category of intervention, i.e. table 4 of point 2.1.1.1.3. of Annex V, based on art. 22(3)d(viii)

-       the amounts indicated in the other tables (form of financing, territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus, ESF+ secondary themes, ESF+\*, ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF gender equality dimension) of point 2.1.1.1.3. of Annex V (art. 22(3)d(viii) ?

**Answer:**

 Article 24(5) of of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 sets out the cases of programme amendment that are considered as non-substantial and therefore, do not require the Member State to formally submit a request for programme amendment. These cases for the ERDF, CF, ESF+ and JTF are as follows:

*“… transfer during the programming period an amount of up to 8 % of the initial allocation of a priority and no more than 4 % of the programme budget to another priority of the same Fund of the same programme. For programmes supported by the ERDF, the ESF+ and the JTF, the transfer shall only concern allocations for the same category of region.”*

Furthermore, in accordance with Article 24(6) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060, the Member State does not have to ask for the approval of the Commission in case of corrections of a purely clerical or editorial nature that do not affect the implementation of the programme.

As regards the concrete cases mentioned in relation to ERDF and ESF+ financing in the question:

* ***if the allocation among specific objectives within the same priority is amended***

In accordance with Article 22(3)(g), the total financial allocation should be broken down by Funds, category of region, year. Break-down by specific objective is not an obligatory element of the financial table. Therefore, any change in the allocation to specific objectives within the same priority does not require the Member State to submit a formal request for amendment of the programme.

* ***if the allocation by type of interventions is amended***

In accordance with Article 22(3)(d)(viii) CPR, the following information should be provided in the programme for each specific objective:

*“the types of intervention and an indicative breakdown of the programmed resources by type of intervention;”*

This entails that the breakdown of resources amongst those types of interventions are of indicative nature.

Therefore, there is no requirement for changes in the indicative amounts within a priority and between the types of intervention during the implementation of the programme, to be followed up by a programme amendment. Nevertheless, in case the Member State would like to formally amend the programme to reflect these changes the modification of the programme is subject to Commission decision.

* ***if amounts included in Tables 5-8 in section 2.1.1.1.3 of the programme are amended***

The  same rule applies for the indicative amounts indicated in Tables 5-8 as for the indicative amounts included into Table 4 (Dimension I – intervention field) of section 2.1.1.1.3 of the programme(for the rule, pls see the previous point).

It should be noted that, without prejudice to the above, any changes within priorities or transfers between priorities pursuant to Article 24(5) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 need to comply with all regulatory requirements, in particular the thematic concentration requirements (Article 4, ERDF/CF and Article 7 ESF+ Regulation), the climate targets (Article 6 CPR), the urban earmarking (Article 11 ERDF/CF) or regulatory limits related to investment in natural gas (Article 7 ERDF/CF).

# QA00095 - The impact of the definition of “beneficiary” in Article 2 of the CPR on state aid schemes

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 2(9) of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Please explain the impact of the definition of “beneficiary” in Article 2 of the Common Provisions Regulation on state aid schemes where the beneficiary is the body granting the state aid (for example, business incubators, competence centres). Does the new CPR change in substance the perception and admitting of Latvian national support schemes (currently under PO1 & PO3) implemented via competence centres, clusters, associations, etc.

**Answer:**

The definition of a beneficiary in Article 2(9), CPR introduced changes in comparison to the amendments introduced by the Omnibus regulation.

In relation to *de minimis* schemes, a definition of beneficiary from Article 2(9)(d), CPR would apply meaning that the body granting the *de minimis* aid could be the beneficiary in case it is initiating or initiating and implementing the operation. In the context of State aid schemes, point (c) of Article 2(9),CPR would apply, meaning that the undertaking which receives the aid would be the beneficiary.

Compared to the 2014-20 period, in case of State aid schemes, when State aid per undertaking is less than EUR 200 000, the Member State would not be able anymore to decide that the beneficiary is the body granting the aid.

Since it is not clear from the question if the Latvian schemes are State aid or the *de minimis* aid, or what are the tasks of the beneficiary, it is not possible to give a straightforward answer on the possibility to continue every single one of the current schemes. It would have to be analysed on a case-by-case basis.

# QA00096 - Inclusion of energy efficiency measures for secondary schools and social housing in PO2

 *Relevant Article*: Article 73(2) of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would like to clarify if energy efficiency measures for secondary schools and social housing can be included in PO2.

**Answer:**

It could be included in **PO2** provided it is in line with Article 73(2)(b) CPR on selection of operations and therefore consistent with the national long-term renovation strategy to support renovation of the national stock of residential and non-residential buildings as foreseen in the enabling condition for PO2.

As it concerns the areas of education and social housing, these measures should be closely coordinated with the measures envisaged for PO4 in the MS.

# QA00097 - Productive investments

 *Relevant Article*: Article 5 ERDF/CF regulation

 *Member State*: LV

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. Are support measures for industry investment in energy efficiency equipment eligible?
2. Would Commission treat investments in energy-efficient equipment under PO2 as “productive investment when primarily supporting energy efficiency measures and renewable energy under point (b)(i) and (ii) of Article 3(1) of the ERDF”?
3. What is the borderline between productive investment in PO1 and PO2?
4. What type of investment could be supported? Is it possible to support, for example, investment of large enterprises in activities like 3.1.1.5 “Support for reconstruction and development of industrial property and infrastructure” in this planning period?

**Answer:**

Investment of SMEs in energy efficiency equipment are eligible. Support for companies other than SMEs needs to comply with the conditions set out in Article 5(2), ERDF/CF Regulation.

There is no absolute borderline between PO1 and PO2; it depends on the main objective of the investment. Under PO1, in specific objective 1.1, ERDF can support the development and testing of innovative technologies and solutions for green transitions and circular economy in identified S3 areas. The deployment and uptake including first movers in the early adoption of innovative solutions however could be supported under PO1, specific objective 1.3, PO2 or other POs where relevant.

‘Primarily’ means that energy efficiency measures or renewable energy have to be the main goal of the operation).

# QA00098 - Targets concerning climate change

 *Relevant Article*: Article 6 and Article 42 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Has a target (minimal amount %) been set for member states for investments to measures concerning climate change like it is in planning period 2014- 2020 and, if so, what monitoring mechanism will be used in 2021-2027 as there is no obligation for Partnership Agreement and CPR does not cover European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

**Answer:**

According to Article 6 of the CPR information on support for environment and climate objectives will be provided by using a methodology based on types of intervention (Annex 1, table 1 CPR).

 The preliminary climate contribution target will be established in the Partnership Agreement. The final target will be established on the basis of information included in programmes and will be monitored on the basis of data submitted by Member States in accordance with Article 42 and the template set out in Annex VII, CPR.

# QA00099 - Use of ITI, CLLD, national specific approaches

 *Relevant Article*:  Article 5, 28, 29, 31-34 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Latvia appreciates that thematic framework of PO5 investment directions, which are included for cohesion policy 2021–2027 implementation in Latvia correspond to Latvia’s challenges.  Meanwhile, the proposed regulation defines that under PO5 Member States may also support operations, which can be funded under the specific objectives, set out under PO1–PO4 (Article 5 of the CPR) . Therefore, PO5 is not only a thematic framework, but also one of the three (ITI, CLLD, national specific) implementation models for integrated territorial development (Article 28).

1. Is there still an option for a member state to choose the most appropriate integrated territorial development model taking into account Article 5 of the CPR and Article 28 of the CPR.
2. Could content of an integrated territorial strategy be broader than investments foreseen under PO5, including complementary investments supported under PO1 or PO2 without applying an ITI approach?
3. Could a “national specific” solution include investments under PO5 and other POs, offering nationally specific solution for integrated planning?

**Answer:**

Article 28 CPR defines tools that Member States can use when supporting integrated territorial development: integrated territorial investments (ITIs), community-led local development (CLLD) and other territorial tools supporting initiatives designed by the Member State.

The tools can be programmed under all policy objectives

Territorial strategies supported through ITI or a another territorial tool need to respect minimum requirements set out in Article 29 CPR. In the case of CLLD, this delivery mechanism must follow a specific method and respect the requirements defined in Articles 31-34 CPR. The content of the strategy would depend on the development needs and the potential of the area covered.

# QA00100 - Technical questions on payment applications and accounts 2021-2027 programming period

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 91 and 93 of the CPR;

                               Annex XXIII and Annex XXIV of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

***Payment application (PA) :***

1. *Column (B) – whether our understanding is correct that in this column all beneficiaries eligible expenditure approved by Intermediate body could be declared, except those, which are agreed in the Programme to be covered as Union contribution according to Article 51 point a), c), d) and e)?*
2. *Should established irregularities be deducted (withdraw) from the PA? The Regulation does not provide clear guidance on this issue.*
3. *Is it possible that expenditure of one operation can be declared based on different forms of Union contribution (for example) 1) reimbursement of support – therefore expenditure should be reflected in column (B), and 2) based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates – therefore expenditure reflected in column (C))?*
4. *Column (C) – whether our understanding is correct, that in this column expenditure agreed in the Programme to be covered as Union contribution according to Article 51 point a), c), d) and e) should be reflected and only EU co-financing, not total expenditure (+ National co-financing)?*
5. *Column (D) – according to Your reply of 15.07.2021 the amount to be reflected in this column should be calculated automatically from data entered in column (B), why data on expenditure declared in column (C) also should not be taken into account?*
6. *Column (E) – please explain what information should be provided both in the PA and Accounts in column “the total amount of public contribution made or to be made in the meaning of point (c) of Article 91 (3)”:*

*6.1.      By whom the public contribution is made or to be made –beneficiary or Managing Authority/Intermediate body?*

*6.2.      In case it is meant Managing authority/Intermediate body, then what data should be reflected in case:*

*6.2.1.    the Union contribution from EC is paid according to Article 51 point a), c)  and d);*

*6.2.2.    the beneficiary is 100% pre-financed from state budget and no reimbursement is needed;*

*6.2.3.    the beneficiary is public body (for example municipality) and part of the financing is provided by itself and is considered as public co-financing, but the Managing Authority/Intermediate body does not reimburse it.*

*7.* *How the amount requested should be calculated? Where the total amount declared is indicated in the PA, to which data the co-financing rate should be applied? In addition please clarify point 4 of Article 93 (Where the Union contribution takes any of the forms listed in Article 51, the Commission shall not pay more than the amount requested by the Member State), since there is no other choices of support from the Funds except those mentioned in Article 51.*

***Accounts:***

1. *Column (A) –please explain what data should be reflected in this column and to what data from the last PA of accounting year it should correspond to - column (B) or sum of columns (B) and (C)?*
2. *Regarding column (B) and (C) please see questions No. 5 and 6;*
3. *Please clarify how the Commission will be aware of the information mentioned in point b) of Article 93 (5) (The support from the Funds to a priority in the payment of the balance of the final accounting year shall not exceed any of the following amounts:…. (b) support from the Funds paid or to be paid to beneficiaries).*

**Answer:**

***Payment application (PA):***

**1.**Yes, the column B should include all expenditure declared linked to fulfilled enabling conditions or contributing to their fulfilment, with two exceptions:

a) TA flat-rate amount (where relevant, calculated in column D), and

b) total eligible expenditure covered by Simplified Cost Option (SCO) schemes pursuant to Article 94 CPR (see also Art. 91(4)(b) CPR) or Financing Not Linked To Costs (FNLTC) schemes pursuant to Article 95 CPR (see Art. 91(4)(a) CPR), (where relevant, included in column C).

**2.** Yes, irregular expenditure should be withdrawn from payment applications or deducted from the accounts as relevant. The amounts withdrawn from payment applications during the accounting year should be reported in the accounts in Appendix 2 - Amounts withdrawn during the accounting year – point (b) of Article 98(3) and Article 98(7). Appropriate audit trail should be ensured.

**3.** Please, see the reply in points 1 and 4.

**4.** In column C you should include eligible expenditure where the Union contribution is made pursuant to Article 51 (a), (c), (d) and (e). These are linked to the amounts as either approved in the programme (Article 94(3) or 95(2) CPR) or as set out in a delegated act (Article 94(4) or 95(4) CPR). These correspond to the total eligible expenditure included in payment applications pursuant to Article 91(4) (a) and (b) CPR. The amounts reimbursed to beneficiary for the cases covered by Article 91(4)(a) and (b) CPR shall not be included in column (B) to avoid double financing of the same expenditure. Such amounts are irrelevant for declaration in payment applications/accounts. [N.B.: However, the amounts reimbursed to beneficiary for the cases covered by Article 91(4)(c) CPR shall be included in column B. ]

In case a part of expenditure of the operation is declared to the Commission based on eligible expenditure incurred by the beneficiary and paid in implementing the operation, and another part is covered by a SCO/FNLTC scheme agreed between the Commission and the Managing Authority and included in the programme, then the expenditure of such an operation will be partially included in column (B) and partially in column (C) of payment applications.

**5.** The reference in Article 36(5) CPR to Article 91(3)(a) or (c) CPR should be understood as encompassing also its derogations referred to in Article 91(4)(a)-(c) CPR. Amounts included in Columns B and C would cumulatively be the basis for calculation of the flat rate technical assistance where programmes chose total eligible expenditure and amounts included in Column E would be the basis where programmes chose public contribution.

**6.** The amount included shall reflect the definition provided by Article 2(28) CPR. In line with Article 2(28) CPR ‘public contribution’ means any contribution to the financing of operations the source of which is the budget of national, regional or local public authorities or of any European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) established in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, the budget of the Union made available to the Funds, the budget of public law bodies or the budget of associations of public authorities or of public law bodies and, for the purpose of determining the co-financing rate for ESF+ programmes or priorities, may include any financial resources collectively contributed by employers and workers.

**6.1.** The public contribution could be made both by the MA and the beneficiaries provided it fulfils the definition above.

**6.2.**The financial flows between bodies involved are irrelevant to establish the amount of public contribution reported in column E. The amount in column E includes also part of financing provided by beneficiaries which are public bodies.

**7.** The co-financing rate will be either applied to the total eligible expenditure (sum of amounts included in columns B, C and D) or to the amount of public contribution (sum of amounts included in column E and in column D) in line with the programme. Article 93(4) CPR provides a safeguard that the Commission, irrespective of the form of the Union contribution, does not reimburse more than the Member State requested in a payment application.

***Accounts:***

**1.**Column A in the accounts corresponds to the sum of column B and C in the payment applications.

**2.** See the relevant clarifications on questions 5 and 6 on the related points above.

**3.** Article 93(5)(b) of the CPR requires that the support from the Funds to a priority in the payment of the balance of the final accounting year shall not exceed support from the Funds paid or to be paid to beneficiaries. Article 94(3), second subparagraph CPR states that “MS shall reimburse beneficiaries for the purposes of this Article” and the exact same wording is included in Article 95(3), first subparagraph CPR. Furthermore, the audit trail for SCOs under Article 94 CPR (Annex XIII, section III) and for FNLTC under Article 95 CPR (Annex XIII, section IV) requires proof of payment of the public contribution to the beneficiary and its date. MS should ensure compliance with these requirements and underlying audit trail.

# QA00101 - Procedure of selection of projects of productive investments in large enterprises for the indicative list of the Territorial Just Transition Plan

 *Relevant Articles*:

* Article 73 of the CPR
* Article 8 of the JTF regulation
* Article 11 of the JTF regulation
* Paragraph 14 of the Regional State Aid Guidelines
* Paragraph 45 of the Regional State Aid Guidelines
* Article 107 of the TFEU
* Article 108 of the TFEU

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Spain has doubts about how to ensure the principle of competition when completing the Territorial Just Transition Plan´s list of specific projects and companies in relation to productive investments in large enterprises (ref. the second paragraph of Article 8(2) and Article 11(2) (h) of the JTF regulation).

To this end, the Member State is considering launching a call prior to the approval of the plan, which would be notified to DG Comp in advance and that would ensure the requirements laid down in the JTF Regulation were met (eligible sectors, job creation, contribution to climate and environmental objectives, contribution to the objectives of the TJTP, non-relocation, etc.).

The successful tenderers of the call would form the list proposed to include in the TJTP, thus complying with the competition principle. Once the plan and programme are approved, they would certify the expenditure of these investments. Would this scheme be possible and does the Commission envisage any difficulties/remediation?

**Answer:**

According to Article 11(2)(h) of the JTF Regulation, where support is to be provided to productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs, the territorial just transition plan (TJTP) should include an indicative list of operations and enterprises to be supported together with a justification of the necessity of such support through a jobs gap analysis. This provision should be understood as a requirement from Member States to explicitly name such operations and enterprises in the plan.

The JTF regulation does not prescribe how the indicative list of operations and enterprises should be established. It only specifies, in its Article 8, the four criteria such investments should comply with to be considered as eligible for JTF support. In that regard, they should be necessary for the implementation of the TJTP, contribute to the transition to a climate-neutral economy of the Union by 2050, support job creation (jobs gap analysis) and do not lead to relocation as defined in Article 2(27) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR).

It is therefore for Member State to define the method to identify productive investments in large enterprises. This process should be carried out in a transparent manner, targeting enterprises and productive investments meeting the above criteria. The identification of investments should also be done in a smooth and effective manner not to delay the preparation of the TJTP.

In principle, the list of productive investments and enterprises remains indicative even once approved by the Commission within the TJTP as part of the programme. The identification of new productive investments in large enterprises after the approval of the TJTP will require neither a modification of the relevant list in the TJTP nor an amendment of the programme. However, the list of Article 11(2)(h) of the JTF Regulation loses de facto its “indicative” character as regards support to large enterprises for productive investments located in ‘c’ areas, covered by paragraph 14 of Regional State aid Guidelines (the RAG).

Productive investments in large enterprises (from the list or identified later on) also have to undergo the formal selection process pursuant to Article 73 of the CPR (see below).

In line with recital (16) of the JTF regulation, support to undertakings should comply with Union State aid rules, as set out in Articles 107 and 108 TFEU. In particular, support to productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs should be limited to enterprises located in areas designated as assisted areas, which can be either ‘a’ or ‘c’ for the purposes of points (a) and (c) of Article 107(3) TFEU:

* ‘a’ areas cover territories with GDP lower than 75% of EU average and outermost regions.
* ‘c’ areas are identified based on a wider range of criteria, e.g. socioeconomic, geographical and structural problems at national level, former ‘a’ areas, sparsely populated areas etc. Member States can also propose other ‘c’ areas to the Commission, such as JTF areas.

Member States must notify to the Commission their proposal for the new regional aid map, identifying all future ‘a’ and ‘c’ areas. The regional aid maps need to be approved by the Commission decision. Member States can also establish a reserve for future designation of JTF areas on the map, in particular when the regional aid map is established before the territorial scope of the JTF areas is defined in the approved TJTP, which is the case for most Member States.

According to the RAG, these two categories of areas follow different rules as regards eligible investments (cf. paragraph 45 thereof) and corresponding maximum aid intensities (cf. Section 7.4 thereof)*.*  In particular, as stipulated in paragraph 45 of the RAG: *‘* *Regional aid schemes may be put in place in ‘a’ areas to support initial investments made by SMEs or large enterprises and in ‘c’ areas to support initial investments made by SMEs and initial investments that create a new economic activity made by large enterprises’.*

For productive investments in large enterprises in ‘c’ areas, paragraph 14 of the RAG provides for exception*.* More specifically, regional aid to such enterprises can also be considered as compatible with the internal market in line with the criteria of these guidelines if it is granted for the diversification of the output of an establishment into products not previously produced in the establishment or for a fundamental change in the overall production process of the product(s) concerned by the investment in the establishment, provided that:

1. it concerns an initial investment in a territory identified for co-financed support from the JTF in a ‘c’ area that has a GDP per capita below 100 % of the EU-27 average;
2. the investment and the beneficiary are identified in the territorial just transition plan of a Member State approved by the Commission; and
3. The State aid for the investment is covered by the JTF to the maximum allowed.

Such aid is always subject to individual notification pursuant to Article 108(3) TFEU.

The sequence of the two procedures before the Commission is as follows:

* As a first step, the Commission approves the TJTP, including the indicative list of operations and large enterprises to be supported.
* As a second step, each individual State aid support, included in the approved TJTP, as indicated in paragraph 14 of the RAG, must be notified to the Commission for prior approval before it is implemented. The initial call for identifying productive investments in large enterprises in ‘c’ areas (as indicated in the question from the Spanish authorities) for the purpose of the TJTP is not subject to the notification requirement under Article 108(3) TFEU (State aid).

N.B. Support to large enterprises for initial investments in areas ‘a’ and support to initial investments that create a new economic activity made by large enterprises in areas ‘c’ and that fall outside the scope of the GBER, can be notified pursuant to Article 108(3) TFEU before the Commission approves the relevant TJTP as part of the programme. This statement equally applies to SME investments going beyond the framework of the GBER.

Finally, as mentioned above, productive investments in large enterprises from the indicative list in the TJTP approved by the Commission and those productive investments in large enterprises that may be identified in the future (after the approval of the TJTP) should still undergo the selection procedure in line with Article 73 of the CPR. This means that such investments will have to be assessed according to applicable selection criteria, as established by the monitoring committee. In this regard, verifying the compliance with the criteria set out in the CPR and JTF Regulation falls primarily under the competence of the managing authorities, together with the verification of their compliance with applicable law, including state aid rules. Only once the selection of an operation is confirmed, its implementation can start and the incurred expenditure can be certified.

# QA00102 - Eligibility of energy efficiency investments for large enterprises, including energy efficiency investments in production lines

 *Relevant Article*: Art.5.2(b) ERDF/CF Regulation

 *Member State*: LT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Are investments in energy efficiency in large enterprise and in production lines when based on energy audit eligible?

What primarily supporting efficiency measures means?

**Answer:**

ERDF support for companies other than SMEs needs to comply with the conditions set out in Article 5(2) ERDF/CF Regulation.

In accordance with Article 5(2)(b) ERDF/CF Regulation, ERDF may support productive investments in such enterprises for energy efficiency or renewable energy measures under specific objectives 2.1 and 2.2– through grants or financial instruments – when primarily supporting such measures. ‘Primarily’ means that the energy efficiency measures or renewable energy measures have to be the main goal of an operation.

In accordance with Article 6(1)(a) ERDF/CF Regulation, the Cohesion Fund can support investments in SMEs and non-SMEs in the environment, including investments related to sustainable development and energy presenting environmental benefits, with a particular focus on renewable energy, as long as the support provided contributes to one of the specific objectives set out for the Fund concerned.

# QA00103 - Technical assistance vs. capacity building actions

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 36(1) and Annex I of the CPR

Articles 4(1), 9(1), 9(2) and 16(4) of the ESF+ Regulation

Article 3(4) of the ERDF Regulation

 *Member State*: IT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What is the difference between actions for the capacity building of partners referred to by Art. 36(1) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 and actions for the capacity building of partners described by Art. 9(2) ESF+ Regulation?

**Answer:**

Actions for capacity building of social partners and civil society organisations, in accordance with recital (28) and Article 9(1) of Regulation (EU) 1057/2021 (ESF+ Regulation), have the overall goal to ensure the meaningful participation of these social partners and civil society organisations in the delivery of employment, education and social inclusion policies supported by the ESF+. Therefore, these actions go beyond the capacity building for the effective administration and use of the Funds and should be programmed under any of the specific objectives set out in Article 4(1) ESF+ Regulation.

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

For which types of actions above would MA use intervention code “170 – Improve the capacity of programme authorities and bodies linked to the implementation of the funds” since it cannot be used for TA priorities but only for interventions under POs 1-5?

**Answer:**

Code “170 – Improve the capacity of programme authorities and bodies linked to the implementation of the funds” in Annex I CPR, is to capture capacity building activities pursuant to Article 3(4)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 embedded in the support under the ERDF/CF specific objectives and should not to be used in the context of technical assistance, for which dedicated codes 179-182 have been envisaged.

As regards the ESF+, capacity building of social partners and civil society organisations will be tracked for the purpose of Article 9 of the ESF+ Regulation through the secondary themes, namely by codes 07 and 08 of Table 6 of Annex I to the CPR.

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can financing for capacity building interventions pursuant to Art. 9(2) ESF+ Regulation cover salaries of social partners/civil society organisations staff?

**Answer:**

Supporting solely salaries in social partners and civil society organisations is not considered as a capacity building operation for the purposes of meeting the requirement set out in Article 9(2) ESF+ Regulation. Such support as part of a capacity-building operation under Art. 9(2) ESF+ could be considered eligible by the MA provided and to the extent only it relates to measures that are demonstrated to increase capacity of these organisations to deliver employment, education and social inclusion policies supported by the ESF+.

**Question 4 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can financing for capacity building interventions pursuant to Art. 9(2) ESF+ Regulation take the form of annual “operating grants”, i.e. the Managing Authority publishes on an annual basis a call for the support of social partners/civil society organisations active in a specific EMPL-policy field to finance the “regular activity” of these organisations?

**Answer:**

As regards financing operating grants, the same logic is to be followed as for salaries. (see answer to question 3).

# QA00104 - Durability of operations aiming at adapting private households to the persons in needs (e.g. elderly)

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 2 and 65 of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the context of measures addressed to persons in need of support in their daily functioning (e.g. elderly), is it possible to finance the adaptation of private housing, in order to allow them to stay in their homes for as long as possible? Is it possible to exclude it from the requirement of the durability of investment?

**Answer:**

Based on the definition of a beneficiary provided by Article 2(9)(a) of the CPR, natural persons (individuals) or private bodies can benefit from the EU support, if they are responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing an operation. There is no prohibition preventing a natural person to be a beneficiary.

In practical terms, this refers to adaptation of the house with equipment, for instance, and other tools that facilitates living in the personal house. This is something that follows Commission policy lines to support that people (e.g. elderly, persons with disabilities) can live in their homes with the necessary equipment and adapted infrastructure and have access to the services they need in the community.

The provisions on durability, pursuant to Article 65 CPR shall apply.

# QA00105 - Phasing of REACT-EU operations and treatment of co-financing

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 92b(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013;

Article 118 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060;

Article 112 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

* Is it possible to phase projects financed under REACT-EU?
* If yes, is the co-financing rate at 100% maintained during the period 2021-2027?

**Regulatory framework** :

* Article 92b(2), third subparagraph of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 [[1]](#scroll-bookmark-81) on implementing arrangements for the REACT-EU resources:

*“[…]The phasing provisions set out in a Regulation laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument are applicable to operations supported by the REACT-EU resources* ”.

* Article 118 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 on conditions on operations subject to phased implementation

“1 *. The managing authority may proceed with the selection of an operation consisting of the second phase of an operation selected for support and started under Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, provided that the following cumulative conditions are met:*

*(a) the operation, as selected for support under Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, has two phases identifiable from a financial point of view with separate audit trails;*

*(b) the total cost of the operation referred to in point (a) exceeds EUR 5 000 000;*

*(c) expenditure included in a payment application in relation to the first phase is not included under any payment applications in relation to the second phase;*

*(d) the second phase of the operation complies with applicable law and is eligible for support from the ERDF, the ESF+, the Cohesion Fund or the EMFAF under the provisions of this Regulation or the Fund-specific Regulations;*

*(e) the Member State commits to complete during the programming period and render operational the second and final phase in the final implementation report, or in the context of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund in the last annual implementation report, submitted in accordance with Article 141 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013*

*2.* *The provisions of this Regulation shall apply to the second phase of the operation* .”

* Article 112 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 on determination of co-financing rates

“ *1. The decision approving a programme shall fix the co-financing rate and the maximum amount of support from the Funds for each priority.*

*2.  For each priority, the Commission decision shall set out whether the co-financing rate for the priority is to be applied to either of the following: (a) total contribution, including public and private contribution; (b) public contribution. […]”*

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-82) As amended by Regulation (EU) 2020/2221 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 December 2020 (OJUE L-437, 28.12.2020, p. 30) as regards additional resources and implementing arrangements to provide assistance for fostering crisis repair in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social consequences and for preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy (REACT-EU)

**Answer:**

1 st question:

According to Article 92b(2), third subparagraph of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, as amended, the phasing provisions of Article 118 of the CPR 2021-2027 (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) are applicable to operations supported by REACT-EU resources. Therefore, if all the conditions established by the above-mentioned Article 118 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 are complied with, operations supported by REACT-EU resources can be phased into the 2021-2027 programming period.

Please note relevant section 6 of the Guidelines on the closure of the operational programmes adopted for assistance from the ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund and the EMFF (2014-2020) [[1]](#scroll-bookmark-81) detailing the requirements and responsibilities of Member States in this regard as well as the potential implications.

2nd question:

The co-financing rate at the priority axis of the programme is fixed by the Commission decision adopting a programme, while the rate of the Union support at the operation level is established by the Member State authorities in the document setting out the conditions for support and it can be higher or lower than the co-financing rate at the priority axis of the programme. In conclusion, it is up to the Member State to establish the rate of the Union support at the operation level following its national eligibility and the programme rules.

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-82) OJ C-417, 14.10.2021, p.1

# QA00106 - Request of clarification regarding the application of financial instruments

 *Relevant Article*: 58-60 of the CPR

 *Member State*: HR

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We made an ex-ante assessment which recommends that most suitable types of financial instruments in the analysed sectors include debt products in the form of investment risk sharing loans, guarantees, micro and small loans and combination of support.

Our questions refers to Investment risk sharing loan:

Namely, ex-ante assessment suggests that the implementation of this particular financial instrument is to be carried out by state owned development bank - Croatian bank for reconstruction and development (CBRD).

It is envisaged that through transparent and competitive procedure CBRD selects commercial banks that will be financial intermediaries. The individual loan would be financed from EMFAF program contribution to the financial instrument and from the funds of the commercial bank in the ratio of 50:50).

QUESTIONS:

In case commercial banks are not interested in implementation of this financial instrument (i.e. due to excessive administrative burden, sufficient own liquidity), can CBRD as a state development bank contribute with its own funds to this particular FI.

In this way, leverage effect would still be above 1, CBRD would lend the loans directly to final recipients without financial intermediaries. *Take a note that CBRD implements its loan programs directly and through commercial banks.*

If the funding contribution from state owned bank is not allowed, another option is that each individual loan is 100% financed from EMFAF (leverage effect is 1). In this case, CBRD would still manage the implementation of this FI, and therefore would lend the funds directly to final recipients.

**Answer:**

The managing authority (MA) may directly award a contract for the implementation of a financial instrument to a publicly-owned bank or institution respecting the conditions of Article 59(3) CPR. If the conditions listed in this Article or in Article 12 of Directive 2014/24/EU are not met, the MA should launch a tender to select the body implementing a financial instrument.

The risk sharing loan means that it pools together CPR Funds, in this case EMFAF, and funds from the financial intermediary. To respect the principle of risk sharing, the body implementing the financial instrument should contribute its own resources (typically 25% minimum). So, it is possible that the body implementing the financial instrument contributes with own funds to the FI, if it can act as financial intermediary under national law. In this case, state aid rules should be respected.

The CBRD could alternatively disburse directly the loans to final recipients as a body implementing a specific investment risk-sharing loan fund (see Article 2(21) CPR).

The option that each individual loan is 100% financed from EMFAF does not comply with the presented outcome of the ex ante assessment and the objectives of an investment risk sharing loan. In this case, there is no sharing of the risks, as they are all taken by the EMFAF.

# QA00107 - Use of amount reimbursed from Technical assistance under Article 36(5) (flat rate) of the CPR for which there is no underlying Technical Assistance expenditure

 *Relevant Article*: Article 36 of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In case the EMFAF programme foresees the use of Technical Assistance by applying the flat rate of 6 % as according to Article 36(5), the reimbursement of a payment application is done by calculating the 6% of the certified eligible expenditure.

If there is no real expenditure for Technical Assistance included in the payment application, or if such expenditure is lower than the 6%, what are the rules for making use of the amount reimbursed from the Commission that does not correspond to any real expenditure incurred for Technical Assistance? As a matter of example, can such amount be used to fund other operations within the EMFAF programme, and/or within the same Specific Objective other than Technical Assistance?

**Answer:**

Where a Member State decides to use the flat-rate financing for technical assistance, the relevant flat-rate percentage for the Fund concerned provided in Article 36(5)(b) CPR (i.e. 6% for the EMFAF support) will be applied automatically to non-TA expenditure or public contribution, as appropriate, included in each payment application submitted to the Commission.

It is the responsibility of the Member State to decide  how to use the amounts reimbursed for technical assistance.

# QA00108 - Gross Grant Equivalent calculation for FIs with capital rebate

 *Relevant Article*: Article 58 of the CPR

 *Member State*: IT

 **Question (summarized):**

How and when to calculate the aid element when the grant element combined within a single financial instrument operation is conditional on the performance achieved by the final recipient?

The MS would like to know, if the grant element which is conditional upon reaching the targets defined for the project [[1]](#scroll-bookmark-86) , needs to be calculated and taken into account in the Gross Grant Equivalent of the financial instrument support (1) at the time of signing the initial loan contract (including the potential grant element clause), or (2) it is sufficient to calculate and take the grant into account when the related conditions are fulfilled and the actual entitlement for the grant element is verified (e.g. in year 3).

The MS states that if the conditional grant element were taken into account already from the beginning in the Gross Grant Equivalent calculation, this would be disadvantageous for the final recipient, for example in the case of aid subject to ceilings in absolute value (de minimis or similar). The final recipient would see this ceiling consumed already in year 0 even if he does not actually benefit from the capital rebate or recoverable grant, which he will eventually benefit in the fourth year.

**Answer:**
The question concerns the ex-ante calculation of the conditional grant part of an aid granted in the form of capital rebate or recoverable grant. In our best understanding ‘capital rebate’ or ‘recoverable grant’ should be analysed in the context of State aid as ‘repayable advance’, i.e. “repayable advance’ means a loan for a project which is paid in one or more instalments and the conditions for the reimbursement of which depend on the outcome of the project” (cf. Article 2(21) of the GBER [[2]](http://webgate.ec.europa.eu#_ftn2) ).

We understand that the gross grant equivalent of the loan part is not an issue, but the questions are:

(1) When should the conditional grant part of the repayable advance be taken into account in the calculation of the GGE, from the start when the subsidised loan is granted or when the trigger condition is fulfilled, i.e. at the end of year 3?
(2) How to calculate the aid content of the grant element?
(3) How to do the adjustment of the aid amount in year 3, if the conditions are finally met/not met?

On the first question, in accordance with Article 2(28) of the GBER: the “date of granting of the aid means the date when the legal right to receive the aid is conferred on the beneficiary under the applicable national legal regime”. The aid is considered to be granted when the granting decision is taken at the beginning, since this is the moment when the Member State gives the beneficiary a legally enforceable right to the aid. Even if there are certain conditions to be met, the Member State has no influence on whether or not the condition materializes in the future, and the Member State will not have any discretion to change or not to grant the aid at that moment, if the conditions are indeed met. Therefore, the conditional grant should be taken into account in the calculation of the GGE from the moment the subsidised loan is granted, i.e. method (1) described in the original question is correct.

On the second question, on how to calculate the aid content of the grant element, Article 7(3) of the GBER states that “Aid payable in the future, including aid payable in several instalments, shall be discounted to its value at the moment it is granted. The eligible costs shall be discounted to their value at the moment the aid is granted. The interest rate to be used for discounting purposes shall be the discount rate applicable at the moment the aid is granted.” Therefore, the conditional grant should be taken into account at its nominal value (or at its discounted value, if it is payable in the future) at the time of the initial granting of the loan to calculate the gross grant equivalent of the repayable advance.

On the third question, for the purpose of State aid, de minimis ceiling or respecting the applicable support rates under Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, since the final recipient received a legally enforceable right to the aid at the beginning, the calculated aid amount of the support cannot be changed depending on whether the conditions are finally met or not met by the final recipient. In other words, the support rate of the project remains unchanged irrespective of the repayment obligation in case of failing the set conditions.

Your questions concern both support under the SPR and under state aid rules. The above explained principles to calculate the public aid amount are based on the GBER but can apply to all support provided under the CAP Strategic Plans.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-87) The question included numerical examples with two types of combined grant element within financial instruments: A) financial instrument with a capital rebate option allowing for cancellation of part of the loan, B) financial instrument with recoverable grant element allowing for recovering the initially provided grant element, both after meeting or failing the pre-defined trigger events by year 3, e.g. reaching certain employment target.

[[2]](http://webgate.ec.europa.eu#_ftnref2) Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 187, 26.6.2014, p. 1–78

# QA00109 - Transfer of additional funding for outermost regions

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 26 and 110 of CPR, Annex V of Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1131

 *Member State*: PT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1131, in its Annex V, sets out the annual breakdown by Member State of global resources allocated to additional funding for the outermost regions. The Member State was not aware of the split by funds (namely ERDF and ESF+) of this additional funding.

1. Can the MS propose in the Partnership Agreement (PA) a transfer of the total ESF+ share of the additional funding for outermost regions to ERDF?
2. Can this transfer be justified solely by reasons of simplification? (ie. rather concentrate all ESF+ support without splitting a part in another priority axis supported by ESF+ OR)
3. Table 5B of the PA template does not include any row for ERDF/ESF+ transfers so which sections of the PA should reflect this type of transfers?

**Answer:**

1. For 2021-27 programming period, the CPR sets out in Art. 110 (1e) the additional funding for the outermost regions and sparsely populated areas as part of the resources for the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal. To pursue the objectives of more social and inclusive Europe, Article 110(2) CPR sets out the amount to be allocated to the ESF+ of this additional funding. Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1131 of 5 July 2021  sets out the breakdown of global resources by Member State , in particular breakdowns by fund (Annexes VI, VII), by category of region (Annexes II-IV) and of the specific allocation (Annex V). The initial split of the specific allocation for the outermost regions between the ERDF and the ESF+ is included in Annexes VI and VII, respecting the amount to be allocated to the ESF + in Article 110 (2) second subpara. CPR (see reference in recital 4 to the annual breakdown by Member State of specific resources for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) taking into account that the amounts of the ERDF and the ESF+ allocated to each Member State should equal the amounts of specific resources allocated according to the different categories of regions and specific resources in favour of outermost regions in France, Spain and Portugal, and regions in Finland and Sweden fulfilling the criteria laid down in Article 2 of Protocol No 6 to the 1994 Act of Accession allocated to the same Member State.

Article 26 CPR allows for transfers from the “initial national allocation for each Fund”, subject to certain ceilings. According to the above, the initial national allocation by Fund is set out for each MS in Annexes VI and VII of the implementing decision and includes the respective allocation of the outermost regions specific allocation to the ERDF and ESF+. Even though there is no explicit reference to the possibility of transferring resources from the specific allocation in Article 26 CPR, this provision can be interpreted as allowing for a transfer of resources between the ERDF and the ESF+ within the specific allocation while respecting the ceilings for transfers at the fund level set out in paragraph 3 and 4 of Article 26(1) CPR established by reference to the initial national allocation set out in Annexes VI and VII of the implementing decision.

2. Additional funding for the outermost regions is to offset the structural social and economic situation of the outermost regions together with the handicaps resulting from the factors referred to in Article 349 TFEU. For the ERDF, Article 14 of the ERDF/CF Regulation sets out specific provisions for the use of the specific allocation. The proposal for a transfer between the funds within the specific allocation will be assessed in this context, in particular if such a transfer would undermine the achievement of the objectives of the funds in the outermost regions. Simplification alone cannot be considered as a sufficient argument.

3. The rationale for the specific additional allocation to the outermost regions is set out in Article 14 ERDF/CF Regulation. Transfer provisions do not ensure that the specific allocation will be used for the benefit of the outermost regions or sparsely populated areas and in line with objectives of Article 349 TFEU.  Due to this fact, the specific allocation for the outermost regions is not reflected in transfer tables in the Partnership Agreement as those resources should not be transferred out (to other regions, EU instruments or funds). The amount of the specific allocation by Member State as defined in Annex V of the the Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1131 cannot be changed. However, the transfer between the ERDF and the ESF+ within the specific allocation  can be reflected in “Table 8 Preliminary financial allocation from ERDF, Cohesion Fund, JTF, ESF+, EMFAF by policy objective, JTF specific objective and technical assistance” since it demonstrates the split of the specific allocation for outermost regions by fund and policy objective. In the case asked, if the entire ESF+ allocation within the additional funding for the outermost regions was proposed to be transferred to the ERDF respecting the ceilings set out in Article 26 CPR, it could be reflected in table 8 of the PA: the ESF+ allocation for the  outermost regions under PO4 may even be zero.

# QA00110 - Programming of CLLD

 *Relevant Article*: 31-34 of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information): Committee selecting the local development strategies**

Article 32 (2) of the CPR stipulates: “The relevant managing authorities shall define criteria for the selection of those strategies, set up a committee to carry out this selection and approve the strategies selected by that committee.“

What functions should this Committee have? Should it be a monitoring committee such as the MCs for regional programmes, involving partners, etc., or rather a body composed of representatives of the MAs for the Funds that finance the local development strategies in a given region? Is it possible to set up a single joint committee for all MAs implementing CLLD or should such a committee operate in each region implementing multi-funded CLLD?

**Answer:**

The committee referred to in Article 32(2) of the CPR is responsible for the selection of community-led local development strategies.

If a Member State so decides, it may confer additional functions to the committee but without prejudice to the exclusive tasks of the local action groups as set out in Article 33(3) CPR and functions of the monitoring committee of the programme pursuant to Article 40(1) CPR.

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Can a local development strategy cover an area and support operations outside the programme area?**

If the local development strategy covering more than one voivodship extends beyond the area of the regional programme, can the programme support municipalities from another voivodship, or only those situated in the voivodship providing funds?

And if it is possible to support municipalities outside their voivodship, how should this be included in the regional programme? Is it sufficient to indicate in the CLLD measure that this concerns the area covered by the strategy?

**Answer:**

The programme may support operations outside the area covered by a programme provided that they contribute to the objectives of the programme. A CLLD strategy defines its geographical area, while Member State is to ensure that the CLLD is focused on sub-regional areas. Thus, a regional programme may support a CLLD, which covers also municipalities from another region (voivodship). A reference in the programme to the areas covered by CLLD strategies would be sufficient.

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information): Verification of eligibility of CLLD projects**

In standard calls, the LAG evaluates and selects projects, and then the MA verifies the eligibility of costs. Should the MC approve the criteria (or the conditions for the granting of support) for this verification? This is not a factual assessment (because it is the LAG’s competence), so in theory there is no such requirement, but it is practically analogous to the assessment, so maybe for the sake of clarity and a uniform approach, it should be submitted to the MC?

**Answer:**

The managing authority responsible for overall implementation of a programme should perform verification to ensure that proposals are in line with eligibility rules set out pursuant to Article 63(1) CPR. Member State may envisage a role in the procedure for the monitoring committee of the programme without prejudice to the responsibilities of the Managing Authority as laid down in Articles 73 and 74 of the CPR.

Within the EAFRD, the body responsible for the verification of eligibility is the paying agency.

**Question 4 (including any relevant facts and information): Setting indicators and targets for CLLD in ESF+**

Several Polish regions are interested in implementation of CLLD from the ESF+ what raises a lot of questions which indicators to use and how targets should be estimated.

There are two ways of programming CLLD in the programme:

* CLLD can be programmed under each specific objective (and in the consequence under many priorities)
* CLLD can be programmed under one separate priority – this is an attractive option as according to the CPR the co-financing is higher -95%.

Under the first option estimation of targets is not so difficult, because CLLD will be a small part of the allocation of the priority and CLLD actions will contribute to the indicator for a given specific objective. Even if the estimates will not be fully correct, it should not be visible in the programme as the amount should be smaller than the estimation error.

The situation is much more complicated when an MA selects the second option. MAs would like to use the indicator of supported CLLD strategies but this is not a common indicator for the ESF+, so it can be used only as a specific indicator. The targets can be estimated based on the needs of Local Actions Groups (LAGs) which are known when their local strategies will  be selected by the MA what will happen after the adoption of the programme (probably in 2023). Is it possible to adopt a programme without target values or so should some fictional targets be established which will be amended later on? Most regions do not know the historical data since CLLD will be implemented for the first time.

**Answer:**

Pursuant to Article 22(3)(d)(ii) CPR, each specific objective, including those implemented through CLLD and regardless of the delivery mode, needs to set out output indicators and result indicators with the corresponding milestones and targets. The estimates for milestones and targets need to be developed in line with the methodology set out in Article 17 CPR.

In duly justified cases, the estimates may be revised by means of request for programme amendment.

# QA00111 - Territorial development - implementing CLLD strategies through operations considered as a group of projects

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 2(4) and 33 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Could the implementation of local strategies under the provisions of the CPR lead to the formation of group of projects which, in accordance with Article 2(4) of the CPR, would be considered as operations where the implementation of such actions would be the responsibility of the local action groups themselves?

**Answer:**

In line with Article 2(4)(a) CPR, an operation means ‘a project, contract, action or group of projects selected under the programmes concerned’. As such, a local action group (LAG), selected as a beneficiary pursuant to Article 33(5) CPR, may initiate or implement an operation consisting of a group of projects.

Nevertheless, in accordance with Article 33(3)(d) CPR, it is the LAG that is responsible for selecting pre-defined operations (regardless if they are a project or a group of projects) in line with the community-led local development strategy. It is noted that the functions of a LAG as a beneficiary (initiating or implementing operations) and as a body responsible for selection of operations have to be separated.

# QA00112 - Cumulative funding of DIGITAL and ERDF (EDIH)

 *Relevant Article*:

Article 63 (9) of the CPR;

Article 22 of the DEP

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

DG CNECT is planning to co-finance the creation of a network of approximately 200 EDIH (with an average of 1 EDIH/region) under the “DIGITAL” programme. The support of DIGITAL should take the form of co-financing of up to 50 % of the running costs of each EDIH (= personnel costs, travel costs, purchase of equipment, depreciation costs). The challenge is therefore to find co-financiers to finance the remaining 50 % for each EDIH.

On the French side, several regions are strongly considering to mobilise the ERDF on this subject.

* French authorities would like **to get confirmation if and how it is possible to mobilise ERDF contribution to cover 40% of a given expenditure (or cost) and to cumulatively mobilise EDIH direct fund to cover 50% of that same expenditure base** (assuming this same expenditure base is eligible under both the ERDF and the Digital programmes)**.** For information: the remaining 10% of the expenditure would be covered by other sources than ERDF or Digital programme contribution.
* Assuming the answer to question 1 confirms the possibility for combining the ERDF and DIGITAL on the same expenditure base as long as the public funding does not exceed 100 % of the project costs, it is then demanded:
	1. To confirm that, **for checking that the public funding does not exceed 100% of the project costs:** the **ERDF** funding is calculated by considering the **co-financing rate at the operation level** and not by considering the co-financing rate at the axis level;
	2. To confirm that, following the submission by a managing authority (MA) to the Commission of a payment claim including eligible expenditures of an EDIH operation(under an ERDF programme priority axis): the contribution from the **ERDF** programme **effectively disbursed by the Commission** to the MA follows the Article 112 CPR rules of the co-financing rate, meaning that the **co-financing is at priority** level and not at operation level.

**Answer:**

The possibility of cumulating funds coming from two different Union funds or EU instruments is allowed by Article 63(9) CPR, which provides that an operation may receive support from one or more Funds or from one or more programmes and from other Union funds provided the same expenditure is not declared twice to the Commission. There is a corresponding provision in the Regulations for directly managed instruments, including in the Regulation on the Digital Europe Programme (see its Article 22).

The Commission services are currently preparing guidance with operational solutions and practical implementation elements that would be particularly useful for managing authorities deciding to allow such combined support to synergy operations. The guidance on synergies should tackle the questions raised.

# QA00113 - Scope of support defined in art. 3 (1) (a) (iii) "enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments"

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 3(1)(a)(iii) of the ERDF

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is the scope of support under this specific objective limited to enterprises from the SME sector, or does it focus on SMEs, but may go beyond them (i.e., supporting small mid-caps and mid-caps)?

In particular, is it legally possible to support small mid-caps and mid-caps under SO1.3 by financial instruments or combinations of grants and reimbursable financing?

**Answer:**

Article 5(2) ERDF/CF lists exhaustively the possibilities to support productive investments other than for SMEs. Unlike in Article 5(2)(a), (b) and (d) ERDF/CF, provisions in Article 5(2)(c) ERDF/CF do not make reference to any concrete specific objective. Therefore productive investments in small mid-caps and mid-caps financed through financial instruments can be supported under any specific objective, including the specific objective under Article 3(1)(a)(iii) ERDF/CF.

# QA00114 - Eligible activities under JTF – activity (k) ‘upskilling and reskilling of workers and jobseekers’

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 2 and 8(1)-(2) JTF

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The question relates to the scope of the interventions under paragraph (k): the Commission notes there that *« Workers to be supported under (k) should be working in industries and sectors impacted by the transition* ***OR******in industries/sectors that will play a role in addressing the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition (e g green companies, sectors with high potential for job creation) »***

Is it correct for to interpret that, once an economic sector is identified (justified with regard to the objectives of the TJTP and consistent with the principle of the DNSH) as a vector of diversification for an eligible territory, the MA may not only use the JTF to support and train job seekers or employees in polluting industrial sectors in decline towards this sector, but also support employees already employed within a company in this sector in the development of their skills? We had understood until now that these sectors of diversification constituted sectors of destination for the priority publics that are the job seekers and the employees of the most emitting industries, it seemed to us excluded from being able to work directly on the reinforcement of skills, for example, from the green economy sector. Confirmation of an openness on this subject (or of a previous misunderstanding on our part?) would open up operational perspectives that we had ruled out until now.

**Answer:**

In line with Art. 8(1) JTF: “The JTF shall only support activities that are directly linked to its specific objective as set out in Article 2 and which contribute to the implementation of the territorial just transition plans established in accordance with Article 11.”

As stipulated by Art. 2 JTF, the JTF shall contribute to the single specific objective of enabling regions and people to address the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union’s 2030 targets for energy and climate and a climate-neutral economy of the Union by 2050, based on the Paris Agreement.

Activities (k), (l), (m) and (o) of Art.8(2) JTF are aimed at addressing in particular the social and employment impact of the transition.

To be eligible, activities should be justified in the territorial transition plans and their link to addressing the impact of the transition should be established.

Workers in sectors, which will play a key role in the transition, for example as vectors of economic diversification, may be eligible if the Member State can demonstrate that the upskilling and reskilling of those workers will help address the impact of the transition on the region and people concerned.

As outlined in section 5.1 of the [Commission’s Staff Working Document on the Territorial Just Transition Plans](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/thefunds/jtf/swd_territ_just_trans_plan_en.pdf) concerning economic diversification, “due importance should be given to sectors with a strong job creation potential, so to mitigate negative repercussions on employment, particularly in sectors with growth potential, such as the raw materials value chain”.

The Member State should therefore explain in its TJTP how the upskilling and reskilling of workers already employed in a sector with, for example, high growth potential would play a role in mitigating the negative repercussions on employment.

# QA00115 - Which Funds can be combined in an instrument under Article 28 (c) CPR - another territorial tool supporting initiatives designed by the Member State

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 5 (1) (e) and Article 28 of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Based on Article 5 - Policy objectives - paragraph 1. (e) CPR, the ERDF, the ESF+, the Cohesion Fund and the EMFF shall support the five policy objectives. Based on Article 28 CPR , integrated territorial development can be supported in three forms: (a) integrated territorial investments; (b) community led local development; (c) another territorial tool supporting initiatives designed by the Member State.

Lower Saxony envisages under Article 28 (c) CPR to establish the so-called ‘Grow and Development Regions’ (G&DRs), to be financed from ERDF and ESF+.  In G&DRs partners such as counties, communes, economic and social partners will cooperate based on a ‘Handling concept’ (in analogy to an integrated strategy for a CLLD). However, there will be two types of G&DRs: those with a real bottom up approach and others where central guidance from State level will be part of the concept. Article 28 (c) CPR mentions as possible instrument, the territorial tool designed by the Member State for investments programmed for the ERDF under (Article 4(1) (e) CPR proposal (policy objective V - a Europe closer to the citizens).

Lower Saxony foresees in the 2021-2027 programming period – as it did in the 2014-2020 programming period - to implement EU structural Funds with an ERDF/ESF Multi-fund programme.

Can you confirm that in a Multi-fund ERDF/ESF programme, the Commission would accept that for instruments under Article 28(c) CPR, ERDF and ESF+ can be combined for investments under the policy objective referred in Article 5(1) (e) CPR ?

**Answer:**

Article 28 applies to the ERDF, the ESF+, the Cohesion Fund, the JTF and the EMFAF, and therefore all these funds may be used to support the territorial tools referred to in point (c) of that Article.

Nevertheless, the ESF+ can only support activities under PO4. Therefore, the ESF+ can support ITI, CLLD or any other territorial tool supporting initiatives designed by the Member State only under PO4. The situation is different for the ERDF, which can support ITI, CLLD and other territorial tools under all policy objectives. Therefore, ERDF and ESF+ support can be combined for integrated territorial development when ITI, CLLD and other territorial tools are used under PO4 or when they draw from activities programmed under different policy objectives (i.e. ESF+ exclusively under PO4, ERDF under all POs).

# QA00116 - How to apply in practice “multi-fund operation” and how does it differ from the “cross-financing” mechanism?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 63(9) and 25(2) of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the current programming period 2014-2020, Member States have been using the multi-fund option when programming their Operational Programmes: multi-fund OPs, multi-fund Priority Axis and even integrated ESF/ERDF projects. The latter were projects selected within joint calls for proposals. Although such approach was a step towards complementarity, it turned out to be burdensome – the “multi-fund” projects had in fact two sets of different implementation rules, 2 separate contracts, 2 separate payment claims.

In the draft Regulation for 2021-2027, Article 63(9) CPR foresees that “*An operation may receive support from one or more Funds or from one or more programmes and from other Union instruments”.*

The questions are:

1. How is it foreseen that this provision will apply in practice to individual operations? Can you provide an illustration and indicate what the MA would need to do? Would it work in the same way as integrated ESF/ERDF projects in the current period, and if not what would be different?
2. In which way does this option differ from the “cross-financing” mechanism, as defined in Article 25 (“*The ERDF and the ESF+ may finance, in a complementary manner and subject to a limit of 15 % of support from those Funds for each priority of a programme, all or part of an operation for which the costs are eligible for support from the other Fund on the basis of eligibility rules applied to that Fund, provided that such costs are necessary for the implementation*”)?

**Answer:**

Article 63(9) CPR provides that an operation may receive support from one or more Funds or from one or more programmes and from other Union instruments, provided the same expenditure is declared to the Commission only once. It gives the possibility of cumulating support coming from different Funds under the CPR (the ERDF, the ESF+, the JTF, the EMFAF, the AMIF, the ISF and the BMVI) and from other Union instruments. Expenditure to be included in payment applications may be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

The Commission services are currently preparing guidance with operational solutions and practical implementation elements that would be particularly useful for managing authorities deciding to allow such combined support to synergy operations. The guidance on synergies will tackle the questions raised.

Cross-financing under Article 25(2) CPR allows the ERDF and the ESF+ to finance all or part of an operation for which the costs are eligible for support from the other Fund. In contrast to 2014-2020, the 2021-2027 CPR Article 25(2) allows for complementary financing of an entire operation.

# QA00117 - Clarification regarding Annex XXIII (payment application) and XXIV (accounts) of the CPR in 2021-2027 programming period

 *Relevant Articles*: Art. 2, 91, 94 and 95 of the CPR

Annex XXIII (Payment Application), Annex XXIV (Accounts)

 *Member State*: CZ

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Payment Application – Annex XXIII**

**Table “Expenditure broken down by priority and, where relevant, by category of region as entered into the accounts of the body carrying out the accounting function”**

**Payment Application – Annex XXIII**

**1. Table “Expenditure broken down by priority and, where relevant, by category of region as entered into the accounts of the body carrying out the accounting function”**

a) It is not clear whether the amounts in columns B and E are mutually exclusive with the amounts in column C, in other words, should the amounts pursuant to Art 91(4)(a),(b) (Art 94 and 95) be also included in the column B (Total) and column E (Total public)?

b) Title of the column C suggests, that only the amount of the EU contribution should be included, however according to the underlying logic of the calculation of the payment (application of the co-financing rate of the priority to calculation basis in the column A) it would be more appropriate to submit the amount of the relevant calculation basis (Total or Total public), is our understanding correct?

c) The same goes for the column D (flat-rate for the technical assistance) where it is not clear whether EU, Total or Total public contribution should be submitted.

**2. Appendix 2 - Information on expenditure linked to specific objectives (SOs) for which enabling conditions are not fulfilled, with the exception of operations that contribute to the fulfilment of enabling conditions (cumulative from the beginning of the programming period)**

According to Article 15(5) or (6) the MS may include the expenditure linked to SO for which enabling conditions are not fulfilled in the payment applications. These amounts will not be included in the table “Expenditure broken down by priority and, where relevant, by category of region as entered into the accounts of the body carrying out the accounting function”, but will be included in the Appendix 2 (columns B and C), therefore it will not be reimbursed until the enabling condition is fulfilled, however it will be taken into account for the N+3 rule.

What is less clear is the procedure once the enabling condition is fulfilled. For example, the MS will submit its first payment application where 10M EUR of the expenditure is related to not fulfilled enabling conditions (column B and C of the Appendix 2) and 90M EUR of the expenditure is related to fulfilled enabling conditions (column D and E of the Appendix 2). Subsequently, let’s say before the submission of the second payment application (PA) all enabling conditions are fulfilled. New expenditure to be submitted in the second payment application is 200M EUR (all linked to fulfilled enabling conditions). Should the amount of 10M EUR previously declared only in the Appendix 2 as linked to not fulfilled enabling conditions be added to the new expenditure in the table “Expenditure broken down by priority and, where relevant, by category of region as entered into the accounts of the body carrying out the accounting function” in the 2nd PA or not? If not, will the Commission add and reimburse this amount on the top of the amount that would come out of the standard payment calculation based on the amounts in the table Expenditure broken down by priority and, where relevant, by category of region as entered into the accounts of the body carrying out the accounting function?

**3. Accounts – Annex XXIV**

 **Appendix 1 - Amounts entered into the accounting systems of the accounting function**

Compared to table Expenditure broken down by priority and, where relevant, by category of region as entered into the accounts of the body carrying out the accounting function, there is no specific column for the declaration of the amounts according to Article 94 and 95, could you please explain why it is not necessary to declare Article 94 and 95 separately in the Accounts. Do we understand correctly that amounts according to Article 94 and 95 should be included in columns A and C?

**Answer:**

**Question 1 a)**

Amounts in columns B and C are mutually exclusive.

Column C should include eligible expenditure where the Union contribution is made pursuant to Article 51 (a), (c), (d) and (e) CPR. These correspond to the total eligible expenditure included in payment applications pursuant to Article 91(4) (a) and (b) CPR.

Column B should include all expenditure declared linked to fulfilled enabling conditions or contributing to their fulfilment, with the exceptions of TA flat-rate amount (where relevant, calculated in column D) and the eligible expenditure included in column C.

The amounts reimbursed to beneficiary for the cases covered by Article 91(4)(a) and (b) CPR reported in column C shall not be included in column B to avoid double financing of the same expenditure.

In case a part of expenditure of the operation is declared to the Commission based on eligible expenditure incurred by the beneficiary and paid in implementing the operation, and another part is covered by a SCO/FNLC scheme agreed between the Commission and included in the programme, then the expenditure of such an operation will be partially included in column B and partially in column C of payment applications.

Columns E and C are not mutually exclusive. Expenditure in column E covers public contribution as defined in Article 2(28) CPR irrespective of the form of the Union contribution and is to be filled in where appropriate in line with the programme (either column E is filled in or columns B+C).

**Question 1 b)**

Your understanding is correct. Column C should include total eligible expenditure where the Union contribution is made pursuant to Article 51 (a), (c), (d) and (e) CPR. This is linked to the amounts as either approved in the programme (Article 94(3) or 95(2) CPR) or as set out in a delegated act (Article 94(4) or 95(4) CPR).

**Question 1c)**

Amounts in column D will be calculated automatically by SFC2021, by applying the technical assistance flat rate percentages resulting from the financing plan of the programme (Table 11) either to the sum of amounts in Columns B and C (where programmes chose total eligible expenditure) or to the amount in column E (where programmes chose public contribution).

**Question 2**

When the enabling condition is fulfilled, the expenditure originally included in the Appendix 2 of the Payment Application (column B and C) should be included in the table “Expenditure broken down by priority and, where relevant, by category of region as entered into the accounts of the body carrying out the accounting function” of the next payment application. Calculation of the amounts to be reimbursed by the Commission is based on amounts included in this table.

**Question 3**

Column A in the accounts’ template corresponds to the sum of columns B and C in the template for payment applications.

# QA00118 - Mid-term review and ESF+ support to material deprivation

 *Relevant Articles*: 16(2) and 18 of the CPR

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The MS would like to have a separate ESF+ Programme for SO (m). Will this Programme be subject to the mid-term review (i.e. is it obligatory)?

The MA’s view is that the mid-term review is derived from the performance framework. The MA considers that Article 18(1) CPR does not concern the ex-FEAD Programme, because Article 16(2) excludes the “(m) addressing material deprivation” specific objective from having milestones and targets. Thus, the MA does not see the obligation to conduct a mid-term review for the Programme and has asked, if there is any guidance/ document which states otherwise.

**Answer:**

Article 18(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) determines that the mid-term review shall apply to programmes supported by the ERDF, the ESF+, the Cohesion Fund and the JTF. Therefore, as there is no derogation provided for ESF+ programmes (or priorities) dedicated to support the specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) (specific objective “(m)”) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/1057 (ESF+ Regulation), this mid-term review shall also apply to and cover this specific objective.

The progress in achieving milestones set for the specific objectives of a programme is only one of several aspects set out in Article 18(1) CPR, that need to be taken into account during the mid-term review.

Therefore, even though a specific objective (m) in programmes or priorities is exempted from the obligation to set out milestones and targets for indicators (Article 16(2) CPR), there are other elements which should be taken into account for the mid-term review.

Finally, although there are no milestones set for specific objective (m), it is still possible to assess the implementation of this specific objective, notably, based on the data reported for the indicators applicable to specific objective (m).

# QA00119 - Visibility, transparency and communication provisions and specific objective addressing material deprivation under the ESF+

 *Relevant Article*: Article 50 of the CPR

 *Member State*: n/a

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Where the product, such as a toothbrush, is in an individual package, where the EU flag and the words “EU co-financed” should be placed - on the product packaging or on the brush itself, which is generally sold in a package?

**Answer:**

Article 50 CPR requires beneficiaries to acknowledge the support from the Funds to the operation. In addition, it imposes specific obligations to beneficiaries in this regard, *inter alia*, by requiring a statement highlighting the support of the Funds in documents and communication material regarding the operation. However, this provision does not require that for operations supported under the specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation food and/or basic material assistance products have a label referring to EU support(food products are not “documents”).

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

For support granted in the form of a hot lunch (in most cases it is provided in disposable packaging, but there are also cases in which it is provided in containers to the final recipients? Given the fact that the product is a hot lunch and is placed in different packages / containers, should there be a visualization and how?

**Answer:**

As explained above Article 50 CPR provides flexibility to Member States on how to highlight the support to end recipients of operations under the specific objective set out in point (m) of Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation. The CPR does not require that food products and basic material assistance have a label referring to the support provided by the EU. The beneficiary should use other means to inform the end recipients of the support provided by the EU which do not lead to their stigmatization (e.g documentation accompanying the distribution of the assistance).

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information):**

For the support provided by voucher / card for children's kitchen, should the voucher / card be visualized? In our opinion, it is necessary to visualize the voucher / card with the EU flag and the inscription “EU co-financed”. Is this enough to follow the rules of visualization?

**Answer:**

Vouchers or cards are “documents” within the meaning referred to in Article 50(1) (b) and therefore they should refer to the support provided by the EU. This can be done by using the emblem of the Union and including a statement referring to ‘Funded by the European Union’ or ‘Co-funded by the European Union’ as set out in Article 49 CPR and Annex IX CPR.

# QA00120 - Regeneration and decontamination of brownfields - repurposing projects

[JTF - EU 2021/1056 - Article 8 - Scope of support](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regiokm/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=143759819)

 *Relevant Article*: 8 (2) (i) of JTF regulation

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would like to confirm the interpretation of art. 8 (2) (i) of JTF regulation. This article allows to supports „*investments in regeneration and decontamination of brownfield sites, land restoration and including, where necessary, green infrastructure and repurposing projects, taking into account the ‘polluter pays’principle*“.

Are there any limitations on what we can consider as a repurposing project?

We think that we can support any project that meets the following conditions:

1. It fulfills the JTF objective.
2. It contributes to the implementation of the territorial just transition plan
3. It is not excluded from the support by art. 9 of JTF regulation.
4. It is located on the site affected by coal mining or any related industry.
5. It has state aid clearance.
6. Large enterprises must meet conditions for productive investments.
7. If possible, it is recommended to utilize old buildings and mining heritage.

Could you confirm that our interpretation is correct and following activities can be considered as a repurposing project?

* Technical infrastructure
* Public functions (education, culture, sport and leisure)
* R&D (innovation centre, university)
* Infrastructure for SMEs or large enterprises
* Renewable energy sources
* Housing
* Waste
* Tourist attractions

**Answer:**

According to [Article 8(2)(i) of the JTF](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regiokm/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=143759819) regulation, repurposing projects may, **wherever  necessary,** be implemented as part of investments in regeneration and decontamination of brownfield sites or land restoration. This means that repurposing projects can be eligible only if such repurposing is necessary for the eligible investments primarily aiming at land restoration or regeneration and decontamination of brownfield sites (such as rehabilitatiation of totally or partly abandoned mine land, oil shale extraction sites or land of former peatlands and greenhouse-gas intensive industries while taking into account the ‘polluter pays’ principle).

The JTF regulation does not further restrict the scope of repurposing projects. Nevertheless, all support provided through the JTF has to fall  under the scope of JTF support to be eligible, and this covers also repurposing projects necessary for the activities provided for in Art. 8(2)(i) JTF Regulation. Where a repurposing project is necessary for the activity envisaged under Art. 8(2)(i) JTF Regulation, all applicable support conditions under the CPR and the JTF Regulation apply. In particular, it should be in line with Article 8 and 9 of the JTF Regulation, should be directly linked to the JTF specific objective and contribute to  the implementation of the territorial just transition plan (TJTP), and it needs to be justified by its contribution to mitigating the impacts of the transition and its link to the transition challenges identified in the TJTP.

As regards activities listed under the last paragraph of your question as potential repurposing projects, they may therefore qualify for support as part of land rehabilitation investments under the JTF if the above mentioned conditions are fulfilled. The Commission will be evaluating the concrete measures in the context of the submitted TJTP.

# QA00121 - Eligibility of urban investments under PO5 SO e(ii)

 *Relevant Article*: Article 29 of the CPR

 *Member State*: RO

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Investments in urban/functional urban areas are envisaged under the integrated territorial development approach and embedded in the county strategies designed to target both smaller urban areas(urban/functional urban areas) and rural areas. Urban areas are made up of urban municipalities and towns but also administrative units in rural areas (villages/communes) located within functional urban areas. Within these non-urban territorial strategies, can operations located inside the urban administrative units (municipalities and town) be eligible for funding under PO5 SO e(ii)?

**Answer:**

The support under the ERDF specific objectives set out in Art. 3(1)(e) should be provided through territorial and local development strategies, through territorial tools set out in Art. 28 CPR.

The identified territory targeted by the territorial strategy constitutes the geographic scope for investments under the given specific objectives.

Under specific objective e(i), all measures should be based on territorial or local development strategies focused on urban areas, including functional urban areas, and thus contribute to sustainable urban development earmarking set out in Art. 11 ERDF.

Under specific objective set out in Article 3(1)(e)(ii) ERDF/CF (SO 5.2), the territorial focus of territorial or local development strategies can be any non-urban territories below the programme level (subregions, functional areas), if justified by the intervention logic of the programme. Such non-urban territorial strategies can include support to urban areas as well, but such support under SO 5.2 cannot be counted for the 8% urban earmarking.

# QA00122 - Are aerodromes other than airports eligible for support under specific objective 3.2?

 *Relevant Article*:

* Point (1)(e) of Article 7 of Regulation 2021/1058
* Points (144), (145), (146), (147) and (153) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014
* Point 16 of Article 3 of Regulation 2018/1139
* Points 4 and 7 of Article 2 of Regulation 1008/2008

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Polish authorities requested support to certain types of aerodromes that are not used for commercial operations of air carriers. The scope of investment would cover all possible items of infrastructure, including runways, aprons, air navigation systems and other installations, buildings and equipment used for aircraft operations and movement.

Pursuant to Article 7(1)(e) of Regulation 2021/1058, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund shall not support investment in **airport infrastructure**, save as otherwise provided for in this Article. The Polish authorities observe that following the terminology used in the international and the EU aviation law, the term ‘**airport’** is narrower than ‘**aerodrome’,** as:

* ‘aerodrome’ means a defined area (including buildings, installations and equipment), intended to be used for the arrival, departure and surface movement of aircraft (point 16 of Article 3 of Regulation 2018/1139);
* ‘airport’ means any area in a Member State especially adapted for air services, i.e. a flight or a series of flights carrying passengers, cargo and/or mail for remuneration and/or hire (points 4 and 7 of Article 2 of Regulation 1008/2008).

This implies that the exclusion made in Article 7(1)(e) of Regulation 2021/1058 does not apply to aerodromes that are used for other purposes than the commercial carriage of passengers passengers, cargo and/or mail. Such other purposes may involve e.g.:

* aviation training;
* aerial sports;
* other aerial works that do not involve commercial carriage of passengers, mail or goods (i.e. aerial photography, aerial surveillance, fire-fighting flights, agricultural flights etc.)
* so-called ‘general aviation’, i.e. non-commercial operations performed by private aircraft owners (incl. for business, tourism or leasure).

Consequently, the Polish authorities seek for a confirmation that the aforementioned categories of aerodromes that do not constitue ‘airports’ can be supported by ERDF under specific objective 3.2 without any restrictions.

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 7(1)(e) of Regulation 2021/1058, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund shall not support investment in **airport infrastructure**, except for outermost regions or in existing regional airports as defined in point (153) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014, in any of the following cases:

* in environmental impact mitigation measures; or
* in security, safety, and air traffic management systems resulting from Single European Sky ATM Research.

The ERDF/CF regulation does not provide a definition of ‘airport infrastructure’, however it refers to point (153) of Article 2 of Regulation 651/2014 for the definition of ‘regional airport’. Taking into account the objectives pursued by the support through cohesion policy, in particular the ERDF and the CF and  according to the rules of systemic interpretation, the same Article of Regulation 651/2014 should be taken into consideration when determining the notion of ‘airport infrastructure’ and not definitions in EU legal frameworks that serve different purposes.

According to point (144) in conjunction with points (145), (146) and (147) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014, airport infrastructure means infrastructure and equipment for the provision of airport services by the airport to airlines and the various service providers, including runways, terminals, aprons, taxiways, centralised ground handling infrastructure and any other facilities that directly support the airport services, excluding infrastructure and equipment which is primarily necessary for pursuing non-aeronautical activities. Airport services mean, in line with point 147, services provided to airlines by an airport or any of its subsidiaries, to ensure the handling of aircraft, from landing to take-off, and of passengers and freight, so as to enable airlines to provide air transport services, including the provision of ground handling services and the provision of centralised ground handling infrastructure.

This implies that ‘airport infrastructure’ does not comprise infrastructure for the handling of aircraft, other than for the commercial carriage of passengers, cargo, and/or mail,  and is not excluded from the ERDF support under Article 7 of Regulation 2021/1058.

This does not mean, however, that aerodromes serving for other air operations than the commercial carriage of passengers, goods or mail qualify for support under specific objective 3.2.

As stated in point 1(c)(ii) of Article 3 of Regulation 2021/1058, investments under specific objective 3.2 should contribute to ‘developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility’. In principle, aerodromes other than airports are not used for the movement of people and goods, and their primary function is to enable and promote aviation sports and training. Although these aerodromes may also be used for ‘general aviation’ operations, their usage for mobility purposes (as a mean of transport for business or tourism) is extremely rare, and the proportion of persons using their own private aircraft as a mean of transport – negligible.

Last, it is noted in addition that the intention of the co-legislators is clearly expressed in recital 41 ERDF/CF Regulation in the sense that only target measures in regional airports in line with state aid rules could receive support.

Therefore, it is concluded that general aviation operations play no practical role in enabling the movement of goods and people. Consequently, investments in aerodromes other than airports would not contribute to ‘developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility’ and do not qualify for ERDF support under specific objective 3.2.

# QA00123 - Eligibility of operations under the JTF

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 8(2) and recitals 12 and 15 of the JTF regulation

 *Member State*: PL

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**By when should the MA sign the contract and spend for JTF NGEU resources and certify them to the Commission? Which of these steps is treated by the Commission as the financial/budgetary commitment? What is the margin of manoeuvre as regards regulatory deadlines signing contracts, effectively spending and certifying for NGEU resources according to Regulation 2020/2094 and financial regulation?**

The managing authorities of Upper Silesia and Lower Silesia have serious concerns concerning the feasibility of quicker spending of the NGEU part of the JTF comparing to the MFF part. In view of the lengthy legislative process, participatory process and work to formulate the objectives for the Territorial Just Transition Plans and shape JTF implementation programmes, the timing related to the contracting of funds is a concern related to the effective implementation of the ambitious objectives of the European Green Deal.

Similar other European regions have concerns, as reflected in the discussion at the meeting "Just Transition Platform Meeting — Coal Regions in Transition virtual week and Carbon-intensive regions Seminars" where questions were raised on how the EU will deal with the problem of using funds from the NGEU by the end of 2023, which translates into the need to spend more than half of the funds from the JTF until 2026.

For the bodies implementing the JTF programme as well as the parties interested in post-mining transformation and planning projects there is a huge time pressure and risk of under-utilisation of the JTF co-financed dedicated funds. This is demonstrated by the deadlines for acceptance by the Commission. The JTF programmes, followed by the activation of the administration implementing the programme, who needs time to complete the publication and evaluation formalities for project proposals submitted. Beneficiaries, on the other hand, need time to implement and settle projects relevant to address the challenges arising in the transition process. The regional authorities would like to explore the possibility of rescheduling the period of disbursement of funds from the JTF.

The regional authorities also ask for clarity regarding when they have to spend the NGEU resources which have an impact on JTF programming. The response requires a combined legal interpretation of 4 regulations (JTF, CPR, NGEU and Financial Regulation).

**Answer to question 1:**

According to Article 4(2) of the JTF regulation, commitments in the EU budget for the external assigned revenues (NGEU) need to be made for the years 2021 to 2023. Yet, it does not mean that managing authorities should contract NGEU resources by end 2023. Commitments are done at the level of a programme.

* In programmes not submitted for adoption by end 2021, the 2021 tranche of JTF resources will be reprogrammed. Whereas the MFF part of the allocation will be split in four fourths from 2022 to 2025, NGUE resources will be split in two equal halves over 2022 and 2023. This should also be reflected in each programme’s financial plan.
* If not committed by end 2022, the 2022 tranche of the NGEU benefits from an automatic carry-over to 2023, based on Article 12(4)(c) of the Financial Regulation. This rule does not apply to MFF appropriations.

Payments under NGEU at the programme level should be made by 31 December 2026[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-103). JTF payments to programmes shall be made from open commitments made from NGEU resources until they are exhausted.

In accordance with Article 4(4) of the JTF Regulation, the decommitment rules for the MFF resources, as set out in the CPR (the N+3 rule), also apply to the NGEU budgetary commitments. Therefore, the Commission will decommit NGEU resources which have not been used for pre-financing or for which a payment application has not been submitted by 31 December of the third calendar year following the year of the budget commitments for 2022 and 2023, in accordance with the rules laid down in Articles 105-107 of the CPR.

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**To what extent can the JTF finance projects in areas outside the sub-region covered by Annex D and the TJTP?**

In the case of two Polish Annex D regions, the regional authorities intend to finance projects which are not located in sub-regions concerned by the TJTP.

In the case of Malopolska, it is acknowledged that the area of Western Malopolska will also suffer heavily from the transition in neighbouring Silesia with ca 500 SMEs in value chains and ca 4500 miners from Małopolska working in Silesia. However, this sub-region will probably not be covered by the JTF as two remaining mines in Malopolska are planned to be closed in 2040 and 2049, which exceeds the 2030 perspective determining JTF eligibility. Commissioner Ferreira has asked to find a solution for the workers and SMEs of Malopolska. Silesia informed that they would be ready to support miners from Malopolska who would be negatively affected by the transition in Silesia. Silesian MA could provide JTF support for Malopolska SMEs from their regional programme, if Malopolska JTF proposed allocation is rechannelled to Silesia region.

Konin case is described in details under point 8.

**Answer to question 2:**

According to Article 8(1) of the JTF Regulation, the JTF shall only support activities that are directly linked to its specific objective and which contribute to the implementation of the territorial just transition plans established in accordance with Article 11. Thus, a project in an area outside the sub-region covered by the TJTP could be eligible for JTF funding provided that this project is, on the one hand, clearly linked to the objective of enabling regions and people to address the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union’s 2030 targets for energy and climate and a climate-neutral economy of the Union by 2050, based on the Paris Agreement and, on the other hand, contributes to implementing the TJTP.

Moroever, in accordance with recital (13) and Article 8(2)(k)-(m) all jobseekers, in this specific case eg. miners of Malopolska working in Silesia, who have lost their job in sectors affected by the transition in a region covered by the territorial just transition plan may be eligible to be supported by the JTF even if the workers who were dismissed do not reside in that region.

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Can sustainable tourism projects be supported by the JTF? What does it mean that “sustainable tourism could be part of the support to local economies through stimulating their endogenous growth potential”? What kind of projects can be qualified as sustainable tourism projects?**

Recital 12 of the JTF Regulation refers to sustainable tourism as eligible type of projects. However, Article 8 para. 2 doesn’t include touristic activities in the exhaustive list of JTF supported activities.

**Answer to question 3:**

Support to tourism infrastructure per se is not eligible under Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation. Yet, sustainable tourism projects may be eligible under the JTF if, for instance, they aim to support tourism operators as a way to diversifying or modernising economic activity in the JTF territories and if they are part of other eligible measures under the JTF, e.g. e.g. productive investments in SMEs or support to the creation of new firms in the touristic sector etc.

As per recital 12 of the JTF regulation, such support should stimulate the endogenous growth potential and harness comparative advantages of the eligible territory in line with applicable smart specialisation strategies. The RIS3 should therefore demonstrate that the JTF territory holds significant potential in the tourism sector to sustain its productivity growth.

Tourism investments also need to be sustainable in the long-term, taking into account all the objectives of the European Green Deal. Eligible projects should contribute to a transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral and circular economy, including measures that aim to increase resource efficiency.

All projects shall support activities that are strictly linked to the JTF specific objective and contribute to the implementation of the TJTPs (Article 8(1) JTF).

**Question 4 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Is revitalisation of degraded urban and rural areas, including housing buildings owned previously by coal mines, eligible for JTF support according to the JTF regulation?**

Degraded areas by mining and para-mining activities very often require comprehensive revitalisation — not only replacing of heat sources and improving energy efficiency of buildings, but also the revitalisation of degraded urban areas, including green infrastructure and other outdoor infrastructure. The regional authorities  envisage the regeneration and re-use of brownfield sites in cities and urban areas, which is an important factor in reducing the negative impact of the transition in coal regions. The efficient conversion of brownfield sites can create unique opportunities, but the regeneration of brownfields should be treated horizontally and should apply to the whole area of the sub-region, as the process of devaluing areas did not only concern post-industrial areas, including post-mining areas. As a result of the activities of the mining and energy sector, social, economic and economic degradation extends beyond the industrial site itself.

Residents of depopulated villages displaced by mines, in compensation for lost property, moved to other settlement units in the same municipality or to other municipalities and cities. The activities of the mine therefore affected, on the one hand, the dispersal of habitats and, on the other hand, their concentration. The socio-economic functions performed by municipalities or localities have been lost, leading to a worsening of existing problems, including: an increase in unemployment, a deterioration in the quality of infrastructure. Changing the environment has also adversely affected people’s survival — social problems (social exclusion, addiction, etc.). Examples of municipalities show that one of the consequences of open-cast mining is increasing distances to basic public and cultural services (cultural centres, community centres, schools, health centres), e.g. by breaking the communication system, which has led to a slow concentration of negative social phenomena, in particular unemployment, poverty, crime, low levels of education, and insufficient participation in public and cultural life in the areas affected by the mining and energy sector. This has resulted in a reduction in the participation of the population in the social life of the region. Often, negative social phenomena are accumulating in localities affected by the mining and energy sector. In addition, a significant proportion of the inhabitants of municipalities affected by the mining and energy sector have been or are employed in the mining industry or in associated services supporting the extractive industry. Once the mine and power plant have come to an end, the inhabitants of such areas (often defined as regeneration areas in regeneration programmes) have to find themselves in a new reality and reinvigorate local entrepreneurship.

Finding a new application for urban and rural degraded areas can unleash business opportunities, create economic diversification and create new jobs that will underpin the success of a just transition in coal regions. In the opinion of the region, these actions fall within the scope of the Regulation, on the one hand, in Article 8 para. Article 2(i) and Article 8, paragraph 2. 2 (o).

As part of the framework developed by the Expert Group on Fair Transformation (15 May 2020) within the framework of the Renewable Industry Development Team for Energy Sources and Benefits for the Polish Economy under the Minister for Climate (Order of the Minister for Climate of 2.04.2020, item 2) pointed out that the challenge is the intensive regeneration of urban structures, which require intensive regeneration processes. The challenge and objective of just transition actions should be to promote and implement the circular economy in regeneration processes. The transition to a circular economy offers an opportunity to change approaches to space management and to create openness to eco-innovation in regenerated neighbourhoods, which are often the most valuable and valuable areas for the economy and the local community. Regenerated areas can not only be “healthy” per se through circular projects, but at the same time they can become a “motor” of circular changes in the structure of the whole city or rural area, from which a wider circular change will start. Such an approach creates great opportunities to achieve sustainability and effectiveness of regeneration processes. Using circular solutions, we have the chance to shape self-sufficient and regenerative areas. The process of assigning new functions to them using innovative and environmentally friendly methods, often seen as “revolutionary”, should be carried out with the strong involvement of all local actors, thus increasing the sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of regeneration processes.

**Answer to question 4:**

The JTF can only support activities that are directly linked to its specific objective as set out in Article 2 of the JTF Regulation. Such activities should also contribute to the implementation of the TJTP.

The general revitalization of urban and rural areas is therefore not eligible for JTF support, except for investments in regeneration and decontamination of brownfield sites (abandoned land of former mines or power plants) and land restoration, in line with Article 8(2)(i) of the JTF Regulation.

Revitalisation of post-mining or post-industrial sites should be implemented in a comprehensive manner, with accompanying support to economic diversification, reskilling/upskilling of affected workers and/or environmental rehabilitation. Such investments can also include, where necessary, green infrastructure and repurposing projects.

From a policy perspective of the Commission services, the focus should be on economic transition. Investments in purely residential housing (construction, reconstruction) should therefore not receive any support under the JTF.

Nevertheless, in line with recital 12 and Article 8(2)(e) of the JTF Regulation, the JTF investments, which contribute to reducing energy poverty, principally through energy efficiency improvements of housing stock, are eligible provided that they contribute to the achievement of the JTF specific objective and contribute to the implementation of the TJTPs.

The general regeneration of degraded urban and rural areas can be supported through the ERDF. The managing authority should therefore explore possible synergies between investments implemented in the JTF territory under the different funds.

**Question 5 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**What kind of types of projects are included in the definition of *sustainable local mobility, decarbonisation the local transport sector and its infrastructure* according to the JTF Regulation? Is railway rolling stock and the modernization of railway lines included in this definition?**

**Answer to question 5:**

In accordance with Article 8(2)(f) of the JTF Regulation, the JTF can support investments in smart and sustainable local mobility, including decarbonisation of the local transport sector and its infrastructure. Such investments should also contribute to addressing the impacts of the transition in the eligible territory and be justified in the TJTP. From a policy perspective, they should therefore not aim to improve the general transport mobility.

Examples of investments may include public transport infrastructure, rolling stock, interchange stations, including park&ride or bike&ride parks and intelligent transportation systems that would improve population access to jobs.

From a policy perspective of the Commission services, developing sustainable local mobility under the JTF also needs an integrated approach. Thus, it is important to underpin such investments by a sustainable and multimodal urban/local mobility plan (SUMP). Linking support for urban mobility operations to the existence of a SUMP can be an effective mechanism for ensuring compliance with the requirements of Article 73 CPR in the selection of operations. The Commission could observe that it considers the existence of a sound strategic framework (such as a SUMP) key for selecting operations which ”present the best relationship between the amount of support, the activities undertaken and the achievement of objectives”.

The JTF regulation does not exclude the possibility of support to the rail rolling stock or to the modernisation of railways. However, due to their scope and objectives, railway investments may not fall into the definition of ‘local’ mobility’ (except for metro or ground level commuter trains) and would therefore not qualify for JTF support. The Commission will be evaluating the concrete measures in the context of the submitted TJTPs.

Projects improving the railway connectivity of just transition regions might still be eligible by pillar 2 even if implemented in other regions if such projects benefit the JTF territory and are justified in the TJTPs.

**Question 6 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**To which extent is the preparation of investments sites eligible for JTF financing according to the JTF Regulation?**

Support for the preparation of investment sites is particularly important in the case of municipalities for which until now taxes and levies on the presence of coal-fired mines and coal-fired power plants have been a key source of revenue for the budgets. As a result of the closure of coalmines, these municipalities are at risk of a significant deterioration in their financial situation, which in the short term will lead to a deterioration in the quality of life of the inhabitants (also due to the loss of existing employment by a large part of the population). It is therefore extremely important to support this type of entity in attracting new investors who, on the one hand, create jobs for redundant miners and energy workers and, on the other hand, give the municipality itself a development opportunity (based on its development in completely new directions than hitherto). Konin subregion plans to qualify for support post-industrial areas, including post-mining and post-power plants areas. Support will also be given to the brownfield sites of other companies, in particular those linked to the mining and energy sector. A characteristic of coal regions is the location of industrial enterprises from other industries as well, so it should not be limited to supporting land after former mines or power plants. Article 8 para. 2 (i) of the JTF Regulation refers, inter alia, to the assignment of new functions, so that under this type of operation Konin foresee that one of the possible directions of support for brownfield sites, including mines, will be to develop them through the creation of investment sites. The guidelines of 30 September 2021 on the allocation of projects to the 3 pillars of MST, prepared by JASPERS experts, indicate that the pillar in the area of spatial transformation aims to make better use and repurposing of available brownfield sites, in particular by making them available to job-creating investors. The recommendations drawn up by the Expert Group on Just Transformation point to the need to create investment sites by supporting and developing brownfield sites and post-industrial sites of strategic importance for coal regions’ municipalities. There is a need for differentiated use of brownfield sites in terms of the economic re-use of brownfield sites by existing or new owners and by Special Economic Zones.

**Answer to question 6:**

The preparation of investment sites may be eligible under the JTF, for instance, as part of a broader investment in regeneration and decontamination of brownfield sites, in line with Article 8(2)(i) of the JTF Regulation (‘repurposing projects’). Such investments should be directly linked to the JTF specific objective, need to contribute to alleviating the impact of the transition in the JTF territory and contribute to implementing the TJTP.

The necessity of such investments should stem from the development needs to address the transition challenges, as specified in the TJTP. The Commission urges the managing authority to put in place all necessary arrangements at the programme level to ensure that the financed operation reflects the actual demand for investment sites and that investment sites are effectively put into use (i.e. they are filled up with firms). To this end, the coordination with other eligible operations under the JTF will be necessary, e.g. with support to the creation of new firms etc.

The Commission will be evaluating the concrete measures in the context of the submitted TJTP.

**Question 7 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Can JTF finance the infrastructure of vocational and technical schools, which, despite the status of schools, they are de facto educational training centres in professions wanted by employers? Can Lower Silesian MA treat this infrastructure, as an education infrastructure in the meaning of JTF Regulation?**

The financing of the infrastructure of vocational and technical schools which,  despite their status as schools, they are de facto training centres for education  in occupations sought by employers. In relation to identified needs in the TJTP for the development of new professions for a decarbonised economy, there is a need for adaptation of school and lab infrastructure for acquisition practical professional skills. So the regional authorities intend to treat this infrastructure, as an infrastructure for the education within the meaning of JTF Regulation.

**Answer to question 7:**

In line with Article 8(2)(o) of the JTF Regulation, investments in educational infrastructure for the purposes of training centres are eligible provided that they are duly justified in the TJTP and directly linked to the specific objective of the JTF. Thus, such investments should address the negative consequences of the transition process, e.g. by being used in upskilling/reskilling programs for former miners.

In this context and under the conditions set out above, the activity proposed by Poland may be eligible. Yet, the Commission will evaluate the concrete measure in the context of the relevant TJTP.

**Question 8 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**To which extent is the restoring and increasing water resources in hydrologically degraded areas eligible under the JTF regulation?**

Konin sub-region wants to reconstruct and increase water resources of areas degraded in terms of hydrology (including by creating water reservoirs in post-mining pits). Type of operation: restoring and increasing water resources in hydrologically degraded WW (‘Western Wielkopolska’) areas (including through the creation of water reservoirs in mine excavations) by, inter alia:

* investments in water facilities and hydrotechnical infrastructure;
* restoration of the hydrographic network and restoration of transformed watercourses;
* development of micro- and small-scale retention;
* conservation and restoration of natural habitats, including wetlands;
* development of green-blue infrastructure, removal of impermeable surfaces, development of rainwater management systems and rainwater drainage, protection of existing parks and rocks and tree woodlands.

In order to restore and enhance water resources, Konin wants to finance by the JTF action in areas outside the sub-region covered by Annex D and the TJTP.

Recital 12 of the JTF Regulation states that restoration projects should be able to support the restoration of sites and the development of green infrastructure and water management. The brownfield sites referred to in the Regulation should not be considered solely in the context of conversion to morphology of the site (surface/noise) or soil contamination. In the case of lignite mining, it is also important to define the extent of hydrologically brownfield sites. Open-cast coal mining in East Wielkopolska has led to nearly half of the subregion being in a zone of accumulation of water deficit phenomena, the extent of which is defined as hydrologically degraded land. In the light of the above, Konin cannot agree with the Commission’s proposed amendment to: ‘reconstructing and increasing WW’s water resources by creating water reservoirs in mine excavations’ — the project of the Wody Polskie (Polish national water manager) covers a wider range of actions aimed at restoring normal water relations in the subregion.

Hydrotechnical infrastructure and the establishment of one of the TJTP of WW flagship projects, i.e. PGW Wody Polskie project “Increase of retention and restoration of water resources of post-mining areas in Eastern Wielkopolska region”.

The Eastern Wielkopolska region, which has been under severe anthropogenic pressure for decades, taking into account climate change, is at risk of water stress like any other region in Poland. The long-term operation of open-cast lignite mines, which has led to long-term reductions in groundwater levels, has played a major role in this regard, with the result that many water bodies and wetlands in the area have dried or drastically reduced their surface area, and many watercourses have changed their nature completely and have not experienced natural water flows for a long time.

This situation should be addressed by restoring the hydrographic network by carrying out measures to increase the water retention potential and restoring natural levels of surface water and groundwater.

The response to problems relating to the water resources of Eastern Wielkopolskie is the project entitled *Increasing retention and restoring post-mining sites in Eastern Wielkopolska*. The implementation of the project will consist of more than 20 tasks whose activities are aimed at slowing down and halting water run-off from river basins through construction or reconstruction:

* stability thresholds in the form of bulls on natural watercourses and canals;
* hydrotechnical structures located on lake outflows that will allow the restoration of historical water levels in and around lakes;
* pipelines and transfers with a pumping station system, which feed water from rivers with greater water resources to post-mining excavations and watercourses, which are within the reach of the colonies of depression associated with functioning and closed lignite open-cast mines.

It is also important to regenerate anthropogenically transformed watercourses, which currently act as canals that discharge mine water.

The planned dam structures aimed at restoring the water resources of, inter alia, lakes by stabilising the water mirror will make it possible to halt uncontrolled run-off and lower water levels in the lakes and to generate water retention in the watercourses. In order to interfere with the environment as little as possible, most dams are planned to be made of natural materials, such as trigger thresholds as rock prisms in the form of bulls, which will also allow the migration of aquatic organisms. River/watercourses in the area of the structures will be strengthened by a stone pitch or rock bed with a tip in the form of a wooden palliade. Works are planned during construction without the need to carry out temporary channels.

In order to maintain river basins with water, it is planned to build transfer pipelines — the construction of a transit transfer of water, e.g. from the river Warta, in order to improve the general hydrological conditions in the catchment areas of the river Teleszyna, Warcica, Bishopna Strugi or Noteci. In most cases, the construction of pipelines and associated pumping stations will use post-mining infrastructure (railway embankments, roads, piercks, ditches and drainage ducts) so as not to interfere with areas of high natural value.

These activities will ensure that the available surface water will be directed to the excavations of open-cast lignite mines in order to refill them more quickly and restore lost groundwater resources in their area. In the absence of additional water supply for flooded excavations and nearby watercourses, with an exceptionally unfavourable land configuration (location in a watershed zone) and with the lowest rainfall in Poland, it will take 30-40 years to fill the excavation voids and restore natural surface and groundwater levels in the area concerned. The implementation of the above-mentioned investments will make it possible to achieve the objectives set, with a view to fully restoring water relations in the area, within 5-6 years of the end of the last one.

In view of the above, the project ‘ Increasing retention and rebuilding post-mining sites in Eastern Wielkopolska’s area is based on the use/construction of hydrotechnical infrastructure, without which it is not possible to rebuild eastern Wielkopolska’s water resources, it is justified that ‘investments in water equipment and hydrotechnical infrastructure’ are recognised by the Commission and the funds allocated for their implementation are eligible.

The proposed measures will improve the water management system in Poland, facilitate access to water, reduce the negative effects of droughts, improve and maintain the good status/potential of waters and ecosystems dependent on waters and improve the safety of water management. They will also allow the restoration of environmentally valuable wetland habitats, the number of which has been reduced by half in the region over the last 50 years.

Without the support of EU funds, the implementation of such a large and important project for Poland will be a long-lasting process and may further exacerbate the already reduced water deficit.

Failure to undertake the project will lead to the continuation of the lack of flows in the East Wielkopolska rivers and the gradual reduction of water levels in lakes and other water bodies, their scrubbing and run-off, and changes in the habitat communities of plants surrounding waters and watercourses.

The provisions of the draft Partnership Agreement provides for the necessary measures under PO 2 in the field of water equipment and hydrotechnical infrastructure to reduce the impact of floods and droughts, if natural ecosystem mechanisms are insufficient and the implementation of these measures does not increase the risk in emergency situations.

In addition, a comment on the draft PA concerning hydrotechnical equipment in the framework of inland waterway transport and Article 4.7 of the Water Framework Directive was submitted to the Commission. The planned investments will not be linked to activities that could worsen the ecological status of water bodies. Thanks to the tasks planned by the RBMP Wody Polskie, the morphological continuity of many rivers, which have remained dry for decades, will be restored, many of the watercourses that are now being calibrated will be restored and, through faster flooding of opencast mines and the construction of thresholds to stabilise the discharges from lakes, it will be possible to achieve good ecological status for many lakes currently degraded.

Investments outside the Eastern Wielkopolskie region and the establishment of one of the TJTP of  WW flagship projects, i.e. the PGW Wody Polskie project “Increase of retention and restoration of water resources of post-mining areas in Eastern Wielkopolska region”

The provision in the TJTP ‘In order to restore and increase water resources in the WW may take action in areas outside the sub-region’ is linked to the planned project of the RBMP Wody Polskie ‘ Increase of retention and restoration of water resources of post-mining areas in Eastern Wielkopolskie’. The implementation of the investment consists of more than 20 tasks spread over a period of 6 years. These tasks are complementary through integral measures to increase retention in the Eastern Wielkopolska region. The hydrographic network of the site can be restored thanks to the interaction of many elements of the various tasks, which are complementary, and the implementation of the whole component will affect the water resources of both surface and underground districts in the area of direct and indirect mining impact.

The project is located in Wielkopolska East, but the different activities cover and will have an impact on the wider territorial scope. In addition to the municipalities located in East Wielkopolskie, the investments are planned to be carried out in the following municipalities: Wittokowo, Trimeszno, Lake Great, Mogilno, Dąbrowa, Strzelno, Warta. In view of the fact that some of these municipalities are located outside the boundaries of the Regional Water Management Board in Poznań, it is planned that the Regional Water Management Board in Bydgoszcz participates in the implementation of the project in order to maximise the expected results.

In view of the location of the open-cast mines and watercourses necessary to carry out the tasks, in areas outside the city of Konin, the Konin district, the districts of Kolski, Turkey and Słupecki, it is necessary to allow the transfer of water to reservoirs and rivers located in the Konin subregion, also outside Wielkopolska East. The hydrographic network does not follow administrative boundaries, but is dependent on the terrain and geological structure of the substrate, and it is therefore difficult to carry out the project to the boundaries of administrative units.

In addition, Minister Tadeusz Kościński informed about the possibility of carrying out certain investments outside Wielkopolska East by letter of 23 February 2021. He stressed that, in principle, the JTF could carry out activities in the areas defined in the TJTP, but that projects could be carried out in areas of neighbouring provinces not eligible for JTF support — to this end, it is essential that the scope of the activities proposed for implementation in such an area is derived from the TJTP and that the objectives of the TJTP in question are implemented.

**Answer to question 8:**

Pursuant to Article 8 of the JTF Regulation, water management as such is not eligible under the JTF. It may be supported only as part of land restoration projects (Article 8(2)(i) of the JTF Regulation), as referred also by  recital (12) of the JTF regulation.  This means that the relevant water projects should focus on soil restoration.

The Commission services will be evaluating the concrete measures in the context of the submitted TJTP.

**Question 9 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**To which extent is economic and investment promotion eligible for JTF financing?**

There is the need for diversification, dynamism of development and improvement of productivity in coal regions. A broad approach to the development of entrepreneurship will require the creation of investment incentives for people leaving the mining and conventional energy sectors, companies in the mining industry to set up a business. However, it will be important to create investment incentives for external investors from modern industries and services in coal regions — without proper economic promotion, a comprehensive approach to the development and diversification of existing economic sectors will not be possible. In addition, the OECD report (Regions in Industrial Transition, Polices for people and places) points out that industrial transformation requires support for knowledge sharing between local leaders and enable new players to enter existing markets and/or industries. The relevant tool includes the promotion of internal events (e.g. local networking) or external events (e.g. representation of the region, regional entrepreneurs at fairs) and incentives for R&D cooperation. Improving and supporting the business environment should include promotion, including through media campaigns or direct interactions.

**Answer to question 9:**

Projects related to economic and investment promotion are not eligible accordingArticle 8(2) of the JTF Regulation. Such support may however be provided through the ERDF. Therefore, the managing authority could explore possible synergies between investments implemented in the JTF territory under the different funds and plan them in a coordinated manner.

**Question 10 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**To which extent are projects for the preservation of cultural identity and heritage, including industrial heritage, aimed at social activation, eligible for JTF financing?**

The JTF Regulation indicates in recital (12) that the list of investments should include investments that support local economies by stimulating their endogenous growth potential in line with relevant smart specialisation strategies, including sustainable tourism where appropriate. In the Regional Innovation Strategy for Wielkopolskie 2030 (RIS 2030), the analyses made it possible to identify the potential of the Konin subregion to become an area linked to sub-regional specialisations. In addition to Wielkopolskie regional specialisations, the following sub-regional smart specialisations have been identified in order to reduce population outflows from the Konin subregion:

* RES and modern hydrogen technologies
* Tourism
* Logistics
* Producing healthy food

In addition, recital (15) of the JTF Regulation indicates the need to preserve the identity of mining communities and to ensure the continuity of past and future communities. This entails paying particular attention to their tangible and intangible mining heritage, including culture.

In addition, in the region’s opinion, this action is in line with Article 8 paragraph. JTF Regulation, point (o) other activities in the areas of education and social inclusion.

These activities are to be carried out by communes or other entities as part of grassroots initiatives for the preservation of cultural identity or cultural heritage (where industrial heritage will be specifically favoured) aimed at social activation of the inhabitants of coal regions. It should also be borne in mind that, as a result of people leaving the mining industry, they are in fact changing, developed over many years of work in the mine, their lifestyles (three shift work, commuting to mines/power plants, etc.). As a result of the change (retiring or changing jobs), there is a risk of social exclusion and the emergence of pathologies. In order to counter this, it may be important to provide different ways of spending leisure activities, including by increasing access to culture for residents. Of course, this element can be extended to include job creation, in which case this type of operation will also fit into Article 8 paragraph. JTF Regulation, paragraph 1) job-search assistance to jobseekers.

**Answer to question 10:**

Cultural projects are not eligible under Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation. However, recital 15 of the JTF Regulation underlines the need to preserve the identity of mining communities during the implementation of the JTF and to ensure the continuity of past and future communities. This involves paying special attention to their tangible and non-tangible mining heritage, including their culture, while carrying out eligible investment under Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation (e.g. restoration of post-mining or post-industrial assets or sustainable tourism - see reply to question 3).

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-104) Article 3.9 of Council Regulation (EU) 2020/2094 of 14 December 2020 establishing a European Union Recovery Instrument to support the recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis

# QA00124 - Verification of applicants for support under ERDF from the perspective of an undertaking in difficulty

 *Relevant Articles*:

Art. 7(d) of the ERDF/CF regulation

Art. 63(1) of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

***Application of the Article 7(1)(d) of ERDF and CF - Based on what conditions and in which cases should the applicants be verified from the perspective of an undertaking in difficulty (special case of self-governing units)?***

1. In cases where territorial self-governing units (municipalities or regions) carry out both economic and non-economic activity and the support is intended only to the non-economic activity;
2. In cases where the economic activity of the applicant covers only up to 20% of its activities as defined in the Commission Notice on the notion of State aid;
3. In cases where the region or municipality is an eligible applicant but the grant goes to an organization established by the region or municipality, for example reconstruction of kindergarten, primary or secondary school;
4. In cases of the de-minimis aid;
5. In cases where a public entity (municipality or a region) owns 100% share in a company that is the beneficiary of the intended support:
6. Example: The aid applicant is a transport company established by the municipality that has a 100% share in the company. Is it necessary to view such an applicant and the relevant municipality and its other commercial entities as one entity (one undertaking), or can the interconnection be ruled out precisely through the link with a public entity (the municipality) and the applicant would be verified separately.

***Should only applicants whose projects are subject to State aid rules be verified or all applicants who are considered an "undertaking" within the meaning of the European law?***

**Answer:**

**Questions 1 - 3:**

According to Article 7(1)(d) of Regulation No 2021/1058 (ERDF/CF Regulation) the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund do not support undertakings in difficulty. For the purposes of application of this exclusion in scope, ERDF/CF Regulation refers to the definition set out in Article 2(18) of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), an act of EU State aid law.

Article 7(1)(d) ERDF/CF:

* applies to (potential) beneficiaries that carry out economic or both economic and non-economic activities, independently of the presence of State aid in the ERDF or CF support;
* does not apply to (potential) beneficiaries that carry out exclusively non-economic activities. N.B. Under EU State aid law, including the GBER, beneficiaries carrying out only non-economic activities are not considered as undertakings. Therefore, the GBER definition of undertakings in difficulty applies only in relation to beneficiaries that act as undertakings.

The financial situation of the (potential) beneficiary that carries out economic or both economic and non-economic activities, even if the economic activity is purely ancillary to the main non economic activity, needs to be verified against the occurence of one of the circumstances defined in point (18) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

**Question 4:** The support for undertakings in difficulty granted in accordance with one of the Commission *de minimis* regulations (but regulation n° 360/2012 of 25 April 2012 on de minimis aid granted to undertakings providing services of general economic interest[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-106)) does not fall under the exclusion in scope of the ERDF/CF Regulation.

**Question 5:** The financial situation of (potential) beneficiary of ERDF/CF is verified against the GBER definition of ‘undertaking in difficulty’, set out in Article 2(18) GBER, listing the occurrences when an undertaking is regarded in difficulty. Any beneficiary of ERDF/CF should fulfil the GBER criteria regarding not being in financial difficulty.

The GBER provisions are interpreted in the lignt of the general principles of State aid law. Two main principles need to be outlined.

First, the classification of a particular entity as an undertaking depends entirely on the nature of its activities and is not dependent on its status under national law or form of ownership. Hence, all criteria of the definition of undertaking in difficulty set out in Article 2(18) of the GBER are in principle applicable to public law bodies, as long as they carry out an economic activity, however only for their economic activity. The fulfilment of the criteria should be assessed based on separate financial accounts for the economic activities that the entity carries out, setting aside non-economic activities.

Second, in accordance with case law, an undertaking is defined as a single economic entity having a common source of control. Therefore, as long as the group acts as a single economic unit, it shall be considered as one undertaking and the economic situation of all the legal persons part of the group shall be considered when granting aid under the GBER. Any of the economic units which will be taking part in an an operation as beneficiaries of the aid should fulfil the GBER criteria regarding not being in economic difficulty. In practice, if the beneficiary is not a 'limited liability company', as described in Article 2 (18) (a), nor 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company', as described in Article 2 (18) (b), the circumstances described in points (a) and (b) would not be relevant for the assessment. In cases where no incorporation has taken place and no separate accounting is done, it is not possible to verify whether aid is not granted to a company in difficulty.  However, in such a scenario, it would seem hard to imagine that the conditions could actually be met to be considered a company in difficulty (e.g. loss of capital requirement, conditions for national insolvency procedures, etc.)

In the example described by the Czech authorities, it may be necessary to consider if the applicant and the controlling municipality (only with regard to its economic activity(ies)) as well as other depending economic entities act as one undertaking.

**On the last question:** The financial situation of all applicants/potential beneficiaries, qualifying as ‘undertaking’, as clarified by the constant case law, should be assessed against the criteria laid down in Article 2(18) GBER. As long as they act as undertakings, public finacing of their activity(ies) is subject to State aid rules. cf. answer to Questions 1-3.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-107) Because this Regulation does not apply to undertakings in difficulty within the meaning of the Community guidelines on State aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty.

# QA00126 - Technical Assistance financed by the Just Transition Fund

 *Relevant Article*:

Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation

Article 112 of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In accordance with the national indications, technical assistance financed from a separate fund, i.e. JTF, will be designed under the new priority axis related to this scope in the Regional Programme for Wielkopolska region.  **In the view of building an appropriate administrative potential on the level of the subregion (as close to the inhabitants as possible), is it possible to increase the level of co-financing for projects implemented/financed under this Priority, e.g. up to 85%?**

**Answer:**

In line with Article 112(1) CPR, the co-financing rate should be set by the decision approving a programme **at the level of each priority**. The applicable rates are indicated in Art. 112(3) of the CPR.

This means that **the co-financing rate can be modulated within the priority** **- at the level of individual operations** provided that the maximum Union contribution for the priority is not exceeded. In this respect, the level of co-financing for individual projects financed under the TA priority supported by the JTF may reach 100%.

# QA00127 - Content of table 11A and calculation of payment claims, including Technical assistance under Article 36(5) (flat rate)

 *Relevant Article*: Article 36 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 CPR

 *Member State*: SE

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**1.How should table 11A be filled in and the co-financing calculated when making use of the 6% flat rate to calculate the amount of technical assistance?**

MS questions the inclusion of TA in the national share in table 11A. It makes the tables inaccurate when the co-financing rate for TA is not the same as that for the SO to which it gets linked in table 11A.  MS has chosen a co-financing ratio of 70/30 for most of its programme, with two exceptions where the co-financing ratio is 60/40 and 20/80 respectively due to additional national funding. For TA the co-financing ratio has been set to 45/55. When the numbers are entered into table 11A with National TA included, the table does not provide the actual co-financing ratio for the SO without TA. MS would like the national share to be without TA and that the co-financing rate per SO is calculated by dividing EMFAF without TA / (EMFAF without TA +national share without TA).This because otherwise the MS has to process programme amendments every time it would like to change the way the national amount of TA is distributed.

**2. How will the amount for reimbursement of the payment claims be calculated?**

**Answer:**

**To question 1:**

Article 40 EMFAF provides that the maximum co-financing rate per specific objective should be 70% (with the exception of support under Art 14(1)).

Article 36(5) CPR provides that the amount of the Fund allocated to technical assistance is identified as part of the financial allocation of each specific objective, and does not take the form of a separate priority, also for the EMFAF. Table 11A of a programme template for EMFAF programmes choosing reimbursement of TA through a flat rate allows to verify if the maximum allowed co-financing rate per specific objective is not exceeded (the amount of Union contribution in relation to the total per specific objective cannot be higher than maximum co-financing rate). National public contribution in Table 11A includes, but does not specify the amount for technical assistance within each SO.

The co-financing rate applied at the level of operations may differ from the co-financing rate for the specific objective/priority. This flexibility existing for all operations should not trigger a programme amendment provided that the limits at the level of each priority set out in Article 93(3)-(5) CPR are complied with. It is noted specifically that given the nature of the technical assistance flat rate,  CPR provides that amounts reimbursed pursuant to Article 36(5) CPR shall not taken into account for the purposes of calculating the ceiling of Article 93(5) CPR.

Where a Member State decides to use the flat-rate approach for technical assistance for 2021-2027, the relevant flat-rate percentage for the fund concerned provided in Article 36(5)(b) CPR (6% for EMFAF) will be applied automatically to each payment application submitted to the Commission. There will be no check of the underlying costs of the amounts reimbursed based on the flat rate at EU level.

Taking into account that:

* flat rate technical assistance will be calculated irrespective of the actual incurred expenditure in technical assistance operations;
* EU contribution for the specific objective (including flat rate technical assistance) will not exceed the ceilings provided for in the CPR and the co-financing rate defined in the Commission decision based on table 11A irrespective of the co-financing rate of technical assistance operations;

changes in a co-financing rate of operations within a specific objective should not require a programme amendment.

**To question 2:**

The amount of flat rate technical assistance in column D will be calculated by applying a 6% flat rate in relation to the expenditure in column E of a payment application. Expenditure related to technical assistance operations should not be declared separately in payment applications.

The reimbursements of the Union contribution will be done by applying the co- financing rate of the priority to the total amount of public contribution i.e. the sum of amounts included in column E and in column D of Annex XXIII  in line with the programme.

# QA00128 - JTF question on waste recovery and lithium

 *Relevant Article*: Article 8 of JTF regulation

 *Member State*: CZ

**Question on waste recovery:**

There are several issues regarding waste recovery and its eligibility:

1. 8(2)(j) allows investments in enhancing the circular economy, including through waste prevention, reduction, resource efficiency, reuse, repair and recycling. The list seems non-exhaustive. Is it possible to support also energy recovery, which is not explicitly mentioned?
2. Thermal depolymerization of plastics could play an essential role in waste management and the chemical industry's greening. It is chemical recycling. Could we consider this technology as eligible in the JTF? The same question is also relevant for gasification.
3. We would like to clarify compliance of energy recovery with article 17 of regulation 2020/852. This article excludes activities leading to a significant increase in the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, with the exception of the incineration of non-recyclable hazardous waste. From our point of view, it excludes activities falling under Annex I of directive 2008/98/EC. Energy recovery falls under Annex II. Therefore we do not see any conflict with article 17 in the case of energy recovery. Could you confirm this interpretation?

**Answer:**

1. As specifically mentioned in paragraph 2 of Article 8 of the JTF regulation, the list of investments eligible for JTF support under this article is exhaustive. Point (j) of Article 8 specifies the investment as “investments in enhancing the circular economy, including through waste prevention, reduction, resource efficiency, reuse, repair and recycling”. In the Commission view, energy recovery from waste, where waste is used as a fuel, is not in line with the policy objectives of the circular economy, where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-111). This view is reinforced by Recital 12 of the JTF Regulation, which specifically explains that waste incineration belongs to the lower part of the waste hierarchy and should therefore not be supported by the JTF. The Commission recalls that certain measures at the bottom of the waste hierarchy are also excluded from support from the ERDF and CF.
2. From the question it is not clear what such thermal depolymerisation of plastics or gasification would mean, and whether they could be considered as recycling. The full details of the operations and their output would need to be provided. The Commission will evaluate the concrete measures in the context of the submitted TJTP.
3. The EU Taxonomy is a classification of financial activities in relation to their effect on climate and environment. The Taxonomy Regulation does not contradict, modify, restrict or extend the requirements under the JTF Regulation.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-112) COM(2015) 614 final

**Question on lithium:**

The CZ TJTP proposes in two coal regions (Ústí and Karlovy Vary) “Supporting the creation of a value chain for the use of lithium and the production of battery cells for the development of an emission-free economy in the Czech Republic”. It would include development of a new industry - lithium mining. The lithium mining is seen as part of the creation chain and it would include an investment in the deployment of technology as well as in systems and infrastructures for affordable clean energy, including energy storage technologies [art. 8(2)(d) JTF regulation]. The CZ authorities would like to support preparatory works, necessary infrastructure, etc., from the JTF. Do these investments fall under the scope of support of the JTF? State aid clearance and DNSH check will be performed in the following steps after eligibility confirmation.

**Answer:**

Creation of a value chain for the use of lithium and the production of battery cells for the development of an emission-free economy could be considered under the scope of the JTF and the Commission will be evaluating the concrete measures in the context of the submitted TJTP.

# QA00129 - JTF eligibility of intervention (bio mass terminals)

 *Relevant Article*: Article 8(2)(d) of the JTF

 *Member State*: FI

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Finland replaces the peat as energy source mainly by wood chips. Wood chips needs different logistical solutions and bio energy terminals are necessary. These terminals that are needed are basically open sites (2-5 hectares) covered with asphalt, close to the main roads, surrounded by fence and with access control. Weighbridge is commonly needed for measuring the cargo.

The purpose of the terminal is to improve the reliability of wood chip deliveries, e.g. during the difficult transport seasons (spring or autumn when snow is falling or frost is melting in forest roads and heavy vehicles can not operate) and during severe frost periods, as well as improving the quality of fuels and improving the logistics of transport and chipping. In addition, different energy sources, such as wood chip, crushing of recycled wood, logging residues and stump crush can be mixed in the terminal area. Fuel loads mixed in the terminal area take better account of the power needs of heating plants at different times of the year. An entrepreneur would be operating in these terminal areas.

The power plants are located in areas where there is usually no space for such terminals and as they are purchasing the fuel (=wood chips) as a service the power plants are not themselves interested in building such terminals.

Finland imports a significant amount of wood chips from Russia. The current situation with sanctions towards Russia is prevailing for undetermined period, the availability of this supply is becoming unreliable and possibly will cease in foreseeable future. Therefore, due to the security of supply reasons the importance of these bio energy terminals is growing significantly. The need for these terminals is identified in the TJTPs.

Are such bio energy terminals eligible for support from JTF/TJTP?

**Answer:**

Article 8(2) point (d) of the JTF Regulation allows for investments in the deployment of technology as well as in systems and infrastructures for affordable clean energy, including energy storage technologies and in greenhouse gas emission reduction. At the same time, point (e) of that provision allows for support to investments in renewable energy in accordance with the Renewable Energy Directive.[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-114) While the latter does not provide a definition of such infrastructure, it refers to reducing costs that “have a material impact on the cost of renewable energy projects and on their competitiveness” (see e.g. its Recital 13 and Article 3). Support to bio energy terminals such as described in the question could in principle be considered eligible in that context.

However, it needs to be demonstrated that these investments are linked to the JTF specific objective, as laid down in Article 2 of the JTF Regulation, and that they contribute to the implementation of the territorial just transition plan (TJTP). They need to be justified by their contribution to addressing the impacts of the transition and their link to the transition challenges identified in the TJTP.

Please note however that the Commission services will be evaluating the concrete measure in the context of the submitted TJTP.

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-115) Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources

# QA00130 - Implementation of umbrella projects under CLLD

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 33, 71, 73, 74 of the CPR; Article 25 Interreg Regulation

 *Member State*: PL

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Is** **financial support to third parties (umbrella projects) allowed? In particular, can Local Action Groups implement umbrella projects in the 2021-27 period? Under what conditions? Should competitive or non-competitive mode apply to such umbrella projects? Should Article 33.3(d) of the CPR regarding final verification of eligibility by the MA also apply in case of umbrella projects?**

Several Polish regions consider programming CLLD in their regional programmes in the 2021-27 period. Some of them implemented umbrella projects in 2014-20 period, which are considered as simplification for both the LAG and the MA. Umbrella schemes are mainly supporting small projects where the administrative burden is perceived as disproportionately high. In particular, there is interest to use the umbrella projects for ESF+. In a typical application of such scheme the LAG is the beneficiary of the grant, it signs the grant agreement with the MA and takes the financial responsibility. In the next step the LAG grants support to different categories of final recipients, such as for example natural persons, NGOs, entrepreneurs, public bodies. Umbrella projects are selected in a competitive mode and have to support the local development strategies that were previously selected for support from the funds.

The same procedure as used in 2014-20 would be applied in 2021-27. Does Article 33(3) and (5) CPR provide sufficient justification to allow the implementation of umbrella schemes by LAGs?

**Answer:**

‘Umbrella projects’ or “cascading operations” have never been defined in the regulations. In the past, these terms commonly referred to operations which consist of re-granting support to recipients by the beneficiary or selecting projects within an operation, however they may refer to different implementing structures in different MSs or regions.

It is thus important to clarify at first in which cases the regulations allow that a beneficiary may select operations or grant support to recipients or select projects within an operation without being appointed as an intermediate body.

In accordance with Article 73 CPR, it is the managing authority that is responsible for the selection of operations except in a case envisaged in Article 33(3) CPR where selection of operations has been defined as an exclusive task of the local action group (LAG).

Article 71(3) CPR allows the managing authority to delegate, in written, certain tasks, to one or more intermediate bodies and one of tasks that can be delegated relates to the selection of operations. It should be noted that in cases where the managing authority or intermediate body or a local action group is also the beneficiary, the tasks related to initiating or implementing an operation should be separated from the responsibilities of selection of operations in line with Article 71(4) CPR (and Article 74(3) CPR and Article 33(5) CPR).

The tasks conferred on beneficiaries by the managing authority (or by the intermediate body) should not circumvent the responsibilities reserved by the CPR for the managing authority or other programme authorities.

CPR and funds-specific Regulations regulate the exhaustive cases where a beneficiary may select final recipients (outside financial instruments):

* In line with Article 25 Interreg regulation the beneficiary of small project fund (SPF) may select small projects within the operation (small project fund constitutes an operation within the meaning of point 4 of Article 2 CPR). The beneficiary of SPF initiates, but does not implement the operation – it is implemented by final recipients in line with Article 25(2) last sub-paragraph Interreg regulation. It is explicitly provided that selection of small projects by the beneficiary of that SPF operation does not require that the beneficiary is identified as intermediate body (unless other tasks than the selection are delegated).

The regulation also specifies where the beneficiary may further cascades the grant to other entities.  In line with Article 2(9)(d) CPR in the context of de *minimis* aid, the beneficiary may be the body granting aid. In such operations, the beneficiary may identify undertakings that are to receive support based on criteria established when the operation was selected. Conditions related to identifying undertakings under de minimis aid should be clearly pre-defined by the managing authority in order not to circumvent the responsibility of the MA for the selection of the operation. They should be clearly specified in the document setting the conditions for support between MA/IB and the beneficiary.

Other operations consisting of re-distributing financial support by the beneficiary to pre-defined types of bodies or natural persons based on pre-defined and clearly defined parameters without any discretion by the beneficiary (such as providing vouchers for energy efficiency) could be implemented provided that such parameters are specified before the operation is selected and reflected in the documents setting the conditions for support between MA/IB and the beneficiary. The tasks of beneficiaries in such an operation should be clearly defined in the document setting the conditions of support. In such a case, the operation would not affect the responsibilities of MA/IB or of a local action group implementing CLLD.

In the context of CLLD, in line with Article 33 CPR, local action groups, which may be a beneficiary, have an exclusive right to select operations. However, in line with Article 33(5) CPR the functions of local action group as a beneficiary responsible for initiating or implementing an operation and as a body responsible for selection of operations must be separated.

To conclude – LAG, in its capacity as a beneficiary may:

* implement small project fund in Interreg programmes, and, in such a case, may select small projects within the SPF (in line with applicable provisions for the constitution of the LAG as beneficiary and for the selection under Interreg (Articles 21 and 25 Interreg Regulation);
* identify and grant aid to undertakings within de minimis aid;
* initiate and implement operations – a project, contract, action or group of projects (including operations consisting of re-granting financial support as described above).

# QA00131 - Support to combined instruments

 *Relevant Article*: Article 58 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

If the ex-ante assessment, performed in accordance to CPR Art 58.3, and it proposed to use a combined FI (grant+loan) for social enterprises, can a Member State decide to have two kinds of support: a) grant+loan, as suggested by the ex-ante assessment, and b) grants?

Can you confirm our understanding that they can do so, but they will have to split the two types of support into two separate operations.

 **Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The ex-ante assessment has proposed to establish two financial products for social enterprises: a) 70% grants + 30% loan for start ups, and b) 50% grants and 50% loan for existing businesses.

CPR Art 58.5 says: *“Financial instruments may be combined with programme support in the form of grants in a single financial instrument operation, within a single funding agreement, where both distinct forms of support shall be provided by the body implementing the financial instrument. In such a case, the rules applicable to financial instruments shall apply to that single financial instrument operation.* ***The programme support in the form of grants*** *shall be directly linked and necessary for the financial instrument and* ***shall not exceed the value of the investments supported by the financial product****.”*

Can you confirm our understanding that the Member State is not allowed to have an instrument, where 70% would consist of a grant and 30% would consist of a loan, because grants would exceed the value of the investments in the form of a financial product within one operation?

**Answer 1:**

Article 58(5) to (7) CPR and fund specific rules do not preclude the provision of a grant operation to beneficiaries that may also receive a combined support (grant and financial instrument) as final recipients through a single financial instrument operation set up in line with the ex-ante assessment.

The support taking the sole form of grant in a distinct operation should be established in accordance with non-discriminatory and transparent criteria and procedures for selection as referred to in Article 73 CPR

**Answer 2:**

Yes, your understanding is correct. Please note that the limit of the support in the form of grants as part of the combined financial instrument operation applies at the level of the financial instrument and not at the level of each investment.

# QA00132 - Cascade funding

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 2, 33, 71, 73 and 74 of the CPR and Article 25 of the Interreg Regulation

   *Member State* : PT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Portuguese authorities would like **to get confirmation if and how it is possible** to make use of cascade funding mechanisms (or Financial Support for Third Parties**)** for projects supported by the ERDF for the 2021-2027 programming period. Portugal is referring to the possibility of supporting beneficiaries that shall open and manage a call to grant support to the final ones​ (e.g. a call for clusters for them to support SMEs of their respective value chains).

The question is formulated in the light of the following definitions set out in Art. 2 (9) of the CPR:

beneficiary’ means:

(a) a public or private body, an entity with or without legal personality, or a natural person, responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing operations;

(b) in the context of public-private partnerships (‘PPPs’), the public body initiating a PPP operation or the private partner selected for its implementation;

(c) in the context of State aid schemes, the undertaking which receives the aid;

(d) in the context of de minimis aid provided in accordance with Commission Regulations (EU) No 1407/2013 ( 37) or (EU) No 717/2014 ( 38), the Member State may decide that the beneficiary for the purposes of this Regulation is the body granting the aid, where it is responsible for initiating or both initiating and implementing the operation;

(e) in the context of financial instruments, the body that implements the holding fund or, where there is no holding fund structure, the body that implements the specific fund or, where the managing authority manages the financial instrument, the managing authority.

**Answer:**

At first, it is important to clarify in which cases the regulations allow that the beneficiary may select operations or final recipients or project within an operation – without being appointed an intermediate body.

In accordance with Article 73 CPR, it is the managing authority that is responsible for the selection of operations except a case envisaged in Article 33(3) CPR where selection of operations has been defined as an exclusive task of the local action group (LAG).

Article 71(3) CPR allows the managing authority to delegate, in written, certain tasks, to one or more intermediate bodies and one of tasks that can be delegated relates  to the selection of operations. It should be noted that in cases where the managing authority or intermediate body is also the beneficiary, the tasks related to initiating or implementing an operation should be separated from the responsibilities of selection of operations in line with Article 71(4) CPR and Article 74(3) CPR.

The tasks conferred on beneficiaries by the managing authority (or the intermediate body) should not circumvent the responsibilities reserved by the CPR for the managing authority or other programme authorities.

CPR and funds-specific Regulations regulate the exhaustive cases where a beneficiary can select final recipients (outside financial instruments): or re-grant support i.e. further cascade support to other entities within the operation selected by the managing authority:

* In line with Article 25 Interreg Regulation the beneficiary of small project fund (SPF) may select small projects within the operation (small project fund constitutes an operation within the meaning of point 4 of Article 2 CPR). The beneficiary as SPF initiates, but does not implement the operation – it is implemented by final recipients in line with Article 25(2) last sub-paragraph Interreg Regulation. It is explicitly provided that selection of small projects by the beneficiary of that operation does not require that these are identified as intermediate bodies (unless other tasks than the selection are delegated).

The regulation also specifies where the beneficiary may further cascades the grant to other entities.  In line with Article 2(9)(d) CPR in the context of de minimis aid provided to  the beneficiary may be the body granting aid. In such operations, the beneficiary may identify undertakings that are to receive support based on criteria established when the operation was selected. Conditions related to identifying undertakings under de minimis aid should be clearly pre-defined by the managing authority in order not to circumvent the responsibility of the MA for the selection of the operation. They should be clearly specified in the document setting the conditions for support between MA/IB and the beneficiary.

Other operations consisting of re-distributing financial support by the beneficiary to pre-defined types of bodies or natural persons based on pre-defined and clearly defined parameters without any discretion by the beneficiary (such as vouchers for energy efficiency) could be implemented provided that such parameters are specified before the operation is selected and reflected in the documents setting the conditions for support between MA/IB and the beneficiary. The tasks of beneficiaries in such an operation should be clearly defined in the document setting the conditions of support. In such a case, the operation would not affect the responsibilities of MA/IB or of a local action group implementing CLLD.

In the context of the question asked the beneficiary may:

* implement small project fund in Interreg programmes, and, in such a case, may select small projects within the SPF;
* identify and grant aid to undertakings within de minimis aid schemes (to note: undertakings mean bodies engaged in economic activity);
* initiate or implement operations selected by the MA as defined by the CPR – a project, contract, action or group of projects (including operations consisting of re-granting financial support as described above);

In case a selected operation consists of a group of projects, the beneficiary may not select projects within the group as they are to be selected ‘under the programme’, thus by the managing authority or intermediate body in line with Article 73 CPR.

# QA00133 - Operation consisting of group of projects – grant scheme

 *Relevant Articles*: Art. 2(4), 2(9), 72(1), 73 of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the period 2014-2020, the Czech authorities use a scheme for the administration of boiler subsidies in Priority Axis 2 of the Operational Programme Environment. The scheme is very successful as it reduces administrative burderns for small recipients. The eligibility of this scheme was confirmed by the interpretation question IQ00110 *- Eligibility of heating boilers for individual households.* The Czech authorities intend to use similar schemes on other activities within the programmes in 2021-2027 period (Environment Programme, Just Transition Programme).

In such cases the managing authority plans to select operations in accordance with point (a) of Article 72 (1) and Article 73 (1) in open calls based on transparent and non-discriminatory criteria approved by monitoring committee. In the context of this scheme the operation means a group of projects as defined in point (a) of Article 2 (4). The beneficiary of this operation to be selected will be a regional authority or other public body, which will be the only eligible applicant in the specific call. The beneficiary will be a body responsible for initiating the operation but not for implementing the operation. The implementation of the operation activities will be delegated to final recipients to which the beneficiary grants the aid. It will provide administrative simplification for small-scale projects (aid of less than EUR 200 000). The selection of final recipients will be based on transparent, non-discriminatory criteria established by the managing authority and approved by the monitoring committee.

From the answer to the interpretation question QA00076 - *Granting state aid by beneficiaries not being part of the management and control system of OP in post-2020* we understood that this type of scheme is possible when it complies with de minimis aid, i.e. the amount of aid granted to the final recipient is lower than the thresholds laid down in 1407/2013 Regulation (EUR 200 000).

The scheme has several benefits. First of all it will reduce the administrative burden for MA and final recipients such as natural persons, NGOs or small companies and micro-enterprises for whom the standard calls procedure is too complicated. From previous experience it is clear that the simplification contributes significatntly to desired results. The scheme will secure involvement of the regional level directly in the programme.

**Answer:**

CPR and funds-specific Regulations regulate the exhaustive cases where a beneficiary can select final recipients (outside financial instruments): or re-grant support within the operation selected by the managing authority. This is notably the case of small project Funds.

The regulation also specifies where the beneficiary may further cascade the grant to other entities. In line with Article 2(9)(d) CPR in the context of de minimis aid provided to  the beneficiary may be the body granting aid. In such operations, the beneficiary may identify undertakings (so entities engaged in economic activity and not households) that are to receive support based on criteria established when the operation was selected.

Therefore, provided that the aid granted to undertakings falls within de minimis aid, the body granting the aid may be considered a beneficiary within the meaning set out in point (d) Article 2(9). It should be noted, however, that the conditions related to identifying undertakings under de minimis aid should be clearly pre-defined by the managing authority in order not to circumvent the responsibility of the MA for the selection of the operation. They should be clearly specified in the document setting the conditions for support between MA/IB and the beneficiary.

For further questions on the definition of beneficiary and the conditions under which a beneficiary may be responsible for granting aid, see replies to questions [QA00132](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regiokm/display/2127QA/QA00132%2B-%2BCascade%2Bfunding) and [QA00130](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regiokm/display/2127QA/QA00130%2B-%2BImplementation%2Bof%2Bumbrella%2Bprojects%2Bunder%2BCLLD).

# QA00134 - Questions related to the definition of the clean vehicle under policy objective 4

 *Relevant Articles:* Art.7.1 (h)(iii); Art.3.1 (d) (ii) and (v) of the ERDF/CF Regulation; CPR (Annex I)

 *Member State*: LT

**Questions (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. Under PO4/Priority 4 of 2021-27 EU Funds’ Investment Programme, the Lithuanian authorities plan the ERDF investments for acquisition of vehicles for collective transportation, i.e. the school buses (SO - Art. 3.1(d)(ii)), and the emergency ambulances/mobile health points (SO – Art.3.1(d) (v)). Please clarify whether this type of investments are subject to the legal provisions of the Art. 7.1(h)(iii) of ERDF and CF Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 for ‘clean vehicle’ as defined in recast of Directive 2009/33/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council for public purposes also apply to the listed special purpose vehicles.
2. If the reply to question No.1 is ‘yes’, please provide the definition of the ‘clean vehicle’ and conditions if any (type of engine) for these two specific type of investments.
3. Please clarify whether there are any exceptions in the said regulation for the purchase of this type of emergency transport in terms of environmental requirements? Please explain whether only environmentally friendly ambulances/school buses could be supported by the Programme’s resources? According to the knowledge of the LT authorities, there are no hybrid plug-ins on the market (including international) at all. It would be impossible to purchase such type of school buses / ambulances. It should be noted that usage of only electric school buses would be problematic as transportation vehicles have to cover long distances in remote areas, or to make several itineraries in a short time. As for the ambulances, they receive a lot of calls during the day, too. Electric cars can only drive a certain number  km, batteries charging takes time, at the same ambulances have to ensure timely emergency assistance. Please advice what are the alternatives?
4. Please also specify the selection of relevant fields of intervention (CPR, Annex I) and what are the conditions (intervention fields 082 ‘Clean urban transport rolling stock’, 077 ‘Air quality and noise reduction measures’ and 130 ‘Mobile health assets’).
5. In case the exception from the legal provisions listed under point 1 is applied, please advice how it should be reflected in the DNSH principle assessment for ambulances/ school buses?

**Answers:**

1. Article 7 ERDF/CF Regulation does not allow to support investments in vehicles which involve the “production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels”. For vehicles which are used for “public purposes” there is an exception to this exclusion from the scope of support for “clean vehicles”, such as plug-in hybrid vehicles. The definition of “clean vehicles” and the exclusions and exceptions of Article 7 ERDF/CF Regulation also apply “to the special purpose vehicles” as listed in the recast of Directive 2009/33/EC.

2. The definition of “clean vehicle” according to Article 4(4) of Directive 2009/33/EC depends on the vehicle category:

* + For light-duty vehicles (vehicle categories M1, M2 and N1, i.e. cars & vans), “clean vehicle” means a vehicle with tailpipe CO2 emissions from zero up to 50 g/km (WLTP values recorded in the vehicle’s Certificate of Conformity).
	+ For buses and other vehicle of category M3, clean vehicle means a vehicle running on alternative fuels as defined in Directive 2014/94/EU on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure, i.e. battery electric, plug-in hybrid, hydrogen, CNG, LNG, LPG, biofuels and synthetic and paraffinic fuels.

It is highlighted that the exception of “clean vehicles” only applies to the vehicles themselves and not related infrastructure, e.g. CNG refilling stations and storage.

3. The second hyphen of Article 7(1)(h)(iii) ERDF/CF Regulation covers financing of some special vehicles, namely “vehicles […] designed and constructed or adapted for use by civil protection and fire services”. Vehicles under this exception are eligible even if they are not “clean”. From a policy perspective, however, support of clean and zero-emission should be favoured where possible, in order to catalyse the market uptake of these more sustainable alternatives.

The category of “vehicles […] designed and constructed or adapted for use by civil protection and fire services” includes ambulances or mobile health points but not school buses.

4. Under PO4/Priority 4, investments related to acquisition of ambulances and health mobile points should be captured by the intervention field 130.

Should the LT authorities consider to plan the ERDF investments for acquisition of  zero-emission vehicles for transportation, i.e. zero-emission (electric) school buses, the intervention field 082 could be used even in rural areas, as it could be considered the closest code available to capture the zero-emission element. In case of plug-in hybrid school buses, usage of intervention field 077 could be considered (unless for investments related to the acquisition of school buses *the closest available are considered to be intervention* fields 121, 122, 123 and 124 depending on the targeted level of education).

5. Eligible investments have to be implemented by taking into account the DNSH principle. Two objectives are particularly relevant here: (1) climate change mitigation and (2) pollution prevention and control. The no significant harm to these objectives can be demonstrated by the low overall impact in case of emergency vehicles, and the reduced dependence on private car use and the use of fossil fuels in case of school buses (which must be clean vehicles).

# QA00135 - Application of CPR and ETC flat rates and other simplified cost options inside a Small project fund

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

 *Relevant Articles*:

Articles 53 to 56 of the CPR

Articles 25 and 38 to 44 Interreg Regulation

 *Member State*: n/a

Article 25 Interreg Regulation sets out **specific rules** [**[1]**](#scroll-bookmark-122) on Small project funds (SPF). Each SPF constitutes an *operation* (paragraph 2). The SPF manager is the (only) *beneficiary* (paragraph 2), whereas the *small projects* [[2]](#scroll-bookmark-123) are implemented by *final recipients* [[3]](#scroll-bookmark-124) . Each SPF is composed by two quite distinct parts of expenditure: 1° the “staff and other costs” under Articles 39 to 43 Interreg Regulation generated by the SPF manager and 2° the expenditure generated by the totality of the final recipients. Consequently, the CPR provisions on simplified cost options, which refer to the total expenditure of an *operation*, are not fit for the two parts of expenditure under a SPF, even less for the expenditure of a single *small project*. Some derogations to CPR rules are therefore already built into Article 25 Interreg Regulation [[4]](#scroll-bookmark-125) .

Although the specific rules in Article 25 Interreg Regulation are meant to simplify the implementation of SPF and small projects considerably, several (future) programme authorities are faced with implementation issues.

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In order to achieve the simplification intended by Article 25 Interreg Regulation, we request to confirm that the maximum of 20% for staff and other costs generated by the SPF manager in Article 25(5) Interreg Regulation constitutes not only a ceiling, but also a case covered by point (e) of Article 53(3) CPR, i.e. a flat rate or a “specific method” established by or on the basis of this Regulation or the Fund-specific Regulations.

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In order to apply the simplification intended by the different forms of simplified cost options set out in Articles 53 to 56 CPR also to small projects often implemented by final recipients neither familiar with “normal” Cohesion policy rules nor with administrative capacity comparable to those of regular Interreg operations, we request to confirm that these provisions can also apply to that part of the operation constituted by the expenditure of the totality of all small projects, i.e. the total eligible cost of the SPF minus the part covered by the staff and other costs generated by the SPF manager.

**Question 3 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Should the 2nd question not be confirmed or should its application not fit for all kinds of SPF to address individual small projects, we request to confirm that the managing authority (MA) may establish programme-specific simplified cost options in accordance with point (e) of Article 53(3), i.e. by applying the flat rates, which are “established (…) on the basis of this [= CPR] Regulation and Fund-specific Regulations, meaning the same types and percentages, but based on that part of the operation constituted by the expenditure of the totality of all small projects.

**Answer to question 1:**

Article 53(3) CPR sets out specific ways in accordance with which the amounts for simplified cost options (SCOs) should be established. In particular, point (e) of Article 53(3) CPR mentions flat rates and specific methods established by or on the basis of this Regulation or the Fund-specific Regulations.

Where the CPR or the Fund-specific Regulations establish a flat-rate or a specific method to calculate SCOs, they make a specific reference to it, as the conditions for their use need to be clear from the outset (see for example Article 54 CPR, Article 55 (1) CPR, Article 56(1) CPR for a flat-rate or Article 55(2) CPR for a specific method). The Interreg Regulation contains specific references to flat rates and specific methods set out for the costs referred to in Art. 39 to 44.

On the contrary, Article 25(5) Interreg Regulation does not. Therefore, the percentage set out in Article 25(5) Interreg Regulation (for the costs categories in Articles 39 to 43 generated at the level of the beneficiary for the management of the small project fund) constitutes a ceiling and not a flat-rate (the 20% ceiling may be covered by real costs).

**Answer to the 2nd and 3rd questions:**

Article 25(6) Interreg Regulation specifies the case where SCOs must be used in small projects. In addition, the last subparagraph of this paragraph makes a direct reference to the application of a provision of the CPR. Outside the last subparagraph of Article 25(6) Interreg Regulation there is no direct reference to the application of the CPR to small projects, which are implemented by final recipients in line with Article 25 (1) Interreg Regulation.

Article 52 CPR provides that Member State shall provide support to beneficiaries in the form of grants, financial instruments or prizes or a combination between these forms. Final recipients are not concerned by the provisions of Articles 53-56 CPR. This means that there is no direct application of the provisions of the CPR or Interreg Regulation (except where specifically referred to in) to small projects.

It is possible, however, that the beneficiary of the small project fund sets out a methodology for the application of SCOs to small projects taking inspiration from the CPR or Interreg rules on SCOs. In doing so the beneficiary should ensure that point (e) of Article 25(3) Interreg Regulation is respected.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-126)    Recital26: “… *So far they have been supported via small-project funds or similar instruments, although they have never been covered by* ***specific provisions****, making it necessary to clarify the rules governing those funds. …”*

[[2]](#scroll-bookmark-127)     Legally defined in point 10 of Article 2 CPR.

[[3]](#scroll-bookmark-128)    Legally defined in point 18 of Article 2 CPR.

[[4]](#scroll-bookmark-129)    E.g. the 2nd subparagraph of Article 25(6) ETC derogates to point (b) of Article 53(3) CPR.

# QA00136 - Questions related to the list of operations and transmission of data

 *Relevant Articles*: Art. 49(3), Art. 42(2)(a) and (b), Art. 42(5) of the CPR

 *Member State*: FI

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

List of operations - CPR Art. 49(3)

* Can we add any other information that we consider useful in addition to those listed in the Regulation?
* Sub-section (h) ‘total costs of the operation’ is likely to refer to public + private financing? In the present period we have reported only the EU+ State and the total public funding, as the EU co-financing rate is calculated from our public funding.
* If we report total costs in the new period, including private funding, can we still report as additional information the EU + the State and the public funding?
* Sub-section (k) Union co-financing rate: In Finland, EU and State funding are in the same budget line, i.e. they are not dealt with separately in the context of project financing. Depending on the amount and distribution of the national counterpart, the actual rate of EU co-financing may also vary from project to project. In addition, there are no fewer than five co-financing ratios in the new programme (including the JTF). Under the circumstances, would it not be the best (if not the only) option to indicate a categorical EU co-financing rate calculated on the basis of public funding, in accordance with the relevant category of region, specific objective or Fund?
* If the answer to question 1) is yes: can we place “additional” data columns in the most natural places (including between (a) to (n) of the General Regulation) or should they only appear in the last columns in the table structure?

Transmission of data - CPR Art 42(2)(a) and (b) and (5)

* Does “for selected operations” mean that the indicator data should be provided on a project-by-project basis or only cumulatively at the level of specific objectives and categories of regions?
* The minimum mandatory requirement in point 5 appears to be that a link to the information provided to the Commission should be published on the website? Given the number and distribution of indicators in the three categories of regions, there is a fairly large amount of data and difficult for the general public to approach => Is it permissible to refine the data in a more illustrative format or must it be in exactly the same format as it is submitted to the Commission?

**Answer:**

* Article 49(3) CPR provides a minimum set of data required. It is in the discretion of the managing authority to add in the list any data it deems useful.
* Total ‘cost of an operation’ referred to in Article 49(3)(h) CPR should be understood as the amount of the total eligible cost of the operation approved in the document setting out the conditions for support (referred to in the Annex XVII CPR). Depending on an operation, it may include private financing. For financial instruments, the document setting out the conditions for support is the funding agreement which should include the amount of programme contribution (as defined in Article 2(19) CPR) committed to the financial instrument, which includes national public and private, if any, co-financing to a financial instrument. The managing authority may inform the public about private resources outside the financial instrument operation raised in addition to the programme contribution if it deems it necessary.
* Yes, see answer no. 1.
* Article 49(3) CPR requires the managing authority to provide information at the level of an operation.
* It is in the discretion of the managing authority to organise the data in a way it deems most useful.
* Data submitted on the basis Article 42(2)(b) CPR (according to the templates in Annex VII CPR) requires the Member State or the managing authority to provide cumulative data at the level of specific objective (or, for technical assistance pursuant to Article 36(4) CPR at the level of a priority). Data reported to the Commission need to be based on data stored electronically for each operation in line with Annex XVII CPR.
* Article 42(5) CPR requires the Member State or the managing authority to publish or to provide a link to all the data transmitted to the Commission. It is permissible to display the data in an illustrative format as long as all the data is accessible.

# QA00137 - Conditions for granting regional aid to large enterprises

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 112 of the CPR

Articles 8(2) second subparagraph and 11(2(h)) of the JTF regulation

Point 14 of the Guidelines on regional State aid (2021/C 153/01)

 *Member State*: n/a

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**What does the third condition in point 14 of the Guidelines on regional State aid (2021/C 153/01) for granting regional aid to large enterprises for the diversification of the output or for a fundamental change in the overall production process with the JTF in certain ‘c areas’ mean (“the State aid for the investment is covered by the JTF to the maximum allowed”)?**

According to paragraph 14 of the Guidelines on regional State aid (RAG), regional aid to large enterprises in ‘c’ areas for the diversification of the output of an establishment into products not previously produced in the establishment or for a fundamental change in the overall production process of the product(s) concerned by the investment in the establishment, can be considered as compatible with the internal market, if:

* it covers an initial investment in a territory identified for co-financed support from the JTF in a ‘c’ area that has a GDP per capita below 100 % of the EU-27 average;
* the investment and the beneficiary are identified in the territorial just transition plan of a Member State approved by the Commission; and
* the State aid for the investment is covered by the JTF to the maximum allowed.

What does the third condition mean, i.e. “the State aid for the investment is covered by the JTF to the maximum allowed”?

Does it mean that

1. the co-financing rate at the priority has to correspond to the maximum rate allowed by article 112 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (2021-2027 CPR)?
2. the co-financing rate of the individual investment is “at the maximum allowed” (which would mean that 100% of the public support would have to be covered by the JTF, as the co-financing rate at project level can deviate from the co-financing rate of the priority)?
3. something else?

There is one Member State which applies the co-financing rate for the concerned JTF priority to the total contribution, including public and private contribution (article 112(2(a)) CPR). In its first programme submitted to the Commission, this Member State has proposed a lower co-financing rate than the maximum allowed by the CPR, and will cover the national co-financing with private funds. If the answer to this ESIF Q&A would be option 1 mentioned above, this Member State could only use the possibility provided for in point 14 of the Guidelines on regional State aid, if it increased the co-financing rate of the concerned JTF priority to the maximum allowed by article 112 CPR. This would lead to an increase of the JTF resources in this priority, and a respective decrease of national and therefore also private funds.

**Answer:**

In the territories most affected by the transition to climate neutrality, the Commission has considered that the structural advantages available to large enterprises may be insufficient for investments that would ensure a balanced socio-economic transition and offer sufficient employment opportunities to offset jobs lost. For this specific reason, it has designed specific derogatory rules for assessing regional aid to large enterprises, granted for initial investments in ‘c’ areas, other than aimed at the creation of new activities, namely for:

* the diversification of the output of an establishment into products not previously produced in the establishment or
* a fundamental change in the overall production process of the product(s) concerned by the investment in the establishment.

The approval of such aid is subject to the general compatibility criteria developed in the RAG and to three specific conditions spelled out in paragraph 14 of the RAG and here below.

* The aid concerns an initial investment in a territory identified for co-financed support from the JTF in a ‘c’ area that has a GDP per capita below 100 % of the EU-27 average;
* The investment and the beneficiary are identified in the territorial just transition plan of a Member State approved by the Commission; and
* The State aid for the investment is covered by the JTF to the maximum allowed.

From a procedural point of view, upon approval of the relevant territorial just transition plan by the Commission as part of the corresponding programme and prior to implementation, Member States must notify to the Commission any aid granted in accordance with these provisions.

The Commission has designed the three specific conditions as safeguards against unnecessary distortions of competition, which would be contrary to the common interest. Most specifically, the third condition, stated in paragraph 14 of the RAG, requires that *‘State aid for the investment be covered by the JTF to the maximum allowed’.* The purpose of this condition is to limit the risk of exponential growth of the public funding made available to large enterprises in the ‘c’ areas via the national co-financing. In fact, it requires that the support at project/beneficiary level comprises to a maximum extent resources from the JTF.

The implementation of this condition requires an articulation between the two sets of rules, which relevant to this question specificities are highlighted below:

Under State aid rules:

* The State aid comprises the whole public financing, captured by the notion of State resources of Article 107(1) TFEU, in this case – JTF and the national public co-financing.
* The maximum aid intensity is assessed at the level of project/beneficiary.

Under cohesion policy rules:

* The maximum level of co-financing rate, for the regions concerned by the derogation under State aid rules, i.e. transition areas, is limited by the ceiling established in Article 112(3) of the 2021/1060 Regulation, including possible exceptions e.g. under Article 112(5) of the 2021/1060 Regulation.
* The co-financing rates are set for each priority in the programme and are approved by the Commission decision approving a programme (Article 112(1) CPR).
* The co-financing rates apply at the level of each priority (Article 112(1) CPR). This means that within a priority the co-financing rate for specific projects/operations might be different from the one of the priority and may also vary from one operation to another.
* the co-financing rate for each priority is applied either at:
	+ the total contribution, including public and private contribution; or
	+ the public contribution.

Against this background:

The maximum co-financing rates for priority axes under cohesion policy are set out in Article 112(3) et seq. of the Regulation 2021/1060. These are only maximum rates, meaning that Member States may include lower rates in their programmes. Additionally, it should be noted that under cohesion policy, there is no legal basis for imposing a certain co-financing rate at the level of individual operations.

Given that the Union contribution will be calculated by application of the co-financing rate of each priority to the total eligible expenditure or to the public contribution, as set out in the financing plan of the programme, this is considered as the reference point for the JTF support  applicable to the projects co-financed under the priority for the purposes of paragraph 14 of the RAG.

Therefore, the third condition set out in paragraph 14 of the RAG requiring that *‘the State aid for the investment is covered by the JTF to the maximum allowed’* should be read as meaning that the JTF support to a project amounts to the maximum co-financing rate set out in the corresponding programme, for the related priority.

It should be noted that the third condition set out in paragraph 14 of the RAG does not preclude that JTF covers the entire State aid support.

This distribution of the public financing national and JTF sources does not affect the maximum aid intensities for large enterprises in these ‘c’ areas. The latter are fixed in the national regional maps in accordance with Section 7.4.2. Maximum aid intensities in ‘c’ areas, paragraph 182(4) of the RAG) and cannot exceed 15% of the eligible costs.

# QA00138 - Eligibility and treatment of costs generated by negative interest rates under Interreg 2021-2027

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 63(1) and (2) and 90(6) of the CPR

Article 37(2) and (3) of the ETC

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In 2020 few Interreg programmes raised the question about the eligibility of costs generated by negative interest being charged by banks since 1 January 2020 on EU-funds held on account by programmes under shared management. By the end of 2020 it was clarified (in a letter signed by Marc Lemaître, following replies to interpretation questions) that such charges would be eligible under the technical assistance priority axis, applying the corresponding co-financing rate. However, programme managing authorities were requested to establish first that the negative interests charged by the banks are bank charges which are linked to the usual administration of the accounts and therefore eligible.

For 2021-2027, we have received again questions from programmes regarding the costs resulting from negative interest rates. Referring to point 6 of Article 90 CPR (on interest gained), they believe that negative interest should be treated in the same way and covered from ERDF fully.

We seek confirmation on the following:

- are such charges eligible as already confirmed for 2014-2020?

- are these charges covered by the TA (even though a flat rate) and co-financed at the TA co-financing rate, thus not 100% from ERDF?

**Answer:**

The negative interests costs being charged by some banks on EU-funds held on account by programmes under shared management are eligible when they are linked to the usual administration of the accounts.

As regards the treatment of such eligible costs, they should be covered by the technical assistance (Article 27(2) and (3) Interreg).

Given the nature of the flat-rate, there will be no check of the underlying costs of the amounts reimbursed based on the flat rate at EU level.

Furthermore, these costs should first be offset against any ‘positive’ interests potentially earned (not declaring negative interest already covered by positive interest earned).

At the same time, the managing authority should take all possible actions to avoid the negative interest charges, in line with the principle of sound financial management. This should be done e.g. by more frequent and swift payments to beneficiaries and payment applications to the Commission; by negotiating a more favourable agreement with the bank; by moving to a bank with more favourable conditions.

# QA00138 - How to declare expenditure in case SCOs are implemented under Art.53-56 CPR and then introduced in a SCO scheme under Art.94: options and risks

 *Relevant Articles*: Art. 53-56 and Art. 94 of the CPR

 *Member State*: FR

**Q1 : Pouvez-vous nous confirmer que nos services seraient en mesure de programmer dès approbation par la CE de la version initiale du PO (donc sans ce BSCU) des opérations de ce type sur la base d’un BSCU, conformément à l’article 53 du RPDC, avant la validation de la décision permettant l’adoption de cette OCS au niveau du programme conformément à l’article 94 ?**

***EN****: Can you confirm that our services would be able to program, as soon as the initial version of the PO is approved by the EC (therefore without this SSUC) operations of this type on the basis of a SSUC, in accordance with article 53 of the CPR, before the validation of the decision allowing the adoption of this SCO at program level in accordance with Article 94?*

**Q2 :** **En cas de réponse positive à cette première question, nous confirmez-vous que la règle selon laquelle les dépenses/réalisations d’une opération antérieures à la date d’introduction de la demande de modification du PO visant à intégrer le nouveau BSCU dans SFC ne sont pas éligibles, ne s’applique pas dans le cas présent au niveau du bénéficiaire (mais seulement à l’AG pour la réalisation de ses demandes de paiement / appel de fonds) ?**

**Très concrètement, pour des opérations de rénovation de logement social qui seraient éligibles dès le 1er janvier 2021 et programmés par l’AG avec un BSCU n’ayant pas été encore approuvé par la CE dans le PO (par exemple juste après l’approbation du PO initial en juin 2022), l’AG introduit formellement une demande de révision du PO pour introduire le BSCU en septembre 2022 :  l’AG pourra-t-elle bien inclure les dépenses correspondantes (opération réalisée entre janvier 2021 et décembre 2022) dans une demande de paiement adressée à la CE en 2023 ?  Quelle forme devra alors prendre la demande de paiement par l’AG auprès de la Commission européenne au titre de ces opérations ?**

*EN: In the event of a positive answer to this first question, can you confirm that the rule according to which the expenditure/implementation of an operation prior to the date of submission of the request for modification of the OP aiming to integrate the new SSUC into* *SFC are not eligible, does not apply in this case at the level of the beneficiary (but only to the MA for the submission of its requests for payment / call for funds)? Very concretely, for social housing renovation operations which would be eligible from 1 January 2021 and scheduled by the GM with a SSUC that has not yet been approved by the EC in the OP (for example just after the approval of the initial PO in June 2022), the MA formally submits a request for revision of the PO to introduce the SSUC in September 2022: will the MA be able to include the corresponding expenditure (operation carried out between January 2021 and December 2022) in a request for payment sent to the EC in 2023? What form should the MA request for payment from the European Commission for these operations then take?*

**Q3** **En cas de réponse positive, pouvez-vous aussi nous indiquer si nous serions en mesure, le cas échéant, de faire remonter à la CE une demande de paiement incluant ces opérations programmées sur la base d’une OCS « bénéficiaire » telle que prévue à l’article 53, en incluant de fait les coûts calculés sur la base applicable ?**

*EN : In the event of a positive response, can you indicate to us if we would be able, if necessary, to forward to the EC a request for payment including these operations programmed on the basis of a "beneficiary" SCO such as provided for in Article 53, de facto including the costs calculated on the applicable basis?*

**…**

**Answers:**

**1.** Member States can implement SCOs at the level of the beneficiary in line with Articles 53-56 CPR directly and without submitting to the Commission Appendix 1 of Annex V for approval. Related costs can be declared for such SCOs in accordance with Article 91(4)(c) CPR.

It is not exluded that the programme decides to include them at a later stage in Article 94 CPR schemes. These will be then covered by reimbursment by the Commission in line with Art. 94 CPR after the relevant programme amendment is approved. It is possible that the programme already starts implementing (at their own risk however) SCOs at the level of the beneficiaries as asked before approval by the Commission of the schemes submitted in Appendix I to the programme. **Thus, the reply to question 1 is yes.**

**2. Regarding the first part of question 2**, Article 63(7) CPR does not apply at any level in the situation presented as the expenditure for operations that are under implementation in line with Articles 53-56 CPR as of programme approval and are to be covered by the SCO scheme as of programme amendment is understood as being already eligible as of 1 January 2021 according to Article 63(2) CPR. This is because the programme amendment has no impact on the eligibility of expenditure, i.e no new expenditure will become eligible as a result of the programme amendment. Programe amendment adopting the SCO scheme impacts only the mode of reimbursement between the Commission and the Member State.

**3. Regarding the second part of question 2,** until a decision in line with Article 94 CPR is adopted, the Managing Authority may declare to the Commission the amounts corresponding to the costs calculated on the applicable basis (ie SCOs implemented in line with Articles 53-56 CPR). This means that **the MA may include the expenditure for SCO operations carried out** **between January 2021 and December 2022 under Articles 53-56 CPR in a payment application to the COM in column B of the payment application template (Annex XXIII CPR)** in line with Article 91(4)(c) CPR. The COM will reimburse the Member State accordingly.

**After the decision on the programme amendment is adopted**, **the Commission will start reimbursing the Union contribution to a programme on the basis of SCOs**. The Managing Authority will include these amounts into a payment application in column C of the payment application template (Annex XXIII) in line with Article 91(4)(b) CPR. The Commission will reimburse the Member Satte accordingly. As of the inclusion of these amounts in the Column C in the payment application, the amounts reimbursed to the beneficiary should not be included in the payment application (column (B) of the payment application template) to avoid double financing of the same expenditure.

We consider that **question 3 is addressed in point 3 above**. Therefore, a separate reply is not necessary.

# QA00139 - CPR and Interreg Regulation 2021-2027 - potential double correction

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 98(6)(a) and Article 103 of the CPR

Article 52 of the Interreg Regulation

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Which is the legal basis enabling the EC to avoid double correction - that is not to issue a recovery order according to Article 52 Interreg Regulation if the amount was already withdrawn in the annual accounts?**

**Example provided by requester explaining the risk of double correction**

During the accounting year 2024/2025 the MA identifies irregular expenditure in the payment claim by the beneficiary (for example 100 000 EUR) that has already been submitted in the interim payment application in the accounting year 2024/2025. MA subsequently opens the recovery procedure, which is however not concluded before the accounts for 2024/2025 are approved by the EC.

According to Art 98(6)(a) of the CPR this irregular amount (100 000 EUR) still has to be and will be deducted from the accounts irrespective of status of the recovery (in our example recovery procedure not concluded). Therefore the total amount declared in the accounts (for example 1 mil. EUR) will be lowered to 900 000 EUR. This means that the financial correction has been applied by the MS and this irregularity should be resolved in relation to EU budget.

However, once the recovery procedure is concluded with the outcome that both relevant partners and MS failed to reimburse unduly paid amounts back to programme, the Commission is in our opinion obliged to issue the recovery order according the Art 52(5) of the Interreg Regulation for those 100 000 EUR, that relevant MS failed to reimburse, even though the financial correction has been already applied in the 2024/2025 accounts.

This in our opinion means, that one irregular amount (100 000 EUR) will be deducted twice from the payments at the level of EU – programme (deduction in the accounts as well as additional offset by the Commission).

This would lead to a double correction, therefore we are trying to find the legal basis (which we are currently not aware of) that would enable the Commission not to issue recovery order according to Article 52(5) of the ETC Interreg Regulation where the correction has already been applied by the MS.

**Answer:**

It is important to distinguish between two distinct procedures:

* financial corrections carried out by the MS hosting the MA of the Interreg programme after identifying irregular expenditure on the basis of Article 98(6)(a) CPR and Article 103 of the CPR;
* recovery orders issued within the procedure of examination of accounts, when the Commission determines the amount chargeable to the Funds for the accounting year and the consequent adjustments in relation to the payments to the MS hosting the MA on the basis of Article 100 CPR.

The MS hosting the MA, after identifying irregular expenditure, should apply financial corrections in accordance with Article 103 CPR and withdraw the irregular amounts from the interim payment application as set out in Article 98(3)(b) CPR or, at the latest, deduct such amounts from the accounts in accordance with Article 98(6)(a) CPR.

When, as a result of the examination of the accounts, the amount chargeable to the Funds for the accounting year is determined, the Commission will apply the consequent adjustments in relation to the payments made to the Member State to balance the accounts. To that end, the Commission will issue a recovery order on the basis of Article 100(2) CPR executed, where possible, by offsetting against amounts due to the Member State hosting the MA in subsequent payments to the same Interreg programme.

It is important to note that such recovery orders do not constitute financial corrections by the Commission on the basis of Article 104 CPR and they do not reduce the support from the Funds to the Interreg programme.

Article 52 Interreg Regulation provides important procedural adjustments aimed at establishing a clear chain of financial liability in respect of recovery for irregularities, taking especially into account the situation when the lead or sole partner is located in a different country than the MS hosting the MA.

Based on the example provided – if the EUR 100 000 irregular expenditure was present in a payment claim but afterwards deducted in the accounts, it would indeed lead to an amount to recover. This amount would be recovered in the context of the annual balance of the accounts by determining the amount chargeable to the Funds for the accounting year and the consequent adjustment in relation to the payments to the MS hosting the MA. The Commission would not issue another recovery order on the basis of Article 52(5) Interreg Regulation for the same expenditure as the financial interest of the EU budget would have already been secured by applying Article 100 CPR.  There cannot be double recovery of the same expenditure.

To conclude, the European Commission will not recover twice towards the MA of the Interreg programme the same irregular amount.

# QA00140 - CLLD programming in ESF

 *Relevant Article*: Art 34 (1) of the CPR

 *Member State*: RO

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The authorities have programmed under ESF + Specific objective (K) (to improve equal and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable services, including services promoting access to person-centred housing and care, including healthcare; modernising social protection systems, including promoting access to social protection, with a particular focus on children and disadvantaged groups; improving the accessibility, including for persons with disabilities, of the effectiveness and resilience of health systems and long-term care services) the following activities for urban LAGs:

(a) preparatory support for the development of Local Urban Strategies (Art. 34 (1) CPR);

(b) preparatory support for national and transnational cooperation between LAGs and other actors;

(c) support for the operation, management and evaluation (impact studies) of urban LAGs, as provided for in Article 34 (1) -c of the CPR.

This also includes cooperation activities between LAGs to strengthen urban-rural linkages.

The Local Urban Strategies under CLLD in Romania are financed both from ESF+ and ERDF.

In this context, we would welcome your advice to the following questions

1. Can only ESF+ finance the activities above even though the Local Urban Strategies are financed both from ERDF and ESF+?
2. In case not, is there any possibility that only ESF+ could do that (maybe under Technical Assistance)?
3. Is such an allocation adequately programmed under Specific Objective (k)?
4. In case not, which would be the most relevant Specific Objective for such activities to be programmed/financed?

**Answer:**

1. As explained in the reply to QA00058, where a community-led local development (CLLD) strategy is financed from more than one Fund, Article 31(3) CPR allows the relevant MAs to support all preparatory, management and animation costs referred to in points (a) to (c) of Article 34(1) CPR from one Fund. As explained in the reply to QA00052, the support referred to in Article 34(1)(c) CPR shall not exceed the 25% of total public contribution to the CLLD strategy .

It should be noted that some of these activities, within the limit set out in Article 34(2) CPR, may also be financed from technical assistance, e.g. impact studies and evaluations of local development strategies or CLLD as a whole.

2. See point 1.

3.CLLD and any related expenditure may be financed under any of the specific objectives of the ESF+ as listed in Article 4(1) of the ESF+ Regulation, with the exception of specific objective (m). It is the responsibility of the Managing Authority to define the intervention logic of the programme and include CLLD under the specific objective that best reflects the purpose of financing. Therefore, provided that these strategies contribute to specific objective (k), they may be supported under that specific objective.

As far as the ERDF is concerned, there are possibilities under policy objective 4 linked to the Social Pillar,  and under policy objective 5 ‘Europe closer to citizens’, in particular specific objective 5.1, which is dedicated to integrated urban strategies, including urban CLLD strategies. It is for the Managing Authority to include a CLLD strategy within the specific objective that best reflects the purpose of the planned activity.

4. See point 3.

# QA00141 - Support to combined instruments

 *Relevant Article*: Article 8 of the JTF

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**1.Will the European** **Commission during the process of verifying / auditing the manner in which the regions spend JTF funds question the non-compliance with the solutions adopted for similar types of operations financed from ESF + funds?**

This fund was set up specifically to address the problems of transition. It can be assumed that the nature of operations financed from its resources, in particular under the activities referred to in article 8.2(k-m) of the JTF Regulation may differ from similar ESF + operations.

2. Pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund, one of the possible actions is raising and changing the qualifications of employees and jobseekers. In view of the above, and taking into account the provisions on State Aid, the managing authority of Wielkopolska region addressed the Commission asking **whether it is possible to finance the following operations from the JFT funds** :

* + reskilling and upskilling of the employees in a holding company  (the main entity undergoing transformation, consisting of several related companies, "parent company" and "related companies") for the needs of the new areas of the company's operations. Due to the closing of the mining operations, the holding company, in order to change its business profile to green energy production, will require employees with different qualifications than the current employees. In the interest of employees and local government authorities, in order to avoid negative social phenomena, it would be the current employees of the holding company to be considered in the first place as staff for new ventures. **Is it possible to implement this type of support from the JTF in terms of the provisions of EU regulations regarding the perspective 2021-2027, including the JTF Regulation and the provisions on State Aid?**
	+ **If there is a company operating within the holding company (e.g. operating in the field of renewable energy sources), intending to employ employees previously employed in a related company (e.g. in a mine; the relationship "parent company" - "daughter company" or " daughter company "-" daughter company "), is it possible to support retraining activities from the JTF?** In such a case, will the principle of excluding any relationship between actions for the benefit of employees and the benefit that could be obtained by the entrepreneur dismissing the employee be maintained? In such a situation, will the purpose and scope of raising / changing qualifications not correspond to the specific needs of a given enterprise, but only to the needs of the dismissed employee in accordance with the requirements of the regional labour market, which will mean that there will be no state aid? Or, the purpose and scope of raising / changing qualifications will correspond to the specific needs of a given enterprise, which will be tantamount to the fact that state aid for a given company will occur?

**Answer:**

1.The actions carried out under JTF, first of all, have to contribute to the JTF single specific objective (Article 2 JTF Regulation), fit into the scope of support as set out in Article 8 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 (JTF Regulation) and help implement the relevant Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP).

JTF actions may be delivered differently from the similar measures developed under ESF+ provided that their implementation fully complies with the legal framework established by Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation) and the JTF Regulation.

2. On the basis of the information provided, it is difficult to establish whether such an operation may be implemented under the JTF.

Further to the conditions already mentioned in Reply 1, any action aiming at upskilling and reskilling (including training) should primarily target workers affected by the transition, irrespective of whether they are still employed or have lost their job due to the transition instead of targeting specific companies and their needs and priorities.

The measures designed in the programme for support by the JTF should be consistent with the requalification needs as detailed in section 2.1 in the TJTP.

As regards State aid, recital (16) of JTF Regulation recalls that JTF support to undertakings should comply with Union State aid rules as set out in Articles 107 and 108 TFEU. It is the responsibility of Member States to ensure compliance with State aid rules. In case the measure qualifies as State aid and, depending on the specific characteristics of the project, there may be several grounds of compatibility, e.g. under the Training aid guidelines, Regional aid Guidelines, Climate, Energy and Environmental Guidelines, or under the corresponding parts of the GBER.

Assuming that all conditions mentioned above are met, expenditure incurred and paid in implementing operations benefitting employees who ultimately had not lost employment  may be eligible.

# QA00142 - Applicability of Article 36(2) of the CPR on technical assistance to the JTF

 *Relevant Article*:

Art. 36.2 of the CPR

Article 8 of the JTF

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Almost the entire NUTS 2 Silesia (PL) region except one NUTS 3 sub-region was indentified by the Commission services as eligible for the Just Transition Fund’s support. The JTF will be programmedat the level of the region, therefore the regional programme will include a relevant priority dedicated to the specific JTF objective. JTF measures will implemented by the same entities as for the ERDF/ESF+. The Managing Authority identified a need to include in the programme a separate technical assistance priority for the JTF. In line with Article  36 para. 2 CPR each Fund may support technical assistance actions eligible under any of the other Funds. **Can it then be confirmed that Article 36 para.2 CPR applies also to technical assistance funded under the JTF? Can the MA support in sequence of time similar operations and the same entities firstly by TA JTF ressources and then by TA ERDF/ESF (or other way round) while avoiding double financing?**

**Answer:**

Among the Fund-specific Regulations, the JTF contains specific rules regarding the support of activities relating to Technical Assistance. In line with article 1(6) of the CPR, these rules complement and qualify the general rules of the CPR (Article 36), including the flexibility provided in Article 36(2) CPR:

* In accordance with point (n) of Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation, technical assistance (TA) actions are eligible under the JTF.
* In addition, according to Article 8(1) of the JTF Regulation, the JTF should only support activities that are directly linked to its specific objective as set out in Article 2 and which contribute to the implementation of the territorial just transition plans (TJTP).

The JTF may also support TA actions eligible under any of the other Funds, as allowed under Article 36(2) of the CPR. In this case however, to ensure full compliance with Article 8(1) of the JTF Regulation given that it specifies the conditions under which TA activities can be supported by the JTF, a Member State would need to prove that such actions are directly linked to and also benefit the JTF specific objective and contribute to the implementation of the relevant TJTP. The examples of eligible measures may include management and control systems or information and communication web tools that are common to the JTF and other Funds under a multi-fund programme.

Due to specific rule set out in the JTF Regulation, a TA measure which does not contribute to the JTF specific objective at all, should be included in a TA priority supported by another Fund.

In any case, the Member State should avoid the duplication of costs and eliminate the risk of double-financing in line with sound financial management. The approach proposed for a sequential support for the same type of measure, first received from JTF TA and afterwards from other Funds’ TA, would ensure the absence of double declaration and double funding of the same expenditure.

# QA00144 - SCOs in operations subject to de minimis aid

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 53 (2) of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to the Art. 53 (2) of the CPR, there is the obligation to use SCOs for operations with a total cost of up to EUR 200,000. This condition applies to projects implemented outside the scope of State aid, as well as to projects subject to de minimis aid.

Does “de minimis aid” mean all de minimis regulations, ie all de minimis regimes (including e.g. the Regulation (EU) No 360/2012 setting out de minimis aid granted to undertakings providing services of general economic interest), or only the Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid?

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 53(2) of the CPR, where the total cost of an operation does not exceed EUR 200 000, the contribution provided to the beneficiary from the ERDF, the ESF+, the JTF, the AMIF, the ISF and the BMVI shall take the form of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates, except for operations for which the support constitutes State aid. By virtue of Regulation (EC) No 994/98 the Council decided, in accordance with Article 109 of the Treaty, that *de minimis* aid being aid granted to a single undertaking over a given period of time that does not exceed a certain fixed amount, is deemed not to meet all the criteria laid down in Article 107(1) and thus, it is not considered as State aid. Therefore**,** asoperations subject to de minimis aid are not considered as State aid, they are not exempted from the mandatory use of SCOs laid down in Article 53 (2) CPR irrespective of which de minimis regulation is applied in a particular case. It includes:

* Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid;
* Commission Regulation (EU) No 1408/2013 - de minimis aid in the agriculture sector;
* Commission Regulation (EU) No 717/2014 - de minimis aid in the fishery and aquaculture sector;
* Commission Regulation (EU) No 360/2012 - de minimis aid granted to undertakings providing services of general economic interest.

# QA00145 - Fossil fuel exclusion (oil shale as non-fuel and oil shale legacy ash)

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 8 and Article 9 of the JTF

 *Member State*: EE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

First of all, as far as the the fossil fuel exclusion is concerned, it is very clearly explained in the JTF regulation that investments related to fossil fuels are not eligible for support via the JTF. This is understood and clear, and we are not challenging it.

What we would like to clarify, though, is that not all fossils can automatically be considered fuels. A fossil is any preserved remains or trace of any once-living thing from a past geological age. Fossil fuels are, indeed, a sub-type of a broader category of fossils, but not all fossils are fuels. For example, phosphorite – a non-detrital sedimentary rock that contains high amounts of phosphate minerals and is found in high quantities in Estonia. It is a fossil, but it is used almost entirely for the production of fertilizers and animal feed supplements, as well as a balancing agent for the production of industrial chemicals. It is not – and cannot be – used as fuel. Another example could be coal: there is a difference between using coal for energy production or steel production; in one case it is a fuel, in the other – input for an industrial process – although it is essentially the same fossil.

The JTF regulation expressly excludes „fossil fuels“ – not fossils in general. The SWD also states: „investments in fossil fuel by-products or in the non-energy uses of fossil fuels (e.g. by-products of shale oil or oil shale ashes) are ineligible when they are technically inseparable from the ongoing production of the fossil fuel itself.“ However, it seems that according to the Commission’s interpretation, even non-fuel use of fossils (in Estonia’s case, oil shale), in processes that are not technically related to the ongoing production of fuels, would be excluded from JTF support.

It is a fact that oil shale may be – and so far has mostly been – used as a fuel. However, that is only one use of this particular material. It can also be used in innovative chemicals production processes that have nothing to do with fuels.

Hence, throughout the process of preparing our TJTP, our interpretation has been the following:

- When oil shale is used as a fuel (whether combusted for electricity production, pyrolyzed for the production of shale oil, coke gas or any other sort of fossil fuel), it is deemed not eligible for JTF funding. This is clear.

- When oil shale is used for the production of chemicals in a process, which is separated and independent from the ongoing production of fossil fuel, it should be eligible for JTF funding.

Can you please comment, if we are interpreting the text of the JTF regulation and the SWD correctly or incorrectly in this case?

**Answer:**

Fossil fuels are non-renewable carbon-based energy sources such as solid fuels, natural gas and oil, as defined in Article 2(62) of the Energy Union and Climate Action Governance Regulation (2018/1999 of 11.12.2018). [[1]](#scroll-bookmark-140) Article 9(d) of the JTF regulation excludes support related to the production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels, without specifying the purpose or end use. It includes the processing of fossil fuels, which means that the JTF cannot support investments in the fossil fuel processing, including oil shale and shale oil for both fuel and nonfuel products.

In addition, from a policy perspective, the JTF should not support any new value chains based on fossil fuels, in particular because it contributes 100% to climate change objectives in the context of the EU budget.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-141) In the energy statistics, fossil fuels cover: solid fossil fuels (coal), manufactured gases, peat and peat products, oil shale and oil sands, oil and petroleum products (excluding biofuels), natural gas and non-renewable waste. See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Fossil_fuel>

 **Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would like to comment on the topic of reuse of oil shale ash, which is the subject of one of the potential projects by non-SMEs, outlined in out TJTP (Ragn Sells).

As already referred to above, according to the SWD, „investments in fossil fuel by-products or in the non-energy uses of fossil fuels (e.g. byproducts of shale oil or oil shale ashes) are ineligible when they are technically inseparable from the ongoing production of the fossil fuel itself.“ Hence, we understand that according to the SWD, investments in ash that is not related to the ongoing production of fossil fuels, is eligible.

In case of the potential project by Ragn Sells, outlined in our TJTP, only legacy ash will be used as input for the project. Currently, there are ca 600 mln tons of oil shale ash in Ida-Virumaa that have been deposited into the environment of the region in the form of so-called "ash mountains" over the last 50+ years. Oil shale ash is classified as a chemical by the REACH regulation and is registered in the European Chemicals Agency's database ( [Reg.nr](http://Reg.nr) : 01-2119703178-42-0002). In 2018, it was also excluded from the list of hazardous waste items, which has presented an opportunity to recycle it and solve a major environmental issue for Ida-Virumaa.

In our understanding, this project – which is not related to the ongoing production of fuels – should technically be considered eligible to apply for JTF funding. Obviously, polluter pays principle is also followed in case of this project.

Could the Commission please confirm that our interpretation of the SWD and the eligibility of this particular project is correct?

**Answer:**

The use of legacy ash is considered as eligible for JTF as far as it contributes to the regeneration of extraction sites and land restoration under article 8(2)(i) of the JTF Regulation.

In case of particular projects’ eligibility, it needs to be demonstrated that these investments are linked to the JTF specific objective, as laid down in Article 2 of the JTF Regulation, and that they contribute to the implementation of the territorial just transition plan (TJTP). They need to be justified by their contribution to addressing the impacts of the transition and their link to the transition challenges identified in the TJTP. Therefore, the Commission services will be evaluating the concrete measure in the context of the submitted TJTP. In this particular case, it will be important to demonstrate that the project deals only with legacy ash and cannot be seen to support the continued extraction of oil shale.

# QA00146 - Investment in ETS activities with no existing benchmark

 *Relevant Article*: Art.8(2) and 11(2)(i) of the JTF regulation

 *Member State*: SE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The JTF Regulation provides an opportunity to support investments to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from activities listed in Annex 1 to Directive 2008/87/EC under several conditions, including that they lead to a substantial reduction of GHG emissions going below the relevant benchmarks.

In the Västerbotten region, one of the planned types of operations is concerning support for the reduction of GHG emissions from activities listed in Annex I to Directive 2003/87/EC in the ETS plant Rönnskär, Boliden Mineral. However, there is no existing benchmark for the processes considered by the Swedes. The reason for not having benchmarks in this specific field, is due to the fact that there is not enough historical data available, too few installations in Europe are active in this specific field of operation so there is no possibility to retrieve enough data for a benchmark. Instead, the Rönnskär facility in Västerbotten receives free allocation of emission allowances according to fall-back benchmarks, i.e. based on the use of fuel, production of heat and/or district heating and process emissions. The GHG emissions from the ETS plant (Rönnskär) in question are reported to the European Commission, which also monitors Member States' compliance with the relevant rules.

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency makes decisions on the allocation of emission allowances, is the supervisory authority and is responsible for following up the companies' annual reporting of greenhouse gas emissions. The Swedish Energy Agency administers the Swedish part of the Union Register. Both the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Swedish Energy Agency will have active roles in the Just Transition Fund’s implementation, and participate in consultations prior to financing decisions made by the managing authority.

As the JTF Regulation clearly refers to the necessity to compare the reduction of GHG emissions with the relevant benchmark, could such a project be considered as eligible in the absence of a benchmark?

**Answer:**

As a preliminary remark, the Swedish authorities should ascertain whether the activity of the Rönnskär facility in Västerbotten, which is not properly defined in the question, falls within the scope of application of Directive 2003/87/EC, as Article 8(2) of the JTF Regulation refers to that directive (see next paragraph). It should therefore firstly be cleared exactly which of the categories of activities of Annex I of that Directive corresponds to the Rönnskär facility. Only then it will be possible to further analyse which benchmark is to be used and how to be calculated taking also into account Regulation 2019/331. The developments below are considered to apply only in the event that the activity at stake falls within the scope of the referred Directive.

Article 8(2) second subparagraph of the JTF Regulation states that support can be provided to *“investments to achieve the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from activities listed in Annex I to Directive 2003/87/EC provided that such investments have been approved as part of the territorial just transition plan based on the information required under point (i) of Article 11(2)*”. In that Article, it is specified that the territorial just transition plan (TJTP) shall contain “*a list of operations to be supported and a justification that they contribute to a transition to a climate-neutral economy and lead to a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions going substantially below the relevant benchmarks established for free allocation under Directive 2003/87/EC and provided that these operations are necessary for the protection of a significant number of jobs*”. The Commission’s Staff Working Document on the territorial just transition plans (SWD(2021) 275 final) further explains how the Commission will assess such proposed investments.

The methodology for free allocations and benchmarking is described in Article 10(a) of Directive 2003/87/EC (‘ETS Directive’), in Regulation 2019/331 on determining transitional Union-wide rules for harmonised free allocation of emission allowances pursuant to Article 10(a) of the ETS Directive, and in Regulation 2021/447 on determining revised benchmark values for free allocation of emission allowances for the period from 2021 to 2025.

Almost all activities receiving free allocation under the ETS have a product benchmark defined. Where defining a product benchmark is not possible, fall-back benchmarks based on heat production or fuel consumption are used (see Regulation 2019/331).

In some very limited cases it was not possible to define a benchmark either because of the limited number of installations, lack of data, etc. This is the case for process emissions (emissions related to the production process of a product) where free allocation is based on historical emissions (for instance linked to the processing of non-ferrous metals like copper):

* no product benchmark is available,
* heat is not measurable and
* GHG emissions do not result from the combustion of fuel (so no fall-back benchmarks are available).

The Commission services consider that investments to reduce GHG emissions from ETS activities can be proposed for JTF support also for activities in industrial facilities[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-143) for which free allocations are given due to process emissions, provided it is demonstrated and justified in the relevant TJTP that the level of emissions per unit of product after and before the investment is significant compared with published data for other similar plants including best available technologies (i.e. BREF or other publicly available reports).

However, for the proposed project for Boliden Mineral to be considered eligible, all other conditions linked to ETS investments also need to be met along with further support criteria under the CPR and JTF regulations.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-144) In contrast, such investments remain excluded in the power sector, because of the exclusion of support for fossil fuels (Art. 9(d) JTF) and because no relevant benchmarks exist for that sector.

# QA00148 - Support by the ERDF of activities for applied research and innovation undertaken by enterprises other than SMEs

 *Relevant Article*: Article 5 of the ERDF regulation

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Spain would like to support activities for applied research and innovation (R&I) undertaken by enterprises other than SMEs. Spain argues the following:

1. the exception linked to the cooperation with SMEs allowed by Article 5, paragraph 2, letter (a) applies only to productive investments (Article 5, paragraph 1, letter d), but not to activities for applied R&I (Article 5, paragraph 1, letter b)
2. R&I activities represent a different intervention than productive investments, and this is confirmed by the intervention codes included in Annex I of Regulation (EU) 1060/2021: codes 009-012 are dedicated to R&I activities, while codes 001-008 are to be used for productive investments.
3. The support provided will respect the relevant state aid rules, namely the General Block Exemption Regulation (EU) 651/2014, the De Minimis Regulation, and the State Aid Framework for Research, Development and Innovation.
4. Support for R&I activities in non-SME enterprises would be provided only under the following conditions: the projects must have a high technological component, the enterprises supported must benefit or have a positive impact in the SMEs of the area where the project is implemented, support is provided only in less developed regions or outermost regions.
5. According to the latest figures, the total R&I expenditure in Spain represented 1.41 % of the GDP, compared to the EU average of 2.32%. This difference is explained mainly by the private expenditure in R&D, that accounted only for 0.78% of the GDP, well below the EU average of 1.53%. The low private expenditure in R&I can only rise with an increased effort of all types of companies, including non SMEs, and this holds true in particular for less developed regions, where SMEs tend to invest less in R&I.

**Following these arguments, could the ERDF support activities for applied research and innovation undertaken by enterprises other than SMEs under the conditions proposed by Spain?**

**Answer:**

As a rule, the ERDF supports productive investment in SMEs (Article 5(1)(d) ERDF/CF). The ERDF may support productive investment in enterprises other than SMEs only in cases defined in Article 5(2) ERDF/CF Regulation. In particular, points (a) and (d) of this provision set out the conditions for investment of enterprises other than SMEs in ‘research and innovation activities’ under the specific objective ‘developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies’.

Applied research in enterprises aims at developing new products, processes or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services. Such activities fall within the notion of productive investments set out in recital 38 of the ERDF/CF Regulation as they constitute investment in fixed capital or immaterial assets with a view to producing goods and services and thereby contributing to gross capital formation and employment.

It is noted that the types of intervention set out in Annex I serve statistical purposes (and thus distinguish between investment in fixed assets, intangible assets or research and innovation activities), however they do not define eligibility.

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# QA00149 - Support of LNG alternative fuel infrastructure, eligibility of biomethane for alternative fuel infrastructure

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7 of the ERDF

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Support of LNG alternative fuel infrastructure, eligibility of biomethane for alternative fuel infrastructure

There are several issues LNG refueling infrastructure and its eligibility:

1. The Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund in general does not allow the projects related to *“investment related to production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels“(*see Article 7, letter h). However according to point iii) of that provision there is an exception for *“investment in: in clean vehicles as defined in Directive 2009/33/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (2) for public purposes“.*
2. Since fossil-based clean vehicle (LNG/CNG vehicle) could not operate without existence of respective refuelling infrastructure, the Czech Republic interprets the exception referred to above in a way that also support of LNG refuelling infrastructure from Cohesion fund should be possible. From the Member State perspective, Commission should take into account particularly the fact that LNG infrastructure in cohesion countries is still lagging behind. At the same time, in the existing legal framework for development of infrastructure for alternative fuels (Directive No. 2014/94 – so called “AFID”) as well as in proposed new regulation dealing with this issue (so called “AFIR”) there are some targets for Member States in relation to LNG refuelling infrastructure.
3. Same time the CZ authorities have raised the question as to whether biomethan could qualify for support and could be used as an alternative fuel in the alternative fuel infrastructure (e.g. liquified biomethane, compressed biomethane). In a view of the CZ authorities biomethane does not qualify as fossil fuel and as a consequence the exclusion referred to in Article 7 of the Regulation EU  2021/1058 *“investment related to production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels“* does not apply*.* Could you confirm this interpretation?

**Answer:**

1. The support for the LNG (liquefied natural gas) as a fuel to be distributed via the network of the alternative fuel infrastructure falls under the Article 7 REGULATION (EU) 2021/1058 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund: The ERDF and the Cohesion Fund shall not support:  (h) “investment related to production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels…”.
2. An exception for “investment in: in clean vehicles as defined in Directive 2009/33/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (2) for public purposes“ does apply only for clean vehicles and cannot be extended to the alternative fuel infrastructure. As a consequence, LNG alternative fuel infrastructure using natural gas is not eligible for the Cohesion Fund support. As to Directive 2014/94/EU it establishes a common framework of measures for the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure in the Union. That Directive is based on Article 91 TFEU, on the Transport Policy, and sets out minimum requirements for the building-up of alternative fuels infrastructure, including recharging points for electric vehicles and refuelling points for natural gas (LNG and CNG) and hydrogen, to be implemented by means of Member States' national policy frameworks. These objectives cannot influence the interpretation of the policy choices made under the Cohesion Policy as regards the measures eligible for support by the ESI Funds. Thus, ERDF/CF could just support refuelling facilities (storage and distribution) exclusively dedicated to clean vehicles used for public purposes.
3. As biomethane does not fall under the category of fossil fuels, it is eligible for support from the ERDF and Cohesion Fund. In this respect, the relevant provisions of Directive(EU) 2018/2001 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources have to be respected. Complementarities and synergies with potential support through the Common Agricultural Policy should be taken into account. The support to biomethane production facilities under cohesion policy should be limited to infrastructure based on input coming from sorted municipal biowaste. Where biomethane production facilities are developed and operated by a farmer or a farming related structure (such as cooperative of farmers), there should be no cohesion policy support to the production facility itself.

# QA00150 - Direct staff costs concerning grants

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 55 of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 55 of the CPR sets rules for flat rate of 20 % on calculating the direct staff costs. It contains special rule for Home Affairs Funds. We would like to ask you for clarification of this rule.

1. The paragraph 1) says that direct staff costs may be calculated at a flat rate of up to 20 % of direct costs other than the direct staff costs of that operation (…) provided that the direct costs of operation do not include (…) contracts which exceed in value the thresholds (…) directive 2014/24/EU and 2014/25/EU.
2. It also says that for AMIF, ISF and BMVI the flat rate shall only be applied to the direct costs of the operation not subject to public procurement.
3. Our question is what is meant by public procurement? Is our interpretation correct that within EU law the public procurement is defined as procurement which exceed in value the thresholds set in directives 2014/24 or 2014/25?
4. Do we understand it correctly that for AMIF, ISF and BMVI it is allowed to use the 20 % rule also for operations which include contracts exceeding the thresholds, however as the basis for calculation serves the costs of the operation minus the costs of the public procurements? And that the difference for other Funds is that when there is a procurement exceeding the thresholds in an operation they cannot use this paragraph 1) rule at all?

**Answer:**

In relation to the flat rate of up to 20 % provided for in Article 55(1) of the CPR to calculate the direct staff costs of that operation, the 1st subparagraph limits its use (for all CPR Funds), where the direct costs of the operation include costs of public works contracts or supply or service contracts which exceed in value the thresholds set out in Article 4 of Directive 2014/24/EU or in Article 15 of Directive 2014/25/EU. In other words: the 20% flat rate under Article 55(1) CPR may only be used in operations implemented trough public procurement where the direct costs of such operations include costs of public works contracts or supply or service contracts which do not exceed in value the thresholds set out in those Directives.

In addition, as regards the AMIF, the BMVI and the ISF specifically, **any costs subject to public procurement** (i.e. the subcontracted/externalised costs) have to be excluded from the basis for the calculation of the flat rate *(cf. Article 55(1)CPR 2nd sub-paragraph)*.

Where an operation includes costs of public works contracts or supply or service contracts which exceed in value the thresholds set out in those Directives, any type of simplified cost options may be established in accordance with the methods set out in Art. 53(3) CPR for the reimbursement of direct staff costs. Article 55(2) CPR may equally be used.

Public procurement within the European Union is governed by Directive 2014/24/EU and the Directive 2014/25/EU. The Directives define inter alia the concept of ‘procurement’, including thresholds. It is the responsibility of the Member States to apply the EU and national rules on public procurement.

Finally, the Czech authorities are invited to refer to the Commission Notice Guidelines on the use of simplified cost options within the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI) – Revised version following the entry into force of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 *(cf. 2021/C 200/01, in particular points 2.4.1., 2.4.2, 3.1.2.2 and 3.1.2)*. While these Guidelines refer to the legal framework of the 2014-20 programming period, the same principles may be applied during the 2021-27 programming period. This is particularly relevant for legal provisions that have been carried over from 2014-20 to the new programming period.

# QA00153 - Treatment/verification of infringements - request for clarification (CPR and ETC Regulation 2021-2027)

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 258 TFEU

Article 97 (1) (d) CPR

Article 22 (4) (j) Interreg Regulation,

Article 22(4)(h) Interreg Regulation

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 22 (4) (j) Interreg Regulation foresees that the monitoring committee should *“ensure that selected operations are not directly affected by a reasoned opinion by the Commission in respect of an infringement within the scope of Article 258 TFEU that puts at risk the legality and regularity of expenditure or the performance of operations; (..)”*.

1. How Interreg programmes should obtain information about the list of infringements? Could this website be sufficient: [Infringement Decisions (europa.eu)](https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement_decisions/?lang_code=en)? Should the managing authorities from Interreg programmes rely on the information provided by national/regional authorities? Screening all kind of infringement procedures (even if limited to ‘direct impact’ will be a huge challenge for MA and MC members.
2. What to do in case of an infringement in an area covered by a specific project? How to assess that selected operations are ‘*directly affected*’ by a reasoned opinion? A very wide interpretation could potentially ‘block’ several Interreg projects/programmes.

**Question 2:**

Article 97 (1) (d) CPR provides that the Commission may suspend all or part of payments (…) if any of the following conditions is met: (d) *“there is a reasoned opinion by the Commission in respect of an infringement procedure under Article 258 TFEU on a matter that puts at risk the legality and regularity of expenditure”.*

It is not clear to us how checks should be carried out by the desk officers when processing interim payments.

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 69(2) CPR Member States are to ensure the legality and regularity of expenditure included in the accounts submitted to the Commission and shall take all required actions to prevent, detect, correct and report on irregularities including fraud.

Ensuring that selected operations are not directly affected by a reasoned opinion by the Commission in respect of an infringement under Article 258 TFEU aims at preventing irregularities. In accordance with Article 22(4)(i) ETC, the monitoring committee or steering committee is responsible for this task in Interreg programmes.

In supporting the work of the monitoring committee, the managing authority is to provide the monitoring committee in a timely manner with all information necessary to carry out its tasks (Article 75(a) CPR).

A reasoned opinion (a formal request to comply with EU law) may be sent to the Member State when the Commission concludes that the Member State is failing to fulfil its obligations under EU law. It explains why the Commission considers that the country is breaching EU law. This justification is the basis for the Member State to establish if there is a direct link between the matter addressed by the reasoned opinion and the expenditure at stake so that to put at risk its legality and regularity or the performance of operations. Programme authorities should be engaged in such an assessment. Partners may bring valuable expertise in such an assessment. The MA or Monitoring Committee may consult the [database of infringement decisions](https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement_decisions/?lang_code=en) as one of the sources of information. It is for the participating Member States to establish efficient communication on infringement cases.

It is up to the Managing Authority and Monitoring Committee to decide, based on all the information available, if an operation or a type of operations are directly affected on a case by case basis.

It should be noted that the reasoned opinion within the infringement procedure may lead to suspension of payments (Article 97(1) CPR). In its assessment if the ‘sufficient direct link’ mentioned in Recital 70 CPR exists, the Commission will base itself on this notion as set-out by the ECJ case-law and will consider the situation on a case by case basis and taking into account the principle of proportionality and depending on the expenditure at stake ([QA00152](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regiokm/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=194215993)).

# QA00154 - Reporting requirements for data fields 112 and 115 – Annex XVII to the CPR

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 72(1)(e), Art.91, Art.94, Art.95  CPR

 *Member State*: DE

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

“With regard to the preparation of flat-rate payments under Article 94/95 CPR, we have examined the data fields for these flat-rate amounts in Annex XVII. The following questions have come up:

1) Data field 112: Does the indication “type of reimbursement” refer to the forms of grants referred to in Article 53 of the CPR (costs actually incurred, unit costs, lump sums, flat rates, combination of the above-mentioned, financing not linked to costs)? Do the types of expenditure also include the information in Article 67 CPR (benefits in kind and depreciation costs)? If so, which other types of expenditure are also meant?

Original text: *Datenfeld 112: Handelt es sich bei der Angabe ‚Art der Erstattung‘ um die Formen der Zuschüsse nach Artikel 53 Dach-VO (tatsächlich entstandene Kosten, Kosten je Einheit, Pauschalbeträge, Pauschalfinanzierungen, Kombination aus vorgenannten, nicht mit Kosten verknüpfte Finanzierung)? Gehören die Angaben in Artikel 67 Dach-VO (Sachleistungen und Abschreibungskosten) zu den Ausgabearten? Wenn ja, welche Ausgabearten sind darüber hinaus gemeint?*

2) Data field 115: Does the indication “kind of support” refer to the subdivision under Article 52 CPR (grant, financial instrument, prize money)? With regard to “type of reimbursement” see question on data field 112.

Original text: *Datenfeld 115: Geht es bei der Angabe ‚Art der Unterstützung‘ um die Unterteilung nach Artikel 52 Dach-VO (Zuschuss, Finanzinstrument, Preisgeld)? Bzgl. ‚Angabe der Erstattung‘ siehe Frage zu Datenfeld 112.*

*3)* The above data fields 112 and 115 provide information on the reimbursement to the beneficiary. If the reimbursement to the beneficiary is different from the reimbursement by the European Commission to the Member State, how should this be recorded in the electronic system? The electronic system is based on information at project level. The accounts to the European Commission have so far been based on the data on the projects. The possibility for lump sums and flat rates under Articles 94 and 95 change this system. Is the presentation of the statement to the European Commission in SFC2021 sufficient?

*Original text: Die vorgenannten Datenfelder 112 und 115 geben Auskunft zur Erstattung gegenüber dem Begünstigten. Wie soll im elektronischen System die Erfassung erfolgen, wenn die Erstattung an den Begünstigten nicht identisch ist mit der Erstattung durch die EU-Kommission an den Mitgliedstaat? Das elektronische System basiert auf Angaben auf Ebene des Vorhabens. Die Abrechnung gegenüber der EU-Kommission hat sich bislang aus den Daten der Vorhaben ergeben. Mit den Pauschalen nach Artikel 94 und 95 Dach-VO ändert sich diese Systematik. Ist die Darstellung der Abrechnung gegenüber der EU-Kommission in SFC2021 ausreichend?*

**Answer:**

Annex XVII provides the ‘Data to be recorded and stored electronically on each operation’. Data fields 112-114 of Annex XVII to the CPR are only relevant for expenditure reimbursed by the Commission based on simplified cost options (Article 94 CPR) whereas data fields 115-117 are relevant only in case expenditure is reimbursed by the Comission based on financing not linked to costs (Article 95 CPR). In such cases:

1) For data field 112 related to simplified cost options: what should be introduced is a) when (date) expenditure was paid to the beneficiaries of operations covered by Art. 94 and b) the form of grant of this reimbursement i.e. costs actually incurred and paid or a type of SCO (the form of grant as per Art. 53(1) CPR)). The wording “each type of expenditure in a payment application” refers to the type of SCO declared to the COM in line with the type of SCO approved under Article 94 (art. 51(c)-(e) CPR).

2) Data field 115: what should be introduced is a) when (date) expenditure was paid to the beneficiaries of operations covered by Article 95; b) the form of grant of this reimbursement i.e. costs actually incurred and paid or a type of SCO or FNLC (the form of grant as per Art. 53(1)(a)-(f) CPR) and c)  the “kind” of support refers to whether it is provided through grants or financial instruments or prize (the form of support as per Art. 52 CPR)

3) It is noted that data fields 112 and 115 of Annex XVII CPR do not require information on the amounts reimbursed to the beneficiaries regarding the schemes approved on the basis of Article 94 or 95 CPR.

# QA00155 - Verifications regarding relocation - CPR and ETC Regulation 2021-2027

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 22 (4) (h) Interreg Regulation,

point (27) Article 2 of the CPR,

point (a) of Article 65(1) of the CPR

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 22(4)(h) Interreg Regulation foresees that the Monitoring Committee shall *“ensure that operations do not include activities which were part of an operation subject to relocation within the meaning of point (27) of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 or which would constitute a transfer of a productive activity within the meaning of point (a) of Article 65(1) of that Regulation*”

Should the managing authorities from Interreg programmes rely solely on the information (declarations) provided by national/regional authorities?

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 22(4)(h) ETC in selecting operations the monitoring or steering committee is to ensure that operations do not include activities which were part of an operation subject to relocation in accordance with Article 66 CPR.

In accordance with Article 66 CPR where a contribution from the Funds constitutes State aid, the managing authority shall satisfy itself that the contribution does not support relocation in accordance with Article 14(16) of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

The procedure under Article 14(16) of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 requires that the beneficiary confirms that it has not carried out a relocation to the establishment in which the initial investment for which aid is requested is to take place, in the two years preceding the application for aid and give a commitment that it will not do so up to a period of two years after the initial investment for which aid is requested is completed.

Therefore, the confirmation of the beneficiary is necessary to obtain the assurance required in Article 22(4)(h) Interreg Regulation.

In supporting the work of the monitoring committee, the managing authority is to provide the monitoring committee in a timely manner with all information necessary to carry out its tasks (Article 75(a) CPR).

At the stage of selection of operations, the monitoring committee or steering committee needs to satisfy itself that the application for assistance contains the applicants’ confirmation (declaration) about the relocation in accordance with Article 14(16) of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

# QA00156 - Exchange rate in case of SCOs as Union contribution

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 54 of the CPR

Article 76 of the CPR

Article 94 of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

**Background**

**CZ had submitted end of last year a question on the exchange rate to use when declaring the SCO amounts under Article 94 to the Commission**. In particular the question as asked is presented below:

*“We would like to verify the correctness of our intended approach to the conversion of amounts set out in the SCO methodologies from CZK into EUR in order to fill in part A of the appendix 1 of the programme in SFC2021.*

*The amounts of the unit costs or lump sums set out in the methodologies by the MAs are expressed in the national currency (CZK). In order to fill in the information in the appendix 1, part A, column „Amount (in EUR) or percentage (in case of flat rates) of the SCO“ in SFC2021 we have to convert these amounts into EUR.*

*For this purpose we plan to coordinate the process horizontally and set the exchange rate used for the conversion in a uniform manner. We plan to use the monthly exchange rate of the Commission in the month, in which the individual MA will submit the programme for the approval in SFC2021.*

*We consider using the said exchange rate for the conversion only as a necessary administrative step in order to fulfil the requirements set out in the programme template because SFC2021 does not allow us to enter amounts in national currency.*

*However in practice the amounts to be paid to beneficiaries as unit costs or lump sums will be set in CZK. Only later, when these amounts are included in payment claims submitted to the body responsible for carrying out the accounting function conversion into EUR will take place using the monthly accounting exchange rate of the Commission applicable in the month during which the expenditure is registered in the accounting system of the body entrusted by the accounting function.*

*It may thus happen that due to the exchange rate fluctuations the amounts in EUR filled in the part A of the appendix 1 will be different from the amounts used for the calculation of the amounts claimed in the payment applications to the Commission.*

*This issue relates also to the EU level SCOs once approved by the Commission, which may bring the same question on the correct exchange rate to be used for the conversion of the amounts set in EUR into CZK. As EU level SCOs haven´t been used in Czechia so far we would appreciate some guidance on this issue.*

*Please could you confirm that CZ understanding regarding the use of the exchange rate for the conversion of the amounts into EUR for purposes of the appendix 1 submission is correct and that this amount may differ from the actual amounts used when calculating payment claims due to exchange rate fluctuation? We would very appreciate the advice from you in this regard.”*

**Following internal consultation and with DG EMPL by e mails the reply provided** to CZ was the following:

“Regarding the submission of Appendix 1 (actually it the programme submission stage): Programmes should be submitted in euro. So, indeed, the CZ SCO amounts should be converted in euros when submitting the programme. CZ can proceed as suggested ie using the monthly exchange rate of the Commission in the month, in which the individual MA will submit the programme for the approval in SFC2021.

For the declaration of expenditure stage:  The SCO amounts will be approved in the COM decision approving the programme. In such case, as the amounts are decided and approved in euros, the provision in Art. 76(1)(c) CPR is not relevant. In line with Art.91(4)(b) CPR, where the Union contribution is made pursuant to points (c), (d) and (e) of Article 51, the amounts included in a payment application are the amounts determined in accordance with the decision referred to in Article 94(3) or the delegated act referred to in Article 94(4). Therefore, legally the amount in the COM decision is binding for the COM & the Member State and this amount should also figure in the declaration of expenditure from the Member State.

This means that for reimbursements in case of SCO schemes under Art.94 CPR, CZ proposal (that the amounts declared to the COM do not necessarily match the SCO amount in EUR of Appendix 1 due to potential fluctuations of the exchange rate) may not be accepted. It is also reminded that the risk deriving from exchange rate is for both parties, and the difference for the MS could be positive/or negative. In the long term, the difference may not be that much or marginal.”

**Question**

The authorities came back with a follow-up question stating the following:

“We clearly understand that the amounts of the unit costs or lump sums set out and described in Appendix 1 have to be expressed in EUR.

However, we don’t see the reason why in this case use of Art. 76(1)(c) is not relevant.  It’s clear that SCO according to Art. 94 (3) have to be approved in the COM decision and every amount in the programme has to be expressed in EUR, but in our opinion the basic principle of converting the amounts of expenditure incurred in another currency into EUR is defined by Art. 76(1)(c). This view is supported by Art. 76(3) which provides specific derogation from Art. 76(1)(c) for the Interreg programmes, but there is no derogation regarding Art. 94.

We perceive the amounts adopted pursuant to Art. 94 as very similar to those in the current programming period 2014-2020 laid down for ESF in the Delegated Acts adopted by the Commission pursuant to Art. 14(1) of the Reg. 1304/2013 (see delegated Act 2015/2195 (C(2020) 8641 from December 2020)). There all amounts are expressed in the national currency and only later for the purposes of calculating the amount to be included in the payment application these amounts are converted into EUR using the monthly exchange rate of the Commission as laid down in Art. 133(1) Reg. 1303/2013.

Moreover, the amounts and rates proposed according to Art. 94 are based on a detailed fair, equitable and verifiable calculation method carried out in national currency. The calculation method together with the amounts established in the national currency are also assessed by the audit authority. On contrary, the Audit Authority does not issue any opinion on the euro amounts included in Appendix 1 nor on the exchange rate used. As a result different amounts would be declared to the Commission in EUR than those precisely calculated and reviewed by the AA.

Besides, in Czechia we have planned to use the same amounts and the same method of declaration on the level COM - MS and  MA – beneficiary, which would however not be possible anymore if the current explanation applied. In this way, Member States which have adopted euro as their currency would be put in a more advantageous position compared to those who use national currencies.

Finally we don’t understand why there should be different converting principle in case of using real costs and SCO according to Art. 94, notably when calculation of SCOs amount is determined on the basis of real costs. In our opinion the simplified costs should come as close as possible to the real costs. This can only be achieved by using the amounts set in the national currency and converting them with the actual exchange rate.”

**Answer**

1. In line with Article 94 CPR the Commission may reimburse the Union contribution to a programme on the basis of SCOs based on the amounts and rates approved by a Commission decision.

To this effect a Member State must submit a proposal to the Commission in accordance with the templates set out in Annexes V and VI, as part of the programme submission or of a request for its amendment.

In accordance with paragraph 3 of Article 94 CPR the decision approving the programme or its amendment shall set out the types of operations covered by the reimbursement based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates, the definition and the amounts covered by those SCOs, and the methods for adjustment of the amounts.

In accordance with Article 87 CPR all amounts set out in programmes, including in the appendices on simplified cost options, reported or declared to the Commission must be denominated in euro. The exchange rate used by the accounting function on the basis of Article 76 CPR cannot change the financing decisions adopting or amending the programme.

1. Article 91(4)(a) and (b) CPR defines the amounts to be included in payment applications when the Union contribution is made pursuant to Article 51 (a)-(d) CPR: these are the amounts expressed in euro as set out in the decisions referred to in Article 94(3) or 95(2) CPR or the delegated acts referred to in Article 94(4) or 95(4) CPR. Due to that reason Article 76 does not apply to such cases.
2. The legislative framework for the ESF Regulation is different from the one of the 2021 -2027 programming period, so the comparison to Regulation 1304/2013 and delegated act 2015/2195 is not relevant. In particular the SCO amounts in the Delegated Act are set out in national currency which is not the case of SCO amounts in the Commission decision under Article 94 CPR. Therefore such amounts being in national currency will be converted in euro by the national authorities when declaring expenditure the Commission in line with Article 133 (1) CPR. The legal framework is thus fully respected and no discrepancies between the amounts of the two levels may occur due to conversion.

Concluding:

* The Commission decision approving the programme approves the SCO amounts under Article 94 CPR in euro. Amendment of the amount agreed requires an amendment of the financing decision. Irrespective of the result of the conversion at national level the amount included in a payment application to the Commission in accordance with Article 91(4)(b) cannot be different than the SCO amount approved in the decision.
* If the national authorities consider that this method is not suitable to them, they may just apply SCOs under Articles 53 to 56 CPR. In this case based on 91(4)(c) payment applications would include the SCO amount calculated on the applicable basis. This amount being set out in national currency would be then converted in euro in line with Art.76 CPR.

# QA00157 - Irrecoverable amount below EUR 250 in the 2021-2027 programming period

 *Relevant Article*: Article 69 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the context of  2014-2020Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 Article 122 providing that “..When amounts unduly paid to a beneficiary cannot be recovered and this is as a result of fault or negligence on the part of a Member State, the Member State shall be responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the budget of the Union. Member States may decide not to recover an amount unduly paid if the amount to be recovered from the beneficiary, not including interest, does not exceed EUR 250 in contribution from the Funds.

* What would be an appropriate amount unduly paid for a Member State to decide not to recover from the beneficiary in the 2021-2027 funding period? What principles and provisions would we need to take into account in deciding the appropriate amount?
* Is it appropriate to continue with the existing practice from 2014 -2020 funding period and choose not to recover an amount unduly paid if the amount to be recovered from the beneficiary, not including interest, does not exceed EUR 250 in contribution from the Funds? Or would it also be acceptable to choose any other amount that we consider appropriate not to recover?

**Answer:**

As explained in the [QA00054](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regiokm/display/2127QA/QA00054%2B-%2BQuestions%2Bon%2Bthe%2BAccounting%2Bfunction%2Band%2Bpayment%2Bapplication), recovery of funds is a Member State responsibility in all cases. The Commission is concerned only with regard to withdrawals of amounts, in accordance with Articles 98(3)(b), 98(6) and 98(7) of the CPR.

In accordance with Article 69(2) CPR Member States are responsible for taking all required actions to prevent, detect, correct and report on irregularities including fraud. As long as expenditure is withdrawn from the accounts, it is up to the Member States to set out the approach towards recoveries.

Unlike in 2014-2020 programming period, the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) for 2021-27 does not contain any provision with regard to the recovery of amounts unduly paid.

On the other hand, Article 52(2) ETC set out the specific conditions for recoveries under Interreg programmes. It indicates that amounts below 250 EUR do not need to be recovered from the project partners to avoid cumbersome recovery procedures between countries for smaller amounts.

# QA00158 - Use of Financial Instruments under the EMFAF

 *Relevant Articles: Articles 58-62 of the CPR*

 *Member State*: HR

**Questions (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. Is it acceptable to use Financial Instruments financed with EMFAF support in the form of micro and small loans for working capital?
2. Instead of providing Financial Instruments for investment risk sharing loans to large enterprises as initially envisaged, it is possible to finance them with Financial Instruments for working capital loans?
3. Is it possible to use portfolio guarantees for working capital loans instead of individual guarantees (for micro, small and medium entrepreneurs) especially in a current economic crises when the capital investments have slowed down and there is more need for working capital.

**Answers:**

To 1. and 2. :

First of all, in accordance with Article 58(3) of the CPR, support from the Funds through financial instruments should be based on an *ex ante* assessment, which should include at least the proposed amount of programme contribution, the most appropriate financial products to address the market gaps,  the proposed final recipients and the expected contribution of the financial instrument to the achievement of specific objectives.

Loans for working capital can be supported from the EMFAF through financial instruments, if they contribute to the achievement of specific objective/s of the EMFAF programme.

In accordance with Annex X of the CPR, the terms and conditions of programme contribution to the financial instrument should clearly identifiy the final recipients[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-154) (SMEs, large companies) as to address market gaps identified in the *ex-ante* assessment.

Finally, please, note that Article 61 of the CPR allows for differentiated treatment of investors operating under the market economy principle through an appropriate sharing of risks and profits, taking into account the principle of sound financial management. The level of such differentiated treatment shall not exceed what is necessary to create incentives for attracting private investors.

3. Nothing in the legal framework forbids the use of portfolio guarantees for working capital loans, if they are clearly justified by the *ex-ante* assessment.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-155) In line with the eligibility rules of the underlying programmes.

# QA00159 - The future structure of the EMFF Monitoring Committee during the funding period of the EMFAF

 *Relevant Articles*:

Art 38 and Art 39 of the CPR

Art 49 of the CPR 2014-2020

 *Member State*: FI

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Regarding the future of the EMFF Monitoring Committee, can the new EMFAF Monitoring Committee also handle EMFF questions, or can the Finnish Monitoring Authority run the EMFF MC via written procedure until 2023?

**Answer:**

Concerning the overlap between the two periods, 2014-2020 MCs will continue to fulfil their tasks until closure of the relevant programme (including the examination and approval of the final implementation report or the last annual implementation report for the EMFF).  In the case of continuity of the programme into the 2021-2027 period, the new monitoring committee (MC) can take over the tasks of the 2014-2020 MC, which then should be properly reflected in the rules of procedure, the membership and agendas. For programmes that do not continue into the 2021-2027 period, the tasks of the 2014-2020 MC may not be taken over.

When the MC covers both periods, this distinction has to be made clear in the rules of procedure of MC. The MA has to ensure that the partners of the previous period, if different from the ones in the new period, are present for the agenda items related to 2014-2020. The agenda has to clearly distinguish the items which concern 2014-2020 and 2021-2027.

In particular, if the 2021-2027 MC will have a different composition of members to the previous MC, it must be clearly established in the rules of procedure the implications this will have on the right of members to vote: members of the 2014-2020 MC can vote on questions relating to the 2014-2020 OP, members of the 2021-2027 MC can vote on questions relating to the2021-2027 programme(s), and members of both MCs can vote on all questions.

Article 49(1) CPR 1303/2013 states that “*The monitoring committee shall meet at least once a year and shall review implementation of the programme and progress made towards achieving its objectives*.” This provision requires at least one physical or online meeting to be held every year. Such a meeting cannot be replaced by written consultations of the MC.

# QA00160 - Responsibilities of beneficiaries

 *Relevant Article*: Article 50 of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 50(1)(a) of the CPR

Accordingly, the beneficiaries are obliged to describe the funding project (including the objectives and results) on their official website - "if such a website exists" - or in the social media.

Since there are constant changes, especially in the area of internet/social media, the question arises as to which point in time is decisive for this obligation? Is it the time of application? That would mean:

If there is no website or no activity in social media at the time of application submission, then no corresponding obligation has to be included in the notice of approval!

This would be a practicable and sensible solution, because a corresponding query can be made when the application is submitted, the granting authority is then aware of the corresponding sites and compliance with this obligation can be checked in a targeted manner.

Article 50(1)(d) of the CPR

Does the obligation to provide information according to Art. 50, Para. 1d) only apply to investment projects (construction projects, technical investments)? This would make sense insofar as it is usually connected with specific locations ("visible locations"). However, in the case of mobile technical investments (vehicles, equipment), the question arises as to whether or where the corresponding information should be displayed.

**Answer:**

Art. 50(1) states: “1. Beneficiaries and bodies implementing financial instruments shall acknowledge support from the Funds”. The rules on information and communication apply to operations that have already been selected and approved for support as their objective is to provide information on and give visibility to operations that are being funded by the Funds. This is also implied by the wording of Article 50 of the CPR, which refers to “beneficiaries” and “support from the Funds.” This means that after support has been provided to the operation, full compliance with information and communication rules should be ensured.

Article 50 applies to all forms of support. Article 50(1)(d) applies to operations relating to physical investments whose cost is below the thresholds set out in point (c) (€100.000 for EMFAF projects), and to any operations which do not involve such physical investments.

For mobile equipment, the relevant display should be clearly visible to the public. It may be placed where such equipment is normally stored, for example on the exterior of a warehouse, if it is not possible to put a plaque on the object itself. It is considered good practice to indicate the support from the Union on all equipment for example by using stickers.

# QA00161 - CLLD support

 *Relevant Articles*: Article 34 and 63 of the CPR

 *Member State*: EE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to the Article 29 paragraph 6 of Regulation 2021/1060 the support may be provided for the preparation and design of territorial strategies.

Article 34 paragraph 1(a) establishes that the Member State shall ensure that support from the Funds for community-led local development covers capacity building and preparatory actions supporting the design and future implementation of the strategy.

Article 34 paragraph 2 establishes that the support referred to under point (a) of paragraph 1 shall be eligible regardless of whether the strategy is subsequently selected for funding.

Article 63 paragraph 1 establishes that the eligibility of expenditure shall be determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in, or on the basis of, this Regulation or the Fund-specific Regulations.

1. Does it mean that, unlike to other forms of integrated territorial development listed in the Article 28, in case of CLLD the provision of support mentioned in the Article 34 paragraph 1(a) is mandatory?
2. Does Article 34 paragraph 2 establish requirement to pay support for the preparation of strategies that are not selected? Does this requirement also apply in case the reason for non-selection is non-compliance of the action group or the strategy?
3. Can Member States define national eligibility rules with regard of the support for the preparation and design of territorial strategies?

**Answer:**

1. In accordance with Article 34(1) CPR, Member States shall ensure that support for the CLLD covers **all** activities listed under points (a)-(c) of that Article, including preparatory actions supporting the design and future implementation of the strategy.
2. The rationale for the preparatory support under Article 34(2) CPR was (apart from capacity building of local actors), to enhance the creation of local partnerships and assist them in designing the local development strategies even before these strategies are selected. As such it is expected that Member States will support the preparatory actions for all CLLD strategies (as outlined in the CPR) that may participate  in a selection process designed by the Managing Authority under a programme, providing that these strategies set out the elements referred to in Article 32(1) CPR and regardless of whether they are selected in line with Article 32(2) CPR.
3. In accordance with Article 63(1) CPR, eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in, or on the basis of, this Regulation or the Fund-specific Regulations. Article 34(2) clearly sets out the specific rule that the support for preparatory actions supporting the design and the future implementation of the CLLD strategies is eligible, regardless of whether the strategy is subsequently selected for funding.

# QA00162 - Single FI receiving contribution from different Funds

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 2 of the CPR

Article 59 of the  CPR

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

One of the regions in France, Occitanie, wants to use financial instruments for the ESF+ (actions on social economy and individual entrepreneurship - microcredit). There are already 2 funds in place, one fund for FI for ERDF and one for EARDF managed by the EIF.

As the amount for the FI for the ESF+ is limited (10 million €) the authorities would like to integrate this into the contract currently in place for managing the financial instrument funded by the ERDF (90 million €). This means that there will be only one mandate or contract for both funds.

We would like to ask your advice whether there would be any legal obstacle or constraint to conclude one contract for both funds.

**Answer:**

We understand the question that France would like to contribute ESF+ funds under shared management to a financial instrument (‘FI’) for the 2021-2027 programming period. This FI is a continuation of the 2014-2020 FI setup in Occitanie with ERDF resources. The ESF+ resources are contributed to the FI as a separate stream of support to be implemented under the same FIs. The intention is to have one funding agreement covering the terms and conditions for the use of ESF+ and ERDF contributions under the same multi-fund programme.

Article 58(1) of Regulation 2021/1060 (‘CPR’) states that managing authorities may provide a programme contribution, from one or more programmes (e.g. ERDF and ESF) to existing or newly created FI.

The MA may entrust the management of one or multiple FIs to the same body implementing a holding fund or a specific fund provided that the provisions under Article 59 CPR on the selection of the body implementing the FI are respected.

The MA must conclude a funding agreement with the body implementing the FI in accordance with Article 59(5) and Annex X of the CPR. For the sake of simplification, the MA may conclude one funding agreement with a body implementing multiple FIs but needs to make sure that the terms and conditions for programme contribution for each FI are clearly identifiable. The update of the funding agreement to include the additional ESF+ programme contributions should define the terms and conditions of their use, including their audit trail in accordance with Section II of Annex XIII to the CPR.

The obligations stated in Article 59(9) CPR should be ensured by the body implementing the FI.

According to Article 92(2) CPR, the first payment claim may be up to 30% of the total amount of the programme contributions committed to the financial instruments under the relevant funding agreement at the date of the submission of the first payment claim (see also QA00083).

# QA00163 - Are costs for the management verifications paid from the project budget by the beneficiaries in the ETC programmes in line with the CPR 2021-2027?

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 72 and 74 of the CPR

Article 46(1) and 42(k) of the ETC

   *Member State* : n/a

**Background:**

As for the managing authorities of the IGJ goal, the managing authority of an Interreg programme shall also carry out management verifications to verify that the co-financed products and services have been delivered, that the operation complies with applicable law, the programme and the conditions for support of the operation (Article 74(1) CPR). The managing authority can carry out the management verifications with its own staff or out-source this task to external service providers (Article 42, point (k), ETC [[1]](#scroll-bookmark-161) ).

Moreover, management verifications shall be risk-based and proportionate to the risks identified *ex ante* and in writing. Management verifications shall include administrative verifications in respect of payment claims made by beneficiaries and on-the-spot verifications of operations.

In some of the 2021-2027 Interreg programmes, the costs of the management verifications will be part of the total project budget and have to be paid by the project partners. There are different models who will actually be the person to carry out management verifications. One model is that the project partners will have to select controllers from the pre-defined list of experts at MS level. Another model is that the management verifications are carried out by staff of the MA or by persons working under the responsibility of the MA and the respective costs are part of the project budget, accounted as a certain percentage. Those costs of management verification have to be planned already in the application form for support, reported as eligible expenditure under the "external expertise and services cost" budget line in the partner's progress reports. The managing authorities refer to Article 42, point (k), ETC as legal basis for this procedure. After the project progress report is approved, the ERDF reimbursement is paid out by the managing authority to the lead beneficiary (Lead Partner).

**Question (including relevant facts and information):**

Is it possible for a beneficiary to select controllers and pay for their work on management verification from the project budget? Is this procedure in line with the Articles 72 and 74 CPR and Article 46(1) and 42, point (k), ETC?

**Answer:**

In accordance with Articles 46(1) ETC and 74(1) CPR, it is for the managing authority to carry out management verifications.

In accordance with Article 46(3) and (7) ETC, the Member States participating to  Interreg programmes may decide that these management verifications are to be done through the identification by each Member State of a body or person (the national ‘controller’) responsible for these verifications on its territory.

In accordance with Article 46(8) ETC, each Member State shall identify as controller either a national or regional authority or a private body or a natural person. In case the controller is a private body or a natural person,  the requirements set out in Article 46(9) ETC need to be complied with.

Article 42, point (k), ETC –which builds on previous Article 6(k) of Commission Regulation 481/2014 – states that  *“verifications pursuant to point (a) of Article 74(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and Article 46(1) of this Regulation”* can be part of eligible expenditure paid by the beneficiaries.

Article 38(2) ETC requests that any expenditure eligible under the ETC Regulation shall relate to the costs of initiating or initiating and implementing an operation or part of an operation and Article 42, point (k) *(on the contrary of points (l) and (m) on accounting and audit costs)*, does not specify that the management verifications costs should be at programme level.

If the programme allows for it and the beneficiaries do use external services and expertise to carry out management verifications, this should be under the following conditions:

* the public or private body or natural person carrying out these verifications should be selected among a pre-defined list of experts established at programme or at national level and complying with the requirements mentioned in Article 46(9) ETC.
* it does not remove the responsibility of the Managing Authority to carry out management verifications or to satisfy itself that the expenditure of beneficiaries participating in an operation has been verified by an identified controller in accordance with Article 46(5) ETC.

In conclusion and in principle, management verifications should be carried out and paid by the Managing Authority or under its responsibility i.e. from the technical assistance of the programme as it is the case in the majority of ETC programmes.

However and pursuant to Article 42(k) ETC, management verifications of an operation could be carried out by a public or private body or natural person under the conditions mentioned above and their costs being paid by the beneficiaries at an operation level.

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-162)         (k) verifications pursuant to point (a) of Article 74(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and Article 46(1) of this Regulation.

# QA00164 - Combination of financial instrument and interest rate subsidy and calculation of management costs and fees

 *Relevant Article*: : Article 58(5) of the CPR

 *Member State*: PL

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Polish authorities wish to clarify the following two further points in relation to the financial instruments set up to provide combined FI and grant support, i.e. interest rate subsidy specifically, in one operation in line with Article 58(5) CPR:

1. The meaning of the investment cost and whether the interest rate subsidy constitutes part of the investment cost as well as the VAT treatment of the interest rate subsidy; and
2. The calculation of the management costs and fees if the combined support of interest rate subsidy is provided by other body implementing FI, i.e. holding fund, than the body implementing the product fund.

**Answer:**

1) We understand that the first question concerns the eligibility of VAT where interest rate subsidies are linked to a loan co-financed from the funds. The question asks in that respect whether interest rate subsidies could constitute ‘investment costs’ within the meaning of Article 64(1)(c)(iii) CPR.

It follows from Article 64(1)(c)(iii) CPR that where an investment is supported by a financial instrument combined with a grant, VAT is eligible for the part of the ‘investment cost’ that ‘corresponds’ to the grant support where the grant part is below 5 million EUR or for any amount where VAT is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation.

A loan may support the full cost of the investment or part of it. If the loan from the programme resources supports part of the cost of investment, the rest of the investment may be supported by other resources - either programme or non-programme resources (e.g. a commercial loan or a grant).

Grants provided to final recipients with a view to financing investments could be directly linked to the cost of investment by such final recipients. However, interest rates subsidies are intended to facilitate access to financing by reducing the applicable interest rate with the result that they cannot be linked to specific investment costs, i.e. no part of the investment ‘corresponds’ to the support in the form of interest rate subsidies. The interest rate subsidy concerns the interest rate which constitutes the financial cost for the loan, therefore the interest rate subsidy is not an investment cost or part of it within the meaning of Article 64(1)(c)(iii) CPR.

2) According to Article 68(1)(d) CPR, the payment of management costs and the reimbursement of management fees incurred by bodies implementing the financial instruments constitute eligible expenditure. Those financial instruments include financial instruments with a grant component under Article 58(5) CPR. Therefore, in the 2021- 27 programming period, when grants and financial instruments are combined in one single financial instrument operation, management costs and fees incurred in relation to the grant component of that operation will also be eligible.

Article 58(5) CPR allows either the body implementing a holding fund or a specific fund to manage the grant element in case of a combination with a financial instrument in one operation.

For example, it is possible to have a set-up where the body implementing the loan fund (i.e. a specific fund) is providing loans to final recipients, and the body implementing the holding fund is managing the interest rate subsidy to or for the benefit of the final recipients.

This provides some organisational flexibility, but it has no impact on the total level of the management costs and fees that can be declared to the Commission as eligible expenditure calculated on the basis of the loans disbursed to final recipients for the loan component and on the basis of the interest rate subsidy disbursed to or for the benefit of final recipients for the grant component.

# QA00165 - Purchase of land limit

 *Relevant Article*: Article 64(1)(b) CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Our question relates to the Article 64(1)(b) CPR, namely to the application of 15 % limit for the eligibility of land purchase in case of „derelict sites and those formerly in industrial use which comprise buildings“. Is the application of 15 % limited in a manner that both sites (derelict sites and sites formerly in industrial use) must comprise buildings, or the use of this higher limit of 15 % is possible regardless the derelict site or site formerly in industrial use is built-on or not?

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 64(1)(b) CPR, for derelict sites and for those formerly in industrial use which comprise buildings limit shall be increased to 15 %.

The limit of the total eligible expenditure used for land purchase is increased to 15 % to favour purchase of ‘brownfields’ (derelict sites and for those formerly in industrial use) over ‘greenfields’. The building is not considered to be a condition for application of 15 % limit. Nevertheless, in case the land is built-on, the 15 % limit covers the cumulative value of both land and the building.

# QA00166 - Eligibility and treatment of costs generated by negative interest rates under Interreg 2021-2027

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 63(1) and (2) and 90(6) of the CPR

Article 37(2) and (3) of the ETC

 *Member State*: n/a

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In 2020 few Interreg programmes raised the question about the eligibility of costs generated by negative interest being charged by banks since 1 January 2020 on EU-funds held on account by programmes under shared management. By the end of 2020 it was clarified (in a letter signed by Marc Lemaître, following replies to interpretation questions) that such charges would be eligible under the technical assistance priority axis, applying the corresponding co-financing rate. However, programme managing authorities were requested to establish first that the negative interests charged by the banks are bank charges which are linked to the usual administration of the accounts and therefore eligible.

For 2021-2027, we have received again questions from programmes regarding the costs resulting from negative interest rates. Referring to point 6 of Article 90 CPR (on interest gained), they believe that negative interest should be treated in the same way and covered from ERDF fully.

We seek confirmation on the following:

- are such charges eligible as already confirmed for 2014-2020?

- are these charges covered by the TA (even though a flat rate) and co-financed at the TA co-financing rate, thus not 100% from ERDF?

**Answer:**

The negative interests costs being charged by some banks on EU-funds held on account by programmes under shared management are eligible when they are linked to the usual administration of the accounts.

As regards the treatment of such eligible costs, they should be covered by the technical assistance (Article 27(2) and (3) Interreg).

Given the nature of the flat-rate, there will be no check of the underlying costs of the amounts reimbursed based on the flat rate at EU level.

Furthermore, these costs should first be offset against any ‘positive’ interests potentially earned (not declaring negative interest already covered by positive interest earned).

At the same time, the managing authority should take all possible actions to avoid the negative interest charges, in line with the principle of sound financial management. This should be done e.g. by more frequent and swift payments to beneficiaries and payment applications to the Commission; by negotiating a more favourable agreement with the bank; by moving to a bank with more favourable conditions.

# QA00167 - Collection of data

 *Relevant Article*: Article 72(1)(e) of the CPR and Annex XVII to Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

 *Member State*: LT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is the understanding that the data listed in field 23 of Annex XVII to Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (hereinafter - the Regulation) does not require direct links and/or data collection in the information system established pursuant to Article 72(1)(e) of the Regulation, if the data is collected in national registers, correct?

The same question also arises regarding the compilation of data referred to in Article 22(2)(d) of Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

It is to be noted that the necessary data collected in other national registers will always be available to the authorities for performing their functions and ensure the traceability.

**Answer:**

Annex XVII to the CPR sets out the data to be recorded pursuant to Article 72(1)(e) CPR without prescribing a specific structure for the electronic system.

With regard to the above, where a national register already provides all the data listed in field 23 of Annex XVII, there is no need to provide a link or duplicate those data in the electronic system established for the purpose of Article 72(1)(e), provided that the managing authority has direct and full access to that national register.

Regarding the compilation of data referred to in Article 22(2)(d) of the RRF Regulation (EU) Member States need to collect and ensure access to the certain standardized categories of data as defined in the provision. This data needs to be collected and stored by the Member States and kept available for audit and control purposes. This data should be made available to the Commission and investigative bodies upon request. There is however no obligation under article 22(2)(d) of the RRF Regulation that this data is shared on a pre-defined regular basis with the Commission. The Commission provided to Member States an integrated and interoperable information and monitoring system, including a single data-mining and risk-scoring tool that can be used to store, access and analyse the relevant data under Article 22(2)d. Member States are strongly encouraged to use this tool, to make their national data systems compatible with this tool, and to provide it with access to the underlying data to assist national and EU-level controls.

# QA00168 - Relocation in context of GBER

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 66(1) of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would like to ask you to clarify the provisions of Article 66(1) of the CPR. Starting from Article 2(27), which defines "relocation" as the transfer of the same or similar activity or part thereof within the meaning of point 61a of Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 (GBER), we assume that the relocation as so defined is applicable to all projects i.e. also to those not covered by the GBER. Is this interpretation correct?

The other question relates to the paragraph 2 Article 66, does it apply to all cases of state aid regardless its type, or does it apply only to the regional investment aid provided in accordance with the Article 14 of GBER?

**Answer:**

The provision of Article 66(1) CPR constitutes a rule applicable to all types of support from the Funds. The non-eligibility of expenditure supporting relocation is therefore not limited to operations covered by Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 (GBER). The reference to the GBER in Article 2(27) CPR is used only for the purposes of defining ‘relocation’. It is up to the Member State to put in place sufficient procedures and checks to avoid supporting relocation. In this vein, pursuant to Article 73(2) CPR, in selecting operations the managing authority has to ensure that operations do not include activities which were part of an operation subject to relocation.

On the other hand, Article 66(2) CPR is limited to the obligations stemming from regional aid. While under the GBER and the Guidelines on regional State aid for 2022-2027 (the RAG), the beneficiary has to confirm that it has not carried out a relocation to the establishment in which the initial investment for which aid is requested is to take place in the two years  preceding the application for aid and give a commitment that it will not do so up to a period of two years after the initial investment for which aid is requested is completed, Article 73(2)(h) CPR puts an obligation on the managing authority to conduct satisfying checks that indeed the cohesion policy does not support relocation.

# QA00169 - Use of grid electricity in the production of hydrogen under ERDF and JTF

 *Relevant Articles:*

Article 7 ERDF regulation

Article 9 JTF Regulation

 *Member State*: SE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Sweden’s national hydrogen strategy includes investments in fossil-free hydrogen, or electricity-based hydrogen, where the hydrogen is produced with fossil-free electricity from the grid. The fossil-free energy mix contains both nuclear and renewable energy.

* Are these investments eligible under the ERDF and under the JTF? And,
* Is there a legal basis justifying that only renewable hydrogen be eligible for support?

**Background:**

Under the ERDF, Sweden is planning these investments under the specific objective 2 (ii) Promoting renewable energy, in accordance with Directive (EU) 2018/2001, including the sustainability criteria set out therein.

Following the EC formal observations on the programme, Sweden specified that this is fossil-free hydrogen, and clarified how renewable energy sources will be produced (electricity from the grid, meaning a mix of energy sources including hydropower, *nuclear*, wind, heat, and sun).

 **Answer:**

It is understood that the scope of planned investments includes the production of hydrogen through electrolysis of water and with the electricity stemming from a mix of renewable and non-renewable energy sources. In the absence of further details, the Commission cannot take a position on specific projects.

The legal basis of the 2021-2027 cohesion policy regulations (including Art. 7(1)(a) ERDF and Art. 9(a) JTF) does not rule out the use of electricity produced from nuclear sources. In contrast, the exclusion of fossil fuels limits the production of hydrogen based on fossil-fuel sources from ERDF support and excludes it from the JTF, in accordance with Art. 9(d) JTF and Art. 7(1)(h) ERDF/CF. In that context, the production of hydrogen produced from electricity containing ‘heat’ is excluded if the heat originates from fossil-fuel sources.

From a policy perspective, EU funds’ support for the production of renewable hydrogen should be encouraged. Renewable hydrogen is defined as “hydrogen produced through the electrolysis of water (in an electrolyser, powered by electricity), and with the electricity stemming from renewable sources”[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-169), whereas renewable energy sources are defined in Directive (EU) 2018/2001 (Renewable Energy Directive) and do not include nuclear energy or heat[[2]](#scroll-bookmark-170). The production of renewable hydrogen is therefore fully in line with Art. 3(1)(b)(ii) ERDF and with Art. 8(2)(e) JTF, which are about “*promoting renewable energy, in accordance with Directive (EU) 2018/2001, including the sustainability criteria set out therein*”.

To the contrary, the production of electricity-based hydrogen based on electricity that includes non-renewable energy sources is not in line with these specific objectives, and should therefore not receive ERDF or JTF support.

In case it is demonstrated that the planned investments contribute to another specific objective, the Commission is ready to assess concrete proposals.

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[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-171) COM(2020) 301 final

[[2]](#scroll-bookmark-172) In this context, the draft Commission Delegated Regulation supplementing Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing a Union methodology setting out detailed rules for the production of renewable liquid and gaseous transport fuels of non-biological origin states the following: “*If the installation producing renewable electricity and the installation producing hydrogen are not only directly connected but are also connected to the grid, evidence should be provided that the electricity used to produce hydrogen is supplied through the direct connection. The installation supplying electricity for hydrogen production through a direct connection should always supply renewable electricity. If it supplies non-renewable electricity, for instance obtained from the grid, the resulting hydrogen will not be considered renewable*”.

# QA00170 - Voluntary involvement in the ESF+ in combination with SCO

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 56 of the CPR

Article 67(1) of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the next funding period, Lower Saxony wishes to include contributions in kind within the meaning of Article 67 (1) of the CPR in the form of work provided free of charge in order to support voluntary involvement in the ESF+ and ERDF. In all the guidelines, SCOs will be used in the ESF+, and this will also be more frequent in the ERDF than in the past. In the ESF+, the following SCO model will normally be expected:

1. SCOs for staff expenditure
2. Flat rate residual costs for staff costs within the scope of Article 56 CPR
3. Participants’ salaries and allowances, if any

In this situation, the inclusion of unpaid work services in the ESF+ support is possible only if the unpaid work can be included in the calculation of staff expenditure and thus also in the basis of calculation of the residual cost. In the other case, volunteering could not be taken into account in ESF+ funding, as it would be covered by the flat rate for residual costs. The extent to which this problem also arises in the ERDF is not yet foreseeable, as it is not yet clear whether there will be a situation with a possible flat rate for residual costs. With regard to the interpretation of Article 67 (1) in conjunction with Article 56 of the CPR, we are not sure whether the work provided free of charge can be included in the basis of assessment for the flat-rate residual costs?

**Answer:**

As the definition of direct staff costs, which is the responsibility of the managing authority, is not linked to the form of expenditure (in kind or not), in kind staff costs can indeed be used in the basis amount for calculation of the 40% flat rate.

This possibility is subject to the conditions that all national requirements regarding eligibility of expenditure as well as CPR requirements as regards audit trail  are respected and provided that the value/amounts for the in kind staff costs are, as specified in Article 67(1)(e) CPR *“determined by taking into account the verified time spent and the rate of remuneration for equivalent work”.*

# QA00171 - Annex XXIII (payment application) Appendix 2 – flat rate technical assistance

 *Relevant Article*: Article 15 of the CPR

Annex XXIII and Annex XXIV of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would like to follow up on question ‘QA00117 - Clarification regarding Annex XXIII (payment application) and XXIV (accounts) of the CPR in 2021-2027 programming period’. From the replies we are not sure whether the amount of the technical assistance in accordance with point (b) of Article 91(3) (flat-rate) should or should not be reported in Appendix 2 (enabling conditions) of the Annex XXIII (payment application). Taking into account Article 15 (5) and (6) of the CPR, which provides for the option to include the expenditure related to operations linked to the non-fulfilling specific objective/enabling condition, the respective amount of technical assistance in accordance with point (b) of Article 91(3) should be added to the expenditure related to operations linked to the non-fulfilling specific objective/enabling condition in the columns B and C of the Appendix 2. Is our understanding correct, meaning that the calculation of the N+3 rule will take into account not just amounts of pre-financing and payment applications but also amounts reported in columns B and C of the Appendix 2 of the Annex XXIII together with the respective amount of the technical assistance in accordance with point (b) of Article 91(3)?

**Answer:**

Technical assistance under Article 36(5) CPR is reimbursed by applying the percentages set out in points (i) to (vii) of paragraph 5 of that Article to the eligible expenditure included in each payment application pursuant to Article 91(3). The amount of the technical assistance under Article 36(5) in column D in table ‘Expenditure broken down by priority’ of Annex XXIII is to be calculated automatically in SFC2021 based on the data provided in the payment application.

As there are no technical assistance activities under Art.36(5) but only a reimbursement based on the expenditure declared in line with Art.91(3), Appendix 2 of Annex XXIII does not contain a column corresponding to column D in table ‘Expenditure broken down by priority’ of Annex XXIII. The amount of the flat rate technical assistance (technical assistance in accordance with point (b) of Article 91(3)) is not to be reported in Appendix 2.

The fulfilment of the N+3 rule will be assessed in accordance with the provisions of Articles 105 and 15(5) CPR taking into account amounts declared in Appendix 2 of payment application as well as corresponding amount of technical assistance in accordance with point (b) of Article 91(3) where relevant.

# QA00172 - Visibility requirements when the beneficiary is a physical person

 *Relevant Article*: Article 50(1)(d) of the CPR

 *Member State*: LV

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What kind of visibility requirements apply when the beneficiary is a physical person and the visibility item is within a private household, concretely in this case the EU support comes for the replacement of a boiler?

In accordance with the requirements of Article 50(1)(d) of CPR, it is permissible to provide publicity by electronic means. Given that individual beneficiaries have a very different electronic environment or not even at all (i.e. not using any online channels), it is rational that publicity can be provided by the intermediate body in one place, by publishing information on the website, for example with an appropriately designed photo-fixation on the implementation of the project.

We believe that it is not rational to make plaque in private properties or to require the beneficiary to create a specific social network only for publicity of the project, provided that it can be provided in a united manner in the electronic environment and, in any event, information on the projects carried out is also collected on the website of the EU funds.

In the light of the above, please supplement the clarification of the application of the criterion by: If the project is intended to be carried out in publicly undisclosed ownership and the project applicant is a natural person, publicity should be provided by the intermediate body, provided that it is specified in the rules on the implementation.

**Answer:**

Article 50 CPR requires beneficiaries to acknowledge support from the Funds to operations. In the case of ERDF-supported operations that do not meet the conditions specified in point (c)(i) of Article 50(1) CPR, beneficiaries who are natural persons should ensure, **to the extent possible**, that the appropriate information is available, highlighting the support from the Funds, at a location visible to the public or through an electronic display (point (d) of Article 50(1) CPR).

In this concrete case of replacing boilers in private housholds, where the beneficiaries are natural persons, displaying information about support from the Funds in private households (e.g. on the boilers) would not meet the condition of a location visible to the public. In addition, beneficiaries should not be required to provide such information on their official websites, where such sites do not exist. In order to acknowledge the support from the Funds, it is advisable that the relevant managing authority or intermediate body ensures promotion and visibility by publishing appropriate information on the project implementation on its website and/or other communication channels such as, for example, social media.

# QA00174 - Reporting requirements in Annex VII – Table 1 regarding FNLC

 *Relevant Article*: 42(2)(a) CPR, Annex VII CPR

 *Member State*: AT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Question:**

Art. 42(2)(a) CPR on transmission of data to the EC requires data to be transmitted on “the number of operations selected, their total eligible costs, the contribution from the funds and total eligible expenditure declared by the beneficiaries to the managing authority broken down by type of intervention; (underline by AT).

The CPR provisions do not provide any indication how FNLTC is to be treated although it is obvious, that most of the reporting requirements cannot be provided in the way foreseen (at least for the reporting points underlined above). How to report in Annex VII in case of FNLC?

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 95(1) CPR, the Commission may reimburse the Union contribution to all or parts of a priority of programmes based on financing not linked to costs in accordance with Article 51 CPR, either based on the amounts approved by the decision referred to in Article 95(2) CPR or set out in the delegated act referred to in Article 95(4) CPR.

In case of financing not linked costs to be defined in a programme, the Member States should submit a proposal to the Commission in accordance with Appendices 2 to the programme templates set out in Annexes V and VI to the CPR, as part of a programme or of a request for programme amendment. The information to be provided in such a proposal is exhaustively set out in Article 95(1) CPR. There is no requirement in that Article to provide information regarding the amounts corresponding to the costs of selected operations.

According to Article 91(4)(a) CPR, by way of derogation from Article 91(3)(a) CPR, where the Union contribution is made pursuant to point (a) of Article 51, the amounts included in a payment application are the amounts justified by the progress in the fulfilment of conditions, or achievement of results, in accordance with the decision referred to in Article 95(2) CPR or the delegated act referred to in Article 95(4) CPR.

In accordance with Article 42(2)(a) CPR, the Member State or the managing authority should electronically transmit to the Commission cumulative data for each programme on the number of selected operations, their total eligible cost, the contribution from the Funds and the total eligible expenditure declared by the beneficiaries to the managing authority, all broken down by type of intervention.

Based on the above:

* The data to be included in columns 8,9 and 10 of Annex VII should include information relating to the operations covered by FNLC scheme based on the information provided in the document setting out the conditions of support delivered to beneficiaries.
* The data to be included in columns 11 and 12 of Annex VII CPR should refer to the expenditure declared in payment claims to the MA by the beneficiary based on the mode of reimbursement set out in the document setting out the conditions of support. It means that if the reimbursement to beneficiaries is based on costs actually incurred and paid, the data provided should include the costs incurred and paid by the beneficiary. If the reimbursement to the beneficiary is based on SCOs or FNLC the data provided should be the amount calculated on the applicable basis.
* The reporting of such data is to be done at priority level, so at aggregated level even if the priority supports also operations not covered by a FNLC scheme.
* It is noted that the information included in Annex VII CPR is for the purpose of providing information on the financial and physical progress of operations necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verifications and audits as well as the elements kept to ensure appropriate audit trail as referred to in Article 69(6) CPR and Annex XIII of the CPR. Management verifications and audits of the FNLC scheme are subject to the limitation expressed in Article 95(3) CPR.

# QA00175 - Programme Authorities/Member State accounting function

 *Relevant Article*:Article 71 of2021-2027 CPR Regulation

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question:**

The question is on the management structure of the new programme.

 In accordance with Article 71.1 of the CPR, the Member State may entrust the accounting function (Article 76) to a body other than the managing authority, in such cases this body shall be identified as a programme authority (CPR, Art. 72.1).

Article 71.3 of the CPR also states that the managing authority may designate IBs to carry out certain tasks under its responsibility. Arrangements between the managing authority and IBs shall be recorded in writing.

In accordance with the above, the accounting function is entrusted by the Member State, and this is not a delegation from the Managing Authority.

According to the above, the question arises as to whether the body entrusted with the accounting function can appoint Intermediate Bodies, as its task is received directly from the Member State and not delegated by the MA.

**Answer:**

Art. 2(8) ‘intermediate body’ means a public or private body which acts under the responsibility of a managing authority, or which carries out functions or tasks on behalf of such an authority.

The CPR does not regulate the internal arrangements of the programme authority responsible for the accounting function. It is the responsibility of the Member State to organize its functioning.

Only the Managing authority can identify intermediate bodies to carry out tasks under its responsibility.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA00176 - VAT eligibility and project total costs

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 64(1)(c) of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would like to follow up on our Polish colleagues' question "QA00002 - Eligibility of VAT under cohesion policy rules in the 2021-2027 programming period" and the EC's answer published in the Q&A on the General Regulation and Fund-specific Regulations and consult with you the approach set up in the eligibility rules in the Czech Republic.

Taking into account the wording of Article 64 of the CPR, but also the effort to avoid double financing and ensure sound financial management, we have approached the VAT eligibility assessment as follows:

* For all projects where the beneficiary is entitled to deduct VAT under national rules, VAT is an ineligible expenditure, regardless of the amount of the total project expenditure. This approach has proven successful in previous programming periods and allows more projects to be supported.
* We take into account the threshold limit of total project expenditure (EUR 5 million) when assessing VAT eligibility only in cases where the project output is operated by a subject different from the beneficiary (non-taxable person) and the operator, having the status of taxable person, charging VAT on revenues stemming from the direct use of the project, i.e. in these cases we apply the principle of recoverability.

Therefore, in the context of this proposed approach, the total project expenditure threshold limit would only be relevant for a smaller number of projects. For this reason, and also in view of the possible complications caused by exchange rate fluctuations, we would like to ask for your opinion whether it is possible to assess the threshold limit only once at the time of issuing the grant agreement in these isolated cases.  And therefore use the exchange rate for the conversion of total project expenditure in force at that moment.

As regards the exchange rate already mentioned, we would like to draw attention to the following situation. If there is an appreciation of the Czech currency during the implementation of the project which could cause the beneficiary to exceed the EUR 5 million threshold limit for total expenditure, VAT would become an ineligible expenditure for the beneficiary without any relevant reason caused by the beneficiary. In this case, we lack legal assurance for the beneficiary and also for this reason we find it problematic to monitor the total amount in EUR during the implementation of the project.

In this context, we would like to mention one more issue, namely the clear definition of the total project expenditure. The answer to the question "QA00136 - Questions on the list of operations and data transmission" states that the total "cost of the operation" referred to in Article 49(3)(h) of the CPR should be understood as the amount of the total eligible costs of the operation as agreed in the support conditionality document (listed in Annex XVII of the CPR). Depending on the operation, it may include private financing. Can this approach be applied to other articles of the CPR where the limit of the total project expenditure is assessed (e.g. the already mentioned VAT or SCO)? According to the current practice in the Czech Republic, only total eligible costs are specified in the grant agreement, would it be possible to follow the interpretation given in the answer to question QA00136, i.e. to use only total eligible costs, when assessing the threshold limit of total costs. This approach would simplify the procedure for meeting the obligations under the CPR.

**Answer:**

Article 64(1)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (‘CPR’) provides for a set of exceptions to the general rule according to which the VAT is ineligible to a contribution from the EU funds under shared management. One of those exceptions applies to operations, having a total cost below EUR 5,000,000, and is not conditioned to the recoverability of the VAT under the VAT legislation. In other words, under 2021-2027 rules, for operations with total cost below EUR 5,000,000 (including VAT), the VAT is always eligible under Article 64(1)(c) CPR.

"QA00136 - Questions on the list of operations and data transmission" provides exclusively interpretation to the total ‘cost of an operation’ referred to in Article 49(3)(h) CPR in the context of monitoring responsibilities of managing authorities. The interpretation took into account the requirements related to data collection set out in Annex XVII CPR.

In the context of thresholds affecting rights or obligations of beneficiaries (such as in Article 50, 53, 64, 118 CPR) the co-legislators intended to ensure the same treatment of all operations below or above the threshold, regardless of whether the support is public or private. Therefore, in the context of the Article 64(1)(c) CPR, the ‘total cost of the operation’ covers all costs needed to implement the operation. It could include, as the case may be, expenditure not eligible for support under the programme, including costs covered by private ressources (as replied to PL).

With regard to the EUR 5 000 000 threshold, it should be assessed on the basis of the total cost of the operation as set out at the time of signing the document setting out the conditions for support or at the time of its last amendment (reflecting all possible cost overruns incurred and paid during the implementation of the operation).The conversion into euro should be made using the monthly accounting exchange rate of the Commission in the month during which the document setting out the conditions for support was signed or last amended.

# QA00177 - Eligibility of a JTF investment in a new ETS installation (“sustainable green-field glass factory”)

 *Relevant Article*: Art.11(2(i)) of the JTF regulation

 *Member State*: SI

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The draft territorial just transition plan for the Slovenian territory of Zasavje includes an investment to build a new glass factory. According to the information given by the Slovenian authorities, the factory, once built, would be a new ETS installation that falls within the scope of application of Directive 2003/87/EC.

Should an investment that leads to a new ETS installation be considered as an “investment to reduce GHG emissions from ETS activities” described in Art. 11(2)(i) of the JTF Regulation?

**Answer:**

The JTF Regulation provides a possibility to support investments to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from activities listed in Annex I to Directive 2008/87/EC. Recital 16 of the Regulation clarifies that the possibility of such investments should be allowed, under certain conditions, “in existing industrial facilities”.

The Staff Working Document on the territorial just transition plans (SWD(2021) 275 final) clarifies that the JTF can grant such support to address duly justified transition challenges in a given territory. In this context, it is recalled that support to such investments is excluded from the scope of support of the ERDF and CF, in order to avoid duplication of available financing, which already exists as part of Directive 2008/87/EC.

Based on the provisions of the Regulation, investments that lead to a new ETS installation should not be considered as investments to reduce GHG emissions from ETS activities as described in Art. 11(2)(i) of the JTF Regulation.

# QA00178 - Publishing the names of members of Monitoring Committees

 *Relevant Articles*: Art. 39(1) CPR and Article 5(1)(c) GDPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 39(1), subparagraph 5 CPR calls for the list of members of the monitoring committees (MCs) to be published on the website referred to in Article 49(1).

Some German Managing Authorities (MAs) take the view that not the names of the natural persons are to be published.

Firstly, in these cases the rules of procedure for the MCs list only authorities and bodies as members, therefore from the wording of the provision of Article 39(1) CPR it should be sufficient to publish the names of these (member) authorities/bodies but not their respective representatives. At the same time, MAs also argue that it would be sufficient to keep a list of representatives with themselves so as to be able to provide the member bodies’ representatives if needed.

Secondly, as another line of argumentation the MAs claim that the publication of the data of the member bodies/authorities creates the practical concordance between the GDPR and the CPR. The GDPR requires the economical use of personal data (Article 5(1)(c) GDPR). The CPR’s request for transparency while respecting data protection is thus met by publishing the authorities’/bodies’ names that are officially members of the MCs while keeping a record of the respective meeting representatives in the MAs.

The need for data protection has been called upon by many nominated MC members as there have been many cases of data misuse in the past, whereby personal data published on the internet by public authorities have been repeatedly misused by the so-called ‘Reichsbürger’ (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichsb%C3%BCrger_movement>).

In order to exclude this for the members of the MCs, according to the MAs in question the publication of the member authorities/bodies only should be maintained.

***Answer:***

Article 39 CPR establishes rules with regard to the composition of the monitoring committee (MC). It states that “each Member State shall determine the composition of the monitoring committee and shall ensure a balanced representation of the relevant Member State authorities and intermediate bodies and of representatives of the partners referred to in Article 8(1) through a transparent process.

These representatives are thus the members of the MC once this body is set up. Therefore, the obligation to publish the list of members of the MC requires the publication of the names of the representatives, i.e. of the persons representing the authorities, intermediate bodies and partners. The requirement to publish the list of the members of the monitoring committee on the “programme” website is provided in Article 39(1) CPR and serves the ultimate aim of ensuring transparency and avoiding conflicts of interest. Whenever a member changes, (e.g. a different person representing the same organisation) the list has to be updated and published (again).

As for the compliance with the GDPR, any processing of personal data should be lawful, fair and transparent. In order for processing to be lawful, personal data should be processed on certain legitimate basis, laid down by law, either in this Regulation or in other Union or Member State law as referred to in this Regulation. It follows in particular from Article 6(1)(c) GDPR (EU) 2016/679 that “processing is lawful if it is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject”; in this specific case, Article 39(1) of the CPR.

In order to abide by the GDPR, and in particular the principles of fair and transparent processing, during the nomination process, the managing authority has to provide potential candidates for membership with information referred to in Articles 13 and 14 of the GDPR and inform them in advance that their names will be made public in accordance with Article 39(1) CPR, so they are fully aware of this legal obligation, when accepting the membership.

The potential misuse of personal data is not a valid reason not to comply with the legal obligation to which the Member State is subject. The GDPR has put mechanisms in place to be used in the case of misuse of personal data (Articles 77 to 84 GDPR).

# QA00179 - Annex XVII of CPR Regulation (fields 20, 102, 103 and 130)

 *Relevant Article*: Annex XVII

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

(a) Regarding Box 20: "Indicate whether the public support for the project constitutes State aid".

*Is it correct to indicate "no" here if it is a grant under the EMFAF Regulation which falls under Art. 42 of the TFEU?*

*Would "yes" only be indicated here if the grant was awarded on the basis of a de minimis or exemption regulation, as it is then state aid within the meaning of Art. 10 of the EMFAF Regulation?*

(b) Regarding Box 102: "Date and reason for each deduction made under Article 98(6) and indicate the nature of the deduction."

*What is meant by "type/nature of deduction"? What are the types?*

(c) Regarding Box 103: "Amounts of total eligible expenditure affected by each deduction (of which amount corrected as a result of an audit)." and Box 130: "Total expenditure of the operation deducted from the accounts under Article 98(6)(a), (b) and (c) during the financial year covered by the accounts (of which amounts corrected as a result of audits)."

*What is the difference between box 103 and 130? Can this be explained with an example?*

**Answer:**

* Regarding Box 20

Box 20 should be completed as follows:

‘No’ for aid granted under EMFAF, and for any public support that does not fulfil the conditions of Article 107(1) TFEU.

‘Yes’ for support granted in accordance with the FIBER (fisheries exemption regulation), and decision approved based on the Fisheries Guidelines.

De minimis aid should not be reported, as it does not constitute State aid within the meaning of Article 107(1) TFEU, nor is it considered State aid within the meaning of the 2021-2027 CPR.

* Regarding Box 102

The main types of deduction referred to in Box 102 are listed in Article 98(6) CPR (submission of the accounts), which distinguishes the deductions from the accounts between “financial corrections” (= irregularities corrected);  “expenditure under ongoing assessment” (= expenditure that might be re-introduced into a payment application in subsequent accounting years once its legality and regularity is confirmed); and “amounts necessary to reduce the residual error rate to 2%” (such as extrapolated or flat rate financial corrections). Any other types of deductions should also be indicated.

* Regarding Boxes 103 and 130

Box 103 relates to each deduction for the given operations (plus which part of that amount was deducted as a result of an audit).

Box 130 relates to the total amount of deductions per operations.

The amounts in Boxes 103 and 130 would be the same if there is only one deduction per operation. However, the same operation could be the subject of several deductions, e.g. if the Managing Authority found an error in an operation previously certified to the COM which should be deducted from the accounts, and then the Audit Authority finds another error for the same operation. In this example, both deductions would need to be encoded separately (the first one as a correction not resulting from audits and the second one as a correction resulting from an audit).

# QA00180 - Durability and transfer out of NUTS2 region

 *Relevant Article*: **:** Article 65(1)(a) of the CPR

 *Member State*: DK

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to Article 65(1)(a) of the CPR the Member State shall repay the contribution from the Funds to an operation comprising investment in infrastructure or productive investment, if within 5 years of the final payment to the beneficiary or within the period of time set out in State aid rules, where applicable, that operation is subject to a cessation or transfer of a productive activity outside the NUTS level 2 region in which it received support.

Denmark is currently working on a scheme for coastal fisheries, which will include investments on small scale coastal vessels.

Could you provide us with guidance on how the term “productive activity” in article 65 will work in this relation. Is the condition linked to the place of registration of the vessel, the place of registration of the company/legal person owning the vessel, or the fishing activities of the vessel?

**Answer:**

Article 65(1)(a) CPR refers to a region, at NUTs 2 level, “in which an operation received support”. In principle, an assessment of transfer outside that NUTs 2 region should therefore depend on the location of an operation as selected by the MA to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the programme.

Where, due to the specificities of an operation, establishment of its location is not straightforward, other justified parameters may be applied by the MA and under its responsibility to set the location of the operation, for example by taking into account the purpose of durability provisions. In accordance with recital 47 CPR, durability provisions are to ‘guarantee that investments in infrastructure or productive investment are long-lasting and prevent the Funds from being used to undue advantage’ as well as ‘ensure the effectiveness, fairness and sustainable impact of the Funds’.

For the coastal fisheries scheme, the condition would be linked to the vessel’s fishing activities.

# QA00181 - E-Cohesion - ways of communication between beneficiaries and programme authorities

 *Relevant Articles*:

Article 69.8 of the CPR

Article 72.1(e) of the CPR

Annex XIV of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**In short:** The MS authorities are asking if they can keep email exchanges with beneficiaries on non-formal aspects (technical or clarification correspondence, etc) while ensuring traceability by properly record and store the correspondence **OR** they are obliged for such type of communication to create a separate messaging system (or a separate e-mail system) within the e-Cohesion system?

**The original question:**

Does Art. 69 (8) mean that "normal" e-mail traffic, e.g. via Outlook, between the processor and the beneficiary is excluded?

1. Does Article 69(8) mean that only e-mail traffic via communication platforms specially integrated into the data exchange system is "permissible"?

**Answer:**

The CPR does not differentiate between formal and informal means of the communication. According to the first sub-paragraph of Article 69(8) CPR, Member States must ensure that all exchanges of information between the beneficiaries and the programme authorities are carried out through the electronic data exchange systems. Email exchanges, ensuring security, integrity and confidentiality, can be seen as fulfilling the requirement of the electronic data exchange system, as long as an appropriate audit trail is ensured within their e-cohesion systems (i.e. by means of a proper filing system), in line with the requirements of Annex XIV CPR.

# QA00182 - Resources to be indicated in the description of the management and control system

 *Relevant Articles*:

Articles 69, 72 and 76 of CPR

Annex XVI of CPR

 *Member State*: DE

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Annex XVI of the CPR sets out the template of the description of the management and control system in accordance with Article 69(11) of the CPR. In its point 2.1.7. it asks for the indication of planned resources to be allocated in relation to the different functions of the managing authority (including information on any planned outsourcing and its scope, where appropriate). Similarly, in point 3.1.4 an indication should be provided of planned resources to be allocated in relation to the different accounting tasks.

Does “planned resources” refer to technical assistance? If not, would you kindly indicate what kind of resources are meant?

**Answer:**

In point 2.1.7 of Annex XVI, the Managing Authority should describe how it will be able to carry out the management functions as described in Article 72 of the CPR. The resources referred to are to ensure the capacity of the MA for its functions therefore they entail any type of resources (eg. human, financial etc), including any planned outsourcing of tasks.

Similarly, point 3.1.4 of Annex XVI (“Indication of planned resources to be allocated in relation to the different accounting tasks”) refers to the capacity of the body that carries out the accounting functions in accordance with Article 76 of the CPR. Therefore, also under this point all resources, whether human, financial or other, should be included.

Therefore, in the above points it is not sufficient to refer to only the financial resources allocated to the MA and the body carrying out the accounting function in the context of technical assistance.

# QA00183 - Purchase of land – property rights

 *Relevant Article*: Article 64(1)(b) of the CPR

 *Member State*: HU

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to Article 64(1)(b) of the 2021-2027 CPR, the purchase of land for an amount exceeding 10 % of the total eligible expenditure for the operation concerned is not eligible for a contribution from the Funds; for derelict sites and for those formerly in industrial use which comprise buildings, that limit shall be increased to 15 %.

The question is whether property rights related to the land should be included in the cost of purchasing land (e.g.: cost of purchase of land use, usufruct, use, rental rights, rights of way)?

Typically, these amounts are not paid to the seller, but to the holder of the property right.

**Answer:**

 In accordance with Article 63(1) CPR, the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in, or on the basis of, the CPR or the Fund-specific Regulations. As there are no specific rules restricting eligibility of costs other than those of the purchase of land at the EU level, if such costs exist under national law and are linked to the operation being supported, they could be eligible provided national rules make it possible (on top of the ceiling linked to the purchase of land laid down in Art. 64 CPR).

# QA00184 - Obligatory use of SCOs - sustainable urban development

 *Relevant Article*: Article 53 (2) of the CPR

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The authorities of Saxony have a question concerning the obligatory use of simplified cost options in the framework of sustainable urban development under specific objective 5.1. of the 2021-2027 programme. Under an integrated urban development strategy, municipalities will provide support to small enterprises.  The support is implemented in a two-step procedure:

1. The intermediate body awards a grant to the municipality for the operation „Einrichtung eines KU-Fonds“ (title in English: “Establishment of a small enterprises fund”. The municipality is the beneficiary of the operation. The grant agreement sets out the municipality’s framework for the implementation of the individual business support projects. The intermediate body pays the grant amount to the municipality.
2. The municipality passes the grants on to the small enterprises following a grant award procedure. The small enterprises receive the support on the basis of a decision taken by the municipality. The individual grants to the small enterprises are in general below 200,000 EUR total cost. The support is considered as *de minimis* aid according to the Saxon authorities.

The question is if, in this case, the use of the simplified cost options is obligatory at the level between intermediate body and municipality or at the level between municipality and small enterprises.

**Answer:**

The two-step procedure of granting support to enterprises decribed in the question is a case of cascade funding. The cases where a beneficiary may further cascade support without being appointed an intermediate body were defined in  [QA00132 - Cascade funding - RegioWiki Extranet - RegioWiki (europa.eu)](#scroll-bookmark-118). Cascade funding schems should be in line with the conditons set out  therein.

In accordance with Article 53(2)CPR where the total cost of an operation does not exceed EUR 200 000, the contribution provided to the beneficiary from the ERDF, the ESF+, the JTF, the AMIF, the ISF and the BMVI shall take the form of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates, except for operations for which the support constitutes State aid.

Based on this provision, the mandatory use of the SCOs is linked to the total cost of the operation. In addition, the provision concerns the contribution (the support) from the MA to the beneficiary which must take the form of a SCO. This means that the elements relevant for the application of the mandatory use of SCOs are the definition of the operation and the beneficiary. There is no provision regarding the mandatory application of SCOs for situations where the beneficiary receives a higher contribution and further cascades the support to other entities which would be considered as final recipients of such support and thus would not be concerned by the CPR provisions.

Therefore, the reply depends on the definition of the operation and beneficiary in each case. Based on the information provided, it seems that in the specific case the municipality signs a grant agreement with the intermediate body to implement business support to small enterprises (the operation) and that the total cost of the operation is above EUR 200,000. Therefore it seems that the beneficiary of the operation is the municipality. This means that it is not mandatory for the support to be provided to the municipality in the form of SCOs. The use of simplified cost options is also not mandatory at the level between the municipality and the small enterprises as they are not beneficiaries but final recipients and, thus, the support provided to them by the beneficiary is not obliged to take the form of SCOs.

# QA00185 - Operations of strategic importance – which information, at which level

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 2, 49(3), 50(1)(e) and 73(5) of the CPR

 *Member State*: IT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

* **Information to be communicated to the Commission**:

Article 73(5) CPR provides that when the managing authority selects an operation of strategic importance (OSI), it shall inform the Commission within 1 month and shall provide all relevant information to the Commission about that operation.

With regard to the information to be communicated, [DG Regio’s toolbox](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/05/05-06-2022-communicating-operations-of-strategic-importance-a-practical-toolbox) indicates that “no prescribed format is envisaged, but it is suggested to indicate elements which need to be provided in any case under Article 49(3) CPR in the list of operations selected for support by the Funds”.

1a) Is there any other information/data that the MA should transmit to the EC with regard to the selected OSIs?

a) How should these information be transmitted? Is there a specific module in SFC?

* **Requirements for OSIs – at which level:**

The MA has selected as OSI a measure to support the offer of non-academic tertiary education. Under these measure, a call has been launched for the selection of the “Istituti Tecnici Superiori” – higher technical institutes that will receive support. The call will therefore select different projects (and beneficiaries), all of which are part of the overall measure.

2a) With regard to the requirements linked to operations of strategic importance (monitoring and communication), do they apply to the measure/call as a whole or do they apply to each single selected project?

2b) For example, with regard to the communication requirements, do they apply to the overall call or the single project, implying therefore that each single beneficiary receiving support under the call (in this case each higher technical institute) need to comply with the communication requirements set out in art. 50(e)?

**Answer**:

1.a)  As explained in the toolbox, no prescribed format is envisaged in the CPR, but it is suggested to indicate elements which need to be provided in any case under Article 49(3) CPR in the list of operations selected for support by the Funds.

1.b) “Visibility, transparency and communication” module in SFC2021 could be used for this purpose. Technical requirements necessary to submit such information are currently being discussed.

2.a) An OSI, in accordance with its definition in Article 2(5) CPR, is always an operation in the meaning of the definition of Article 2(4) CPR. Therefore, obligations of beneficiaries or of the Member State/Managing Authority are also linked to the operation (and not to other level of intervention).

2.b) See the reply in 2.a. Please, take note that the correct reference is Article 50(1)(e) CPR related to responsibilities of beneficiaries.

# QA00186 - Use of technical assistance for visibility of projects of strategic importance

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 36(5), 46, 49, 50, 51(e) of the CPR

 *Member State*: BE

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. *If considerable extra expenses would need to be incurred in order to give sufficient visibility attention (CPR Art 46) about EMFAF co-financed projects, e.g. in the case of operations of strategic importance, could these be included into the overall expenditure of the concerned project ?*
2. *If not, would this publicity need to fall entirely under the responsibility of the MA (still with possibility to outsource) and within the 6% limitation of TA under Art 36 5 as related to point (e) of Art 51?*
3. *And, would it be possible for the MA to outsource this publicity to the project promotor executing the operation of strategic importance, by granting financial means originating from TA?*

**Answers:**

1. Costs for giving visibility to co-financed operations, including those of strategic importance, can be covered by the overall expenditure of the concerned operations.
2. Not applicable in view of the reply to question (a).
3. Aiming to support organizing impactful events or activities that reach out to broader audiences, it would be possible for the MA to grant TA means to the project beneficiary for publicity related to an operation of strategic importance. Please note that the responsibility of Article 50(1,e) CPR remains with the beneficiary. However, it is easier from an administrative point of view if the costs are covered by the overall expenditure of the operation.

**General comment:** The national authorities are invited to consult the toolbox “Communicating Operations of Strategic Importance in 2021-2027” (in particular pages 10-13 inclusive), which can be found at the link below. [communicating\_operations\_2021-2027\_en.pdf (europa.eu)](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/informing/communicating_operations_2021-2027_en.pdf)

# QA00187 - Eligibility of electric cars and solar panels

 *Relevant Articles*: Articles 36 and 63 of the CPR

 *Member State*: RO

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The regional authorities in Romania intend to finance electric cars, electric charging stations and solar panels at the headquarter of the managing authority from the technical assistance priority of the programme.

Please give us a point of view regarding the eligibility of the following categories of expenses, within the technical assistance priority of the Regional Program:

- Purchase of electric vehicles

- Purchase and installation of photovoltaic panel systems that use renewable, non-polluting energy sources, in order to produce electricity and use it at the headquarters of the MA;

- Purchase of recharging stations for electric vehicles;

- Construction, installation and assembly work related to recharging stations;

- Expenses related to the works for the provision of electricity necessary for the operation of the investment objective, as well as expenses related to the connection to the electricity network;

- Expenses for the purchase and installation of the photovoltaic panel system as an alternative solution for supplying electricity to recharging stations;

- Expenses for supporting documentation and obtaining approvals, agreements and authorizations;

- Design services, site management, project verifier.

**Answer:**

Technical assistance (TA) under Article 36 CPR supports actions necessary for the effective administration and use of the Funds. As regards investments linked to the headquarters of the MA presented in the question, only expenditure which is necessary for the managing authority to carry out its functions as regards the effective administration and use of the funds can consequently be covered.

The purchase of electric cars from technical assistance is not explicitly excluded in the CPR, however it should be limited to vehicles that are necessary for the performance of the tasks of the managing authority referred to in Article 36(1) of the CPR (such as on-the spot verifications).

In general, technical assistance should not be used to build or renovate public administration buildings unless there is a clear added value.In case investments are well justified in the sense that they are  proven to contribute to achieve the objectives of TA, purchase and installation of photovoltaic panel systems or charging infrastructure for electric cars at the premises hosting the MA can be considered eligible.

If granted, any support from TA to such investments should be proportional to the use of the deliverables by MA (only the share of expenditure that can be attributed to MA can be covered by TA) and duration of the programming period against the life-time of investment (only the share of life-time of investment that is within the programing period can be covered by TA). An appropriate pro-rata approach needs to be developed.

Alternatively, also taking into account that the life-time of these investments is usually longer than the programming period we would recommend to consider the option of covering from TA the relevant share of the depreciation costs of the above investments. Eligibility of depreciation is set out in Article 67(2) CPR.

Member State is responsible for the effective use of technical assistance in accordance with Article 36 CPR.

# QA00189 - Optimisation of existing heating systems while maintaining the use of gas

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7(1)(h)(i) of the ERDF/CF Regulation

 *Member State*: DE

**Background**

*- Example 1*

**Energy renovation chilcare facility Buschgraben**

The purpose of the support is to renovate the building envelope for energy purposes and to optimise heating and water supply systems using renewable energy sources. To this end, the outer walls, roof and cellar ceiling are insulated, the windows are replaced and the floor is supplied with space heating in sub-areas. The heating and hot water system is optimised. The existing gas heating system will be operated in combination with an air-to-water heat pump. In addition, a solar layer for the provision of hot water in the kitchen will be installed on the roof. As the heating demand is reduced, the distribution system is also adapted. The network will be rescaled. The use of a decentralised ventilation system with heat recovery (85%) is also part of the action. The renovation meets the standard „EnEV 2014 minus 44%“. The requirements of funding level III are met.

*- Example 2*

**Optimisation of the energy supply of the church municipality of Rixdorf**

The purpose of the aid is to produce a central heating supply for the building complex existing on the above-mentioned site of the Evangelische Kirche Rixdorf (Magdalenenkirche, municipal house with two building parts and crèche). In order to switch to low-temperature operation, it is foreseen that the old boiler will be replaced by two gas absorption heat pumps, as well as the replacement of heat distribution and heating surfaces. An existing gas condensing boiler shall be integrated into the system for peak load supply.

*- Example 3*

**Energy renovation of Kita (crip) Baseler Str. 69**

The purpose of the support is to renovate the building envelope for energy purposes and to renew the heating and hot water supply systems. The existing gas heating system will be replaced by a gas condensing boiler (25 kW) in combination with an air-to-water heat pump (21 kW). In addition, a solar installation for the provision of hot water will be installed on the roof. The existing gas heating system is from 1993 and is therefore not subject to a renewal obligation under §10 EnEV. The use of a decentralised ventilation system with heat recovery (85%) is also part of the action. This renovation meets the standard “EnEV 2014 minus 41%”. The requirements of funding level III are met.

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In the 2014-2020 period, the ERDF programme has supported a number of renovation projects in which energy from renewable sources was integrated into the heating system of the building. However, in order to ensure the supply of heat even in peak load situations, the combustion of gas could not be completely abandoned in these cases. In many of these cases, an existing gas heating system was combined with a gas-fired heat pump supported by the project. This funding possibility is also provided for in the German Federal Funding Programme for Efficient Buildings (BEG). These plants are technically mature and have a low price, ans are efficient and low-maintenance in their operation. In order to illustrate the specific content of the funding, please find attached three brief descriptions of such projects.

Since it is intended to support similar operations with ERDF funding also in the new funding period 2021-2027, we are consulting you in order to ensure that the provisions of Article 7(1)(h)(i) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 (Regulation (EU) 2021/1058) are applied with legal certainty. Can projects that concern the above-mentioned form of optimisation of existing heating systems while maintaining the use of gas, still be supported with ERDF funding in the 2021-2027 funding period?  Or  - in the opposite case -  in the cases described, could only electricity- or hydrogen-powered heating systems still be supported?

**Answer:**

The provisions of Article 7(1)(h)(i) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 (Regulation (EU) 2021/1058) do not allow for the support of investments linked, amongst others, to the combustion of fossil fuels, except for a limited number of specific cases as listed in the Regulation. Investment related to fossil fuels may be considered eligible only if it falls under these exceptions. In particular, support to natural gas condensing boilers could only be eligible in cases where they replace in housing coal-, peat-, lignite- or oil shale-based installations.

Taking into account recital 41 of the ERDF/CF Regulation investments in heating systems combining gas and renewable energy source for the optimisation of  these systems are possible on the pro-rata basis. In such cases, support should correspond pro-rata to the share of renewable energy input to such heating systems.

On the other hand as set out under PO2, the support to energy efficiency measures in buildings (such as insulation operations, replacement of windows/doors, upgrade of the ventilisation system), renewable energy integration in buildings and smart energy management measures  are eligible.

Please note the answer does not endorse the eligibility of the schemes presented in the examples.

# QA00190 - Managing Authority an eligible beneficiary of activities other than TA

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 2 of the CPR

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would like to know whether the Managing Authority can be an applicant/beneficiary of activities other than Technical Assistance (TA), for example activity promotional campaigns under the Specific Objective 2.2, contrary to the EMFF period when this was allowed only for TA.

**Answer:**

Based on the definition of “beneficiary” in Article 2(9) CPR, and without any further exclusions in the CPR and Fund-specific Regulations, managing authorities can be beneficiaries of operations under actions other than technical assistance provided that such operations contribute to a specific objective,  fall within the scope of support of the relevant CPR fund and are in line with the programme. In accordance with Article 74(3) CPR, where the managing authority is also a beneficiary under the programme, separation of functions needs to be ensured.

# QA00191 - Final allocation of the flexibility amount

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 18 of the CPR

 *Member State*: LT

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can the MA allocate to the operation the whole amount of the programme dedicated to material deprivation (one priority only) except the flexibility amount? The latter would be allocated after a mid-term review.

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 86 CPR, for programmes under the Investment for jobs and growth goal, an amount corresponding to 50 % of the contribution for the years 2026 and 2027 (‘flexibility amount’) per programme in each Member State should be retained and definitively allocated to the programme only after the adoption of the Commission decision following the mid-term review in accordance with Article 18 CPR. Furthermore, in accordance with Article 18(5), until the adoption of the Commission decision confirming the definitive allocation of the flexibility amount, this amount should not be available for selection of operations.

To conclude, the MA may commit to operations selected before the mid-term review in accordance with Article 73 CPR, the whole amount of the priority under the programme with the exception of flexibility amount.

More information about the flexibility amount, see also [QA00048](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regiokm/display/2127QA/QA00048%2B-%2BFlexibility%2Bamount%2Band%2Bfuture%2Btransfers%2Bof%2BERDF%2Ballocations%2Bbetween%2Bprogrammes).

# QA00192 - How to modify the list of support to productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs?

 *Relevant Articles*:

* 24(6) of the CPR
* Article 73 of the CPR
* Article 8 of the JTF regulation
* Article 11 of the JTF Regulation
* Paragraph 14 of the Regional State Aid Guidelines
* Paragraph 45 of the Regional State Aid Guidelines
* Article 107 of the TFEU
* Article 108 of the TFEU

 *Member State*: EE

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

As stated in the answer to the question QA00101: In principle, the list of productive investments and enterprises remains indicative even once approved by the Commission within the TJTP as part of the programme. The identification of new productive investments in large enterprises after the approval of the TJTP will require neither a modification of the relevant list in the TJTP nor an amendment of the programme. However, the list of Article 11(2)(h) of the JTF Regulation loses de facto its “indicative” character as regards support to large enterprises for productive investments located in ‘c’ areas, covered by paragraph 14 of Regional State aid Guidelines (the RAG).

As Ida-Viru is a “c” area, the list is not indicative, as stated in above answer. This means that if and when Estonia wants to support investments that are not yet in the list, the list needs to be changed.

Therefore Estonia has asked the following:

**Is the modification of the list of support to productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs considered to be clerical or editorial change or does it require an amendment of the programme?**

**Answer:**

In principle, the list of productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs, required by Article 11(2)(h) of the JTF Regulation, remains indicative even once approved by the Commission within the TJTP as part of the programme. This implies that the identification, and support of new productive investments in enterprises other than SMEs after the approval of the TJTP requires neither a modification of the relevant list in the TJTP nor an amendment of the programme. However, if the Member State intends to present the new investments as formally part of the programme, a programme amendment, approved by the Commission,  is required to reflect the formal update of that list. This is without prejudice of the need for those productive investments to undergo the selection procedure in line with Article 73 CPR.

However, in the specific case, as the one in Ida Viru referred in your question, when a Member State intends to support enterprises other than SMEs for productive investments in ‘c’ areas, unless granted for initial investments to create new economic activities, all potential beneficiaries and investments should appear in that list, as announced in paragraph 14, 2nd condition of the Guidelines on regional State aid. Therefore, a programme amendment is required to reflect any such new investment/beneficiary to ensure that the aid is compatible with the internal market (through notification).

# QA00193 - Visibility requirements for phased operations

 *Relevant Articles*:

Articles 50(c), 118 and 118a and Annex IX of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060(CPR 2021-2027)

Article 115(3) and Annex XII, 2.2 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (CPR 2014-2020)

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What is the guidance for beneficiaries who finish the first phase of their project with financing from 14-20 period and second phase from 21-27 programming period. Each phase of the project should follow and fulfill visibility requirements according to the period from which the finances are paid.

Nevertheless, mounting two different plaques with two different logos and statements seems ineffective both from the cost perspective and communication aim. Moreover, putting two logos on one plaque would challenge a new rule, that there should not be any sign of EU support, other than the „EU emblem and co-financed by EU statement“, while the 14-20 rules insist strictly on putting the fund and programme name.

We would welcome an exception for phased projects that they can put a plaque by CPR 21-27 that would fulfill the publicity rules also for the first phase financed by 14-20 programme. This would lead to fulfilling strategic goals in the cohesion policy communication at the project level.

**Answer:**

Beneficiaries of operations subject to phased implementation which fall under Articles 118 or 118a of the CPR 2021-2027 can fulfil their visibility obligations by using only one plaque or billboard, however the information on this plaque/billboard should respect the requirements provided by the respective regulatory framework. Concretely, the phase of the operation co-financed from 2014-2020 Funds should follow the rules from the CPR 2014-2020 (Article 115(3) and Annex XII, 2.2 ), and the phase of the operation co-financed from 2021-2027 Funds should follow the rules from the CPR 2021-2027 (Article 50(c) and Annex IX).

# QA569\_EMFAF\_Shadow MC

 *Relevant Article*:Article 69; 39 of the CPR Regulation

 *Member State*: NL

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

We (the NL) are preparing the implementation of EMFAF through a first subsidy regulation, which is scheduled to open for applications in November 2021. However, formal approval of the NL Programme is expected to take place in December 2021. In our correspondence with the EC we have been encouraged to start with all the necessary preparatory work with the beneficiaries prior this moment of final approval of the NL Programme. The subsidy will not be granted before the NL Programme is approved by the EC, but we do want to enable applications to be submitted before the approval of the NL Programme.

At this point we encounter the following problem. We are not sure whether it is possible to formally install a Managing Authority before the Programme is formally approved. In accordance with article 22(3)(k) of Regulation 2021/1139, the Programme has to set out the programme authorities and article 71 of Regulation 2021/1139 states that member states are held to install a Managing Authority to implement the EMFAF, but does not state if this managing authority can be installed before the approval of the Programme. Could you please let us know whether it is possible to install a Managing Authority before the Programme is formally approved by the EC?

If not, would it be possible to install a ‘shadow Managing Authority’ for the time being, until the NL Programme has been approved? This is the procedure we were advised to follow with regard to the installment of the Monitoring Committee. And if so, will an application that is submitted to a “shadow Managing Authority” be considered as an application for funding that is submitted to the Managing Authority within the meaning of article 63(6) of the CPR?

**Answer:**

According to Art. 69 of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 each Member State shall have in place, at the latest by the time of submission of the final payment application for the first accounting year and no later than 30 June 2023, a description of the management and control system in accordance with the template set out in Annex XVI. It shall keep that description updated to reflect any subsequent modifications. This means that formal designation as in the CPR Regulation 2014-2020 is no longer required.

According to Art. 39 of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 the Monitoring Committee should be set up within 3 months of the adoption of the programme. Would a MS wish to set up the MC before the adoption of the programme in order to prevent delays in implementation by enabling the approval of selection criteria by the MC for instance, that is possible and highly encouraged. The approval of selection criteria can also be done by a “shadow” MC, set up as an interim solution until the adoption of the EMFAF programme. Please note that when the “regular” MC will be established, it needs to formally confirm the decisions of the shadow monitoring committee.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA573\_EMFAF\_Alternative fishing methods

 *Relevant Article*: **Article 17 of the CFP and Recitals of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (EMFAF)**

 *Member State*: **DE**

 **Question  (including any relevant facts and information):**

Are alternative fishing methods already specifically promoted at federal or European level, and if so, which ones and how high are the corresponding funding amounts?

**Answer:**

The EMFAF can support innovation and investment in alternative fishing techniques which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the CFP, in particular the objectives of restoring and maintaining populations of harvested species above levels which can produce MSY, of avoiding and reducing, as far as possible, unwanted catches and of minimising the negative impact of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem. The eligible techniques are not predefined in the Regulation but Recital 20 provides examples such as low-impact, selective, climate resilient and low-carbon practices and techniques.

However, the Regulation provides for restrictions as regards certain operations, in particular:

* Acquiring equipment that increases a fishing vessel’s ability to find fish is not eligible;
* Support must not increase a vessels’ fishing capacity, unless it directly results from an increase in gross tonnage that is necessary for improving safety, working conditions or energy efficiency;
* Support cannot be granted simply for complying with requirements that are obligatory under EU law, except for certain equipment used to control fishing activities;
* Investments on board cannot be granted for vessels that have been mostly inactive over the previous 2 years;
* Support given i) to young fishers to help them acquire, for the first time, a second-hand vessel and ii) to replace or modernise a vessel’s engine are subject to conditions, e.g. the vessel must belong to a segment of the fishing fleet without structural overcapacity and the new or modernised engine must not have more power than the engine being replaced.

The aid intensity rate is set by the Member State in accordance with Article 41 and Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation. The standard maximum rate is 50% but some derogations are possible in the cases described in Annex III, e.g. operations related to small-scale coastal fishing (100%), operations related to the implementation of the landing obligation (75-100%), operations that combine innovative features, collective interest and collective beneficiaries (100%), operations related to protecting marine biodiversity (100%), etc**.**

***N.B.***

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA578\_EMFAF\_Co-financing rate SO 3.1 and compensation for additional costs in the ORs

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 40 and 10.2 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question 1:**

Taux de cofinancement de l'OS 3.1 (DLAL)

Les régions qui gèrent le DLAL en France par délégation de l'AG, souhaitent avoir un taux de cofinancement non-unique sur cet OS (certaines souhaitent cofinancer à hauteur de 50% et d'autres de 70%). Or, ce taux est normalement le même pour tout le territoire et défini dans notre programme pour les autres OS. Afin de prendre en compte cette demande, serait-il possible d'indiquer deux lignes dans le plan de financement du programme ?

**Question 2:**

Compensation des surcoûts dans les RUP
Nous souhaiterions rendre éligible l'aide au montage des dossiers portant sur la compensation des surcoûts dans les RUP. Toutefois, cette dépense n'est pas incluse dans le calcul de ce type d'action qui se base sur le volume de production (la méthodologie de calcul est indiquée dans chaque PA RUP). Ainsi, comment serait-il possible de rendre éligible cette dépense : peut-on créer un type d'action supplémentaire dans l'OS 1.5 ou rendre éligible cette dépense dans l'OS 1.1 ?

**Question 3:**

Formation
Le financement pour répondre à des normes obligatoires est interdit par le FEAMPA. Toutefois, nous souhaiterions rendre éligibles certaines dépenses pour lesquelles des besoins ont été identifiés en France et qui ne sont pas expressément listées comme admissibles à une aide publique par l’article 31 du règlement n°651/2014 du 17 juin 2014. Ces dépenses sont essentielles à plusieurs titres :

* Elles sont rattachables à une dépense elle-même admissible à une aide publique ;
* Elles se rattachent à une formation non obligatoire ;
* Elles se rattachent à la fois à une formation non obligatoire et à une autre obligatoire.

Plus particulièrement, les dépenses que nous souhaiterions rendre éligibles sont les suivantes :

* Les dépenses de rénovation des référentiels pour permettre la formation par apprentissage ;
* Les dépenses de rénovation des référentiels pour permettre le e-learning ;
* Les dépenses de modernisation des centres de formation en contrepartie, par exemple, d'une diminution des tarifs de formation ou d'augmentation l'offre de formation ;
* Les dépenses d’acquisition ou de modernisation d’équipements indispensables à la tenue de la formation, par exemple des simulateurs.

**Answer 1:**

Conformément à l’article 40, le taux de co-financement doit être défini pour chaque objectif spécifique (OS) au niveau national. S’il peut varier entre OS, il ne peut varier pour un même OS. Nous rappelons toutefois que le taux de 70% est un maximum et que les autorités nationales sont libres de définir un taux inférieur (par exemple un taux médian entre 70% et 50%). Il est par ailleurs possible de jouer sur l’intensité de l’aide publique dans le respect de l’article 41.

**Answer 2:**

Il est possible de soutenir l’aide au montage des dossiers de compensation de surcoût dans les RUP au titre de l’assistance technique.

**Answer 3:**

Selon l’article 13(k), l’inéligibilité des dépenses relatives à des normes obligatoires en vertu du droit de l’Union porte uniquement sur les investissements à bord de navires de pêche. Les dépenses listées dans la question n’étant pas relatives à des investissements à bord, elles ne sont donc pas inéligibles en vertu de l’Article 13(k).

**N.B.**

*Conformément à l'article 63, paragraphe 1, du règlement (UE) 2021/1060 (le règlement portant dispositions communes), l'éligibilité des dépenses est déterminée sur la base de règles nationales, sauf lorsque des règles spécifiques sont fixées dans le règlement portant dispositions communes ou dans les Règlements spécifiques au Fonds.*

*Conformément à l'article 12 du règlement (UE) 2021/1139 (le règlement FEAMPA), les opérations sélectionnées par les États membres doivent relever du champ d'application des priorités et des objectifs spécifiques énoncés à l'article 8, paragraphe 2, ne doivent pas être inéligibles en vertu de l'article 13 et doit être conforme au droit de l'Union applicable.*

*Conformément au considérant 7 du règlement FEAMPA, le soutien devrait avoir une valeur ajoutée européenne claire, notamment en remédiant aux défaillances du marché ou aux situations d'investissement sous-optimales de manière proportionnée, et ne devrait pas dupliquer ou évincer le financement privé ni fausser la concurrence sur le marché intérieur .*

## QA589\_EMFAF\_Utilisation of EMFAF Art. 32 for actions not directly related to data collection and management

 *Relevant Article*: Article 32 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: FI

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

Regarding the environment actions in the union priority 4, the article 32 states:

*Support granted to achieve the specific objective referred to in Article 31 of this Regulation through the promotion of marine knowledge shall contribute to actions aiming to collect, manage, analyse, process and use data to improve the knowledge on the state of the marine environment, with a view to:*

 *(a) fulfilling monitoring and site designation and management requirements under Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC;*

 *(b) supporting maritime spatial planning under Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council; or*

 *(c) increasing data quality and sharing through the European marine observation and data network (EMODnet).*

 It seems that this article restricts financing possibilities only to these three identified themes (a to c) and furthermore only to actions aiming to collect, manage, analyse, process and use data to improve the knowledge on the state of the marine environment. Can broader environmental projects in which the data is not only collected and analysed but also utilized in the concrete actions (such as protection of marine area, collecting marine litter etc) financed under this article? Or should concrete actions be financed from other sources like from article 25?

In informal comments regarding the Finnish OP draft, the Commission remarked (comment number 42) that normally broader environmental actions like marine litter and new harmful substance would be addressed in specific objective 1.6. Indeed, the article 25 (Protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems) is more open to address various environmental challenges. However, the maritime policy is strategically important area in Finland and also the national decision making process of union priority 4 is structured in different manner than in the other union priorities. Therefore, it is important for us to understand how strictly the article 32 concerning the marine knowledge should be interpreted.

**Answer:**

Specific objective 4.1 is very specific. It concerns marine knowledge only under the scope described in points (a), (b) and (c) of Article 32 of the EMFAF Regulation. Other operations related to marine knowledge are potentially eligible under Articles 23 and 25 of that Regulation. The wider interpretation suggested by Finland could create issues regarding accounting and delineation between different actions and is therefore not appropriate.

Therefore, we consider that Finland should restrict the use of Article 34 to only those activities explicitly stated in the article, and use other articles for other activities. To facilitate the demarcation between the articles potentially concerned by marine knowledge, we suggest Finland to define the potential eligibility of the actions from the narrowest scope to the broadest: first check if the operation falls under Article 32, then Article 23, and finally Article 25 if neither 32 nor 23 is applicable.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

### QA590\_EMFAF\_Question from Finland regarding EMFAF use of Art 34 for coast guard projects with or without involvement from the EU agencies

 *Relevant Article*: Article 34 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: FI

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

The article 34 (Coast guard cooperation) restricts the financing possibilities to actions which national authorities carry out in the framework of the European cooperation on coast guard functions. These functions are defined in more detail in three regulation.

1. *Support granted to achieve the specific objective set out in Article 31 through the promotion of coast guard cooperation shall contribute to actions carried out by national authorities in the* ***framework*** *of the European cooperation on coast guard functions referred to in Article 69 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Article 2b of Regulation (EC) No 1406/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2019/473 of the European Parliament and of the Council.*

The article 69 in the regulation 2019/1896 (European Border and Coast Guard) specifies European cooperation on coast guard functions following manner:

1. *Without prejudice to EUROSUR, the Agency shall, in cooperation with EFCA and EMSA, support national authorities carrying out coast guard functions at national and Union level and, where appropriate, at international level by:*

*(a) sharing, fusing and analysing information available in ship reporting systems and other information systems hosted by or accessible to those agencies, in accordance with their respective legal bases and without prejudice to the ownership of data by Member States;*

*(b) providing surveillance and communication services based on state-of-the-art technology, including space-based and ground infrastructure and sensors mounted on any kind of platform;*

*(c) building capacity by drawing up guidelines and recommendations and by establishing best practices as well as by providing training and exchange of staff;*

*(d) enhancing the exchange of information and cooperation on coast guard functions, including by analysing operational challenges and emerging risks in the maritime domain;*

*(e) sharing capacity by planning and implementing multipurpose operations and by sharing assets and other capabilities, to the extent that those activities are coordinated by those agencies and are agreed to by the competent authorities of the Member States concerned.*

The regulations 2016/1625 (European Maritime Safety Agency) and 2019/473 (European Fisheries Control Agency) define the European cooperation in similar manner as it is in the Article 69 regarding the European Border and Coast Guard (see above). Based on these three regulations, it seems that European cooperation on coast guard functions is defined as actions, in which implementations are supported by one of the European agencies.

In the Finnish OP draft, the strengthening of cooperation between different national coast guard functions (e.g. maritime surveillance and protection of the marine environment) is identified one of the needs, which should be supported from the EMFAF programme. In order to address this topic rightly in the programme, it is important to understand possible restrictions of the article 34. Can we interpret this article broadly which would enable financing of actions carried out by national authorities without a support of the European agencies? Or, if there is a mandatory requirement that cooperation actions have to be always supported by one of the European agencies, does it mean that one of the agency has to participate in the implementation of the project? If this is case, how should this be documented?

**Answer:**

Article 34 covers actions carried out by national authorities. The reference to the “European cooperation on coast guard functions” describes the framework in which the national actions must be implemented, but not the actions themselves. Therefore, there is no requirement to involve the EU agencies directly in the implementation of the operation.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA585\_EMFAF\_First acquisition of a fishing vessel (registration in EU fleet)

 *Relevant Article*: Article 17.6 e) of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: FR

**Question:**

Durée d'enregistrement sur le fichier flotte de l'UE.

Nous souhaiterions avoir votre analyse sur l'interprétation à l’article 17, 6. e) relatif aux conditions de l’éligibilité du navire de pêche de la condition suivante : « a été enregistré dans le fichier de la flotte de l’Union pendant trente années civiles maximum avant l’année de présentation de la demande de soutien. » Dans le FEAMP, la condition porte sur un âge précis du navire de pêche qui doit avoir entre 5 et 30 ans. Cette notion ne figure plus dans le texte du FEAMPA qui mentionne cependant l’inscription dans le fichier de la flotte de l’UE pendant une durée de 30 ans maximum.

Pour l'application du point e), nous nous interrogeons :

1. Pouvez-vous nous confirmer qu'il n’y a plus d’exigence sur l’âge maximum d’un navire de pêche mais que l’éligibilité au soutien du FEAMPA est uniquement conditionnée par le fait que le navire de pêche a été enregistré dans le fichier de la flotte de l’UE pour la pêche pendant 30 ans maximum avant l’année de présentation de la demande d’aide ?
2. Sur la durée de 30 années d’inscription au fichier de flotte, cette durée est-elle consécutive ou accumulée pour les activités de pêche du navire ?

A titre d'exemple, un navire a été enregistré pour la première fois le 24/06/1983, soit il y a 38 ans. Mais, celui-ci est sorti de flotte entre le 01/06/2006 et le 16/02/2018 pour un changement d’activité. Puis, le navire a été à nouveau enregistré au fichier de flotte de l’UE en 2018. Si l’on exclut la période d’activité hors pêche, le navire n’a été enregistré que pendant 26 ans au fichier de flotte de l’UE. Il semble en conséquence éligible. Est-ce bien le cas ? Ou doit-on opérer le calcul à partir de la date du premier enregistrement (auquel cas, il ne serait pas éligible) ?

**Réponse:**

La condition posée à l’article 31.2 c) du règlement FEAMP selon laquelle le navire devait avoir entre 5 et 30 ans d’âge a été remplacée par les conditions cumulatives suivantes posées à l’article 17.6 alinéas d) et e) du règlement FEAMPA :

1. le navire est inscrit au fichier de la flotte de l'Union depuis au moins trois années civiles précédant l'année de dépôt de la demande d'aide dans le cas d'un petit navire de pêche côtière, et pendant au moins cinq années civiles dans le cas d’un autre type de navire; et

2. a été enregistré dans le registre de la flotte de l'Union pour une durée maximale de 30 années civiles précédant l'année de dépôt de la demande d'aide.

Il n’y a donc pas, dans le FEAMPA, de conditions quant à l’âge du navire.

Pour établir la durée maximale de 30 ans, seules comptent les années pendant lesquelles le navire était effectivement enregistré au fichier de la flotte de l’Union que ce soit de façon continue ou discontinue. Les périodes de sortie de flotte ne sont pas prises en compte, bien qu’un navire, une fois enregistré dans la flotte de l’Union, conserve son numéro ‘CFR’ pendant toute son existence. En effet, le règlement fixe bien une « durée » et non une date de premier enregistrement. Dans votre exemple, le navire est donc éligible.

**N.B:**

*Conformément à l'article 63, paragraphe 1, du règlement (UE) 2021/1060 (le règlement portant dispositions communes), l'éligibilité des dépenses est déterminée sur la base de règles nationales, sauf lorsque des règles spécifiques sont fixées dans le règlement portant dispositions communes ou dans les Règlements spécifiques au Fonds.*

*Conformément à l'article 12 du règlement (UE) 2021/1139 (le règlement FEAMPA), les opérations sélectionnées par les États membres doivent relever du champ d'application des priorités et des objectifs spécifiques énoncés à l'article 8, paragraphe 2, ne doivent pas être inéligibles en vertu de l'article 13 et doit être conforme au droit de l'Union applicable.*

Conformément au considérant 7 du règlement FEAMPA, le soutien devrait avoir une valeur ajoutée européenne claire, notamment en remédiant aux défaillances du marché ou aux situations d'investissement sous-optimales de manière proportionnée, et ne devrait pas dupliquer ou évincer le financement privé ni fausser la concurrence sur le marché intérieur .

## QA593\_EMFAF\_Eligibility of support to trainings

 *Relevant Article*: Article 13 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question:**

Nous avons une question relative aux modalités de mise en place d'une mesure compensatrice de l'envoi en formation selon les modalités suivantes :
- Mesure au profit de l'armateur (employeur) ;
- Venant compenser le départ en formation d'un/de plusieurs marins ;
- Par le financement d'un revenu de remplacement lui permettant d'employer, le temps de la formation, d'autres marins à bord pour une durée déterminée.

Une telle mesure peut-elle être compatible avec la règlementation FEAMPA et le RPDC et les prescriptions en matière d'aides d’État et plus généralement au regard des exigences du droit communautaire ?

**Answer:**

La contribution du FEAMPA au capital humain et notamment à la formation professionnelle est affirmée au considérant 25 du Règlement. Par ailleurs, l’article 13 qui contient une liste limitative des mesures inéligibles n’interdit pas le soutien aux formations.

Toutefois, l’Article 12 du Règlement FEAMPA spécifie que l’utilisation du fonds est limitée à la poursuite des priorités et objectifs de ce même fonds.

Il résulte des règles précitées que s’il est possible d’utiliser le FEAMPA pour aider un employeur à subvenir au coût d’une formation qu’il supporte pour lui-même ou ses employés, il n’est pas possible de l’aider financièrement, au titre du FEAMPA, pour compenser des pertes causées par l’absence de ses employés fussent-ils en formation. Ce dernier cas qui constitue une aide économique pour manque de personnel est en effet trop éloigné des objectifs du FEAMPA.

Pour toute question relative à l’interprétation des règles sur les Aides d’État, nous vous invitons à prendre l’attache de la DG Concurrence (M. Gereon Thiele, Chef d’unité H6).

**N.B.**

*Conformément à l'article 63, paragraphe 1, du règlement (UE) 2021/1060 (le règlement portant dispositions communes), l'éligibilité des dépenses est déterminée sur la base de règles nationales, sauf lorsque des règles spécifiques sont fixées dans le règlement portant dispositions communes ou dans les Règlements spécifiques au Fonds.*

*Conformément à l'article 12 du règlement (UE) 2021/1139 (le règlement FEAMPA), les opérations sélectionnées par les États membres doivent relever du champ d'application des priorités et des objectifs spécifiques énoncés à l'article 8, paragraphe 2, ne doivent pas être inéligibles en vertu de l'article 13 et doit être conforme au droit de l'Union applicable.*

*Conformément au considérant 7 du règlement FEAMPA, le soutien devrait avoir une valeur ajoutée européenne claire, notamment en remédiant aux défaillances du marché ou aux situations d'investissement sous-optimales de manière proportionnée, et ne devrait pas dupliquer ou évincer le financement privé ni fausser la concurrence sur le marché intérieur .*

### QA594\_EMFAF\_Investments on board of fishing vessels

 *Relevant Article*: Article 13 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: NL

 **Question:**

The NL EMFF Managing Authority would like to know whether the restriction on investments on board fishing vessels that have carried out fishing activities for less than 60 days in the two calendar years preceding the year of submission of the application for support, is applicable to fishing vessels that have not carried out fishing activities, but have been used for no less than 60 days in aquaculture activities.

**Answer:**

Article 13(l) of the EMFAF Regulation refers specifically to the restriction on investments on board for fishing vessels that have carried out ’fishing activities‘ for less than 60 days in the two calendar years preceding the year of submission of the application for support.

Article 4(28) of Regulation 1380/2013 (the CFP Regulation) states that 'fishing activity' means ‘*searching for fish, shooting, setting, towing, hauling of a fishing gear, taking catch on board, transhipping, retaining on board, processing on board, transferring, caging, fattening and landing of fish and fishery products’*. That definition applies to the EMFAF pursuant to Article 2(1) of the EMFAF Regulation.

Unless the ’aquaculture activities‘ as referred to by the Dutch authorities do encompass activities included in the definition of “fishing activities” under Article 4 (28) of the CFP Regulation, having carried out ’aquaculture activities‘ for 60 days in the two calendar years preceding the year of submission of the application for support does not fulfil the requirement under Article 13 (l) of the EMFAF Regulation. Therefore, investments on board are not eligible to EMFAF support for the fishing vessels concerned.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added-value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

#### QA595\_EMFAF\_The eligibility of support of aquaponics system under EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: Article 27 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question:**

We have a question concerning the activity Investment in Intensive Aquaculture Systems, which is part of Priority 2 Fostering sustainable aquaculture activities, and processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products. It is contributing to food security in the Union, specific objective 2.1: Promoting sustainable aquaculture activities, especially strengthening the competitiveness of aquaculture production, while ensuring that the activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term.

Based on increased demand from potential beneficiaries, the MA intends to include in this activity the possibility of supporting the implementation of Aquaponics Systems, the products of which are about 1/3 fish and 2/3 vegetables.

The MA has the following questions on this issue:

1) Are the components including the “plant part” of the aquaponics system eligible from the OP 2021–2027 or is only the part of the system dealing with fish production eligible?

2) Would subsequent revenues from the sale of grown vegetables possibly be taken as a state aid?

**Answer:**

Article 27 of the EMFAF Regulation refers to the scope of Specific Objective 2.1 as described in Article 26(1)(a): “ *promoting sustainable aquaculture activities, especially strengthening the competitiveness of aquaculture production, while ensuring that the activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term* ”.

In this context, aquaculture means “*the rearing or cultivation of aquatic organisms using techniques designed to increase the production of the organisms in question beyond the natural capacity of the environment, where the organisms remain the property of a natural or legal person throughout the rearing and culture stage, up to and including harvesting*” (*Cf*. Article point 25 of Article 4 of Regulation 1380/2013). Aquaponics is a food production system that couples aquaculture and hydroponics. Hydroponics is not covered by the scope of aquaculture as defined above, thus is not eligible to support under Specific Objective 2.1.

Therefore, aquaponics falls under the scope of Specific Objective 2.1, but only the aquaculture-related expenditure of the supported operations is eligible.

If the features of the operations do not allow to clearly distinguish aquaculture-related expenditure from hydroponics-related expenditure, we invite the Member State to grant support under simplified cost options pursuant to points (b), (c) or (d) of Article 53(1) of the CPR. The methodology for calculating these simplified cost options should approximate the share of the aquaculture-related expenditure in the operation.

As regards the question on State aid, please note that the “subsequent revenues from the sale of grown vegetables” would not be considered as State aid because such revenues are the consequence of the operation, not its input (i.e. public money).

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA587\_EMFAF\_Support for data collection

 *Relevant Article*: Article 23 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: SE

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

SE has a question about support under EMFAF Article 23. Article 23 only refers to Article 6 of the Data collection Framework (DCF) Regulation EU 2017/1004 on the national work programmes.

However, DCF Regulation Article 9(10) states that regional plans shall be considered to complement or replace parts of national work programmes.

If a regional work plan is drawn up for part of the Swedish data collection work (e.g. for a fishery in the Baltic Sea), this could mean that the Swedish part of the DCF execution would be covered by the regional plan.

SE draws the Commission’s attention to this fact and that the pursuit of greater regionalisation of data collection work must not mean that data collection work will lose EU funding through the EMFAF.

SE find it difficult to see how the Commission could replace these activities through direct management, especially as the direct management work programme is financed through annual work programmes and the regional DCF plans can be multiannual and cover a large number of Member States.

SE’s view is that regional plans should always be seen as complementary to the national work programmes that are covered by the regionalisation, and therefore can be financed as other data collection activities under Article 23 EMFAF.

SE would like this confirmed with reference to the wording of Article 23 of the draft EMFF Regulation which reads:

***Article 23 Collection, management, use and processing of data in the fisheries sector, and research and innovation programmes***

1. *The EMFAF may support the collection, management, use and processing of biological, environmental, technical and socio-economic data in the fisheries sector, as provided for in Article 25(1) and (2) of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 and further specified in Regulation (EU) 2017/1004, on the basis of the national work plans referred to in Article 6 of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004. The EMFAF may also support fisheries and aquaculture research and innovation programmes, as provided for in Article 27 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.*
2. *The support referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article shall contribute to the specific objective referred to in point (d) of Article 14(1).*

**Answer:**

Article 23 of the EMFAF Regulation enables MS to provide support for the collection of data in the fisheries sector, as provided for in Article 25 (1) and (2) of the CFP Regulation and as specified in the DCF Regulation, on the basis of the national work plans referred to in Article 6. This means that data collection activities included in a MS’s national work plans are eligible for EMFAF funding.

The EMFAF Regulation does not refer to regional plans established under Article 9 of the DCF Regulation The objective of the regional work plans is to supplement or replace certain parts of, the national work plans. The regional plans are fully in-line with the condition of EMFAF support for data collection as set out in Article 23, paragraph 2: The activities contribute to *“fostering efficient fisheries control and enforcement, including fighting against IUU fishing, as well as reliable data for knowledge-based decision making”*.

Furthermore, the regional work plans are approved by the Commission and replace or supplement relevant parts of the national work plans.

In conclusion, data collection activities undertaken under a regional work plan, approved by the Commission, are eligible for EMFAF support.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added-value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA591\_EMFAF\_Co-financing rate and intensity of public aid under EMFAF - public law bodies

 *Relevant Article*: Article 40 and 41 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: CZ

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

During the preparation of the new operational programme, a question arose concerning the financing of projects where the beneficiary is a public entity and the public support rate is less than 100% (i.e. investments, where the intensity of public aid is 50%).

In the case where the beneficiary is a public entity, all expenses are public (i.e. also the part paid by the beneficiary). In some REGIO operational programmes, a funding rule is applied so that public support (e.g. 50% of total eligible expenditure) is fully covered by EU resources and no other public national co-financing is used at all, i.e. the state budget (national co-financing in the remaining 50% of support consists of private co-financing by the beneficiary).

Thus, in the case of a project for CZK 1 million, when the support is CZK 0.5 million, the entire part is paid only from the EU fund (hypothetically from the EMFAF). This means a faster spending of the allocation.

This method is currently widely used in other CZ ESIF and has become a common practice. As part of the preparation for the implementation of the new programme, we were asked by the Ministry of Finance whether we will use this as well. We would like to point out that this procedure concerns a minority of beneficiaries and should not have an impact on the overall level of EU co-financing at the level of priority or specific objective.

Therefore, please can you inform us whether this principle is also used by other MS implementing the EMFF and whether the introduction would pose a problem in new programming period (in particular with regard to EMFAF Articles 40 and 41). We will be grateful for any more detailed information concerning this topic.

At the moment, we can already imagine that this could be associated with certain complications. If we manipulate the co-financing rates and create them according to the submitted applications of public beneficiaries, we can not determine the exact allocation of the programme in the OP. If we are wrong please let us know. In the case of different co-financing rates, the MA would have to make sure at the level of SO that the given percentages are not exceeded, i.e. 70% of eligible public expenditure from ENRAF (Article 40 of the EMFAF).

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 40 of the EMFAF Regulation, the maximum EMFAF co-financing rate per specific objective shall be 70 % of the eligible public expenditure. This means that the EU pays up to 70% of the public share of the eligible expenditure. The co-financing rate is set for each specific objective in the financing plan of the programme.

The co-financing rate is set independently from the intensity of public aid (i.e. the public share of the eligible expenditure), which is set by the Member State for each operation, in accordance with Article 41 and Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation. Row 8 of Annex III stipulates that the Member State may apply an intensity of public aid of 100% of the eligible expenditure of the operation for which the beneficiary is a public body.

In all cases, the respective EMFAF co-financing rates must be applied.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA606\_EMFAF\_Clarification regarding control expenditure

 *Relevant Article*: Article 22 of EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: HR

**Question:**

We need a clarification related to actions under control and enforcement: could you please confirm if, in addition to the purchase of items/tools used for control in fisheries, such as vessels, maintenance of those items (i.e. vessels) is eligible for support in certain period after being purchased with support under the Programme?

**Answer:**

According to Article 12.1(a) of the EMFAF Regulation “Member States may select for support operations which fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2)”.

This provision means that support has to contribute to EMFAF specific objectives, and cannot go beyond their scope.

Thus, operational costs are eligible expenditure only if they are consistent with the types of actions under a specific objective and form part of an operation that contributes to a specific objective. Operational costs not linked to the achievement of the objective of the operation are not eligible expenditure.

Therefore, maintenance costs of control vessels may be eligible for support under the EMFAF if they are consistent with the types of actions under specific objective 1.4 “Fostering efficient fisheries control and enforcement, including fighting against IUU fishing” and form part of an operation which contributes to the specific objective 1.4.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added-value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA607\_EMFAF\_Intensity of aid for consortium partners in R & D projects

 *Relevant Article*: Article 41\_EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: HU

Under the EMFF OP we have the measure ” Innovation”, which is an R+D+I measure. Under the EMFAF OP we are planning this R+D+I measure as well.

It would be very good if the universities or research institutes could apply for the R+D+I measure together in consortium with farmers. Universities and research institutes are public law bodies so they can have 100% aid intensity. Farmers can apply for only 60% aid intensity.

The consortium project would be carried out by two consortium partners. It would be implemented by a public law body (university or research institute) entitled to apply 100% aid intensity, which would be the leader of the consortium, and by another partner (farmer) entitled to apply only 60% aid intensity (in case of sole application) under the EMFAF regulation.

 **Question 1: Is 100% aid intensity applicable for the eligible expenses of all consortium partners within this project?**

We asked the COM some time ago about a similar case under the EMFF, and we got the answer below. Based on the COM’s answer we can get only 50% aid intensity for all members of the consortium (so for the public law bodies as well) and because of this reason we do not have project carried out by universities or research institutes and farmers together in consortium.

***COM’s answer before:*** *In line with Article 95 of the EMFF Regulation, the public aid intensity rate should be applied to the total eligible expenditures of an operation. In this meaning, there is no possibility to split the budget of an operation and to define different public aid intensity for the different parts. In line with the CPR, the beneficiary of an operation may be a public or private body or in case of the EMFF a natural person. If the beneficiary of an operation is a consortium, the rate of public aid intensity is to be defined on the basis of how the Managing Authority determines the legal status of the consortium and not its individual members.*

We cannot understand why we cannot get 100% aid intensity for all members of the consortium, or why we cannot examine the members separately, so support the public law bodies with 100% aid intensity and the other partners - which are not public law bodies - with 50% aid intensity.

**Question 2: This will be a problem under the EMFAF OP as well. Or does it depend only on the national regulation?**

**Answer 1:**

According to EMFF article 95.1, the maximum intensity of public aid is 50% of the total eligible expenditure unless there is a derogation.

It is worth noting the case where the beneficiary – in the meaning of Article 2(10) of the CPR – is solely the public research institution but the operation is implemented *in collaboration/partnership* with a small or a large enterprise (including an aquaculture farmer). In this case, the public aid intensity may be up to 100% in accordance with Article 95(2)(a). At this stage a number of landlocked countries already opt and implement projects under this form without any issues being raised.

However, in case an enterprise (including an aquaculture farmer) - in the meaning of Article 2(10) of the CPR – is solely the beneficiary in cooperation with a public research institution than the maximum intensity of public aid would be 50 % (or 30% for a large enterprise).

Admittedly a consortium may take different legal forms and may be acknowledge differently by the Member States national legislation. That is why the COM past answer pointe out that the aid intensity depends on the how the Managing Authority determines the legal status of the consortium and not its individual members.

**Answer 2:**

An interpretation similar to the one under EMFF may be applied for the EMFAF.

In case the public research institution is the main/sole beneficiary but the operation is implemented *in collaboration/partnership* with a small or a large enterprise (including an aquaculture farmer), then the public aid intensity may be up to 100% in accordance with Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation.

in case an enterprise (including an aquaculture farmer) is the main beneficiary in cooperation with a public research institution than the maximum intensity of public aid would be 75 % in line with point 18 of Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation.

Again, if the public research institute decides to create a consortium (i.e. as a new legal entity) with a private company (including an aquaculture farmer) than the MA should decide what is the legal status of this consortium under the national legislation. If it is a public entity than the public aid intensity s 100% in line with Annex III of EMFAF. If it is a private institution it will benefit from the 75% aid intensity.

**N.B**

*Pursuant to Article 57(1) of [the political agreement on] the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the CPR or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article [12a(1)(a)] of [the political agreement on] the EMFAF Regulation, the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article [9(2)], must not be ineligible pursuant to Article [13] and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 6 of [the political agreement on] the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA610\_EMFAF\_Definition of SMEs in the context of EMFAF implementation

 *Relevant Article*: Article 28 of EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Slovenia

 **Question:**

I am sending you a question that has recently arisen when re-discussing our latest draft OP with our partners, on the way of determining the size of the enterprise.

According to Article 28 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004, support for achieving the specific objective in point (b) of Article 26(1) of this Regulation, can be given only to SMEs. Support to large enterprises can only be granted through the financial instruments.

Slovenian processing sector mainly consists of SMEs out of which a lot of them are looking forward for future investment possibilities. One of them is an enterprise (X).

This company (X) is engaged in activity *Processing and preserving of fish, crustaceans and molluscs* and activity *Other business and management consultancy activities* . The company 100% owns three distribution companies (A, B and C). Together, the companies generate (data for 2020) EUR 20,310,102 in net sales revenue, employ 105 workers and have an asset value of EUR 22,114,773.

According to European regulations, this company, together with its 100% owned companies, is one of the medium-sized companies, which are considered to be companies that employ less than 250 people and whose annual turnover does not exceed 50 million euros or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 43 million.

However, the company (X) is 100% owned by another company (Z), which has activity *PRODUCTION OF POULTRY MEAT* and annually generates EUR 44,011,808 net sales revenue, employs 415 workers and has EUR 43,128,437 worth of assets. The company Z is 58% owned by the company Y, which is engaged in activity *PRODUCTION OF FEEDINGS* and annually generates 73,207,489 EUR of net sales revenue, employs 267 workers and has 86,599,415 EUR of asset value.

We are interested in how to determine the size of the company X taking into consideration the Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC and especially given the fact that activities carried out by the owners of the company (i.e. companies Z and Y) are completely different from the activities of the company X.

Would the company (X) be defined as a large company due to the owners (Z and Y) mentioned above, although its owners do not perform the same activities?

I would like to ask you for your opinion on the size of this company acknowledging that if it is a large company, they already expressed their non-interest into financial instruments.

**Answer:**

Article 28 of the EMFAF Regulation reads:

“To achieve the specific objective referred to in point (b) of Article 26(1) of this Regulation as regards the processing of fishery and aquaculture products, support to enterprises other than SMEs shall only be granted through the financial instruments provided for in Article 58 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 or through InvestEU, in accordance with Article 10 of Regulation (EU) 2021/523.”

Article 2(1) of the Annex to Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) provides that the category of SMEs is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million.

Article 3(3) of the same Annex provides that ‘linked enterprises’ must be taken into consideration in calculating staff numbers and financial amounts concerned.  In accordance with Article 3(3)(a) a linked enterprise is an enterprise which “has a majority of the shareholders' or members' voting rights in another enterprise”.

Based on the facts that you have presented in your question, companies X, Z and Y seem to be linked companies as they form a group through the direct or indirect ownership of company X by companies Z and Y. The fact that operators do not work on the same market is irrelevant and does not influence the determination of the company as SME or large enterprise.

Therefore, it means that 100% of the associated enterprises Y and Z staff headcount, turnover and/or balance sheet should be added to company X figures.

As a conclusion, we consider that company X should be considered as large company and as such may only be granted support through financial instruments in accordance with Article 28 of the EMFAF.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added-value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA611\_EMFAF\_Submission of programmes

 *Relevant Article*: Article 21 of EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Poland

Question regarding article 21 point 5 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004

Bearing in mind the doubts that arise and questions from Polish fisherman on the wording of Art. 21 point 5 – regarding eel - of EMFAF regulation, Poland kindly ask for an answers on the questions below.

 **Question 1:**

Should any day with eel caught, even if eel is caught as bycatch with fishing gears used for directed fishery of other species, need to be considered as eel fishing day that cannot be taken into account as one of 120 days mentioned in art. 21 point 5 letters a-c ?

**Question 2:**

Does eel provision apply only to targeted eel fishery with eel fishing gears?

**Question 3:**

When carrying out a fishing operation on one day with fishing gears for eel and with fishing gears for other species, will the day with none eel catches, be counted as one of 120 days assuming that eel fishing gears will be picked up separately every other day?

In Poland’s opinion, any catches where eel is present as a target species or as by-catch, cannot be counted as one of the 120 days required to benefit from temporary cessation. When eel is caught as by-catch and is released back into the water, that fishing day may count towards days required under Article 21 sec. 5 of the EMFAF Regulation. In the opinion of Poland, the purpose of eel provision is to reduce the fishing pressure on eels, thus, in the event of the release of the caught eel as by-catch, this goal will be achieved and it is possible to count the fishing day as of 120 days required.

**Answers :**

Article 21(5) of the EMFAF Regulation provides that a minimum number of days at sea is required in order to be eligible for temporary cessation under Article 21(1) EMFAF. This minimum does not apply to “eel fisheries”. This derogation aims to provide flexibility to this fishery given its specific nature and the state of the species.

”Eel fisheries” should be understood as fisheries that conduct a “directed fishing”  targeted at eel specifically, as defined in Article 6(3) of Regulation 2019/1241 (Technical Measures Regulation). Moreover, the landing obligation does not apply to eel because eel is not subject to catch limits (as laid down in Art 15(1) of Regulation 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy), and there are no delegated acts or specific provisions concerning eel in Regulation 2016/1139 (Baltic MAP). In the Baltic Sea there are restrictions on fishing for eel and it is not allowed to keep eel on board caught with any active gear. When accidentally caught, the eel must be released immediately (Annex VII, part C, point 6 of Technical Measures Regulation).

In light of the above:

**Answer 1:**

The derogation for eel fisheries under Article 21(5) of the EMFAF Regulation concerning the reference to the number of days at sea does not apply to the obligatory catch and release of eel caught accidently (by-catch).

**Answer 2:**

The derogation under Article 21(5) applies only to directed fishing of eel with fishing gear targeting eel.

**Answer 3:**

Only the fishing days of directed fishing of eel are subject to the derogation under Article 21(5), irrespective of the quantity of eel effectively caught.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA613\_EMFAF\_Programme Authorities / Member State accounting function

 *Relevant Article*:Article 71 of2021-2027 CPR Regulation

 *Member State*: Spain

 **Question:**

The question is on the management structure of the new programme.

 In accordance with Article 71.1 of the CPR, the Member State may entrust the accounting function (Article 76) to a body other than the managing authority, in such cases this body shall be identified as a programme authority (CPR, Art. 72.1).

Article 71.3 of the CPR also states that the managing authority may designate IBs to carry out certain tasks under its responsibility. Arrangements between the managing authority and IBs shall be recorded in writing.

In accordance with the above, the accounting function is entrusted by the Member State, and this is not a delegation from the Managing Authority.

According to the above, the question arises as to whether the body entrusted with the accounting function can appoint Intermediate Bodies, as its task is received directly from the Member State and not delegated by the MA.

**Answer:**

Art. 2(8) ‘intermediate body’ means a public or private body which acts under the responsibility of a managing authority, or which carries out functions or tasks on behalf of such an authority.

The CPR does not regulate the internal arrangements of the programme authority responsible for the accounting function. It is the responsibility of the Member State to organize its functioning.

Only the Managing authority can identify intermediate bodies to carry out tasks under its responsibility.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA614\_EMFAF\_Permanent cessation with retrofitting under Baltic MAP and EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: Article 20 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Denmark

 **Question 1:**

Is it possible to grant permanent cessation with decommissioning and retrofitting under the EMFAF and Baltic MAP?

**Question 2:**

Can the retrofitted vessel be exported to a third country after it has been retrofitted?

**Answer 1:**

Pursuant to Article 20(2)(b) of the EMFAF Regulation, permanent cessation “*is achieved through the scrapping of the fishing vessel or through its decommissioning and retrofitting for activities other than commercial fishing, keeping in line with the objectives of the CFP and of the multiannual plans referred to in Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013*”.

Pursuant to Article 20(2)(a) of the EMFAF Regulation, support for the permanent cessation of fishing activities is available only where “*the cessation is foreseen as a tool of an action plan referred to in Article 22(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013*”. Therefore, all the fleet segments complying with this condition are eligible. There is no limitation of the scope to certain sea basins, as it was the case under the EMFF with respect to the Baltic MAP and the Western Mediterranean MEP. Article 8a of Regulation (EU) 2016/1139 (Baltic MAP) as amended in 2020 refers only to conditions for support under the EMFF, thus does not concern the eligibility conditions under the EMFAF.

Therefore, it is possible to grant support for permanent cessation with decommissioning and retrofitting in the context of the Baltic MAP, provided that the fleet segments concerned qualify pursuant to Article 20(2)(a) and that the retrofitting “*keeps in line*” with the objectives of that MAP. Recital 30 of the EMFAF Regulation provides guidance in this respect: “*where the retrofitting would lead to an increased pressure of recreational fishing on the marine ecosystem, support should only be granted if it is in line with the CFP and with the objectives of the relevant multiannual plans*”.

**Answer 2:**

In accordance with Art 15 EMFAF regulation, where support under Chapter II (of which Art 20 is part) is granted in respect of a Union fishing vessel, that vessel shall not be transferred or reflagged outside the Union during at least five years from the final payment for the supported operation.

In conclusion, it is possible to export the retrofitted vessel 5 years after the final payment for the supported operation.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA615\_EMFAF\_Annex III EMFAF definitions

 *Relevant Article*: Annex III to the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

Nous nous interrogeons sur l'existence de définitions européennes pour les termes "être d’intérêt collectif" et "présenter des caractéristiques innovantes ou garantir un accès public à leurs résultats" inscrits dans l'annexe III du règlement FEAMPA relative au taux maximum d'intensité. En effet, nous avons déjà la définition de bénéficiaire collectif. Cela faciliterait une interprétation commune.

**Answer:**

**Collective interest** refers to the interest of the members of the organisation, of a group of stakeholders or of the general public. The actions supported should thus encompass more than the sum of the individual interests of the members of the collective beneficiary. They have therefore a broader scope than those normally undertaken by private enterprises. Managing Authorities should ensure that collective actions are not used to unduly take advantage of the more favourable provisions for collective beneficiaries.

**Innovative features** refer to innovation activities.

According to the OSLO manual2[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-213) :

- A business innovation is a new or improved product or business process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the firm's previous products or business processes and that has been introduced on the market or brought into use by the firm.

- A product innovation is a new or improved good or service that differs significantly from the firm’s previous goods or services and that has been introduced on the market.

 - A business process innovation is a new or improved business process for one or more business functions that differs significantly from the firm’s previous business processes and that has been brought into use by the firm.

In the EMFAF context this may include:

- identification or application of innovations that are useful in finding marketing solutions,

- identification or application of new ideas that are useful in finding solutions to issues of business processes (e.g. more sustainable fishing),

- identification or application of new ideas that result in new products and services (e.g. environmental and social services),

- support for changes or improvements in a series of linked tasks or activities to better help businesses reach their goals.

Mere studies, research and advice on potential innovations in the future are excluded.

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-214)      Oslo Manual 2018: Guidelines for Collecting, Reporting, and Using Data on Innovation.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article[12a(1)(a) of the EMFAF Regulation, the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 9(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 6 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA616\_EMFAF\_State aid clearance needed under EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: Article 10 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: ES,EE

**Question** :

For what support granted under the EMFAF regulation will it be necessary to attain State aid clearance?

**ES question:**

Article 42 TFEU states: *The provisions of the Chapter relating to rules on competition shall apply to production of and trade in agricultural products only to the extent determined by the European Parliament and the Council within the framework of Article 43(2) and in accordance with the procedure laid down therein, account being taken of the objectives set out in Article 39.*

Article 43 (2) TFEU states: *The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, shall establish the common organisation of agricultural markets provided for in Article 40(1) and the other provisions necessary for the pursuit of the objectives of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy.*

Therefore, in order to apply those Articles, and thus to apply the exception from the application of the competition rules to products listed in Annex I to the TFEU, Parliament and the Council are required to determine how to do so.

For this purpose, Article 10 (2) of the EMFAF reads as follows: *Articles 107, 108 and 109 TFEU shall not apply to payments made by Member States* ***pursuant to this*** *Regulation and falling within the scope of Article 42 TFEU* .

In the period 2014-2020, the same was included in the Regulation, however, when the specific measures were laid down, and the Regulation was adopted in co-decision, we understood that the Parliament and the Council established the aid in respect of which the exception for Annex I products is applicable. This, in our view, applied the EU TFEU.

However, for the period 2021-2027, this is not the case, and Regulation 1139/2021 does not include the measures, with the exception of specific cases of engines, temporary stops or scrapping. In this respect, most of the measures will be established by the Member States in our Operational Programmes and these OPs are approved by Commission Decision and not by the Council and Parliament. Therefore, we do not see the actual application of the EU TFEU as clearly, except for stops, scrapping, etc., which are expressly set out in Regulation 1139/2021.

The first doubt is therefore what happens to those types of activity included in the Operational Programme, which are not expressly mentioned in the text of Regulation 1139/2021, and which relate to the production, marketing and processing of fishery and aquaculture products listed in Annex I. For example, aid for productive aquaculture investments or investments on board to switch to more selective gear **.** When targeted at companies in the sector, **do these actions have to be organised by means of a state aid regulation or is it sufficient to describe them in the OP and state that they are organised under the EMFAF?**

The second question before us concerns the assessment of whether they should be subject to State aid on the basis of the product, activity or beneficiary. In this respect, Article 42 TFEU states: *The provisions of the Chapter relating to rules on competition shall apply to* ***production of and trade in agricultural products only to*** *the extent determined by the European Parliament and the Council within the framework of Article 43(2) and in accordance with the procedure laid down therein, account being taken of the objectives set out in Article 39.*

It is therefore indicated that there may be an exception to the application of the competition rules but only as regards **production and trade** . In this respect, our doubt is what happens to everything relating to training, innovation, protection and conservation of the marine environment, etc., which, although carried out by the fisheries and aquaculture sector, does not specifically concern production or trade. In such cases, should we always be governed by state aid rules?  This is important because, as you know, the vast majority of actions in fisheries and many of the activities in aquaculture and processing are not productive: E.g. training, innovation, participation in research campaigns, waste collection, energy efficiency, water use, etc.

In addition, and if we have to be governed by state aid regulations, we find ourselves in a situation of insecurity that is clearer by one example. In our proposal for the Operational Programme, we have included more training activities than those set out in the proposal for a Regulation on exemptions, and therefore we do not know in what situation these proposed actions would remain in our OP if they were ultimately not included in the Regulation on exemptions to be approved.

**EE question:**

EE plans to buy a research vessel with EMFAF funding (by a public body). In case no economic activity is involved, it seems no need for state aid approval. However, if it performs economic activity approval under GBER art 26 might be a possibility.

**Answer to ES question:**

Under Article 10(1) of the EMFAF, State aid rules apply in general to the fishery and aquaculture sectors. However, Article 10(2) of the EMFAF states that *Articles 107, 108 and 109 TFEU shall not apply to payments made by Member States pursuant to this Regulation* ***and*** *falling within the scope of Article 42 TFEU.*

By its decision to adopt the EMFAF Regulation, the European Parliament and the Council decided that when a Member State makes payments for operations implementing the Member State’s national EMFAF programme, and those operations contribute to one of the Priorities of the EMFAF Regulation and one of the Thematic Objectives of the CPR and does not constitute an ineligible operation in accordance with Article 13 of the EMFAF, the first condition of in Article 10(2) is fulfilled.

The second condition of Article 10(2) requires that the payment falls within the scope of Article 42 TFEU.

Article 42 applies ”*to* ***production of and trade in agricultural products only to*** *the extent determined by the European Parliament and the Council within the framework of Article 43(2) and in accordance with the procedure laid down therein, account being taken of the objectives set out in Article 39”.* In accordance with Article 38(1) TFEU, the use of the term "agricultural", is to be understood as also referring to fisheries, having regard to the specific characteristics of this sector.

In accordance with Article 1(1) of Regulation 1380/2013, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) covers a) the conservation of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries and fleets exploiting such resources; and b) in relation to measures on markets and financial measures in support of the implementation of the CFP: fresh water biological resources, aquaculture, and the processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products.

Consequently, Article 42 TFEU covers the production, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products. This means that all payments for operations contributing to the production of and trading in fishery products under the national EMFAF programmes are exempted from the requirement to have a State aid clearance. Therefore, support paid to fishers, aquaculture producers and processers of fishery and aquaculture products that supports the recipient in his/her capacity as a fishery, aquaculture producer and processer of fishery and aquaculture products are considered as payments for the production of and trading in fishery products. Article 39 TFEU does not specify what activities should be undertaken to support the objectives of the common agricultural/fishery policy.

 What is important is in what capacity the beneficiary receives the support and that the said support falls under the objectives of the common agricultural (fishery) policy.

This means that all payments for operations towards beneficiaries in their capacity as a fishery, aquaculture producer or processer of fishery and aquaculture products fall under Article 10(2) of the EMFAF Regulation.

As an example, if a fisher receives support for the EMFAF programme of a MS in the form of training in relation to his/her production of or trade in fishery products, such support falls within the Article 10(2) exception. It is important that the training concerns activities that contribute towards one of the EMFAF Priorities and one of the CPR Thematic Objectives.

Another example, if a fisher receives support from the EMFAF programme of a MS in the form of training which is not related to his capacity as a fisher, this support would need State aid clearance under one of the State aid instruments.

**Answer to EE question:**

The decision to classify an activity as an economic activity does not depend on whether the activity is carried out  by a public or private actor, but on the activity itself. The purchase of a research vessel is considered as an economic activity in accordance with the TFEU.

As for the need for State aid clearance for the support of the purchase of a research vessel under the EMFAF the following should be considered.

Article 10(2) of the EMFAF states that *Articles 107, 108 and 109 TFEU shall not apply to payments made by Member States pursuant to this Regulation* ***and*** *falling within the scope of Article 42 TFEU.* If supported under the EMFAF,  the purchase of a research vessel may be considered to fall under the exception of Article 10(2) of the EMFAF, if it is possible to demonstrate that the vessel is used to increase fishery productivity by promoting technical progress (Article39 TFEU) and therefore the end beneficiary is considered to be the fishers.

However, this would require the MS to demonstrate that the research vessel will only benefit fishers. If this cannot be demonstrated, State aid rules and procedures apply.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added-value, inter alia, by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA617\_EMFAF\_Collective beneficiary\_Annex III, EMFAF Regulation

 *Relevant Article*: Annex III to the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Hungary

**Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

There is a company which will be created by the Hungarian Aquaculture and Fisheries Inter-Branch Organisation and the National Federation of Hungarian Anglers. The company is not a public body, so it can not apply for the 100% intensity rate under the row 8 of the Annex III. of the EMFAF regulation.

We think maybe this company could continue our marketing campaign (Kapj rá!) in 2021-27.

We would like to ask, could this company fullfill the criterias of row 14 of the Annex III. of the EMFAF regulation)?

(i) they are of collective interest;

(ii) they have a collective beneficiary;

(iii) they have innovative features or ensure public access to their results.

In our opinion this company has a collective interest, this is a collective beneficiary and under point iii) it could be use new applications or new marketing tools (which were not used before during our campaign) as innovative features, and all of their results would be published.

**Answer:**

According to Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation there are 3 conditions to be fulfilled for a beneficiary to get 100% maximum aid-intensity rate:

(i) they are of collective interest;

(ii) they have a collective beneficiary;

(iii) they have innovative features or ensure public access to their results.

* The term “*collective beneficiary*” should be understood as referring to an organisation recognised by the responsible authority as representing the interest of its members, of a group of stakeholders, or of the public at large. The beneficiary should be the collective organisation itself and not its members.
* To be eligible to the preferential treatment defined by this annex, the actions undertaken by this organisation also need to be in the “*collective interest”* of its members, of a group of stakeholders or of the general public. Such actions should thus encompass more than the sum of the individual interests of the members of this collective beneficiary. They have therefore a broader scope than those normally undertaken by private enterprises.
* The meaning of the “*public access”* to the results of a project funded under EMFF refers to the fact that the general public should not be restricted both to its physical access to the results of the operation as well as in their access to information about the results of the operation.
* “*Innovative features*” refer to innovation activities.

According to the OSLO manual[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-217) :

* A business innovation is a new or improved product or business process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the firm's previous products or business processes and that has been introduced on the market or brought into use by the firm.
* A product innovation is a new or improved good or service that differs significantly from the firm’s previous goods or services and that has been introduced on the market.
* A business process innovation is a new or improved business process for one or more business functions that differs significantly from the firm’s previous business processes and that has been brought into use by the firm.

In the EMFAF context this may include:

* identification or application of innovations that are useful in finding marketing solutions,
* identification or application of new ideas that are useful in finding solutions to issues of business processes (e.g. more sustainable fishing),
* identification or application of new ideas that result in new products and services (e.g. environmental and social services),
* support for changes or improvements in a series of linked tasks or activities to better help businesses reach their goals.

Mere studies, research and advice on potential innovations in the future are excluded.

*Considering the aspects above, it is* *the responsibility of the Managing Authority to assess the status of the company – as a collective beneficiary that acts in the ‘collective interest’ of its members*. *Close consideration should also be given to the national, commercial law and to whether there is a (profit-making) scope of this company.*

*Managing Authority should also ensure that collective actions are not used to unduly take advantage of the more favourable intensity rate in the Annex III of the EMFF regulation.*

 *With reference to a Call of Proposals for a marketing campaign 2021-2027, the Member State will have to ensure equal access to all entities that may be eligible for the implementation of a national marketing campaign.*

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-218)       Oslo Manual 2018: Guidelines for Collecting, Reporting, and Using Data on Innovation.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA618\_EMFAF\_Use of EMFAF for co-financing awareness-raising campaigns on marine litter

 *Relevant Article*: Article 25 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: BE

 **Question:**

BE is preparing its draft EMFAF programme. One observation received by DG MARE on the first version of the programme, was that the programme failed to refer to awareness raising measures on the impact of litter on the marine environment, in line with the requirements under Directive 2019/904. In order to understand better what are opportunities under the EMFAF, the BE MA wants to obtain confirmation that awareness-raising measures on the impact of marine litter in line with Directive 2019/904 would be eligible under SO 1.6 (Article 25, EMFF).

**Answer:**

According to Article 25(1) of the EMFAF Regulation, the EMFAF may support actions that contribute to the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems, including in inland waters. The support shall contribute to the specific objective of contributing to the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems as referred in point (f) of Article 14(1) of the EMFAF Regulation.

As a result, awareness raising campaigns on reducing marine litter are eligible under Specific Objective 1.6 insofar as they contribute to the protection or restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems, including in inland waters. This includes campaigns related to the impact of marine litter in line with Directive 2019/904.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA619\_EMFAF\_Temporary Cessation under EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: Article 21 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: DE

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Commission has repeatedly emphasised that recourse to EMFAF is possible on the part of the Member States even before official approval by the Commission, but that in such a case the Member State concerned bears the risk that the measure in question will be approved under the operational programme.

Germany would like to make use of this possibility for the temporary cessation in the Baltic Sea. The premiums are to be paid only after approval of the operational programme.

In the case of temporary cessation under the EMFF, support was provided not only under the Operational Programme but also taking into account the national Guidelines for the Promotion of Measures for the Adaptation of Fishing Activities and the Development of the Fishing Fleet of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MAF-BMEL) (see Annex). On p. 93 of the German EMFF OP in its current version, reference is made to the these Guidelines: "Further details, in particular the period of cessation of fishing activities, the number of days for which compensation is granted and, where appropriate, other modalities, which may differentiate between regions, farm sectors, vessel sizes, vessel types and fishing gears, shall be regulated in the national provisions implementing the temporary cessation of fishing activities."

For EMFAF, such a national complementary support guideline is not yet available. Is this an obstacle to implementing the envisaged support for temporary cessation under EMFAF?

**Answer:**

Pursuant to Article 39 of the EMFAF Regulation, compensation for additional costs or income foregone and other compensation provided under this Regulation shall be granted under any of the forms referred to in points (b) to (e) of Article 53(1) of the Common Provisions Regulation. This means that compensation for the temporary cessation of fishing activities must take the form of a “simplified cost option”.

The Member State must establish the methodology for calculation in accordance with Article 53(3) of the Common Provisions Regulation. The Common Provisions Regulation does not require the *ex ante* approval of this methodology by the Commission, thus it must not be described in the EMFAF programme.

Any other administrative tool, being a guideline or national/ministerial decree, to regulate the eligibility for support, to select the applications and pay the compensation to beneficiaries is the responsibility of the managing authority.

As regards implementation before the adoption of the programme, Article 63(2) of the Common Provisions Regulation, provides that expenditure for selected operations is eligible as of 1 January 2021. Concretely, this means that:

* Grant decisions signed before the approval of the programmes are not legally binding as regards the Common Provisions Regulation and the EMFAF. However, Member States can do all the necessary preparatory work with the beneficiaries before the approval of the programme by the Commission. This includes preparatory work within a ‘shadow’ monitoring committee to adopt selection criteria. Therefore, Member States can launch calls before the approval of the programme, but any selection of operations and signature of grant decisions is under the sole responsibility of the Member State, without prejudice to their legal validity as regards EU law.
* The applicants should be made aware in the calls for projects that the final confirmation of support is subject to the formal approval of the selection criteria by the monitoring committee and of selection of operations by the managing authority, once the programme is adopted. It means that any contractual arrangements done before programme adoption and project selection based on approved selection criteria is at Member States’ risk and it needs to be re-contracted afterwards.

Pursuant to Article 63(6) of the Common Provisions Regulation, operations cannot be selected if they have been physically completed or fully implemented before the submission of the application for funding to the managing authority. Under this rule, what matters is the date of submission of the application, not the date of selection of the operation.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA620\_EMFAF\_Aid intensity for operations related to small-scale coastal fishing

 *Relevant Article*: Annex III to the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Latvia

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

LV MA would like to know if the 100% aid intensity under shared management for operations related to small-scale coastal fishing as referred in Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation is applicable as in the EMFF programming period.

In 2016, for the expert group on the EMFF in reply to frequently asked questions COM has provided the following information on intensity of public aid for operations related to small-scale coastal fishing: *’’* *In order to benefit from increased percentage points, the operation must directly benefit the owner of a small-scale fishing vessel.’’*

Do we correctly understand that it is essential for the aid applicant to be the owner of the small-scale fishing vessel, and then adding value to the catches, i.e. activities up to the first sale of fishery products and the offer of their products to consumers is eligible for 100 % support aid intensity?

**Answer:**

In line with Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation, operations related to small-scale coastal fishing (SSCF) may benefit from a maximum 100% aid intensity rate meaning that SSCF fishermen are the direct beneficiaries of the operations.

In order to identify the beneficiary as a member of the small-scale coastal fishing community, and thus provide a maximum 100% aid intensity, the Managing authority shall satisfy itself that the operation is directly benefitting the owner of a small-scale fishing vessel.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA621\_EMFAF\_Moving financial allocations between 1.1.1 and 1.1.2

 *Relevant Article*: Annex II to the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: BE

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

BE is preparing its draft EMFAF programme. In order to have more clarity about the flexibility that exists when financial allocations are distributed in the adopted programme, the BE MA wants to know if it has understood the text of CPR Art. 24 correctly what concerns (sub) SO 1.1.1 and 1.1.2;

“According to Art. 24 CPR, the transfer of up to 8 % of the initial allocation to one SO to another SO is considered as “non-significant”. Can we assume that the budget under 1.1.1. and 1.1.2. is considered as one SO (1.1.) according to the financing plan (Annex III, EMFAF)?”

**Answer:**

The second paragraph of Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) Article 24 (5) says

“For programmes supported by the EMFAF, the Member State may transfer during the programming period an amount of up to 8 % of the initial allocation of a specific objective to another specific objective, including technical assistance implemented pursuant to Article 36(4)”.

While the Member State should strive to maintain the approved budgetary allocations as much as possible in order to reach the initial targets of the programme, the above mentioned paragraph of Article 24 of the CPR offers the opportunity for limited shifts.

Article 14(1) of the EMFF Regulation lists the 6 Specific Objectives (SO) for Priority 1, of which the SO described in point (a) is “strengthening economically, socially and environmentally sustainable fishing activities”.

As set out in Annex II to the EMFAF Regulation, that SO is subdivided into two sub-categories: 1.1.1 and 1.1.2. The sub-category 1.1.2 covers operations supported under Articles 17 and 19 (i.e. “first acquisition of a fishing vessel” and “increase in the gross tonnage of a fishing vessel to improve safety, working conditions or energy efficiency”). This subdivision is relevant only as regards Table 11A of Annex V to the CPR (i.e. the financing plan) in order to trace the amounts subject to the financial ceiling laid down in Article 5(5) of the EMFAF Regulation, which covers Articles 17 and 19. Therefore, it is necessary to trace support under those Articles individually in the financing plan.

However, sub-categories 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 are not SOs. Annex II to the EMFAF Regulation provides that this nomenclature is used only for the purpose of the financing plan. Therefore, 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 are the two components of the SO described in Article 14(1)(a) and in the third column of Annex II.

Conclusion: for the purpose of the transfer of up to 8 % of the initial allocation from one SO to another SO pursuant to Article 24 of the CPR, the financial allocation for the SO described in Article 14(1)(a) of the EMFAF Regulation is the sum of the allocations indicated for the sub-categories 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 in the financing plan. The Member State must ensure that any transfer that would increase the allocation of sub-category 1.1.2 complies with the financial ceiling established in Article 5(5) of the EMFAF Regulation.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA622\_EMFAF\_Intensity of aid for R&D projects and aquaculture investments

 *Relevant Article*: Annex III; Art 41, EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Hungary

 **Questions :**

Under the EMFF OP we have the measure ”Innovation”, which is an R+D+I measure. Under the EMFAF OP we are planning this R+D+I measure as well. We would like to clarify the various aid-intensities that should be applied in different cases as follows:

**Question 1:**

If the aim of the measure is R+D+I (like our EMFAF measure 2.1.2. or EMFF measure 2.1) and the beneficiaries **are not public bodies**, the public aid is 75% in line with point 18 of Annex III of the EMFAF Reg.

**Question 2:**

If the aim of the measure is R+D+I (like our EMFAF measure 2.1.2. or EMFF measure 2.1) and the beneficiaries **are public body and not public body in consortium**, the public aid is 75% in line with point 18 of Annex III of the EMFAF Reg.

**Question 3**:

If the beneficiaries are **only public bodies (alone or in consortium),** the public aid is always 100% under the whole EMFAF in line with point 8 of Annex III of the EMFAF Reg.?

**Question 4:**

Is the public aid under priority 1 of the EMFAF 50% **for enterprises** in line with Article 41(1) of the EMFAF Regulation?

**Question 5:**

If the aim of the measure is aquaculture investment and the **beneficiaries are enterprises**, the public aid is 60% in line with point 17 of Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation?

**Question 6:**

If the aim of the measure is processing (like our EMFAF measure 2.2.2. or EMFF measure 5.3.3) and the beneficiaries are enterprises, the public aid is 50% in line with Article 41(1) of the EMFAF Regulation?

**Question 7 on aid-intensity for aquaculture investment:**

Under the EMFF, according to the Article 48(3) it was possible to support aquaculture investments only for aquaculture enterprises, and the public aid was 50%. HU cannot read this kind of rule in the EMFAF Regulation.

**Question 8 on aid-intensity for aquaculture investment:**

I would like to ask, if it will be possible for the public bodies as well (with 100% public aid) to apply for aquaculture investment (for our EMFAF measure 2.1.1)? Of course the public body has to deal with fish farming, it has to have registered fishing activity and fishery income.

Aquaculture investment is meant to generate profits and it is normally assumed to be done by private entities in all MS.

**Answers:**

General remarks:

* The aid intensity rates established in Article 41 and Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation are maximum Member States may apply a lower rate.
* Where one operation falls under several of the rows 2 to 19 of Annex III, the highest maximum aid intensity rate shall apply. Here again, the Annex refers to a maximum
* It is for the Member State to decide under which Annex III row the operation is categorised.

These answers are indicative only.

**Answer 1:**

Regarding RDI investments, one key aspect should be clear: Partnership and consortium are not one and the same thing. The latter (i.e. consortium) implies that a new entity is formed, which may be either public or private – depending on the national legislation in the various MS. The MA should decide on that.There are 3 possibilities for EMFAF RDI operations:

1. A public body may be in partnership/cooperation with a private company and still receive 100% aid-intensity (row 8 of EMFAF Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation – hereafter “Annex III”). The condition is that the public body should be the sole beneficiary. The partner will thus be a participant and not entitled to receive any monies.
2. A private company may be in partnership/cooperation with a public body. Whether it may receive 75% aid-intensity, if the private company is the sole beneficiary, will depend on the type of the operation. It should be noted that row 18 of Annex III   is not about RDI investments as such. It is about “operations supporting innovative products, processes or equipment in fisheries, aquaculture and processing”. The output (i.e. products, processes, equipment) must be innovative, not the input (i.e. the investment).
3. A public entity (i.e. research institute etc.) may create a ***consortium*** with a private entity. *A consortium leads to the creation of a new entity, which may be private or public – in line with the national legislation. It is understood that this is HU’s intention; if so, the MA has to decide if the new entity created by the consortium is public*[***[1]***](#scroll-bookmark-224)*or private. Then the MA decides if row 8 (100% aid intensity) or row 18 (75% aid intensity) applies, assuming the relevant conditions are met. Row 14 could also be considered.*

If the aim of the measure is R+D+I and the beneficiaries **are not public bodies** , then the public aid is 75% (if it meets the conditions of row 18 of Annex III). Again, row 14 may be considered.  In this case it is assumed that the beneficiaries are private entities.

**Answer 2:**

The MA will need to decide if the entity resulting from the consortium is private or public [[2]](#scroll-bookmark-225) .

1. If it is **a public body**, the aid-intensity is 100% (row 8 of Annex III): „Operations for which the beneficiary is a public body or an undertaking entrusted with the operation of services of general economic interest as referred to in Article 106(2) TFEU, where support is granted for the operation of such services”.
2. If it is a **private body**, the aid-intensity is 75% (if the conditions of row 18 of Annex III are met). Row 14 may also be considered.

The easiest route for RDI will be to have a public body as the sole beneficiary in cooperation/partnership with the private body. The intensity in this case will be 100% and it will not be a consortium where the MA will have to decide which form it took (i.e. public or private).  But row 14 should also be considered.

**Answer 3:**

Not necessarily. If a public body is the only beneficiary, the aid-intensity is 100% (row 8 of Annex III). In cases where you have a consortium (even if created by public bodies) the MA will need to check if the new entity created via the consortium is a public or private in line with the national legislation and with the definition of “public body” in Article 2. *For example*: 2 research institutes decide to create a consortium and the new entity emerging from the consortium is a private entity that generates profit. This private entity will benefit from only 75% aid-intensity, not 100%.

**Answer 4:**

If the public aid is under priority 1 of the EMFAF, then the aid-intensity is 50% for enterprises, in line with Article 41(1) of the EMFAF Regulation (unless the operation falls under one of the rows in Annex III).

**Answer 5:**

Please note that this is referring to ’Operations supporting sustainable aquaculture implemented **by SMEs’** – row 17 of Annex III. Thus, only SMEs will receive a higher aid intensity due to their size, which must be checked by the MA when approving the operation.  The other enterprises will receive maximum 50% according to Article 41(1) of the EMFAF Regulation.

**Answer 6:**

For aid intensity rates, Article 41(1) EMFAF applies by default, except if the operation falls under one of the rows listed in Annex III.  The relevant rate from the Annex would then apply.

**Answer 7 on aid-intensity for aquaculture investment:**

See answer to question 6.

**Answer 8 on aid-intensity for aquaculture investment:**

If a public body is making ’aquaculture investment’, it goes beyond its non-profit scope and row 8 of Annex III: „ *Operations for which the beneficiary is a public body or an undertaking entrusted with the operation of services of general economic interest as referred to in Article 106(2) TFEU, where support is granted for the operation of such services* ”. Thus, in this case the public body will not perform an operation or service of general economic interest and it will thus not benefit from 100% aid intensity.

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-226)      In accordance with the definition of “public body” in Article 2(2)(12):  “*the State, regional or local authorities, bodies governed by public law or associations formed by one or more such authorities or by one or more of such bodies, governed by public law*”.

[[2]](#scroll-bookmark-227)       Idem footnote 1.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA624\_EMFAF\_Intensity of aid for R&D projects and aquaculture investments

 *Relevant Article*: Article 41 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Cyprus

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to the EMFAF Regulation 2021/1139, the maximum aid intensity rate should be 50 % of the total eligible expenditure, with the possibility, in certain cases, to set derogatory rates.  According to annex III  (specific maximum intensity rates under shared management)  the max intensity rate for operations supporting sustainable aquaculture implemented by SMEs  is 60%.

Taking into account the above:

a) We would like to ask whether the derogation of 60% applies to all related activities to sustainable aquaculture such as marketing and processing.

And  if it does not apply to all related activities as in a):

b) Certain activities related to marketing of aquaculture products cannot be distinguished between production and marketing. Examples of this are grading of harvested fish and packing equipment.    Therefore we would like to ask if operations that include such equipment that are considered as marketing operations but interlinked with production would benefit from the increase of co-financing of 60%.

**Answer:**

Article 41 (‘Intensity of public aid’) of the EMFAF Regulation provides that ‘Member States shall apply a maximum aid intensity rate of 50% of the total eligible expenditure of the operation’. The ‘total eligible expenditure of the operation’ refers to the total of public and private expenditure. By way of derogation, specific maximum aid intensity rates are set out in Annex III of the mentioned Regulation. Where one operation falls under several of the rows 2 to 19 of Annex III, the highest maximum aid intensity rate shall apply. Under row 17 of the Annex III, it is specified that operations supporting sustainable aquaculture implemented by SMEs will benefit from 60% maximum aid intensity rate.

This derogation cannot be applied to all related activities under priority 2 “Fostering sustainable aquaculture activities and processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products” but only to operations supporting sustainable aquaculture implemented by SMEs as specified in the derogation.

Furthermore, Article 26 of the EMFAF Regulation clearly distinguishes processing and marketing (Art. 26(b)) from operations supporting sustainable aquaculture activities (Art. 26(a)). The latter refers to the definition of aquaculture in Article 4(25) of the CFP Regulation, involving operations related to “the rearing or cultivation of aquatic organisms using techniques designed to increase the production of the organisms in question beyond the natural capacity of the environment […] up to and including harvesting”.

This helps distinguish production from marketing of fish products, which begins at the level of individual farmers. The farmer rears or harvests fish and processes them to a certain level before making it available to the market with a series of operations which usually include also storage, sorting, grading, and packaging. Grading and packaging, in particular, are considered some of the main features of fish marketing, as they allow for making fish products ready for storage or sale, by allocating prices and preparing them for delivery to marketers or consumers.

It follows that in case operations refer to processing and marketing, the maximum intensity of public aid would be 50 % in line with Article 41 of the EMFAF Regulation. This therefore applies also to operations related to the grading of harvested fish and packing equipment since those are considered as marketing operations.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 57(1) of [the political agreement on] the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the CPR or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article [12a(1)(a)] of [the political agreement on] the EMFAF Regulation, the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article [9(2)], must not be ineligible pursuant to Article [13] and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 6 of [the political agreement on] the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA626\_EMFAF\_State aid clearance needed under EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: Article 10 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

For what support granted under the EMFAF regulation will it be necessary to attain State aid clearance?

**ES question:**

**Following the previous question received by ES, and the answer sent to ES MA on 11 March (IQ 616) , ES is asking to which extend the support can be granted on measures included in the EMFAF programme.**

On some measures support is very clear, for example productive investments for aquaculture. But in others doubts arise, for example, all investments made to improve working and safety conditions on board and on land, or all investments to improve energy efficiency such as solar panels, actions to involve fishermen in the surveillance and monitoring of protected marine areas, actions carried out in ports whose beneficiaries are port authorities and for the collection of marine waste.

ES would like to know if it could be generally understood that all of them to be eligible, as for their contributing to production and marketing or whether a more restrictive approach should be considered, and only consider those that are directly related to production and marketing such as productive investments, traceability, more selective gear or improved processing of products covered by the landing obligation, etc.

ES is raising the issue for example at OP PMP plans level, as they may have  measures to improve energy efficiency, safety and health such as telemedicine and other measures, in the same PMP, to improve the marketing of species coming from the landing obligation, etc.

**Answer:**

*Proposed reply to ES question:*

As mentioned in the reply sent to ES on 11th March 2022, support paid to fishers, aquaculture producers and processers of fishery and aquaculture products that supports the recipient in his/her capacity as a fisher, aquaculture producer and processer of fishery and aquaculture products are considered as payments for the production of and trading in fishery products.

Article 39 TFEU does not specify what activities should be undertaken to support the objectives of the common agricultural/fishery policy.

This means that support for any activity undertaken, in any way, shape or form, by the fishers, aquaculture producers and processers of fishery and aquaculture products in their capacity as such does not require state aid approval when eligible under Article 12 of the EMFAF Regulation and included in the EMFAF programme.

This includes support for improving working, health and safety conditions on board and land, improving energy efficiency (within the limits of the Regulation), activities carried out by POs, etc.

This also includes diversification within any of the mentioned areas, such as a fisher starting to process their own catch, but it does not include diversification outside the mentioned areas, such as tourism, restaurant, etc.

It would also include payments to service providers of trainings/advisory services to fishers/aquaculture producers/processors for services that are related to their capacity as a fisher, aquaculture producer and processer of fishery and aquaculture products.

When it comes to support to landing sites, ports, MPAs the situation is somewhat different. Therefore, the Managing Authority will have to evaluate the individual cases  to determine whether the support would fall within Art 10(2) of the EMFAF Regulation or would require state aid clearance.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added-value, inter alia, by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA627\_EMFAF\_Use of EMFAF for co-financing on-land processing of collected marine litter

 *Relevant Article*: Article 25 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: BE

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

BE is preparing its draft EMFAF programme. In order to understand better what are opportunities under the EMFAF, the BE MA wants to obtain confirmation that expenses related to on-land processing of marine litter in line with Directive 2019/904 would be eligible under SO 1.6 (Article 25, EMFAF).

**Answer:**

According to Article 25(1) of the EMFAF Regulation, the EMFAF may support actions that contribute to the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems, including in inland waters. The support shall contribute to the Specific Objective (hereinafter “SO”) of contributing to the protection and restoration of aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems as referred in point (f) of Article 14(1) of the EMFAF Regulation (i.e. SO 1.6).

Moreover, Article 8(5)(j) of the EMFAF Regulation clarifies that the contribution to the reduction of marine litter in accordance with Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council, i.e. on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, is one of the elements that the Commission shall take into account in the assessment of the programme.

Under the EMFAF more flexible architecture, it follows that (on-land) processing of lost fishing gear and marine litter collected from the sea can be eligible for support under SO 1.6 as long as the related actions contribute to the protection or restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity, as prescribed under that SO.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA632\_EMFAF\_Maximum aid intensity for CLLD operations

 *Relevant Article*: Art 41 and Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Belgium

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Belgian Managing Authority is preparing its draft EMFAF programme in which CLLD will be included and is seeking clarity about the aid intensity for operational and other CLLD costs.

“- Point 12 of Annex III of the EMFAF states that operations related to the operational costs of local action groups have a maximum aid intensity rate of 100 %. Does this apply both to Article 34 (1) (a) and (c) of the CPR Regulation?

- In view of the previous question, does the implementation of the operations selected under the local strategy (in accordance with Article 34 (1) (b) of the CPR Regulation) imply these are subject to the other rates of support set out in Annex III to the EMFAF Regulation?”

**Answer:**

The operations referred to under point 12 of Annex III, i.e. those related to the running costs of local action groups, should be strictly limited to Article 34(1)(c) of the CPR Regulation, notably “the management, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its animation, including the facilitation of exchanges between stakeholders”. Thus “capacity building and preparatory actions supporting the design and future implementation of the strategy”, as defined in Article 34(1)(a) of the CPR Regulation, do not fall under *running* costs but under *preparatory* costs (including capacity building). These costs may fall under different maximum aid intensity rates.

This interpretation is supported by the classification of the Types of Actions in Annex IV of the EMFAF Regulation which identifies three CLLD-related types under codes 13, 14 and 15 ; of which only the last one refers to *running* costs (which could include animation).

Concerning the operations of various nature supported by EMFAF under Article 34(1)(b) of the CPR Regulation, which are the ones implementing the LAG strategy, the general provisions of Article 41 defining the maximum aid intensity are applicable.

Conclusion: to the operations resulting from the LAG strategy, as well as LAG preparatory and capacity building costs, the provisions of Article 41 EMFAF apply to define the maximum aid intensity. In the case of justified LAG running costs, the maximum 100% aid intensity rate of Point 12 of Annex III can apply.

*N.B.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA634\_EMFAF\_Maximum intensity of aid for beneficiaries without legal personality

 *Relevant Article*: Art 41 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Romania

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to Art. 2(9)(a) of CPR, a beneficiary could be an entity without legal personality. Such an entity could be a partnership between a University/ research institute, which is a public body and an aquaculture company, which is a private body and they could have an aquaculture project. This entity would not fall under the definition of Art. 2(9)(b) of CPR (PPP).

According to Art. 41 of EMFAF, the maximum aid intensity rate is 50% or other, as set in Annex III. Where one operation falls under several of the rows 2 to 19 of Annex III, the highest maximum aid intensity rate shall apply.

In the case of the above mentioned entity, two rows from Annex III of EMFAF could apply:

a)  Row 8 Operations for which the beneficiary is a public body... - 100%;

b) Row 17 Operations supporting sustainable aquaculture implemented by SMEs - 60%.

Please confirm whether in this case Art. 41(3) of EMFAF is applicable and the 100% maximum aid intensity rate should apply.

**Answer:**

Article 2(2)(12) of the EMFAF Regulation defines ‘public body’ as ‘the State, regional or local authorities, bodies governed by public law or associations formed by one or more such authorities or by one or more of such bodies, governed by public law’. In cases where a beneficiary is without legal personality, it is up to the Member State to decide on a *case-by-case basis* and in consideration of the type of operation to be implemented (profit making vs. public-use), if the beneficiary falls under that definition, and thus is eligible to the 100% aid intensity rate referred to in row 8 of Annex III to the EMFAF Regulation.

Managing Authorities should differentiate partnership and consortium.. A consortium implies that a new entity is formed, which may be either public or private – depending on the national legislation. In light of the above, Managing Authorities should consider the following possibilities

1. A public body may be in partnership/cooperation with a private company and still receive 100% aid-intensity (row 8 of EMFAF Annex III to the EMFAF Regulation). The condition is that the public body should be the sole beneficiary. The partner will thus be a participant and not entitled to receive any funds.
2. A public entity (i.e. research institute etc.) may create a consortium with a private entity. A consortium leads to the creation of a new entity, which may be private or public – in line with the national legislation. The Managing Authority has to decide if the new entity created by the consortium is public[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-233) or private.

Managing Authorities should ensure that beneficiaries do not unduly take advantage of the more favorable aid intensity rate granted to public bodies.

Row 17 of Annex III does not apply to beneficiaries without legal personality because it concerns operations implemented by SMEs, hence by companies with a legal personality.

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-234)     In accordance with the definition of “public body” in Article 2(2)(12):  “*the State, regional or local authorities, bodies governed by public law or associations formed by one or more such authorities or by one or more of such bodies, governed by public law*”.

*N.B*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA635\_EMFAF\_Interpretation of the result indicator ‘number of operations’

 *Relevant Article*: Annex 1 of the EMFAF Regulation and Article Art. 2(4)(a) of CPR Regulation

 *Member State*: Romania

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to Regulation (EU) 1139/2021 (EMFAF), Annex 1 COMMON INDICATORS OF THE EMFAF, the output indicator is ”CO 01 - Number of operations”. An operation may have a different status, from ”selected” to ”finalised” or ”completed”, but the regulation is silent in this regard.

Since Regulation (EU) 1060/2021 (CPR) foresees in Art. 1 (6) that EMFAF may complement CPR and, in case of doubt, CPR prevails, in our opinion de definitions of CPR apply also to the output indicators of EMFAF.

Thus, if, according to Art. 2(4)(a) of CPR, ”operation” means ”a project, contract, action or group of projects selected under the programmes concerned”, then the output indicator referred to in Annex 1 COMMON INDICATORS OF THE EMFAF should be understood as operations that have been selected (meaning that a contract for financing that operation has been signed both by the Managing Authority and the applicant).

**Answer:**

It is correctly stated that Annex I of the EMFAF Regulation mentions only one type of output indicator: “CO 01 - number of operations”. Output indicators measure the specific deliverables of the intervention, according to article 2(13) of the CPR.

It is up to the Member State to define the target value for the number of operations for each specific objective in the EMFAF programme. That is the sum of all operations to be implemented for that specific objective. It has been correctly described that ‘operation’ refers to a project, contract, action or group of projects **selected** under the programmes concerned. Indeed by the term ’selected’ a signed contract for financing the operation needs to exist between the Managing Authority and the applicant. With respect to the output indicator ‘number of operations’, the milestone must refer to the number of operations to be selected by the end of 2024, and the target to the number of operations to be selected by the end of 2029, irrespective of the level of implementation or completion of those operations.

*N.B.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA640\_EMFAF\_Modernisation of fishing vessels above 12 m under EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: Article 13 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Bulgaria

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

We have several questions regarding fishing vessels above 12 meters (segment: 18-24 m and +24 m), namely concerning the opportunities for investment on board (renovation of ship/repair) during the EMFAF programming period.

1. The owners of vessels need to improve safety on board as regards the following specific investments; are they eligible under EMFAF ?

* renovation of ship hull and propeller shafting; renovation of ship frame; renovation of proper-rudder system; replacement of the deck (main and foredeck) - wooden floor and steel sheets under it; replacement of bulwark; sanding and repainting of the hull; replacement of protectors for static electricity on the ship’s hull (Vessel Antistatic Solutions); replacement of sterntube; docking, blasting and high pressure water jet.

2. Is it eligible to invest in replacement (modernisation) of equipment, which is obligatory under Union or national law?

3. Is it eligible to invest in radar, GPS and cartographer?

**Answer:**

1. Pursuant to Article 63(1) of the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, the eligibility of expenditure shall be determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in, or on the basis of, this Regulation or the Fund-specific Regulations. Pursuant to Article 12 of the EMFAF Regulation (EU) 2021/1139, the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.

The Recital 23 of the EMFAF Regulation gives examples of eligible actions (e.g. health, safety and working conditions, energy efficiency and the quality of catches) but is also clear on those that are not eligible (e.g. acquisition of equipment that increases the ability of a fishing vessel to find fish).

Eligibility is defined pursuant to Article 12 of the EMFAF Regulation, which itself refers to the list of ineligible operations in Article 13. Recital 23 of the EMFAF Regulation cannot be used to circumvent Article 13 EMFAF Regulation.

It is the responsibility of the Managing Authority to evaluate and establish which type of investments to improve safety on board fishing vessels listed under question 1 fulfils the eligibility requirements of Article 12 and do not fall under the ineligible operations set out under Article 13.

It is also important that the necessary type of action to support investments improving safety on board fishing vessels is included in the programme.

2. As stated in the Article 13(k) - investments on board fishing vessels, including replacement (modernisation) of equipment, necessary to comply with the requirements under Union law in force at the time of submission of the application for support, including requirements under the Union’s obligations in the context of RFMOs, are not eligible, unless otherwise provided for in Article 22.

Investments required under national law are eligible, provided they go beyond the requirements under Union law.

3. Radar, GPS and cartographer on fishing vessels are not eligible pursuant to Article 13(b) because they are equipment that increase the ability to find fish.

*N.B.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA644\_EMFAF\_Interpretation of certain EMFAF provisions in view of correct programming

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 26(1)(b), Article 22(3) and Articles 33 and 34 of the EMFAF regulation.

 *Member State*: Croatia

 **Question 1**

We would like to know if introducing a healthy meal of fishery and aquaculture products in the diet of children and young people in educational institutions (schools/kinder gardens) in Croatia can be financed under Article 26(1)(b) of the EMFAF Regulation. More precisely, the following activities are foreseen:

* Distribution and/or delivery of fishery and aquaculture products. Within these activities, financing of fishery and aquaculture products is envisaged, beneficiaries of the support would be suppliers/educational institutions.
* Equipping schools/kindergartens with equipment for preparation/storage of fishery and aquaculture products.
* Accompanying educational activities.
* Promotional activities.

 **Question 2**

Taking into account the direct link between the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan, CISE, as well as coast guard functions with the control and enforcement system, and taking into account Article 22(3) of the EMFAF Regulation, could you clarify if actions for the achievement of objectives set in Article 31 of the EMFAF Regulation are eligible to be financed under Priority 1, specific objective 4, aimed at improving the control system?

**Answer 1**

In accordance with Article 26(1)(b) of the EMFAF Regulation, the EMFAF may support interventions aming at promoting marketing, quality and added value of fishery and aquaculture products, as well as processing of those products. Based on the description provided by the Croatian authorities, we do not have sufficient elements to evaluate and provide a decisive conclusion on the potential eligibility of the activities concerned (i.e. distribution and delivery, equipment for preparation/storage of meals) under SO 2.2.

In general, educational and promotional activities targeted at increasing the awareness of fisheries and aquaculture products in children’s diet may be considered eligible under SO 2.2, as long as these activities contribute to the scope and objectives set out in Article 26(1)(b) of the EMFAF Regulation. The simple supply of fisheries and aquaculture products to schools does not fulfil the objectives of Article 26(1)(b) EMFAF Regulation and does not therefore constitute an eligible type of action under SO 2.2.

We would like to remind you that, pursuant to Article 63(1) of the CPR Regulation, the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the CPR or in the Fund-specific Regulations.

**Answer 2**

Article 22(3) of the EMFAF Regulation reads that *The support referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article may also contribute to maritime surveillance as referred to in Article 33 and to the cooperation on coast guard functions as referred to in Article 34.* Similar provisions are included in Articles 33 and 34 of the EMFAF Regulation.

These provisions clarify the situation of multipurpose activities, i.e., activities used both for fisheries control and maritime surveillance. Such types of activities should be supported under the article corresponding to their main mission, but they can be supported under the scope of the other respective articles, without a predefined demarcation.

However, this provision should not undermine the rule that at least 15 % of the Union financial support should be allocated to fisheries control and enforcement (Article 5(4) of the EMFAF Regulation).

Therefore, when you decide on the demarcation between Articles 22, 33 and 34 of the EMFAF it is recommended to evaluate which is the main purpose of the planned activity and to bear in mind that 15% of the programme allocation should be devoted to fisheries control and data collection activities exclusively.

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA646\_EMFAF\_IQ on Point 14 and 17, Annex III, Regulation no 2021/1139

 *Relevant Article*: Point 14 and 17, Annex III, Regulation no 2021/1139

 *Member State*: Poland

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. Poland is working on the national provisions for Priority 2 of the EMFAF and is defining the rules for calculating the aid-intensity of an operation. Poland refers to the following provisions:

1) Regulation 2021/1139, Annex III, point 14.

In order to increase the aid intensity, the operation must meet all of the following criteria:

(I) are in the collective interest.

(II) they have a collective beneficiary.

(III) have innovative features, where appropriate, at local level, and ensure public access to their results.

Poland asks what is the definition of collective beneficiary.

2. Regulation 2021/1139, Annex III, point 17.

As a rule, Poland applies a support intensity of 50 % of the eligible costs. Poland wants to raise the level of support in aquaculture investments to 60 % for eco-certified farms and young fishermen up to the age of 40 who will apply for aid.

Poland asked if the intensity of support for these groups of applicants (60 %) be applied on the basis of the provision of Annex III, point 17, ‘Operations to support sustainable aquaculture implemented by SMEs’?

**Answer:**

1. The term 'collective beneficiary' as referred to in Annex III of EMFAF, should be understood as referring to an organisation recognised by the responsible authority as representing the interest of its members, of a group of stakeholders, or of the public at large.

The beneficiary is always the collective organisation itself and not its members.

2. A farm practising sustainable aquaculture is eligible for EMFAF support if it contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the CFP as set out in Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013. That means that the aquaculture farm must be environmentally sustainable in the long-term and is being managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies. The Managing Authority has to determine whether the farm in question fulfills these criteria.

The designation of eco-certification is not a factor in setting the aid intensity. Only **SMEs** which implement sustainable aquaculture can receive a higher aid intensity due to their size, which must be checked by the Managing Authority when approving the operation.

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA647\_EMFAF\_Art. 18 engine replacement - verification

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 18 EMFAF

 *Member State*: Germany

 **Questions (including any relevant facts and information):**

Question 1: Regarding the exchange of machinery (boat engines) according to Art. 18 para. 2 d, a 20% saving in CO2 emissions is to be achieved. The implementing regulation No. 2022/46 is to be consulted for the subordination of the cases regulated in para. 5 subpara. 2 a). Is the exchange of a new/modern boat engine with combustion drive against a boat engine with the same but older drive technology also permissible under application of this regulation? Is the criterion of the use of an energy-efficient technology according to Art. 1 No. 1c of the Regulation 2022/46 thus fulfilled?

Question 2: In addition, the question arises as to how the technical inspection of replaced machinery prescribed in Article 18(3) of Regulation 2021/1139 can be regarded as fulfilled in practice, since a physical measurement on site appears uneconomical?

**Answers:**

Answer 1:

Paragraph 5 of Article 18 of the EMFAF Regulation defines the methodology for measuring the 20% reduction of CO2 emissions required under point (d) of paragraph 2.

The Member State must first check if the first subparagraph of paragraph 5 is technically applicable. That subparagraph requires information certified by the manufacturer for both the old and the new engine as regards either their CO2 emissions (point a.) or their fuel consumption (point b.). Member States can choose whether to apply point (a) or point (b).

If (and only if) the first subparagraph of Article 5 is not technically applicable because the relevant information certified by the manufacturer does not allow a comparison of the CO2 emission or fuel consumption, the Member State must apply the second subparagraph as an alternative methodology. That second subparagraph offers three options, under which the 20% reduction of CO2 is considered to be met:

* The new engine uses an energy-efficient technology and the age difference between the new engine and the engine being replaced is at least seven years. Both conditions are cumulative. The list of energy-efficient technologies is established in Article 1 of Implementing Regulation 2022/46. “Internal combustion” is included in that list but is eligible only if there is at least seven years difference between the new engine and the engine being replaced.
* The new engine uses a type of fuel or a propulsion system which is considered to emit less CO2 than the engine being replaced.
* The Member State measures that the new engine emits 20% less CO2 or uses 20% less fuel than the engine being replaced under the normal fishing effort of the vessel concerned. Article 2 of Implementing Regulation 2022/46 defines on what the normal fishing effort is to be construed.

If several of those options are applicable, the Member State decides which one to use.

Answer 2:

According to Article 18(3) of the EMFAF Regulation, a physical verification is a prerequisite for receiving support under the EMFAF for the replacement or modernization of engines.

The EMFAF Regulation is not prescriptive on the modalities of this physical verification, which is for Member States to decide. However, such a verification must always be physical and its purpose to ensure that the new or modernized engine fulfils all the conditions of:

* Article 18(2)(c): for small-scale coastal fishing vessels, the new or modernized engine does not have more power in kW than that of the current engine.
* Article18(2)(d): for other vessels up to 24 meters in overall length, the new or modernized engine does not have more power in kW than that of the current engine and emits at least 20 % less CO2 compared to the current engine.

By extension, the physical verification should also ensure that the new or modernized engine fulfils all the conditions of Article 18(5).

N.B.

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA648\_EMFAF\_Art. 21 (3) of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 21 (3) of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Germany

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

According to Art. 21 (3) of the EMFAF Regulation, support under paragraph 1 may only be granted if the fishing activities of the vessel or fisherman concerned are interrupted for at least 30 days in a given calendar year. This regulation lacks a reference to a single measure, probably also because the Commission may not have assumed that a fisherman could also participate in two different measures of this kind in the same calendar year, e.g. German fishermen in the Baltic Sea in one closure of cod and a second closure of herring/sprout.

In MV, the regulation is interpreted in such a way that the minimum laytime of 30 days is measure-related (if you participate in cod and herring/sprat, you have to lie still for 2x30=60 days).

On the part of the BMEL, we assume that this interpretation of Art. 21 para. 3 EMFAF Regulation is correct and that the minimum laytime is measure related. This also seems to be suggested by Art. 21 para. 6 of the EMFAF Regulation, which regulates the maximum support for decommissioning in the programme period per fishing vessel (12 months, during the term of the EMFAF).

This means that a fisherman can also participate in two decommissioning measures per year and receive the corresponding support, but he must also comply with the minimum decommissioning period of 30 days in each case.

It would also be possible, however, to interpret Art. 21 Para. 3 EMFAF Regulation not in terms of measures but in terms of vessels.

Accordingly, it would be sufficient for a vessel to interrupt its fishing activities for a total of 30 days per year. In this case, the fisherman could also apply for funding for a further, shorter interruption in the same calendar year (e.g. 20 days).

**Answer:**

Support under the EMFAF is conditioned upon the eligibility of the operation. Article 21 of the EMFAF Regulation (hereinafter “the Regulation”) focuses on the eligibility of the temporary cessation scheme.

In the specific case raised by DE, the temporary cessation scheme may be granted under two conditions:

* the conservation measures fall within the scope of Article 21(2)(a) of the Regulation, read in conjunction with Article 21(4), and
* the fishing activities of the vessel or fisher concerned are stopped during at least 30 days in a given calendar year, as provided for in Article 21(3) of the Regulation; such interruption of fishing activities needs to relate to the said conservation measures.

The days of cessation of fishing activities do not need to be consecutive. They can be split in as many blocks as necessary. The total cessation duration in a calendar year must be minimum 30 days, which can only be verified ex post. Nevertheless, Member States are encouraged to establish a clear planning of the cessation period before selecting the operations. The days are counted per vessel and the minimum thresholds of 30 days should apply irrespectively of the different conservation measures.

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA649\_EMFAF\_Interpretation of Article 13 and 14 of the EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: (Articles 13(1)i and 14(1) of the EMFAF)

 *Member State*: Croatia

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We would be grateful if you could clarify to us whether the relocation of port complex, more precisely the relocation (moving from one place to another) of the existing fishing port which is an integral part of it, i.e., the investments required and related to the relocation of the port are considered eligible under Regulation (EU) 2021/1139.

**Answer:**

According to Article 25(2)(b) of the EMFAF Regulation, the EMFAF may support, inter alia, investments in ports or other infrastructure to provide adequate reception facilities for lost fishing gear and marine litter collected from the sea. In addition, the EMFAF may support operations contributing to the implementation of the landing obligation referred to in Article 15 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, such as operations improving the infrastructure of fishing ports, auction halls, landing sites and shelters in order to facilitate the landing and storage of unwanted catches.

At the same time, Article 13(1)(i) of the EMFAF Regulation explicitly stipulates that support shall not cover the construction of new fishing ports or new auction halls, with the exception of new landing sites.

Therefore, we consider that the transfer of an existing fishing port to a new place may be eligible under the EMFAF under the following conditions:

* the effective closure of the previous site of the transferred fishing port.
* the evidence that the transferred fishing port clearly contributes to one or more of the objectives listed in Article 25(2)(b) of the EMFAF Regulation or the implementation of the landing obligation referred to in Article 15 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.

It is the responsibility of the Managing Authority to ensure the fulfilment of the above conditions regarding the scope of the operations as well as the fulfilment of the eligibility conditions for projects.

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA651\_EMFAF\_eligibility of support for the placement of a nitrogen catalyst on fishing vessels

 *Relevant Article*: EMFAF Articles 13, 14 and 18

 *Member State*: Netherlands

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

The Netherlands intends to implement a measure to reduce nitrogen emissions from shrimp fishing vessels. The objective of the measure is to make the shrimp fleet more sustainable. By subsidising the purchase and installation of an SCR catalyst placed in the tailpipe, nitrogen emissions can be reduced. In view of the objective of the measure (i.e. sustainability of the fleet), we believe that the measure fits within EMFAF Specific objective (SO) 1.1; can the Commission confirm this?

The call for proposals will provide grant support for the purchase and installation of SCR catalysts. In addition, a grant may be requested for the costs of having a report drawn up by an approved or certified measuring company confirming the measurement results of the vessel’s emissions after the installation of SCR catalytic converter.

Objective of the type of action: shrimp vessels fishing in nature protection areas (Natura 2000 sites) off the Dutch coast must have a new permit under the Nature Protection Act as of 1 January 2023. A novelty compared to the old permit is that shrimp vessels will now also have to comply with the new nitrogen requirements. In order to continue fishing near the nitrogen-sensitive Natura 2000 sites, where fishing activities of the shrimp fleet take place, measures are needed to reduce nitrogen emissions. Installing an SCR catalyst is an efficient way of reducing nitrogen emissions.

In technical terms, an SCR catalyst is placed in the exhaust and reduces nitrogen oxide emissions. Nitrogen dioxide in the exhaust gases of the engine passes through a NOx reduction catalyst. In the catalyst, a urea solution is mixed with the exhaust gases. The concentration of nitrogen dioxide is measured at both inflow and outflow. The associated control system controls that the urea solution is injected in the correct mixing ratio. The application of urea solution therefore varies depending on the amount of nitrogen dioxide produced by the engine at that moment. This creates the optimal conditions for generating a chemical reaction, including using the heat of the exhaust gases, in which the gases break down into carbon dioxide (CO2) and ammonia (NH3). The ammonia binds the nitrogen dioxide, which is thus converted into H2O and N2. In this way, the SCR catalyst can eliminate up to 100 % NOx. The actual rate of reduction is related to the performance of the engine at any time. For exhaust gases at a temperature of 250 °C at constant rpm, 100 % nitrogen dioxide reduction is not an exception.

The functioning and performance of the engine is not affected by the catalyst, but the engine produce less noise, as the catalyst also acts as an additional silencer. The catalyst can also be removed. The engine will not be affected by this.

**Answer:**

The objective of this type of action is to reduce the emission of nitrogen dioxide from the exhaust of fishing vessels, thereby reducing their negative impact on the environment, in particular for shrimp vessels fishing in marine Natura 2000 sites.

According to the technical specifications provided by the Netherlands, the SCR catalysts would be placed in the exhaust and not on the vessel engine. The SCR catalyst can  be removed without affecting the functioning of the engine.

The proposed type of action does not appear to fall within any of the categories of ineligible types of operations or expenditure provided for under EMFAF Article 13.

Considering that the catalyst would not alter the main functionalities of the vessel engine, which can function without it, and given the objective of the investment support, which is to make the shrimp fleet more sustainable by reducing its nitrogen emission (and in addition would result in reducing its noise pollution), the proposed type of action can be considered to contribute to more environmentally sustainable fisheries within the meaning of EMFAF Article 14 (1)(a), and could thus be supported under EMFAF Specific objective 1.1.

# QA655\_EMFAF\_Aid intensity for grant support to stock insurance policy for aquaculturers

 *Relevant Article*: EMFAF Regulation, Annex III

 *Member State*: Poland

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

1. In relation to the insurance of aquaculture resources, Poland would like to apply an aid intensity rate of 60% for the EMFAF support to the insurance policy premium to be paid by the aquaculture operators. Does the EMFAF allow this level of support?
2. Furthermore, would it be possible to increase the aid intensity rate to 75% in case of aquaculture operators that are member of a producer organization within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organization of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products [ [1]](#scroll-bookmark-244) ?

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-245) Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the common organization **of the** **markets in fishery and aquaculture products, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1184/2006** **and** **(EC) No 1224/2009** **and repealing** **Council Regulation (EC) No** **104/2000**

**Answer:**

1.In accordance with Article 41 paragraph 1 of the EMFAF Regulation, Member States shall apply a maximum aid intensity rate of 50 % of the total eligible expenditure of any operation.

By way of derogation from paragraph 1, specific maximum aid intensity rates are set out in Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation.

Under point 17 of Annex III, Member States are allowed to raise the aid intensity rate to maximum 60% in the case of operations supporting sustainable aquaculture implemented by small and medium-sized enterprises (SME).

As a consequence, Member States can consider increasing the aid intensity rate for grants contributing to the cost of a stock insurance policy provided that the beneficiary is a SME and implements sustainable aquaculture.

A farm practicing sustainable aquaculture is eligible for EMFAF support if it contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the CFP as set out in Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013. That means that the aquaculture farm must be environmentally sustainable in the long-term and is being managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies. The Managing Authority has to determine whether the farm in question fulfills these criteria.

2.Under point 15 of Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation, Member States are allowed to raise the aid intensity rate to maximum 75% in case of operations implemented by producer organizations, associations of producer organizations or interbranch organizations.

Accordingly, in case the stock insurance policy would be taken out by the producer organization as legal entity and as beneficiary of the policy, an aid intensity rate of maximum 75% can be applied. However, the mere membership of a producer organization would not entitle its members to benefit individually from an aid intensity rate of 75%. If the stock insurance policy would be taken out by the individual members themselves as legal entity and direct beneficiary of the stock insurance policy, the rates referred to in the reply to question a) apply.

In accordance with Article 73(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation), in selecting operations, the Managing Authority shall establish and apply criteria and procedures which are non-discriminatory and transparent. In addition, according to point (a) of Article 188 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1046 (Financial Regulation), grants shall be subject to the principle of equal treatment. Therefore, Member States are expected to select operations and establish grant allocation rules that ensure the respect of these principles. In particular, differentiation of aid intensity rates should not result in a different treatment for beneficiaries in a similar situation.

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA656\_EMFAF\_Temporary cessation

 *Relevant Article*: Art. 33 EMFF and Art 21 EMFAF

 *Member State*: Poland

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In accordance with Article 33(1)(d) of the Regulation (EU) of the European Parliament and of the Council No 508/2014 of 15 May 2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No. 2328/2003, (EC) No 861/2006, (EC) No 1198/2006 and (EC) No 791/2007 and Regulation of the European Parliament of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) No 1255/2011 (hereinafter "the Regulation"),

The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund may contribute to the financing of measures for the temporary cessation of fishing activities where the temporary cessation fishing activities take place between 1 February and 31 December 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, including for vessels operating under a sustainable fisheries partnership agreement.

Support under the action "Temporary cessation of fishing activities" shall be provided to the owner of a fishing vessel which is registered as active and which, in the last two calendar years preceding the date of application for support application for support has been engaged in fishing activities at sea for at least 120 days.

In 2020, in Poland, under the above measure, aid was paid out in connection with the COVID-19 outbreak. Some 70 fishing units in the Polish fleet did not meet the the 120 fishing days condition applicable to them in the two previous calendar years. This was due to factors beyond the control of the shipowners, including, among others: the ban on cod fishing, shipyard repairs, storms or fishermen's indisposition. indisposition of fishermen.

In view of the above, I ask whether it is possible to amend the Regulation by abolishing the condition of 120 fishing days in the previous two calendar years for the above-mentioned shipowners, which would enable them to apply for support under the measure "Temporary cessation of fishing activities".

**Question 2 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In accordance with Article 21(1) and (2) of Regulation (EU) of the European Parliament and of the Council 2021/1139 of 7 July 2021 establishing a European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 (hereinafter referred to as 2017/1004). and Aquaculture and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 (hereinafter the "the Regulation"), in certain cases EMFAF may allocate support to compensate for temporary cessation of fishing activities.

However, in accordance with Article 21(5) of the Regulation, the above support under the measure "Temporary cessation of fishing activities" shall be granted, inter alia, to shipowners who have worked for at least 120 days during the two calendar years preceding the date of submission of the application for support, have worked at sea on board a Union fishing vessel concerned by the temporary cessation. In accordance with the Regulation, indicated reference to the number of days at sea does not, however, apply to eel fishing.

In view of the above, I would like to ask for an interpretation of Article 21 5 of the Regulation:

Where the owner of a fishing vessel has carried out fishing activity only for 120 days in the two calendar years preceding the date of submission of the the date of the application for support and during that period he caught, for example, on one fishing day, an eel, is that day not counted in the number of days determining eligibility for support and consequently 119 days are considered sufficient in his case to satisfy the condition relating to the number of fishing days?

However, does the reduction of the number of days to qualify for support by the days in which eels were caught, in the example above, has the effect of not meeting the condition of 120 fishing days in the previous two calendar years?

Hypothetically, where the owner of a fishing vessel has been fishing for eel only for 120 days, does this mean that no day would count towards his fulfilment of the condition of 120 fishing days in the two preceding calendar years under accordance with the aforementioned provision of Article 21(5) of Regulation 2021/1139?

**Answer 1:**

The Commission does not foresee any further amendment of the EMFF Regulation in connection to the mandatory 120 fishing days condition in order for beneficiaries to be eligible to receive temporary cessation support under Article 33 of the EMFF Regulation. This condition provides a sefaguard against the risk of supporting temporary cessation for inactive or dormant vessels.

**Answer 2:**

Article 21 of the EMFAF Regulation sets out rules governing the support for temporary cessation of fishing activities. Paragraph 5 of Article 21 states that “The reference to the number of days at sea in this paragraph shall not apply to eel fisheries.” This derogation reflects the specific nature of eel fisheries. Such fisheries should be understood as fisheries specifically targeting eel. From the information provided, it is to be understood that the beneficiary incurred into a case of accidental capture of an eel while out at sea targeting species other than eels. As a consequence, the beneficiary can still be considered as complying with the conditions of 120 days of fishing activities (targeting species other than eels) in order to be eligible for temporary cessation support. It is the responsibility of the Managing Authority to ensure compliance with this requirement by the beneficiary.

*N.B.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA657\_EMFAF\_Reporting - Annex I of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/79

 *Relevant Article*:  Annex I of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: Germany

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

Data according to Annex I, Table 1 of the Implementing Regulation 2022/79 (Infosys table)

Field 12: "Number of persons directly involved in the operation (excluding contractors and persons/employees not directly involved in the operation)".

What is meant here, which persons should be recorded here? Can this be explained by means of an example, e.g. for a construction project in the field of processing/marketing?”

**Answer:**

Regarding Infosys field 12, “Number of people directly involved in the operation”.

As defined in the Infosys Implementing Regulation 2022/79, values for Infosys field 12 should include the total number of individuals directly involved in the operation. It should not include contractors or people/employees not directly participating in the operation. Thus, the values entered in field 12 should be the total number of employees of the business/entity that is receiving the funds, whose work activities will be directly affected by the operation.

For a construction project in the field of processing or marketing, i.e. the construction of a new aquaculture pond or the renovation of an existing pond, the number entered in field 12 should be the total number of employees active in processing at the facility where the construction project is taking place. It should not count the contractors and other individuals outside the company who worked on the construction/renovation of the ponds, nor the employees within the company whose work won’t be affected by the construction of the new pond (e.g. employees dealing with sales, HR, marketing, etc.).

N.B.

 *Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA658\_EMFAF/State aid

 *Relevant Article*: *Article 10 of the EMFAF Regulation*

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

We are contacting you concerning article 10 of FEAMPA concerning the articulation between the FEAMPA regulations and the rules on State aid. In this sense, would it be possible for you to look at our attached framing note intended for the instructing services on this article to validate our interpretation? *[FR provided a 15 page note on State aid in the context of EMFAF]*

Moreover, after a first contact with them, several questions arise:

- can aid for the infrastructure of a fishing port come within the scope of Article 42 TFEU?

 - within the framework of a scientific-economic operator partnership, can the national contribution be considered as State aid even if one of the partners is not a company exercising an economic activity?

**Answer:**

As regards your draft note, please note that, in principle, the relevant moment for the legal analysis is the moment when the State aid scheme is notified to the Commission. In this respect, the Commission assesses concrete aid measures, and it is not in a position to endorse or comment on general guidance documents.

Article 42 TFEU applies “*to* ***production of and trade in agricultural products only to*** *the extent determined by the European Parliament and the Council within the framework of Article 43(2) and in accordance with the procedure laid down therein, account being taken of the objectives set out in Article 39.*”

Therefore, support for any activity related to the production of or trade in agricultural (and fishery) products undertaken by fishers, aquaculture producers and processers of fishery and aquaculture products does not require State aid approval when eligible under Article 12 of the EMFAF Regulation and included in the EMFAF programme.

It is for the Member State to satisfy itself on a case-by-case basis whether these conditions are fulfilled. Where this is not the case, the measure is subject to State aid control. In order to check the compatibility of a State aid measure with the internal market, Member States may verify whether the general *de minimis* regulation (i.e. ‘Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 [[1]](#scroll-bookmark-249) ) or a block exemption regulation adopted pursuant to Article 108(4) TFEU (e.g. Regulation (EU) No 1388/2014 [[2]](#scroll-bookmark-250) ) applies. If that is not the case, the measure must be notified to the Commission which, in principle, would assess it in light of the State aid Guidelines applicable to the fishery and aquaculture sector [[3]](#scroll-bookmark-251) .

[[1]](#scroll-bookmark-252)       Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid, OJ L 352, 24.12.2013, p. 1.

[[2]](#scroll-bookmark-253)       Commission Regulation (EU) No 1388/2014 of 16 December 2014 declaring certain categories of aid to undertakings active in the production, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

[[3]](#scroll-bookmark-254)       Communication from the Commission — Guidelines for the examination of State aid to the fishery and aquaculture sector, (2015/C 217/01), as amended.

**N.B.**

*Pursuant to Article 63(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (the Common Provisions Regulation), the eligibility of expenditure is determined on the basis of national rules, except where specific rules are laid down in the Common Provisions Regulation or in the Fund-specific Regulations.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia, by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA659\_EMFAF\_Ineligible operations/Increase in the gross tonnage of a fishing vessel

 *Relevant Article*: *Article 13 of the EMFAF Regulation*

 *Member State*: FR

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Article 13**

The question relates to the interpretation of Article 13 point b) “the acquisition of equipment which increases the ability of a vessel to find fish”. The origin of our question relates to the follow-up to an audit of the Court of Auditors of the EU, which took place in 2012. This audit had given rise to a recovery plan at the time to deviate from the right to help a certain number of investments on board (sounders, sonars in particular). The EFF text at the time prohibited equipment likely to increase the capture capacity of vessels. The EMFF, and then the EMFAF, no longer refer to the catch capacity but only to the capacity to find fish.

The increase in fishing capacity (defined precisely in the CFP) remains prohibited but the Commission in its communications has always made a clear distinction between capacity to catch fish and fishing capacity. Article 13 point a) refers to fishing capacity (measured by tonnage and power) and not to catching capacity which as such is no longer mentioned in the EMFAF. The regions wish to widen investment capacities as much as possible in equipment that improves safety but could be considered as improving the catching capacity, such as gear (net hauler, trap hauler, etc.), which were declared ineligible in 2012, but these investments do not improve the ability to find fish.

Thus, we would like to know whether certain equipment which will improve safety but which will objectively improve catching capacity (net hauler type) is still ineligible under the current framework.

**Article 19**

Regarding Article 19, could you provide us with the following clarifications:

1. Technical clarification on investments in "integrated bridge systems intended to improve navigation or engine control", clarification of the types of operation concerned.
2. Is it possible to finance the creation of a bulbous bow? This is an increase in tonnage which increases the energy efficiency of the ship, the article only refers to "replacement or renovation of the bulbous bow".
3. Interpretation of an eligibility condition, capacity reassignment.

One of the eligibility conditions for this financing is "the entry into the fishing fleet of new fishing capacity as a result of the operation is compensated by the prior withdrawal, without public aid, of at least equivalent fishing capacity from the same fleet segment or an unbalanced segment".

This condition implies a specific procedure for the applicant which can be simplified as follows: ask the Regional Fleet Management Commission, prior to its application for financing, for the additional capacity necessary to increase its tonnage. The Commission, depending on its regional capacity reserve or any exits, will decide on the possibility of allocating additional capacity to the vessel requesting financing.

This procedure raises questions in particular on the conditions of use of the regional capacity reserve but also beyond the national one. Indeed, during an exchange within a meeting of the North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC) of July 11, 2022 on the decarbonization of fishing vessels, representatives of DG MARE, when questioned on the issue of the gauge lock to allow the modernization of ships and their energy efficiency, explained that the Member States already had resources to implement the modernization and in particular the capacity reserves.

**Answer:**

**Article 13**

Article 13(b) stipulates that the acquisition of equipment that increases the ability of a fishing vessel to find fish is ineligible. This refers to fish finding technologies and equipment, for example sonar or fish aggregating devices, other than those used for research purposes. Therefore, independently of whether the equipment in question increases the “catching capacity”, if it increases the ability of the vessel to find fish, then it would be ineligible under Article 13(b).

Depending on the features of the equipment and independently of whether it increases the “catching capacity” of the vessel, it could also increase fishing capacity, e.g. because it increases its loading capacity, engine power, range capacity or skills of the crew. In this case, the equipment would be covered by Art. 13 (a) (increase of fishing capacity).

The CFP Regulation defines fishing capacity as a vessel's tonnage in GT (Gross Tonnage) and its power in kW. Depending on the features of the equipment, it might increase fishing capacity and as such would be ineligible under Article 13 (a), unless the conditions of Article 19 (1) are fulfilled. The conditions of Article 19 (1) are only fulfilled if the operation increases the gross tonnage parameter of fishing capacity, not the power parameter. The sole purpose of the increase must be the improvement of safety, working conditions or energy efficiency.

However, with the information available to the Commission regarding the equipment, it is not possible to clearly analyse if it would indeed lead to: increased ability of a fishing vessel to find fish (as set out in Article 13(b)); or to an increase in fishing capacity (as set out in Article 13(a)); or to the sole safety, energy efficiency or working conditions improvement purpose (as set out in Article 19(1)).

**Article 19**

1. Integrated bridge systems intended to improve navigation or engine control (Art. 19 (3) c)). The International Maritime Organization (IMO) defines an Integrated Bridge System as "a combination of systems that are interconnected to allow centralized access to sensor information or command/control from workstations, to 'increase the safety and efficiency of ship management'. [Integrated bridge system (IBS) (imo.org)](https://www.imo.org/fr/OurWork/Safety/Pages/IntegratedBridgeSystems.aspx)
2. Article 19 (3) e) does not allow support for the creation but only for the replacement or renovation of existing bulbs, even if the creation would have the effect of increasing the energy efficiency of the ship.
3. Article 19 (2) d) must be implemented according to a logic of segments and at the national level. This provision is based on the logic of the entry/exit regime of Article 23 of the CFP Regulation: any increase in the capacity of a vessel must be compensated by a corresponding reduction in another vessel of the same national fleet, in order to ensure that the overall capacity of the fleet does not increase.

However, this paragraph goes further than the entry/exit regime, since it provides that the withdrawal of capacity must come from the same segment of the fleet as the vessel benefiting from an increase, or from a segment of the fleet declared unbalanced in accordance with Article 22 of the CFP Regulation (in the entry/exit regime, it can come from any segment).

The withdrawal of fishing capacity must take place before the official registration in the Union fleet register indicating the additional gross tonnage of the vessel benefiting from the support.

Member States can use the unallocated fishing capacity they have in reserve from previous withdrawals (in accordance with the entry/exit regime). However, they must demonstrate that this reserve capacity has been taken from the same fleet segment as the supported vessel, or from an unbalanced fleet segment.

*N.B.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA661\_EMFAF\_IQ on Point 15, 14, 7 and 4, Annex III, Regulation no 2021/1139

 *Relevant Article*: Point 15, 14, 7 and 4, Annex III, Regulation no 2021/1139

 *Member State*: Spain

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

In Spain, some Intermediate Bodies are already planning the basis for future EMFAF calls. In this regard, the Spanish MA has doubts about the Production Plans.

At present, according to Annex III of EMFAF Regulation, the aid intensity of the Producers Organizations Production and Management Plans is established in line 15 (75 %) and, if it applies, line 14 (100 %).

However, Spain would like to know whether the aid intensity mentioned in line 7 (100 %) could be applied to these operations in respect of those actions within the OPEs’ plans which relate exclusively to small-scale coastal fishing or whether they were Canary Islands’ OPEs’ plans, line 4 (85 %) by default would apply.

**Answer:**

In accordance with Article 41 paragraph 1 of the EMFAF Regulation, Member States shall apply a maximum aid intensity rate of 50 % of the total eligible expenditure of any operation. By way of derogation from paragraph 1, specific maximum aid intensity rates are set out in Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation.

Under point 15 of Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation, Member States are allowed to raise the aid intensity rate to maximum 75% in case of operations implemented by producer organizations, associations of producer organizations or interbranch organizations.

In addition, under point 7 of Annex III of the EMFAF Regulation the aid intensity rate can be raised to maximum 100% in case of operations related to small-scale coastal fishing and under point 4 can be raised to maximum 85% in case of operations located in the outermost regions.

According to paragraph 3 of Article 41 of the EMFAF Regulation, where one operation falls under several of the rows 2 to 19 of Annex III, the highest maximum aid intensity rate shall apply.

Therefore, it can be concluded that operations implemented by producer organizations, associations of producer organizations or interbranch organizations can benefit of an aid intensity rate up to 85% or 100% in case they are located in the outermost regions or are related to small-scale coastal fishing respectively. In the case of operations implemented by producer organizations, associations of producer organizations or interbranch organizations located in the outermost regions and related to small-scale coastal fishing, the highest maximum aid intensity rate applies, hence 100%.

N.B

 *Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA662\_EMFAF\_Eligibility of investment on vessels

Answer

 *Relevant Article*: Article 13 EMFAF

 *Member State*: Denmark

 **Questions:**

**Question 1**: In Article 13.1(l), do the “60 days in the two calendar years…” mean that the fishing vessel must have carried out fishing activities for 60 days in total for the two calendar years or for 60 days in each of the two calendar years? In the Danish translation of the EMFAF, it specifically mentions 60 days a year in the two calendar years, while the English version and other translations do not specify this. It seems there is a discrepancy in the Danish version of the Regulation.

**Question 2**: The PO’s have highlighted that some fishers might be unable to fulfil the 60-days condition due to Covid-19 and issues relating to Baltic Sea, especially in 2020. We plan to open the aid scheme this year, which is why the two calendar years would be 2020 and 2021. Would it be possible to use other years for reference, for example exclude 2020 or include 2022?

**Question 3**: If a new vessel has been bought in 2020 or 2021 and is not able to achieve the 60-days condition, will it then be excluded for support under EMFAF, or will it be possible to use another reference period for such vessels?

**Question 4**: For the coastal fishers using passive fishing gear, the day at sea is often shorter, and the fishers therefore has lesser days at sea compared to fishers using active fishing gear. Likewise, fishers using trap nets usually use several vessels to tend to their trap nets, and they might not be able to meet the minimum requirement of 60 days at sea. Would it be possible to make an exception for this type of fishery using passive gear?

**Answers:**

**Answer 1**: Pending a corrigendum of the translation errors in the DK version of the EMFAF Regulation, we would advise you to refer to the EN version published in the EU Official Journal. According to it, the total number of days of fishing activities must be at least 60 days over the two-year period (in total), irrespective of how those days are spread over this period.

**Answer 2**: According to article 13(l) of the EMFAF Regulation, the reference period shall be the two calendar years preceding the submission of the application. If an application is submitted in 2022, then this means the years 2020 and 2021.

**Answer 3**: The same considerations to question 2 apply, notably, it must be the two calendar years preceding the submission of the application. If an application is submitted in 2022, then this means the years 2020 and 2021. No exception can be made to new vessels or second-hand vessels being bought in 2020 or 2021. (The EMFAF regulation ties the 60-day requirement to the vessel, not the owner, and does not specify fishing location).

**Answer 4** : The 60 day requirement refers to the days the vessel was at sea, irrespective of the kind of gear carried on board

N.B.

 *Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA665\_EMFAF\_State aid / EMFAF

 *Relevant Article*: Art 10 EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: France

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

We are of the opinion that the definition of the fisheries sector including the activities of "processing and marketing", which include "all the operations in the chain of handling, processing, production and distribution occurring between the time of the capture or landing and the stage of the product.", - wholesalers (wholesalers who do not handle the product), - fishing ports - providing port services upstream and downstream from the marketing of fish (even if they never own the fish), - fish markets - involved in selling and handling the product (even if they never own the fish) are part of the industry (the “secteur”).

However, your first answer only mentions "fishers, aquaculture and processing".

On the other hand, there is also the question of the inclusion in the fishing sector of professional and inter-professional organizations, not owners of the products, which represent the companies of the various links in the sector. We consider them part of the industry, just like every individual company in that industry.

These are in particular: - producer organizations and associations of producer organizations recognized under the common market organization 1379/2013, - interprofessional organizations recognized or not under Regulation 1379/2013, - representative organizations of fishermen recognized by national legislation (fishing committees, whose members are fishermen and other actors in the sector), - professional associations and trade unions for fishing, fish trading, aquaculture, processing, etc.

Could you please confirm that our analysis is correct, and your first answer is not exclusive? We enclose in the same way a note produced by the regions on this subject.

**Answer:**

As indicated in our previous reply, support for any activity that is related to the production of or trade in agricultural (and fishery) products undertaken by fishers, aquaculture producers and processing of fishery and aquaculture products does not require State aid approval when eligible under Article 12 of the EMFAF Regulation and included in the EMFAF program.

This definition covers the cases mentioned in your question above. So, we confirm your analysis.

N.B.

 *Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA670\_EMFAF\_Article 28, Regulation no 2021/1139

 *Relevant Article*: Article 28 of the EMFAF Regulation

 *Member State*: SPAIN

 **Question (including any relevant facts and information):**

Article 28 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 expressly states: “To achieve the specific objective referred to in point (b) of Article 26(1) of this Regulation as regards the processing of fishery and aquaculture products, support to enterprises other than SMEs shall only be granted through the financial  instruments provided for in Article 58 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 or through InvestEU, in accordance with Article 10 of Regulation (EU) 2021/523”.

In this regard, it refers specifically to “as regards the processing of fishery and aquaculture products”, i.e. support for large processing companies to improve their production lines or to include new lines of products should go through financial instruments. However, there is an important need in processing companies to carry out actions aimed at energy efficiency, such as solar panels, appropriate insulation, etc., and all of these actions do not seem to us to be directly related to the processing of fishery products.

Therefore, we wanted to confirm with DG MARE if energy efficiency investments in the area of large companies can be supported by grants in addition to financial instruments under the EMFAF.

Now, there is an important need for all sectors to reduce energy consumption and energy costs, so it would be important for our interpretation to be correct and make it possible to subsidize this type of action to all companies regardless of their size.

**Answer:**

As set out in Article 28 of the EMFAF Regulation, support to enterprises other than SMEs shall only be granted through financial instruments, as provided for in Article 58 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, or through InvestEU, in accordance with Article 10 of Regulation (EU) 2021/523, and not through grants.

The requirement for non-SMEs to use financial instruments therefore extends not just to direct processing activities, but also to any necessary investments that allow the processing to take place.  This would include the aforementioned energy efficient investments.All investments should contribute to the achievement of the specific objective referred to in point (b) of Article 26(1), i.e. ‘*promoting marketing, quality and added value of fishery and aquaculture products, as well as processing of those products*’.

It is worth noting that one of the windows of InvestEU is dedicated to sustainable infrastructure, and in particular renewable energy, energy efficiency and building renovation projects focused on energy savings and the integration of buildings into a connected energy source, storage, digital and transport system, improving energy infrastructure interconnection levels.

*N.B.*

*Pursuant to Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 (the EMFAF Regulation), the operations selected by Member States must fall under the scope of the priorities and specific objectives set out in Article 8(2), must not be ineligible pursuant to Article 13 and must be in accordance with applicable Union law.*

*In accordance with Recital 7 of the EMFAF Regulation, support should have a clear European added value, inter alia by addressing market failures or suboptimal investment situations in a proportionate manner, and should not duplicate or crowd out private financing or distort competition in the internal market.*

# QA\_ESF+\_001 - Definition of social enterprise

 *Relevant Article*: Article 2 ESF+

 *Member State*:

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Does the definition in the ESF+ Regulation on social enterprise prevail over the national for support under ESF+ shared management?

**Answer:**

The terminology on ‘social enterprise’ was already defined and well established under the former EaSI Programme 2014-2020 by Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013 and now this terminology is further fine-tuned in the ESF+ Regulation under Article 2(1)(15). The definition applies to both strands of the ESF+ Programme, however, in practice, this definition is more relevant for the direct and indirect management strand as within the shared management strand this this term is only used in the context of Article 14 (“social innovative actions”). As stated in Recital 29 of the ESF+ Regulation, the definition of a ‘social economy enterprise’ should be in line with the definitions provided in national law and the Council Conclusions of 7 December 2015 on the promotion of the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe. Recital 36 further clarifies, that ‘social economy enterprises’, where they are defined under national law, should be regarded as social enterprises within the context of the EaSI strand, regardless of their legal status, insofar as those enterprises fall within the definition of a ‘social enterprise’ provided for in the ESF+ Regulation.

# QA\_ESF+\_002 - Relation between specific objectives (h) and (l)

 *Relevant Article*: Article 4

 *Member State*:

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What is the relation or difference between specific objectives (h) and (l)?

**Answer:**

SO h) requires a link to the labour market while this is not the case for SO l) so social activation measures can be programmed under SO h). SO l) should be focused on social integration measures, which are not linked to the labour market. This SO is based on the scope of support provided by the FEAD in 2014-2020 under OP II and can also be used for measures for supporting the social integration of the most deprived, but it is not limited to this target group. Therefore, Member States have flexibility on how to programme measures to promote social integration of people at risk of or in poverty.  It is possible to provide support to social integration measures under SO (l) which are independent from the support provided under (m). In addition, it is also possible to use SO (l) to complement the support to the most deprived under SO (m). The support to accompanying measures for the most deprived is compulsory but they can be supported either under SO m) or under SO l) (as social integration measures). SO h) should be used in the case social activation is part of an integration pathway to the labour market  for persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

# QA\_ESF+\_003 - Temporary measures for the use of the ESF+ to respond to unusual and exceptional circumstances

 *Relevant Article*: Article 4(3)

 *Member State*:

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

How does the temporary measures for the use of the ESF+ to respond to unusual and exceptional circumstances work in practice?

**Answer:**

To learn the lessons from the current crisis, it is imperative that the legal framework for the ESF+ provides for mechanisms that can be quickly invoked should exceptional circumstances arise in the next decade. It is linked to article 20 CPR.

Therefore, the ESF+ has an empowerment for the COM to take temporary measures for the use of the ESF+ in response to exceptional and unusual circumstances for certain MS to ensure that under limited and specific circumstances derogations to certain rules may be provided to facilitate response to such circumstances.

These include the possibility to extend the scope of support for the ESF+, in particular to allow for financing of short-time work schemes, which are not combined with active measures, and access to healthcare, including for people not in immediate socio-economic vulnerability. This has a time limit of 18 months.

The provision also states that if deemed necessary, the COM can propose amendments to the Regulation. This can include amendments to the thematic concentration requirements except those related to youth and support to the most deprived, as these groups are often most affected by such crises and as a result a set amount of resources should be always be earmarked for these groups.

# QA\_ESF+\_004 - Specific objectives to programme support for labour migrants/members of marginalized communities

 *Relevant Article*: Article 4

 *Member State*:

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Which specific objectives should be used to programme support for labour migrants/ members of marginalized communities?

**Answer:**

Specific objective (h) aims to foster active inclusion for disadvantaged groups in general, whereas specific objectives (i) and (j) provide a targeted support to ensure that ESF+ interventions reach third country nationals including migrants (i) and marginalised communities including Roma people (j), that otherwise, may not benefit from mainstream support.

Nevertheless support to these targets groups, can be provided under other specific objectives provided they are eligible under the national legislation. Output indicators “third-country nationals”, “participants with a foreign background” and “minorities (including marginalised communities, such as Roma people)” should be used.

# QA\_ESF+\_005 - Link between the EU4Heath Programme and the ESF+

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7

 *Member State*: Spain

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What is the link between the EU4Heath Programme and the ESF+?

**Answer:**

The EU4Health Programme will complement Member States’ health policies in order to improve human health throughout the Union. It will notably contribute to addressing the needs and challenges identified in the COVID-19 crisis. It will thus aim to boost EU’s preparedness for major cross-border health threats, strengthen health systems so that they can face epidemics as well as long-term challenges against communicable and non-communicable diseases and strive to make medicines and medical devices more available and affordable. ESF+ should ensure synergies and complementarities with the EU4Health Programme through actions aiming to facilitate access to healthcare for people in vulnerable situations.

# QA\_ESF+\_006 - 3% for support to the most deprived in addition to the 25% for social inclusion

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Why is the the 3% for support to the most deprived in addition to the 25% for social inclusion?

**Answer:**

The 25% + 3% was the most important point for the European Parliament, and due to the current crisis, the thematic concentration of 25% for social inclusion and 3% for the support to the most deprived is indeed fully justified and necessary. Recent studies show that the short and medium-term impacts of COVID-19 will be particularly severe for the most disadvantaged and risk compounding existing socio-economic divides. MS need to support the most vulnerable people by a broad and coordinated policy response that includes strengthened social protection, education, health care, and specific interventions to enhance personal security of women and children, as well as actions supporting vulnerable workers left behind.

In addition, the 90% co-financing rate for support to the most deprived also provides an incentive for Member States as it reduces their burden with regard to the national contribution for measures supporting the most deprived. Thus fulfilling these two requirements will be achievable for all Member States. Unlike in the current programming period, the co-financing rate is fixed, which means MS cannot chose a lower or a higher co-financing rate.

# QA\_ESF+\_007 - Appropriate amount for child poverty and youth employment

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

How will an appropriate amount be determined for child poverty and youth employment

**Answer:**

The new requirement for all other Member States to programme “an appropriate amount” for addressing child poverty and supporting youth employment is similar to what we have for the programming of addressing the challenges identified in the European Semester.

The Commission will assess whether an amount is appropriate depending on each Member State’s particular national situation, thereby adhering to the principle of “one size does not fit all”.

This assessment will be carried out on the basis of the challenges identified in the CSRs, Annex Ds and European Semester, as well as relevant data from Eurostat etc. The exact amount will be negotiated bilaterally between the Commission and the Member State concerned.

# QA\_ESF+\_008 - Can 0 be an appropriate amount?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can 0 be an appropriate amount?

**Answer:**

The Commission will assess this requirement on a case by case basis, and taking into account the particular national situation, as well as CSRs and Eurostat data etc. It is possible that on the basis of this assessment, the Commission concludes that 0 is an appropriate amount. This is the case where the Member State is performing well in an area and is already taking appropriate measures with their national budget to address the challenges.

# QA\_ESF+\_009 - 2017-2019 average benchmark for child poverty and youth employment

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Why the 2017-2019 average benchmark for child poverty and youth employment?

**Answer:**

The COM supports the benchmark of an average for 2017-19. This provides a solid base to identify those MS who have a consistent, systematic and clearly justifiable need to programme more support to these key policy concerns.

# QA\_ESF+\_010 - Applicability of the thematic concentration of 5% to combat child poverty?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Do regions have to comply with the thematic concentration of 5% of funding to combat child poverty?

**Answer:**

The thematic concentration is calculated against the national allocation of ESF+ resources under the shared management strand.

# QA\_ESF+\_012 - Mechanism to anticipate the needs of skills on the labour market

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 7 and 11

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can actions envisaged under the priority dedicated to youth employment cover the functioning of a mechanism to anticipate the needs of skills on the labour market, as a ”structural reform” aiming to facilitate the youth employment and professional training?

**Answer:**

As in the 2014-2020 period, the ESF+ can support structural reforms aiming to support youth employment. This investment will count towards the 12.5% minimum thematic concentration requirements for youth employment as long as it is programmed under one of the three ESF+ specific objectives listed in Art 11 ESF+ Reg: (a), (e) and (l). There are no limitations with regard to applicable specific objectives if the Member State needs to allocate an appropriate amount to youth (Art 7(6) first subparagraph ESF+). An operation for anticipating skills needs could contribute to the youth thematic concentration requirement as long as the Member State can demonstrate a direct link to supporting youth employment. A general ESF+ operation for anticipating skills needs, however, would fall rather under specific objectives (b) or (g) and will therefore be broader than a youth employment operation. In this case, it may contribute to meeting the thematic concentration requirement only partially and only in the Member States which will allocate an appropriate amount.

# QA\_ESF+\_013 - How to track thematic concentration requirements if there is no dedicated priority?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

How will thematic concentration requirements be tracked in case there is no dedicated priority?

**Answer:**

Firstly it is important to highlight that the level of the thematic concentration is different between the ESF+ and ERDF: for the ERDF it is at policy objective level, whereas for the ESF+ it is at specific objective level as we only have 1 policy objective that we support (i.e. PO 4). That is why we can follow thematic concentration via SOs.

For this reason, MS will indicate at the beginning of the programming in the Partnership Agreement how they intend to comply with thematic concentration requirements for ESF+ in its operational programmes.

For the social inclusion thematic concentration the reason we do not oblige Member States to programme social inclusion in a dedicated priority or programme is because it covers 4 different specific objectives, and is a very broad thematic topic therefore it makes more sense for this to be monitored on the basis of specific objectives. We would then count the financial allocations programmed under these SOs together to reach the thematic concentration of 25%.

In addition, for child poverty and addressing challenges identified in the European Semester, we have ESF+ secondary themes, given that these measures maybe be programmed under specific objectives and priorities which may cover other measures beyond this thematic concentration requirement. These secondary themes are to capture data on ESF+ expenditure contributing to cross cutting objectives, which could be linked to multiple specific objectives e.g. climate change and social innovation. We have added 2 new ESF+ secondary themes: tackling child poverty and addressing CSRs. We can use the ESF+ secondary theme to track expenditure on these areas as it is a broad topic, however, the amounts under secondary themes are only indicative, which means that Member States may not necessarily respect them when implementing the programmes.

ESF+ thematic concentration can be verified through the intervention codes (table 1 of annex 1). For each priority, MS have to categorise financial programming using one of the codes between 110 and 127. Each code mirrors exactly one part of the specific objective. Indicating the financing programming in these codes is indicative, however, in order to determine if MS are complying with thematic concentration they have to include the complete financial information on the relevant codes, so the Commission can assess if they are complying with thematic concentration or not at the level of the programme.

However, as allocations to types of intervention are only indicative, it is important to carefully monitor the implementation of the programme by member States to ensure that thematic concentration requirements are respected also when implementing the programme.

# QA\_ESF+\_014 - How will thematic concentration requirements work in practice and how do they interlink?

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 7, 10, 11 and 12

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

**Answer:**

***Social Inclusion & Support to the most deprived***

-       **Social inclusion** is set at 25% and can be programmed under specific objectives (h) to (l)

-       **Support to the most deprived** is set at 3% and can be programmed under specific objective (m) except in duly justified cases where it can also be under specific objective (l). This is in addition to the 25% for social inclusion.

 ***Child Poverty***

-       The **5% for support to tackling child poverty will be part of the 25% for social inclusion** when programmed under specific objectives (h) – (l) **except** when the MS is using (l) to meet the 3% for support to the most deprived.

-       In this case, the % allocated to (l) for support to the most deprived children should be in addition to the 25% for social inclusion.

-       In practice, it will be easy to identify this % as MS need to programme the support to the most deprived in a dedicated priority axis.

-       In addition, any % for child poverty contributing to specific objective (f) will not be counted towards the 25% social inclusion.

***Youth employment***

-       The 12.5% for youth employment must be programmed under specific objective (a) and can in addition, also be programmed under specific objectives (f) and (l).

-       Support to youth employment must be programmed under a dedicated priority.

-       As the support to the most deprived and youth employment are to be programmed under dedicated priorities, then MS cannot programme actions under specific objective (l) to count to both youth employment and support to the most deprived.

-       It would also not be possible to have an overlap between actions programmed under specific objective (l) to count towards both child poverty and youth employment (again due to the use of the dedicated priority for youth).

-       **NB** when MS are obliged to programme ‘an appropriate amount’ for support to youth employment – the obligation to programme under a dedicated priority or programme, and under SO (a), (f) and (l) does not apply.

# QA\_ESF+\_015 - Is specific objective (i) obligatory ?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 4

 *Member State*: N/A

**Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is specific objective (i) “promoting socio-economic integration of third-country nationals, including migrants” of ESF+ is obligatory for inclusion in the programmes financed under ESF+?

**Answer:**

It is not compulsory to programme ESF+ support under specific objective (SO) (). This mention aims merely to highlight the fact that support provided under this SO counts towards the 25% social inclusion thematic concentration requirement. Support to third-country nationals can be programmed under other SOs. Member States with challenges identified for this target group are expected to programme support, either under this SO or other SOs.

# QA\_ESF+\_016 - Article 8 Respect for the Charter

 *Relevant Article*: Article 8

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What does Article 8 on the Charter mean in practice?

**Answer:**

In its report, the European Parliament had proposed that if ESF+ operations do not comply with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, the expenditure of the operation would be deemed ineligible. The Commission and the Council both argued that the proposal would create a disproportionate administrative burden, and would diverge too far from the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR).

The co-legislators agreed to introduce a new article on the link between the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the ESF+. It is important to note that this article only reinforces already existing CPR obligations, and does not create any new obligations for ESF+ operations.
This article includes cross references to the relevant provisions in the Common Provisions Regulation in order to enhance the visibility of the Charter.
It emphasizes that all operations should be selected and implemented in respect of the Charter.

It also includes a cross reference to article 63(6) of the CPR on complaints, and refers to the fact that infringements of the Charter should be taken into account when determining corrective measures in line with the CPR.

These obligations already exist in the CPR however the EP were very determined to include this in order to enhance the visibility of the Charter, which is of course of crucial importance and applicable law.

# QA\_ESF+\_017 - 0.25% for capacity building for social partners and civil society organisations

 *Relevant Article*: Article 9

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What can be covered under the 0.25% for capacity building for social partners and civil society organisations?

**Answer:**

It is first important to note that Article 9(2) on capacity building is not just restricted to the capacity of stakeholders to implement the funds. It is wider than this, and is about capacity building for all stakeholders delivering education, lifelong learning, training and employment and social policies, including through sectoral and territorial pacts to mobilise for reform at the national, regional and local levels. It already exists in the 2014-2020 ESF Regulation under TO 11, and as is stated in the text is very wide ranging and can include actions such as in the form of training, networking measures, and strengthening of the social dialogue, and to activities jointly undertaken by the social partners and organisations of civil society, such as NGO’s.

# QA\_ESF+\_018 - Programming of the capacity building of social partners and civil society organizations

 *Relevant Article*: Article 9

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is it possible to support general capacity of social partners and civil society organizations, which is not directly linked with any specific ESF+ objective?

**Answer:**

Only activities related to the capacity of social partners and CSOs in the thematic areas of employment, education and social inclusion and which fall within the areas covered by the ESF+ specific objectives can be supported.

Therefore these measures have to contribute to one of the specific objectives of the ESF+. For instance, the measure aimed at increasing the level of membership in organisations for entrepreneurs and employers, could be programmed under SO (d) promoting the adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change, active and healthy ageing and a healthy and well-adapted working environment that addresses health risks; in case it contributes to this specific objective.

# QA\_ESF+\_019 - How to implement "an appropriate amount of ESF + resources under shared management in each programme to capacity building of the social partners and civil society organisations"?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 9

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

How should we implement Article 9 (2) ESF +  "an appropriate amount of ESF + resources under shared management in each programme to capacity building of the social partners and civil society organisations"?

**Answer:**

The Commission will assess whether an amount is appropriate depending on each Member State’s particular national situation, thereby adhering to the principle of “one size does not fit all”. This assessment will be carried out on the basis of the challenges identified in the CSRs, Annex Ds and European Semester, as well as relevant data from Eurostat etc. The exact amount will be negotiated bilaterally between the Commission and the Member State concerned. It is possible that on the basis of this assessment, the Commission concludes that 0 is an appropriate amount. This is the case where the Member State is performing well in an area and is already taking appropriate measures with their national budget to address the challenges.

# QA\_ESF+\_020 - 90% co-financing rate

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 4 and 10

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can the co-financing rate for the ex-FEAD be higher or lower than 90%?

**Answer:**

The co-financing rate for the priority or programme under specific objectives set out in art. 4(1), points (l) and (m) is a fixed 90% and thus it is not possible for MS to use a lower (or higher) co-financing rate. Member States can add further resources and mention this in the OP, but this remains outside the scope of the ESF+ in terms of audit, monitoring and evaluation.

# QA\_ESF+\_021 - How to programme the 3% for support to the most deprived under both specific objectives (l) and (m)?

 *Relevant Article*: Articles 10 and 22

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

How to programme the 3% for support to the most deprived if you wish to use both specific objectives (l) and (m)?

**Answer:**

In case MS wish to provide support to the most deprived under both specific objectives (l) and (m) in order to meet the 3% minimum requirement, this support should be programmed under two separate dedicated priorities.

The reason for this is because SO (l) and (m) are subject to different rules on programming, as article 22 ESF+ provides for specific rules for priorities providing support to specific objective (m). it is up to the MS to decide on the most appropriate programme arrangements and on whether to programme these measures at national or regional level. Therefore, it is possible indeed for a MS to programme specific objective (m) at national level and (l) at regional level.

# QA\_ESF+\_022 - Programming actions for NEETs

 *Relevant Article*: Article 7 and 11

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can we foresee a dedicated priority for young people (NEETS) while programming actions for NEETs in other priorities?

**Answer:**

Yes, you can. You can programme measures for young people in other priorities, besides the priority dedicated to youth. The investment to youth under other priorities can also be tracked by using the intervention field 134 Specific support for youth employment and socio-economic integration of young people in case those measures are specifically for youth.

# QA\_ESF+\_023 - CLLD & Social Innovation

 *Relevant Article*: Article 14

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is implementation through CLLD and/or the ITI (which are bottom-up approaches based on partnerships on different local/regional levels) as “support actions of social innovation and social experimentation”?

If a priority in a programme is to be implemented using CLLD and/or ITI approaches, can we consider that social innovation is supported through the interventions under this priority and that the requirement of Art 14 (4) “Member States shall dedicate at least one priority to the implementation of paragraph 1 or 2, or both.” is fulfilled?

**Answer:**

The answer is yes provided that the logic intervention underlying these initiatives demonstrates their socially innovative elements. More precisely:
- The requirement is that “Member States shall support actions of social innovation and social experimentation”
- The continuation of the text does not present an alternative to this requirement. It provides examples of what is included in the ways of implementing this.

# QA\_ESF+\_024 - Dedicated Priority Social Innovation

 *Relevant Article*: Article 14

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is it mandatory to programme a separate priority for social innovations and social experimentations?

**Answer:**

Yes, it is compulsory to dedicate at least one priority to social innovation. Under such a dedicated priority/priorities the ESF+ co-financing can be increased up to 95%. However, the use of such increased co-financing is capped to max 5 % of the national ESF+ resources.

# QA\_ESF+\_025 - In-kind contributions

 *Relevant Article*: Article 16

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is it possible to make in-kind contributions to participants in an operation either through salaries, allowances or cash cards?

**Answer:**

This provision already existed in 2014-2020 programming period (and before). It is set out in Article 13(5) of Regulation (EU) 1304/2013. This provision does not establish that passive measures are eligible or not for support. It is a provision which sets out specific rules on eligibility of costs with regard to contributions in kind, in addition to the cases set out in Article 67 CPR. This provision allows certain contributions in kind paid by third parties in benefit of participants to be eligible for support under the ESF+ i.e allowances or  salaries for participants paid by third parties. This is possible provided that these contributions are made in accordance with national law and the eligible costs declared is not higher than the costs borne by the third party. To conclude, this provision determines that contributions in kind may be considered as eligible costs in an operation. These costs would have to be linked to the participation in an action which contributes to one of the specific objectives set out in Article 4(1) ESF+.

# QA\_ESF+\_026 - Are the conditions set out in Article 16(1) for the eligibility of costs for the purchase of certain goods alternative or cumulative?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 16

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Are the conditions set out in Article 16(1) for the eligibility of costs for the purchase of certain goods alternative or cumulative?

**Answer:**

Yes, these conditions are alternative and not cumulative. therefore, if the purchase is the most economic option there is no need for the other two conditions to be met.

As an example of full depreciation, would be a training for the unemployed which would last 5 years and the beneficiary decides to purchase computers for the training. In addition, in accordance with accountancy rules in that MS, the value of a computer is considered to be fully depreciated after 5 years. In this case, the equipment is considered to be fully depreciated during the operation. This is just an indicative example as the time for depreciation is set out by national rules.

# QA\_ESF+\_027 - Respecting the dignity and preventing stigmatization of the most deprived persons

 *Relevant Article*: Article 19

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

What does respecting the dignity and preventing stigmatization of the most deprived persons mean in practice?

**Answer:**

Art. 19(3) precisely requests that the provision of aid should respect the dignity and prevents stigmatisation of the most deprived persons. This should be intended both in relation to the selection of such aid and to the modalities of such aid.

# QA\_ESF+\_028 - Financing of accompanying measures

 *Relevant Article*: Article 21

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Is it necessary that compulsory accompanying measures should be financed by the ESF+?

**Answer:**

Article 17(4) ESF+ requires that accompanying measures, besides being compulsory, should be supported under the ESF+ - either under specific objective (m) or (l) as social integration measures. This is a change compared to the rules applicable in 2014-2020, where accompanying measures are compulsory but there is no obligation for Member States to support them under the FEAD.

Although this means that Member States have the obligation to use the ESF+ to support them, Member States still have flexibility to support them either under specific objective (m) or (l). In case Member states decide to support them under (l) they should ensure the most deprived are both targeted under (l) and (m).

# QA\_ESF+\_29 - Can the vouchers be exchanged for payment of rent or household bills?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 22

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can the vouchers to be exchanged for food or basic material assistance, include the payment of rent or household bills?

**Answer:**

No, basic material assistance is defined in article 2 as "goods which fulfil the basic needs of a person for a life with dignity, such as clothing, hygiene goods, including feminine hygiene products and school material". Rent and utilities are services and they go beyond the typology of basic consumer goods of limited values as presented in the list of examples.

# QA\_ESF+\_030\_Can the structured survey be implemented externally through technical assistance?

 *Relevant Article*: Article 23

 *Member State*: ES

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Can the structured survey be implemented externally through technical assistance?

**Answer:**

Yes, MS may use technical assistance to carry out the survey to end recipients.

# QA\_ESF+\_031 - Youth indicators

 *Relevant Article*: Annexes I and II

 *Member State*: N/A

 **Question 1 (including any relevant facts and information):**

Taking into consideration the ”Common output indicators related to operations targeting people: - number of children below 18 years of age\*, -    number of young people aged 18-29 years\*, of the ESF+ Regulation (Annexes I and II), please clarify how to approach the output indicators at the level of the priority dedicated to youth employment, having in mind that under this priority the target group (including NEETs) covers the young people 15-29 years old.

**Answer:**

Indicators will be reported at the level of the specific objective, broken down by category of region (and gender for indicators on participants).

If the support will reach out to young people between 15-29 years, part of them will be reported to common output indicator EECO06 ‘children below 18 years of age’ and the remaining part to common output indicator EECO07 ‘participants aged 18-29 years’.

# UD0020 - Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background

 *Ares reference*:



##  Useful links