



REACT-EU funds: programme management with focus on the health sector

Matchmaking session – online, 14 October 2021

FOLLOW-UP NOTE

PARTICIPANTS

Beneficiary organisation: Region Hauts-de-France

- Thomas Spriet, Marie-Pierre Richard, Laura Decottignies, Cécile Bogucki, Gilles Grienbaum

Peers and Experts

- Marco Lopriore, EU Funds expert, EIPA
- Ales Pekarek, Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic (CZ)
- Gerd Schumacher, Rene Dieck, Forschungszentrum Jülich, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany (DE)
- Kristīne Karsa, Ministry of Health of Republic of Latvia, Budget and Investments Department, Latvia (LV)

Interreg Europe

- Nicolas Singer, Head of Unit, Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat
- Thorsten Kohlich, project manager, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform (moderator)
- Elena Ferrario, thematic manager, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
- Karine Gevorgyan, office assistant, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

As many other Managing Authorities in Europe, the Region Hauts de France is called to manage the REACT-EU funds made available under the Next Generation EU package until 2023. Considering the tight timeframe and the new priorities emerging in the context of crisis recovery and post-crisis resilience, the Region was looking for exchanging ideas and approaches with other EU regions on the way this additional envelope are managed.

In particular, the Region was interested in two main aspects:

- **Programme management:** how to ensure a successful implementation of REACT-EU in terms of overall programme management (i.e. a significant amount of funds to be spent in a very short timeframe – how to handle a challenging spending and certifying process)
- **Support to investment in products and services for health, including investments in medical equipment and infrastructure:** how are other MAs organising the support to applicants and beneficiaries, in particular for those institutions concerned by regulatory measures such as, for instance, public procurement rules or state aid.

The objective of the proposed matchmaking session was to exchange with other MAs and intermediate bodies of Operational Programmes facing similar challenges and to allow Region Hauts de France to access their knowledge and take inspirations from other EU contexts.

All peers presented their territorial contexts and some key information on the management of REACT-EU in their countries/regions (see annexed presentations).



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. Programme management: How do you handle a high number of applicants in a short time? Have you hired new staff to manage REACT-EU? Have you changed your processes/methods? What has been your communication strategy?**
 - **Setting strict eligibility criteria** is a way to ensure a limited number of applicants. This approach secures the funding being allocated to organisations having a solid profile.
 - **Hiring new staff** can certainly be an effective measure to contribute to a fast programme implementation. In CZ some temporary staff was hired to support the smooth implementation of the programme. However, as stressed during the discussion (CZ, DE), the recruitment of new staff also carries the risk of a slow uptake of the needed know-how, as new personnel requires training and time to be fully performant in an environment characterised by tight schedules and deadlines.
 - **No particular simplification measures** were taken in CZ, DE or LV, except for ensuring a streamlined set of rules across different programme fundings. However, they have strived for producing extremely clear guidance documents for the applicants.
 - **Working closely with intermediary organisations** (e.g. clusters, chambers of commerce, etc) is a very effective way of disseminating information on REACT-EU (DE). Moreover, active support and close communication with applicants has proven to be one of the key success factors for the call launched in North Rhine-Westphalia. At the same time, no additional measures were taken to reinforce a specific communication strategy.
- 2. Support to investment in products and services for health, including investments in medical equipment and infrastructure - Is there a shared health strategy with the State level? What type of investments are supported in your region and which amount of ERDF is dedicated to health ? Do you support investments in hospitals and/or elderly care homes? Do you experience State aid-related problems to appraise health institutions projects?**
 - **State aid** is a challenge faced in all countries. In some cases, **a declaration** is provided by the applicant, spot-checked by the Managing Authority during the projects implementation (this applies in particular in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the funds are allocated to not-for-profit research projects). In other cases, **a calculation method** is provided by the Managing Authority to avoid overcompensation, together with the availability of a **dedicated staff expert** in support to the applicants (LV). It is crucial to ensure the presence of **competent staff members within the Managing Authority** team. In a country having a multilevel governance system such as France, the national and the regional level should agree upon a common framework allowing clear guidance to the final beneficiaries.
 - In order to ensure the eligibility of investments in elderly care homes, close communication with the European Commission and the obedience of their detailed framework needs to be ensured (CZ).
 - Ensuring a **timely spending** of the REACT-EU resources can be achieved by different means. A **clear communication** on this matter is fundamental. At the application stage, it should be an important **qualitative evaluation criterion**. Assessors can pay particular attention to the measures described by applicants to make sure that they keep an optimum spending pace. In DE, for instance, the feasibility of implementing the necessary public procurements is explicitly assessed during the application stage. During the implementation phase, following the beneficiaries closely is also key, while at the same time avoid proposing already the “phasing” option. In some countries such as The Netherlands, priority is given to “big spenders”, i.e. organisations with an important spending power, to ensure the funding are absorbed timely. In any case, the logistical crisis worldwide will impact the actual realisation of projects, resulting in delays that may hardly be avoided by Managing Authorities.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

In the short run, the matchmaking hosts will consult internally how to follow-up on the items discussed during the session.



At this stage of the programmes' implementation, all MAs are surely in a “discovery” phase, testing the adopted measures with still little visibility on the success of their implementation strategies. Therefore, the suggestion was made to meet and exchange again in approx. 9 to 12 months time on the state of play of the REACT-EU implementation, to see what measures worked, and what could have been done differently.

The Province of Noord-Brabant (NL), Managing Authority for the Operational Programme South Netherlands, would be interested to join potential future exchanges on REACT-EU implementation, characterised by the double duty to ensure sound management while keeping the ambitions of quality, impact and sustainability.

Note circulation: All attendees.