

Art of Cooperation – First Level Control in the new programming period panel discussion summary

The 2021-2027 Programming period is proposing a series of novelties, many of them with a considerable impact on the position of the first level control bodies within the programme management structures and the role and responsibilities of controllers in verifying different types of expenditures within the projects. The new approaches resulting from the risk-based management verifications and the introduction of a wide range of simplified cost options are redefining the depth and extent of the implication of the controller within the project implementation cycle.

The workshop investigated the challenges induced by these new approaches. The participants discussed a wide variety of relevant topics, as the extent of the expected workload compared to the previous programming period, or the challenges / risks resulting from sample-based checks. The event therefore provided a platform for professional exchanges, thus contributing to the preparation efforts for a smooth, efficient and precise control activity.

The panellists represented first level control units from several countries (Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Austria, Slovenia) dealing with more than 40 CBC programmes. One of the important conclusions of the discussion was that in the last programming period the workload of the controllers was excessively burdened by the 100% check of the reported costs and the connected on-the-spot checks. The on-the-spot-check methodologies were slightly different among programmes, but in each case a minimum of 1 site visit was necessary, independently of the type and size of the projects.

The panellists highlighted that the experienced teams of Controllers existing in each country is an important asset for the institutional system, which must be maintained and developed, since it represents a guarantee of high-quality work.

Several programmes would welcome a capacity expansion as well as a more effective communication with audit bodies. The participants agreed that it would be beneficial if audit processes and expectations were harmonized in the future, which would make the system and audit processes much more predictable and transparent.

In relation to the Simplified Cost Option methodologies, the panellists welcome the simplification of the control processes, however they have noted that in practice, the implementation will probably not be smooth, at least in the beginning.

Many questions are foreseen regarding to what to check and how deeply to check costs reported as SCOs. Currently, there is a wide range of possibilities, from not checking anything, to checking the existence of those costs. The panellists expressed the need for a closer cooperation between controllers, joint secretariats, managing authorities and audit bodies on this topic. According to their opinion, the workload will not be reduced with the Simplified Cost Option method, because of the need of deeper control of the procurement procedures required by the audit bodies.

Finally, the participants welcomed the Art of Cooperation event and expressed their hope that there will be similar events in the future where they can continue sharing their good practices and experiences in the field of management verifications.