Monitoring Systems Network

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Vienna, Austria

Summary

Introduction

This year's meeting in Vienna was the seventh meeting of the Monitoring Systems Network. 45 monitoring systems JS and MA experts from 18 countries using 12 different monitoring systems joined this 1,5 days of intensive dialogues for joint learning and problem solving.

Another important objective was to jointly generate ideas and visions for the continuous development and improvement of Interreg monitoring systems. Monitoring systems play a key role in supporting monitoring, controlling and reporting processes of everyone involved in programme management. Perhaps even more importantly, they also present the cooperation programme to the outside world and its interfaces for project application and reporting are essential aspects of programme simplification and overall attractiveness to applicants. There are therefore many topics of joint strategic and practical interest to Interreg monitoring systems experts with the ultimate aim of providing simple and attractive solutions to programme stakeholders including project applicants and project holders.

During the interactive meeting, four different monitoring systems were presented showing very different approaches and interfaces. Moreover, some programmes showed additional developments, which work next to the monitoring system and make the work of programme bodies easier.

Presentation of specific functionalities of monitoring system used by ESPON programme

Jozsef Szarka from ESPON programme presented their custom made system called the e-MS. The system covers the entire programme and project workflow and is a very useful tool for monitoring programme and project implementation. One appealing development is the classification of financial errors and irregularities, which was presented and discussed in detail: Controllers as well as programme authorities have the opportunity to allocate error types to cuts in the partner report. The MA has the option to verify and correct the allocation done by the controllers.

Presentation of specific functionalities of monitoring system used by Germany-Netherlands programme

Martijn Spaargaren from JS of Germany-Netherlands programme presented the programme monitoring system called InterDB. The system supports monitoring of projects from application to payment. The payment mode was created in order to follow up on payments from different financing sources (so called financers). The system recognises different financers per project and adjusts contributions in case of financial corrections. Another interesting solution is a reply to Audit Authority requirement to have all the fields listed in Annex III of the Regulation 480/2014 downloadable from the system. The InterDB is able to generate a complex excel document with all the data stored in the 113 fields required by the regulation in one spreadsheet.

Data Warehouse/Business Intelligence Solution for Analysis and Reporting of Euregio Meuse-Rhine

Christian Berker, representing Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine, introduced a concept of data warehouse and business intelligence solutions and presented a custom development project complimenting the Interreg community monitoring system (eMS).
The presented solutions allow programmes to analyse data stored in the database of the monitoring system providing users with high flexibility.

Central Europe Internal Monitoring Solutions

Claudia Pamperl and Jose Almeida from JS of Central Europe programme presented their JS workspace portal, which was developed in-house by Jose. The portal joins different applications used on a daily basis by JS staff. It also gives other authorities, e.g. national contact points, access to certain applications. Some of the applications are connected with the eMS monitoring system of the programme and generate maps or custom statistics based on the database, some complement the eMS, introducing additional workflows for project assessment. Jose generated as well a script for data transfer from the eMS to the Arachne risk management tool of the European Commission. This script is also integrated in the portal and is used by JS to generate the html, which is later uploaded in Arachne.

Reporting Solutions used by North West Europe Programme

Catalin Florean, IT manager of North-West Europe programme, presented two reporting tools used by the programme to generate maps and statistics using eMS data. NWE uses proprietary Microsoft reporting solutions and free of charge BIRT software. Both tools have their advantages and disadvantages. Using both provides the opportunity to generate different custom reports and present them in different forms. Any programme using a monitoring system based on relational database can use such solutions, but creating reports requires good knowledge of SQL and database schemes as well as the business logic of the system. It is recommended to work on a copy of the database in order not to influence system performance when generating heavy reports.

Monitoring System of North Sea Region Programme (OMS)

Isabella Leong and Jesper Jonson from the JS of North Sea Programme introduced their online monitoring system (OMS). The system was built exclusively for their programme and builds upon experiences from the previous period. The main idea of the system is to have every information in one place and perform all the necessary transactions online. The programme is particularly proud of their online voting system for members of the Steering Committee. It is mostly used for approving/rejecting project changes. This feature however does not replace the physical meeting of the committee but is a good starting point for discussions on allocating funding to projects.
Their system also allows them to approve project modifications online, ranging from the request to modify by a partner, to the assessment and recommendation of the JS and the final decision of the SC.
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Monitoring system of SUDOE programme (e-SUDOE)

Isabelle Roger and Fernando Chofre presented the e-SUDOE system. This is a custom-made monitoring system built for the programme. SUDOE decided to develop their own system as the one used in previous period was very highly rated by programme authorities as well as beneficiaries. The system contains sections and it can be decided for each section who has read only, write and/or delete rights. Moreover authorities can add a check from a pre-defined list for every field of the Application Form. CA and AA use different systems and data are transferred via HTML files. In order to limit the double counting of beneficiaries as well as to better comply with the e-cohesion requirements, the system supports entity registration: Before applying for funding each organisation needs to register in the system and then use the e-SUDOE code for identification of the organisation. Another feature is used for reporting on staff costs: Each employee working for the project needs to have a profile, which defines salary and working time for the project and is used to calculate eligible expenditure when reporting.

Audit log viewer developed by Croatian programmes

Zoran Kalinic presented a development by the Croatian programmes, custom-made to response to comments of the Audit Authority complaining about the difficult accessibility and readability of the audit log in the eMS. The software reads the table auditlog from the eMS database and presents it in user-friendly and readable format. If needed more work might be done to improve the readability of the entries, but for the moment the solution was sufficient for the AA.

Conceptual Options to Deal with Staid Aid in the Monitoring System of Euregio Meuse-Rhine Programme

Christian Berker presented different options considered by the Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme for dealing with State aid and in particular activity-based co-financing rates. The eMS is limited to one partner=one co-financing rate but state aid procedures agreed by the programme require more flexibility (i.e. more than one co-financing rate per partner depending on activities). The most feasible solution is duplication of partners, where one partner would technically be introduced once but shown twice (preferably by clicking a button, which copies all partner data). Then state-aid relevant activities would be financed as one partner with one co-financing rate and other activities under a different 'partner' with a different co-financing rate. Depending on project complexity, there could be a need for more than two 'partners' representing one organisation. The downside of this solution is additional workload for partners and programme authorities (especially in reporting phase) as well as lack of partner-level statistics as the system will not sum up the partners as one. The Programme is currently discussing different solutions to improve the situation.

Discussions

Rounding issues
Programmes are facing rounding issues at different levels of calculations, mostly when calculating the co-financing level of projects. Big issues are calculations done in excel by programme authorities that lead to different rounding results as the authorities do not reproduce the system business logic. One programme solved this problem by always rounding down the final results to full EUR and paying the projects only full EUR. No one objected so far and projects have understanding for this solution.

System audits
Most of the systems were already audited. Most concerns were about access rights, security, and accessibility. Hacking attempts are not as rare as one would assume and there were already proven attempts of hacking the monitoring systems of some programmes. Also spamming might influence system performance. Security is a very important aspect and needs to be taken seriously. One AA requested that the system requires periodic password changes.

New personal data protection regulation
The General Data Protection regulation (GDPR) will be enforceable from 25 May 2018 after a two-year transition period. It implies strict regulations towards personal data. In case of Interreg programmes, we are mostly concerned about staff costs (personal data about salaries) but even contact data might be an issue. The issue of who can see which data (e.g. should Lead Partner see the staff costs of other partners?) and who can modify which data will be of key importance. The regulation requires not to keep personal data longer than necessary and to give each person the right to change or request deletion of his/her personal data. How can it be done in the context of EU co-financed projects where data needs to be stored for a certain period of time?

Monitoring of State aid
As the EMR programme described in their presentation, there are different problems when dealing with state aid-relevant projects. The programme has very high targets to support SMEs and it is therefore important to attract as many private beneficiaries as possible. This includes providing maximum co-financing rates permissible according to the different articles of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), even if different co-financing rates need to be applied to different activities (work packages). Other programmes solve the state aid differently. They either give de-minimis aid only or decrease the co-financing rate of the entire partner/project to what is allowed according to one article of the GBER.
Most of the projects fall under de-minimis or GEBER except for large companies that might be an issue as they cannot use GBER. If programme cannot adjust their rules to increase overall support for the private partners, the attractiveness of the programme decreases.