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Call for tenders REGIO/2020/OP/0010

Study on the monitoring data on ERDF and Cohesion Fund operations, and on the monitoring systems operated in the 2014-2020 period

(2019CE16BAT214/2020CE16BAT075)

Open procedure

TENDER SPECIFICATIONS

Part 2: Technical specifications

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	SCOPE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCUREMENT	3
1.1.	Description	3
1.2.	Tasks and deliverables	4
1.3.	Methodology	10
1.4.	Work organisation	10
1.5.	Time schedule	10
1.6.	Organisation of the study	11
2.	CONTENT, STRUCTURE AND GRAPHIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE DELIVERABLES	12
2.1.	Content	12
2.2.	Graphic requirements	13

1. SCOPE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCUREMENT

1.1. Description

The services that are the subject of this call for tender, including any minimum requirements, are described in detail below:

1.1.1. Background

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF) invest EUR 353 billion to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU during the period 2014-2020. This investment is channelled through 220 operational programmes under the investment for growth and jobs objective and another 101 cooperation programmes under the territorial cooperation objective of cohesion policy.

The European Commission has to undertake an ex-post evaluation of cohesion policy programmes 2014-2020 until end-2024. The ex-post evaluation will be carried out through a number of different (thematic) work packages. Prior to launching these work packages the Commission wants to gather solid evidence about the co-financed operations and their deliverables that would serve the basis for the subsequent evaluations.

National authorities managing the programmes are required under Article 115 of the Common Provisions Regulation to maintain a list of operations by operational programme and by Fund, and to make the list accessible through a website. For a common analysis of all the operations funded by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund in the 2014-2020 programming period these datasets have to be integrated into a single database. The monitoring requirements provide for the categorisation of the operations under several dimensions, which needs to be elaborated further in order to allow for a more refined thematic evaluation.

The deliverables of the programmes are measured by output indicators. Output indicators refer to the physical products of the investments, which are expected to contribute to the results. The current system uses both programme specific output indicators and common output indicators with target values for 2023 in the programmes and achievement values reported on an annual basis.

There are 46 common output indicators, which represent the majority of investments; they can be aggregated and compared across all the Member States and Regions of the EU. Programme specific indicators cannot be aggregated at EU level, but they are very much relevant at the level of Member States in expressing specific outputs that contribute to achieving the programme objectives, and as such they should be assessed during the ex-post evaluation in the country specific contexts. The common output indicators are used 6,000 times, while programme specific output indicators are used 11,000 times.

The regulatory framework of cohesion policy 2021-2027 will impose reinforced monitoring requirements on managing authorities to track financial, output and result information of the operations co-financed. The Commission would like to help managing authorities in setting up their monitoring systems by collecting and providing good practices about existing systems and monitoring arrangements.

The European Commission, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, wishes to undertake a study on the list of operations co-financed by the ERDF and Cohesion Fund in the 2014-2020 programming period, on the monitoring data collected by programme authorities pertaining to the outputs delivered by these operations and on the set-up, design and functioning of the monitoring systems of the programmes.

1.1.2. Objectives

The objective of the study is to provide reliable and robust monitoring data that will serve the basis for the Commission's ex-post evaluation of cohesion policy programmes co-financed from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund in the 2014-2020 programming period. The work carried out under this contract will provide input to the ex post evaluation in terms of (1) creating a single database of the funded operations and classifying them according their scope of intervention, form of finance and type of beneficiary and (2) gathering, classifying and quality assessing the output indicator data collected by managing authorities. The study will exploit, analyse and synthesize the vast amount of monitoring data available in the national/regional monitoring systems so that it can be processed further and used for later analysis and evaluation work.

The work carried out under this contract will enhance the Commission's and other stakeholders' understanding of the functioning of the programmes' monitoring systems and will also provide an assessment about the data reliability. The study will provide a useful input to Member States and managing authorities for the development and design of their monitoring systems for the 2021-2027 period.

1.2. Tasks and deliverables

For each task detailed below, the tenderer is requested to outline the methodological approaches it plans to implement, the main challenges it perceives in the task and how it proposes to address those challenges. This will enable to clearly understand the work that the contractor is proposing to do.

The work to be carried out requires at least one individual country expert per Member State analysed. For Member States with more than 10 programmes more than one expert may be necessary. The tender shall include a proposal for a list of experts. In the first project meeting the Commission will analyse with the contractor the list with a view of approving the selection or making alternative proposals in specific cases. The list of experts shall be finalised in agreement with the Commission at the end of the second month of the execution of tasks.

The study will be undertaken in six stages/tasks:

Task 1: Data collection and construction of a single database

The contractor will collect the list of operations/projects supported under the 220 operational programmes and 76 cooperation programmes and synthesize them in a single database.

The contractor will obtain the list of operations co-financed from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund from each managing authority. The individual datasets will be in different formats and will include different data fields. The contractor will integrate the datasets obtained from

managing authorities into a single database. The integrated single database will include as a minimum for each operation/project:

- the data fields required under Annex XII CPR;
- the CCI number of the programme;
- the code and title of the priority axis under which the operation was supported;
- the identification and title of the action or measure in the programme under which the operation was selected;
- the thematic objective defined in Article CPR under which the operation was selected;
- identification of the EU Fund that co-financed the operations;
- total project cost in EUR;
- public contribution to the operation in EUR;
- the form of finance;
- the categories of expenditure assigned to the operation under the dimensions defined in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 215/2014.

The tender should propose additional data fields to be collected that may be relevant for evaluation work. The tender should describe the structure of the proposed database (all the data fields both collected through datasets or through other forms of data collection).

Certain information may be missing in some datasets. In these cases the contractor will collect the relevant information of the operations from the managing authorities in order to ensure completeness of the single database. The contractor will align the data fields of the different lists, and the database will be cleaned of potential errors and inconsistencies.

The single database to be produced by the contractor will be static, reflecting information available about the operations with cut-off date of date of 31 December 2020.

The single database may eventually be published on the Open Data Platform by the Commission.

Deliverable 1: A single database, integrating all the lists of operations of cohesion policy programmes 2014-2020 co-financed from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, with the data fields listed above and any additional data fields proposed by the contractor, filled for all operations in English language.

Deliverable 2: A report summarising the data collection process, the gaps, inconsistencies, data errors encountered during the integration of the datasets and the solution to overcome these, and the data cleaning process.

Task 2: Typology clustering the operations

The contractor will examine the individual operations listed by the managing authorities and will collect further information about them with the view to establish clusters on the basis of common characteristics of the operations. The contractor will add common attributes to the operations, which will allow clustering them into typology groups.

The contractor will establish:

- A typology clustering of the operations funded into a manageable number of typology groups (types) under each thematic objective according to the scope of the individual operations. The contractor will propose the typology groups under each thematic objectives which will have to be agreed with the Commission. The task will include testing that the individual operations have been correctly assigned to the appropriate EU categories of intervention.
- A clustering of the beneficiaries of the operations according to their size and nature. If relevant, also the types of end-beneficiaries or users should be analysed (e.g. the beneficiary is a municipality that builds an infrastructure of which the end beneficiaries are the local population, etc.).

The tender should propose further possible clustering, for example on the financing schemes of the individual operations according to their form.

The contractor will base this work on, for example:

- the analysis of the data available about the operations in the datasets provided by the managing authorities;
- the analysis of the content and description of the operations;
- the analysis of the call for proposal under which the operation was selected for support;
- the data collected via face to face interviews with the managing authorities and/or intermediate bodies to understand the scope, beneficiary and other characteristics of the operations;
- the analysis of the codes of interventions attributed by managing authorities to the individual operations.

The tenderer should provide detailed information on how it proposes to carry out this task. The tenderer should describe how he intends to present an easily accessible database of operations created under Task 1 completed with the attributes for clustering.

Deliverable 3: List of clusters for the typologies of operations in breakdown by thematic objective and for the beneficiary types.

Deliverable 4: The single database (deliverable 1) completed with assigning common attributes to the operations that allow clustering them in the groups defined under deliverable 3.

Deliverable 5: A report assessing the categorisation applied by the national authorities to the operations under the 8 category dimensions provided by Annex I of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014, and a quantitative assessment of the total eligible expenditure of the operations attributed to the typology clusters and beneficiary types defined under deliverable 3.

Task 3: Indicator data collection and validation

The task is divided into two subtasks:

- a) Validation of common indicator data reported to the Commission
- b) Data collection of programme specific indicators

Task 3a: Validation of common indicator data reported to the Commission

The contractor will review the Annual Implementation Reports (AIR) for the years 2019 and 2020 to assess and verify the indicator values reported. The review will cover the common indicators listed in Annex I of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulations. The assessment will be based on desk review of AIRs and on interviews with the relevant authorities in the Member States. If necessary, supporting documentation obtained from the relevant authorities will also be reviewed. The Commission draws the tenderers' attention to the varying practices across Member States, which will often require contacting several different authorities in the same MS (for example in each of the regions in case of decentralised administrative systems).

The analysis will be undertaken based on the 2019 and 2020 AIRs. The assessment will answer amongst others the following questions for each of the indicators for each MS and provide a synthesis across MS for the common indicators:

- Is the definition of the indicator and the methodology to be used clearly documented?
- Is there guidance provided on how the data should be collected and aggregated, especially in countries with a large number of programmes?
- Is the same definition and methodology used in each operational programme, i.e. by each managing authority? If not, how do they differ? How the consistency of the definition of the indicator and the data reported is ensured?
- Do the data reported relate to actual outcomes in the case of all programmes as opposed to expected or planned outcomes? Is the basis of the data reported clear in all cases?

The contractor will provide a judgement on the plausibility/reliability and consistency of the indicator values reported, and whether the achievement values are under- or over-reported and to approximately what extent. In cases where the data is implausible/unreliable or inconsistent there can be various reasons for that: inherent to the indicator, project specific, manual/automated data processing, quality control, double counting, etc. The assessment will identify the reasons for the unreliable indicator data. Where common indicators are reported but not identified in the electronic system of data transfer as "common", these will be included in the analysis.

Finally the assessment will provide for each Member State and indicator the amount of expenditure from the programme represented by the common indicator.

The tenderer should provide detailed information on how it proposes to carry out this task. The tenderer should in particular outline the approach and methodology it intends to follow for identifying the relevant expenditure of the programmes that contribute to each common indicators used by the programme.

Deliverable 6: An Excel table for each common indicator, broken down by programme and Member State, with cumulative total values, with verified cumulative total values corrected to take account of estimated under- or over-reporting and with the expenditure of the programme that contributes to the deliverable expressed by the common indicator. A qualification will be provided about the plausibility/reliability of the cumulative total values for each indicator by MS.

Deliverable 7: A report presenting the results of Task 3a containing an overall qualification of the plausibility/reliability of each common indicator.

Task 3b: Identification of programme specific indicators relevant for evaluation purposes

By reviewing the AIRs for 2019 and 2020, the contractor will identify programme specific indicators that report significant achievements at the level of individual programmes or at the level of MS if the indicator is used by several programmes. The work requires identifying programme specific indicators:

- that express deliverables (outputs) of a significant share of the programmes' financial allocation, and/or
- that share common definitions across different programmes and potentially across different Member States.

The identification of such indicators will allow having a more complete overview about the deliverables of the operations and programmes, covering a larger share of the budget than the one represented by common indicators. For programme specific indicators sharing the same definition and measurement unit across programmes and Member States the indicator targets and achievement values will be aggregated at MS and potentially at EU level. The contractor will present the selected programme specific indicators by MS and by investment priorities together with their short definition, measurement unit and the related expenditure covered. The contractor will provide a mapping of these indicators against the type of interventions established in Task 2 where they are typically applied.

Information will be presented in Excel spreadsheets by Member States and investment priorities.

Deliverable 8: List of identified programme specific indicators by Member States.

Deliverable 9: Database of programme specific indicators by Member States and investment priorities that express significant achievements. The database will include the indicators' definition, measurement unit, target value and achievement value for 2020. Where there is a possibility to aggregate data across regions or Member States (common definition and measurement unit), this should be done both for target and achievement values, but with a commentary on the robustness of such an exercise (strengths and weaknesses).

Task 4: Assessment of monitoring systems' data collection and data processing arrangements

The contractor will analyse and assess the functioning of the programmes' monitoring systems, addressing the following topics:

- arrangements for data collection and aggregation at programme level;
- quality control mechanism for checking data;
- manual interventions in the system;
- reporting of monitoring data to the Commission (aggregation, quality control, plausibility checks);

- data aggregation at regional/national level (across several programmes);
- adaptation to new national/EU requirements.

Through the analysis the contractor will identify strengths and weaknesses in the arrangements for collecting, processing and reporting monitoring data (indicator and financial data, including the categorisation of expenditure). The assessment will identify causes for under- or over-reporting indicator achievement values and the contractor will propose possible measures to be taken by the respective authorities to have better data reliability. The contractor will identify good practices and will make recommendations that can be considered by national authorities when designing their monitoring systems for the 2021-2027 period. The contractor will also produce country sheets with the description and the main characteristics of each MS monitoring system(s).

Deliverable 10: Country sheet for all MS with the assessment of the functioning of their monitoring system.

Deliverable 11: A draft report summarising the main strengths and weaknesses identified, the causes of implausible/unreliable indicator data reporting and proposed solutions to overcome these and providing best practice examples and recommendation for the design of monitoring systems for the 2021-2027 programming period. The report will make use of the finding accumulated under task 3.

Task 5: Organisation of workshop

The contractor will present the results of the assignment under tasks 3 and 4 at a half-day workshop in Brussels with representatives of relevant national authorities involved in the subject of the study (e.g. managing authorities, intermediate bodies, coordination bodies, monitoring and evaluation departments), external experts (including the two advising on this study, see 2.7) and Commission officials.

The contractor will be responsible for the organisation and content and financing of the workshop, which should be held outside Commission premises, including identifying participants, preparing the content of the seminars, leading discussions and writing up the event. The contractor will cover all the cost of the workshop including travel and accommodation costs for participants from public authorities (excluding Commission staff), cover travel and accommodation costs for participants not from public authorities as well as a fee appropriate to the level of expertise.

The conclusions of the workshop will feed into the final report.

Deliverable 12: Organisation of a workshop in Brussels: the contractor will also be responsible for setting up the programme (based on outcomes of tasks 3 and 4) and for preparing a written summary of the discussions and conclusions of the workshop. The conclusions of the workshop will feed into the final report.

Task 6: Final report

The final report will pull together findings of tasks 3 and 4 and the conclusions of the workshop in a concise document of a maximum of 100 pages. The final report will be based on the draft report prepared under task 4.

Deliverable 13: Final report consisting of (1) the revised draft report of task 4 and (2) a publishable executive summary.

1.3. Methodology

A combination of methods will be used in this study for example:

- interviews with Member States, Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies where necessary,
- desk research – analysis of AIRs and any other supporting documentation from the Member States,
- analysis of data stored in the DG for Regional and Urban Policy's databases (SFC2014, Open Data Platform). The successful contractor will be given access to these systems.
- other methodological approaches as appropriate, to be specified in the tender documentation.

The tender documentation should outline how these or other methods will be combined to deliver the various tasks. The tender should analyse the major difficulties inherent in carrying out this contract and outline strategies to overcome them.

1.4. Work organisation

The overall duration of the tasks is 14 months starting from the entry into force of the contract.

The following table gives a synoptic view of the deliverables along with the related timetable

1.5. Time schedule

Task	Title	Deliverable	Meeting	Timeline
			Kick-off meeting	within 2 weeks
Task 1	Construction of a single database	1: single database	Steering group meeting	within 3 months
		2: report on the construction of the single database		
Task 2	Data collection and typology clustering the operations	3: list of clusters	Steering group meeting	within 6 months
		4: single database completed with clustering		
		5: report on the categorisation data		

Task 3	3a: Validation of common indicator data reported to the Commission	6: common indicator fiches by MS with verified totals	Steering group meeting	within 9 months
		7: report about the results of the assessment under this task		
	3b: Identification of programme specific indicators relevant for evaluation purposes	8: list of selected programme specific indicators		
		9: database of selected programme specific indicators with aggregate values		
Task 4	Assessment of monitoring systems	10: country sheets of monitoring systems	Steering group meeting	within 12 months
		11: draft report of monitoring systems and data with recommendation for the 2021-2027 period		
Task 5	Workshop	12: workshop, summary and conclusions of the discussions		within 13 months
Task 6:	Final report	13: final report		within 14 months

1.6. Organisation of the study

The contractor will finance two experts to give advice throughout the study, comment on the deliverables, and participate at the seminar. Both experts should be familiar with the cohesion policy framework. One of the experts should have in-depth knowledge of monitoring system designs and operation and have experience in data processing and analysis, whereas the other expert should have experience with the diverse typology of cohesion policy interventions and their evaluation. The experts will be proposed and their fees will be covered by the contractor. The proposed experts will have to be accepted by and directly report to Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy.

The Contractor must ensure that all logistic aspects of the assignment are correctly carried out. The Contractor is also responsible for all administrative aspects such as contracting the experts, provision of insurance etc. Ensuring the quality of the assignment is one of the key responsibilities of the Contractor as he is fully responsible for the quality of the reports or/and other outputs required. These documents will be delivered physically by and under the responsibility of the Contractor.

The Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy will establish a steering group representative of the relevant Directorates of the Directorate General as well as other interested Directorates General. The contractor will provide documentation for and attend four meetings of the steering group. It is anticipated that the meetings will take place in order to discuss (1) the single database constructed (2) the clustering of the operations and the report on the reliability of categorisation, (3) the database on indicators and (4) the country fiches and summary report on monitoring systems.

The contractor will be expected to attend a kick-off meeting and four meetings of the steering group in Brussels reviewing the progress of the study and resolving any problems arising. Video conferences could be also organised.

The costs of managing the contract by the Contractor, as well as the travel costs related to the meetings with the Commission will be carried out with no additional charge and are understood to be incorporated in the offer.

2. CONTENT, STRUCTURE AND GRAPHIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE DELIVERABLES

The contractor will deliver the datasets and reports detailed above.

All reports and datasets will be submitted in English in an easily accessible style. A French or German version needs to be provided only for the executive summary of the summary report on monitoring systems.

Each deliverable will be examined by the Commission (a DG REGIO-led steering group), which may ask for additional modifications or propose changes in order to redirect the work if necessary. Deliverables must be approved by the Commission.

The deliverables will be submitted in electronic format. The Contractor will provide the constructed databases in Excel or similar format and the reports in Word and PDF format.

2.1. Content

2.1.1. Summary report on monitoring systems

The report must include:

- an abstract of no more than 200 words and an executive summary of maximum 6 pages, in English and German or French;
- specific identifiers which must be incorporated on the cover page provided by the Contracting Authority;
- the following disclaimer:

“The information and views set out in this [report/study/article/publication...] are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. The Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this study. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission’s behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.”

2.1.2. Publishable executive summary

The publishable executive summary must be provided in both in English and German or French and must include:

- specific identifiers which must be incorporated on the cover page provided by the Contracting Authority;
- the following disclaimer:

“The information and views set out in this [report/study/article/publication...] are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. The Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this study. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission’s behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.”

2.1.3. Requirements for publication on Internet

The Commission is committed to making online information as accessible as possible to the largest possible number of users including those with visual, auditory, cognitive or physical disabilities, and those not having the latest technologies. The Commission supports the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 of the W3C.

For full details on the Commission policy on accessibility for information providers, see: http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/standards/accessibility/index_en.htm

For the publishable versions of the study, abstract and executive summary, the contractor must respect the W3C guidelines for accessible pdf documents as provided at: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>.

2.2. Graphic requirements

The contractor must deliver the study and all publishable deliverables in full compliance with the corporate visual identity of the European Commission, by applying the graphic rules set out in the European Commission's Visual Identity Manual, including its logo. The graphic rules, the Manual and further information are available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/services/visual_identity/index_en.htm

A simple Word template will be provided to the contractor after contract signature. The contractor must fill in the cover page in accordance with the instructions provided in the template. The use of templates for studies is exclusive to European Commission's contractors. No template will be provided to tenderers while preparing their tenders.