

Single IT system for validating EAFRD and EFF payment claims – Portugal

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1. Who developed the tool?

The system was developed by the Instituto de Financiamento da Agricultura e Pescas (IFAP), the Portuguese Paying Agency for Agriculture and Rural Development.

2. Why was the tool put in place?

When developing the IT system for the registration and validation of payment claims, three important objectives were taken into account. Firstly it was vital that the system improved administrative capacity, making the payment process more efficient and effective. Secondly, creating a system that facilitated the beneficiaries to submit electronic applications and provided better services to the end-user. Thirdly, reducing the costs and expenditure for both the beneficiaries and the administration.

The single IT system for payment claims was also developed in line with IFAP objectives to support effective financing and simplify the implementation of EAFRD and EFF, in accordance with the objectives and strategic framework of community rural development and the common fisheries policies as defined in the Regulations.

The main elements of functionality built into the single IT system for the registration and validation of payment claims are in general:

- Offering an online portal acting as an IT interface for the beneficiaries, Paying Agency, Managing Authorities and the LAGs,
- Providing better services to the end-user and facilitating the beneficiary in their electronic application and handling process,
- Providing an easy on-line access to all information at any time - payment claims, payment amounts, monitoring, financial data etc.,
- Reducing time spent on completing forms automatic checks of encoding errors, re-use of previously encoded data in repetitive processes etc.,
- Preventing the completion of redundant forms,
- Electronic services, including:
 - eSubmission – only one set of information exchanged in electronic form by different stakeholders;
 - Only once encoding - Paying Agency, Managing Authorities and LAGs do not request information already received;
 - eSignature - use of a login & password;
 - eStorage – storing data that can be retrieved within a certain time period.
- Ensuring security and an audit trail through the above electronic services,

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- Enabling the exchange of information between systems,
- Reducing costs for both public administration and beneficiaries, and;
- Improving administrative capacity leading to greater efficiency.

This single system is accessible by beneficiaries, Paying Agency, Managing Authorities, LAGs and the certifying authority.

3. What does the tool do?

A written agreement was signed between the Paying Agency and the LAGs to delegate administrative control and verification of the compliance of payment claims. The single IT system was designed and implemented by a project team from IFAP. The project team, based on the business and IT requirements, identified all the technical components that were deemed necessary for this system. They also learnt from and shared experience during the implementation process from other projects, namely best practice models and generic approaches in terms of project management and technical applications, for example the implementation of similar Portuguese projects in the 2000-2006 period and the implementation of a similar system in the European Social Fund.

4. What was the main impact on the financing of LEADER and on which level was this impact achieved?

The main effects of the single IT system for beneficiaries can be defined as follows:

- Greater simplification with easier application forms,
- A unique system to register payment claims,
- Form can be completed remotely,

- The progress of the validation of the payment claim can be tracked, without having to contact several organisations, whilst also receiving feedback and automatic updates,
- Data is pre-filled, e.g. forms are pre-filled with the approved and implemented amounts,
- The same information is not requested twice by the Paying Agency or other national authorities. The Paying Agency takes into account the information available in its database – application of the ‘only once’ principle,
- All the project-related documents needed during the payment claim life cycle are provided and beneficiaries exchange these with the Paying Agency or with the LAGs,
- The different phases of the payment claim can be verified by the beneficiary, including if the payment was made,
- Clear and simple information is provided,
- Information can be easily updated by beneficiaries,
- Payments are made faster,
- The burden on beneficiaries is reduced throughout the implementation of the project,
- Electronic communication with beneficiaries speeds up the validation of the payment claim,
- There is only one source of data which is standardised and automatic with no double financing which allows competences to be concentrated effectively,
- Text messages are sent to beneficiaries confirming that payment is made,
- Ensures that payments are made only to bank account belonging to the beneficiary,
- Allows an effective reduction in the administrative burden.

The main effects of the single IT system for Paying Agencies, Managing Authorities and LAGs can be defined as follows:

- A unique system to register and validate payment claims accessible by the Paying Agency, Managing Authority, LAGs and the certifying authority,
- Better monitoring and coordination of processes in order to help the Paying Agency, Managing Authorities and LAGs to manage each project at the beneficiary level. This provides a better picture of each project and improves validation capabilities,
- Provides clear and simple information about the beneficiaries,
- Validates specific rules (calculates the amount to be paid) and calculates the amount to be paid after verification of the eligibility criteria,
- Calculates reductions where applicable,
- Provides links to the 'visit operations supported' report,
- Verifies, through a check list, public procurement procedures,
- Confirms bank guarantees, in case of advance payments,
- Prioritises payments,
- Allows a reduction in administrative tasks.

5. What was needed to be able to design and implement the tool?

The single system has been constructed taking into account several elements to facilitate the project implementation/progress:

- Focusing on specific rural development issues,
- Sharing experience from other projects during the implementation process,
- Raising awareness of the use of online portal - a user friendly tool is a positive introduction,
- Formulating clear definitions of the information required, guidelines or goals set, provide feedback if

information is not correct, provide a hint or example on each input field to indicate what is required,

- Recognising the available internal resources and capabilities against the limited resources capacity in terms of financing,
- Educating and training beneficiaries, Managing Authorities and LAGs on how to use the system,
- Developing ongoing workshops, assistance and training programs to ensure better implementation and use of the system for Managing Authorities, LAGs and beneficiaries.

6. What are the lessons learnt and relevance for LEADER 2014-2020?

The single IT system for registering and validation of payment claims clearly adds value for the beneficiaries of rural development funds in terms of simplifying procedures and reducing the administrative burden. Therefore the continuation of the system as such is indispensable. For the next programming period IFAP will continue to improve the system by introducing new requirements/validations in terms of submission of payment claims and validation of payment claims as well as adjusting the system to the new rules for the rural development and fisheries programmes.

7. Is there any further information on the tool?

Web site IFAP: www.ifap.pt

8. Contact details for further information

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