



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

www.wales.gov.uk



Welsh European Funding Office

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for ERDF, ESF & Ireland Wales European Territorial Co-operation Programmes

Version 2

March 2020

Cronfeydd yr UE:
Buddsoddi yng
Nghymru
EU Funds:
Investing in Wales



VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	19 March 2020	Not published on EU Funding pages of the Welsh Government website. Issued directly to ERDF/ESF beneficiaries.
2.0	24 March 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Title amended to include the Ireland-Wales Programme2. Amendment to question 63. Further FAQs added

Coronavirus (COVID-19) & European Structural Funds supported projects

The Welsh Government has published advice and information on COVID-19 for individuals, business and employers, the social, community and residential care sector and the education sector. This advice can be found at <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

The UK Government has recently produced an action plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>) for how the UK has planned for and what further action will be taken to tackle the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The purpose of the above guidance is to assist individuals and businesses in preparations to minimise risks and impact and we recommend beneficiaries should familiarise themselves with them, if not already done so.

If you should experience any impact on the delivery of your structural fund project as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19), please refer to the relevant WEFO contact for further advice. WEFO recognises that this situation is evolving very quickly with advice likely to change at short notice. Taking this into account, we will look to make decisions as early as possible and on a case by case basis, whilst taking into account all official advice at that time.

In the meantime this FAQ document has been produced for beneficiaries to reference before contacting WEFO.

1. Eligibility of project costs – will project costs continue to be eligible where official restrictions are in place which affect ‘business as usual’ activity?

Any necessary costs that have already been approved by WEFO, are featured within the operation’s Business Plan and included within the agreed Delivery Profile will continue to be eligible, even in situations where offices have been forced to close and staff are working at home or project activity is reduced. For example rental costs, other accommodation costs (including Flat Rates) and staff costs. As with all costs agreed by WEFO, there is an expectation that value for money is secured and where savings or reductions can be made then these options should be explored where possible.

2. Can Staff Costs continue to be claimed?

Yes Staff costs for beneficiary staff contracted to work on the operation continue to be eligible and should continue to be claimed in line with the organisation’s own policies and in accordance with WEFO’s eligibility rules, as has always been the case. Where the beneficiary’s policies cover extraordinary circumstances (for example special leave for school closures) these costs continue to be eligible. Additionally where beneficiaries policies allow for staff to continue to work at home whilst self-isolating then these costs will continue to be considered eligible. WEFO would accept official emails as evidence to confirm what the organisation policy is for circumstances related to Coronavirus. Sick pay continues to be eligible if claimed in accordance with the WEFO eligibility rules.

3. Restriction of travel abroad.

This concerns operations/ projects that contain costs for travel abroad within approved business plans and/ or those operations/ projects where individual journeys abroad have been authorised by WEFO. Where travel has been booked & it is to a country/ territory that FCO has advised ‘against all travel’ or ‘against all but essential travel’ – a beneficiary will firstly need to approach its own travel insurance provider (where applicable) & claim against the insurance. If for any reason, the travel insurance policy will not reimburse the cost of travel, the reasons for this will need to be provided to WEFO. Pending the reasons for the insurance policy not paying out & where WEFO accepts as being reasonable/ justified to claim from structural funds, then the foregone travel costs will be considered eligible. Insurance excess fees are considered to be an eligible cost.

4. What is the impact of having to extend projects and increase costs with little or no increase in targets and outputs?

If beneficiaries are unable to deliver their projects as planned because of the virus, we will consider the situation on a case by case basis, as we would for any other situation where force majeure prevents a beneficiary from delivering their contractual obligations as planned. We will of course be sympathetic to this, and will consider extensions etc. as appropriate but being mindful that these dates cannot go beyond the Programme eligibility date of 31st December 2023, with a preference for dates not to be later than June 2023 in order to enable all closure activity to occur. PDO will be the point of contact to discuss this in detail.

5. Would cancellation fees be eligible?

Where a beneficiary has incurred costs which turn out to be fruitless because of events or decisions beyond their control e.g. meetings are cancelled by third parties or following Government advice, that expenditure will not be made ineligible for EU funding, as long as reasonable steps have been taken to minimise that cost e.g. they have made any possible insurance claims. Looking ahead beneficiaries should exercise caution when booking attendance events and avoid doing so whilst movement/travel restrictions are in place, unless there is a fully refundable option in such scenario.

6. Can alternative methods of providing participant evidence be used – for example scanned/ electronic signatures, email confirmation and scanned copies where not possible to have sight of original copies?

Yes scanned copies of identification or emailed enrolment forms could be accepted as evidence for management verifications, the same applies to participant results that can be self-declared under existing rules. For example we would be willing to accept email confirmation from a participant (i.e. please see attached my application form, this along with the email could replace the signatures for the time being). It has also been agreed that we will allow passports etc. to be provided without being certified. These flexibilities have been introduced on the condition that, at a future date, projects will need to go back over this evidence as per normal requirements and at the earliest opportunity. Beneficiaries **must continue** to ensure that GDPR rules are taken into account whilst implementing these revised measures.

7. Can electronic signatures be used on the assumption that the organisation's own policies and procedures allow for this?

There is no WEFO or EC requirement that hard copy documents or 'wet signatures' are used or are preferable to digital records and the use of electronic systems, where at all possible, is encouraged. If alternatives to 'wet signatures' are used then the beneficiary must conform to the requirements set out in section 5.1.4.2 of the WEFO 'Rules' so as to ensure that the authenticity and integrity of the records can be relied upon for legal/ audit purposes, there are the required certification processes and controls in place and the ICT systems used conform to the require BSI standards.

Further information can also be found in the link below, to the UK Gov site document, which contains a link to a UK regulation and the eIDAS regulation.

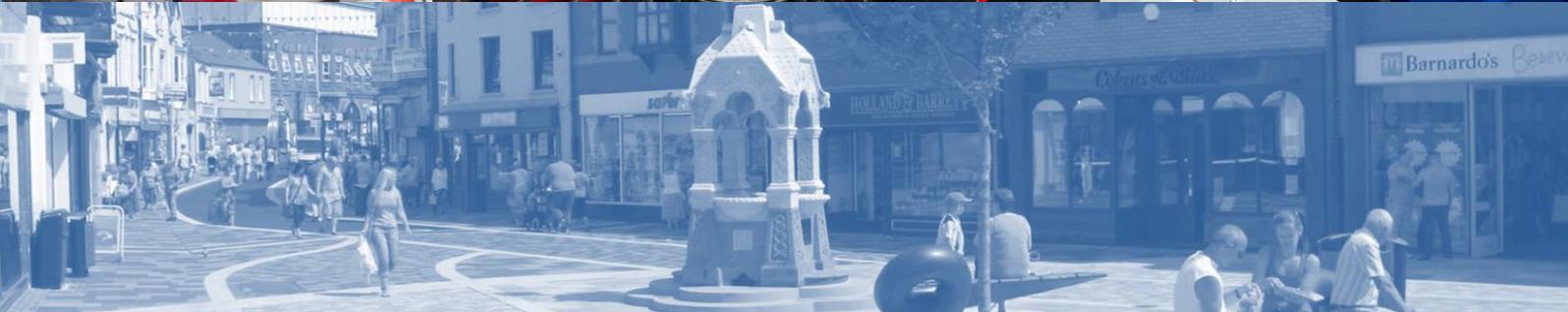
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545098/beis-16-15-electronic-signatures-guidance.pdf

8. Redeployment of staff – where operation/ project staff are being redeployed to other core critical services to address the impacts of COVID-19 will operation/ project staff costs still be eligible for support via the structural funds?

Where there is a need for operation/ project staff to be redeployed to undertake urgent work on minimising the impact of COVID 19, please contact your Project Development Officer (PDO)/ Operations Officer (OO) and provide the following information:

- (a) copy of the organisation policy or similar evidence which enables redeployment of staff – e.g. organisation email/ bulletin or terms of employment contract;
- (b) details of the operation/ project staff members to be re-deployed;
- (c) time period of redeployment i.e. start and end dates (latter where known) ;
- (d) redeployment activity & wider benefits of undertaking the activity, particularly if/ where the activity has some alignment with the original WEFO approved operation aims/ objectives/ activity.

The above will enable the PDO/ OO to provide informed advice & will ensure a sufficient audit trail for the future.



For further information:

www.gov.wales

@wefowales/@wefocymru

Enquiries Desk 0845 010 3355

UNDEB
EWROPEAIDD
EUROPEAN
UNION



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government