



European Commission

Directorate General Regional Policy
Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Gender Equality
Directorate General Agricultural and Rural Development
Directorate General Fisheries and Maritime Affairs



SFC2007 | Information letter

It is with great pleasure that we can announce the upcoming release of the first version of SFC2007, the new system for fund management in the European Community for the programming period of 2007 – 2013.

The general and the implementing regulations related to the Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund, the Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Fisheries Fund approaches the final approval and publication, thus enabling us to introduce the new IT system for the fund management.

In this information letter you will find the latest information concerning the project and all related issues such as planning, use of the system, training and other useful information.

We expect that this new system will provide a modern and transparent instrument for the management of the funds and we can assure you that our directorates general will be available to assist with the successful implementation and integration of this system.

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SFC2007 | Information letter

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01

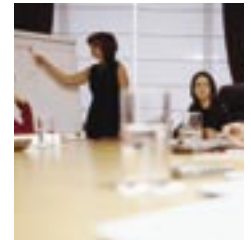
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Introduction



Background

The mission of the *SFC 2007* computer system is to implement the operational part of the European Community Funds regulations for the operational period 2007-2013. This operational part consists in communicating and collecting operational information necessary to follow-up the programmes and to prepare the financial execution. This is the *front-office system*. Additionally, the financial preparation and execution part is the *back-office system*.

European Funds for the period of 2007-2013: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund (CF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and European Fisheries Fund (EFF).

An introduction meeting was held January 25th 2006 in Brussels. Details from the meeting can be found here:

<http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/region/sfc2007/home>



SFC2007 is a joint project involving 5 Directorates General: Regional Policy (REGIO), Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (EMPL), Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), Fisheries and Maritime Affairs (FISH), Informatics (DIGIT).

New period

The new period 2007-2013 is accompanied by new regulations that bring a notable change: According to the Council regulations, all exchanges concerning financial transactions between the Commission and the authorities designated by the Member States shall be made by

The system will cover the following

e-Government: “the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations combined with organisational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes and strengthen support to public policies”

Level 1 – Simple website: Information is provided online about public policies and administrative procedures, but there is little or no change in the nature of the interaction of citizens with the institution.

Level 2 – On-line government: Simple electronic interaction mechanisms are implemented (like e-mail or web-based forms) in an effort to provide better services to citizens.

Level 3 – Integrated government: Parts of administrative activity are automated. The services offered are not based on existing procedures that are simply revamped to use ICT but are the product of a genuine integration between interaction channels, back office information systems and administrative processes. However, some steps in administrative workflows are still paper-based.

Level 4 – Transformed government: No paper forms need be filled in. Administrative activity is completely automated end-to-end, crossing organisational boundaries. Services are built up from the viewpoint of internal and external users, rather than based on the organisation’s set-up, so as to maximise user satisfaction through better quality and more transparency while also increasing efficiency.

electronic means in accordance with the implementing rules adopted by the Commission.

Moreover, in terms of efficient and innovative use of Information Technologies in administrations and enterprises, some trends are noteworthy. At the level of policy, the Lisbon 2010 objectives (i2010 initiative) and the e-Europe+ Action Plan (and also the Action Plans 2002 & 2005) are promoting the increased involvement of IT in public sector business processes (e-Government leading to paperless administration). The European Commission is eager to give an example adopting the e-Commission initiative. In the private sector, IT Governance, Enterprise Architecture and generally the alignment of IT with business are nowadays in the order of the day.

Limitations and needs

The new regulation and the recent trends are rendering the existing IT system (2000-2006 period) almost obsolete. Its scope is limited and the possibilities of interactions with other systems (flat files) are out-dated. Maintaining similar functionality in different systems and versions implies extra costs and the manual paper verification and re-entry of data are

not compatible with the e-Governance guidelines. As a result there was a clear need to improve and modernise the existing system, especially considering that SFC2007 must remain operational until at least 2017.

Regulatory status

Regarding ERDF, CF and ESF, the publication in the Official Journal of the European Union of the Council regulation is foreseen for 20/07/06 and the publication of the Commission regulation is foreseen for the end of October. For EAFRD, the Council regulations and the Commission regulation on financing have already been approved whereas the Commission regulation on measures is foreseen for October. Finally, for EFF, the Council regulation has been adopted on 19/06/06 and the Commission regulation for the end of September.

The Community Strategic Guidelines are foreseen for October 2006, and consequently neither the Strategic Planning documents nor the Operational Programmes can be finally evaluated before this date, even though Operational Programmes can be submitted before.



Planning



Original

Four main milestones have been originally planned. The first two concentrate on Member States functionality (front office) and the next two concentrate on internal Commission functionality (back office).

Milestone 1 (July 2006): Provide the

functionalities related to the National Strategic Reference Framework, the Operational Programme Proposal Preparation and the Ex-Ante Evaluation all of which are processes carried out before the beginning of the new programming period.

Milestone 2 (January 2007): Provide the payment related functions as well as some

reporting and audit functionality.

Milestones 3 and 4 (July 2007 and March 2008): Related to internal Commission functionality but they will also have an impact on the Member State implementations. The Member States processes are related to audit, evaluation and advanced reporting which are processes that are not required at the beginning of the programming period.

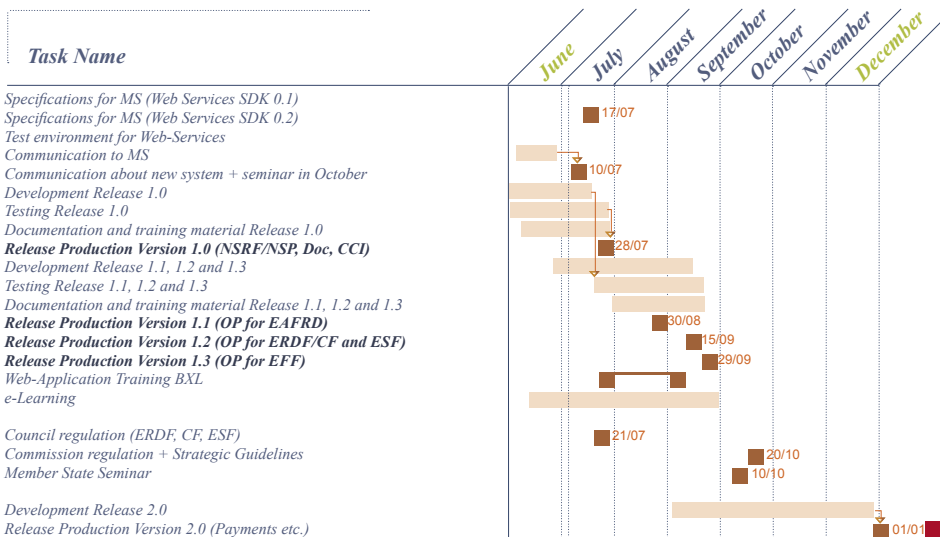
Current

The main issue affecting the original planning has been the delay in the adoption of the regulations. Mainly the implementing regulations have undergone many changes as a result of numerous technical committee meetings resulting in new requirements and differences between the various funds becoming more and more profound. Certain technical issues which affected the development of the system have also contributed to a delay of approximately one - two month in the achievement of Milestone 1.

The risk of delays was already identified at the start of the project and the mitigation measures included iterative development and the splitting of functionalities between front-office (early in

the development process) and back-office (late in the development process). The first were mainly relevant to the Member States interaction, whereas the second to the internal Commission processes. The modular construction of the system was therefore allowing a partial deployment without having to wait for the acceptance of the Commission regulations. As a result, multiple releases are planned for milestone 1 (both including Web Application and Web Services): Release 1.0 end of July including NSRF/NSP, CCI and document management for all the funds. Functionalities related to the Operational Programmes will split in three releases reflecting the Commission implementing regulations with each release implementing the specifics for each individual fund. Release 1.1 by end of August for EAFRD Operational Programmes. Release 1.2 by mid September for ERDF/CF and ESF Operational Programmes and finally by end September release 1.3 for EFF Operational Programmes.

The training sessions will, depending on user interest, start at end of July and the e-Learning modules will accompany release of Milestone 1. The rest of the planning remains as is, with a seminar in October tentatively set for the 10th of the month and the following system releases as originally planned.



04



SFC2007: The system



Improvements

A large number of improvements have been incorporated in the new system concerning both functionality and performance. In terms of functionality there will be improved management facilities (e.g. calculation simulations and consultation) and the provision of just a single dossier containing all information related to a CCI and facilitating searching, reporting, auditing and getting status and info on payments for the Member States.

The validation function will validate that all the mandatory fields have been filled, official documents attached and that the sums and figures in the financial tables corresponds to a set of predefined rules and equations.

The calculation functions ensure that both Member States and the Commission use the same calculations for payment claims and other financial transactions.

In terms of performance the system will be providing improved data consistency and integrity, (data are not re-encoded by the Commission) and state of the art data exchange that provides automatic error handling, reduced delays and interoperability.

Interfaces

The system has two different interfaces. There is standard Web-Application providing screen and menu-based interface and accessible via Internet (https) using Internet Explorer / Mozilla Firefox. No additional development effort is needed on the part of the Member States. The user-interface is designed to be multi-lingual. However, the first release is in English only.

The finalised system will notably provide:

- electronic exchange of structured and unstructured documents,
- encoding facilities for the Member States to prepare the electronic documents,
- calculation simulation environment,

- both for Member States and Commission desk officers,
- electronic signing of documents through user authentication,
- consultation of documents: search facilities, tree navigation, status, contact person etc.,
- advanced reporting, notifications and workflow.

Additionally there is also an interface through Web-Services that enables the automatic transfer of data directly from the local administration system. This type of interface requires the adaptation of the Member States local system(s).

Please note that all management functions are provided by both interfaces. It is for each Member State to decide which interface to use. It is perfectly possible to manage everything with the Web-Application alone and consequently without the need for specific IT development.

Releases

Release 1.0 of the system (in Milestone 1) provides the following functionalities:

- Strategic planning (NSRF / NSP): This is core business functionality
- CCI request and assignment of a valid CCI code for a programme: This functionality constitutes a significant improvement with regard to the existing situation where the CCI code has to be explicitly obtained from the Commission by means of a manual workflow.
- Document management

The system operates with two main categories of documents:

- official types and
- drafts, working documents, info, etc.

Moreover, a **business entity** can consist of two parts:

- structured data (Financial tables, etc.) and
- unstructured data (Word® documents, Excel® sheets, ...)

more, additional effort has to be spent comparing the paper and electronic versions and the inconsistencies found have to be analysed and corrected manually.

The new requirements for period 2007-2013 stipulate that all the data will be exchanged electronically and the paper version is only authorised in case of force majeure. Since today certain documents have to be signed with a handwritten signature, this procedure has to be replaced by a form of electronic signature (e-Signature). This will imply for the Member States some degree of change in their internal workflow where, what was previously signed on paper, could now be delegated to a user of the system who will sign electronically.

Signing and authorising electronically

An electronic signature is data in electronic form attached or logically associated with other electronic data (e.g. an electronic document) and which serves as a method of authentication. It establishes a high degree of certainty regarding the authenticity and the integrity of the information exchanged. There are several methods of providing an e-Signature such as username and password, a token (calculator) or onetime passwords and finally, digital certificates (PKI) all of which respects the directive 1999/93/EC when applied in a semi-closed network as is the case for SFC2007.

For SFC2007 the needs were for a simple and user-friendly system that fulfils all the legal requirements and yet can be easily accepted and implemented by all Member States for all funds. From a security point of view, the system does not handle restricted or classified information. Moreover, because of the business process related workflow and procedures outside of the system (e.g. banking details and user roles and rights established through other

channels, payment request associated with an operational programme), the associated risks are low. This was also demonstrated by a specific security risk analysis (summary can be found in CIRCA).

The chosen solution was to use a username/password combination based on the ECAS system. ECAS is the Commission system for user authentication and guarantees, amongst others that the password is always transmitted encrypted and that certain rules are followed regarding the strength of the user's password. The risk analysis has shown that, with this solution, the risks can be sufficiently mitigated while at the same time the inconveniences and costs of establishing a certificate infrastructure can be avoided.

In order to provide the Member States with proof that a given business entity or document has been sent to the Commission at a given time an electronically signed acknowledgement of reception is sent to from the Commission to the Member State in question at the time of reception. The acknowledgment is in form of a PDF file containing information about the data transferred electronically signed by the SFC2007 system using a digital certificate. The certificate itself is published in the SFC2007 CIRCA site. Documents signed with this certificate are recognised by the Commission as proof of transmission in case of a dispute.

Force majeure

According to the regulations, in cases of force majeure, and in particular of malfunctioning of the computer system or a lack of a lasting connection, the Member State may forward to the Commission the documents required in hard copy, using the forms set out in the annexes of the appropriate regulations. However, it has to be noted that the paper version is only used as proof of submission date. As soon as the system is again operating, the Member State, being the data owner,

must always introduce the data electronically. The Commission will ensure that the reception date is that of the paper version. As an example, the functionality for the transmission of the Operational programs will not be available until release 1.1 – 1.3

(August/September) although these programs could have been transmitted after the publication of the Council regulation in the Official Journal at the end of July 2006. This constitutes a force majeure situation as described above. ■



Obtaining access to the system

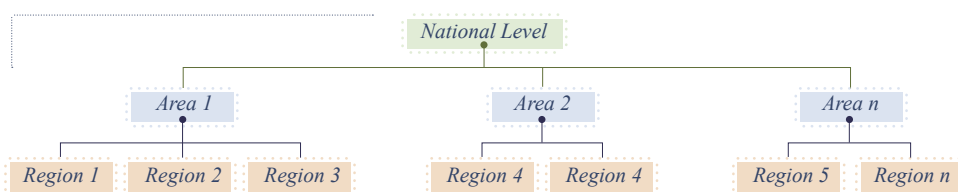
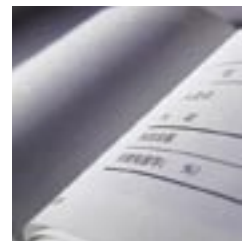
Introduction

The risk analysis of the SFC2007 system has shown that an authentication mechanism based on username and password with some additional security elements (such as protection of the password communication) would sufficiently mitigate the risks related to identity theft. Such an authentication mechanism is ECAS, the authentication service of the European Commission that allows any web application to check user credentials (e.g. login/password) and retrieve user identity. ECAS is under the responsibility of the Directorate General Informatics (DIGIT).

Furthermore the system operates with a number of different roles arranged in a node-hierarchy that reflects the territorial/regional model of the Member State and the Fund in question as well the local IT systems in place.

In the example below, the National Level can access all the data, the Area 1 can access data related to regions 1, 2 and 3, whereas the regions themselves do not have access to data from other regions.

Each Member State administration must communicate their hierarchy model to the Commission before access can be granted.



Please note that the figure above only serves as an example. More or less complicated structures can be applied as well.

Each user in the system is assigned a role that not only reflects the node hierarchy above but also the authority in question (managing, certifying, auditing), consultation and modification rights as well as the rights to prepare, validate or send data and documents.

In order for a user to obtain system access, a special procedure involving registra-

tion and validation of credentials is used. In the case of Member State users, this procedure necessitates the involvement of an MS organisation responsible for this operation (MS Liaison). Each Member State must appoint an MS Liaison, either one single liaison or as a maximum one liaison per Fund.

The detailed procedure for obtaining access and the access request form can be downloaded from the CIRCA site (see page 14).

The following sections present the stand-

MS System Owner: The technical person in charge of the system in a given Member State. For small organisations, this may coincide with the MS Liaison.

MS Liaison: The single point of reference of a Member State authorised to submit requests, to grant, modify or suppress access to SFC2007 System, to the Commission. This person (or entity/organisation) is responsible for the verification of the identity of the users and their legitimacy to access the system. *The MS Liaison must in accordance with the Commission Regulations be appointed by the Member State concerned and communicated to the Commission before user access can be granted.*

RA (Registration Authority): Any person or organisation to which some or all the tasks needed for the *certification* are delegated. In the context of SFC2007, the SFC2007 Support Team performs this function on behalf of the Commission.

LRA (Local Registration Authority): It contributes to the collection and verification of the data needed for the certificates and user credentials. “Local” emphasises the fact that the function is performed by a local reference of the Member State organisation. Depending on the fund IT organisation of the Member State (e.g. in the case of a centralised organisation) it will be the same as the MS Liaison.

SFC2007 Support Team: The single point of contact for users in the Member States organisations, for any query related to the SFC2007 System and responsible for the identification of the MS Liaison.

SFC2007 Operations Team (or Ops): The entity responsible for the technical execution of the Access Control modifications by accessing the system.

Identity: A unique name of an individual person (entity). quality and more transparency while also increasing efficiency.

Registration: The process by which a user obtains a credential such as a username or digital certificate.

Authentication: The service that validates an entity (a user and by extension, a legal entity, an ICT service or other) so that its identity can be established and verified.

Authorisation: The mechanism to grant permission for an entity to perform some action with regards to some resource (entitlement). Authorisation provides the information needed for access control, providing the means on which can be decided who can access what information.

and procedures for obtaining:

- a) End-user credentials
- b) Server certificates for establishing Web Services.

Procedures for end-users

In order to emit the user credentials a formal procedure has to be followed which involves the SFC2007 support team and the MS liaison. These entities are responsible for the collection of all necessary

information concerning the end-users, validation of this information and transmission to SFC2007 Operations Team in complete and proper format. The original request is done by means of a dedicated form that contains all the necessary user information and is emitted by the MS Liaison. The SFC2007 support team will collect the forms, make sure that they contain all the necessary information and forward them to the SFC2007 Operations Team (Ops) who in turn produces the

user name and password combination and communicates it back to the support team. Finally the end user receives the unique User ID and a half of the password by e-mail whereas the other half will be given by phone. This procedure heightens the security and permits a further authentication of the user.

Procedures for Web Services

A secure communication by means of Web Services (two-way SSL) necessitates the emission of digital certificates (PKI) for both of the participating servers. In this case, the MS system owner will request a certificate using a special form. The role of the MS Liaison is to validate this

information and officially transmit it to the SFC2007 support team. The requested certificates will be sent back to the MS Liaison who, in turn, will forward them to the MS system owner (see also point ‘Certificates fir testing - Web-services’).

References

The necessary documentation is located in the CIRCA user group and consists of:

- A guide for the request of end-user credentials, including the necessary forms in Annexes;
- A guide for the request of server certificates, including the necessary forms.



Testing

Status

The testing of the web user-interface is performed by the SFC2007 development team according to the testing methodology employed in the development lifecycle. In parallel to that, the testing of the Web Services interface by the IT teams in the Member States will allow the identification of problems that have to do with connectivity and integration issues (how well the local MS system interacts with SFC2007) as well as problems or bugs that have to do with internal SFC2007 processing. At the conclusion of this information letter test certificates had been issued to several IT teams in the Member States and the first connections been made. Further information will be provided at the October seminar.

Certificates for testing

(Web-services)

A certificate for testing has to be installed on a machine that will communicate with

the SFC2007 server. Even though this “machine” is what is commonly called a “server”, it in fact plays the role of “client” in this context, hence the name “Client Certificate”.

The certificate has to be presented to the Reverse Proxy server performing the 2 way SSL authentication in order to authenticate the systems (either in the Member State or inside the Commission) which intend to use the Web Services interface of SFC2007.

The procedure for requesting a certificate for testing is comprised of the following administrative steps:

- The operational person in charge of the creation and installation of the server keys (normally the system administrator in the Member State, called the “initial requestor”) must create a properly formed certificate request (in PEM format - see reference XX, annex II), containing the required certificate attributes. Example of procedure and tool to generate



the certificate request can be found in CIRCA.

- The person responsible for the development of the local system to be interfaced to SFC2007 (having the role of “Local” Registration Authority (LRA)), fills in the request form (see annex I). This form and the certificate request (PEM file) are then sent to the RA (SFC2007 support team) in accordance with the procedures described in CIRCA. (NB: for a certificate request to access the test environment, it is mandatory that the Common Name field contains the “TEST” suffix).
- The SFC2007 support team, after checking the request, sends back (e-mail to the initial requestor and cc: to the System Owner) the Certificate file generated by the Certification Authority, also attached the Commission’s root certificate which will be used by the SFC2007 “clients” to authenticate the SFC2007 (reverse proxy) server. Note that the Certification Authority mentioned here is not to be confused with the certifying authority for the funds. In this context it is a specific role in the management of digital certificates and PKI.
- If validation/verification fails the SFC2007 support team informs (by e-mail) the initial requestor and the System Owner in the Member States of the refusal and the reasons. In that case, the procedure has to be restarted from step 1.

References

A description of the Web Services specifications, including the description of an abstract layer easing the integration with the SFC2007 central system, plus a tutorial and sample application can be found in the Software Development Kit located on the CIRCA site of the project:

http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/region/sfc2007/library?l=/technical_specifications

There are two distinct procedures: One to request a certificate which will only be valid in the SFC2007 test environment, and one to request a certificate which will only be valid in the SFC2007 production environment. The latter procedure of course implies much stronger validation steps.

The document describing the available SFC2007 environments (development, testing, production etc) for Web Application and Web Services is published on the CIRCA site of the project too under name “SFC2007-DP-094 Environment Reference” at address :

http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/region/sfc2007/library?l=/technical_specifications/available_environments



Training & documentation

The SFC2007 Project team provides all the necessary technical assistance and end user training to the Member States. This assistance can be in the form of first

and second level helpdesk as well as the provision of a dedicated testing environment described in other sections of this information letter.



The first training session is planned in Brussels for the end July with further sessions programmed for August and September. They will be held in English and the training is intended for key-users in MS. These key-users will, with the assistance of e-Learning modules, train other users locally. Travel expenses for training sessions will not be reimbursed.

However, Member States can use technical assistance budget in order to finance the training costs. Invitations to the training session will be sent through the CIRCA user-group only.

The training will have a duration of one day and the associated e-Learning will be comprised of two modules:

- Welcome, introduction, getting started, strategic planning, CCI request and document management.
- Operational Programmes

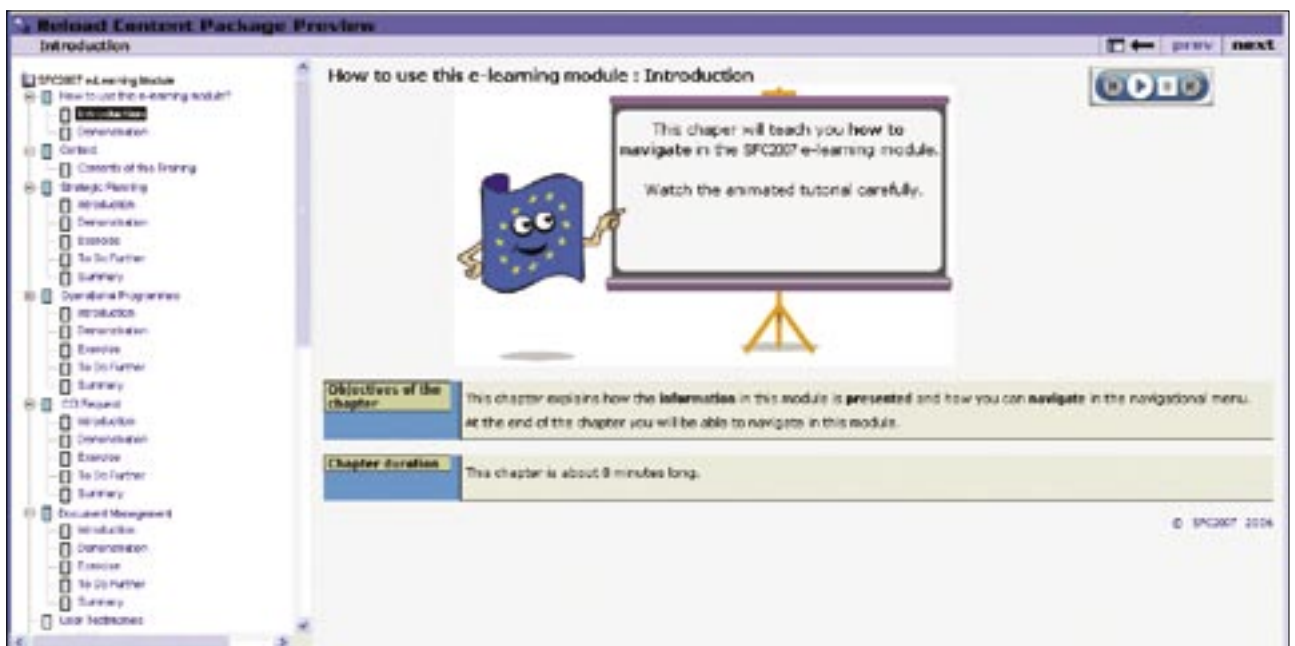
The e-Learning modules have been designed to allow users progress at their own pace. They will be launched in parallel to the release of the application in accordance with the planning for Milestone 1.

Documentation

For maximum clarity, different sets of documents exist for the different audiences.

The Project overview document and the Web-Services and XML technical notes have been made available in draft version to the CIRCA interest group. Regarding 'Access and Security', the following documents have recently been (or will be shortly) published:

- Procedures related to production and test certificates
- Detailed documentation on access, security, role management etc including access request form for Web-Application users.





Help desk and user assistance

One cannot over-emphasise the importance of a good helpdesk and user assistance in the successful deployment and use of SFC2007. The envisaged service is two-fold: regular user support and bi-lateral communication between developers.



The first level support is provided via the functional mailbox sfc2007-info@ec.europa.eu. It concerns key-users, end-users (lost passwords, bug/problem reports etc) and generally all other questions and requests. Support is provided in English and French.

The second level support is provided via bilateral discussion with IT experts in the Commission. These experts and teams are available for issues that concern development, interoperability, deployment, documentation, test accounts and sample certificates, sample code, server and web services addresses and generally any advanced technical issue.

Finally, extensive technical documentation is available at the CIRCA user group <http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/region/sfc2007/home>. Access is reserved to registered users.



Seminar in October



The seminar will take place on the 10th of October. The agenda is based on the June communication and is constituted by the following main items:

- A detailed presentation of the planning
- Training issues (Live sessions, e-Learning, documentation, etc.)
- Demonstration of the system
- Presentation of “best practises”

The focus will be on the demonstration of the system and presentation of ‘success stories’ and best practices from pilot countries. A call for papers and presentations from the pilot and the most advanced Member States will be made.



EAFRD specific aspects

Communications between the Commission and the Member States relating to the approval, financial management, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes 2007-2013 financed by EAFRD, will go through the SFC2007 system. However, information relating to the annual accounts of paying agencies, referred to in Art. 8(1)(c)(iii) of Council Regulation 1290/2005, will be sent for both EAGF and EAFRD through the IT means currently used.

Specific functions and associated screens in SFC2007, adapted to the rural develop-

ment regulations requirements, will allow programme managers to prepare and send to the Commission the structured and not structured documents relating to national RD strategies, operational programmes, declarations of expenditure, annual reports, monitoring indicators, evaluations etc. As for the other Funds, the system will offer facilities on real time information (calculation, consultation, search, reporting ...), data consistency, automatic error handling and transparency between all the partners involved in programme implementation.

By the end of August 2006 it will be possible to load and send to the Commission rural development programmes. Tailored functions in SFC2007 shall facilitate financial programming by checking coherence with the financial perspectives, minimum spending rates, co-financing ceilings etc, set out in Council Regulation 1698/2005.

By the end of September, authorised paying agencies and coordination bodies will be able to test loading and sending quarterly declarations of expenditure to the Commission. This will allow them to develop the interface between their local systems and SFC2007 in order to be operational by January 2007. With this interface, sending declarations to the Commission will become an extremely simple operation.

Similar facilities are being created for the others documents and information to be exchanged between the Commission and Member States (annual reports,

monitoring indicators, evaluations etc), in all cases duly tailored according to the specific RD legal basis.

Treatment by DG AGRI of declarations of expenditure, and payments to the Member States will follow rules quite different from the other funds covered by the system.

This is mainly due to the existence of predefined RD measures and axis, to the financial management on the ground according to the paying agencies accounting rules, and to the annual clearance of accounts procedure. This is the reason why DG AGRI has developed a separate back office (RDIS FIN), which will facilitate work between the Commission and paying agencies, without any disadvantage for managing authorities and other partners.



References

Circa

CIRCA is the official user-group for the SFC2007 project. The site contains all documents, specifications, procedures and software tools published. Note that the access is limited to registered users. For access please send a request to the helpdesk e-mail.

 <http://forum.europa.eu.int/Members/irc/regio/sfc2007/home>

Help-desk

The helpdesk serves as the unique contact point not just for normal user questions but for all questions concerning the SFC2007 system. User should use this e-mail for any questions concerning the SFC2007 system. The address should also be used for communication to the Commission the information mentioned in the check list (see section “Member State check list”).

e-mail: sfc2007-info@ec.europa.eu





Member State check list

- The member state administrations and the responsible for the management of the Funds must together with the Permanent Representations to the EU designate a centralised authority that will handle the access requests to the SFC2007 system. The details concerning this authority must be communicated to the Commission as soon as possible (see “Obtaining access to the system > Introduction“, p.8).
- Key-users should be identified in order to provide efficient training (see “Training & documentation“, p. 11 & 12).
- Local IT departments should apply for test certificates if the choice has been made to use the web-services interface (see “Testing > Certificates for testing (Web-services)“, p. 10 & 11).
-