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**TRANSPARENCY ON STRUCTURAL FUNDS'  
BENEFICIARIES IN ITALY AND EUROPE**

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The Public Investment Evaluation Unit (UVAL – *Unità di valutazione degli investimenti pubblici*) provides technical support to government bodies by preparing and disseminating methods for evaluating public investment programs and projects before, during and after the projects themselves, in part to optimize the use of EU Structural Funds. The unit is a part of the network of central and regional evaluation teams.

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## Transparency on Structural Funds' Beneficiaries in Europe and Italy

### *Abstract*

The paradigm of Open Government Data is quickly emerging as a powerful tool to foster governmental transparency and accountability, improve decision making, enhance citizens' knowledge and awareness, and encourage the creation of new public services. In parallel, EU Cohesion Policy is experiencing profound transformation. New regulation proposals for programming period 2014-2020 are currently highlighting the importance not only of publishing information on Structural Funds interventions and beneficiaries on line, but also of the format in which such information is made available, pursuant to the new regulation proposals by the European Commission. The present work aims to explore the different strategies EU regions are currently applying when publishing on line the lists of beneficiaries of Operational Programmes (OPs) co-funded by EU Structural Funds, and provides quantitative evidence and policy requirements so as to improve what currently available. To such end, an *ad-hoc* web-based survey has been carried out into the universe of all EU OPs co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), aiming to ascertain the presence or absence of specific quality features, based on the most recent academic literature and national and international guidelines on Open Government Data. The analysis performed enables exploring the most widespread patterns used for publishing data, highlighting their respective strengths and weaknesses and identifying good practices to replicate. Furthermore, each OP is evaluated according to the degree of implementation of the European Transparency Initiative guidelines set forth by the European Commission. The results show that the quality and quantity of information and data on projects and recipients diverge greatly between different types of OPs, geographical locations and types of public administration back-office organisations; yet a minimum dataset, required by current 2007-2013 Structural Funds Regulation, is always publicly available. The analysis also identifies both best and current practices of data publication. OPs are classified into three homogeneous groups according to the strategies adopted for data publication: (a) OPs solely focused on compliance with current regulation (61 percent), (b) OPs committed to making data accessible by non-technically oriented citizens (21 percent), and (c) OPs focused on quality, openness and re-use of data (18 for percent).

## La trasparenza sui beneficiari dei Fondi Strutturali in Italia e in Europa

### *Sommario*

Il paradigma degli *Open Government Data* si sta rapidamente affermando come strumento di trasparenza delle politiche pubbliche per migliorare i processi decisionali, rendere i cittadini più informati e consapevoli, favorire la creazione di nuovi servizi. Parallelamente, le politiche di coesione vivono una fase di profonda trasformazione in vista della programmazione 2014-2020 che vede una forte enfasi non solo sulla pubblicazione dei dati sugli interventi e sui beneficiari dei Fondi Strutturali, già oggi prevista, ma anche sul formato con cui rendere disponibili tali informazioni, come riportato nelle proposte di nuovi regolamenti della Commissione Europea. Il presente lavoro ha lo scopo di indagare le modalità di pubblicazione via web delle liste dei beneficiari dei Programmi Operativi (PO) co-finanziati dai Fondi Strutturali Comunitari attualmente adottate. Si forniscono, inoltre, evidenze quantitative e indicazioni di policy per migliorare quanto oggi disponibile. Al tal fine è stata condotta una rilevazione dei contenuti disponibili via web sull'universo di tutti i PO europei co-finanziati dal Fondo Europeo di Sviluppo Regionale (FESR) e dal Fondo Sociale Europeo (FSE) con l'obiettivo di verificare la presenza o assenza di specifiche caratteristiche di qualità, sulla base della più recente letteratura accademica e delle linee guida nazionali e internazionali in tema di *Open Government Data*. L'analisi effettuata ha permesso di esplorare i modelli più comuni di pubblicazione dei dati, evidenziandone punti di forza e di debolezza ed individuando buone pratiche da riutilizzare. Ciascun PO è stato valutato in base al grado di recepimento delle indicazioni della *European Transparency Initiative* della Commissione Europea, mostrando come quantità e qualità delle informazioni su beneficiari e progetti differiscano notevolmente tra diverse tipologie di PO, localizzazione geografica e modalità di gestione del *back office* delle Amministrazioni. Un "nucleo minimo" di dati, rappresentato da quanto previsto dal Regolamento 2007-2013 dei Fondi Strutturali, è comunque quasi sempre presente. I PO, infine, sono stati classificati in tre gruppi omogenei in funzione delle strategie di pubblicazione dei dati adottate: (a) Programmi focalizzati sull'adempimento burocratico (61 per cento), (b) Programmi focalizzati sulla fruibilità delle informazioni da parte degli utenti (21 per cento), e (c) Programmi focalizzati sulla qualità e riuso del dato (18 per cento).

*This work reports the findings of the analysis promoted by the Directorate General for EU Unitary Regional Policy (DGPRUC) of the Department for Development and Economic Cohesion (DPS) at Italy's Ministry of Economic Development, aiming to compare the quality of data on the lists of beneficiaries of Italy's Operational Programmes (OPs) with EU best practices.*

*Originating from a survey into the presence of distinctive features in the lists of beneficiaries published by Operational Programmes funded by EU Structural Funds, upon a web-based survey of sites of OPs Managing Authorities (MAs), this work gets to formulate a set of indications to ensure full transparency on the beneficiaries of EU Cohesion Policy resources.*

*The survey was set up in October 2010 and updated twelve months later. Some of the findings hereby reported were presented by the author on the occasion of institutional meetings and study seminars and have underlain, within the Department for Development and Economic Cohesion (DPS), an array of initiatives aimed at actively promoting enhanced quality, completeness and user-friendly information detail on the use of Structural Funds in Italy. Luigi Reggi works as an analyst and advisor on regional policy for research and innovation at the Directorate General for EU Unitary Regional Policy (DGPRUC) of the Department for Development and Economic Cohesion (DPS). He furthermore collaborates with the "Carlo Bo" University of Urbino and the "Sapienza" University of Rome on subjects related to IT and Communication dissemination in the public sector as well as on the impact of European Cohesion Policy. He facilitates the definition and sharing of the European research roadmap on Open Data in the framework of the CrossOver Project ([crossover-project.eu](http://crossover-project.eu)), and writes in the Regional Innovation Policies blog ([luigireggi.eu](http://luigireggi.eu)).*

*Chiara Assunta Ricci collaborated in data collection and analysis.*

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ERDF co-financing

Governance and Technical Assistance NOP 2007-2013

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## Foreword

The Open Government paradigm (i.e. the set of actions and initiatives aimed at increasing transparency in the public sector conduct) is quickly emerging as a powerful tool to improve decision making, raise citizens' awareness and information, and encourage the creation of new services. In this approach, it becomes of major importance to make data and information available – in an open format – on topics such as government practices and attainments, public administration's revenue and expenditure, and initially allocated and actually spent financial resources. Such information is made available in an open data format, which is the basic ingredient to favour re-use of data, which, in turn, can lead to an increasingly transparent public management and ensures citizens' informed participation in policies.

Over the past few years several initiatives have been raised at national and international level to promote increasingly wider access to data on public spending and recipients of funds managed by the public administration also through resources earmarked to specific objectives, programmes or initiatives. Ranging from *recovery.gov* (US site providing detail data on specific economic stimulus programmes) to *openspending.org* (Open Knowledge Foundation initiative to visualise public financial data from several countries) or *farmssubsidy.org* (collecting information on European aid to the Common Agricultural Policy) and, in Italy, OpenCPT (project coordinated by the Department for Development and Economic Cohesion to enable, *inter alia*, access to data on public revenue and expenditure with regional details<sup>1</sup>), several initiatives have been set up based on transparency on the use of public sector resources as an asset offered to users who either simply wish to: learn and be informed; or to: use and process/elaborate data to analyse dynamics; ascertain expenditures and investments made in the common interest; evaluate single initiatives; and, in some cases, offer applications and services based on such data. The availability of open data on the resources managed by public administrations (EU, national, local) is a patrimony to offer to the community, but it also is and can be an essential instrument for those in charge of evaluating public investments and ascertaining the use of such resources. Open re-usable information is an extraordinary ingredient to devise various evaluation methods and enrich public debates, by providing studies, research and informed requirements. The first spontaneous initiatives of Open Government have been rapidly followed by specific regulatory information which supports a progressive process of data and information opening at national and international level.

Designed to increase opportunities for citizens' growth and social inclusion regardless where they live, and usually financed through EU and national additional resources,

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<sup>1</sup> [www.dps.tesoro.it/cpt/banca\\_dati\\_home.asp](http://www.dps.tesoro.it/cpt/banca_dati_home.asp)

territorial Cohesion Policy is strongly involved in a process aimed at ensuring enhanced transparency and control on the resources assigned to central/local administrations, enterprises and individuals, in order to reduce territorial disparities. The EU supports Cohesion Policy through Structural Funds, which now account for approximately a third of the EU budget and whose Operational Programmes in Italy are complemented by operations funded through the national Development and Cohesion Fund.

The Regulations of Structural Funds for 2007-2013 require Member States and Operational Programmes' Managing Authorities to make available information on the use of the Funds and, in particular, to publish the lists of beneficiaries, intervention names, and amounts of public aid addressed to the projects. The European Transparency Initiative (ETI) of the European Commission, furthermore, provides requirements on key information to be reported in the lists of beneficiaries published as per relevant Regulations.

EU provisions certainly represent the first step in a path of profound innovation on going at national level, which aims to improve policy quality through the progressive opening of monitoring data on single funded interventions. Success certainly depends on informed citizens' participation and their possibility to express own points of view and exert positive pressure on the subjects responsible for expenditures.

The issue of transparency in EU Structural Funds management and use becomes further relevant in view of the 2014-2020 programming cycle, whose general Regulation proposal provides for Member States having to issue all information on their Operational Programmes in an open format which enables data processing and re-use (CSV or XML).

At national level Italy's Cohesion Action Plan, adopted in recent months and focused on strategic areas for social inclusion and growth in specific territories, proposes a transparency model that anticipates and broadens EU guidelines by integrating their information domains with the release of the data on the results and achievements of single interventions in open formats.

In this perspective, the present paper offers an assessment of current arrangements for the publication of the lists of Cohesion Policy beneficiaries. The assessment is based on an *ad-hoc* survey across the websites of the Managing Authorities (MAs) of Operational Programmes financed by EU Structural Funds, with the aim to compare quality, completeness and usability of the lists of OPs beneficiaries, study the Italian case in relation to the EU context, and identify, through statistical techniques, homogenous groups of OPs in terms of transparency.



## **I. Transparency in 2007-2013 EU Cohesion Policy**

### **I.1 Open Government Data paradigm**

The paradigm of Open Government and, in particular, of Open Government Data (OGD) is based on the idea that, through technology – and notably “Web 2.0” tools and methods – citizens can gain more transparent access to government documents and procedures and actively participate and collaborate, as well as reuse public data to create new services.

Although the EU Public Sector Information Directive on the reuse of public sector information has been in force since 2003 – with which the Commission has introduced common legislative standards to regulate the publication of public sector re-usable information – the rapid spreading of Open Government policies began after the publication of the Open Government Directive<sup>2</sup> by the President of the United States Barack Obama in December 2009. The Directive has given the concept of open government a more contemporary connotation identifying open data as an operational tool for participation and cooperation of citizens and businesses in public policy. Since then, many OECD countries have adopted national strategies to rationalise the dissemination of public data on line, in many cases through national or local portals where data are stored and categorised upon the US data.gov model.

The opening of public databases is presumed to be crucial not only in terms of public action transparency but also to promote the creation of new value-added services developed by knowledge-intensive private sector.

“*De facto*” standards defining “open data” can be identified in the 8 OGD principles issued by the Open Government Working Group<sup>3</sup> in 2007, currently considered as the reference point for data evaluation and requiring released information to be:

- Complete – All public data are made available. Public data are data that are not subject to valid privacy, security or privilege limitations.
- Primary – Data are published as collected at the source, with the finest possible level of granularity, not in aggregate or modified forms.
- Timely – Data are made available as quickly as necessary to preserve the value of the data.
- Accessible – Data are available to the widest range of users for the widest range of purposes.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/documents/open-government-directive>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.opengovdata.org/>

- Machine-processable – Data are reasonably structured to allow automated processing thereof.
- Non-discriminatory – Data are available to anyone, with no requirement for registration.
- Non-proprietary – Data are available in a format over which no entity has exclusive control.
- Licence-free – Data are not subject to any copyright, patent, trademark or trade secret regulation. Reasonable privacy, security and privilege restrictions may be allowed as governed by other statutes.

Special attention has been paid in recent years to the publication of data on public policies for economic development, notably on: the allocation of government budgets; detail of the most significant balance sheet items; implementation of economic stimulus measures set up during the crisis; and the destination, amount and impact of public subsidies to businesses.

The first official initiatives in this direction were launched by the U.S.A. through *USASpending.gov* and *Recovery.gov*, namely two web portals enabling citizens to search and quickly retrieve data on public spending, and track the impact of economic stimulus measures.

The Obama effect then started among federal institutions and is now spreading across the States: in 32 of them, according to the *US Public Interest Research Group*<sup>4</sup>, it is already required to provide very detailed databases on government spending available to public access.

Other experiences, conversely, have developed “bottom up”, organised by associations or foundations such as the *Sunlight Foundation* in the United States or the *Open Knowledge Foundation* in England. This is the case of the “*Where does my money go*”<sup>5</sup> Portal, which provides interactive visualisation and analysis of data on England’s public expenditure. In Europe also *FarmSubsidy*<sup>6</sup> and its “spin-off”, *FishSubsidy*, have developed “bottom up”. The two websites publish information on the subsidies provided by the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), itemised by single Member State. Properly geo-localised data on each single beneficiary are aggregated into a single database where users can carry out targeted searches which would be impossible through traditional publication methods by Member States.

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<sup>4</sup> US PRIG, *Following the Money*, 2011

<sup>5</sup> <http://wheredoesmymoneygo.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.farmsubsidy.org>

## **I.2 2007-2013 Cohesion Policy: Operational Programmes and initiatives for transparency**

The EU Cohesion Policy has the primary purpose of promoting the overall harmonious development of the European Union and its regions by reducing regional disparities (Article 174 of the Treaty). Through EU Structural Funds co-financing of national and regional programmes (i.e. the second item of the EU budget after the CAP), Cohesion Policy aims to promote competitiveness and employment in the regions recording highest growth and, above all, to foster convergence between the most developed areas and the under-utilised areas in the Union.

It is notably in most disadvantaged countries and regions that the introduction (through EU rules and regulations) of practices and tools such as systematic ex-ante, on-going and ex-post evaluation of interventions influences not only the quality of policies co-financed by EU Structural Funds but also the administrative capacity of public authorities responsible for OPs and, indirectly, the quality of national and regional ordinary policies.

In this sense, the focus on transparency in the management of SF co-financing policy can be a powerful lever for disseminating a more conscious culture of administrative transparency (i.e. open government) among European regions.

Structural Funds<sup>7</sup> Regulations for 2007-2013 already require Member States and Managing Authorities of Operational Programmes to provide information on the measures financed. Article 69 of Council Regulation No 1083 of 11 July 2006 states “*The Member State and the managing authority for the operational programme shall provide information on and publicise operations and co-financed programmes. The information shall be addressed to European Union citizens and beneficiaries with the aim of highlighting the role of the Community and ensure that assistance from the Funds is transparent.*”

In particular the managing authority shall be responsible for organising the publication, electronically or otherwise, of the list of beneficiaries, the names of the operations and the amount of public funding allocated to the operations (Article 7 of Regulation No 1828 of 8 December 2006).

In addition, in November 2005, the European Commission launched the European Transparency Initiative (ETI), which covers a wide range of subjects such as: public access to documents; enhanced information on EU funds management, use, and beneficiaries; professional ethics of public office holders in European institutions; and lobbying transparency.

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<sup>7</sup> European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF)

Among the issues, ETI also focuses on the disclosure of information on the recipients of EU funds disbursed under shared management, as specified in the Green Paper presented by the European Commission on 3 May 2006.

In 2008, the Commission provided guidance to Member States on how to implement the ETI through a Guidance Note agreed upon by Member States on the occasion of the Coordination Committee of the Funds (COCOF) of 23 April 2008.

The main standards provided by COCOF as to transparency on EU funds beneficiaries (itemised in the indicative table annexed to the Guidance Note) suggest that the lists of beneficiaries should indicate:

- The name of the individual, entity or firm, whether public or private, responsible for initiating and carrying out operations (Article 2 of Council Regulation No. 1083/2006);
- The name of the operation;
- The amount of public funding committed to the operation;
- The amount of public funding paid to the beneficiary at the end of the operation;
- The year of final payment;
- The date of the last update.

The initiative also includes the creation of a clickable<sup>8</sup> map of Europe with links to websites where databases are loaded.

Through the National Strategic Reference Framework, Italy's articulation of the 2007-2013 ERDF and ESF programming provides for overall 66 OPs, of which 52 under the "Convergence" Objective (CONV Obj. – 19 OPs) and the "Regional Competitiveness and Employment" Objective (RCE – 33 OPs), while the remaining 14 OPs fall within the "European Territorial Cooperation" Objective. The CONV Objective includes National Operational Programmes (NOPs) – namely 7 Regional (ROPs) and 2 Interregional (NIOPs). Conversely the RCE includes 32 ROPs and 1 NOP.

Each Operational Programme pursues specific and operational objectives as per the action lines associated with single projects.

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<sup>8</sup> The map of ERDF programmes is available at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/country/commu/beneficiaries/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/beneficiaries/index_en.htm)

**Table I.1 - RCE and CONV Objectives' OPs co-financed by 2007-2013 Structural Funds itemised by objective area, programme typology, and fund**

	ERDF	ESF	TOT
<b>CONV, of which:</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>
National or Interregional	7	2	9
Regional	5	5	10
<b>RCE, of which:</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>33</b>
National or Interregional		1	1
Regional	16	16	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>52</b>

*Note:* CONV: "Convergence" Objective  
RCE: "Regional Competitiveness and Employment" Objective  
ERDF: European Regional Development Fund  
ESF: European Social Fund

*Source:* Italy's NSRF 2007-2013

### I.3 European Transparency Initiative implementation – Assessment

The objective of this section is to assess whether and how the specific instructions provided by the European Transparency Initiative (ETI) on publication of the lists of beneficiaries of EU Structural Funds are implemented by Italian and EU Operational Programmes. In this sense, the survey updates – through quantitatively rich detail – a report on the subject commissioned by the European Parliament and presented in July 2010<sup>9</sup>, and a subsequent report commissioned by DG Regional Policy of the European Commission published in December 2010<sup>10</sup>. To this end, a score was assigned to each Operational Programme under EU27 RCE and CONV Objectives, based on the number of COCOF suggestions dated 23 April 2008 (listed above) fulfilled by the Managing Authority (see Table I.2. below).

**Table I.2 - Scores assigned to each OP**

Number of fulfilled criteria	Score (%)
0/6	0
1/6	16.7
2/6	33.3
3/6	50.0
4/6	66.7
5/6	83.3
6/6	100.0

*Note:* Criteria are: 1) Name of the individual, entity or firm, whether public or private, responsible for initiating and carrying out the operations; 2) Name of the operation; 3) Amount of public funding committed to the operation; 4) Amount of public funding paid to the beneficiary at the end of the operation; 5) Year of final payment; 6) Date of last update.

<sup>9</sup> Centre for Industrial Studies, *The Data Transparency Initiative and its Impact on Cohesion Policy*, Report for the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development, 2008.

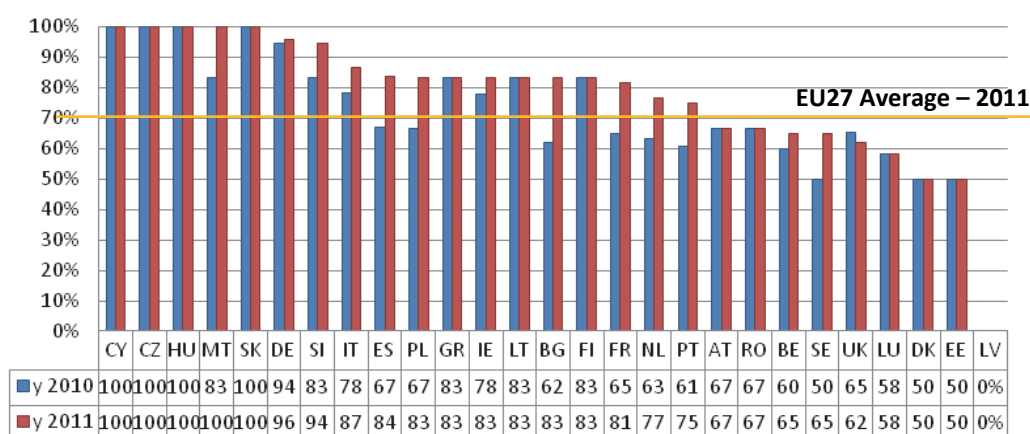
<sup>10</sup> Technopolis Group, Study on the quality of websites containing lists of beneficiaries of EU Structural Funds – *A final Report to DG Regional Policy*, 2010.

Figure I.1 shows the average level of compliance, itemised by Member State, with the European Commission instructions on data collected in 2010 and 2011. The index results from a simple average of the scores assigned to OPs in each Member State.

At EU level, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Slovakia turn out to be fully compliant with ETI requirements. Latvia does not seem to satisfy any EU requirement, as its thematic website dedicated to EU funds only provides links to the websites of the various administrations responsible for the projects but does not publish a single list itemised by OP or a single template for the several lists, which thus turn out to be all different. The EU average is equal to 82 percent.

Versus the findings revealed by the 2010 survey, only the United Kingdom's position has worsened<sup>11</sup>. Belgium records the highest percentage deviation versus the previous year, and Malta is the only country whose compliance level shifted from 83 percent in 2010 to 100 percent 2011, thus meeting all the set requirements.

**Figure I.1 - EU27 OPs average level of compliance with ETI: 2011 versus 2010**



Source: Web-based survey

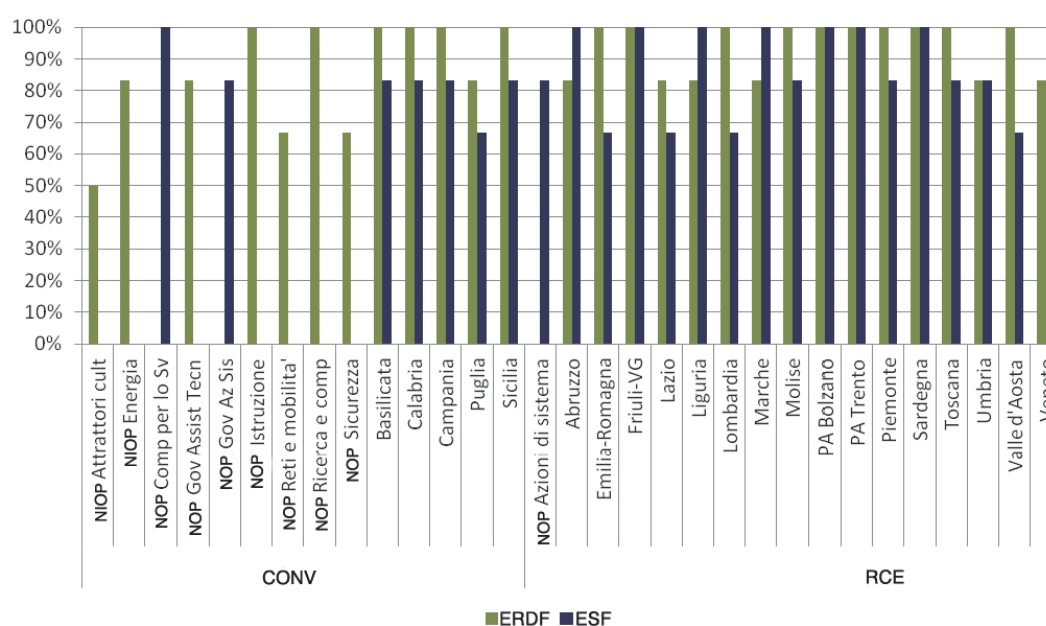
In 2011 Italy's Operational Programmes attained an average score equal to 87 percent, higher than the EU average. Figure I.2 illustrates in detail the score attained by Italy's single Operational Programmes. The level of compliance with ETI requirements strongly varies across programmes, unlike other EU countries, Italy does not hold a unified national *repository* of information on beneficiaries; on the contrary, each Italian Managing Authority manages its own information system.

<sup>1</sup> The websites of four UK Operational Programmes were no longer available during October 2011; their cores are therefore equal to zero.

ERDF programmes' level of compliance proves on an average higher than ESF programmes (90 percent versus 82 percent); likewise RCE OPs show higher scores than CONV OPs (90 percent versus 85 percent).

Among national programmes, only “Research and Competitiveness” NOP and “Education” NOP show full compliance with the Commission instructions. Conversely, the regional authorities attaining maximum score both for ERDF and ESF Programmes are Sardinia, Friuli Venezia Giulia and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano (all under RCE Objective).

**Figure I.2 - Italy's OPs level of compliance with ETI requirements**



*Note:* Convergence (CONV), Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE)

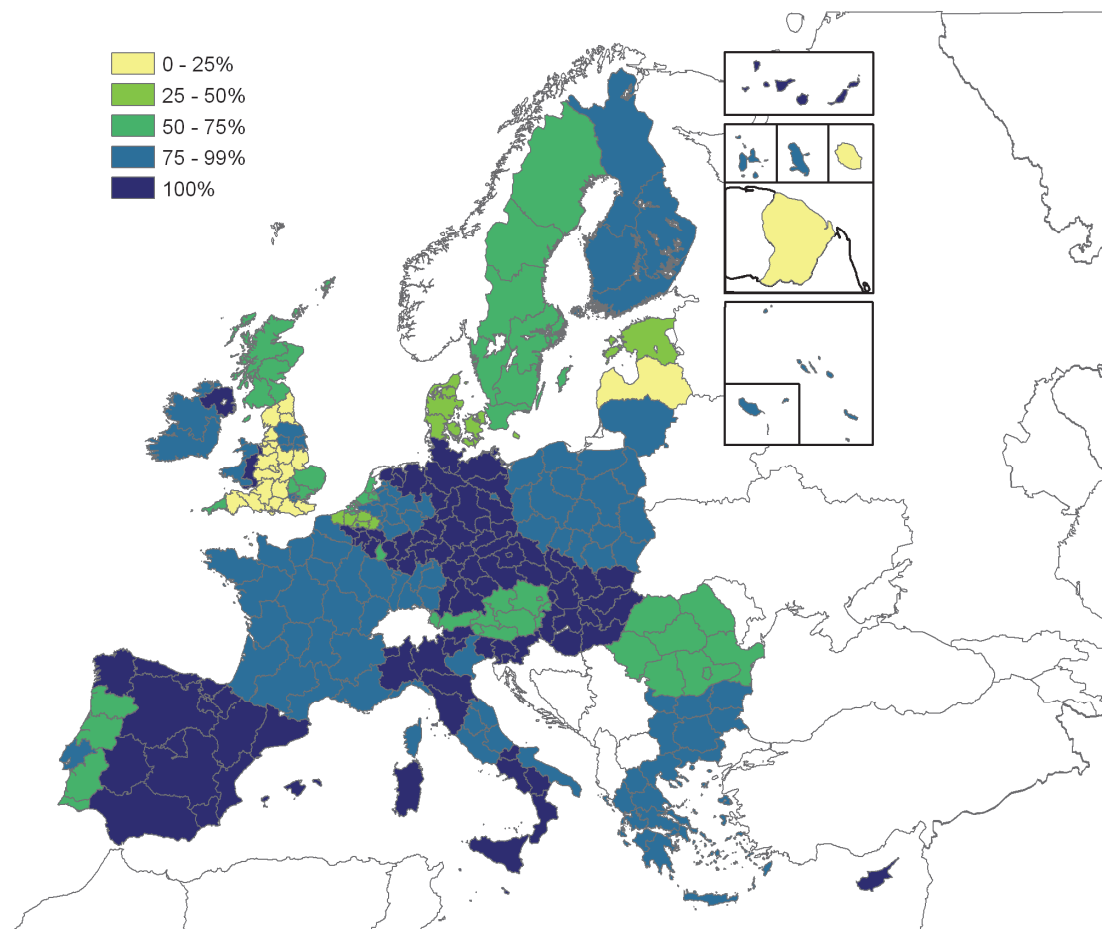
*Source:* Web-based survey

The map in Figure I.3 provides a representation of the compliance index itemised by NUTS2 EU Region. For each region, a weighted average was calculated between the level recorded by the Regional Operational Programme and, whereby present, by national and multi-regional Programmes impacting on the territory. The financial dimension of the programme is employed as weight, based on the amounts of EU co-financing to regional OP and national or multiregional OPs (evenly divided by the number of regions on which the OP focuses)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, the score assigned to Sicily results from the weighted average between Sicily ROP index and the indices of the 5 ERDF NOPs related to the regional territory. The weights considered in the weighted

The map helps identify those cases showing disparities in terms of performances by Member States' programmes: besides countries with a uniform colour, indicating the presence of a centralised information system (e.g. France, Spain, Poland, etc.), countries with internal variability are shown. The United Kingdom is a clear example, as it encompasses regions largely compliant with ETI requirements alongside regions recording very low scores.

**Figure I.3 - NUTS2 ERDF OPs level of compliance with ETI requirements (2011)**



*Source:* Web-based survey

average are: for Sicily ROP, the amount of the Community co-financing; and, for the 5 NOPs, the amounts of Community co-financing evenly divided among the 4 Convergence Regions.



## II. Quality of data on beneficiaries: Survey and Analysis

This Chapter analyses data on the lists of beneficiaries published by the 363 EU27 ERDF/ESF OPs approved in July 2009<sup>13</sup>, through first-hand visits paid to all the websites promoted by EU Managing Authorities. The identification of the lists of beneficiaries was performed starting from the websites of DG Regional Policy and DG Employment of the European Commission, which provide direct links to web pages where data are made available. With regard to non available or damaged links, a web-based survey was carried out via most common search engines. The resulting information was cross-referenced with data on programmes made available in the Community monitoring system (i.e. types of programmes, impacted areas, funds, objectives, amounts of resources, etc.). The analysis relies on a database provided by DG Regional Policy and updated in September 2011.

Assessing the lists based on contents available on the web aims to exclude elements of subjectivity which are typical of other search methods (e.g. questionnaires, interviews). Relative variables reference 39 characteristics<sup>14</sup>.

### II.1 Selecting target features

Table II.1 illustrates the list of variables identified amongst data on Structural Funds' beneficiaries, grouped into homogenous categories and two macro-categories.

Consistently with the classification elaborated by the Center for Technology in Government of the State University of New York<sup>15</sup>, the two macro-categories refer to the two basic principles of access and dissemination of government information, namely *Stewardship* and *Usefulness*.

The former – *Stewardship* – includes the actions and policies addressed to data “care” and aiming to ensure information quality and detail, reduce the risk of misuse, and consequently increase users' confidence in government information.

The latter – *Usefulness* – includes the creation of added value for citizens and enterprises and innovation promotion, thus understanding the actions aimed at making data more accessible to end-users.

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<sup>13</sup> Cooperation programmes are excluded.

<sup>14</sup> Variables collected both in 2010 and 2011. In 2010 the number of variables collected is slightly higher (see Annex A).

<sup>15</sup> S. Dawes, *Stewardship and Usefulness: Policy principles for information-based transparency*, Government Information Quarterly 27 (2010) 377-383.

Under the first principle<sup>16</sup>, categories such as *content* and *financial data* are aimed at evaluating the level of detail with which information is provided. Besides the minimum set of information required by regulations, the Managing Authority can provide further details both on funded projects and final beneficiaries' features. Conversely, the category of *data quality* refers to the features of *databases* containing information, whereas categories such as *downloadable file format* and *licence* relate to how data are made available.

Under the second principle<sup>17</sup>, *database consultation through masks* includes variables that describe the level of detail and possible options and features offered by the specific web pages and forms for data browsing, or by the websites that enable visualising data in graphical form or through interactive processing.

Annex A provides a detailed list of the variables identified, complemented with their description, definition, and reference methodological aspects.

Variables were identified by considering (besides compliance with the instructions in the Governance Notes of 2008 mentioned in paragraph I.2) consistency with the eight principles of Open Government Data listed in Section I.1 and the EU Directive on public information re-use<sup>18</sup>. Additional sources for the categorisation of variables are the guidelines issued by the Central Office of Information – Great Britain<sup>19</sup> (a guide addressed to those involved in public sector communication and to British websites operators), which establishes minimum requirements for the publication of documents in re-usable formats, also paying attention to issues such as ease of finding information and clear data description.

The survey also took into account the intrinsic characteristics of the lists of Structural Funds' beneficiaries emerged from empirical analysis and from the requirements set out in the two previous studies on the publication of currently available lists of Structural Funds' beneficiaries<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> The principle of *stewardship* as to access and dissemination of public data is broken down into five categories: "Content", "Financial Data", "Downloadable file format", "Information Quality", "Licence".

<sup>17</sup> The principle of *usefulness* as to public data accessibility is broken down into two categories: "Database consultation through search masks", and "Advanced Functions".

<sup>18</sup> Directive 2003/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 November 2003 on the re-use of public sector information – Official Journal L 345, 31/12/2003 P. 0090-0096.

<sup>19</sup> Central Office of Information – COI (2010)

<sup>20</sup> Centre for Industrial Studies (2008) and Technopolis Group (2010).

## II.2 Predominant features in Italy and Europe

Table II.2 illustrates the characteristics of the lists of beneficiaries and displays (in the last two columns) the relative presence in percentage of each characteristic of ERDF and ESF Italian and EU OPs, with reference to 2011. Satisfactory results are related, as highlighted by the previous analysis<sup>21</sup>, to the characteristics suggested by ETI<sup>22</sup>, although the amount of funding actually paid out at end-operation is not always specified. The “payment” variable is, in fact, only present in 65 percent of cases in Italy and 43 percent in Europe.

Nevertheless the Regulation does not provide for additional variables aiming to ease information retrieval, immediate comprehension and reusability, which are thus left to Member States’ discretionality and lead to very heterogeneous findings.

Best chances for improvement in terms of transparency and re-use of information concern the format used for publication. The PDF format – difficult to reprocess – is in fact the most widely used, and is present in 87 percent of Italian OPs and 64 percent of EU27 OPs. Conversely, the RDF format, consistent with the linked data<sup>23</sup> paradigm and optimal for re-use, turns out to be totally absent.

The date of the last update is made explicit only in 19 percent of the lists of beneficiaries in Europe and data are described in a small percentage of OPs as well as the translation of the fields in another EU language (only 4 percent in Italy and 13 percent in the EU): simply taking such characteristics into account would strongly improve the quality of published data and encourage cross-country comparisons.

The licence under which the information is published is never made explicit. The clarification of an open licence such as Creative Commons<sup>24</sup> or Open Data<sup>25</sup> (the Italian licence specifically developed for public databases) would help dispel any doubts on the actual possibility of re-using the information published.

Eventually, there is ample room for improvement also on information usefulness, as the presence of search masks and interactive maps still proves limited. The creation of this type of interface for users has been criticised by analysts having a “pure” approach to

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<sup>21</sup> See Paragraph II.3

<sup>22</sup> As specified in Paragraph II.3: Name of the individual, entity or firm, whether public or private, responsible for initiating and carrying out the operations; Name of the operation; Amount of public funding committed to the operation; Amount of public funding paid to the beneficiary at the end of the operation; Year of final payment; Date of last update.

<sup>23</sup> “Linked data”: Method of publishing structured data so that it can be interlinked and become more useful. It builds upon standard web technologies such as HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) and URI (Uniform Resource Identifier), but rather than using them to serve web pages for human readers, it extends them to share information in a way that can be read automatically by computers. This enables data from different sources to be connected and queried automatically. See Berners-Lee (2006).

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.creativecommons.it/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.formez.it/i odl/>

open data<sup>26</sup>, who grant more importance to Administrations' efforts to publish the underlying data, which in turn enable the creation of new interfaces and services by private entities such as developers of applications or journalists who base their surveys or investigations on such data. This approach largely relies on the availability of new technologies with low or very low costs both for development of services accessible via the Internet and for processing of large amounts of data that can lead, for example, to improved decision-making.

The data collected partly contribute to confirming such criticism: approximately one-fifth of the Operational Programmes in the EU, in fact, makes data available only via web interfaces and search masks but does not directly provide downloadable files, thus making their re-use very difficult.

More functionally to Open Government objectives, it can therefore be assumed that, on the one hand, public sector efforts to develop platforms and web interfaces can certainly ease data consultation and use by wider audience; on the other hand, it is however necessary to enable free acquisition of “raw” data, with the highest level of granularity.

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<sup>26</sup> See: Robinson et al. (2009).

Table II.1 - Characteristics of the lists of beneficiaries of 2007-2013 SF-cofinanced OPs: presence percentages (2011)

Macro-category	Category	Characteristics	ETI	Italy Av. %	EU27 Av. %
Stewardship	Content	Final Beneficiary	Yes	100	97
		Project	Yes	100	97
		Axis		65	45
		Specific/Operat. Objectives		52	25
		Intervention Line		25	15
		Project description		12	18
		Award and payment dates	Yes	75	70
		Project start/end dates		2	17
		Status (active/completed)		6	19
	Financial Data	Financial value allocated to the project	Yes	100	97
		Payments	Yes	65	43
		EU co-financing		17	37
		National co-financing (or other)		10	12
	Downloadable file format	PDF		87	64
		DOC		0	1
		HTML (single page)		6	6
		HTML (multiple pages)		12	23
		XLS		8	31
		CSV		2	1
		XML, JSON		0	0
		RDF, linked data		0	0
	Information Quality	Last update date	Yes	88	91
		Update frequency		8	19
		Data description		12	16
		Fields description in another language		4	13
		Number of clicks from home page < 3 robots.txt does not prevent search engine search		25	65
				0	0
	Licence	Evidence of data publication licence		0	0
Usefulness	DB consultation through masks	Search by Fund type		6	29
		Search by Project		10	27
		Search by OP		2	31
		Search by Axis/Object./Action		6	17
		Search by Beneficiary		10	13
		Search by Resources		2	8
		Search by Territory/Area		10	19
		Search by Project status		0	7
	Advanced Functions	Georeferencing through maps		0	16
		Visualisation through graphs and other elaborations		2	17
		Data with sub-regional detail		29	18

Note: ETI = Characteristic included in the ETI suggestions – Source: Web-based survey

### **II.3 Data quality, completeness and accessibility categories: comparative analysis at EU regional levels**

For each of the categories composing *Stewardship* and *Usefulness* in terms of access and dissemination of data on Structural Funds' beneficiaries, as follows the itemisation of the results attained by EU Operational Programmes through a simple index (expressed in percentage) resulting from the sum of the characteristics already active versus theoretically overall "activable" characteristics:

- "Content" Index
- "Financial Data" Index
- "Information Quality" Index
- "Search masks" Index
- "Advanced Functions" Index
- "Format" Index.

Each representation aims to compare Italy's performance with other EU countries' and includes:

- A map of ERDF OPs at EU level, providing regional detail. For each region an average has been calculated between the Regional Operational Programme index value and, whereby present, National and multi-Regional Programmes impacting on the same regional territory<sup>27</sup>;
- A graph comparing the average of ERDF and ESF programmes in Italy and in the EU;
- A graph comparing the average of programmes whose data are included in centralised system at national level with programmes that have developed own solutions<sup>28</sup>;
- A graph comparing the performance of each country, analysing evolutions over time (October 2010 – October 2011).

#### ***II.3.1 Content***

The index of the "Content" category is composed of the following variables (see Table II.1):

- Final Beneficiary
- Project

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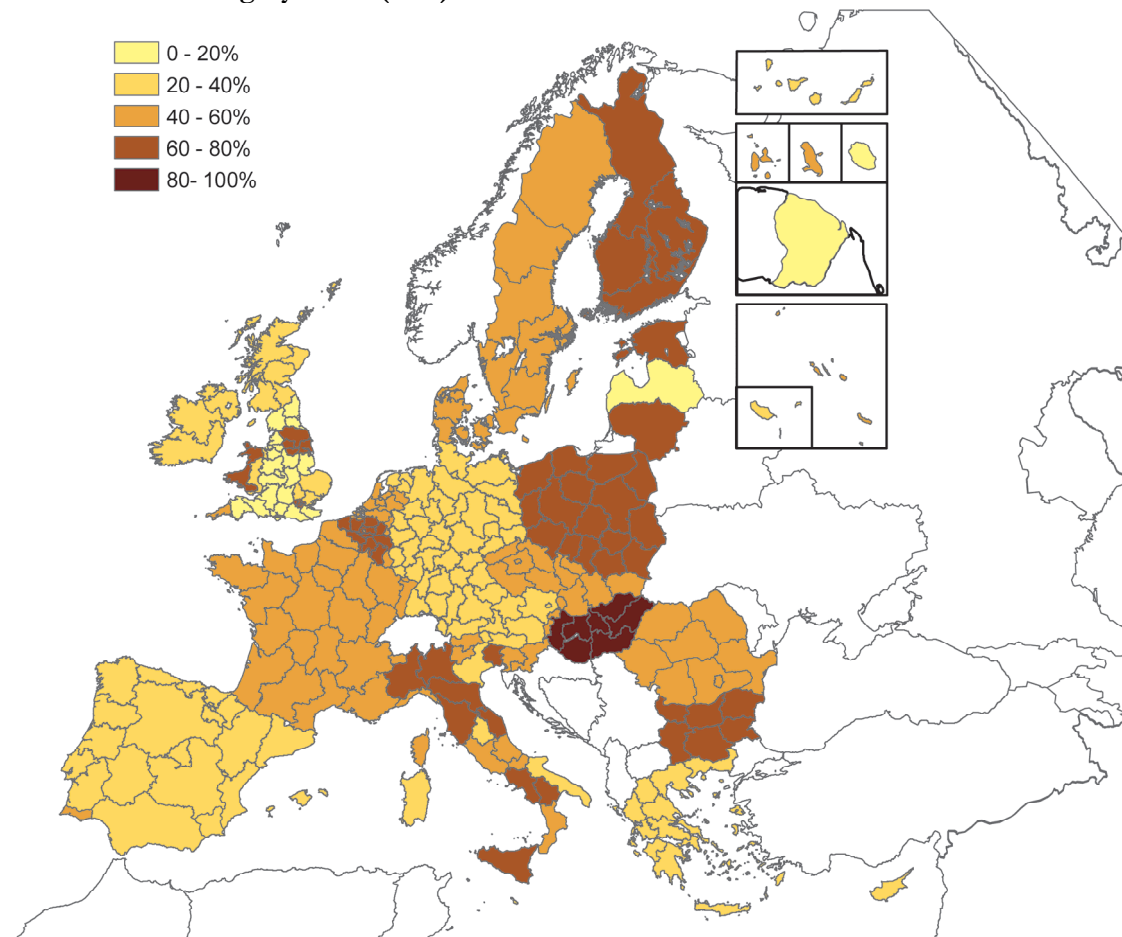
<sup>27</sup> Weighted average using programme's financial size as weights.

<sup>28</sup> The countries hosting more than one NUTS2 region and adopting a centralised system are: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain, France, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Finland, and Sweden.

- Axis
- Specific/Operational Objectives
- Intervention Line
- Project description
- Award and payment dates
- Project start/end dates
- Status (active/completed)

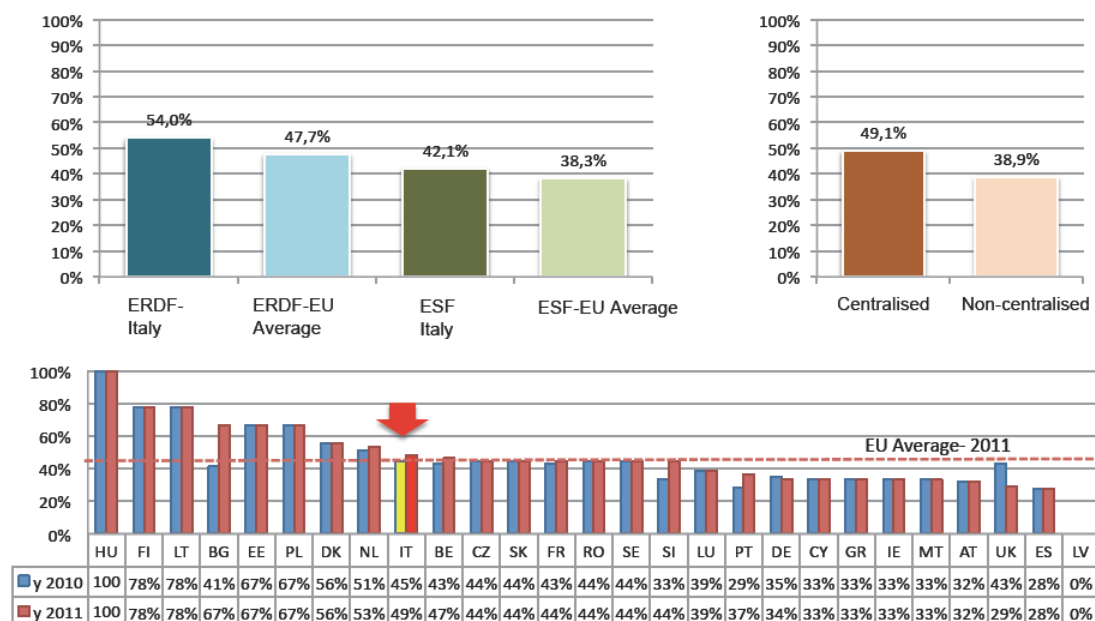
Figures II.1 and II.2, referring to the index of the “Content” category, indicate the level of detail of information on OPs beneficiaries.

**Figure II.1 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF OPs beneficiaries: “Content” category index (2011)**



*Source:* Web-based survey

Figure II.2 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF/ESF OPs beneficiaries: “Content” category index (2011)



Source: Web-based survey

Italy ranks slightly above the EU average and shows remarkable differences at regional level. Most of Italy’s OPs present a highly detailed description of the information provided, with index values higher than 66 percent and a few exceptions notably related to ESF programmes. Italy’s ERDF average is relatively high (54 percent), notably if compared with the EU average (48 percent); conversely, ESF OPs record lower levels (42 and 38 percent, respectively). Centralised systems seem to better ensure complete information: countries using centralised systems reveal significantly higher index levels (49 percent versus 39 percent).

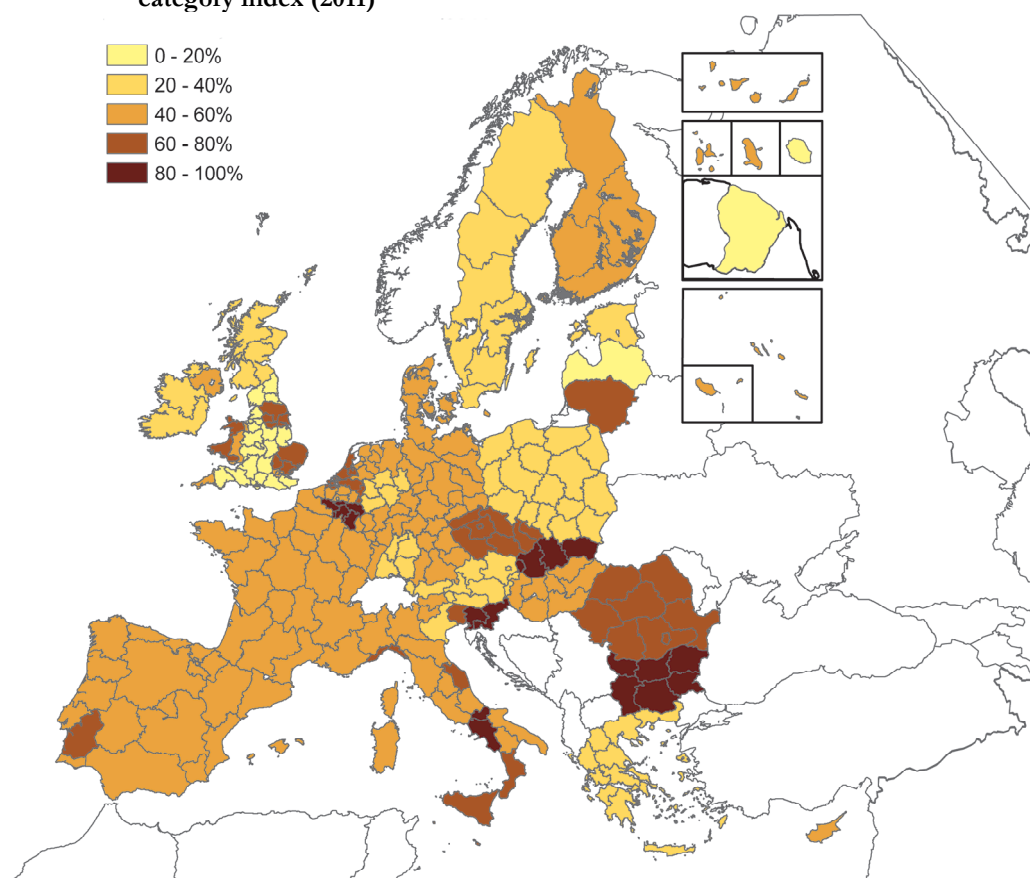
Among EU countries, most detailed contents are related to Hungary (100 percent), Finland and Latvia. Furthermore, Bulgaria, Sweden and Portugal indicate an index increase between 2010 and 2011; conversely, the United Kingdom is the only country recording a decrease (See Footnote 10).

### II.3.2 Financial Data

Figures II.3 and II.4 illustrate the “Financial Data” index, which includes variables such as “Financial value allocated to the Project”, “Payments”, “EU co-financing”, and “National (or other) co-financing”.

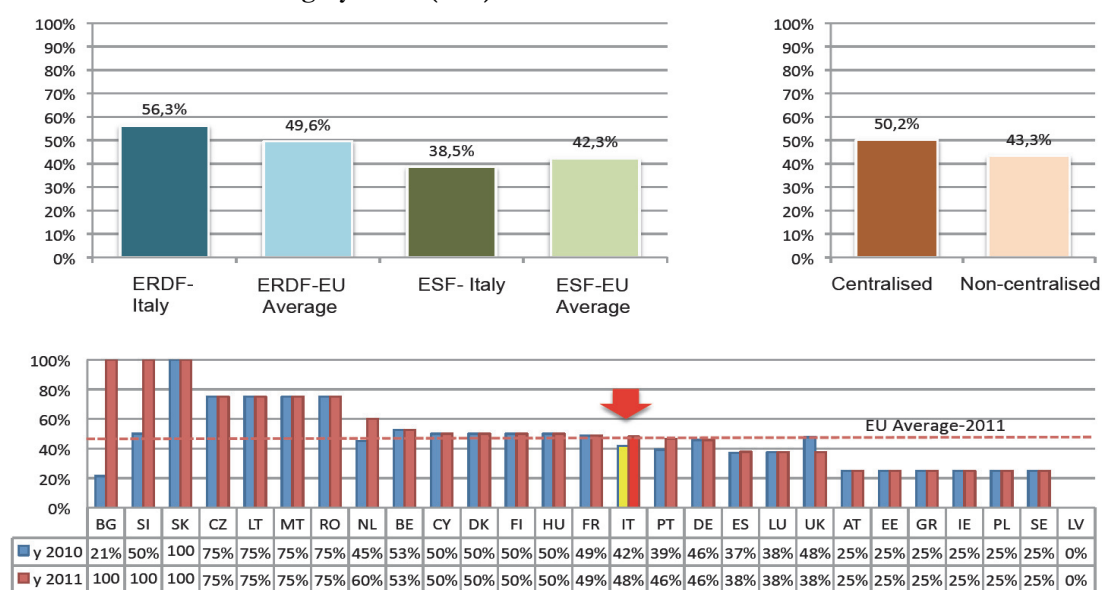


**Figure II.3 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF OPs beneficiaries: “Financial Data” category index (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

**Figure II.4 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF/ESF OPs beneficiaries: “Financial Data” category index (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

Also in this case Italy is in line with the EU average, with values above the average as to the ERDF and below the average as to the ESF.

As in the case of the “Content” index, the EU situation is quite heterogeneous, with some programmes in Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovak Republic representing best practices. The same goes for Italian programmes. ERDF programmes such as “Campania” and “Research and Competitiveness” record the highest index value, 100 percent.

### ***II.3.3 Quality***

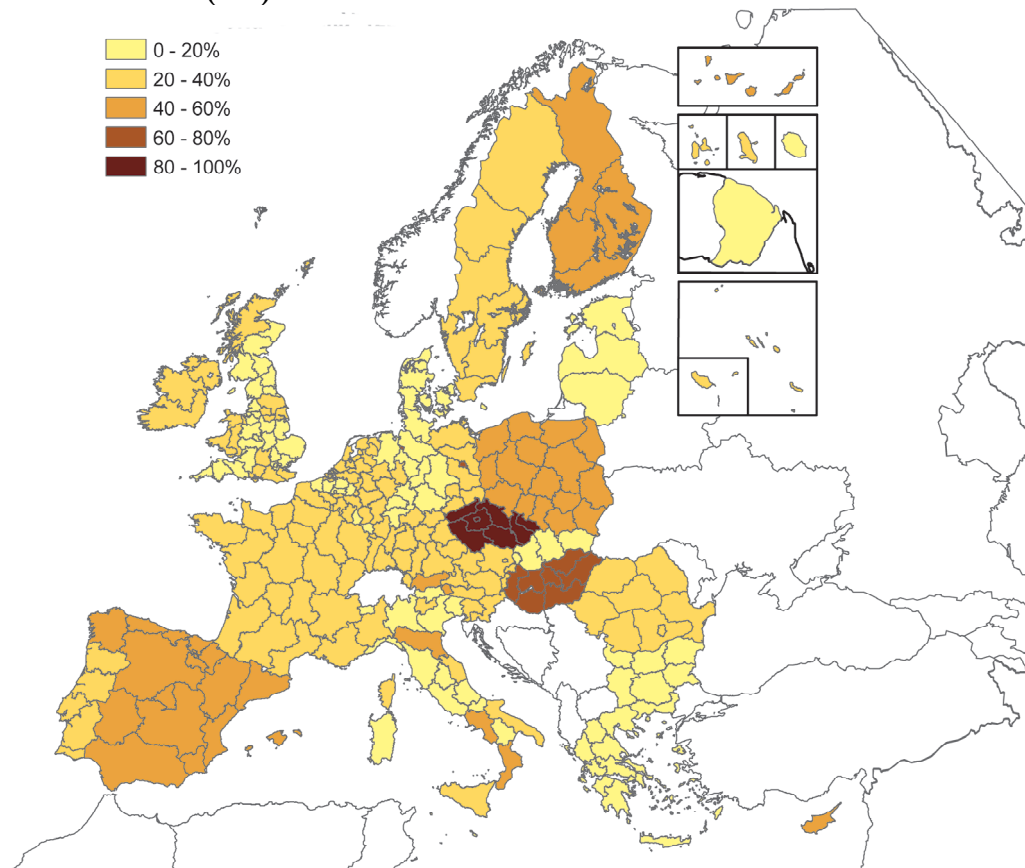
The “Quality” category measures the degree of update, description and accessibility of information. The index results from the sum of the presence of the following variables:

- Last update date
- Update frequency
- Data description
- Description of fields in another language
- Number of clicks from home page < 3
- *robots.txt* does not prevent the search through search engines.

Italy’s position in this category is below the EU average, both for ERDF and ESF programmes. Strong differences are evident at regional level. Umbria’s ESF OP and “Calabria”, “Campania”, “Research and Competitiveness” and “Emilia-Romagna” ERDF programmes represent Italy’s best practices with index values higher than 50 percent. Better performances are attained by the programmes implemented by the Czech Republic (83 percent) and Hungary (67 percent).

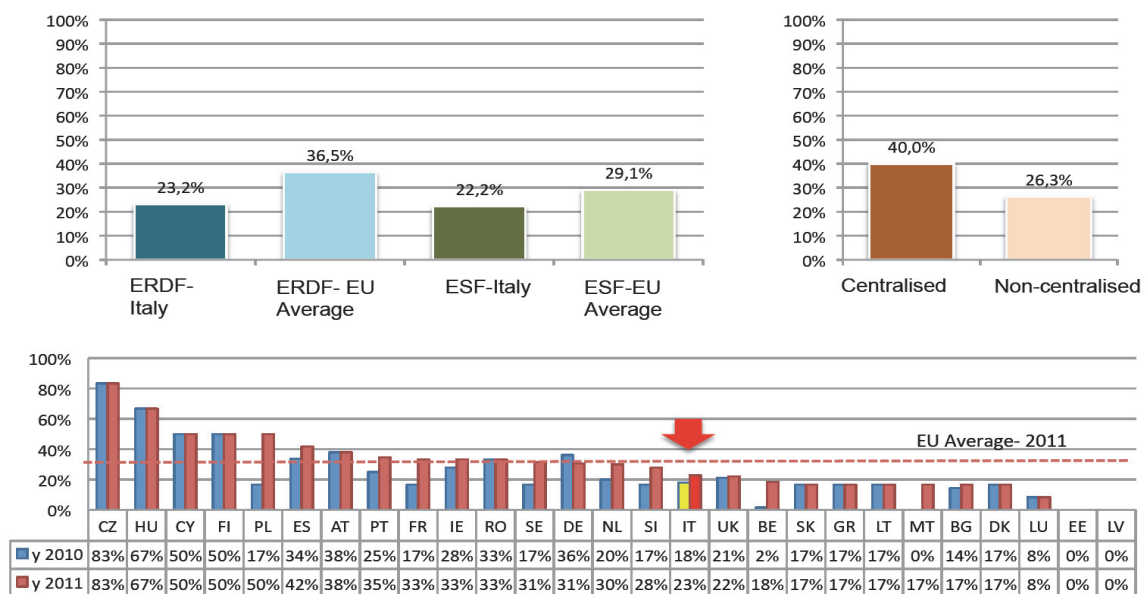
In this case, the added value resulting from the adoption of centralised systems for access to data is evident, allowing for averagely much higher data accessibility and updating (40 percent versus 26 percent), on an average.

**Figure II.5 - Characteristics of 2007-2013 ERDF OPs beneficiaries data: “Quality” category index (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

**Figure II.6 - Characteristics of 2007-2013 ERDF/ESF OPs beneficiaries data: “Quality” index category (2011)**



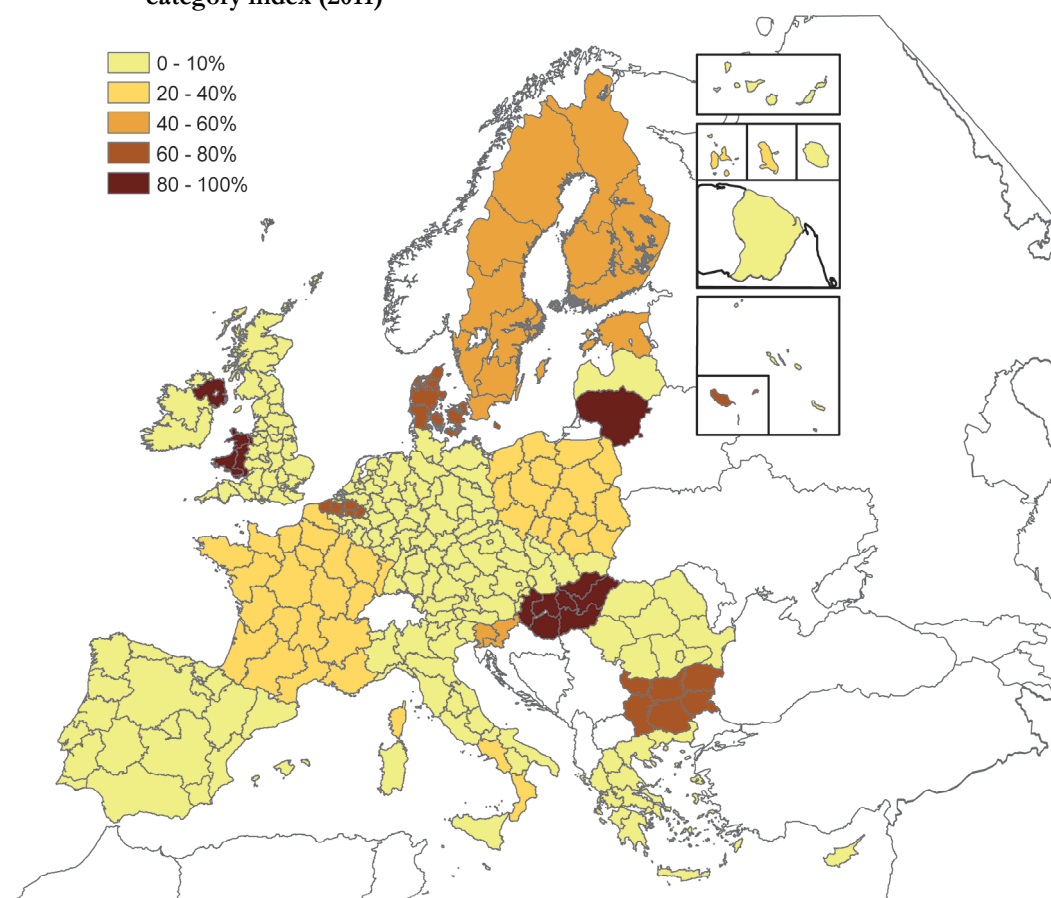
Source: Web-based survey

### II.3.4 Search masks

Figures II.7 and II.8 show the index distribution as to the availability of interactive search masks for access to information, and reveal these methods are still reserved to definitely few subjects both in Italy and in the EU. The few “experiments” identified mainly concern the centralised systems of France, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Hungary and Bulgaria, but are extremely rare within non-centralised systems.

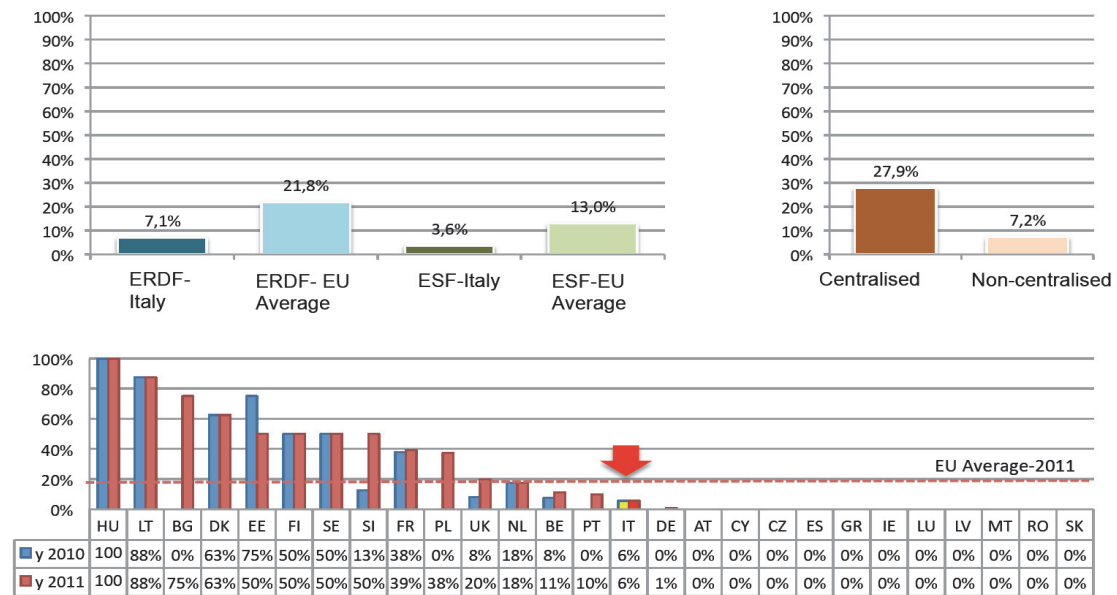
As to Italy: the “Calabria” ERDF ROP has available a search interface; while the “Campania” ROP (ERDF/ESF data) and the “Education” NOP utilise data access masks.

**Figure II.7 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF OPs beneficiaries: “Search masks” category index (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

Figure II.8 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF/ESF OPs beneficiaries: “Search masks” category index (2011)



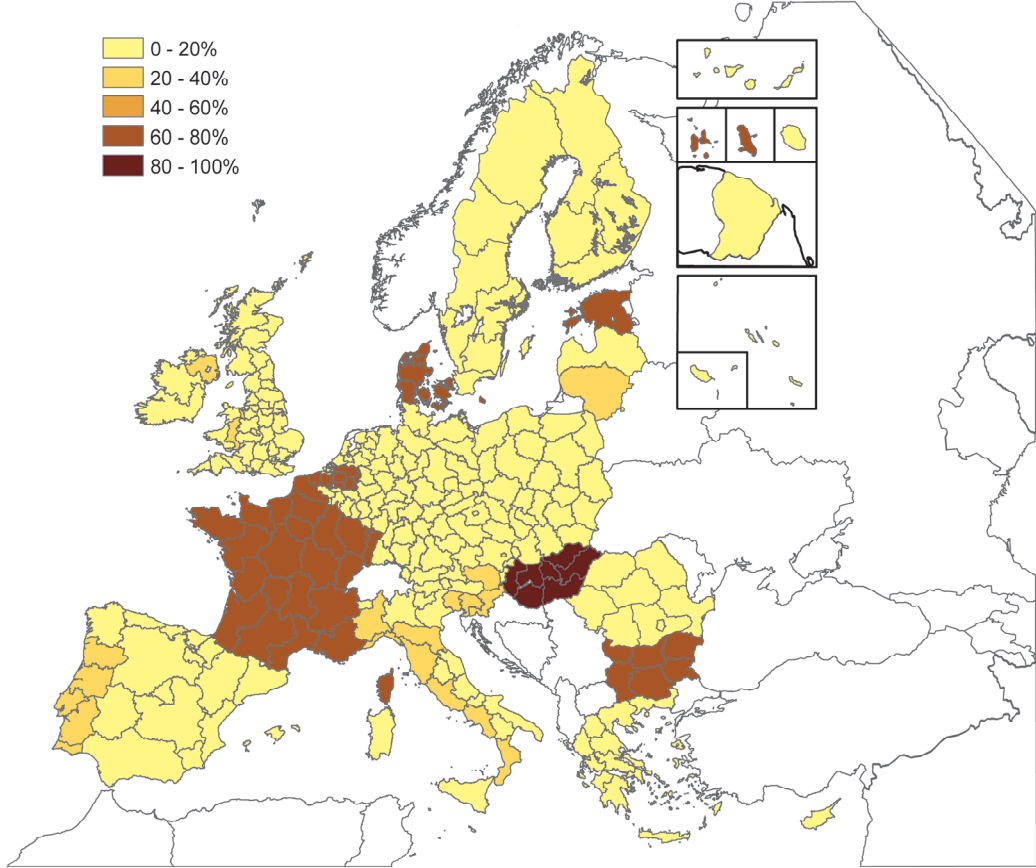
Source: Web-based survey

### II.3.5 Advanced functions

Figures II.9 and II.10 show the distribution of the index related to advanced functions for data presentation tools such as graphs and maps, or other types of processing. Even in this case, such characteristics are quite rare, both in Italy and in the EU.

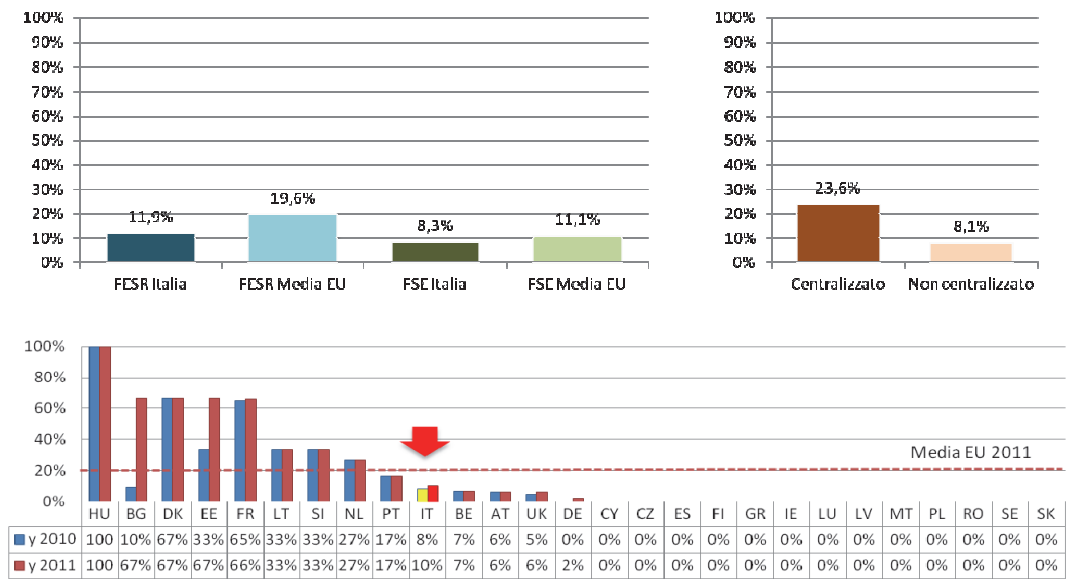
In Italy, the “Calabria” NOP (ERDF) proves to be the most advanced programme, offering search masks as well as data representations in graphical form.

**Figure II.9 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF OPs beneficiaries: “Advanced Functions” category index (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

**Figure II.10 - Characteristics of data on 2007-2013 ERDF/ESF OPs beneficiaries: “Advanced Functions” category index (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

### II.3.6 Format

The “Format” index is probably the most important indicator of Structural Funds’ transparency level, as it enables reuse and autonomous reprocessing by all users.

The score assigned by the index (see Table II.2) is directly proportional to the degree of openness and re-usability of the specific format employed. The score assigned takes into account whether the formats used are machine-readable, open or, at best, consistent with the linked data model.

**Table II.2 - Score assigned to the format of files containing data on 2007-2013 Structural Funds beneficiaries**

Format	Score (%)
PDF	16.7
DOC	16.7
HTML (multiple pages)	16.7
HTML (single page)	33.3
XLS	50.0
CSV	66.7
XML, JSON	83.3
Linked data model supporting format (e.g. RDF)	100.0

*Note:* PDF: Portable Document Format – DOC: Microsoft Word document  
HTML: HyperText Markup Language – XLS: Microsoft Excel electronic sheet  
CSV: Comma Separated Values – XML: eXtensible Markup Language  
JSON: JavaScript Object Notation – RDF: Resource Description Framework  
Linked Data: Web publication method which enables interconnecting non-previously linked data

The general situation at EU level (see Figure II.11) appears rather daunting – namely, no programme seems to use more “advanced” formats among those considered (XML, JSON, RDF), and only 1 percent uses the open CSV format. We can conclude that the only chance to retrieve data in reusable format(s) depends on the possibility to download them in Microsoft Excel proprietary format (XLS).

Besides Estonia using the CSV format, only Bulgaria, France, Czech Republic, Finland, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia allow easy reuse of data in their respective information systems.

With reference to index values, the only positive findings on information reusability are those equal to or higher than 50 percent. Italy in this case lies below the European average, both with regard to ERDF programmes (23 percent) and ESF programmes (19 percent).

Italy’s best programmes, which publish data in a machine-readable format and make data available in XLS format, are: “Calabria” ROP, using CSV; “Research and Competitiveness” NOP; “Piemonte” ROP (ERDF and ESF); and “Autonomous Province of Trento” (ERDF).

**Figure II.11 - Score assigned to the format of files containing data on 2007-2013 ERDF OPs beneficiaries – “Format” category index (2011)**

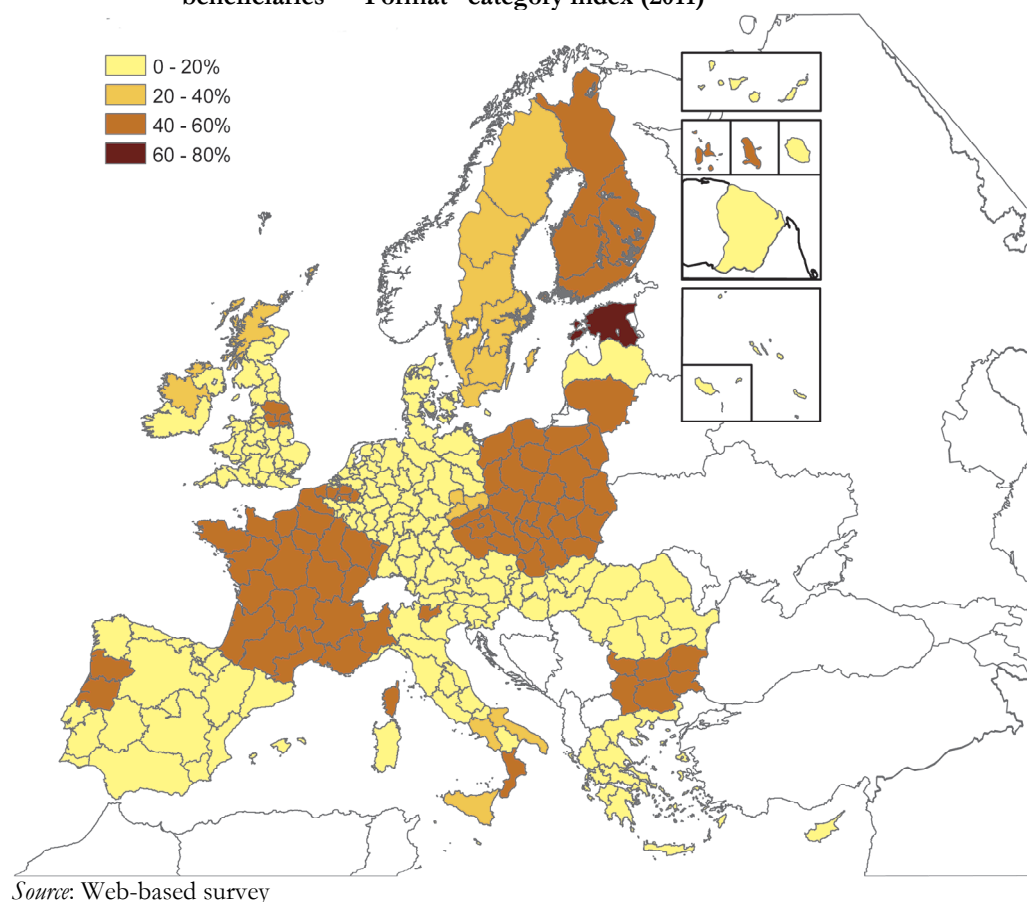


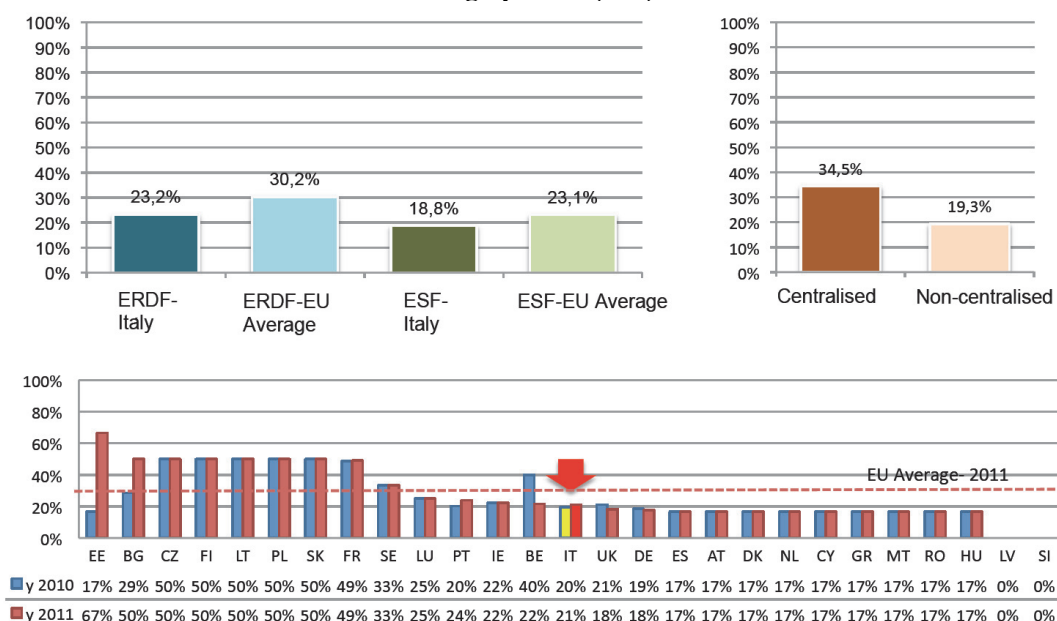
Figure II.13 illustrates the distribution percentage of more advanced formats made available by Italy's OPs<sup>29</sup>.

Also in this case the advantages provided by centralised systems are evident – i.e. the countries equipped with this type of system record an average index equal to 34 percent, 15 points higher than the others.

<sup>29</sup> Whereby more formats are available, the most advanced was considered, in terms of openness and reuse. In sequence: PDF, DOC, HTML (multiple pages), HTML (single page), XLS, CSV, XML, JSON, RDF.



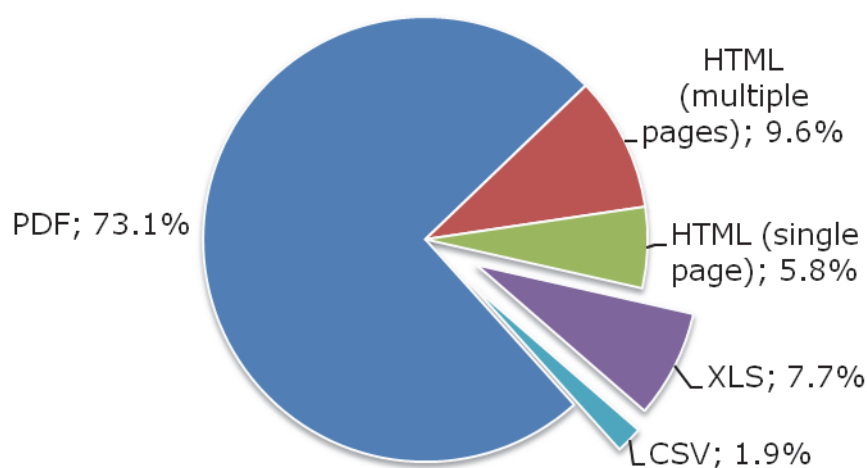
**Figure II.11 - Score assigned to the format of files containing data on 2007-2013 ERDF/ESF OPs beneficiaries – “Format” category index (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

PDF is the most common format (73 percent), followed by HTML, direct representation of information on beneficiaries in the website. In the latter case it is important to distinguish between the systems that present data in multiple pages (sometimes hundreds) and those that use a single HTML page, which can be more easily exported to a data reprocessing software. In Italy, the former case is more common (10 percent) than the latter (6 percent).

**Figure II.13 - Data on Italy's 2007-2013 OPs beneficiaries, by most advanced available format (2011)**



Source: Web-based survey

### III. Data publication strategies: interpretative analysis

This Chapter aims to investigate the main strategies adopted by the Managing Authorities of EU Operational Programmes for publication of data on related projects and beneficiaries. To such end we have used data collected in October 2010, which reveal a slightly higher number of variables identified – each corresponding to as many characteristics of the information provided via web – and for which, moreover, Convergence and Competitiveness objectives programmes have been considered along with numerous cooperation programmes, for a total of 434 OPs.

**Table III.1 - Categories and characteristics of the lists of beneficiaries of 2007-2013 SF co-financed OPs used in the itemised cluster analysis (2010)**

Category	Characteristics (2010)
Content	Final beneficiaries Project Axis Specific/Operational objectives Intervention line Project description – Project manager contact Assignment and payment dates Project start and/or end dates Status (active/completed)
Financial Data	Project value Payments EU co-financing Other co-financing
Downloadable file format	PDF HTML XLS or CSV
Ease of search	Page containing data and included in the XML site map Number of clicks from home page DB link is in the webpage linked by Inforegio <i>robots.txt</i> does not prevent the Search through search engine
Update and description	Last update date Update frequency Data description (metadata) Fields description in another language
Search masks	Search / Fund type Search / Project Search / OP Search / Axis / Objective / Action Search / Beneficiary Search / Resources Search / Territorial scope Search / Project status (active/completed) Accessible DB with detailed grids
Georeferencing and advanced functions	Georeferencing through maps Visualisation through graphs and other elaborations Data presented with detail / Municipality / Province

In order to fully use the 2010 *database* richness in information, some of the categories illustrated in Chapter II are broken down or modified as previously illustrated in Table III.1. Likewise in the analysis presented in Chapter II, indicators are created consistently with the categories of variables identified. Indicators are calculated by summing up the characteristics of each category and relating values to an interval equal to  $[0,1]$ <sup>30</sup>, except for the *Format* category, for which three indicators have been created corresponding to the three formats actually used<sup>31</sup>.

Table III.2 illustrates the average, maximum and medium values actually assumed by each indicator, as well as the standard deviation.

**Table III.2 - Descriptive statistics of transparency indicators of data on 2007-2013 Structural Funds' beneficiaries (2010)**

Indicators		OPs analysed	Average	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Search masks		434	0.17	0.29	0	1
Georeferencing		434	0.14	0.27	0	1
Format	PDF	434	0.60	0.49	0	1
	HTML	434	0.18	0.39	0	1
	XLS / CSV	434	0.31	0.46	0	1
Content		434	0.43	0.21	0	1
Update and description		434	0.25	0.25	0	1
Ease of search		434	0.52	0.17	0	0.75
Financial resources		434	0.61	0.19	0	0.75

*Source:* Data elaboration, web-based survey

The connection between the indicators can be deduced by the correlation matrix of variables (Table III.3), which reveals, for instance, that the *search mask* indicator is strongly correlated to geo-referencing (0.78), HTML format (0.53), and content detail (0.59), but weakly correlated to the PDF format. As a result, an Operational Programme offering data through a web portal with advanced functions, such as search and/or graphical visualisation of information, is likely to publish its own lists in a HTML format (i.e. search output) and to enable visualising data through interactive maps.

Conversely, the PDF format seems to be incompatible with a number of desirable characteristics of the lists of beneficiaries, and appears to be poorly correlated to the indicators associated to *content*, and *update and description*.

<sup>30</sup> The maximum utilised for normalisation is equal to the number of indicators present in each category, and therefore corresponds to the “ideal case”, in which all characteristics are present.

<sup>31</sup> The CSV format is aggregated at XLS.

Richer detail on the content is generally provided through most suitable formats such as XLS and CSV (the correlation between indicators is equal to 0.44), enabling effective data reuse.

**Table III.3 - Correlation matrix of indicators of transparency of data on 2007-2013 Structural Funds' beneficiaries (2010)**

	Search masks	Georeferencing	PDF	HTML	XLS / CSV	Content	Update & Descript.	Ease of Search	Financial Resources
Search masks	1.00								
Georeferencing	0.78	1.00							
PDF	-0.28	-0.05	1.00						
HTML	0.53	0.50	-0.04	1.00					
XLS / CSV	0.39	0.45	-0.40	0.17	1.00				
Content	0.59	0.48	-0.23	0.18	0.44	1.00			
Update and description	0.06	0.01	-0.16	-0.33	0.25	0.36	1.00		
Ease of search	0.07	-0.03	-0.09	0.01	0.23	0.18	0.29	1.00	
Financial resources	0.11	0.15	0.05	0.12	0.24	0.39	0.17	0.31	1.00

*Source:* Data elaboration, web-based survey

A *Principal Component Analysis (PCA)*<sup>32</sup> has therefore been applied to the above described categories of variables in order to reduce the complexity of available datasets and further verify connections between the indicators in the Cartesian space identified by the first two factors (which explain 54.2 percent of total variance).

A subsequent hierarchical *Cluster Analysis* enables identifying three homogeneous groups among all EU Operational Programmes.

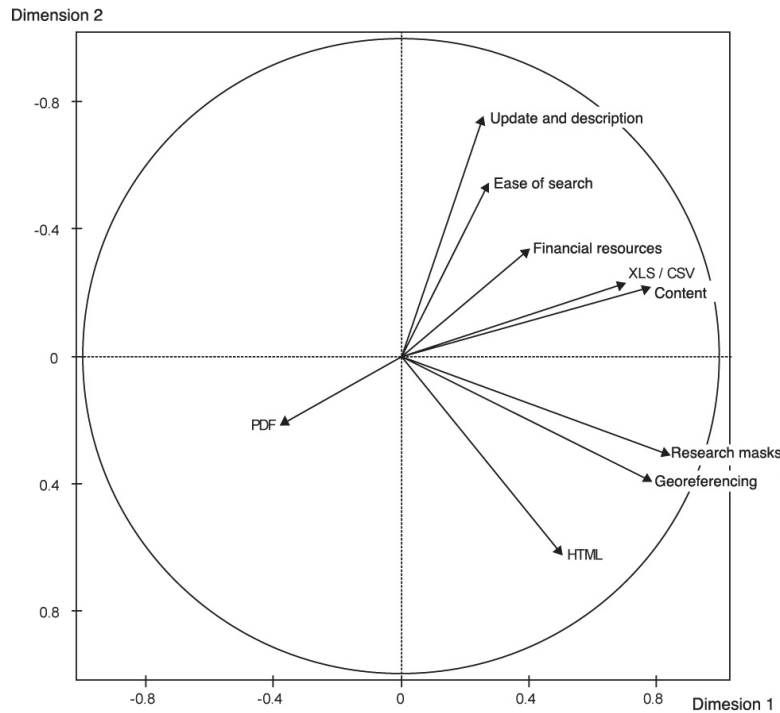
Figure III.1 helps further analyse the relationship between the indicators, namely the coordinates calculated through the PCA for the first two factors identified. Confirming what already indicated by the correlation matrix, the variables tend to aggregate themselves into homogeneous groups consistent with the principles of *stewardship* and *usefulness* suggested by most recent literature and previously mentioned (see Section II.3.3). In particular, the characteristics relating to the *stewardship* principle tend to aggregate

<sup>32</sup> An analysis of non-linear main components was subsequently applied and provided fully equivalent results.

themselves – thus denoting a high correlation index – in the top-right quadrant, while the characteristics linked to the *usefulness* principle occupy the bottom-right quadrant.

As seen, the PDF format appears poorly correlated with the other variables (notably data quality variables, in the lower part of the bottom-right quadrant), and also turns out to be an indicator of poor information quality.

**Figure III.1 - Transparency indicators of data on Structural Funds' beneficiaries: main factors**



Source: Data elaboration, web-based survey

Figure III.2 provides a graphical illustration of the findings revealed by the PCA and the subsequent *cluster analysis*. The two dimensional axes represent not only the position of variables but also of single observations related to Programmes.

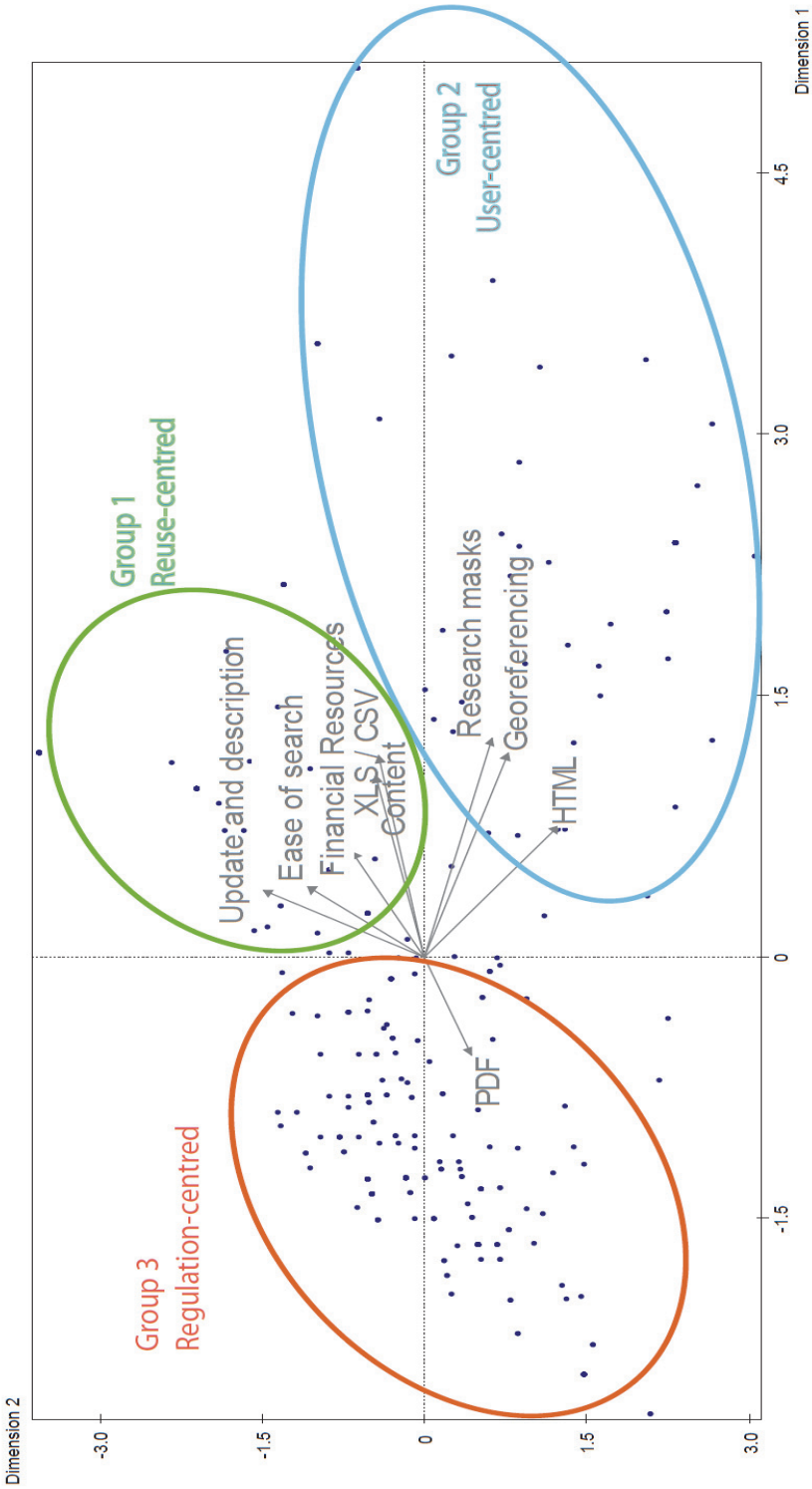
The analysis confirms the classification hypothesis suggested by literature:

- The top-right quadrant (Group 1) focuses on the characteristics of data quality and reusability (content, financial data, downloadable XLS format, ease of search, update and description), which then appear strongly inter-connected. The programmes in Group 1 can therefore be labeled *user-centred*.
- The bottom-right quadrant (Group 2) focuses on the characteristics that enable users to more effectively access data published in administrations' websites. The categories characterising this cluster are: presence of a search mask, data geo-

referencing, and use of “pop-up” or other HTML views to display data detail on projects and beneficiaries. The programmes in this Group can be labelled *reuse-centred*.

- The left-side quadrants (Group 3) host numerous OPs characterised by indicators’ poor performances (i.e. few characteristics are present). Group 3 is therefore characterised by the absence of variables’ high values, with the exception of the PDF format. Such programmes publish limited, hard-to-access and, generally, poor quality information; hence they can be labelled as *regulation-centred*.

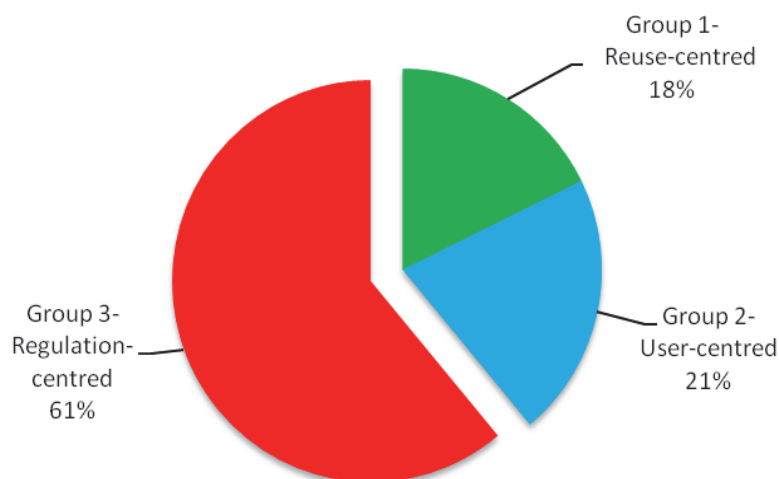
Figure III.2 - Transparency indicators of data on SFs OPs beneficiaries: homogenous groups as per the analysis of main components



Source: Data elaboration, webbased survey

The analysis enables quantifying the number of Operational Programmes falling within the three groups identified. It is worth noting that more than half OPs (61 percent) fall within Group 3 – i.e. *regulation-centred*; the remaining Programmes between Group 1 and Group 2 in similar proportions (respectively 18 and 21 percent).

**Figure III.3 - Number of OPs within the 3 groups (percentages)**



*Source:* Data elaboration, web-based survey

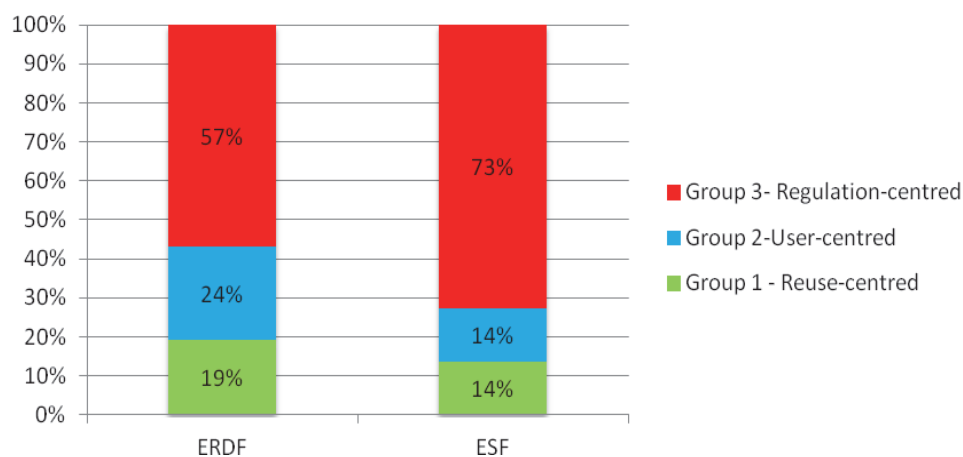
Further elaboration explores the distribution of the three groups to change the main characteristics of OPs: Fund (ERDF, ESF) Objective (Convergence, Competitiveness, Cooperation), Territorial Scope (national, multi-regional, regional OP), Programmed Resources, Information Centralisation, Member State.

#### **a) Fund**

Figure III.4 shows the distribution of programmes according to the kind of fund: the ERDF presents higher percentages of programmes belonging to Groups 1 and 2 (equal to 19 and 24 percent, respectively) versus the ESF.



**Figure III.4 - Breakdown, by fund, of homogenous Operational Programmes as to transparency (percentages)**

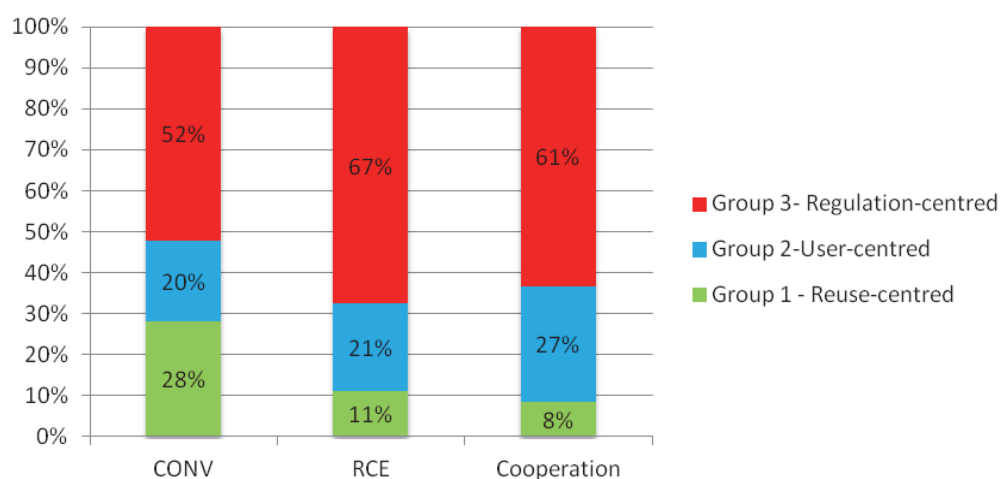


Source: Data elaboration, web-based survey

**b) Objective**

The breakdown by objective area is shown in Figure III.5. In the case of Convergence Objective (CONV), the number of OPs belonging to the two most “virtuous” groups approaches half of the total (Group 1 – Reuse-centred: 28 percent; and Group 2 – User-centred: 20 percent). Conversely, with regard to the Competitiveness and Employment and Co-operation (RCE) Objective, Group 3 (regulation-centred) shows significantly higher percentages.

**Figure III.5 - Breakdown, by objective, of EU homogenous OPs as to transparency (percentages)**

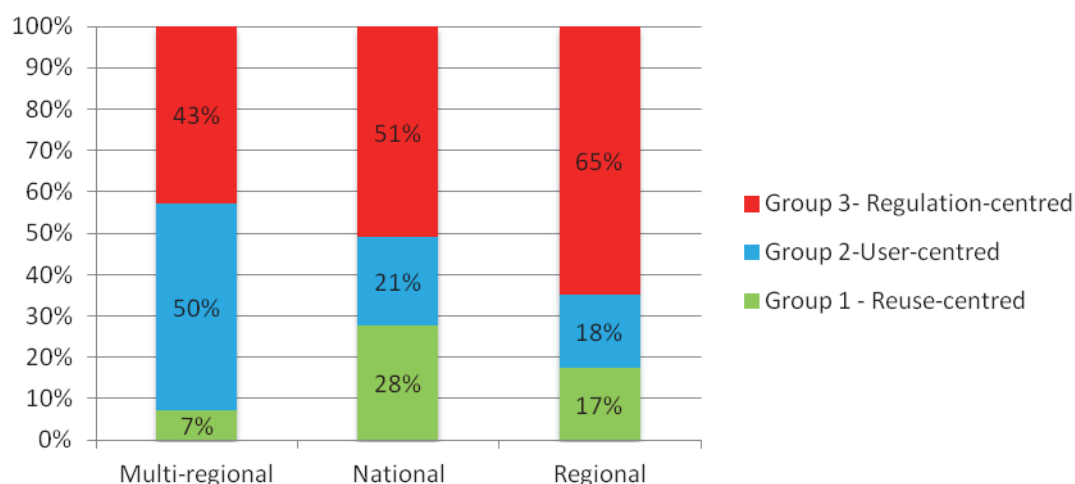


Source: Data elaboration, web-based survey

**c) *OP territorial scope***

The histogramme in Figure III.6 shows the breakdown into groups based on the territorial scope of single Operational Programmes. National Programmes appear characterised by high quality published data (28 percent); while Group 2 (user-centred) is prevalent in the case of multi-regional programmes (50 percent). Among regional programmes, Group 3 (regulation-centred) is widely prevalent.

**Figure III.6 - Breakdown, by territorial scope, of EU homogenous OPs as to transparency (percentages)**

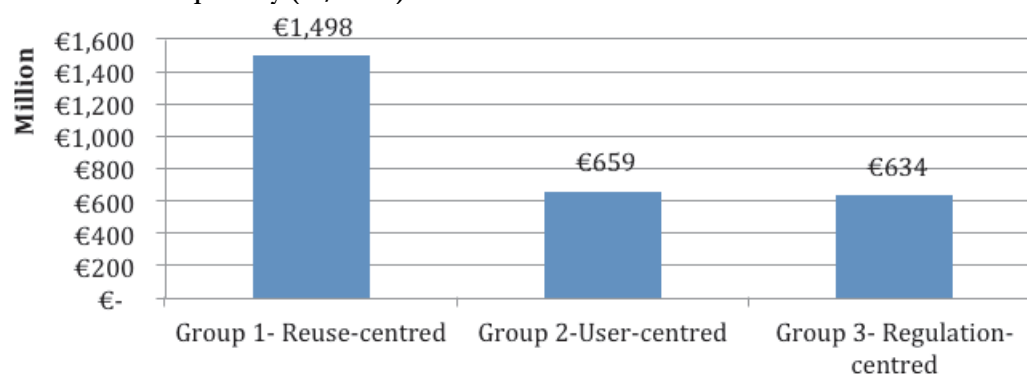


*Source:* Data elaboration, web-based survey

**d) *Programmed resources***

The findings of the cluster analysis show interesting evidence in terms of programmed resources: the average size of Group 1 (reuse centred) is more than double the two remaining groups, which is certainly satisfactory as to transparency, as programmes with higher funding turn out to provide more and more easily reusable information.

Figure III.7 - Average EU co-financing to OPs, broken down by homogenous group, as to transparency (M/EUR)

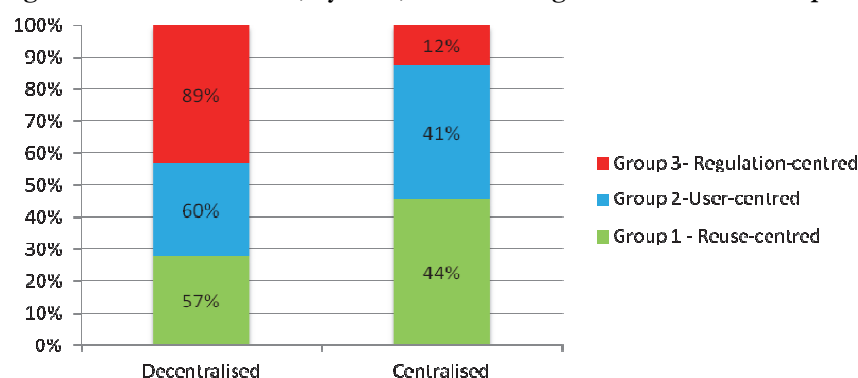


Source: Data elaboration, web-based survey

#### e) **Information centralisation**

Figure III.8 takes into account the national level of information centralisation. Within centralised information systems, the lists of beneficiaries of all the programmes of a Member State are published in a single website providing strongly standardised data. The composition of Group 3 clearly reveals that decentralised systems publishing information based on heterogeneous criteria and no shared standards provide lower quality data. As a matter of fact, only 12 percent of the programmes belonging to Group 3 (regulation-centred) utilise centralised information management systems.

Figure III.8 - Breakdown, by fund, of EU homogenous OPs as to transparency (percentages)

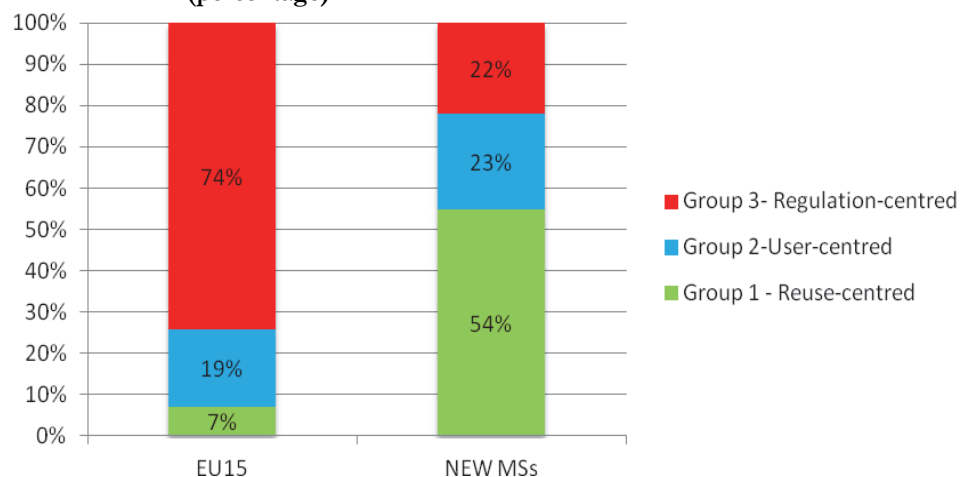


Source: Data elaboration, web-based survey

#### f) **Member States**

Figure III.9 highlights the differences between EU15 Member States' OPs and new Member States' OPs. The latter turn out to be definitely more virtuous as to the publication of the lists of beneficiaries in 54 percent of cases, thus falling within Group 1, much higher than in EU15 Member States' Operational Programmes (7 percent) falling within the same Group.

**Figure III.9 - Breakdown, by typology of homogenous EU MS OPs, as to transparency (percentage)**

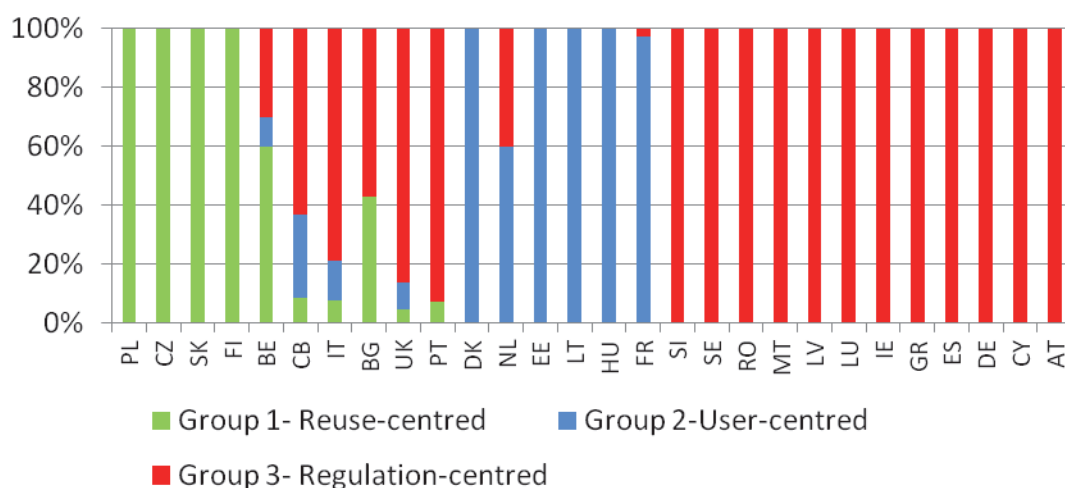


Source: Data elaboration, web-based survey

The OPs breakdown by MS is detailed in Figure IV.10. All OPs of the Slovak Republic, Poland, Finland and the Czech Republic fall within Group 1; conversely, the OPs of Lithuania, Hungary, Estonia and Denmark fall within Group 2.

*Cross Border, Interregional* and *Transnational Cooperation* Programmes (see Figure III.10) are characterised by largely heterogeneous distribution amongst groups, as in the case of Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom.

**Figure III.10 - Distribution, by Member State, of EU homogenous OPs as to transparency**



Note: The acronym CB covers “Cross Border”, “Interregional” and “Transnational Cooperation” OPs

Source: Data elaboration, web-based survey

#### **IV. The next programming period: 2014-2020 Structural Funds Regulations under the transparency test**

In October 2011 the European Commission proposed the new General Regulations for Structural Funds for the 2014-2020 period, which are currently the subject of negotiations with the 27 Member States<sup>33</sup>. The proposal for a General Regulation provides more detailed information than the Regulation currently in force; in particular, Article 105<sup>34</sup> “Information and Communication” establishes that Member States are responsible for:

- a) Ensuring the creation of a single website/portal providing information on all the Operational Programmes of a Member States and on access to such OPs;
- b) Informing potential beneficiaries as to the financing opportunities in the framework of Operational Programmes;
- c) Publicising, among EU citizens, the role and achievements of the Cohesion Policy and the Structural Funds through information and communication actions on the results and impact of partnership contracts, operational programmes and interventions.

It is furthermore established that Member States shall maintain a list of operations itemised by programme and fund, in CSV or XML format, accessible through a single website/portal and providing the list and synthetic description of all the Operational Programmes of the Member State concerned.

The list of the interventions shall be updated every three months and, pursuant to Annex V to the Regulation proposal, shall specify in at least one other official language of the Member State the following data fields:

- 1. Beneficiary name (only legal entities; no natural persons shall be named)
- 2. Operation name
- 3. Operation summary
- 4. Operation start date
- 5. Operation end date (expected date for physical completion or full implementation of the operation)
- 6. Total eligible expenditure allocated to operation
- 7. EU co-financing rate (by priority axis)

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<sup>33</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/what/future/proposals\\_2014\\_2020\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/proposals_2014_2020_en.cfm)

<sup>34</sup> Chapter II, Information and Communication

8. Operation postcode
9. Country
10. Name of category of intervention for the operation
11. Date of last update of the list of operations.

The headings of data fields and names of the operations shall be also provided in at least one other official language of the European Union.

Other relevant proposals in Annex V concern the obligation to provide “*updating information about the operational programme's implementation, including its main achievements, on the single website or on the operational programme's website that is accessible through the single website portal*” and the involvement of education and research institutions for dissemination of information on operations and beneficiaries via the Web.

#### **IV.1 Transparency in Structural Funds Regulation proposal for 2014-2020**

The analyses aimed at quantifying the degree of consistency of data currently made publicly available on the beneficiaries of the 2007-2013 OPs co-financed by Structural Funds with the European Transparency Initiative (see Paragraph I.3 above) were replicated for the requirements proposed by the Commission for 2014-2020 new Regulations in the field of information and communication on the financing provided by the Funds.

The variables listed in the previous paragraph were thus considered, with the exception of “Country” and including all requirements listed in the Annex V of the Regulation proposal.

**Table IV.1 - Percentage distribution of the score assigned to each OP as to compliance with the EU Regulation proposal for 2014-2020**

<b>Number of fulfilled criteria</b>	<b>Score (%)</b>
<b>1/11</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>2/11</b>	<b>18.2</b>
<b>3/11</b>	<b>27.3</b>
<b>4/11</b>	<b>36.4</b>
<b>5/11</b>	<b>45.5</b>
<b>6/11</b>	<b>54.5</b>
<b>7/11</b>	<b>63.6</b>
<b>8/11</b>	<b>72.7</b>
<b>9/11</b>	<b>81.8</b>
<b>10/11</b>	<b>90.9</b>
<b>11/11</b>	<b>100.0</b>

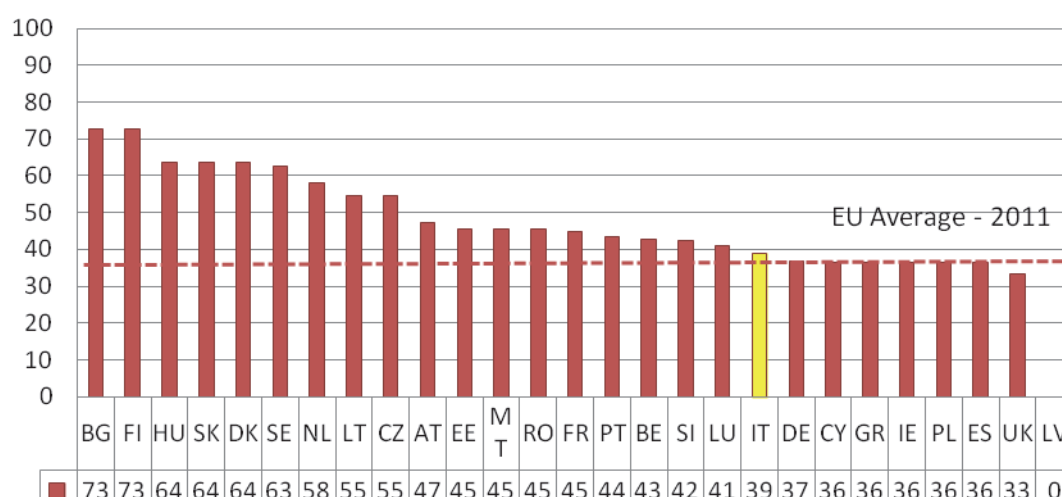
Figure IV.1 shows the level of compliance with the 11 essential pieces of information that could be imposed by future regulations and is, on an average, equal to 44 percent at EU level.

The introduction of such new requirements thus proves necessary so as to ensure more transparent publication of data on Structural Funds use.

Belgium and Finland turn out to be, on an average, the most consistent EU States, although they currently do not meet all of the six previously established requirements (see Figure II.8), thus showing that each State has so far interpreted and implemented directives on transparency in a rather autonomous way.

In 2011 Italy stood above the EU average as to the degree of consistency with ETI recommendations; conversely, it now reveals low consistency together with Germany and Cyprus, which seem to have lost several positions.

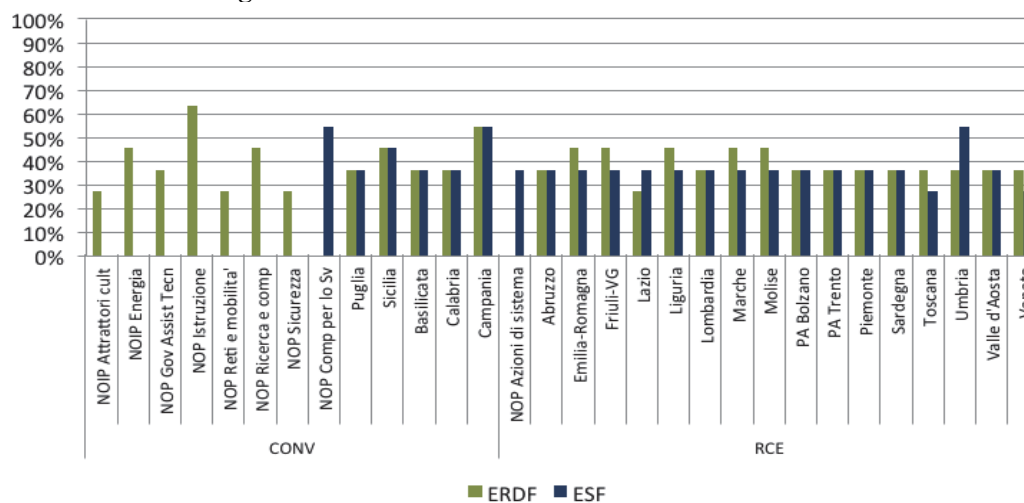
**Figure IV.1 - EU27 2007-2013 Operational Programmes' average level of compliance with the requirements set by the Regulation for 2014-2020**



Source: Web-based survey

Data on Italy (see Figure IV.2) highlight the scores obtained by Italy's OPs do not differ much from the national average (38 percent), and Regions' results broken down by fund are more homogeneous than as to compliance with ETI requirements. The "Education" NOP meets the highest number of requirements with a compliance percentage equal to 64 percent. The minimum level attained by Regional Programmes is equal to 27 percent.

Figure IV.2 - Italy's 2007-2013 OPs' average level of compliance with the requirements set by the Regulation for 2014-2020

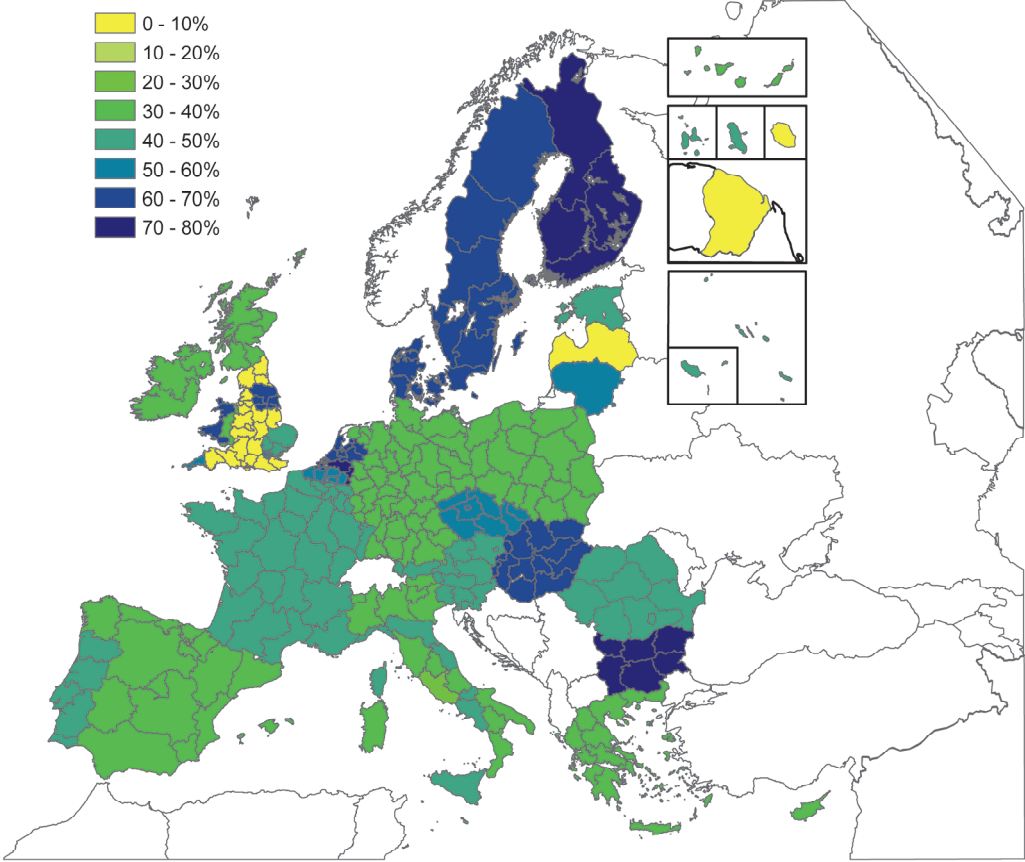


Source: Web-based survey

The map in Figure IV.3 shows regional differences at NUTS2 level, and considerable differences between regions are identified in countries that do not have a centralised system for data access (e.g. UK, Belgium, and Netherlands).



Figure IV.3 - EU27 2007-2013 OPs average level of compliance with the requirements set by the Regulation for 2014-2020



Source: Web-based survey

## V. Conclusion

The survey on the quality of the lists of Cohesion Policy beneficiaries has analysed all Operational Programmes co-financed by the Structural Funds in Europe based on the direct visit of the relevant Managing Authorities' websites. The method guarantees objectivity and comparability of the results obtained versus a questionnaire-based survey addressed to administrations.

A detailed analysis has been carried out on the information quality (size, level of detail and granularity of information, update, data description, ease of search) and on aspects related to accessibility granted to information users (i.e. search masks or geo-referenced data).

Selected on the basis of the most recent academic literature and national and international guidelines on the subject of Open Government Data, the features covered were aggregated into specific indicators in order to measure OPs performance and explore the most common models for data publication by Managing Authorities. Furthermore, the analysis reveals EU and Italian Operational Programmes implementation of the requirements set forth by the European Transparency Initiative of the European Commission and their compliance with current proposals for Community Regulation 2014-2020.

The amount of information on beneficiaries and projects differs greatly across programmes, although a “minimum core” (i.e. dataset provided for by the Structural Funds Regulation 2007-2013) is almost always present. On the contrary, data show the requirements set forth by the new Regulation – much more stringent in terms of quantity and quality of information to be made available – still require administrations' efforts so as to be satisfied in full.

The use of appropriate statistical techniques has allowed identifying homogenous groups. Multivariate analysis on data publication methods also taking into account qualitative aspects suggests the presence of three groups of programmes:

- a. *Regulation-centred* programmes (61 percent), which use closed formats (PDF) and publish “meager” information difficult to access and, in general, of poor quality;
- b. *User-centred* programmes (21 percent), which make available to the public considerable amounts of information through interactive systems (search masks, maps, etc.), although in some cases they do not allow users to download data in processable and reusable formats;

- c. *Re-use centred* programmes (18 percent), which pay more attention to issues such as downloadable database size, update, multi-language description, ease of search, etc.

As follows some suggestions on how to improve current practices by contributing to the definition of specific requirements on the publication of data on beneficiaries, to be included in the EU regulations of the next programming period.

The database publication format undoubtedly represents the main characteristic of the lists of beneficiaries' quality. Open machine-readable formats and, in prospect, linked-data technical paradigm offer surprising advantages in terms of data transparency and possible reuse by public and private bodies. Such aspects are widely underlined by the EU Directive on public information reuse, and by current importance of Open Government and open data policies role in OECD countries.

The application of such principles does not require technical/organisational changes in the way data are managed by administrations or minor adjustments in the infrastructure/software used. Conversely, it is necessary to invest in promoting the culture of transparency, while raising awareness of the economic benefits resulting from data reuse.

From this point of view, investing in interfaces for searching or viewing data is certainly a positive factor that can contribute to increasing the public value of information made available, thus managing to engage an audience wider than the narrow circle of people able to re-elaborate information independently.

Nevertheless, such investment in interfaces for data presentation must not come at the expense of the possibility to download data in an open reusable format – i.e. a key condition for the creation of new interfaces and services by other subjects.

The results show that higher quality of data is strongly correlated to the use of information management systems centralised at national level. The presence of a single point of access to data on all the operational programmes of a given Member State and of univocal standards for data presentation also leads to greater availability of information and allows for immediate comparison of data on different programmes.

Full comparability and immediate availability of information would be guaranteed by the implementation of a single database at EU level, as already suggested by other studies<sup>35</sup>.

Data quality should be ensured by frequent and explicit update of the published lists – namely, among most requested items by users in numerous instances of government data opening.

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<sup>35</sup> Relevant recommendations are developed in the reports released by the Centre for Industrial Studies (2008) and Technopolis Group (2010).

Eventually, information should be accompanied by an effective description of the related variables (metadata). It would furthermore be desirable that raw data be complemented with interpretation provided by relevant Managing Authorities so as to correctly represent the meaning of the contents released and encourage proper use thereof – for instance by emerging data journalists or by independent initiatives for transparency.

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## Annex A. Definition and methodological detail of variables identified

Variable identified	2010	2011	Description
Final Beneficiary	Yes	Yes	The website publishes the name of the individual, public and/or private body or firm in charge of initiating and implementing the operation.
Project	Yes	Yes	The name of the project selected by the Managing Authority is indicated in a clear and easily recognisable manner.
Axis	Yes	Yes	The priority axis of the reference intervention is specified for each approved project.
Specific/Operational Objectives	Yes	Yes	The reference specific/operational objective is specified for each project approved.
Intervention Line	Yes	Yes	The reference intervention line is specified for each project approved.
Project description inclusive of contact details (e-mail address, phone, etc.)	Yes	Yes	The project is described in a detailed manner (objectives, implementation patterns, etc.) and the contact details of the implementing subject are provided (name, e-mail address, phone number, etc.).
Assignment & payment dates	Yes	Yes	The website specifies the date on which the funding is assigned and paid out.
Project start/end dates	Yes	Yes	The website specifies the dates on which the project is initiated and concluded.
Status (active/concluded)	Yes	Yes	The website specifies the project progress degree (i.e. active, concluded, etc.).
Project value	Yes	Yes	The website specifies the overall amount of (public and private) funds assigned to the project.
Payments	Yes	Yes	The website specifies the amounts paid out to the operation at the last date of update versus the committed amount.
EU co-financing	Yes	Yes	The website specifies the EU funds committed to the operation.
National (or other) co-financing	Yes	Yes	The website specifies the amounts committed to the operation by national or other (e.g. regional, private, etc.) funds.
PDF	Yes	Yes	These variables refer to the format of the downloadable file containing data, which varies consistently with the related higher/lower re-usability.
HTML	Yes	Yes	
DOC	Yes	Yes	
XLS	Yes	Yes	
CSV	Yes	Yes	
XML, JSON	Yes	Yes	
RDF, <i>linked data</i>	Yes	Yes	
The page containing the data is included in the website map	Yes		The map of the website publishing the data gives access to the page publishing the list of beneficiaries (i.e. MA website, OP site, etc.).
Number of clicks from home page	Yes	Yes	The number of clicks from the homepage of the website publishing the data (i.e. MA website, OP site, etc.) required to have access to the page displaying the list of beneficiaries, so as to verify how easy it is for users to search and find the data published.

Variable identified	2010	2011	Description
The link to DB is on the same page linked by Info regio	Yes		The information is provided separately as to ESF and ERDF/CF; and the two types of data can be retrieved through access to the websites of DG Employment and DG Regio, where two interactive maps provide direct links to the lists related to the specific funds in the respective national or regional sites of the Member State. The responsibility of providing a correct link to the EU centralised website lies exclusively with the Member State: the survey on such characteristics aims to verify whether such requirement is met.
<i>robots.txt</i> does not prevent search via search engines	Yes	Yes	The survey aimed to verify that, through access to <i>robots.txt</i> files, search engines were not prevented from indexing the pages containing downloadable or on-line consultable databases.
Date of last update	Yes	Yes	This variable refers to the date of the last data update expressly stated by the subject in charge of data publication.
Update frequency	Yes	Yes	This variable refers to the presence of a notice related to the update frequency of the list of beneficiaries.
Data description (metadata)	Yes	Yes	Indications are available as to the description of published data, and, in particular, of database fields. The research, firstly addressed to proper files containing database metadata, has subsequently been expanded so as to cover also simple information on the HTML page containing the data concerned.
Description of fields in one other language	Yes	Yes	The information related to the OP is available also in one other language (English) besides the national language, to enable immediate data comparison and easy reading at international level.
Evidence of the licence under which data are published	Yes	Yes	The survey verified the presence of disclaimers or other notice(s) on the application of any type of licence (e.g. Creative Commons).
Search by Fund type	Yes	Yes	The website provides a search mask that enables philtering published data according to the fund type.
Search by Project	Yes	Yes	The website provides a search mask that enables philtering published data according to the project concerned.
Search by OP	Yes	Yes	The website provides a search mask that enables philtering published data according to the OP concerned.
Search by Axis / Objective/ Action	Yes	Yes	The website provides a search mask that enables philtering published data according to the relevant axis/objective/action
Search by Beneficiary	Yes	Yes	The website provides a search mask that enables philtering published data according to the relevant beneficiary.
Search by Resource	Yes	Yes	The website provides a search mask that enables philtering published data according to the relevant resources.
Search by Territorial scope	Yes	Yes	The website provides a search mask that enables philtering published data according to the relevant territorial scope (i.e. region, province, and municipality).
Geo-referencing	Yes	Yes	Data are geo-referenced via maps (e.g. Google maps). Maps could illustrate the geographical position of the beneficiary, also indicating the relevant project and other information.



Variable identified	2010	2011	Description
Visualisation via graphs and other elaborations	Yes	Yes	Data are represented through elaborations that enable immediate reading (e.g. Graphs, synoptic tables, etc.).
Centralised system	Yes	Yes	The variable refers to the presence of a single centralised website that collects all the information related to national OPs and provides access to the lists of beneficiaries of all active OPs in the country concerned, published upon standard criteria. The level of centralisation reveals Member State's propensity to coordinating efforts aimed at easing the access to data.

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