# Selection of operations:
Findings of the stock taking study and handbook of good practices

Study: objectives & deliverables

- **Taking stock** and **disseminating** information on the practices and procedures that authorities managing the ERDF, ESF and CF apply in selection of operations, in 2014–2020.

- **Main deliverables**:

  - ✓ **analytical report** covering the analysis of **practices**, **procedures** and **criteria** used for the selection of operation in selected programmes

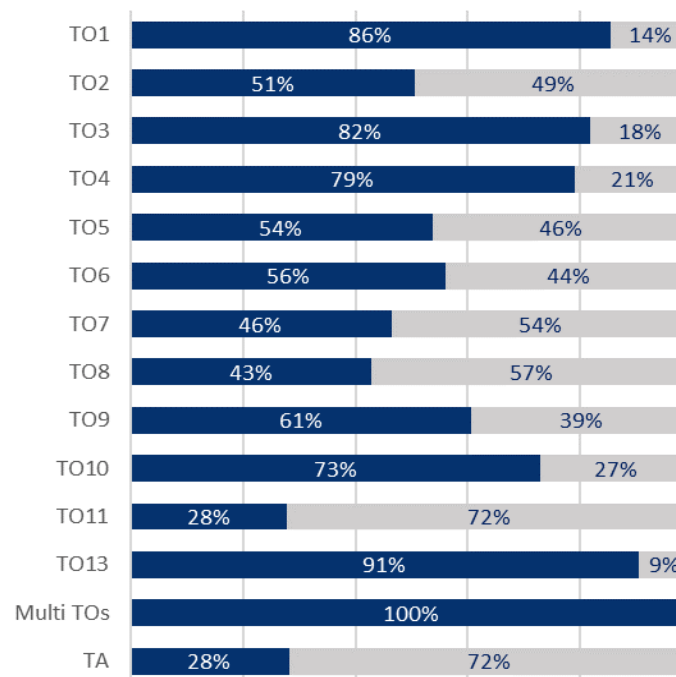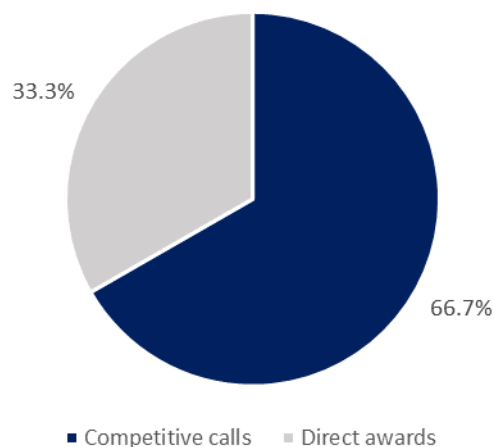 - ✓ a **handbook** of practices for effective selection of operations

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9 steps in selection of operations
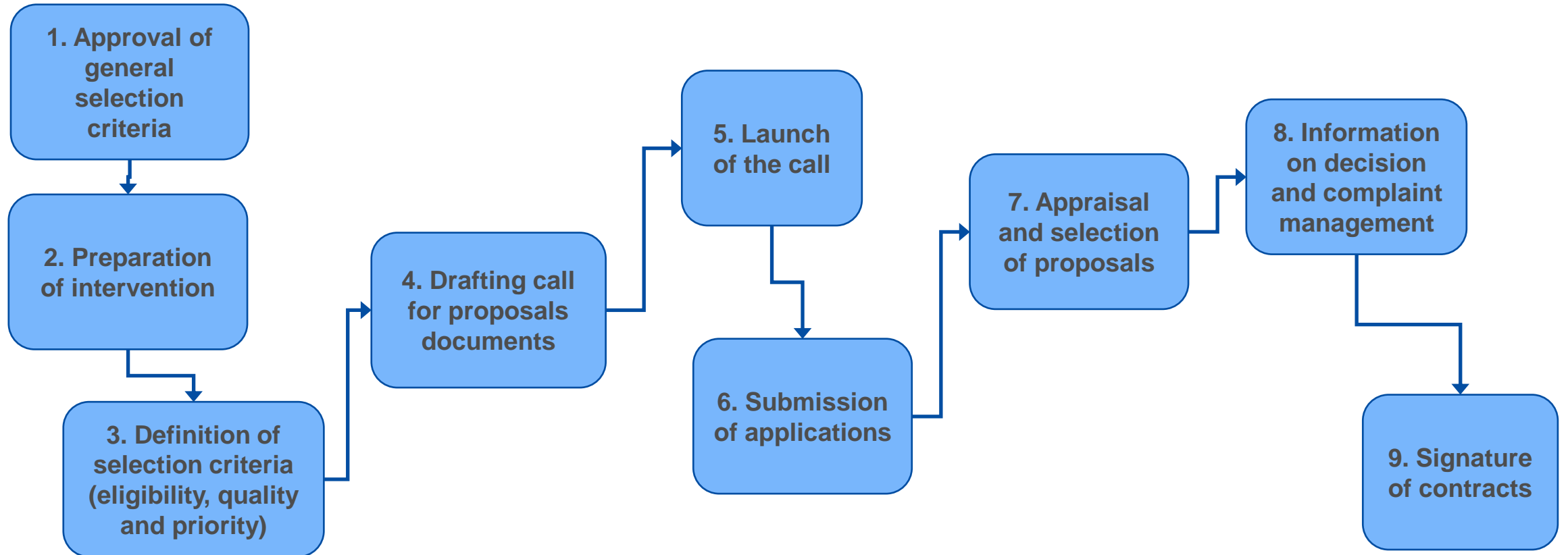
Details on sample:
29 programmes selected and 87 calls (1% of total ERDF/CF)

- The sample is **not statistically representative**, also due to the context-specific nature of each call. However, considering the geographical and thematic coverage of the analysis, as well as the fact that it covers different types of selection procedures, the results **offer important insights** on strengths and weaknesses of actual practices across the EU.

- **Types of calls** in the sample: 66.7% of the total budget allocated through **competitive** calls, 33.3% through **non-competitive** selection procedures

Pie chart legend: ■ Competitive calls ■ Direct awards
- 33.3%
- 66.7%

Bar chart:
|	Competitive	Direct awards
TO1	86%	14%
TO2	51%	49%
TO3	82%	18%
TO4	79%	21%
TO5	54%	46%
TO6	56%	44%
TO7	46%	54%
TO8	43%	57%
TO9	61%	39%
TO10	73%	27%
TO11	28%	72%
TO13	91%	9%
Multi TOs	100%	
TA	28%	72%

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Analysis of selection of Operations

Some interesting findings

Selection of operations: average duration of steps

- **376 FTE** days is an overall average **duration** of steps 4 to 9

- **Appraisal and selection** of proposals is the most burdensome step (46.4% of the effort) followed by **contract preparation & signature** (26.1%)

- However, duration in calendar days range from less than **160** to more than **1600 calendar days**

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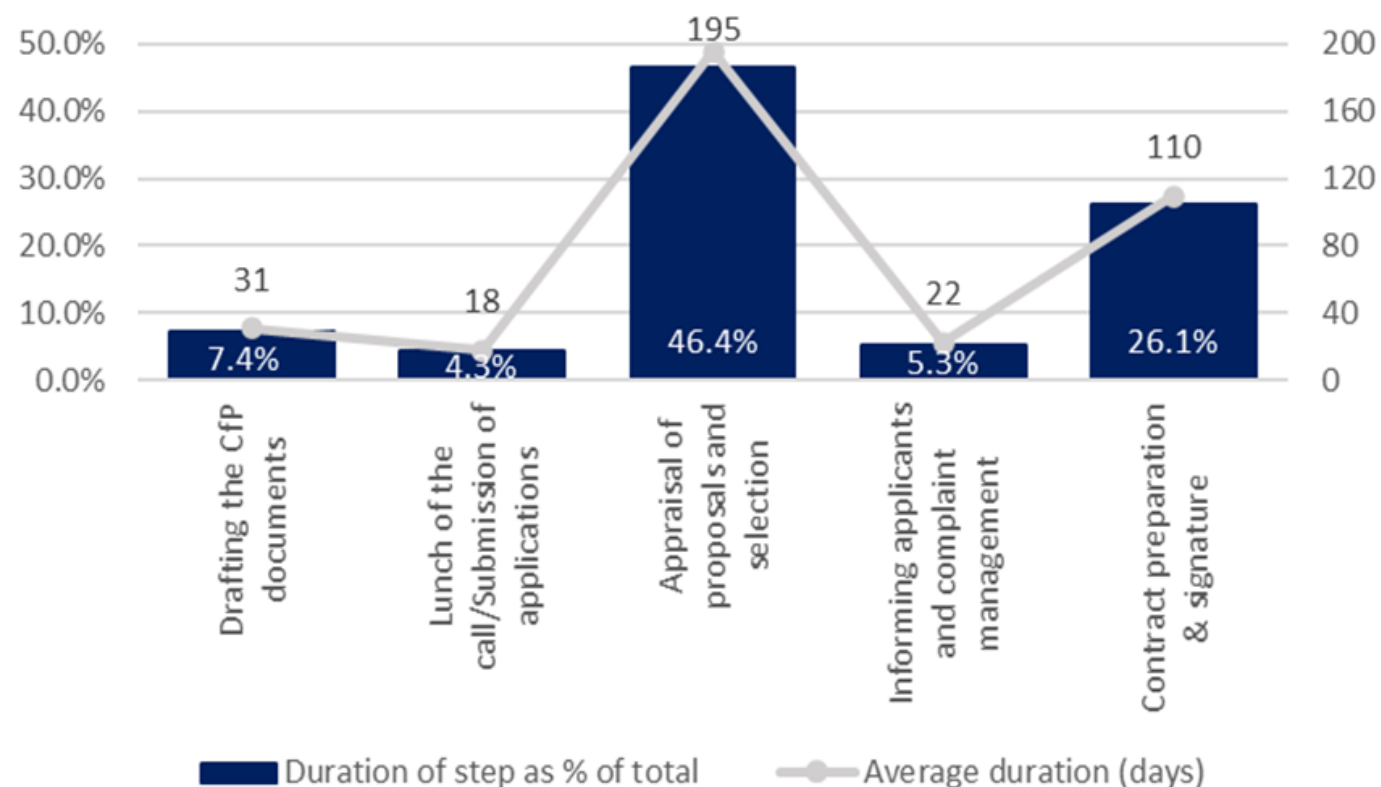
Selection of operations: general selection criteria (step 1)

- The approaches regarding the role of the Monitoring Committee in approving selection criterial **differ widely** between managing authorities and across the OPs.

- Nearly half of sampled OPs, the MC approves both general and call-specific criteria

- In the OPs where the MC approves only general selection criteria, specific selection criteria are approved by the MA or by sectoral committees

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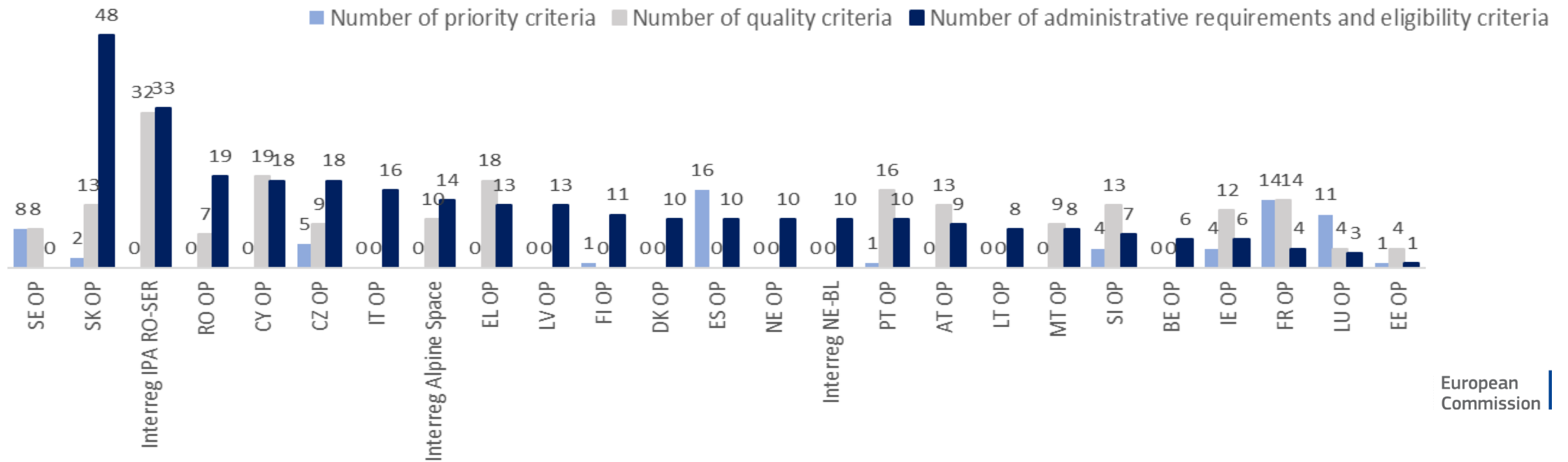
Selection of operations: definition of specific selection criteria (step 3)

- **Eligibility, quality and priority criteria** are defined in this step. On average, in our sample, each call has 18 eligibility, 9 quality and 3 priority criteria.

- **Cost-related criteria** were used in 44% of the calls of the sample. For these, on average, **21% the final score** was related to costs.

- Highest number of criteria **68, lowest 1**. Higher number of selection criteria is correlated to **longer selection process**.
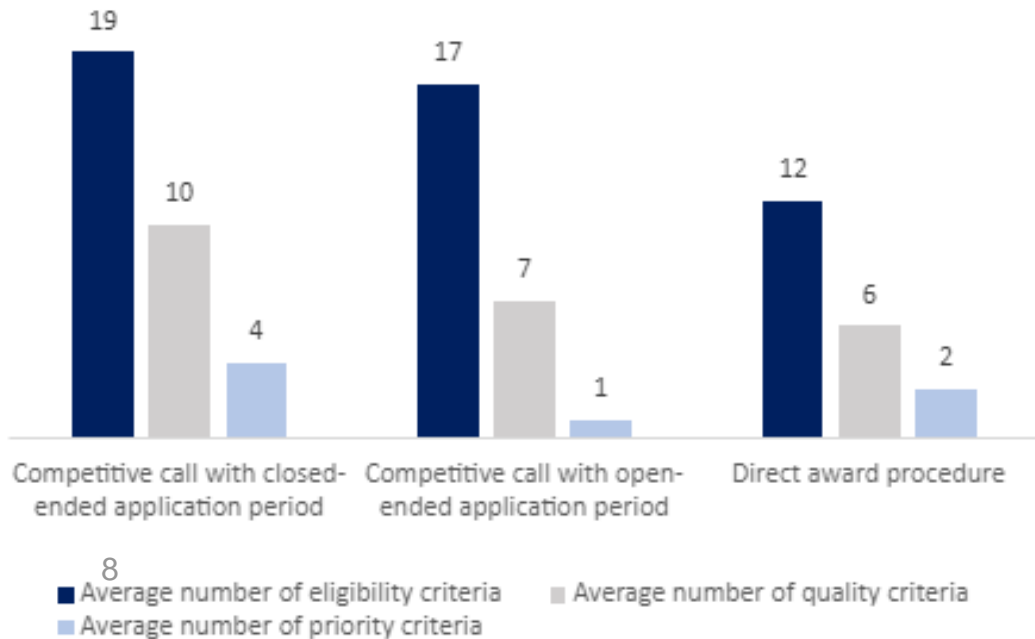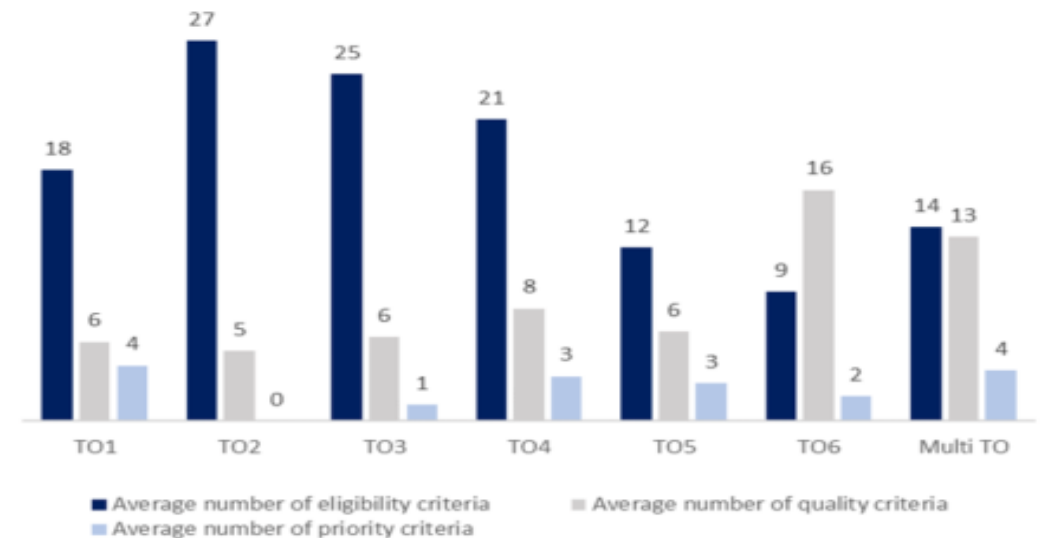

Competitive call with closed-ended application period: eligibility 19, quality 10, priority 4.
Competitive call with open-ended application period: eligibility 17, quality 7, priority 1.
Direct award procedure: eligibility 12, quality 6, priority 2.

■ Average number of eligibility criteria   ■ Average number of quality criteria
■ Average number of priority criteria

Figure 25: Average number of eligibility, priority and quality criteria by TO (N=80)

TO1: eligibility 18, quality 6, priority 4.
TO2: eligibility 27, quality 5, priority 0.
TO3: eligibility 25, quality 6, priority 1.
TO4: eligibility 21, quality 8, priority 3.
TO5: eligibility 12, quality 6, priority 3.
TO6: eligibility 9, quality 16, priority 2.
Multi TO: eligibility 14, quality 13, priority 4.

■ Average number of eligibility criteria   ■ Average number of quality criteria
■ Average number of priority criteria

Note: TO8 and TO5 have been excluded from this analysis as the included information for only one call.
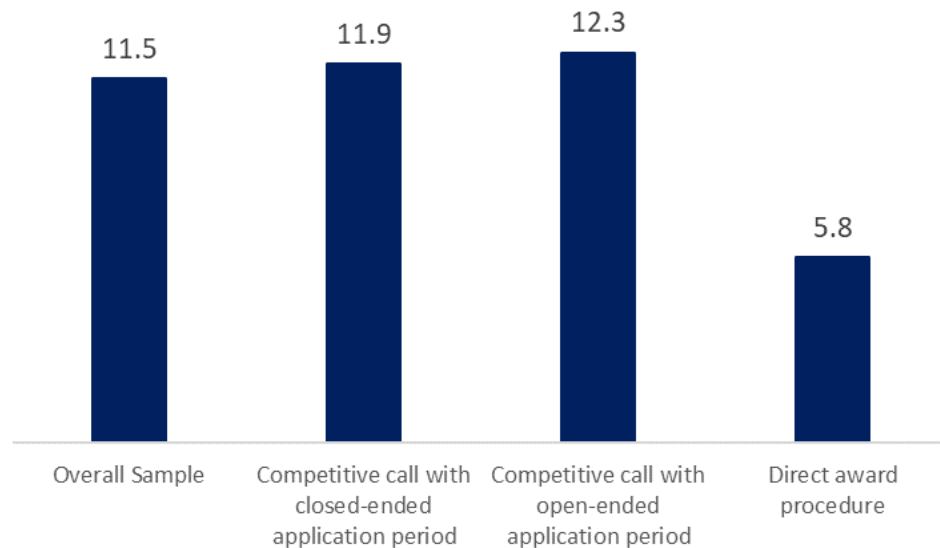Source: Ismeri, Ecorys, Ramboll 2022

Step 3: points to consider

➤ First, get the **rationale** right – **clear intervention logic** of the call! Then,

    ➤ Define adequate **number** of selection criteria

    ➤ Chose the **types** needed – eligibility, quality and/or priority criteria

    ➤ Do not forget to factor in "**value for money**" (even in non-competitive procedures)

    ➤ Check for **overlapping** criteria

    ➤ Make criteria "**operational**" (not theoretical, especially for horizontal principles)

➤ Prepare criteria **assessment methodology**

➤ **Test** the **scoring system** (make sure it brings wanted results in line with rationale)

➤ **Learn** from past experiences
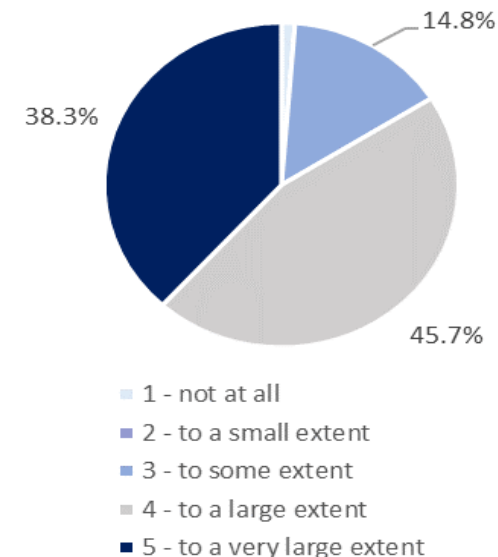
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Selection of operations: drafting call documents (step 4)

- Authorities produced **12 documents** per call, on average.

- **Public consultations** are used in a few cases, despite their utility.

- Indeed, when public consultations are carried out during the call drafting, fewer questions on the call documents are received from the applicants during the application process.

Average number of documents drafted by type of call (N=86)

Extent to which CFP documents are clear to interested applicants (N=81)

14.8%

38.3%

45.7%

- 1 - not at all
- 2 - to a small extent
- 3 - to some extent
- 4 - to a large extent
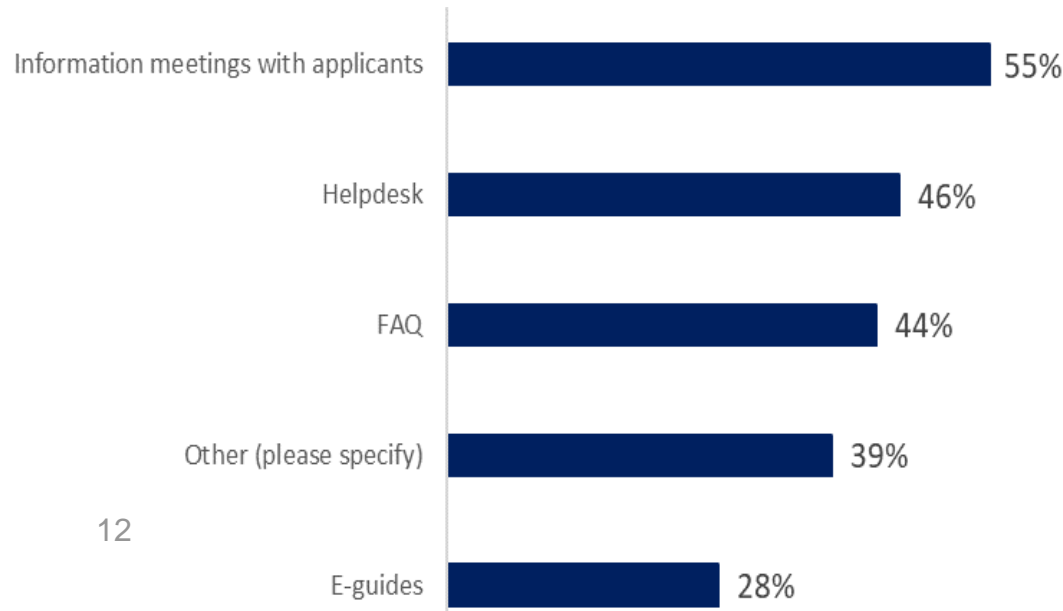- 5 - to a very large extent

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Step 4: points to consider

➢ **Well-designed call** prevents number of issues and lays the path for smoother selection. Choose the most suitable type of selection procedure (competitive/non-competitive, etc.)

➢ Call shall be well targeted! **Scope** (potential beneficiaries and supported activities) shall be **adequate** (calibrated) to market **needs** and available **budget**

➢ Consultation (co-design) with stakeholders and market very useful – **reality check**

    ➢ However, it is *not to please* everybody…

    ➢ It is to check and explain your rationale, intervention logic, criteria and even scoring system

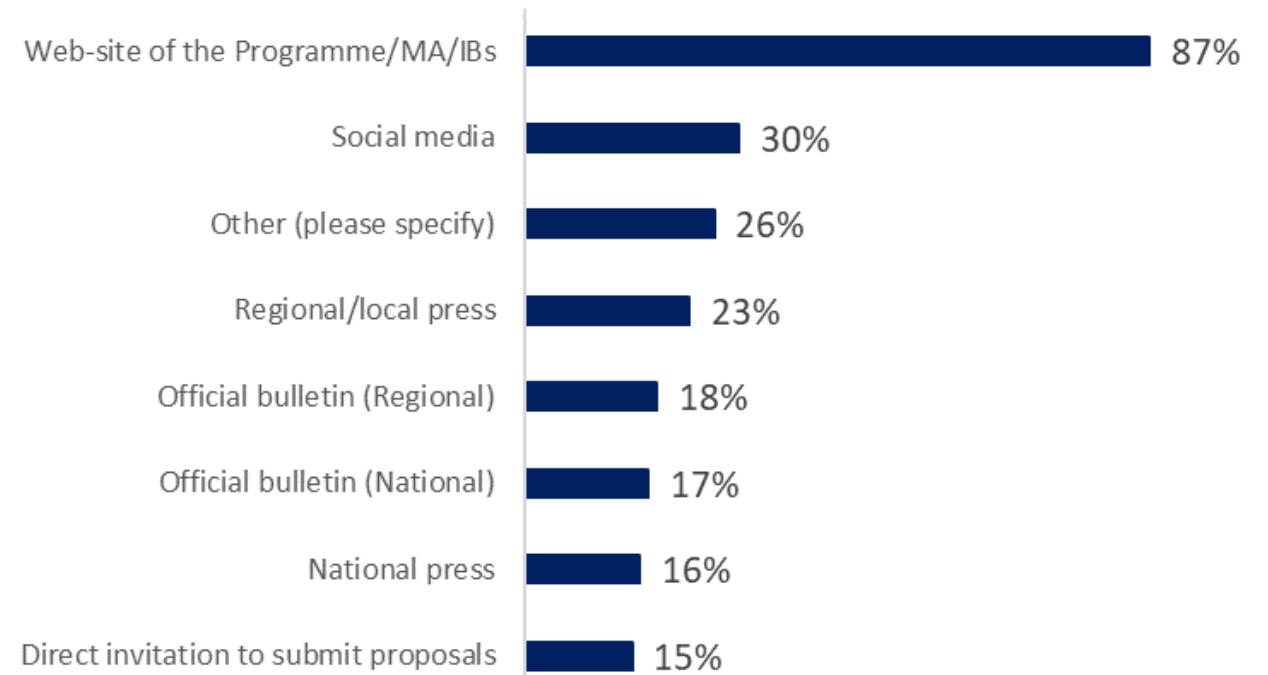➢ Less documents in more **standardise** form

Selection of operations: launch of calls (step 5)

- Around half of the MAs provide **helpdesk services**, arrange information meetings or manage a FAQ service. Also **individual feedback** to applicants via various communication channels (email, phone, in person).

- Providing extensive support to applicants during the application phase results in less complaints and legal appeals, as it reduces mistakes in the applications

Frequency of provision of support to potential applicants

Use of different practices and tools to promote the call

Frequency of provision of support to potential applicants	
Information meetings with applicants	55%
Helpdesk	46%
FAQ	44%
Other (please specify)	39%
E-guides	28%

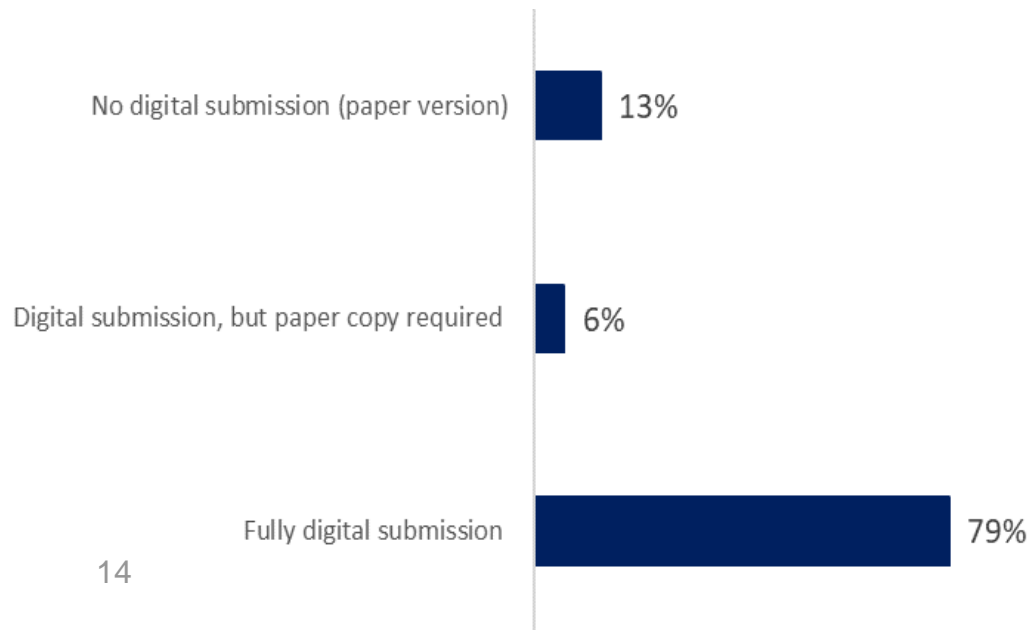| Use of different practices and tools to promote the call	
Web-site of the Programme/MA/IBs	87%
Social media	30%
Other (please specify)	26%
Regional/local press	23%
Official bulletin (Regional)	18%
Official bulletin (National)	17%
National press	16%
Direct invitation to submit proposals	15%

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Step 5: points to consider

➢ Advertise the call via **various channels** (including social media, specialised channels that target Beneficiaries are used to, etc.)

➢ Give **sufficient time** to prepare the proposal and **use this time** to support potential applicants, do match making events for potential partners, etc.

➢ Invest good amount of time and efforts to speak to **potential applicants** – clarify rationale and conditions of the call, explain your expectations, application form, provide examples, etc.

➢ In some calls, **individual feedback** (ensuring equal treatment) helps to ensure better quality of applications
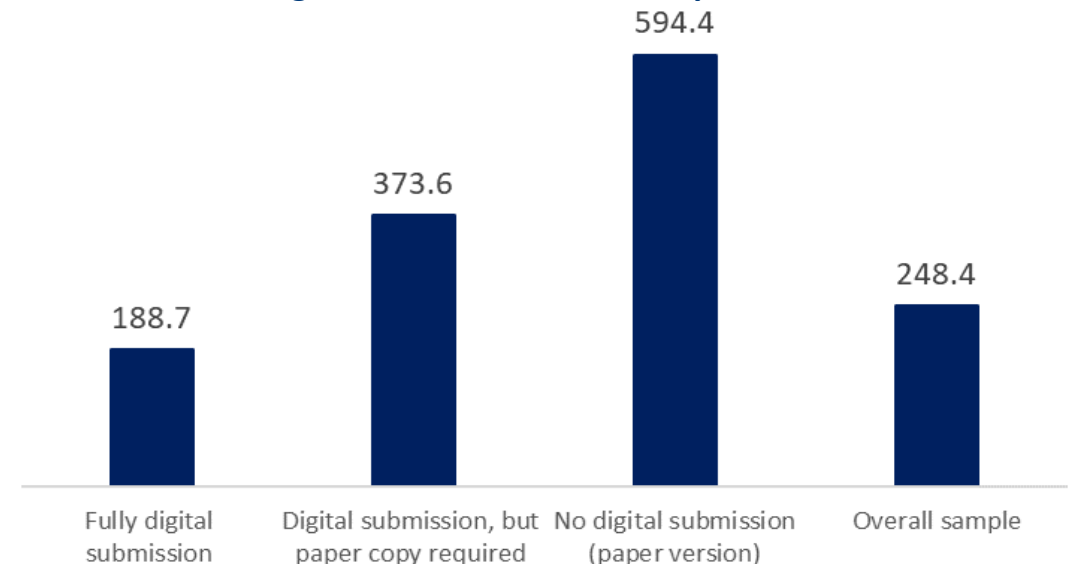
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Selection of operations: submission of applications (step 6)

- **85%** of sampled calls have **at least partially digital application systems** in place.

- Most digital systems rely on **online application** platforms. In 5% of the calls, emails were used for submission.

- In **44%** of the calls there are also **automated checks** which optimise and speed up the process further.

- When IT solutions for the submission of applications are **interoperable** internally, with IT solutions used in other steps of the selection (e.g. for the appraisal of proposals and communication), and externally, with other databases and registers, there are **important efficiency gains** for both authorities and applicants.

Extent to which it is possible to submit applications digitally

No digital submission (paper version) — 13%

Digital submission, but paper copy required — 6%

Fully digital submission — 79%

Average duration of submission step in days by degree of digitalisation of submission process

Fully digital submission — 188.7

Digital submission, but paper copy required — 373.6

No digital submission (paper version) — 594.4
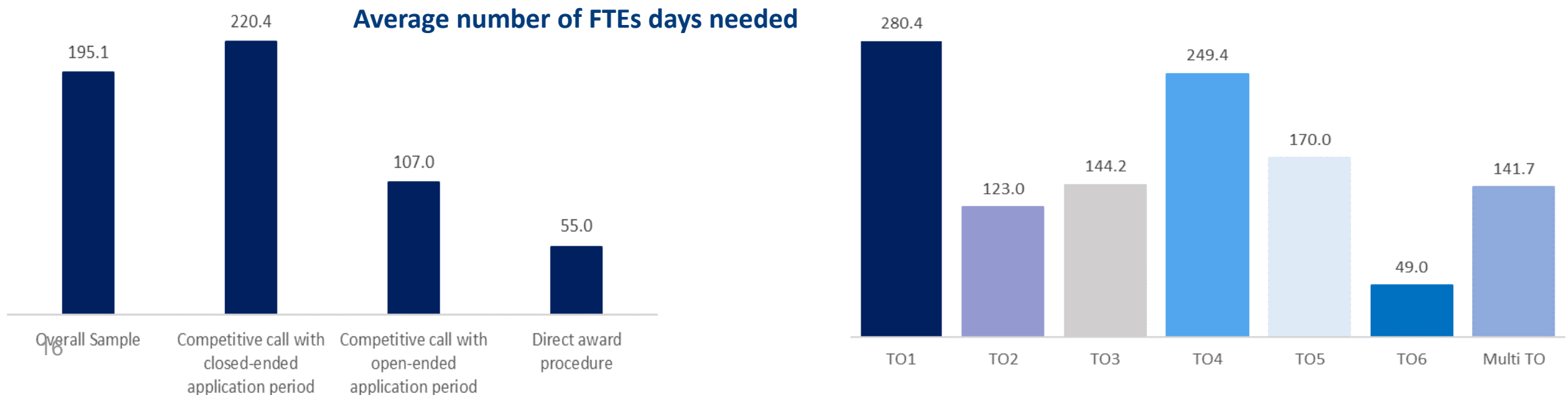
Overall sample — 248.4

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Step 6: points to consider

➢ Degree of digitalisation: submission shall be **as digital as possible**

  ➢ E-application

  ➢ With logical checks for filling mistakes and helps

  ➢ Please consider which supporting documents are needed for submission and which can be requested at a later stage (e.g. after passing quality threshold, etc.)

  ➢ Interoperability with interna/external registers, other databases, etc.

➢ Aligned with IT tools used for appraisal of applications received

➢ Intuitive and user friendly

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Selection of operations: appraisal of proposals (step 7)

- On average approx. 30 persons per call are involved in this step of the selection, average number of FTEs days 195.1

- Share of **external** personnel – 48%, while for TO1 & TO2 - 69%

- **Evaluation Committee** is a common practice (79 % of calls)

- **Less than half** of the analysed calls used **IT tools** in the appraisal of applications

Average number of FTEs days needed

Overall Sample	195.1
Competitive call with closed-ended application period	220.4
Competitive call with open-ended application period	107.0
Direct award procedure	55.0

TO1	280.4
TO2	123.0
TO3	144.2
TO4	249.4
TO5	170.0
TO6	49.0
Multi TO	141.7

Step 7: points to consider I

- Evaluation team/panel/committee

  - Evaluators (incl. external experts) should be selected and made **available in advance**

  - Balance the team in terms of **skills**, including specific expertise needed for specific topics like horizontal principles, state aid, etc.

  - Declare and manage **conflicts of interest**

- Working methods

  - Trainings/explanatory meetings on **assessment methodology**

  - Discussions and **consensus meetings**

  - Set **clear modus operandi**: define number of experts assessing one application and procedure if they their assessment differs significantly

  - Clear **justification** for the score given

  - For non-competitive procedures selection should follow the logic of negotiations aiming to improve the proposal.

Step 7: points to consider II

➢ Tools

  ➢ **IT systems/tools** to support assignment of the application to experts, remote access to evaluations, support in ranking, various alerts for the process and the workflow, etc.

  ➢ IT tool should get data from the submission tool and feed data to IT tools used at later stages – information for beneficiaries and contract preparation.

➢ Decision taking

  ➢ Is appraisal and ranking by the evaluation committee/panel final process of selection? or the selection is done by separate body based on proposed ranking?

  ➢ Define **clear procedures if ranking or selection decision is changed** at this stage. Preferred scenario is re-evaluation based on the same criteria.

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Selection of operations: information on award decision & complaint management (step 8)

- the underlying reasons for complains and legal appeals are related to **eligibility of applicants, activities, selection criteria and scoring**

- For competitive procedure "complaint rate" is around 10%, legal appeals – 5%.

Figure 91. Average number of complaints or legal appeals as a percentage of total applications received by TO (N = 71)

Average number of complaints received as a percentage of applications submitted by TO (N = 71)
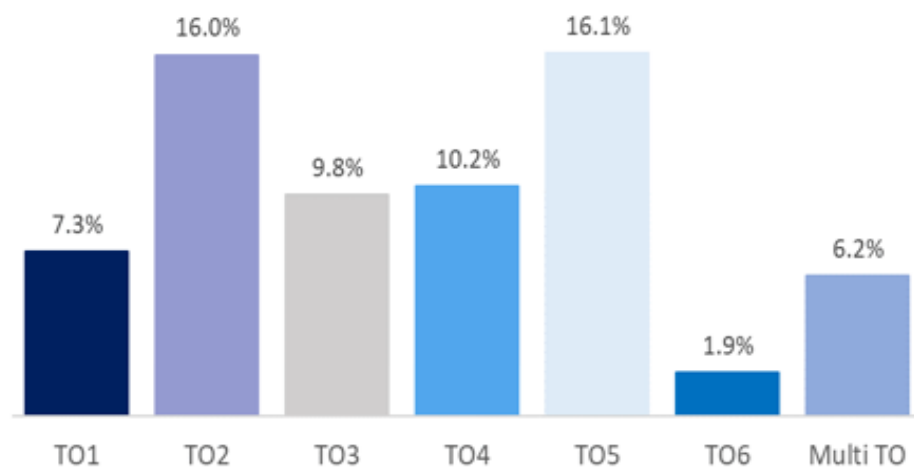
Average number of legal appeals received as a percentage of applications submitted by call type (N = 74)

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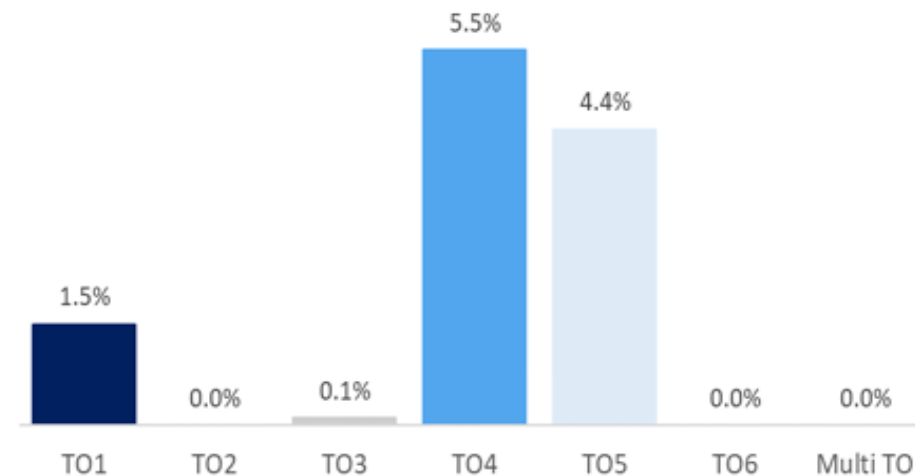
Step 8: points to consider

➢ It is important to **explain the reasons** for not selecting

➢ Not formally, but using experts inputs/comments made while assessing criteria

➢ For complains

➢ Check if the nature/reasons for complains has no systematic nature

➢ Re-evaluation of concrete proposal/criteria is not a big deal, but gives additional assurance regarding correctness of final decision

➢ Legal appeals

➢ Get qualified support

➢ **Do not block contracting** of successful projects (unless complaints show systematic problem of the evaluation process), consider having financial reserve for such purpose

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Selection of operations: signature of contracts (step 9)

- On average, 109.6 FTE days required for this step

- In nearly 80% of calls **digital solutions** are used for signing contracts, while no IT tools are used in slightly more than 20% of the cases

Share of calls according to the level of digitalisation of contracting
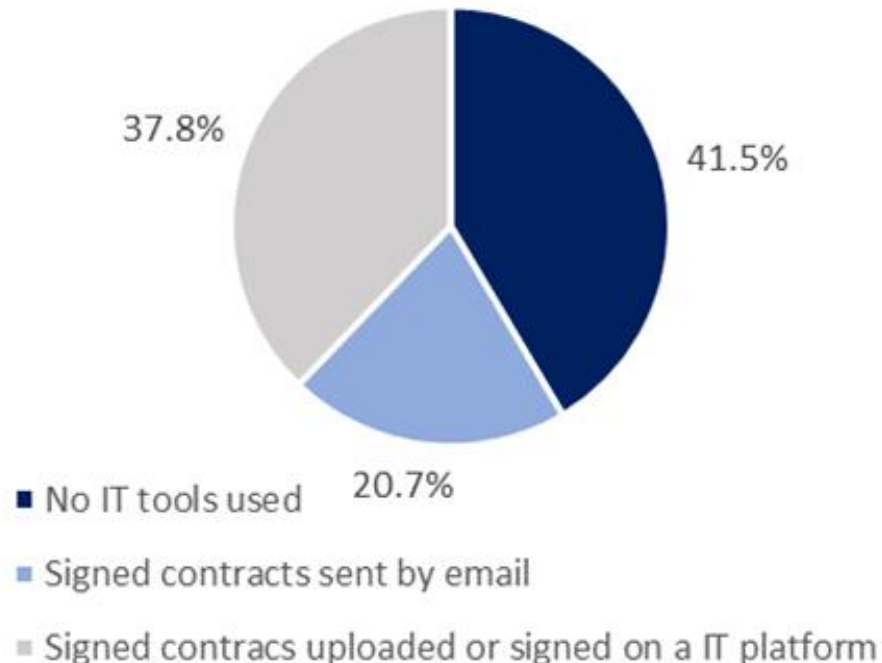
Average FTE days needed to prepare and sign one contract, according to the level of digitalisation

37.8%

41.5%

20.7%

- No IT tools used
- Signed contracts sent by email
- Signed contracs uploaded or signed on a IT platform

3.7

2.2

0.8

No IT tools used
Signed contracts sent by email
Signed contracs uploaded or signed on a IT platform

Step 9: points to consider

➢ Process should be **as digital as possible**

➢ **Proposal adjusted** based on recommendations from evaluation

➢ Training and **explanation to Beneficiaries** on contract conditions is very useful

➢ **Standard contracts conditions/templates** helps to ensure smoother contract preparation and signature process

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Analysis of selection of Operations

... in summary

Selection of operations: problems faced

- Lack of clearly defined **focus of interventions**. Lack of knowledge on the **project pipeline** and **interest** of the **target groups**.

- Selection criteria is one of the **most relevant** aspects generating some issues:
  - *too many, too complex, too broad, and not operational criteria*
  - the lack of *supporting guidelines* on how to assess/quantify those criteria
  - It is evident that there is a need for intensive **consultations** with the relevant stakeholders **during** the process of the **criteria and call design**

- Challenges concerning **human resources** (appointment of **evaluators**)

- Unexplored potential of **digitalisation and standardisation**

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Selection of operations: aspects of good practice

- **Reducing** the administrative **burden** (for applicants, MA and IB):
  - Digital tools to support selection processes, incl. interoperability
  - Standardised templates & forms/sharing info between MA/IBs
  - e.g. supporting documents at the end of the process
- Ensuring sufficient **human resources**
  - In time!
  - Exchange of experts among institutions
  - Specialised experts (e.g. state aid/PP, horizontal principles)
  - Initial and consensus meetings
  - Learn from mistakes
- Good **communication** activities in all stages of the calls
- Regular **support** to the potential **applicants**

Handbook: what is it about?
Some examples of good practices:

Preparation of the intervention
- Learning from past calls and ensuring **market relevance**
- The use of **participatory** approaches to improve the selection process
- **Practical training** and a **network of practitioners** to reinforce authorities' capacity to **design** interventions

Definition of selection criteria
- Involving **experts** in design and assessment of selection criteria
- **Thematic committees** supporting the design of the call and the identification of appropriate selection criteria

Drafting call for proposals documents
- Use of **standardized templates** and sharing of examples of successful applications
- **Participatory approach** in designing the CFP documents

Call launch and submission of applications
- Provision of **individual support** to applicants
- User **friendly IT tools**, interoperable with external register/databases and that allow some **automation** in the submission of application

Appraisal and selection of proposals
- External evaluators, recruited on the basis of a **framework contracts**
- IT tools that allow automatic detection of **double funding** and **automatic appra**isal of projects' quality
- **External experts training** ensuring efficiency and transparency

Informing applicants on the outcome, and management of complaints
- Providing detailed **feedback** and suggestions to unsuccessful applications
- Efficiently managing the complaints **prevents from blocking** the contracting phase

Contract signature
- Use of **IT tools** for contract preparation and signature
- **Training successful applicants** on the contract management aspects

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Thank you!

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