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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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GUIDANCE

Evaluation Plan guidelines what are they all about?

WRITTEN BY **SARI RANNANPÄÄ**

The Evaluation Plan guidelines are a hands-on practical manual for the Managing Authorities for designing and implementing the Evaluation Plan. The guidelines help in the preparation of evaluation activities and tasks for the future programming period and serve as a handbook. The guidelines may also be useful for other evaluation stakeholders as a concise information package that covers the main issues related to rural development policy evaluation.



WHAT IS THE EVALUATION PLAN?

The Evaluation Plan is a new element in the Rural Development Programmes (RDP). It is a mandatory part of the RDP in which the Managing Authority describes, in seven sections, the monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the programming period 2014-2020. The purpose of the Evaluation Plan is to serve as a reference document for the management, conduct and follow-up of evaluation tasks and activities as well as for annual reporting. Even though the legal requirement for the Evaluation Plan is new for RDPs, most Managing Authorities have already used similar tools to plan the monitoring and evaluation activities of the RDPs.

WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION PLAN GUIDELINES?

The Evaluation Plan guidelines are a non-binding document which complements related legal acts. It was developed by a Thematic Working Group under the guidance of the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development in close collaboration with the European Commission and the Evaluation Expert Committee. The document clarifies the legal obligations related to the Evaluation Plan by describing the minimum requirements spelled out in the implementing regulation. A wider set of recommendations on how to set up and run evaluation during the programming period is included. The guidelines take account of the differences between the Member States:

they contain practical tools and recommendations at a general level without prescribing a specific system.

The purpose of the guidelines is to give pragmatic guidance that reduces uncertainty over the form and contents of the Evaluation Plan and thus helps to maximise its quality. Namely, the better the Evaluation Plan is understood and put into action, the faster it is transformed into a solid planning tool that eases the work of the Managing Authority.

The Evaluation Plan guidelines, which were based on the text of the Regulations after the political agreement on new direction of the Common Agriculture

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SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION PLAN CONTENTS

1) OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION PLAN

- Based on the general objectives of the EP, which aim to ascertain that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken and resources are available
 - to provide information for programme steering and for the enhanced Annual Implementation Reports in 2017 and 2019
 - to secure availability of data at the right time in appropriate format
 - to ensure minimum consistent evaluation results for all RDPs, to allow aggregation at key moments
- May also include programme-related specific objectives

2) GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

- Description of the monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the RDP
- Identification of main actors and their responsibilities

3) EVALUATION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

- Indicative list of evaluation topics and activities planned for the programming period

4) DATA AND INFORMATION

- Outline of the system to record, maintain, manage and report statistical information and the provision of monitoring data for evaluation purposes
- Identification of data sources and possible data gaps
- Planning of data management

5) TIMELINE

- Indicative outline of timing of the evaluation activities to secure availability of results, especially for the enhanced Annual Implementation Reports in 2017 and 2019

6) COMMUNICATION

- Plan showing how the evaluation results will be made available for various target audiences
- Identification of information needs and channels related to the communication of evaluation results

7) RESOURCES

- Description of resources needed and planned for implementing the Evaluation Plan, including human resources and administrative capacity, data, IT and financial resources

The contents of the Evaluation Plan were described in detail in the previous issue of Rural Evaluation News (11/June 2013)

Policy and the European Structural and Investment funds was reached on 24 September 2013, were shared with the Member States in November 2013. The draft guidelines can formally only be completed after the implementing acts are finalised.

WHAT IS IN THE GUIDELINES?

The Evaluation Plan guidelines are divided into three parts. The first part relates to the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan chapter in the RDP, whereas

the second part contains more extensive recommendations on setting up and running evaluation activities during the programming period. The third part is a practical toolbox with model templates and a glossary. The tripartite structure makes it easier to distinguish between the legal requirements concerning the Evaluation Plan and the recommended good practices for setting up evaluation during the programming period. It also respects the wishes of those Member States who requested limited guidance focusing only on the legal aspects and of those who

preferred comprehensive guidance on the main evaluation-related issues.

Part I of the guidelines

The first part of the guidelines, 'Evaluation Plan in the RDPs', provides the base and recommendations for drafting the seven sections of the chapter on Evaluation Plan in the RDP.

The recommendations are not categorical. Rather, they are formulated in such a way as to accommodate the specificities of each Member State. Each of the seven sections is structured in the same way. First, the minimum requirements and key terms for each section are explained. Then the key issues to be considered and practical tips for drafting the section are outlined. Finally, the references for further information elsewhere in the guidelines are given. After the description of the legal requirements on the content of the Evaluation Plan, the related actors and processes are described.

Part II of the guidelines

The second part of the guidelines, entitled 'From Plan to Practice', provides explanations and guidance on the content and process of evaluation of the RDP. The structure mirrors that of the first part on drafting the Evaluation Plan, but the descriptions, advice and good practice go beyond the legal minimum requirements both in scope and depth. The second part is divided into two sections that describe evaluation-related processes and substance respectively.

The first section 'Governance and management of evaluation' focuses on the 'who' and 'how' of the evaluation during the programming period, namely actors and processes. To begin with, organisational set-up and actors involved in a monitoring and evaluation system are described. The issues related to timing, quality control, necessary resources and data are discussed. Reporting and communication on evaluation are depicted at the end of the section.

The second section 'Evaluation topics and activities' looks at the 'what' of the evaluation during the programming period.

HOW DO WE COME FROM THE EVALUATION PLAN TO PRACTICE?

Part I

Provides the **base for drafting** the 7 sections of the chapter on Evaluation Plan in RDP

Part II

Provides **explanations and guidance** on the content and process of evaluation of the RDP in relation to minimum requirements. Facilitates drafting and implementing the Evaluation Plan.

Tools

Provides additional **practical tools** for Evaluation Plan drafting, implementation and reporting.

It covers the elements, topics and activities that need to be covered in evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes. First, the common and programme-specific elements of the evaluation system are explained. Then the evaluation topics, as well as cross-cutting and specific evaluation topics are described. Finally, evaluation activities are characterised.

Part III of the guidelines

The third and final part of the guidelines is a hands-on toolkit with model templates for the benefit of the Member States. The indicative templates include, amongst others, an indicative outline of an internal Evaluation Plan, indicative Terms of Reference for an evaluation, as well as a table for retro-planning, also known as backward scheduling, of evaluation activities.

The toolbox also contains a glossary of the main terms used. The glossary is aimed at helping the readers to understand the terms used precisely. It also contributes to evaluation capacity building and to the shared understanding of evaluation-related terms in the Member States.

HOW TO BEST USE THE GUIDELINES?

The guidelines are aimed at helping the Managing Authorities to plan, develop and fine-tune the Evaluation Plan. They will also be helpful for the *ex ante* evaluators who assess the Evaluation Plan as part of the RDP. During the programming period, the guidelines should be valuable

Plan to Practice' and the glossary will be useful for evaluation stakeholders and others interested in evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.

The guidance document consists of three parts but the different parts are strongly intertwined. The second part, 'From Plan to Practice' deepens the first part 'Evaluation Plan in the RDPs'. The second part also gives necessary background information for the first part and describes good practice in evaluation during the programming period. The third part 'Toolbox' defines the terms and gives model templates that the Member States can use in their evaluation planning. It is therefore recommended that the Managing Authorities dedicate some attention to Part II and III before starting to work on the Evaluation Plan.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The yearly Focus Groups in EU Member States in 2013 had chosen the topic of "Establishing and implementing the Evaluation Plan of 2014-2020 RDPs". As most MAs had not started to draft their Evaluation Plan the Focus Groups were a welcome opportunity to initiate the drafting process as it was bringing together the key stakeholders. In general the Evaluation Plan is perceived as a useful tool to improve the current system via planning evaluation at the time of programme design. Some of the main findings and recommendations derived from these Focus Groups are given below (the full report can be read [here](#)):

- Most RDPs will define the objective and purpose of the EP linked to the minimum requirements. The potential role in enhancing the function of evaluation by setting specific objectives, e.g. number, scope or quality standards of evaluations foreseen, was acknowledged by some MS.
- When defining the evaluation topics and activities, all the building blocks of an RDP should be addressed. Special attention should be paid to emerging topics and topics which were not covered adequately in the current period (e.g. innovation, net effects, secondary effects, ...).
- With respect to data and information needs a number of new challenges were identified, mainly to allow for counterfactual methods. Also the need for better data on land cover type and on farming practices (for agri-environmental measures) and for statistical data on rural communities for the assessment of quality of life measures was stressed.
- Communication of evaluation results was seen as a major challenge due to the technical character of the message to convey and the great differences between the target groups to be reached. A need to develop more targeted formats and to use different communication channels than in last period was evident to most participants.
- Since the quality of evaluation depends largely on the financial and human resources allocated to it has been recommended to ensure these resources via the Evaluation Plan in the longer term. And moreover, to foresee additional budget for covering *ad hoc* evaluation needs.



Assessment of National Rural Networks - Lessons Learnt and Future Prospects

WRITTEN BY JELA TVRDONOVA

Building on the positive experiences with networking among local action groups during previous programming periods, the EU rural development policy for 2007-2013 foresaw the establishment and operation of National Rural Networks in each Member State. These networks could either be operated as specific interventions within a Rural Development Programme (RDP), financed from Technical Assistance (National Rural Networks – NRN) or be established through a separate programme with an independent budget¹ (National Rural Network Programme – NRNP)².



As for all RDPs the NRNP had to undergo a mid-term evaluation (MTE) in 2010 in order to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency and assess its impacts³. The mid-term evaluations of NRNs were more focused on their **contribution to RDP objectives**. Moreover, the MTE of both NRN and NRNP looked at the **added value**, generated through broader rural networking, creation of social capital and improved governance in rural areas.

The main **methodological challenges in the assessment of National Rural Networks** consisted in their specific intervention logic, the complex character of National Rural Networks, the definition of programme-specific indicators capable of capturing the expected effects on broader rural networking and the generated added value. Against this background, the application of robust evaluation methods to assess network results and impacts was particularly difficult.

While the initial **Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework** 2007-2013 (CMEF) did not provide any specific guidance on the evaluation of National Rural Networks, the Evaluation Helpdesk organised several workshops and published a working paper on this topic. Through these activities a wealth of experience about the problems encountered and the solutions adopted by Member States in assessing the activities of National Rural Networks has been collected. These experiences provide important indications on how to better support Managing Authorities and evaluators in assessing networks in future.

In the **context of the rural development policy 2014 – 2020** the role of NRNs will be further strengthened with the aim to⁵:

- **Increase the involvement** of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development;
- **Improve the quality** of implementation of rural development programmes;
- **Inform** the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities;
- **Foster innovation** in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.

Reflecting this increased role of NRNs in the implementation of rural development



policy, and their expected contribution to rural development objectives, the European Commission is putting more emphasis on their assessment in the next programming period: The Common Monitoring and Evaluation System 2014-2020 will provide a set of common elements (evaluation questions, output indicators linked to actions proposed for NRNs) in the implementing acts in order to allow for a more straightforward and yet effective assessment of National Rural Networks. As the set of common elements will be kept to the necessary minimum, Managing Authorities may still need to complement it with programme-specific evaluation questions and after a careful review of their rural network intervention logic, with programme-specific output and result indicators linked with identified data sources.

With a view to improving the understanding and to facilitating the future assessment of National Rural Networks the

Evaluation Helpdesk is currently developing a working paper which compiles and describes the relevant elements of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System for National Rural Networks. The guidance contains:

- The proposed set of common context parameters to describe the specific context in which networks are operating (context analysis);
- A suggested intervention logic for each of the common NRN/NRNP objectives, to illustrate the possible links between NRN/NRNP common objectives and actions of the NRN/NRNP action plan and with proposed programme-specific results and common and programme-specific output indicators;
- Direct and secondary contributions of the group of actions of the NRN/NRNP action plan towards the NRN/NRNP objectives;
- An NRN/NRNP evaluation framework (incl. intervention logic), comprising

common and programme-specific evaluation questions, programme-specific result indicators linked to NRN/NRNP objectives, and common and programme-specific output indicators linked to the group of actions under the NRN/NRNP action plan.

The working paper will be further enriched through exchange and discussion with representatives of Managing Authorities, evaluators and NRNs. A Good Practice Workshop on the evaluation of National Rural Networks will be organised by the Helpdesk in Rome (Italy), 10&11 April.

- 1 in case of Member States with regional programmes
- 2 EC Regulation 1698/2005, Art. 66 and 68
- 3 EC Regulation 1698/2005, Art. 84
- 4 Working paper on evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes, Helpdesk of European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, Brussels, 2010
- 5 Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 54.2



INTERVIEW



ALESSANDRO MONTELEONE
National Rural Network
– Italy

How does the Italian Rural Network (NRN) currently support the provision of data for RDP evaluations?

NRN activities that support the provision of data for evaluation purposes seek to enable Managing Authorities (MAs) and evaluators to have consistent access to relevant data and methodological developments.

The Italian NRN is currently working:

- To screen Context Indicators (in partnership with data providers) in order to create a robust database, accessible via the NRN webpage. When data gaps are identified, the NRN plans to calculate the values of the proxy indicators proposed by the EC.
- To build a spatial data warehouse with relevant geographic information on the implementation of the CAP (Pillar I and II) and on other relevant data for policy evaluation.
- To collect specific data on strategic themes at national and EU level, in particular on biodiversity, for which information gaps currently exist.
- To implement a monitoring system for complex projects (e.g. LEADER, cooperation and supply chain projects).

For which indicators have solutions been found?

The NRN is currently making progress in providing sound

data for environmental indicators (e.g. Farmland Bird Index, High Nature Value and nutrient balance).

What conditions enable the Italian NRN to support regional data provision?

The NRN aims to create a “National System for Monitoring and Evaluation”, in order to:

- Create a network amongst research and policy institutes, data providers and other stakeholders to improve monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities.
- Draw on the knowledge of qualified experts on specific M&E topics.
- Utilise financial resources to start specific activities to quantify values for specific indicators, or to agree improved methods for their calculation.
- Discuss with stakeholders in the evaluation community the challenges experienced while carrying out activities.

What will change in the next programming period?

The Italian NRN programme is currently in its design phase, but the “success” of previous M&E activities will encourage its continuation in the next programming period. However, the Ministry and Managing Authorities should agree specific activities to strengthen M&E networking activities, in order to enhance results.



MEMBER STATES' EXPERIENCE

Synthesis of the Annual Progress Reports for 2012 concerning ongoing evaluation: Findings

WRITTEN BY **VALERIE DUMONT**

As in the previous years the Evaluation Helpdesk has examined the ongoing evaluation sections of the Annual Progress Reports (APRs) and synthesized the findings. This work is carried out on the basis of the reports submitted by the Managing Authorities in June 2013. Here are some selected findings and outcomes from the synthesis.



MAJOR EVALUATION MILESTONES

A substantial number of APRs mention the conduction of research and evaluation studies in the reporting year 2012. The majority of these studies concentrate on the assessment of results and impacts for the preparation of the *ex post* evaluation. Preparing the next programming period 2014 – 2020 is also very much reported although it is not always easy to distinguish which part of the activities relate to programming and to the development of the monitoring and evaluation system for 2014-2020.

OTHER MILESTONES COMPRISE

- Programme modifications as a follow up to MTE recommendations (several Länder in DE, FR-Guadeloupe, FR-Hexagone, etc.);
- Ongoing improvement of the monitoring database, IT system related to some specific measures (AT, BE-Vlaanderen, BG, DE, EE, IT, LV, etc.);
- Development of additional indicators and evaluation questions (IT);
- Workshops, meetings and trainings related to the improvement of the ongoing evaluation system through

CHANGES TO THE EVALUATION SYSTEM

- > Further improvement of the RDP management is envisaged through simplification of procedures (ES-Andalucia);
- > Multi-regional debate on evaluation, coordination workshops on climate change and village renewal/LEADER (4 Länder in DE)

- the achieved results (AT, ES, etc.);
- Dissemination of evaluation results (CY, LV, UK-Wales, etc.);
- Preparation of the *ex ante* evaluation for 2014-2020 (HU, LU, ES, etc.).

EVALUATION STUDIES AND TASKS IN 2012

- > HNV (AT)
- > GVA (ES – Castilla-Y-Leon)
- > Farm Bird Index (EL)
- > Study on 'Diversification of economic activity' (FR-Hexagone);
- > Creation of an indicator system for evaluating the actions of the National Rural Network (CY);
- > Study on Agriculture and HNV (FR-Hexagone);
- > A natural heritage monitoring contract was awarded to Environment Systems working with Thomson Ecology (UK-Scotland)
- > Comparing the two programming periods to improve the planning process of the new programme either in a working group or together with the *ex ante* evaluator (6 regions in ES)

EVALUATION SYSTEM

There has been a considerable increase in tendering, selecting and contracting evaluators in 2012 mainly with regards to the *ex post* and *ex ante* evaluations. Moreover, for ongoing evaluation activities, one can observe a rise in the externally hired expertise including both methodological work and data provision activities.

Some organizational changes in the evaluation system are reported for instance in

CONTRACTUAL ISSUES IN 2012

- > Ongoing evaluator appointed to carry out the *ex post* evaluation (PT-Madeira and 6 Italian regions);
- > A different evaluator from the *ex ante* and mid-term evaluator appointed for the *ex post* evaluation (IT Friuli-Venezia-Giulia);
- > The *ex ante* evaluator was previously involved in ongoing evaluation (UK-Wales);
- > *Ex ante* evaluation and SEA tendered out in one bid to guarantee close cooperation and good coherence between the two evaluation tasks (NL).
- > Contracting additional activities within ongoing evaluation; strategic monitoring report about the progress of the National Strategic Plan for RD in 2014 (SK);
- > Countryside & Community research Institute: Social return on investment of Axes 3 & 4 activity (UK-England).

terms of additional resources (an external evaluation expert was contracted to carry out monitoring and evaluation activities in HU). As for the IT system and data management, for instance a tendering procedure to develop an interface between the MA and the Paying

Agency for monitoring purposes of the RDP was carried out and awarded to an external contractor whose tasks is to design and test a software and later on maintain it (BG). Another example shows the development of Manuals of procedures for data collection and electronic support for data input into the system (SE).

EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Compared to 2011, the number of evaluation activities undertaken in the Member States has almost doubled in 2012. The assessment of impacts in Axis 1 (mainly measures 111 and 121 and result indicators 1 to 4) received the major focus among all axes differing from last year where Axis 2 counted the largest number of evaluation activities. Although significantly lower than the first two axes, evaluation activities in Axis 3 and Axis 4 have undergone a noticeable progress. The assessment of horizontal impacts is still lagging behind.

APPROACHES TO EVALUATION PLAN 2007-2013

- > Planning document dealing with RDP indicators system (IT-Emilia Romagna, ES-Galicia)
- > Overview of the evaluation activities over time (IT-Valle d'Aoste)
- > Explanation of a methodological framework, development of activities and the organizational structure (people, time and resources) (SI, IT-Friuli-Venezia-Giulia)

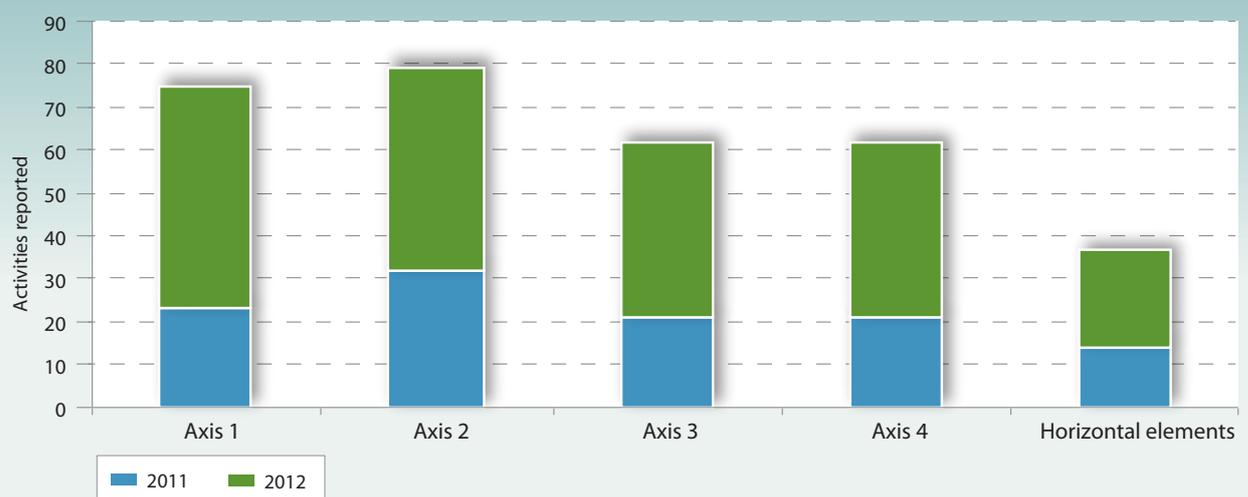
EVALUATION PLAN

In order to structure and steer the evaluation process, some Member States refer to the use of an Evaluation Plan or similar planning documents. However, there is no common concept for this 2007-2013 programming period and one can observe different approaches to the Evaluation Plan which constitute a basis to develop the Evaluation Plan as required for the next programming period.

DATA COLLECTION

In the APRs for 2012, very little is reported on approaches, systems in data collection and management. Concerning

REPORTED EVALUATION ACTIVITIES ACROSS AXES

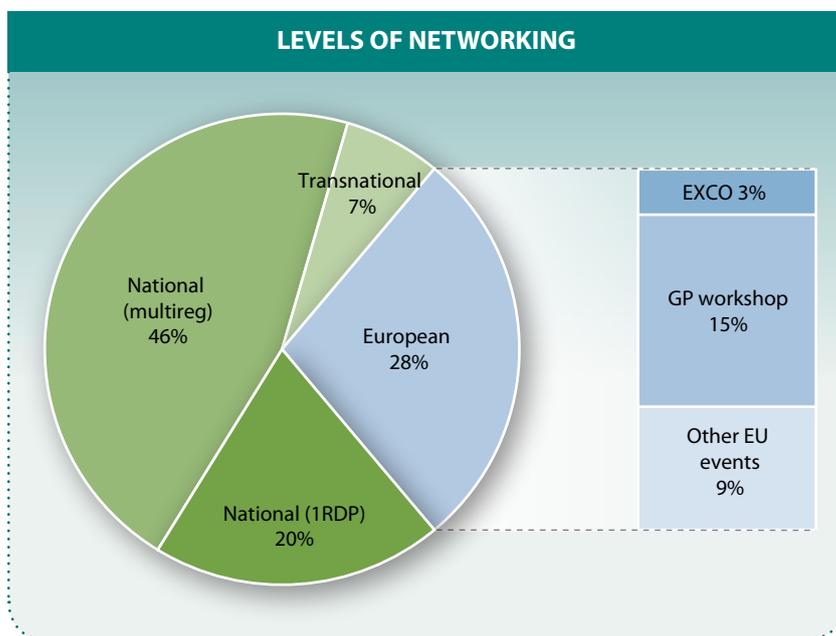


additional data for beneficiaries, major activities have been reported for Axis 1 whereas little mention is made for Axis 3 and Axis 4. Evidence suggests that after the MTE, coordination between data providers is no longer limited to the Managing Authority, the Paying Agency and the implementing bodies but involves other data providers. The changes in the IT system are less reported than in the past and the described activities aim to improve the system's efficiency in terms of time, data quality, data access and compliance with the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF).

NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

A total of 150 networking activities are reported in the APRs for 2012, consisting of workshops, seminars and conferences. Among the most often reported events:

- Good Practice Workshops of the Evaluation Expert Network for Rural Development;
- Other EU level events (CAPRI-RD, Workshop on Climate Action, Strategic Programming and Monitoring and Evaluation for RDP 2014-2020, ExCo meetings, etc.)
- Transnational exchanges (Baltic conference on biodiversity, Meet-



- ing between Portuguese evaluation team and the Italian NRN task force for evaluation, etc.);
- National events (the use of evaluation results, result indicators, LEADER evaluation, Focus Groups, etc.).

Half of the reports contain specific information on the outcomes of the events. One substantial change compared to the previous years is that the target audience attending those events includes a wide number of evaluators (72%) and

an increasing number of data providers (25%).

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

Data availability, data quality, missing definitions for some indicators, unavailability or inappropriate timing of data for baseline indicators impairing the quantification of impacts remain the most important difficulties reported in 2012.

APRS' FINDINGS IN A NUTSHELL	
Governance	Member States have invested a lot of effort in coordination, steering and planning whereas the Evaluation Helpdesk has continued supporting networking and capacity building activities.
Evaluation systems/ activities	After the MTE, Member States have developed methodologies reflected in various evaluation studies for Axes 1 & 2 and have shifted their focus from output to result and impact. Some improvement needs to be made for Axes 3 & 4.
Data Collection	For Axes 1 & 2, the data collection system has improved and the type of data used and identified focus more on results and impacts. There is a closer link between monitoring and evaluation. Collecting secondary data has considerably improved. Improving data collection for Axes 3 & 4 still needs to be undertaken.



CAPACITY-BUILDING

International monitoring and evaluation conference

Budapest, 25-27 September 2013

WRITTEN BY **Ms. BERNADET HULLAI** AND BY **TÍMEA SZERVÁNSZKY-KALAKÁN**

The Hungarian National Development Agency (NDA) – responsible for the management of EU Structural and Cohesion Funds development programmes – in cooperation with the European Commission and the Hungarian Ministry of Rural Development held an international monitoring and evaluation conference in Budapest on 25-27 September 2013.



The conference was opened by Mr. Nándor Csepreghy, Deputy State Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office and by Mr. Lajos Búsi, Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development.

The idea of having a joint conference covering all EU funds came up when the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development held a Good Practice Workshop in Budapest, on 8-9 October 2012 entitled "Targeted data management for evidence-based evaluation in Rural Development".

Participants were invited not only from the field of agriculture and rural development, but also from other policy areas that are managed by the Structural and Cohesion Funds. In Hungary the Ministry of Rural Development is responsible for the management of EAFRD co-financed programmes, whereas the National Development Agency co-ordinates the implementation of sectorial and regional operation programmes co-financed by the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

The aim of the conference was to enhance the effective preparation of the next programming period by discussing the key issues of monitoring as a management tool as well as the *ex ante* evaluation requirements and issues (e.g. the relevance, feasibility and effectiveness

of programmes, possibilities of impact modelling, indicators, experience of previous programming periods, etc.)

Experts were invited from countries all over Europe and the USA, among them colleagues of the different Directorates General of the European Commission responsible for ESIF, the World Bank, members of the public administration, evaluation experts and academics.

The plenary session of the 2nd international monitoring conference held on 25 September had two main focuses: the relevance of monitoring in the 2014-2020 programming period and the experiences and challenges of monitoring as a management tool. The main features of the monitoring systems of ERDF and ESF for the next programming period were presented by Mr. Konrad Lammers from the Europa-Kolleg and by the representative of DG REGIO ([see PPT](#)). As for EAFRD, Mr. Christophe Derzelle from DG AGRI talked about the role of indicators and monitoring in RDP for the next programming period.

The introductory part was followed by an interesting summary of the experiences of different evaluations from the point of view of a sociologist. Mr. András Csité (Hétfa Institute) underlined the wide range of expectations put against indicators by decision makers and emphasised



the importance of the smooth operation of the whole system, even at the level of beneficiaries.

During the second plenary session, four experts gave their presentations on their experiences and lessons learnt during the implementation. Ms. Dinka Bujas from Croatia (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds) presented the system of the implementation of the structural funds in Croatia ([see PPT](#)). Mr. Attila Béres, a monitoring and evaluation consultant from Hungary presented the possible pitfalls of a not properly functioning monitoring system ([see PPT](#)). Ms. Mária Szabó (Ministry of Rural Development) and Ms. Tímea Hegedűs (Agricultural and Rural Development Agency) gave an insight into the monitoring system of the EAFRD in Hungary from the point of view of the Managing Authority ([see PPT](#)) and the Paying Agency ([see PPT](#)). Ms. Mária Szabó



also reflected on the new elements of the monitoring system to be used during the next programming period.

Following the plenary session, participants were able to choose between two thematic sessions focusing on the practical means of a result-oriented approach. The thematic session on "Successful data collection in rural development" dealt with the system of data collection presented by Mr. Andrea Furlan (Region Emilia-Romagna) and by Mrs. Alena Kuruczova (Agricultural Paying Agency, Slovakia). Finally, as regards data collection in the field of rural development, some good practices were presented by Ms. Krisztina Magócs, an external evaluation expert in Hungary.

The second thematic session focusing on the "Experiences of Operational Programme drafting on indicators (ERDF, ESF)" concluded that strong national coordination is crucial for the functioning of the monitoring system.

The new and innovative implementing instrument of Joint Action Plan was introduced by Mr. Stefan Schulz-Trieglaff (DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion), and the experiences of pilot projects in the Czech Republic ([see PPT](#)) and in Poland ([see PPT](#)) were also presented.

THE MONITORING CONFERENCE WAS FOLLOWED BY THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION CONFERENCE ON 26-27 SEPTEMBER HELD IN THE RENOWNED GERBEAUD HOUSE.

The main aim of the evaluation conference was to contribute to the successful preparation of the EU Members States' Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period by facilitating international discussion. Therefore the conference focused on *ex ante* evaluations and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as a compulsory and supporting exercise for Partnership Agreements.

On the first day of the conference, representatives of the European Commission

presented the *ex ante* evaluation requirements for 2014-2020. Zélie Peppiette, from DG AGRI gave a very interesting presentation on the [new requirements concerning the appraisals of the RDPs, the process of the ex ante evaluation and the SEA](#), as well as giving an insight into the task foreseen both for DG AGRI and the Member States. She also discussed the **content of the Evaluation Plan Guidelines**.

The presentations were followed by a round table discussion with representatives of the European Commission and the *ex ante* evaluation management of Member States. The issues and experiences by Member States concerning rural development were reflected on by Zélie Peppiette and Hannes Wimmer from the Evaluation Helpdesk. External evaluators Jörg Schramek, IFLS from Germany ([see PPT](#)) and Davide Zanon, Gruppo CLAS from Italy ([see PPT](#)) presented their evaluation experiences in rural development. Various methodological approaches that play a crucial role in the 2014-2020 planning were also discussed.

Following the round-table discussion, results of macro modeling, impact assessments concerning the labour market, as well as the evaluation results of territorial assessments in Ireland ([see PPT](#)) and Austria ([see PPT](#)) were presented by academics, researchers and evaluators. A separate session dealt with social inclusion, where representatives of the World Bank presented the [results of poverty mapping](#) in Central Europe, as well as the result of the World Bank's Evaluation on its [Youth Employment Programmes](#). The representative of the Hungarian Hétfa Research Institute discussed the instruments and the results of development policy and the new instruments to be used from 2014 in order to reduce [poverty and inequalities](#) in Hungary.

On the second day, other methodologies - use of macromodel forecasts and randomized control trials- that can be used for evaluating programmes were introduced by two speakers from the USA. Iain Jenkins' presentation discussed [market failure](#) and its causes, how it is normally applied and how the concept can inform planning. A very interesting case study on targeting sectors and "cyber security" was also presented.

The main focus of the last session of the conference was on [Strategic Environmental Assessment](#) in the frame of which Mr. Ion Codescu, representative of DG ENV presented the EC requirements for the SEAs for 2014-2020.

Matteo Ignaccolo from Catania University, Italy presented the sequence of steps of an [integrated process of planning and evaluation](#) as well as the methods using examples from transport planning. Mr. Ignaccolo emphasized the importance of community (stakeholder) involvement or public engagement in the SEA process.

Finally, Gyöngyvér Gyene from the National Development Agency presented the [SEA experiences in Hungary from the perspective of implementation](#) and made some recommendations how to avoid SEA risks.

We believe that the three-day event provided a uniquely enriching learning environment as well as a forum for different Member States to discuss challenges they are currently facing in the planning of their Operational Programmes. Participants representing the different funds also had the opportunity to share experiences and good practices, exchange views and to take a glimpse at the challenges and successes of the different EU funds.



FIND OUT MORE

- > The presentations of both conferences can be downloaded from the following website:
- > www.nfu.hu/monconf2013
- > http://www.nfu.hu/4th_international_evaluation_conference_preparing_for_eu_2014_2020_budapest_26_27_september_2013

Meetings of the Evaluation Expert Committee

WRITTEN BY **ENRICO GASPARI**



Between June and November 2013 Member States' representatives, European Commission officials and the Evaluation Helpdesk team gathered in Brussels for the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth meetings of the Evaluation Expert Committee.

This report summarises the key topics discussed and the main achievements of the meetings.

INTERVENTION LOGIC AND INDICATORS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES (RDPS)

Subsequent to the political agreement achieved, the RD intervention logic has been slightly modified by introduction of new wording for some RD priorities and Focus Areas.

The most significant modification regards Focus Area 5D, which now includes "reduction of ammonia emissions" as a policy objective, in addition to "reduction of GHG emissions". This involves changes to impact indicator no 7 (now called "Emissions from agriculture") and the introduction of a new complementary result indicator (P5D Result (2): "Reduced emissions of ammonia from agriculture").

COMMON MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM 2014-2020

On the basis of the outcomes of a thematic workshop with evaluation experts and European Commission representatives, the Evaluation Helpdesk developed a working document on Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs) for Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020.

The document, which proposed a draft set of CEQs linked to policy objectives, and identified appropriate judgement criteria and indicators, aimed to (i) improve consistency between CEQs, RD indicators and the policy framework and (ii) to reduce the set of CEQs compared to the current period. The document proposed 18 Focus Area related EQs and 20 Horizontal related EQs. Following discussion in the 17th ExCo meeting, the list of CEQs was revised, and is now made up of 18 Focus Area related questions, 3 programme related questions and 9 questions linked to overall EU objectives, making a total of 30 CEQs for rural development.

During the 17th meeting, the proposed requirements for reporting on evaluation activities in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) were presented. AIRs must be submitted yearly from 2016 until 2024. In AIRs, MAs should report on EP modifications, evaluation activities undertaken, activities related to provision and management of data, list of completed evaluations, communication activities and the follow-up of

evaluation results. AIRs should refer to the Evaluation Plan and describe both difficulties encountered, as well as solutions adopted and proposed.

GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

During the three Evaluation Expert Committee meetings, Part I, Part II and the Toolbox of the Evaluation Plan guidelines were presented to MS representatives. The Evaluation Plan is a new element within the rural development monitoring and evaluation system for the programming period 2014-2020. Part I of the guidelines includes guidance on how to build and draft the Evaluation Plan as a part of the RDP while Part II and the Toolbox include guidance on how to implement the Evaluation Plan during the programming period.

In addition, during the 17th and 18th meetings, the preliminary ideas for the *ex post* evaluation guidelines for the 2007-2013 period were outlined. The guidelines will be developed by a Thematic Working Group and will have a similar structure to the one of the *ex ante* evaluation guidelines. More specifically, it will include: practical support for the Managing Authority to steer the *ex post* evaluation process; instructions on application of advanced evaluation methodologies addressed to evaluators; a collection of good practice examples to consider in the assessment of RD impacts.

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP AND FOCUS GROUPS ORGANISED BY THE EVALUATION HELPDESK

During the 16th ExCo meeting, the outcomes of the Good Practice Workshop "[The ex ante evaluation of SWOT analysis and needs assessment](#)" held in Prague on 27th – 28th May 2013 were communicated to the members of the Committee.

Moreover, dates and host for a new Good Practice Workshop on climate change have been identified; the workshop was subsequently held in February in Cyprus (see next page).

Finally, following the ExCo representatives' vote during the sixteenth ExCo meeting, it emerged that the favoured topic to be addressed during the Focus Groups 2013 is "Establishing and implementing Evaluation Plan of 2014-2020".





Good Practice Workshop Larnaca (Cyprus) 10-11 February 2014

WRITTEN BY **ENRIQUE JAVIER NIETO**

 In close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment of Cyprus the Evaluation Helpdesk organised a Good Practice Workshop (GPW) "Climate Change mitigation and adaptation: Assessing the scope and measuring the outcomes". It took place in Larnaca (Cyprus) on the 10&11, February 2014 attracting a total of 70 participants from 20 different EU countries.

The event aimed at facilitating the exchange of good practice in national and international experiences with climate change adaptation and mitigation in agriculture and forestry. The European Commission representatives provided a comprehensive overview of the climate change context and trends in Europe highlighting the outstanding role of RDPs to combat climate change challenges in Europe. They also showcased the increased relevance of climate change issues within the rural development policy since 2007. They illustrated the importance of capturing the RDPs contribution towards climate change mitigation and adaptation and the need for integrating appropriate evaluation elements and tools within the common monitoring and evaluation system for the 2014-2020 programming period.

Bill Slee, Expert of the Evaluation Helpdesk, reflected on potential actions that can be taken through RDPs and the key aspects to be considered by MAs in order to enhance the capacities of programmes to address climate change mitigation and adaptation. He stressed the need for robust and accurate evaluation methods that provide sound evidence justifying the choice of interventions and capturing the results and impacts of the interventions (of climate-change relevance).

Four case studies - from Cyprus, Spain, Wales and Ireland - were presented to complement the above reflections. The case study presentations illustrated different RDP responses implemented in the four countries to address specific climate change challenges such as water stress and scarcity, forest fires or GHG emission from agriculture. Additionally, the presenters described the different evaluation methodologies applied to assess the contribution of the actions taken and outlined the main results achieved by the respective programme. In a reflection round, participants used the case studies to share experiences and discuss about the main challenges faced in the assessment of climate change mitigation and adaptation responses and to identify potential solutions.

The Evaluation Helpdesk conducted a short survey on the level of awareness of main rural development stakeholders of the important role of RDPs in tackling climate change mitigation and adaptation, the main 2007-2013 RDP measures that contribute to climate change and current evaluation practices applied across Europe. The main results were presented during the GPW and will be further elaborated in a background document that will be shortly available on the Evaluation Helpdesk Website.

Through an interactive working session participants discussed the set of rural development measures for the 2014-2020 programming period and assessed their effectiveness in addressing the various climate change challenges in different EU regions. The main results of this exercise are illustrated in the outcome document of the Good Practice Workshop that is available on the Evaluation Helpdesk's Website.

All the information, presentations and outcomes of the Good Practice Workshop are available [here](#).

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