



European  
Commission

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

# **SYNTHESIS OF EX ANTE EVALUATIONS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES 2014-2020**

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# Overview

- Evaluation objectives
- Main components of the synthesis:
  - Descriptive overview
  - Evaluation themes
- Evaluation methods
- Main findings and conclusions: 8 topics
- 12 key recommendations

# Objectives of the evaluation

## Related Regulatory Provision

Syntheses at Union level of the ex ante and ex post evaluation reports shall be undertaken under the responsibility of the Commission. The syntheses of the evaluation reports shall be completed at the latest by 31 December of the year following the submission of the relevant evaluations. [**Article 79**, Ref. (EU) No 1305/2013]

## Objectives of the evaluation

- The synthesis provides an **overall analysis** of the ex ante evaluations of the 115 RDPs and NRNPs 2014-2020, taking into account the **programming documents** and the **strategic environmental assessments**.
- It reports on the **outcomes of the ex ante evaluation reports**, working out **common trends at the European level** but also the **differences between programme areas**. Emphasis of the synthesis is on the **analysis and assessment of specific topics** included in the evaluation themes.
- Beyond **gathering and analysing data**, the synthesis provides founded **judgements** based on analysis and puts forward reasoned **conclusions** and **recommendations**.

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# Main components of the evaluation (1)

- **DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW**

overview of the ex ante evaluation (EAE) reports covering 6 issues:

- 1 – Assessment of the context and needs
- 2 – Relevance, internal and external coherence of the Programme
- 3 – Measuring the progress and the results of the Programme
- 4 – Appraisal of the planned arrangements for the implementation
- 5 – Assessment of horizontal themes
- 6 – Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Synthesis of main conclusions and recommendations; follow-up of recommendations of ex ante evaluations

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# Main components of the evaluation (2)

- **EVALUATION THEMES**

1. **Process** of the ex ante evaluations

2. Intervention logic and **internal coherence**

3. **External coherence** and added value

4. **Six thematic clusters** of actions:

- Investment
- Knowledge transfer, Advisory Services and EIP
- Agri-environment-climate
- Forestry
- Young farmers, Small farmers and Areas with Natural Constraints
- Risk management

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# Methods and tools used

## Source of information:

- the **ex ante evaluation reports** and the **115 RDPs** in the EU 28 MS.  
(note: May 2015: 52 RDPs adopted or ready for adoption, 63 RDP's still in progress)
- Additional information from **Partnership Agreements**, **SEA**, and any relevant national/regional reports and qualitative and quantitative data available.

## Methods:

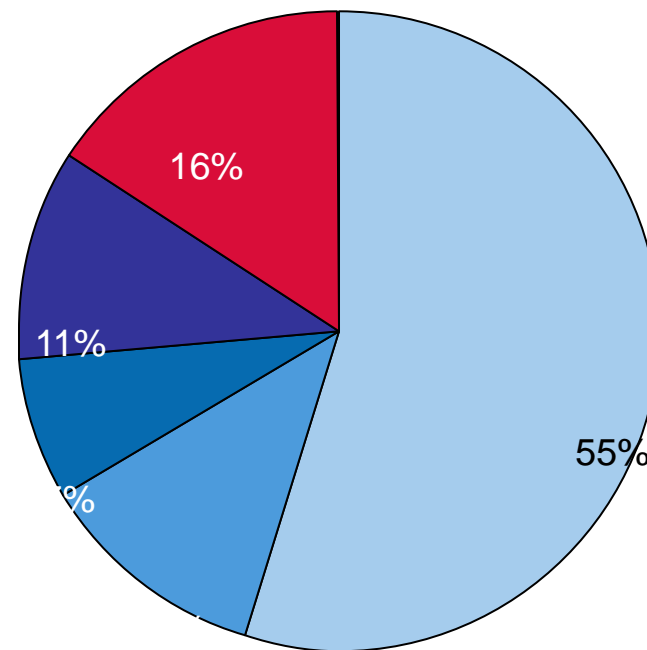
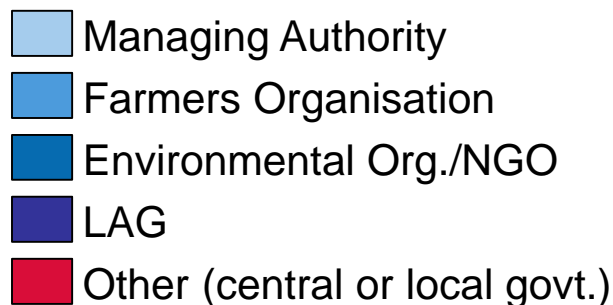
- **Analytical grids and templates** filled in by geographic experts
- **Survey of managing authorities and stakeholders**
- **Case studies** for 6 thematic clusters (ET4), each comprising between 10 and 20 programmes

## Important role of good practice examples!

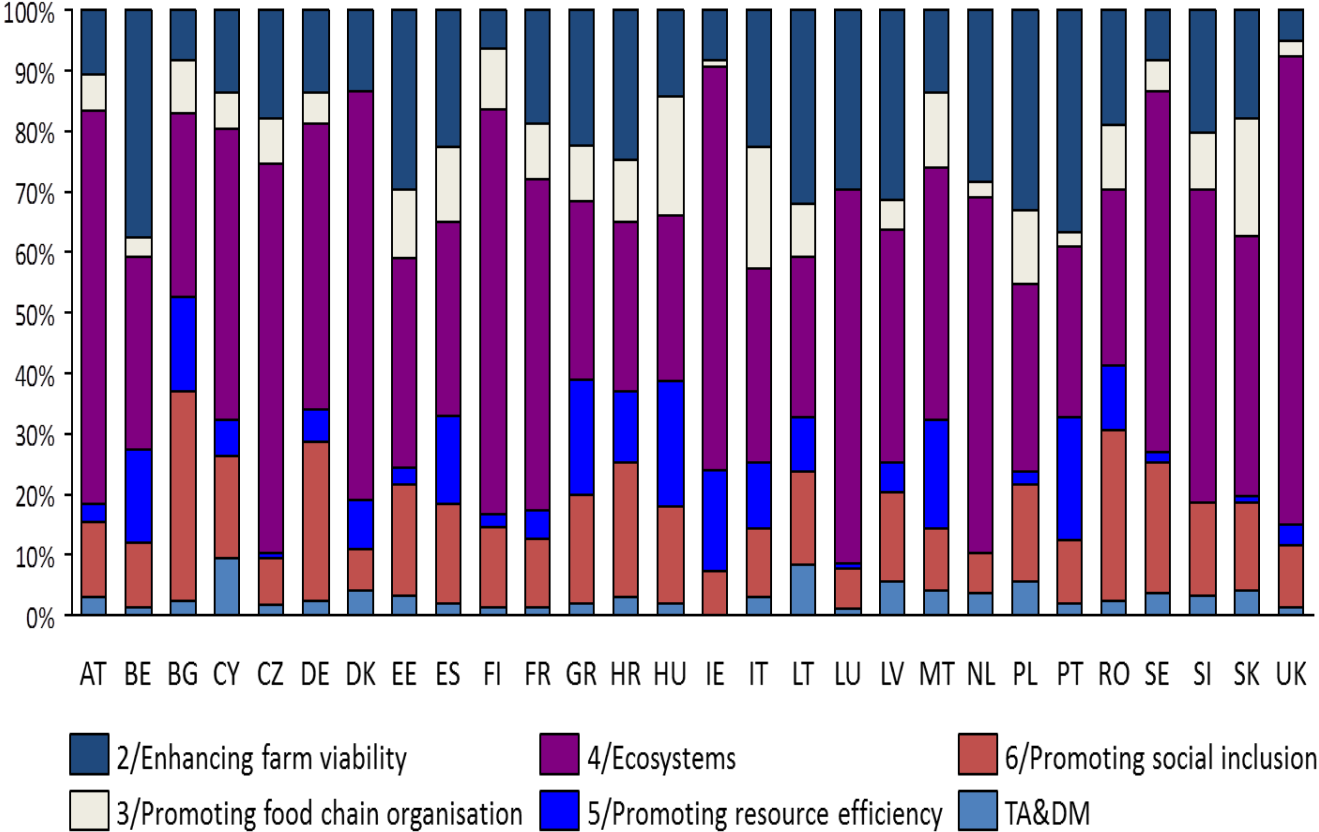
- Based on inputs from geographical experts
- Presented in boxes throughout the report

# Survey scope, participants and response rate

- Scope: cover information gaps in relation to Evaluation Themes 1, 2 and 3
- Standardised questionnaire sent to all Managing Authorities and representatives of major stakeholders such as farmers associations and NGOs
- Almost 350 representatives from all MAs and stakeholders were finally contacted, and 95 replies were received, which represent a 27.1% response rate.
- The respondents represent 65 countries/regions (56.5%) distributed in the following categories:



# Overview of priorities – by MS



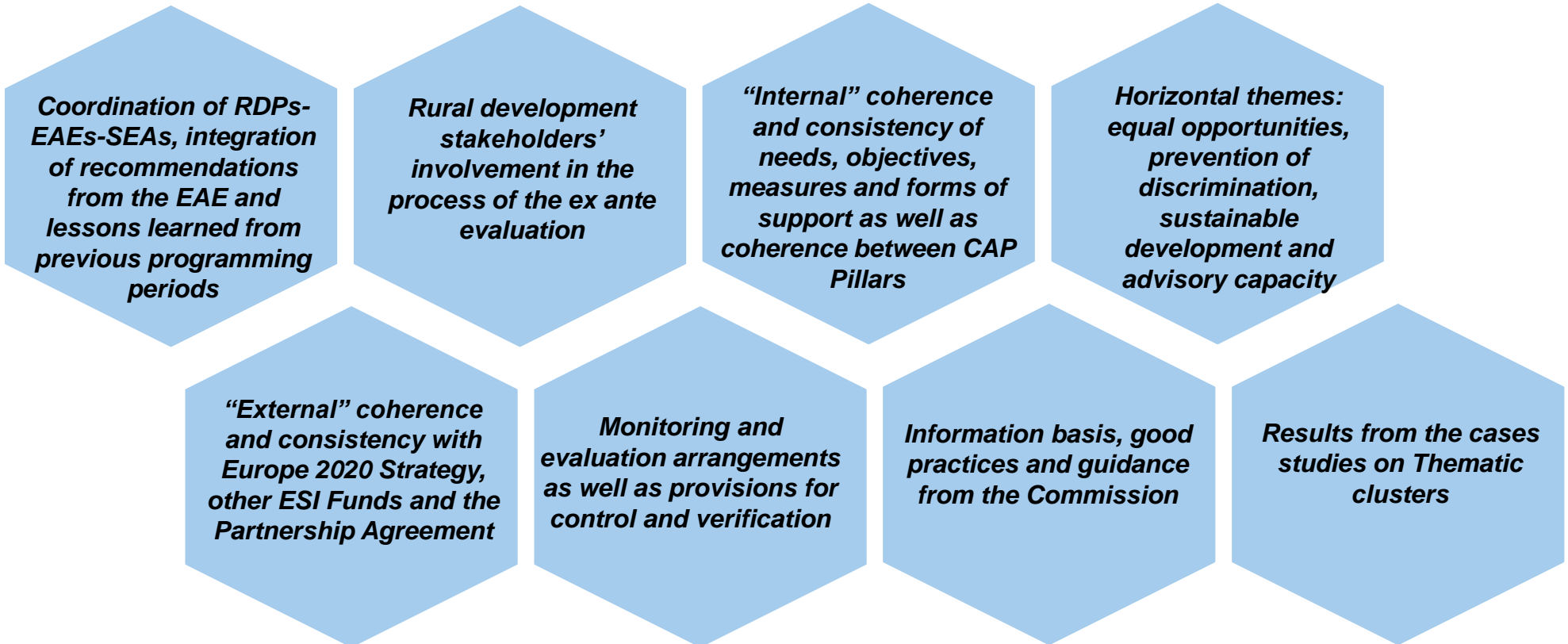
### Main findings

- Priority 4 on *restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry* has clearly been prioritised, as it receives the largest funding allocation in total (43%) and is dominant in 24 countries.
- Priority 2 on *enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture* receives the second largest funding allocation in total (19.7%).
- Priority 6 on *promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas* comes third (16.3%).
- Priorities 3 on *promoting food chain organisation* and 5 on *promoting resource efficiency* have overall received lower allocations.



# Main findings

- Aiming to **enhance the contribution of ex ante evaluation** to the design of sound RDPs – Based on descriptive chapter and 4 evaluation themes
- The findings and conclusions are classified into the following topics:



# Coordination of RDPs-EAEs-SEAs, integration of recommendations from the EAE and lessons learned from previous programming periods

## Key Statement

The recommendations of the EAEs, as well as, the lessons learned from previous programming periods have been widely considered in the RDPs. The cooperation between MA executives, ex ante evaluators and SEA experts has been satisfactory, with potential for improvement through the strengthening of coordination mechanisms.

## Conclusions

- Almost all EAEs describe and assess **all three steps in the RDP design**.
- **Cooperation between MA executives, EAE and SEA experts: satisfactory in 75% of the RDP's.**
- The use of **Steering Groups** supporting the RDP design process **was not a common practice**.
- In nearly 2/3 of the EAEs **the evaluators have checked** that a) **all legal requirements** for the RDPs external consistency **are covered**, b) the **monitoring system and evaluation plan are suitable**, c) the **structures and processes** foreseen for **LAG selection** and **LEADER implementation are adequate**.
- **In nearly 63% of the countries/regions, all recommendations of the evaluator have been fully considered in the design and content of the RDPs.**
- Potential for improvement: structures and processes for LAGs selection, LEADER implementation

# Rural development stakeholders' involvement in the process of ex ante evaluation

## Key Statement

Stakeholders' involvement in the RDP design process should be further enhanced, since their contribution to the identification of differentiated needs has been of crucial importance.

## Conclusions

- In 79% of cases, **sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the RDP design process** reported.
- The most significant lesson learned from the previous programming period concerns the **early introduction of public consultation** in the process.

# Horizontal themes: equal opportunities, prevention of discrimination, sustainable development and advisory capacity

## Key Statement

Sustainable development is most prominent in the RDPs, while other horizontal themes such as advisory capacity, gender aspects, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, are less emphasised.

## Conclusions

- Whereas the assessment of the **adequacy of the RDPs to promote sustainable development and equal opportunities has generally been covered** by the ex ante evaluations, more than half of the evaluators did not assess the relevant advisory capacity due to lack of information.

# “Internal” coherence and consistency of needs, objectives, measures and forms of support as well as coherence between CAP Pillars

## Key Statement

SWOT analysis and needs’ assessment provide a comprehensive and evidence-based picture of the programming areas. Potential for improvement is identified in the following: coordination mechanisms between the two Pillars, monitoring and evaluation plans of the RDPs and the indicator system.

## Conclusions

- For most RDPs, the ex ante evaluators attest that the **RDP objectives** are clearly **defined** and **well related to the needs** established through the SWOT analysis and the needs’ assessment.
- The presentation and **analysis of the expected impacts is an identified weakness** of the RDPs and EAE reports.
- A clear and **systematic presentation** of the **intervention logic** is often **missing**.
- **Deficiencies** have been found primarily with regard to the **links between expected outputs and results**.
- **Half** of the EAEs confirm that there is **consistency** and **adequate coordination between the two Pillars** and coordination mechanisms are outlined.

# “External” coherence and consistency with Europe 2020 Strategy, other ESI Funds and the Partnership Agreement

## *Key Statement*

The formulation of an overall European Strategy (Europe 2020), followed by national strategies regarding the optimal use of ESIF, has ensured the satisfactory coherence of the RDPs with the external policy environment.

## *Conclusions*

- In the majority of the RDPs, the **objectives** are **closely linked** and contribute **to all three objectives of Europe 2020** Strategy.
- The **contribution of RDP measures to the Europe 2020 objectives** is given but **mentioned less explicitly** in the RDPs.
- **Coordination and alignment between funds is ensured** in 63% of the cases via different mechanisms, most of them being coordination committees with representatives of the concerned bodies.

# Monitoring and evaluation arrangements as well as provisions for control and verification

## Key Statement

There is room for improvement regarding the description of monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Provisions for programme control and verification have not adequately been assessed in most of the ex ante evaluations.

## Conclusions

- For 53% of the RDPs the evaluators attested that the **target values for indicators** directly related to the achievements of focus areas are **plausible** and **realistic**.
- **Monitoring and evaluation plans** were assessed as **inadequate** or even **missing** for about 1/3 of the programmes.
- **Only 45%** of the ex ante evaluations **attested to the clarity of the arrangements for control and verification** at the level of measures.

# Information basis, good practices and guidance from the Commission

## Key Statement

There is a potential for improvement of the information basis (information available to the ex ante evaluators) included in the EAEs and the RDPs in order to better answer the evaluation questions. In addition, there seems to be a need to further develop the guidance provided by the Commission. The use and dissemination of good practice examples should be enhanced in order to strengthen peer to peer learning.

# Thematic cluster 1 - Investments

## Key Statement

Regarding investments in the RDPs examined, EU15 countries focus their RDPs on the improvement of living conditions in rural areas and on the prevention of depopulation, whereas new MS focus more on physical assets. Complementarity with other ESIF regarding investments in infrastructure and irrigation is generally achieved through (legal) regulations and co-ordination mechanisms between the institutions concerned.

## Conclusions

- Investment support aims to contribute to **farm viability and competitiveness, resource efficiency, climate-resilient economy, preservation of ecosystems.**
- The investment measures are very important elements of all RDPs. In some cases, **accounting for over 60%** or at least 50% of their overall respective RDP budget.
- There is a group of EU15 RDPs in which **M07 is quite balanced with M04** in terms of the RDP budget share.
- **Institutional structures are activated** in order to ensure complementarity between RDPs and other ESIF investments. In addition, demarcation lines and preventive actions have been set by the MS to exclude double funding under various EU funds.
- National RDPs are more “generic” in the design of measures related to investments, whereas **regional programmes address very specific local problems.**

# Thematic cluster 2 – Knowledge transfer, advisory services and European Innovation Partnership

## Key Statement

In general, high quality in knowledge transfer and advisory services is ensured through selection criteria and other arrangements. There are synergies with other rural development measures and related measures under Pillar I. **Explicit provisions for linking advisory services and researchers within Operational Groups are mostly lacking in the case studies.**

## Conclusions

- The **definition of qualifications and experience of the bodies involved is appropriate** to ensure the quality of the services.
- Only 3 of the RDPs examined (Austria, Denmark and Wales) intend to use **exchange schemes and visits**.
- Knowledge transfer and advisory services in most RDPs mainly contribute – besides Priority 1 – to rural development Priorities 2-5.
- **Synergies with other rural development measures are present** in all case studies and cover a wide range of measures.
- Of the RDPs examined only BE-Flanders will set up a national EIP network.



## Thematic cluster 3 – Agri-environment-climate

### Key Statement

With regard to the coordination between agri-environment-climate measures and greening requirements under Pillar I, the **MS focused on operational aspects of AEC measures and clear demarcation lines in order to eliminate the risks of double funding. As a result, synergies between AEC measures and greening at least in the observed cases are low.**

### Conclusions

- **MA**s have strongly **concentrated** on the **operational aspects of AEC measures** to eliminate risks of double funding between the two Pillars.
- The key **information gap** in the country reports is the narrative of **MA**s on how they perceive **links between the environmentally focused interventions under the two Pillars**, in terms of the expected outcomes for the protection of natural resources and the supply of public goods.
- Interesting examples of **good practices** at the programming level, but also some specific solutions introduced at the national level to strengthen and facilitate AEC measures (e.g. the collective management plans)
- Mandatory greening via Pillar I is expected to raise interest for uptake of voluntary sustainable agriculture practices in countries/regions of the EU where the interest and participation in agri-environmental programs has been comparatively low.

## Thematic cluster 4 – Forestry

### Key Statement

The MS aim to apply the thresholds for the need for forest management plans at a level that include a majority of forest holdings, as well as, forest areas. All reports examined argue that a key element is to verify the environmental value of land to be afforested. Information on different types of areas, land use and environmental value of the areas that are included in afforestation schemes is limited.

### Conclusions

- **MAs** aim to **apply the thresholds** at a level that include a **majority** of **forest holdings** and areas.
- While Forest Management Plans (FMPs) or comparable schemes are important for all of the case studies, their **structures and contents** are very **diverse**. The thresholds applied might also differ from country to country.
- The vast majority of the case studies **address** a set of **sustainability criteria** within FMP or comparable schemes, although in most cases, targets and application measurement is hardly quantified.
- **Most of the programmes** examined **consider** the issue of **inappropriate afforestation** and also address environmental and further social targets, and have stated how they **address the issue of protecting and enhancing biodiversity** where woodland expansion measures are planned.
- The extent to which the RDP-measures contribute to **adaption to and mitigation of climate change** is **hardly highlighted** in some cases, while in others there is explicit information on the mitigation effect of afforestation.

# Thematic cluster 5 – Young farmers, small farmers and areas with natural constraints

## Key Statement

Synergies under the two Pillars can be identified for young farmers, while less focus has been given to synergies among Pillars I and II concerning small farmers and areas with natural constraints.

## Conclusions

- The **small-farmer scheme** under sub-measure 6.5 was planned **only in 4 countries/regions** examined.
- **Synergies** have been observed **for young farmers under the two Pillars**: Pillar I provides an income aid, whereas M06 a lump sum payment/business start-up support conditional on the submission of the business plan.
- All MS paid a lot of attention to the complementarity aspect in relation of eligibility criteria and for synergies between the two CAP Pillars.
- The need for multilevel policy coordination at European, country and regional level, constitutes an **institutional challenge** for some MS.

# Thematic cluster 6 – Risk management

## Key Statement

The emphasis of risk management in the cases observed is on Sub-measure 17.1 'Crop, animal and plant insurance premium' and this sub-measure is mainly based on experiences of the previous CAP period (Pillar I). The methods for the calculation of losses / drop in income and the calculation of administrative costs are manifold and there is little evidence if these methods are appropriate.

## Conclusions

- A **lack of cooperation between farms, enterprises and research institutions** has been identified as a potential obstacle. Sub-measures 17.2 & 17.3 are newly introduced and some MS face significant difficulties in both their design and implementation.
- The success of measure M17 "Risk management" depends on reversing farmers' lack of motivation to pay insurance premiums in the past. The current economic crisis may impede uptake and partially explain farmers' low engagement rate, as many cannot invest in insurance schemes due to limited financial resources.
- **Methods for calculating losses / drop in income and administrative costs are manifold.** For example, some MS have included in the calculation of income losses biological and climate indexes, while others plan to use national indices with data for yield loss and annual production. Regarding the administrative costs on setting up the risk management tools, some MS use methods to calculate them and some others do not.

# Key Recommendations

## 1. Lessons learned from the previous periods and good practices

**Lessons learned** from the previous programming periods **and good practices should be disseminated to all countries/regions.**

Examples:

- Procedures related to LAGs selection and LEADER implementation;
- Implementation mechanisms to ensure an integrated approach to territorial development and encourage direct links between CLLD and investments supported by ERDF;
- Systems of extensive collaboration and dialogue between farmers and advisors;
- Solutions regarding the AEC measures implementation;
- Design of risk management sub-measures.

## 2. Stakeholder involvement

- **Stakeholders' involvement** in the ex ante evaluation and the RDP design **should be further enhanced** through the early introduction of public consultation in the process.

## 3. Internal coherence

- ... by a **better presentation** of the adequacy of the **chosen forms of support, their coherence with the measures, actions and specific objectives**, as well as, of the **links between planned actions and expected outputs** and, even more, the **links between expected outputs and results.**
- RDPs should **prioritise needs** (requirement of thematic concentration in CPR)

# Key Recommendations

## 4. Coordination between the funds and better targeting EU2020 objectives

- Demarcation of intervention areas and/or beneficiaries, complementarity and synergies with CAP Pillar I and the ESIF should be improved through the **establishment of coordination bodies** and the **use of common information management systems**.
- With regard to future demographic changes in rural areas, the **RDPs contribution to the objective of inclusive growth should gain more weight**.

## 5. Control and verification

- **Appropriate arrangements for control and verification** need to be ensured, (human resources and expertise as well as governance and communication procedures between the involved institutions).

## 6. Guidance from the Commission

- Further **guidance on the design of new sub-measures** (e.g. in risk management), **indicators, monitoring and evaluation issues, as well as, coordination mechanisms and management structures**.
- **Capacity building and peer to peer exchange** between MAs and other actors involved, through the **dissemination of good practice examples, reflection workshops and seminars**.

# Key Recommendations

## 7. Investments

- Regarding **investments**, close **monitoring of the implementation of Measure M04** is critical, since this measure turns to be the **most popular (and necessary) type of intervention** under the RDPs.
- The **impact** from the implementation of **M07** “Basic services and village renewal in rural areas” **should be assessed**, especially in cases where the allocated budget for this measure at national level is relatively low.

## 8. Knowledge transfer, advisory services, EIP

- **Dialogue between farmers and advisors should be strengthened**, through the involvement of advisors and practitioners in the EIP operational groups.

## 9. Agri-environment-climate

- The **implementation of AEC measures** and greening measures under Pillar I **should be closely monitored**, in terms of possible synergies to be attained and ways of reducing administrative costs. Effect on AEC uptake.
- Where AEC measures have not been very popular, it should be considered to **evaluate if and how Pillar I greening practices have increased the agri-environmental awareness of farmers** with higher uptake AEC measures.

# Key Recommendations

## 10. Forestry

- Regarding forestry, **the quantification of indicators should be improved** for both the RDP implementation and targets set at national/regional level, e.g. public funds for investments in forests and restoration measures; afforestation areas; increase in forest areas through RDP implementation; indicators of hemeroby (proportion of certain natural woodland areas); forest areas of High Nature Value.

## 11. Young farmers, small farmers and ANC

- **Evaluations regarding a) contribution to generation change** by support offered to young farmers under Pillar II, b) the **agrarian structure changes** in countries which have decided to choose the small farmer scheme under Pillar II and c) **the reasons that the support for natural constraints under Pillar I did not attract the attention of MS should be considered.**

## 12. Risk management

- **Risk management related policies should adopt a holistic approach** (considering increasing uncertainties due to price volatility of global agricultural markets and due to climate change), rather than deal with individual risks.
- The Commission should provide **more guidance for the newly introduced risk management sub-measures**, regarding the efficient design and implementation of the toolkit, as well as on common methodologies for calculating income losses and the respective administrative costs.



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## Report published on-line:

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation/rural-development-reports/ex-ante-rdp-synthesis-2014-2020\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation/rural-development-reports/ex-ante-rdp-synthesis-2014-2020_en.htm)

# Thank you for your attention!

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# Case studies selection

Cluster	Measures selected <sup>1</sup>	RDPs selected
1. Investment	M04, M05, M06, M07, M16, M19	<b>In total 20 RDPs</b> : 12 National RDPs ( AT, BG, CZ, ES, HU, IE, LT, LV, SE, SK, PL, RO) and 8 Regional RDPs (BE-Flanders, DE-Saxony, FI-Mainland, FR-Mayotte and Aquitaine, IT-Toscana, PT-Azores, UK- England)
2. Knowledge transfer, advisory services and European Innovation Partnership	M01, M02, M16	<b>In total 16 RDPs</b> : 9 National RDPs (AT, CZ, DK, HR, IE, LT, PL, RO, SE) and 7 Regional RDPs (BE-Flanders, DE-Saxony, ES-Aragon, FI-Mainland, FR-Bourgogne, IT-Toscana, UK-Wales)
3. Agri-environment-climate	M10, M11, M12	<b>In total 15 RDPs</b> : 8 National RDPs (AT, BG, EE, HR, IE, NL, PL, SK) and 7 Regional RDPs (DE-Hessen, ES-Aragon, FI-Mainland, FR – Mayotte, IT-Toscana, PT-Continente, UK-England)
4. Forestry	M08, M15	<b>In total 12 RDPs</b> : 5 National RPDs (Denmark, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia) and 7 Regional RDPs (DE-Baden-Württemberg, ES-La Rioja, FR-Aquitaine and Mayotte, IT-Emilia Romagna, PT-Continente, UK-England)
5. Young farmers, small farmers and areas with natural constraints	M06, M13	<b>In total 11 RDPs</b> : 5 National RDPs (AT, DK, HR, PL, RO) and 6 Regional RDPs (DE-Bavaria, ES-Aragon, FI-Mainland, FR-Mayotte, IT-Veneto, UK-England).
6. Risk management	M17	<b>In total 13 RDPs</b> : 10 National RDPs (FR, HU, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, RO) and 5 Regional RDPs (BE-Flanders, ES-Castilla y Leon, PT-Azores, Continente and Madeira).

<sup>1</sup> According to Reg. EU 1305/2013