REPORT

A JOURNEY THROUGH EVALUATION PLANS: LEARNING FROM PAST EXPERIENCES FOR THE FUTURE CAP

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP
ONLINE, 28-29 JUNE 2021

The Evaluation Helpdesk is responsible for the evaluation function within the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) by providing guidance on the evaluation of RDPs and policies falling under the remit and guidance of DG AGRI's Unit C.4 'Monitoring and Evaluation' of the European Commission (EC). In order to improve the evaluation of EU rural development policy the Evaluation Helpdesk supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, RDP managing authorities and evaluators, through the development and dissemination of appropriate methodologies and tools; the collection and exchange of good practices; capacity building and communicating with network members on evaluation related topics.

Additional information about the activities of European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development is available on the Internet through the Europa server (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu).

REPORT

A JOURNEY THROUGH EVALUATION PLANS:
LEARNING FROM PAST EXPERIENCES FOR
THE FUTURE CAP

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP
ONLINE, 28-29 JUNE 2021

CONTENTS

TABLES, FIGURES AND MAPS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AECM	Agri-Environment-Climate Measures
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
AE	Agri-environmental
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CLLD	Community-led local development
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPW	Good Practice Workshop
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
IRES	Istituto di Ricerche Economico e Sociali Piemonte
	Piedmont Institute of Economic and Social Research
IT	Information Technology
JRC	Joint Research Centre of the European Commission
LAG	Local Action Group
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
	Links between the rural economy and development actions
MA	Managing Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRN	National Rural Network
PA	Paying Agency
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SG	Steering Group
ToR	Terms of Reference

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 17th Good Practice Workshop of the Evaluation Helpdesk 'A journey through Evaluation Plans: Learning from past experiences for the future CAP', took place online on 28-29 June 2021. It brought together 83 participants from 25 different EU Member States, including RDP Managing Authorities (MAs), evaluators, European Commission representatives, researchers, National Rural Networks (NRN), and other evaluation stakeholders. The overall objective of the workshop was to reflect on experiences in relation to the design and implementation of Evaluation Plans. Specifically, it aimed at: exchanging experiences concerning the design and implementation of Evaluation Plans in order to identify what worked well and what should be avoided; discussing specific elements of the Evaluation Plans in relation to the process, governance, content, management, and communication; and identifying best practices for the future for further promoting evaluation culture and for better design and implementation of the Evaluation Plans.

Six case studies were presented during the two-day workshop, bringing together experiences from selected Member States (Italy, Greece, Estonia, Sweden, Romania and Hungary) in relation to the following elements of evaluation planning: governance and coordination, evaluation activities and topics, data management as well as communication. The group discussions during the first day focused on the identification of bottlenecks in relation to these elements, as well as some good practice on what worked well. The group discussions of the second day went a step further to explore ways to address the bottlenecks identified during the first day and improve evaluation planning in the future.

All the experiences offered useful lessons on the benefits of evaluation planning:

- In relation to **governance and coordination**: clear responsibilities of actors and better coordination through dedicated structures (e.g. Steering Committee, Evaluation Unit, etc.) facilitate evaluation planning and implementation. Close working between the MA and the evaluator helps better access to data and better understanding of evaluation needs, while external structures contribute to quality control. Thematic groups, where they exist, help guide more complex thematic evaluations. Finally, synergies with other units/funds/networks help build capacity and share evaluation experience.

- In relation to **data management**: there is a sequence of steps that are important to follow when planning data management for evaluations. First and foremost is the assessment of data needs, followed by an analysis of data availability. The next step is the development of definitions and methodologies for data collection. This step becomes more efficient if followed by cooperation agreements with data providers. At the same time, it is important to use alternative approaches when data sources are insufficient or outdated, such as use specific data collection for environmental indicators, use of innovative technologies (e.g., GIS-based) or additional indicators.

- In relation to **evaluation activities and topics**, the overarching lesson is to go beyond compulsory evaluations to cover a large variety of themes that address evaluation needs. For this reason, annual plans should complement the multi-annual evaluation planning. Different methodologies and study typologies for specific evaluation topics merit the contracting of different specialist evaluators. Evaluation activities contribute to knowledge building and to fostering evaluation culture, while some Member States have dedicated activities for building evaluation capacity.

- In relation to **communication**, targeted and general communication activities can take place after each evaluation report/study or on ongoing basis. A variety of communication channels and tools such as ad hoc events, online publications, workshops, podcasts, press releases, articles, info days, NRN events/website, training events, can be used to address a wider audience or specific evaluation stakeholders. Communication should focus on the results of specific evaluations but also of evaluation in general with the objective to raise awareness on the usefulness of evaluation for evidence based policy making and implementation.

1   SETTING THE FRAME

1.1. Introduction

The Evaluation Plan has been an innovative element in rural development programmes (RDPs) in the current 2014-2020 programming period, aiming at capitalising on the accumulated evaluation capacity and building on the experiences in planning of evaluation. It has served during implementation, as a reference document for the management, conduct and follow-up of evaluation activities, as well as the basis for reporting in Annual Implementation Reports. In this way, it has become the key tool for evaluation during the programming period. Currently, the precise evaluation requirements of the CAP Strategic Plan are still in the making; however, Member States are already preparing and setting up their monitoring and evaluation systems and taking basic decisions on how evaluations will be run in the future, considering that the Evaluation Plans post-2020 will have a more strategic and flexible approach. Therefore, the Good Practice Workshop No. 17 (GPW-17) 'A journey through Evaluation Plans: Learning from past experiences for the future CAP' served as a forum to discuss the governance of evaluation and to reflect in this respect about the role and added value of Evaluation Plans.

Given the innovative character of Evaluation Plans and the experience accumulated since their conception, it was time to gather this experience to answer some overarching questions: What worked well and what were the main obstacles in the implementation of the RDP Evaluation Plans as well as potential solutions? What can we learn from the design and implementation of RDP Evaluation Plans and other planning documents? To what extent has a strategic approach in planning evaluations improved the quality of evaluation results and their relevance for policy making? What constitutes a good approach to planning evaluation activities? To what extent has the feedback from the activities of Evaluation Plans been timely for informing future policy making? To what extent have the communication activities of Evaluation Plans contributed to improved dissemination of evaluation results?

In order to answer these questions, the GPW-17 explored Member State experiences with the overall objective to **reflect on experiences in relation to the design and implementation of Evaluation Plans**.

83 participants from 25 different EU Member States attended the online event, including RDP Managing Authorities (MAs), evaluators, European Commission representatives, researchers, National Rural Networks (NRN), and other evaluation stakeholders.

Figure 1. Participants of the GPW-17 per role and Member State
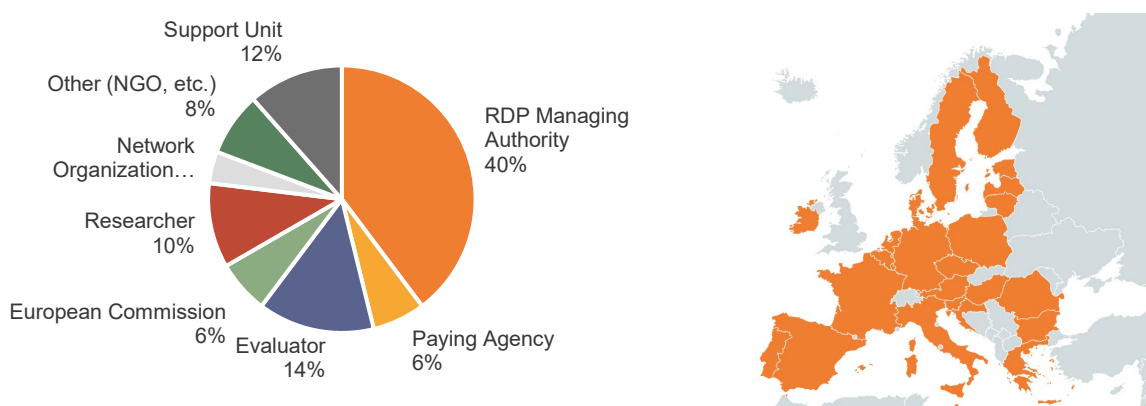
1.2. Policy and evaluation framework

During the introduction to the workshop, Ms Marili Parissaki explained that the Evaluation Plan contains information concerning the objectives and purpose of evaluations, the evaluation topics and activities as well as information on the required data and information collection activities. It also describes the

governance systems for evaluation, the resources and timeline required, while also establishing a mechanism for dissemination and follow-up of evaluation results. The overall purpose of the Evaluation Plan is to ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken, and that the data needed for RDP evaluation is available from an early stage of the RDP implementation. A better approach to Evaluation Plans can bring several benefits: planned and structured RDP evaluations, targeted monitoring and evaluation activities, and making better use of evaluation results.

The Commission took the opportunity to point out that the GPW-17 should constitute a platform for exchange on how evaluations have been carried out during the current programming period, before the new planning of evaluation starts.

The GPW-17 offered the possibility to Member States to exchange amongst each other, with a particular interest on how the Evaluation Plan was executed to get the results on time, as well as on a general approach to data planning for evaluation.
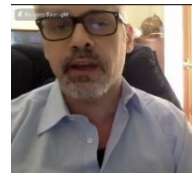
2   SHARING EXPERIENCES

2.1 Day 1 - The elements of evaluation planning in selected Member States

2.1.1 Experience from Italy

Mr Vincenzo Angrisani (Evaluator, IT) presented 'RDP's Evaluation Plan: the Italian experience from 2007-2013 to 2014-2020'. In the development of Evaluation Plans in Italy in 2007-2013, the NRN was a key actor, producing guiding documents and organising events for evaluation stakeholders. During the current programming period, there were positive governance and coordination experiences in the regions of Piemonte, Lombardia and Toscana. In Piemonte, in-house evaluators enabled better coordination with the MA and data provider, which led also to the implementation of a more functional monitoring system. In Lombardia, synergies were created with competent authorities, coordination efforts were made with MAs of other ESI funds and recommendations were discussed between the MA and the independent evaluator. In Toscana, a quality check approach was adopted on the whole evaluation process, and in particular on data used. Further good practices were implemented in Molise and Toscana regarding evaluation topics and activities. In Molise, the Evaluation Plan linked evaluation activities with the RDP uptake. In Toscana, Local Action Groups (LAGs) received specific support (coaching) for the development of their self-assessment methodology. The regions of Campania and Veneto carried out specific communication activities such as events for large audiences.

> The lessons learned from these experiences are that a dynamic, adaptive, and co-owned Evaluation Plan, as well as the dissemination of evaluation results and knowledge sharing facilitate a better evaluation culture.

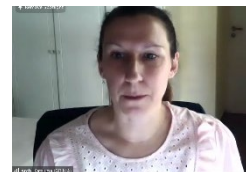**Link to the PPT:** RDP's Evaluation Plans: The Italian Experience from 2007-2013 to 2014-2020

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

What does 'shared ownership of the Evaluation Plan' mean? Given that the MA is responsible in the first place, who should be involved as well?	*Mr Angrisani explained that for the specific case of some Italian regions, involving evaluators and other actors, such as the environmental agency, would bring several benefits: on the one hand, all stakeholders would understand what is on the table in terms of methods, approaches, technicalities, etc.; and on the other hand, a more widely spread evaluation culture would be built within the administration. This remark stems from the fact that in Italy not many modifications occurred from the first approval of the RDP until now.*
Who exactly was the independent evaluator in this case?	*Mr Angrisani clarified that the evaluator was the Research Institute of Piemonte (IRES[1]) agency, who was not only an evaluator of the RDP but also of other EU co-funded programmes in the Piemonte region.*
The presented communication and awareness raising activities were particularly interesting. Who were the people who were recipients of the communication activities?	*Mr Angrisani explained that, as far as the Campania region is concerned, the events were initially open to the administration (all offices in charge of implementation of the different measures/interventions which were subject of the given evaluation report), but then events opened also to a larger audience. During one of these events there was a streaming with a farmer, who was presenting his experience with the funds and with investments he made. In the Veneto region, there was one event, reaching all partnerships concerned and also a larger audience.*

---

[1] Istituto di Ricerche Economico e Sociali Piemonte

2.1.2 Experience from Greece

Ms Anthi Katsirma (Evaluation Unit, MA, GR) presented 'Evaluation Plan of the Greek RDP'. During this programming period, an evaluation unit was established in the Greek MA. This unit cooperates with evaluators, implementation bodies, the Monitoring Committee and rural development networks (Greek and other NRNs). For the better planning of evaluation steps and activities, an Annual Evaluation Plan is developed. Several evaluation activities were conducted, such as external thematic evaluations in the field of environment (water, soil, biodiversity), guidelines for the LEADER/CLLD evaluation, and a networking platform for LAGs. Data collection has also improved by including a specific chapter for indicators in the Call for applications. Results of evaluations were disseminated online and in events.

> The lessons learned from the Greek experience were that establishing a separate Evaluation Unit, establishing multiannual and annual evaluation planning and conducting more useful (i.e., focused on learning, taking into account the interests of stakeholders) and formative evaluations improves the evaluation process in Member States.
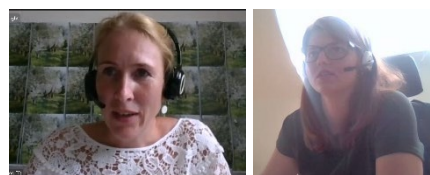
Link to the presentation: Evaluation Plan of the Greek RDP

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

How is the collaboration with stakeholders happening in Greece? How is the MA in contact with farmers?	*Ms Katsirma explained that farmers can participate in the Monitoring Committee via the delegation of farmers at the moment. The MA is however interested in broadening the stakeholders, especially in LEADER/CLLD evaluation.* *Mr Apostolopoulos (Greek MA) clarified that, for thematic evaluations, the evaluators' approach is to contact beneficiaries and farmers directly in order to understand their goals and how they feed their goals into the interventions the MA undertakes, e.g., what is the motivation of beneficiaries to use a specific agri-environmental measure, and their motivations to participate. This is very difficult to understand if only an overall impact assessment of the RDP is done. Beneficiaries and farmers are directly approached through focus groups and questionnaires.*
How could stakeholder needs be gathered? An evaluation Steering Group could be useful.	*Ms Katsirma explained that in Greece, there was not a typical steering group, but an informal steering group with all the administrative bodies, and some universities.*
What is an umbrella evaluator?	*Ms Katsirma clarified that the umbrella evaluator is the evaluator who has the whole perspective of the evaluation, and who answers all the evaluation questions submitted to the European Commission. This is different from scientific evaluators who focus on more scientific aspects (water, soil, biodiversity).*

2.1.3 Experience from Estonia

Ms Iiri Raa (Agricultural Research Centre, EE) and Paula Talijärv (Ministry of Rural Affairs, EE) presented 'Estonian RDP 2013-2020 Evaluation (Plan)'. Estonia has undertaken efforts to improve the evaluation culture and to build evaluation capacity. Studies for environmental indicators have been conducted and bottom-up events and actions have been organised involving evaluators, other Member States' institutions and research centers. The Evaluation Plan is implemented by the MA, with the support of an ongoing evaluation concept on environmental measures. All the information collected is available for external evaluators. On data management, cooperation agreements have been reached and soil GIS-based (Geographic Information System) apps are being used. More than 90 additional national indicators were used to answer the Common Evaluation Questions based on studies. Communication between data providers/evaluators and the MA has been frequent, as well as communication directed to external stakeholders.

> The lessons learned from the Estonian experience is that frequent communication on data, continuous data collection and synthesis, good quality of data collected through application forms and studies beyond the minimum requirements are positive practices that improve the implementation of the Evaluation Plan.

Link to the presentation: Estonian RDP 2014-2020 Evaluation (Plan)

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenters:

Are the mentioned additional indicators more impact indicators than output and result-indicators?	*Ms Raa confirmed that the additional indicators are indeed like impact indicators.*
It was interesting to hear about the Nordic-Baltic collaboration! It seems that there is a policy transfer.	*Ms Talijärv explained that the Nordic-Baltic collaboration was very active in the programming period 2007-2013, but it is not very active at the moment.*
Could more details about the GIS tool for farmers in relation to soils, peat soils and peatland, specifically using remote sensing, be given?	*Ms Raa explained that the GIS tool for soil sampling route is created as a response on an RDP AE support requirement for farmers: to take soil samples. The sample can be taken both by farmers and trained soil samplers, but only trained samplers can use the GIS app. The soil map is integrated into the GIS tool, it can be seen, where there are peat soils. Another GIS tool provides information on crop suitability with soil type, it can be accessed by everyone and includes also peat soil types. There is a specific RDP AE measure for peat soils available for farmers as well. It is not remote sensing, it is determination in-site.*
On the quality control of the soil data: does the MA rely on data provided by farmers? How is the data quality-checked?	*Ms Raa clarified that data is only considered if submitted by certified soil samplers. If farmers who have not passed the training take the sample, the data is not transferred in the database that is used for evaluation purposes.*

2.2. Day 2 - Evaluation planning as part of an integrated evaluation system: experiences from selected Member States

2.2.1. Experience from Sweden

Mr Joel Karlsson (Evaluation Secretariat, Swedish Board of Agriculture, SE) presented 'How are evaluations planned and organised in Sweden?'. At the beginning of the programming period, the Evaluation Secretariat was formed within the Swedish Board of Agriculture. The Secretariat is responsible for the quality control of evaluations, evaluation planning and communication. Besides the RDP Evaluation Plan, an operational plan was developed, consisting of a long list of specific evaluation topics selected according to a needs assessment and discussion with stakeholders. Evaluation topics included programme impacts and programme outputs and results. Evaluation results were communicated through events with different stakeholders and online.
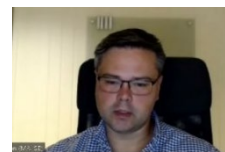
> The lessons learned from Sweden's experience are the importance of having clear processes and structures as well as involvement of stakeholders from the beginning of the programming period, developing external evaluation contacts and taking into account national needs besides EU requirements.
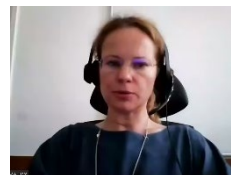
Link to the presentation: How are evaluations planned and organised in Sweden

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

Who are the types of stakeholders involved in defining the operational plan and which methods were used for the annual needs assessment?	*Mr Karlsson explained that this depends on the stage of the programme cycle. In some years, lots of workshops are organised, including the network, the Ministry, etc. Larger workshops are also organised in other years.*
There is the multi-funding for CLLD in Sweden. The presentation mentioned the comparison of projects from different ESI Funds. Is there an evaluation of the whole CLLD with all funds, or only for LEADER with this comparison? **Could more details be given about the model to evaluate LEADER impacts?**	*Mr Markus (Swedish MA) explained that the Swedish Board of Agriculture is the MA for all CLLD. There are a number of follow-up studies that have looked and compared CLLD projects funded through fisheries or regional/social funds. There has been a qualitative assessment (e.g., assessment of the type of projects). A large evaluation that looks at all CLLD as a whole is currently in the pipeline, which will look at all the parts that the agency is responsible for, i.e., all CLLD in Sweden. Furthermore, a methods study is now being finished. The study attempts to see how the impacts of CLLD and LEADER can be identified and discussed. A summary in English will be available for these studies.*
How many persons are part of the Evaluation Secretariat? Do other European funding programmes also have an evaluation secretariat? And if so, how do you coordinate with them?	*Mr Karlsson described that there are 6 people working full-time for evaluation planning. For the ex post evaluation, at least 5 more people will join to lead different projects. There is no cooperation with similar units, from other funding programmes.*
How familiar are the Evaluation Secretariat members into rural development policy? To what extent do they know what is the idea behind the measures that are steered for the evaluation projects?	*Mr Karlsson explained that many of the members have worked on the issue for a long time. This part of the policy is very special and challenging to evaluate.*

2.2.2. Experience from Romania

Ms Camelia Popescu (MA, Romania) presented 'RDP2014-2020 Evaluation. Implementation of the Evaluation Plan'. The Evaluation Plan in Romania has been transposed into more detailed annual Evaluation Plans, targeting thematic evaluation studies and administrative capacity building activities, which are approved by the Romanian MA. Evaluation needs have been identified, and activities to cover these needs were carried out such as trainings and analysis of evaluation results. The recommendations were followed up through specific actions which are systematically monitored. Efforts were made to promote the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation for evaluation actors. Some challenges were identified in this programming period, such as the long period of the planning and procurement process, the difficult access of evaluators to certain data and the correlation of the evaluation results with the stages of programme implementation.

> Lessons learned to overcome these challenges include launching specific projects to collect data for specific indicators, collaboration between the evaluator and actors involved in the evaluation process as well as understanding and prioritising evaluation needs.
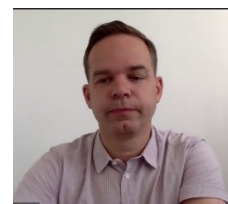
Link to the presentation: RDP 2014-2020 Evaluation: Implementation of the Evaluation Plan in Romania

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

Are the monitoring fiches publicly available or are they for MA purposes only?	*Ms Matei (Romanian MA) informed that the monitoring fiches are available for MA purposes only, but they are also shared with the Evaluation Steering Committee members and with the European Commission services.*
Are other funds used in Romania for CLLD? Is there an evaluation of the whole CLLD with all funds, or different evaluations for LEADER?	*Ms Popescu explained that in Romania there is a mono-fund for LEADER. The evaluation of the LEADER approach is carried out at the level of the programme. There is also one evaluation for each Local Development Strategy developed by each Local Action Group, meaning separate evaluations per LAG.*
Was a single evaluator selected for the whole programming period, with a single contract?	*Ms Popescu explained that there was an ongoing evaluator for four years, conducting the mandatory evaluations for the Annual Implementation Report and the evaluations identified when the project was launched (7 evaluations covered by this project). However, during the years, some other evaluation needs appeared so for those particular evaluation studies, a different evaluator was selected.*

2.2.3. Experience from Hungary

Tamas Cserneckzy (Evaluator, HU) presented 'Planning Programme Evaluation in the 2014-2020 Period'. In the current period, there was a significant development in the ambition regarding evaluation in Hungary. This higher ambition meant an increased demand for coordination capacity and data, which was challenging, particularly for environmental and social data availability. The evaluator consortium coordinated with the MA and the PA for the implementation of the evaluations. A large number of economic, environmental and social impact evaluations were conducted. Synergies with the ex ante and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the CAP Strategic Plan have been created. Environmental impact monitoring started this year and it is a multispectral monitoring work, gathering data from different databases, developing models for water and remote sensing. Social impact monitoring was also conducted through a phone app.

> The Hungarian experience shows the positive effects of combining monitoring and evaluation, the connection between the evaluations conducted during implementation, ex ante and SEA, and the importance of continuous data gathering about environmental and social impacts.

Link to the presentation: Planning Programme Evaluation in the 2014-2020 period in Hungary

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

What are the main elements of added value evaluated for LEADER?	*Mr Cserneczky explained that added value of the LAGs in Hungary is very much connected to networking and fusing together the different development processes.*
In the expert committee with 6 people, are there also experts from the MA or are they mainly researchers? **How many experts are involved in these 22 thematic evaluations?** **Are these evaluations and experts who are involved in these thematic evaluations and studies financed fully from the state or from the RDP technical support?**	*Mr Cserneczky stressed that more than 70 experts are working on the thematic evaluations: there is a coordination team of 6 people, plus all external experts and consultants. There is a team of another 6 people in the MA who is also dealing with the monitoring activities. Furthermore, there is a monitoring unit in the Paying Agency (PA). All these teams form a regular coordination forum or share weekly.* *All thematic evaluation and monitoring activities are financed through technical assistance.*
	Mr Cserneczky confirmed that thematic evaluations will have an English summary. *Some evaluations from Hungary are available on the Helpdesk Website. There are more than 200 Member States' evaluations on the Helpdesk website to explore.*

3   CONCLUDING REMARKS

The outcomes of the discussions on evaluation planning presented at the workshop and expert input, together with the group discussions, provided insights in relation to the bottlenecks of evaluation planning, good practice on what worked well and suggested improvements for the future. The detailed outcomes of the group discussions are included in the **Annex**. The discussions of Day 1 focused on the bottlenecks and what worked well / good practice, in relation to governance, data management, evaluation activities/topics and communication. The discussions on Day 2 went a step further to make suggestions for addressing the bottlenecks identified in Day 1.

3.1 Bottlenecks and good practice in relation to governance

There are two different approaches overall to the evaluation planning in Member States: the cases where the MA takes a lot of interest and involvement, and the cases where evaluators have this task and there are no further efforts beyond the minimum requirements. Farmers/beneficiaries and other actors need to be more involved in setting the evaluation process and what topics need to be evaluated. A further impediment for more meaningful involvement of stakeholders in evaluation planning and implementation is the lack of capacity and resources.

Some Member States address these issues through collaboration with external actors (e.g. research bodies or universities) who bring in thematic expertise. There are also cases where a structured system is in place to facilitate the involvement of farmers or where several thematic evaluators are used to cover the capacity needs. Internal structures (e.g. Evaluation Unit within the MA) help have a dedicated team to evaluation planning and implementation, while external, independent bodies (e.g. advisory body, Steering group) contribute to planning individual evaluations and quality control.

Suggestions for the future include the existence of an intermediate body (e.g. Steering Group[2]) that can bring together MAs, evaluators, and PAs, including such bodies at regional level for regionalised Member States (e.g. regional Steering Groups). The NRNs can also play a key role in bringing together all relevant actors for planning and implementing evaluations. Collaboration can be strengthened with formal agreements between evaluation stakeholders, including collaboration with thematic actors (e.g. environmental authorities), provided there are also clear working procedures in place.

3.2 Bottlenecks and good practice in relation to data management

Missing environmental data (especially at the farm level) and social data (especially from rural residents) is a key bottleneck now and expected to also be one in the future. The existence of different data sources or parallel but not connected monitoring systems can be a problem, in parallel with the lack of a clear understanding of what an indicator means or what data has to be collected and when. Limited data quality checks and security issues further aggravate the problem.

Some Member States address these issues by using a detailed data development plan for collecting data from the farmer or involving national statistical offices in the definition and collection of data for specific indicators (e.g. social).

Suggestions for the future include better coordination with the PA, environmental and other data providers, including national and regional statistical units (cooperation agreements) to define timeline and type of data, working with higher education and research institutions for data collection and quality check. Finally, collecting data in applications from the beginning is a key suggestion for ensuring the provision of the required data directly from beneficiaries.

---

[2] A Steering Group is different from the Monitoring Committee of the programme. It is an additional Committee established mainly for the purpose of steering implementation of the Evaluation Plan.

3.3 Bottlenecks and good practice in relation to evaluation activities and topics

The identification of evaluation needs is a key starting point for evaluation planning and a critical bottleneck at the moment. Another one is how to decide the evaluation topics, the frequency and level of evaluation (regional/national or result/impact), the degree of specificity (general or thematic evaluations) and the extent to which evaluation activities and topics should go beyond what is mandatory.

Some Member States address these issues by identifying evaluation needs with the help of an Evaluation Steering Group, the MA and the evaluators, combining umbrella with thematic evaluations, using Steering Groups also for defining evaluation topics or using an Evaluation Unit for annual planning of evaluation activities and topics, making thus the evaluation process more adaptable to the changing needs.

Suggestions for the future include to rely on formative evaluation at the beginning of the implementation period, e.g. to evaluate the delivery mechanisms. Results (of the programme and of specific measures) can be assessed during implementation, and only at a later stage (i.e. a few years after implementation to assess the impacts. Evaluation Steering groups, NRNs and evaluators can provide valuable input to define the evaluation topics. Overall, a participatory approach for the identification of evaluation needs is recommended. A review of past evaluations can help to identify some knowledge gaps that should be addressed in future evaluations.

3.4 Bottlenecks and good practice in relation to communication

The communication of evaluation results faces bottlenecks related to who should be the recipients of communication (identifying the target group and addressing their different needs, e.g. MAs are interested in impacts, while beneficiaries are interested in the results of their projects), what communication format to use (especially when there is a lack of human capacities) and when is the right time for communicating evaluations (especially when the results are not available when needed). Further bottlenecks include the difficulty to understand evaluation results and ensure they reach the different types of stakeholders with the appropriate message.

Some Member States have used stakeholder mapping to better target their communication efforts, while others have undertaken efforts to make the content and tool of their communication interesting for each type of stakeholder (e.g. leaflets and stands in agricultural fairs or territorial meetings with targeted information).

There is a clear need for further awareness raising of the benefits of evaluation through more and better targeted communication in the future. **Suggestions include** networking, knowledge exchange through peer learning events, use of new media (including social media), showcasing practical examples, use key rural structures such as LAGs as an information 'bouncer' or 'multiplier', while emphasising also the role of NRNs in spreading communication messages regarding evaluations to different typologies of stakeholders.

> An overarching concluding remark from the GPW is that a change of mindset is needed. Why do we evaluate? To whom is the result of the evaluation relevant to in their daily work? This is necessary to be kept in mind when drafting the Evaluation Plans. If Member States look at each other for solutions, they may find out there are not as many bottlenecks as it seems, if a sharing of experience culture prevails.

,

ANNEX

Day 1 Group Discussions

Table 1. Summary of Day 1 discussions regarding the topic 'Governance: Experiences on the design and implementation of RDP Evaluation Plans'

Governance
Following only minimum requirements
• Bottlenecks: ○ Evaluators often focused on the minimum requirements rather than a meaningful assessment of the policy and its measures. So no new indicators were proposed for programme specific evaluation questions and it has been difficult to make use of evaluations and results, mainly regarding impacts.
Collaboration between MA, evaluators, data providers

• Bottlenecks:
    ○ The complexity of the management (3 levels: regional, national, EU) requires strict coordination.
    ○ Too much responsibility on the evaluator: only one evaluator in some regionalised Member States; collecting data other than what is provided by the MA is the sole responsibility of the evaluator; overcoming data protection issues; lack of resources in the MA poses extra burden on the evaluator.
    ○ Online coordination not as effective (in view of Covid-19).
• What worked well:
    ○ Collaboration with research body with funding from Ministry, which provided reports (experience from IE).
    ○ Expert group from universities and agencies giving advice (experience from EE).
    ○ MA tender to independent expert responsible for the evaluations (methodology and conception of evaluations, based on specific quality criteria) (experience from HU).

Meaningful involvement of stakeholders in evaluation planning and implementation

• Bottlenecks:
    ○ Governance becomes more complicated when farmers and agri-consultants are involved (defining evaluation needs, setting evaluation questions, validation, communication).
    ○ In some regionalised MS there are several Evaluation Plans (regionalised) and limited capacity in different regions.
    ○ Need to involve beneficiaries, especially for environmental measures.
• What worked well:
    ○ Farmers are very important part of the process. They can provide new information on what they need. There was a structured system for involving farmers (experience from DK).
    ○ Involving evaluators and measure managers. There is also a document in the MA describing activities (experience from GR).
    ○ Several evaluators dealing with various thematic topics of evaluations and a general evaluator providing a synthesis of all the thematic works and presenting to other stakeholders (experience from GR).
    ○ Independent advisory body: contributes to planning for individual evaluations, quality control, suggestions for improvements. Key point in ensuring the independence of evaluations and providing specialists on specific topics (experience from SE).

Resources
• Bottlenecks: ○ Capacity building for actors involved in implementation and evaluation of the programme is necessary, including on financial issues.

- What worked well:

  - A project on capacity building for actors involved in implementation and evaluation of programme: MAs, LAGs, Steering Committee, etc. It allowed addressing all needs for different entities (example from RO).

  - It is really useful to have an evaluation unit inside the MA, which serves as a tool for the evaluation process (experience from GR).

  - A Steering Group or similar body can also complement resources in the MA, while offering expertise on evaluation topics

Table 2. Summary of Day 1 discussions regarding the topic 'Data management'

Difficulties to obtain data
Environmental data
• Missing environmental impact data and shortage of baseline environmental data at the farm level. This can potentially be addressed with digitalisation and the application of techniques to gather data at the farm level.
Social data
• Difficult to obtain a representative sample on social impact data, especially the preferences of residents in rural areas. In addition, the social aspect of the new CAP would require new data. Hungary has started a social impact monitoring project to address this.
Data sources
• Mixing different data sources or the existence of parallel but not connected monitoring systems can be a problem. This can be addressed by exploiting IACS and combining data with the help of the GIS methodology. It may however be difficult to engage beneficiaries to give this data.
• It is necessary to understand what an indicator means, and to request data for them at the beginning, in the application forms. Applications need to be set up from the beginning of the period (in the Calls for proposals) for including the required data. This, however, does not solve the problem of previous commitments (application forms from the previous period did not have the same data requirements as current ones).
Coordination
• The MA has access to data via the application forms. However, if data is collected by other bodies or other procedures, then it may not be available easily (combining, etc.). There is a need for better coordination with the PA, environmental and other data providers (cooperation agreements) to define timeline and type of data.
• Interoperability remains a challenge: evaluators often mention difficulties to get data from PA application tool.
Data quality
• Big amounts of data but without quality check can be a problem causing misunderstandings and mistakes.
• Need to define better the frequency for collecting data as well as the disaggregation at local and regional level.
Data security
• In general, it takes time to be allowed to use the data.

Table 3. Summary of Day 1 discussions regarding the topic 'Evaluation activities/topics'

Evaluation needs
• Bottlenecks:
○ How to identify the evaluation needs of stakeholders and keep the Evaluation Plan sufficiently flexible to adapt to evolving needs.
• Good practices:

	o Identification and analysis of evaluation needs through an Evaluation Steering Group, involving various stakeholders (experiences from IT and RO).
	o Evaluators propose topics and the MA decides (experience from LV)
	o Identification of needs within the MA: focus on evaluation of LAGs, capacity building (experience from HR).

Evaluation topics

- Bottlenecks

  o How to decide what to evaluate, prioritise resources and get evaluation results on time.

  o How to balance the emphasis on mandatory parts and specific parts of evaluations.

  o How to deal with different levels of evaluations (results, impacts) in order to understand what measures work and do not work and why.

- Good Practices:

  o Combine umbrella evaluations with thematic evaluations (e.g. CLLD, agri-environment and climate) (experience from GR).

  o Evaluation day in GR (present all topics that are to be evaluated)

  o An RDP Steering Committee suggests the evaluation topics to be included in the evaluator's annual work plan, after a thorough presentation of evaluations and research work undertaken on specific topics (experience from LV)

  o Use of ongoing evaluators to tackle ad-hoc needs more quickly (e.g. COVID effects in IT)

  o Regional Steering Group to identify regional evaluation needs (including also research institutes, farmer organisation, other policies).

Evaluation activities and timing

- Bottlenecks:

  o When to evaluate what and how to sequence evaluations (e.g. ex post only in 2026).

  o Assessing impacts of environmental measures require baseline and 5-10 years' time.

  o There is a need for a mid-term evaluation, but it is not mandatory.

  o Conflict of impacts/results. For example, between environmental and competitiveness. It should be communicated or addressed at the same point in time so policy-makers are well informed.

- Good Practices:

  o Leave behind what is mandatory and what is not: Be formative at the beginning, evaluate delivery mechanisms right at the beginning, evaluate results after 1-2 years and check on impacts later (experience from GR).

  o Multi-annual evaluation planning that is dynamic and adaptive (experience from GR and IT).

  o Look at new things at the beginning, e.g. how the green architecture works together, how the eco-schemes and AECM work; and focus on established measures later.

Table 4. Summary of Day 1 discussions regarding the topic 'Communication'

Who (recipients)

- Bottlenecks

  o Knowing who exactly the target is? Citizens? MA? PA? Depending on the target, the media/tool used for communication will be different.

  o Motivating the different stakeholder groups to 'need' the information provided by the communication of evaluations. For example, the MA cares about impacts and farmers care about practicalities of what they need to implement at farm-level, and whether they will receive or not money for it.

- o There are very few experiences of sharing and disseminating evaluation results and processes to wider public, as the evaluation results stay withing the MA and professionals.

  o Costs: communicating beyond the NRN and the Monitoring Committee may become very costly.

- Good practices

  o A stakeholder map from the beginning when designing the Evaluation Plan helps better target the communication. The method consists of using "circles" to place stakeholders depending on their importance (experience from GR).

  o Sometimes there are unexpected target groups: Students using the results of evaluations (experience from HR).

  o Webinars open to the public, including the experts from university, civil society. The goal is to reach a *common understanding* in the policy (experience from IT).

How (what format)

- Bottlenecks

  o Not enough human capacities and resources for communication.

  o Making sure that target groups really understand the evaluation results.

- Good practices

  o Annual meeting of social and economic partners (experience from DE).

  o Sharing evaluation studies and reports online for access to the broader public (experiences from AT, RO, LT).

  o The NRN disseminates targeted information through territorial meetings with stakeholders (experience from IT).

  o Making the content of the communication tool interesting for the target groups, e.g. leaflets and stands in agricultural fairs (experience from EE) or specialist magazines, like agrobusiness magazines (experience from LT).

  o Include 'hot topics', so that evaluators get invited to explain the results (e.g., by NGOs on the issue of "big/small farms") (experience from LT).

  o For each completed evaluation, the MA arranges a 1-h workshop with 20 participants from implementing and policy-responsible authorities (experience from SE).

When (right time)

- Bottlenecks

  o Need to build an evaluation culture and increase the awareness of the usefulness of evaluations before communicating the results.

  o Need for better planning as sometimes policy makers need evaluation results in a very tight time.

- Good practices

  o Communication according to the type of evaluation, e.g. communicating to the MA yearly on specific themes like environment measures and on and-hoc basis for studies on other priorities (experience from EE).

Outcomes of communication

- Bottlenecks

  o Communicated evaluation results may not be taken into account if they are contrary to the expectations of policy-makers.

  o Evaluation results may be difficult to understand, e.g. how to interpret the value of a water indicator, how to understand the importance of an impact indicator on the wider pollution in the area, etc.

  o More work is needed to get feedback from farmers.

  o Mid-term evaluations do not show impacts and may be difficult to be used for improving implementation but can be useful for informing future policy.

- Good practice

  o The Evaluation Plan could serve as a way to justify the money and how to succeed on the aims of the policy: 'Evaluation is not a technocratic obligation but a tool to better conduct the policy'.

Day 2 Group Discussions

Table 5. **Summary of Day 2 discussions regarding the topic 'Governance'**

How to improve effective collaboration between MA, evaluators, data providers
• Have an **intermediate body** that can bring together MAs, evaluators, and PAs. For example, a Steering Group or Evaluation Unit or other platform to bring together stakeholders' representatives and share bottlenecks (challenges with methods, technical issues), data and solutions at operational and theoretical level.
• **Formal agreements for evaluation stakeholders' cooperation**, for example agreements of evaluators-MA-PA-data providers.
• In the context of the new delivery model of the CAP Strategic Plans, create for regionalised MS strongly **coordinated Steering Groups at regional and national level.**
• **Clear working procedures:** start from main needs on data, methodology, responsibilities' distribution and schedule, and follow up.
• **Continuity of evaluators**: same evaluator for ex ante, during the programme and ex post.
• **Collaboration of thematic actors**, e.g. environmental stakeholders' meetings to decide interventions.

Table 6. **Summary of Day 2 discussions regarding the topic 'Data management'**

Bottlenecks	Improvements
Availability and timeliness of environmental and social impact data - shortage of baseline data at farm level - representativeness - opinion of rural citizens - new social data for new CAP - frequency of data collection **Examples (FI, EE):** Data collection for impact indicators are not planned for evaluation purposes, cannot check what is the situation inside the MS – + expensive to collect, cannot really use them	**Cooperation agreements** with data providers (define timeline and type of data)
	Example Sicily (IT): Department of agriculture/regional government is a mixed group, gathering and analysing development plan at farm level. Investment measures require a development plan. Data related to land, agricultural practices, types of crops. Tool (created with FADN methodology) is useful for evaluators.
Access data sources and combine them - understand what indicators mean - security issues - coordination with other data providers - parallel monitoring systems - use GIS	**Example RO:** Social data (I25 and C10) – have to be based on national definition on rural areas, not in Eurostat, so need RO database. Department for sustainable development in RO has a new initiative to involve the national institute of Statistics to provide indicators for all programmes.
	To work in close collaboration with higher **education institutions to collect data**.
How to obtain good quality data - application forms from the beginning - big quantity, low quality	Quality screening possible if you contract **research institutes** (questionnaires/data collection methods) – need time and resources and better design from the beginning

- misunderstandings and mistakes - data al local and regional level **Example ES**: Soil data, agreements with labs where farmers take the samples. Bottleneck: methodology to collect this data is different and need to harmonise this data - How to ensure national representation of data (there are some methods, but it is hard to apply them) - Many biodiversity indicators, which one to use? - Difficult to collect impact indicator data in application forms, how to explain to beneficiaries (administrative burden for them)	Setting up good **monitoring programs** that fit into the evaluation context (e.g., collaboration with research institutes and others that collect data)
	Collect data from applications on impact of projects in a kind of a "conclusion report" – maybe not for environmental indicators which take longer.
	Example from researcher (JRC): Control if beneficiaries achieved what they foresaw in their applications
	Needs assessment: depends on the indicators used.

Table 7. Summary of Day 2 discussions regarding the topic 'Evaluation topics and activities'

How to improve the Identification of evaluation needs: how and by whom?
• **A Steering Group,** involving regional/ national stakeholders, to undertake an ongoing analysis of needs. • **NRN** could coordinate evaluation needs at national level through networking. • Use a **participatory approach** for the Identification of needs: focus groups, meetings. • **Identify gaps** by checking previous evaluations. • Use **regulation** as a basis: CAP objectives, discussed with the Steering Group. • Involve **ex ante evaluator and SEA experts** to identify evaluation topics
Examples of proposed evaluation topics for different levels
EU level
• Green **architecture**:   o How do eco-schemes and AECM work together? • Assessing impacts of environmental measures • Evaluation of results after 1-2 years • Assessment of CAP specific objectives
National level
• Evaluation of **delivery mechanism** • **Formative** evaluation (programme operation and management) • **Summative** evaluation of evaluations conducted at regional levels
Specific topics
• **Methodology** studies (e.g. model for evaluating LEADER impacts) • Evaluation of **financial input** and results (e.g. costs of preserving nature) • Assessment of how to optimise the impacts of measures between **Pillar 1 and Pillar 2**

Considerations for prioritising evaluation topics
• Keep separate time and resources
Time
• Go first for **'preliminary evaluations'** (based on monitoring), evaluate first delivery and outputs, and later impacts.
• Can start evaluation of selection criteria etc. immediately after launch
• First evaluate the implementation of measures and more specific topics (e.g. innovation) later.
Resources
• **Assess the costs** of thematic evaluations (in case of ongoing evaluations)
• **Prioritise evaluation budget according to size** of measures (but not mechanically)
• Decision on resources depends on **policy priorities** (e.g., impact on environment)

Table 8. Summary of Day 2 discussions regarding the topic 'Communication'

How to improve evaluation culture
• Network building
• Increase the **awareness** on the need to communicate evaluations (within the MA)
How to improve communication channels
• Boost **social media** (young influencers) in rural areas.
• Innovation in communication: using **new media** to communicate faster and more target group specific.
• Reflect on the different target groups: MA needs are different from those of beneficiaries or the broader public. The latter needs simple language, while beneficiaries need information on the concrete results of their activities.
• Use conferences for disseminating evaluation results, taking into account the different target groups that may be present there. Draft the tender so that the conference is organised to take this into account.
• Transfer practical messages: introduce examples of RDP projects so that participants see the good practices + evaluation results.
• Obtain feedback on the effectiveness of different communication channels.
• "We have, as a community, to invest in evaluation planning and foresee moments for communications activities, so that we can plan different moments for different targets"
How to improve timeliness of communication for policy making
Reflections from HR: evaluation on LEADER
• Why? Communicate results and discuss next steps!
• Evaluation not as something to read but something to act on. Therefore, communicate to **LAGs** through workshops.
• Communicate results and discuss next steps with a view to the future: **strategic planning.**
Reflections from HR: the logic of the new period is different
• Maybe too early to talk about "what is the best type of evaluation to feed policy making"? We need: expertise, time, to know what evaluations are needed.
Reflections from LT: how to communicate recommendations
• Presentation of final results after the evaluations to MA, PA. Can also be topic specific.
• When recommendations are presented to the public, it must be stated that policy makers are going to build on them (evidence based policy making).

- Recommendations sent to other divisions and ask for feedback: was the recommendation useful? Has it already been implemented?

- **Use the NRN** to communicate results and recommendations.