3 Methodology

3.1 General approach, scope and timeframe

The ex-post evaluation covers the 18 Key Actions and 55 activities defined in the EU FAP work programme, at the Community level and in the 27 EU Member States. The description of the implementation is based on the progress reports presented by the Commission as a part of the Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) annual work programmes and on the information collected by the evaluation questionnaires and interviews, both from the Commission and Member States. The period of analysis covers the EU FAP implementation period 2007-2011.

![EU FAP Ex-Post Evaluation](image)

**Figure 8.** EU FAP Ex-Post Evaluation.

Dotted lines delineate the scope of the implementation review (e.g. the pre-assessment as part of the Evaluation Question 1), and the full lines delineate the scope of the whole evaluation (responses to the Evaluation Questions 1-5).

The ex-post evaluation implementation reporting and pre-assessment is largely based on the work started in the mid-term evaluation (2009), but now extending the observations and analysis to the second half of the Action Plan implementation period (see Figure 8) and collecting evidence on results, effects and (expected) impacts of the activities carried out.

3.2 Intervention logic model, definitions and judgement criteria

Following the approach applied in the mid-term evaluation, the monitoring and evaluation framework for the ex-post evaluation is based on the same Intervention Logic Model. Figure 9 depicts the causal relationships between the outputs of the EU FAP, including relevant inputs, activities, and expected results. Description of the implementation provides an answer to what activities have taken place, by whom and (to the extent possible) with which resources, and which outputs (concrete products and services) were produced. Effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation is assessed in relation to the results that have been achieved in contrast to the results and impacts that were expected to have been achieved by the EU FAP.
Ex-post evaluation of the EU Forest Action Plan

The ex-post evaluation covers two Evaluation Themes, namely, (1) an evaluation of the implementation and (2) an evaluation of relevance. These themes are addressed across 5 Evaluation Questions (EQs). The first EQ focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation. These terms are understood as:

**Effectiveness**: The extent to which the EU FAP objectives and intended results were achieved or are expected to be achieved. Based on the inventory of activities evidence is gathered about results and effects from the activities of the Action Plan. Evidence is collected both from secondary sources and from the perceptions of the Leading Actors implementing the Action Plan (Commission Services and Member States) as well as from the stakeholders that were (directly or indirectly) affected by the Action Plan.

**Efficiency**: The extent to which outputs and/or the desired effects were achieved with the best possible use of resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, administrative costs, etc.). The Action Plan documents indicate existing financial instruments that were used in implementing the activities of the Action Plan. However, no financial targets are set in the Action Plan documentation. Information collection uses reviews of secondary sources (financing programmes, reports on use of other relevant instruments such as the forestry measures in Rural Development Programmes and LIFE+) and information from the Leading Actors and the stakeholders. The perceptions of Leading Actors as well as stakeholders on good practices and/or shortcomings in the implementation are used to illustrate the assessment of efficiency.

Figure 9  The EU FAP intervention logic.

Causal relationships elaborated in the Action Plan objectives hierarchy and the analysis of the implementation and effects.
The second EQ focuses on how the Action Plan contributed to improving the coherence and cross-sectoral cooperation in implementing the EU Forestry Strategy. These terms are understood as:

**Coherence:** The extent to which the EU FAP activities were contradictory across the horizontal and vertical level and their contribution to the objectives of the EU Forestry Strategy. Coherence is assessed at: (1) **horizontal level:** across relevant policy areas at EU and Member States level, and (2) **vertical level:** between international, EU and Member State levels.

**Cooperation:** The extent to which the EU FAP activities enhance the cooperation between actors implementing the EU Forestry Strategy principles. Cooperation is assessed at: (1) **horizontal level:** across actors of relevant policy areas at EU and Member States level, and (2) **vertical level:** between actors at the international, EU and Member States level.

The third EQ focuses on contribution of the Action Plan to balancing the economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives related to forestry. These terms are understood as:

**Balanced contribution of the Action Plan** refers to activities formulated for EU FAP objectives (1 to 4), and activities carried out by the EU FAP, including expected impacts, how they were addressed and their contribution to the economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives.

**Economic, environmental, socio-cultural objectives** refer to the division of sustainability into three domains: economic (e.g. standard of living), ecological (e.g. biophysical carrying capacity) and socio-cultural (e.g. systems of governance). This generates an operational view of sustainability that stimulates environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic viability related to forestry. Environmental, economic and socio-cultural criteria have to be considered with equal importance.

The analysis of **relevance** (Evaluation Theme 2) assesses the extent to which the EU FAP activities were consistent with the current and/or future needs of the stakeholders (including key actors at international, EU and Member States levels). This assessment includes an analysis of the EU FAP in relation to the needs, problems and issues that the Action Plan was expected to address. Relevance was approached from three angles:

1. **Relevance of issues.** The EU Forestry Strategy definitions, the EU FAP Objectives, and an investigation into new emerging issues,
2. **Relevance of instruments.** The Action Plan, Key Actions and activities, including an investigation of any activities missing from the Action Plan, and
3. **Relevance of the organisational set-up.** This is done through an assessment made by the evaluation team, utilising perceptions of the Leading Actors implementing the plan (the Commission and the Member States) and feedback from the stakeholders.

Theme 2 includes two EQs. The first addresses the added value of the EU FAP in implementing the EU Forestry Strategy and the second addresses the relevance of the Action Plan objectives, key actions, activities and the adequacy of its organisational set-up. These terms are understood as:
Added value: The extent to which the implementation of the EU FAP adds benefits to what would have been the result without the EU FAP in implementing the EU Forestry Strategy. It is defined by the (1) degree of coherence and coordination, (2) efficiency and effectiveness, and (3) activities triggered and/or influenced by the Action Plan.

Coordination can be understood as a (1) one-way hierarchical process of directing action, (2) two-way dialogue of sharing and gaining information about parallel actions, or (3) multiple level collaboration process of dialogue and feedback in preparing positions and future actions.

Organisational set-up refers to the established bodies relevant in the implementation of the EU FAP at the EU or Member State level.

Adequacy of the organizational set-up refers to the extent which the organisational setup facilitates and supports the Action Plan implementation.

3.3 Data and information sources

The evaluation is based on extensive background work as well as information and data collected through a document review, interviews and an evaluation survey.

The document review covers the official documentation of the EU FAP and its implementation. Some of the documents are publicly available, and some are not. The Commission has delivered meeting and working group materials to the evaluation team. Meeting documentations of the Standing Forestry Committee (for ex-post evaluation available in CIRCA), Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork (minutes from December 2008 onwards publicly available in the internet), and the Inter-services’ Group on Forestry (for ex-post evaluation available in the CIRCA) were also made available to the evaluation team. Reviews of official documents of the European Council and the European Parliament are based on internet-based document registers that are publicly available. Also materials from relevant stakeholders, including the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, have been reviewed. Furthermore, information on activities carried out has also been collected from the public databases of several financing instruments.

The information collection tools (evaluation survey and interviews) were designed with three target groups in mind: (1) Commission Services, (2) Member States, and (3) stakeholders. The Commission was a Leading Actor in the implementation of the EU FAP, and the Commission survey was constructed to go through all EU FAP activities in detail. In practice, the respondents concentrated on the questions and specific Key Actions that were relevant to their work for the EU FAP. Interviews (personal and phone interviews) were carried out between February and March 2012 to complete the data collection. In total 16 Commission Departments and Services were contacted for the assessment. Although information and perceptions were collected from several departments, the evaluation report does not distinguish which department has been active in which Key Action or given which assessment. The information collected from the Commission representatives presents descriptions of the implementation and self-assessment of the progress made and the involvement of other Leading Actors (e.g. other Commission Services and Member States) and stakeholders in specific EU FAP objectives or Key Actions.

The Member State survey included an inventory of the EU FAP Key Actions and activities where the Member States were indicated as Leading Actors in the EU FAP work programme (including pre-filled information about activities reported at mid-term). It also included an assessment on the EU FAP implementation, its relevance, and the relationship of the national forest programme and national forest policy to the Action Plan. The survey questionnaire was distributed through the contact persons for the Member State representatives in the Standing
Forestry Committee (SFC), and also additional phone interviews were carried out during the data collection in January–March, 2012. All 27 Member States were contacted for the survey and a response was received from 25 Member States (all except Belgium and Malta). Together with the status of implementation, the Member States were also requested to specify the most important measures in their country contributing to the achievement of the EU FAP. The level of detail in the Member States’ responses vary considerably, but compared with the data provided at the mid-term, the information provided at the ex-post evaluation tends to be more general. The reported activities at national level are in most cases updated from the ones given in the mid-term evaluation and, for example, for Objective 3 that was mainly left for the second half of the implementation period, its gives a good overview of what has happened at Member State level. A number of respondents referred only to the Community level implementation, and a number of respondents pointed out that it is difficult to indicate activities at the national level that were implemented specifically due to the EU FAP. Furthermore, compared with the responses given at the mid-term, now some Key Actions were reported as being carried out on on-going bases, instead of reporting the same activities as “carried out” at the mid-term. This confirms the observation made at the mid-term; several activities are ongoing (in many cases for several years already) and they would have taken place also without the Action Plan, even though they can now be seen as contributing to the objectives defined in the EU FAP. As a consequence, the resulting list of activities in the Member States is not exhaustive, but rather provides a sample of activities carried out in line with the objectives of the Action Plan. Member State assessments of the implementation and relevance of the EU FAP provide feedback to the Community level implementation (e.g. implementation by the Commission as a Leading Actor, implementation by the Member States as Leading Actors, and involvement of the stakeholders in the EU FAP as a whole).

The stakeholder survey was distributed as an on-line survey. Targeted invitations were sent to the Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork and also to stakeholders from outside the actual implementation of the EU FAP. The distribution list covered 356 e-mail addresses, but there was also an open registration for contributing to the survey. The survey was open between February and March 2012. Additional phone interviews were conducted in order to complete the data collection. A total of 51 responses were received. It should also be noted that 6 responses correspond to organisational rather than individual replies to the survey. According to the AGFC groups, these stakeholder responses represent: producers (45.1%); traders, operators, industry and workers (15.7%); environmental organisations (17.6%); and other stakeholders (21.6%). Other stakeholders include mainly research and technology related organisations.

To allow for a comparison of the assessments by the three target groups, parts of the questionnaires were identical for all three groups. In addition to this, a number of interviews were conducted by telephone with stakeholder, Member State and Commission representatives to clarify responses in the questionnaires and to collect more detailed and general assessments on the ex-post evaluation questions. All responses were invited as an expert assessment, thus no official statements were requested from the organisations. This affects the quality of information, and consequently the nature of conclusions that can be drawn from the assessments. The assessments cannot be generalised to cover the organisation or group from which individual responses came. The level of detail and explanation of the views given vary considerably in the written questionnaire responses, which needs to be taken into account when reading the analysis for the evaluation questions.

3.4 Validity of assessment for judgements made in the analysis

The ex-post evaluation is based on extensive document reviews and data search, as well as on data and information collected by surveys. When assessing the validity of assessments made in this report, the following viewpoint should be taken into consideration.

The Action Plan is a tool to coordinate action ongoing at multiple levels. Although it defined the objectives and lines of action (Key Actions) on a timeline, with indication of Leading Actors
sharing the responsibility of implementation, there are no specific financial or other resources earmarked for the implementation of the Action Plan.

The activities referred to in the EU FAP are often already ongoing, and at the stage of ex-post evaluation it is very difficult to know to what extent (if at all) motivation for observed activities can be attributed to the EU FAP, even when the activities themselves are clearly defined. Much of the evidence gathered by evaluation surveys is in addition subjective and to a certain extent dependent on the knowledge, involvement and understanding of the individuals responding to questionnaires or interviews. The evaluation team has addressed this challenge by crosschecking the information between the survey responses (Commission, Member State and stakeholder responses) and by identifying additional sources of information (document reviews).

The objectives of the Action Plan are general and influence is expected to materialise in changes at Member States and the EU level. Apart from the meetings, reports and studies produced in the EU FAP, it is difficult to find concrete evidence of up-take or follow-up either at the Community or Member State level. Many processes are ongoing and parallel, interlinked and connected. Showing explicitly that specific influence or input was due to EU FAP activities is difficult, but it is equally difficult to provide evidence that EU FAP did not have an impact on these developments – even if it was one factor among several that led to the situation as it unfolds at the stage of the ex-post evaluation.

Judging the efficiency of individual Key Actions remains difficult if no concrete output (e.g. study) is involved and the resources employed are largely unknown. In the analysis, particular attention was paid to the cost-effectiveness of the activities, taking into consideration the potential of financing available, its actual uptake and its use in the context of the EU FAP activities. However, in this respect the analysis or the examples given are not exhaustive, but rather demonstrate implementation of the Action Plan for the issue in question.

The EU FAP is expected to connect to national implementation (e.g. National Forest Programmes (NFP) or equivalent). Elaboration and assessment of this connection has been challenging due to the fact that there were different expectations on EU FAP and its influence on NFP or the Member States level in general. Consequently no generalisation can be made for the whole EU27, but the analysis (see EQ2) illustrates the variety of goals, approaches and results across EU27.

The EU FAP covers several policy areas related to forestry, and the evaluation is expected to assess its influence on the development of those areas (e.g. F-BI, research and innovation, biodiversity conservation, climate action, energy). The evaluation surveys were, however, distributed through the established forestry contacts at EU level. The Member States were addressed in the surveys through the SFC representative, although the questions cover several ministries also beyond the forest or forestry related fields in the Member States; and the Commission Directorates General were addressed through the Inter-services Group on Forestry contacts, although the questions cover issues handled by several units within an individual Directorates General. This can affect the generalisation of evaluation assessments beyond the group reached in the surveys. The evaluation team has addressed this challenge by document reviews (including also scientific and other articles), and internet search of documents and references from other relevant bodies (e.g. Council and the European Parliament) and forest-related fora (pan-European and global level).

The level of detail in survey responses varies. The general, often anecdotal responses provided in the surveys by representatives of the Member States, the Commission and stakeholders leave room for interpretation, and this interpretation is influenced by the evaluation team members' expertise and assumptions. The evaluation team addressed this challenge by first dividing the responsibility of assessment of the four EU FAP objectives within the team, and then, when drafting the analysis and first lines of conclusions bringing the team
members’ contributions under whole team’s assessment and cross-checking of the assumptions made.

Especially the stakeholder responses in the evaluation surveys provide a broad spectrum of viewpoints on the Action Plan. The feedback and assessments given vary considerably from one respondent to another. In the analysis it has to be born in mind that some of the stakeholders have been centrally involved in the implementation (e.g. through AGFC, and SFC ad hoc working groups, studies), and are thus likely to be well aware of the Action Plan, and others have followed the Plan from more distance, not directly participating in it. Both viewpoints, from inside and outside the implementation, have been valuable input for the evaluation. The analyses in this report try to bring up the different viewpoints expressed, but the sharpness of statements is necessarily diluted when summarising the survey responses.

In the ex-post evaluation report the survey responses are referred to in the EQs (see chapter 4). Individual responses or feedback are not presented, but responses are summarised as response from Member States, Commission or stakeholder representatives. Commission responses from different DGs are not identified in the descriptions. Summing up the assessments for the analysis requires generalisation of the responses. The self-assessments of the Leading Actors (Commission and Member States) are included in the judgements, and feedback from other actors and the stakeholders is given in order to show whether the statements given can be verified. Conclusions made in the analysis are based on the evaluators’ external view and expert opinion, unless specifically otherwise indicated. In the end, the judgements made in this report are based on the evaluation team’s external view and expertise in the particular area.