

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR RDP:
GUIDELINES FOR THE
EX ANTE EVALUATION OF
2014-2020 RDPs

JUNE 2014

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European Evaluation Network
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The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Network”) operates under the responsibility of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Unit L.4 (Evaluation of measures applicable to agriculture; studies). The overall aim of the Network is to increase the usefulness of evaluation as a tool for improving the formulation and implementation of rural development policies by helping to establish good practice and capacity building in the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes up until 2013.

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Evaluation plays an increasingly important role in the development, implementation and design of EU policies. Against the background of the ongoing financial crisis, the assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of allocated resources is emphasized even more in overall EU governance. In times when the concern about the use of public finances is growing, evaluation represents a key instrument to inform evidence-based decisions about effective spending on policy measures.

These *ex ante* guidelines are targeted mainly at Managing Authorities and evaluators of Rural Development Programmes. They are intended to accompany them during the process of planning and conducting the *ex ante* evaluation of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes. A broader spectrum of stakeholders (European Commission and socio-economic partners) involved in programme development and consultation may also find these guidelines useful.

The guidelines have been drafted by a team of evaluation experts in close collaboration with the relevant services of the European Commission and the Evaluation Expert Committee for Rural Development. Selected experts (Robert Lukesch, Roberto Cagliero, John Grieve, Judit Habuda, Morten Kvistgaard, Enrique Martínez-Cantero, Angelos Sanopoulos, Dirk Schubert, João Pedro Silva) have contributed their wealth of evaluation experience to the text. Members of the Evaluation Expert Committee acted as a sounding board to check whether successive drafts of the text were adapted to the needs of the target audience. Representatives of DG Agriculture and Rural Development, DG Environment, DG REGIO and DG MARE have ensured the coherence of the guidelines within the EU policy framework. The Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development coordinated and facilitated the drafting process.

The rural development *ex ante* guidelines are non-binding in nature and complement related legal acts. The present document has been drawn up on the basis of the Regulations published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 20 December of 2013, namely the Regulation (EU) No 1303/ 2013¹ and the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013². It does not prejudge the final content of any delegated or implementing acts that may be prepared by the Commission.

Brussels, June 2014

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

² Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005

ACRONYMS

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CEP	Country Environmental Profile
CIA	Cross Impact Analysis
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CF	Cohesion Fund
CSF	Common Strategic Framework
DG AGRI	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DG BUDGET	Directorate-General for Budget
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG ENV	Directorate-General for the Environment
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional Policy
EAE	<i>Ex ante</i> evaluation
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EAGF	European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
EC	European Commission
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESI Funds	European Structural and Investment Funds

ESF	European Social Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategy
MA	Managing Authority
NRN	National Rural Network
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SPF	Strategic Policy Framework
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TA	Technical Assistance
ToR	Terms of Reference

INTRODUCTION

What is ex ante evaluation all about?

Ex ante evaluation concerns the process of developing a policy programme and is performed before its implementation. The evaluation involves a range of stakeholders and acts as a critical mirror for the authorities responsible for programme development. It provides an assessment of whether development issues have been diagnosed correctly and should identify any gaps; whether the strategy and objectives proposed are relevant to national and regional needs; whether the approach proposed is coherent, and consistent with Community policies and guidelines; whether the assumptions concerning expected results and impacts are realistic and in line with the resources available. This process should enable successive drafts of the programme to be refined and improved so that it is more likely to achieve its objectives in a cost-effective manner.

Moreover, *ex ante* evaluation sets the corner stone for subsequent monitoring and evaluation activities, by ensuring that all necessary information is available and that the system is adequate to provide the data needed to assess the programme's results and impacts. This prepares the ground for reliable monitoring and evaluation throughout the programming period, which contributes to successful programme steering and demonstration of the programme's achievements.

Whilst it is indeed a legal requirement that all the 2014-2020 RDPs should be subject to *ex ante* evaluation, the exercise is not simply about fulfilling a formal legal requirement. It is about doing everything possible to ensure that an RDP is designed to meet the needs of the area it serves, making the best use of the resources available to improve the lives of the rural communities within the territory and to protect and enhance the rural environment. It is about using public money to make a difference to people's lives.

These guidelines focus on the mandatory elements which should be addressed in all the *ex ante* evaluations. However they should not be seen as exhaustive. There may well be additional issues linked to an individual programme or territory which a Managing Authority may wish to include in order to gain the most from the *ex ante* exercise. Where this is the case, Managing Authorities are encouraged to expand the scope of the *ex ante* to meet their specific needs.

What is the legal basis for ex ante evaluation of Rural Development Programmes in the period 2014 - 2020?

In September 2013 the European Parliament, the EU Council and the European Commission reached an agreement on reforming the common agriculture policy (CAP) for the 2014-2020 programming period. The EU regulations were published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 20 December 2013. Those elements most relevant for the *ex ante* evaluation of Rural Development Programmes are:

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (hereafter); and

- Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 (hereafter).

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 contains elements concerning strategic planning and programming, conditionalities and performance review, as well as arrangements for monitoring and evaluation, common to all programmes under the Common Strategic Framework (CSF): Article 55 covers the common requirements for *ex ante* evaluations.

Articles 77 and 62 of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 contain additional elements specific to RDPs.

What is new compared to ex ante evaluation in the previous period?

While at a first sight the respective sections in the Regulations seem not to have changed radically compared to the current programming period 2007-2013, there are however some notable differences:

- **The elements to be assessed by *ex ante* evaluation are more extensive and include aspects which go beyond the strategy and content of the programme**, such as the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for management of the programme.
- ***Ex ante* evaluation has become more deeply integrated into the programme design process** by involving the *ex ante* evaluator from an early stage of programme development. While in the period 2007-2013 the *ex ante* evaluation was in many cases conducted only after the development of the programme document, the new requirement advocates a more iterative process between evaluator and Managing Authority. This should lead to a more efficient process, and a better outcome, but also presents specific challenges for both Managing Authority and evaluator.
- **The process of planning and conducting the *ex ante* evaluation has become more interlinked with parallel processes** (Programming, Partnership Agreement, etc.). This is both more ambitious and more demanding to implement.

Why do we need specific ex ante guidelines for Rural Development Programmes?

These *ex ante* guidelines are intended to provide those responsible for managing and conducting the *ex ante* evaluations with a fuller understanding of how to translate the legal texts into a practical and successful exercise which materially improves the quality of the RDP.

As the guidelines have been drafted in close cooperation between the European Commission and evaluation stakeholders they should lead to a common understanding of the requirements, including the practical challenges linked to the implementation. This should generate common expectations of what can and should be achieved in the *ex ante* evaluations.

Although the guidelines cannot cover every single question which may arise during the *ex ante* evaluation, the document aims to give practical guidance on the most important issues and common concerns, to ensure that nothing essential is overlooked and to avoid unnecessary pitfalls. It is intended to help Managing Authorities and evaluators, socio-economic partners and European Commission staff who have to deal with various aspects of the *ex ante* evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.

These guidelines focus mainly on territorial RDPs which account for the majority of both programmes and expenditure. However where there is a separate programme for the National Rural Network, it must also undergo an *ex ante* evaluation. The "process" part of these guidelines (Part I: Chapter 2) is

also applicable to NRN programmes, and a specific section on evaluation of networks is included (Part II: Chapter 5.4) which covers NRNs whether they are included within a territorial RDP or in a separate stand-alone programme.

DGs REGIO and EMPL have also produced a guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation for the Cohesion Policy (The Programming Period 2014-2020, Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund - Guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation). These guidelines for rural development go further because they also address issues specific to rural development, such as the use of common indicators and the assessment of the SWOT analysis. In addition these guidelines contain a number of practical tools, such as templates for the Terms of Reference and the *ex ante* evaluation report, and methodological support.

These guidelines are not binding, and Managing Authorities may of course choose to use other approaches and methods provided that the legal requirements are fulfilled. However, many Member States actively requested support from the Commission for this task and it is hoped that this document responds to those requests, and will save time and effort, ensure all aspects are adequately covered and avoid subsequent problems in the *ex ante* exercise. The Commission also has the responsibility to produce a synthesis of the *ex ante* evaluations and some consistency and comparability in the approach to individual *ex ante* evaluations will facilitate this task.

How to use these guidelines?

The *ex ante* guidelines for Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020 have been drafted with a view to be informative and helpful for different groups of stakeholders:

- 1) Representatives of programming authorities will find a concise summary of the purpose of the *ex ante* evaluation as well as information on how to organize and coordinate the process. It is of utmost importance for them to fulfil the legal requirements for submission of the Rural Development Programme and at same time to make the exercise as useful as possible through supporting improvements to the design of the RDP. Part I is specifically designed to meet these needs.
- 2) Evaluators may be more interested in further explanations of what is intended by the often very brief legal texts. For this purpose the guidelines explain the rationale behind the requirement, develop it further with a view to create a common understanding of the task and finally provide very practical suggestions of which approaches could be used to assess a given aspect of the programme. Part II has been drafted with a particular focus on evaluators' needs.
- 3) Officials within DG Agriculture and Rural Development concerned with accompanying the preparation of the RDPs 2014-2020 may find it helpful to have a reference point which summarizes the common understanding of the purpose and the tasks of *ex ante* evaluation.

The present document has therefore been structured in three distinct parts, which can be used as stand-alone documents, but which give the interested reader the opportunity, through cross links provided in the text, to go more into depth. In this light it has been decided to keep the three parts in one document. In order to maintain the "stand-alone" character of each part, there is necessarily a certain amount of repetition, particularly in relation to the legal requirements.

PART I: Mainly for Managing Authorities

This covers the purpose, process and scope of the *ex ante* evaluation.

Chapter 1 discusses WHY *ex ante* evaluation should be conducted, setting out the rationale and purpose of *ex ante* evaluation.

Chapter 2 explores HOW the *ex ante* evaluation should be conducted, providing practical guidance on the process including how to link it to programme development and the Strategic Environmental Assessment. This chapter also explains the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders and includes a description of necessary consultation procedures.

Chapter 3 goes article by article through the relevant legal provisions, highlighting what must be covered by the *ex ante* evaluation. It indicates where to find additional guidance on each topic in Part II which contains more detailed information on each task. This approach responds to specific requests from Member States to distinguish between legal obligations and recommended good practice.

PART II: Mainly for evaluators

This covers the tasks of the *ex ante* evaluation in more detail.

It contains 6 chapters that explain in detail WHAT the *ex ante* evaluation should contain. It discusses subject by subject what needs to be covered, and the approaches suggested to assess a given subject. It also includes good or not-so-good practice and suggested evaluation questions.

PART III is a TOOLBOX It contains practical support such as draft Terms of Reference for *ex ante* evaluation and SEA, evaluation questions and working templates, which should assist both evaluators and Managing Authorities in conducting the *ex ante* evaluation.

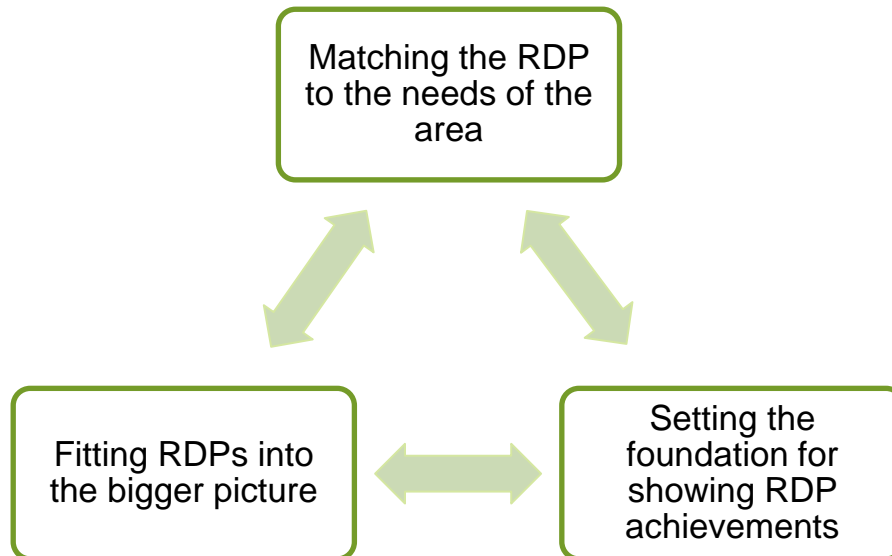
PART I: MAINLY FOR MANAGING AUTHORITIES

1 WHY EX ANTE EVALUATION?

What is the point of the ex ante evaluation?

Ex ante evaluation is more than a compulsory exercise within the governance of ESI Funds as stipulated by regulations. The key role of the *ex ante* evaluation is to contribute to the development of an RDP which is in line with the needs of the Member State on the one hand and with EU wide priorities on the other hand. Moreover, the *ex ante* evaluation plays a practical role in relation to the delivery and evaluation of the programme.

Figure 1 Role of the *ex ante* evaluation in design and evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

1.1 Matching the RDP to the needs of the area

The *ex ante* evaluation is intended to help ensure that what is proposed in the programme makes sense, is logical and justified, and that the proposed priorities, objectives, measures and allocations of resources are appropriate in order to respond to the needs identified through the needs assessment. It should act as a check to see if the needs assessment is comprehensive and balanced, whether the objectives are in line with the needs identified, and whether the strategy, activities and resource allocation proposed in the programme are likely to achieve its objectives and targets. Where appropriate it should make recommendations to improve the draft programme.

In addition to the programme content, a range of associated elements, such as delivery mechanisms, administrative and advisory capacity, monitoring and evaluation procedures should also be assessed to see whether the capacity and support available are appropriate to implement the programme as foreseen.

The *ex ante* evaluation of the new programmes takes place during the later stages of the existing programmes. The evaluator is able to draw on the experience of the current programming period (e.g. through MTE) and the previous one (through *ex post* evaluation) to improve the design and implementation of the new programmes

The use of external experts brings not only an independent objective view to the process, but also contributes to specific expertise which can contribute to improving the final result. A good *ex ante* evaluation undertaken by a skilled and knowledgeable evaluator can contribute to more effective use of the funds available; increase the achievements of the programme, and save time and resources in programme implementation.

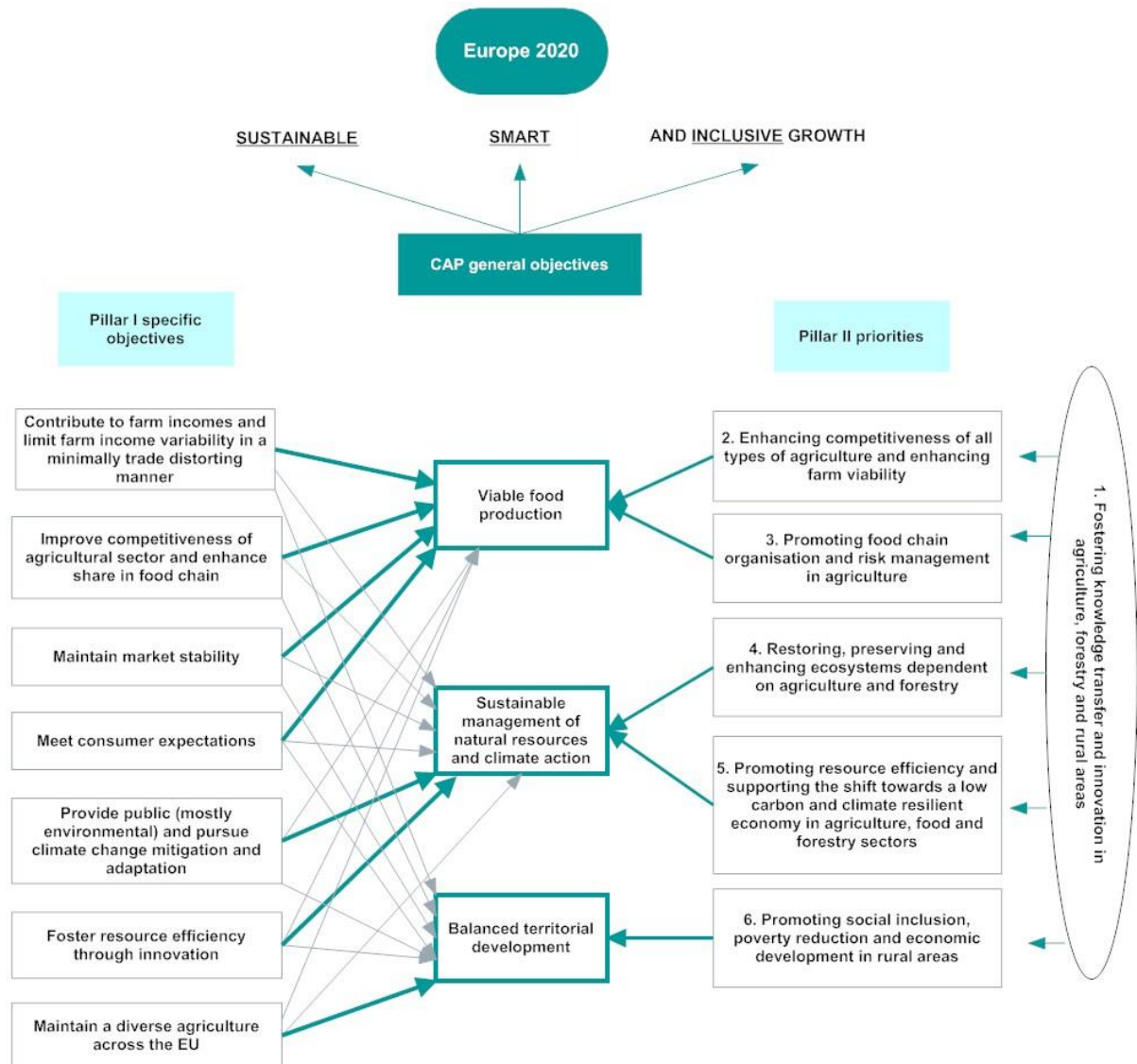
1.2 Fitting RDPs into the bigger picture

As Rural Development Programmes are not the only policy interventions in rural areas, one of the roles of the *ex ante* evaluation is to check that different instruments complement rather than compete with or contradict each other. In this respect the particular contribution of the *ex ante* evaluation is to:

- **Assess the consistency of the RDP with the measures financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) under Pillar I of the CAP³.** The 1st Pillar focuses on direct support for farmers and market measures whilst the 2nd Pillar covers rural development. The common objectives of the whole CAP (viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and balanced territorial development) will be assessed in future using a common set of impact indicators, to which both pillars contribute through their different mechanisms. The RDP *ex ante* evaluation should therefore consider potential synergies, contradictions or overlaps in both Pillars effects (e.g. on farm incomes, biodiversity, etc.).

³ Article 3 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013⁴ Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Figure 2 Overall CAP intervention logic showing links between the 1st and 2nd Pillars.

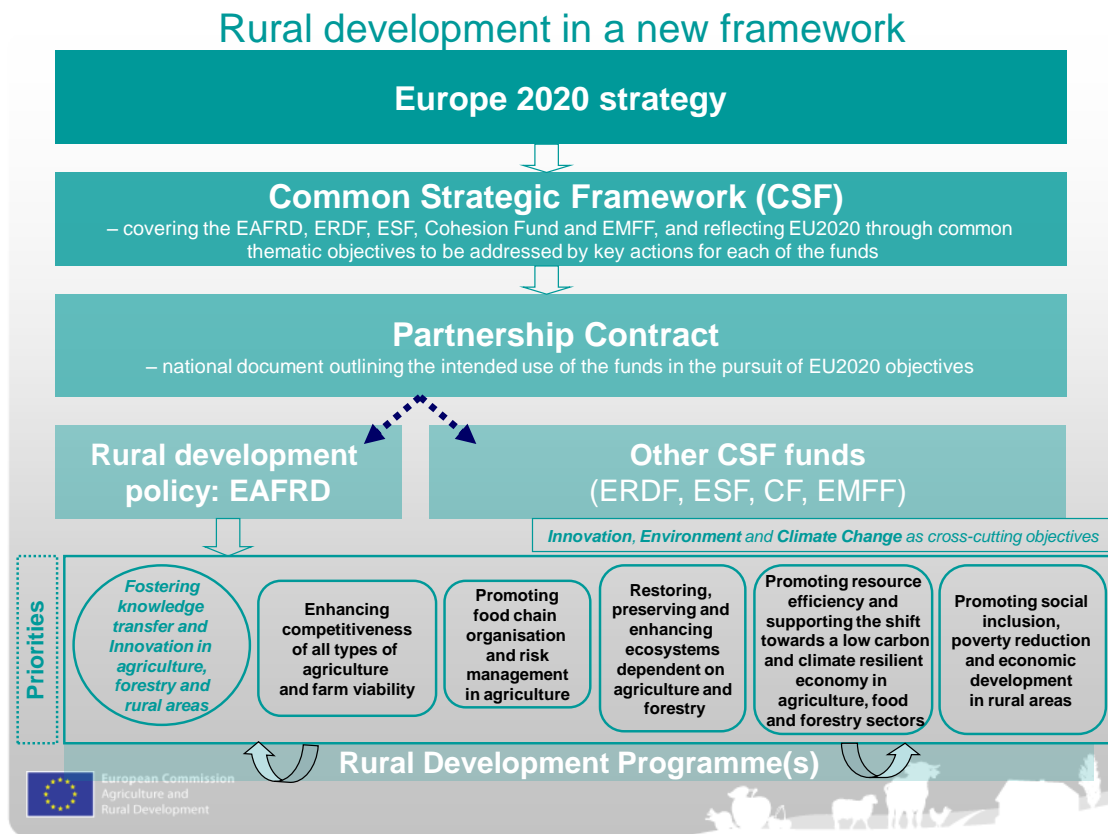


Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

- **Assess interaction between the Rural Development Programme and interventions supported by other national/regional funds.** Besides the 1st Pillar of the CAP, there may be a range of other national or regional policies implemented in rural areas. The interactions between such instruments and the Rural Development Programme should be considered in the *ex ante* evaluation.
- **Consider the consistency with other ESI Funds' programmes (ERDF, ESF, EMFF and CF):** The Common Strategic Framework of the European Union provides the overarching framework coordinating the strategic focus of the different contributing funds and describing how they may contribute to the EU2020 objectives and to the targets of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth⁴. At Member State level the Partnership Agreements draw together the strategies of the individual programmes, and describe the arrangements made for effective and efficient implementation and coordination.

⁴ Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Figure 3 Rural development policy in the context of EU2020 and the CSF.



Source: DG AGRI, Workshop "Strategic Programming and Monitoring and Evaluation for RDPs 2014-2020", Brussels, 14th -15th March 2012

NB: some terms used in this figure have changed since March 2012: "CSF Funds" are now referred to as "ESI Funds" and "Partnership Contract" is now referred to as "Partnership Agreement"

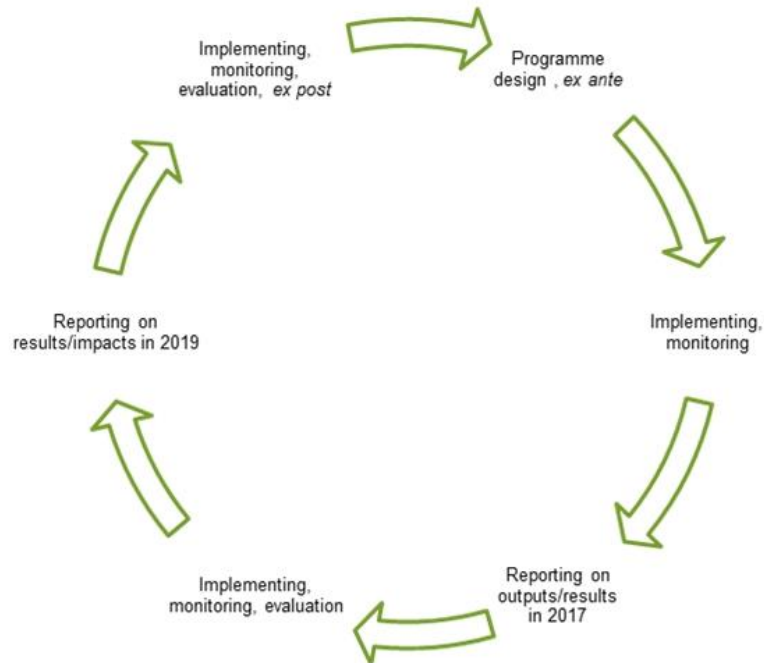
1.3 Setting the foundation for showing RDP achievements

The *ex ante* evaluation constitutes the first building block for the evaluation system of Rural Development Programmes in the period 2014-2020. A good *ex ante* is a solid foundation for monitoring and evaluation, which will contribute to effective programme steering, and enable the achievements of the RDP to be demonstrated throughout the programme implementation cycle. The specific contribution of the *ex ante* is to:

- **Ensure that all relevant indicators are included in the programme with appropriate values.** Identify and where appropriate contribute to filling gaps, so that the needs assessment is based on comprehensive current values for context and impact indicators. Check the feasibility of planned values for output indicators, and quantified targets for result/target indicators in relation to the resource allocation proposed. Check that programme-specific indicators are included where necessary and support their establishment where missing.
- **Support the specification of data types to be collected, their management and processing,** which informs programme authorities and stakeholders on the programme implementation and facilitates the assessment of its achievements and impacts.

- **Avoid or mitigate possible problems linked to evaluation during the programming period** through validation of the programme's intervention logic.
- In the case of **regional programmes**, consider how links will be made between the direct results recorded for the RDP (through result/target indicators) and **its overall impact**, if data for most impact indicators are recorded at national level only.

Figure 4 The *ex ante* evaluation in the Rural Development Programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation cycle.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

2 THE *EX ANTE* EVALUATION PROCESS

The *ex ante* evaluation, incorporating the Strategic Environmental Assessment, is not a snapshot at a moment in time, it should be considered as a partnership process between the Managing Authority and the *ex ante* evaluators with the common goal of preparing the best possible RDP for the country/region. In order to be most effective, the *ex ante* evaluation needs to accompany the design process of the Rural Development Programme and to be integrated with it, so that the programme can be progressively refined through a series of incremental improvements.

2.1 Financing the *ex ante* evaluation

First of all there is the question of resources to finance the *ex ante* evaluation. According to the clarification provided by DG AGRI⁵, Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 does not, in principle, foresee the financing of preparatory costs for the 2014-2020 programming period under the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes.

Exceptionally though, such preparatory costs, including the costs of *ex ante* evaluations, may be financed from the technical assistance envelope on the basis of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, if a genuine link between the preparatory activities concerned and the activities of the current Rural Development Programme is established, which justifies the continuity of the policy also with respect to Technical Assistance.

The possibility to finance such preparatory activities for the 2014-2020 programming period has to be specified in the respective Rural Development Programme.

2.2 Which stakeholders shall be considered in the *ex ante* evaluation and the Strategic Environmental Assessment?

The legal framework for both the programming process and the SEA require the involvement of stakeholders. Stakeholders can be defined as *all actors who are concerned with (or have a stake in) an action*⁶. The three interlinked processes: (i) the design of the Rural Development Programme, (ii) the *ex ante* evaluation and (iii) the Strategic Environmental Assessment involve the following stakeholders:

- Managing Authorities of Rural Development Programmes and relevant ministry departments, agencies with specific knowledge in designing the Rural Development Programmes;
- Socio-economic and institutional partners involved in the Rural Development Programme design and the SEA via consultation processes. Further details of the stakeholders to be consulted during the SEA can be found in Part II: Section 6.2;
- *Ex ante* evaluator(s);
- Environmental Authorities involved in the Strategic Environmental Assessment;
- The European Commission.

⁵ Evaluation Expert Committee of 14th March 2012

⁶ According to the glossary of key terms of the 'European Synthesis of the *ex ante* evaluations of RDPs 2007-2013'.

2.3 What are roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the *ex ante* evaluation and in the Strategic Environmental Assessment?

The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the *ex ante* evaluation process should be discussed and clearly defined. All parties should be made aware of their roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the process.

The Managing Authority plays the key role being responsible for:

- managing the preparation and the writing of the Rural Development Programme and, where applicable, of thematic sub-programmes, as well as links to Pillar 1 and the Partnership Agreement;
- organising, facilitating and harnessing a transparent consultation process with socio-economic and institutional partners, ensuring information flows and publicity in the programming phase;
- tendering the *ex ante* evaluator and SEA experts, collaborating with them in Rural Development Programme design;
- preparing the Evaluation Plan (to be submitted as part of the RDP)⁷;
- submitting the programme document and annexes⁸ to the European Commission, including the description of *ex ante* conditionalities⁹.

Relevant ministry departments, Implementing/Paying Agencies, in-house or outsourced agencies contribute and bring in specific knowledge in designing the Rural Development Programme's content while assisting the Managing Authority in the design phase.

The partners represent the significant stakeholders' views and interests. Stakeholders are either direct and indirect beneficiaries or 'partners' in programme implementation in line with the principles of EU support for the ESI Funds¹⁰, namely: competent regional, local, urban, and other public authorities, economic and social partners, bodies representing the civil society, including environmental institutions, non-governmental organisations, and bodies for promoting gender equality, social inclusion, and non-discrimination. Partners are called to actively participate in the consultation processes during the programme design and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). During the programme preparation as well as the SEA public consultation they may participate in working and/or Focus Groups, or get involved in consultation and dialogue processes via forums, meetings, seminars, web blogs, etc.

The *ex ante* evaluator(s) are experts functionally independent of the authorities responsible for programme implementation¹¹. Their role is to carry out the *ex ante* evaluation, being engaged from an early stage in the programming process¹², to accompany and reflect it through its three main stages (figure 5): (i) the analysis and SWOT; (ii) the setting up of the objective hierarchy, the programme targets and the intervention logic; and (iii) the fine tuning of measures and delivery mechanisms. The *ex ante* evaluators are also responsible for the SEA, including its results and its mandatory consultation process. (NB the *ex ante* evaluation and SEA can be conducted as one integral exercise or as two separate but linked operations. See Part I: Section 2.4.3 for further details).

⁷ Article 66 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁸ Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁹ Article 9 and Annex V of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

¹⁰ Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

¹¹ Article 54(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

¹² Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

The Environmental Authorities will be involved in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (**SEA**) process. They are the lead partner in transboundary consultations with other EU Member States in case the programme is likely to significantly affect the neighbouring Member State. In some Member States they may be responsible for organising the stakeholder consultations linked to the SEA (See Part II: Section 6.2 for further details).

The European Commission will use the *ex ante* evaluation, the SEA and the description of the process and recommendations, during the programme negotiation phase between the submission of the programme and its approval by an implementing act¹³.

2.4 What are the key steps to be considered in the *ex ante* evaluation and in the Strategic Environmental Assessment?

2.4.1 Four elements, three key stages

The *ex ante* evaluation is both an accompanying and an independent task. It could be compared to that of a sporting sparring partner. The *ex ante* evaluators contribute to refining and improving the Rural Development Programme through a process of incremental adaptations. This requires a well-designed, iterative co-operation between the Managing Authority¹⁴ and the *ex ante* evaluators/SEA experts. Ideally this takes place throughout the lifespan of the programming process from its genesis to the submission of the draft programme to the EC. In turn, the preparation of the RDP is linked to the development of the Partnership Agreement. Thus there are four linked elements proceeding simultaneously: Partnership Agreement development, RDP development, the *ex ante* evaluation and the SEA.

It follows that ideally the *ex ante* evaluation and the SEA should be synchronised, irrespective of whether one contractor or two are responsible for the tasks. Thus considering that the *ex ante* evaluator should be contracted by the Managing Authority as soon as possible, when the preparation of the RDP is being initiated¹⁵, a similar approach should apply to the experts conducting the Strategic Environmental Assessment. Ideally they should be contracted together with the *ex ante* evaluator, or if this is not deemed appropriate, on the basis of separate tenders, in which the mutual interrelationships are specified (See Part I: Section 2.4.3 for further details).

Of course there is no one-size-fits-all solution about how to structure the *ex ante* evaluation and how to weave it into the whole programming process. However the following points are essential:

- The RDP has to be structurally linked with the Partnership Agreement.
- The *ex ante* evaluation has to be structurally linked with the RDP.
- The SEA has to be structurally linked with the *ex ante* evaluation.

The following format (i) meets the minimum requirements, (ii) can be regarded as good practice and (iii) still is within the limits of affordable complexity from the perspective of Managing Authorities.

¹³ Article 10 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

¹⁴ Paying Agencies will be more or less involved in the partnership process, according to the country-specific arrangements. As the *ex ante* evaluation is commissioned by the MA, it stands here for all programme authorities involved.

¹⁵ The Terms of Reference and details on procurement are addressed in the section on contractual relationships (Part I: Section 2.4.3).

In this sense three main stages of the programming process can be defined, during which the *ex ante* evaluators should be engaged in programme design¹⁶, and their feedback and recommendations be integrated into the content of the evolving programme:

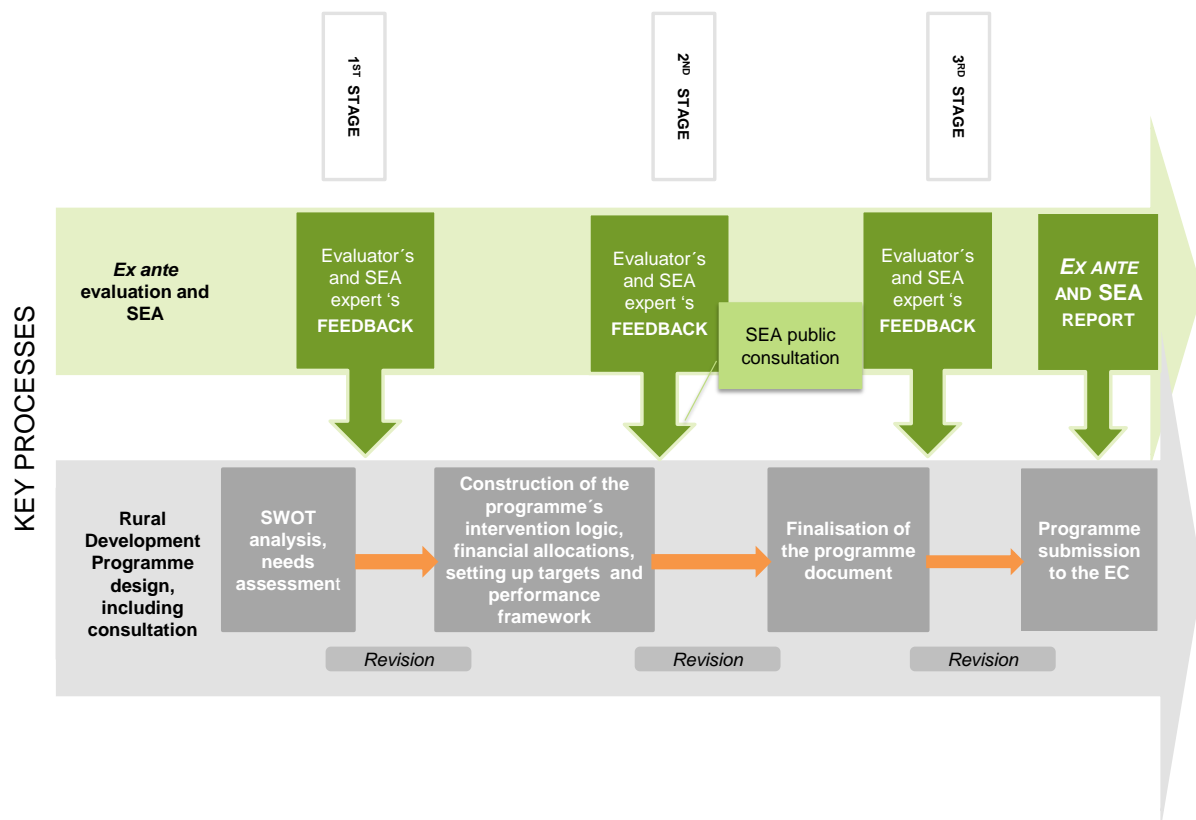
Stage 1: the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment;

Stage 2: the construction of the programme's intervention logic including the budgetary allocations, establishment of targets and the performance framework;

Stage 3: defining governance, management and delivery systems, finalisation of the programme document, integrating the *ex ante* evaluation report.

Linking the consultations with socio-economic partners, the SEA requirements and the development of the Partnership Agreement, together with the design of the Rural Development Programme is a demanding task which requires careful planning in advance. Sound planning starts with a clear understanding of the entire process, so as an aid to this the key elements can be depicted schematically, as in the figure below.

Figure 5 Example of *ex ante* evaluation/SEA and rural development programming: intertwined and iterative processes.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

In order to manage this process effectively, setting up a **Steering Group** composed of representatives of the key players in the four horizontal strands depicted in the diagram is recommended (e.g. Managing Authority, Paying Agency, socio-economic stakeholders, Environmental Authorities, evaluators, etc.). The Steering Group should oversee the programme development process, establish timelines, milestones, inputs needed (such as data) and identify the

¹⁶ Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

time, human and financial resources required. Later during the programme implementation the Steering Group could stay active in steering the evaluation of the programme during the programme period. The plan should cover the following principal tasks and elements:

- gathering and collating information and data to assess the baseline situation in the designed territory and relevant sectors;
- undertaking the SWOT analysis and need assessment;
- preparing the intervention logic – objectives, priorities, measures and actions, expected outputs and targets, financial allocations;
- preparing the governance and management systems including delivery mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation procedures, Evaluation Plan, etc.;
- integration of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, including the involvement of Environmental Authorities;
- conducting public consultations in relation to programme design and the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

2.4.2 Description of the main steps of *ex ante* evaluation, SEA and consultations in the design of the Rural Development Programme

The steps of programme design including the role of *ex ante* evaluator, SEA experts and partners can be described as follows:

Stage 1: the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment

- The **Managing Authority** in collaboration with other Ministry departments, agencies, institutes, etc. prepares the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment for the RDP territory.
- The ***ex ante* evaluator** gives feedback on these analyses. The evaluator should look at the baseline values of context, and impact indicators, assess the coherence and completeness of the SWOT analysis and of the needs to be addressed by rural development interventions¹⁷. Any gaps identified should be highlighted, and recommendations made for completing/improving the description and analysis.
- **The SEA experts** at this stage give their point of view on the analysis of the environmental issues, the depth of their assessment, indicators, data and information requirements which need to be taken into account for the Strategic Environmental Assessment. They should also verify if the SWOT analysis makes reference to the likely development which would take place if the programme was not implemented¹⁸.
- **The partners** in the consultation process such as competent regional, local, and other public authorities (in particular Environmental Authorities), economic and social partners, bodies representing the civil society, including environmental partners and non-governmental organisations, should be informed and consulted on the SWOT analysis discussed and validated by the *ex ante* evaluator and the SEA experts. They should have the opportunity to give their views on the description of challenges and needs of the territory and beneficiaries, and recommendations provided by *ex ante* evaluators. All relevant points raised by partners shall be taken into account.

¹⁷ For more detail see Part II: Chapter 1.

¹⁸ For more detail see Part II: Chapter 6.

- Having received the feedback, validations, and proposals for adjustments mentioned above, the **Managing Authority** should revise the SWOT analysis and needs assessment to take account of the recommendations made. The recommendations of the *ex ante* evaluator/SEA experts and the way they were addressed should also be recorded (See Part II: Section 6.4 for further details).

Stage 2: construction of the intervention logic including the budgetary allocations, establishment of targets and the performance framework

- The **Managing Authority** in collaboration with other Ministry departments prepares the intervention logic, and identifies the objectives, measures and actions to be included in the RDP. The Managing Authority also suggests the allocation of resources, planned outputs, common and programme-specific targets and the values for the performance milestones.
- At this stage the **ex ante evaluator** gives feedback on the programme's expected contribution to the EU2020 Strategy, the intervention logic proposed in relation to the needs identified, internal and external coherence, the coherence between expected outputs and results, the allocation of budgetary resources, the relevance and the clarity of common and programme-specific indicators, whether the target values and the values proposed for the milestones within the performance framework appear realistic. The evaluators should also give their opinion on the monitoring of the programme from the point of the data collection for carrying out subsequent evaluations¹⁹. They should also assess any other compulsory elements of the *ex ante* evaluation as and when the information becomes available (e.g. adequacy of advisory capacity, etc.)
- **The SEA experts** at this stage give their judgement on the potential environmental impact of the proposed programme objectives and priorities, measures and actions, and as well as on possible cumulative effects of the programme as a whole. The SEA experts should propose alternative options if they identify potential undesirable effects on the environment. In addition, SEA experts should also examine the proposed evaluation criteria and the indicator system related to environmental issues (for further information see Part II: Section 6.4).
- **The Environmental Authorities** launch the consultation process within the SEA focusing on the likely environmental impacts of the proposed draft RDP²⁰. Those members of the public intended to participate in SEA consultation are defined as the *public affected or likely to be affected by, or having an interest in, the decision-making subject to SEA Directive, including relevant non-governmental organisations, such as those promoting environmental protection and other organizations concerned*²¹. The details of the public consultation arrangements are to be determined by the Member State. The SEA Directive does not specify the methods by which the draft RDP should be made available nor their time frame, however they are required to be part of the draft programme and the SEA Environmental Report, including those on transboundary consultations²². The final form of consultation chosen by the Member States will basically reflect the governance structure and the established modus operandi of the public sector in each country. In general the SEA public consultation is structured into three levels of

¹⁹ For more detail see Part II: Section 4.2

²⁰ According to Article 3 of the SEA Directive

²¹ Ibidem. This public for SEA consultations is more broadly defined than for the consultation processes for the RDP programming and for the Partnership Agreement.

²² Transboundary consultations as addressed in Article 7 of the Directive are not addressed in the guidelines. In most of the EU funded programmes (except CBC programmes) they were not applied in the current period.

engagement²³, namely i) information, ii) consultation and iii) cooperative decision-making (for further information see Part II: Section 6.4).

- **The partners** should be consulted again at this stage, (when no final decisions are taken yet) to discuss the suggested intervention logic including the proposed set of measures and actions under each rural development priority and the budgets allocated, and considering the feedback from the *ex ante* evaluator, SEA experts, and the results of the public SEA consultation. The consultation should lead to validation and/or adjustments of the proposed targets and milestones for the performance framework, and may lead to more substantial changes to the intervention logic or structure of the programme.
- Having received all the feedback, validations, adjustments and proposed alternatives regarding the programme intervention logic, targets and performance framework, the **Managing Authority** should review the intervention logic, budgetary allocations, targets and performance milestones to take account of the recommendations made. The recommendations of the *ex ante* evaluator/SEA experts and the way they were addressed in RDP development should be properly documented (See Part I: Section 2.4.4 for further details). If there are significant changes in the proposed intervention logic, targets and/or performance milestones, they should be validated via an additional consultation loop with the partners mentioned above.

Stage 3: defining governance, management and delivery systems, finalisation of the programme document, integrating the ex ante evaluation report

- The **Managing Authority** together with other relevant services, e.g. Paying Agency, completes the draft programme document and provides all remaining information as specified for the content of the RDP and for the *ex ante* evaluator to assess all elements referred to in the legal texts²⁴ (e.g. administrative capacity for implementation of the programme).
- **The SEA experts** assess the environmental impact of the entire draft programme including effects on biodiversity, flora, fauna, soil, water, air, climatic factors, on population, human health, material assets, cultural (including architectural and archaeological) heritage, landscape, and the interrelationships between these factors. They should further propose reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the programme; provide reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with; outline the relationship of the RDP programme to other plans and programmes; depict the current state of the environment and expected development without the programme (the 'zero option'); provide environmental characteristics of affected areas, including in particular those relating to the Natura 2000 network; assess how environmental protection objectives are taken into account; and propose mitigation and monitoring measures. All the improvements and recommendations made should be mentioned in the SEA report. The consultation process and its conclusions and recommendations also have to be included in the SEA report, as well as indications on the environmental monitoring of the programme.
- At this stage the **ex ante evaluator** gives final feedback on the all parts of the draft programme document, and other aspects related to its implementation (e.g. adequacy of administrative resources for the implementation of the RDP) as stipulated in Article 55 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013²⁵ and Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and drafts the final report, incorporating the outcome of the SEA.

²³ Austrian Society for Environment and Technology (2007): The Public Participation Manual: Shaping the future together. http://www.oegut.at/downloads/pdf/part_publ-part-manual.pdf

²⁴ Article 8 and 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Article 55 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

²⁵ See also Part II: Chapter 4 of the guidelines

- The **Managing Authority** finalises the draft programme document taking account of the recommendations made. The recommendations of the *ex ante* evaluator/SEA experts and the way they were addressed should also be recorded (See Part I: Section 2.4.4 for further details).
- Finally the **Managing Authority** submits the draft RDP and all annexes, including the *ex ante* evaluation report (which incorporates the SEA) to the Commission.

2.4.3 Contractual relationships and division of responsibilities

The relationships and division of roles and responsibilities between all those involved in the Rural Development Programme design, the *ex ante* evaluation and Strategic Environmental Assessment should be clearly established from the start of the process. A clear plan and defined lines of communication are fundamental to establishing a good working basis amongst all those involved. This clear definition is crucial for an effective and efficient *ex ante* evaluation which in turn will contribute positively to a more effective RDP.

These relationships should prominently figure in **the terms of reference for the *ex ante* evaluation and the SEA**²⁶. The ToR specifies the conditions under which the tasks related to the *ex ante* evaluation and SEA will be conducted, sets up roles and responsibilities, and informs potential *ex ante* evaluators/SEA experts what is expected in respect to content, process and timing. If they are clearly outlined in the ToR, the applicants' responses to the proposed terms may provide a key indication as to their suitability for the task. The toolbox (page 139) contains templates covering the elements required for both the *ex ante* evaluation and SEA.

There are various ways to tender/contract *ex ante* evaluation and SEA. One option is to conduct the *ex ante* evaluation in-house, e.g. in an independent evaluation unit inside of the responsible ministry. If applying external options different contracting possibilities exist: one possibility is to have **just one single tender** for both tasks in which case the SEA and *ex ante* experts either belong to one company/consortium or the SEA is sub-contracted to the *ex ante* evaluation. Another option for one tender is that both tasks are tendered in the same ToR with two subsections for two separate lots. The second option is to have a **tendering procedure for each task separately**. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages in terms of spending resources, carrying consultation processes and the independence of the appraisal of the RDP, this may be outlined in the form of table below:

Option to tender/contract <i>ex ante</i> and SEA	Advantages	Disadvantages
One tender for both tasks, conducted either by one consortium or with the SEA sub-contracted	Efficiently organised and utilised resources Consultation process organised more effectively Better coordination of processes	Needs care that full and specific requirements of both exercises are adequately covered May lower the number of stakeholders involved May restrict pool of potential contractors with required specialisation
One tender for both tasks, separate lots	Better coordination of consultation process Independency of opinion	Possible requirement for more resources More complex management
Two different tenders	SEA is independent from <i>ex ante</i> Broader spectrum of stakeholders involved	Requirement for more resources (financial, management and coordination)

²⁶ See default ToR for *ex ante* evaluation and SEA in Part III: Chapters 2 and 3 of the Guidelines respectively.

Option to tender/contract <i>ex ante</i> and SEA	Advantages	Disadvantages
	Stronger evaluator specialisation possible	Potential timing problems if processes not synchronised

There is no straightforward recommendation regarding which option a Managing Authority should choose in tendering the *ex ante* evaluation and the SEA. However, when choosing it, the following factors should be taken into account (besides advantages and disadvantages mentioned in the table above):

- The size of the programme: when an RDP is small in terms of the budget and the scope of intervention (and the TA budget also): it may be advisable to tender both tasks together.
- The legal environment of the Member State: national legal provisions relating to procurement procedures or the contracting process must be followed. This may have implications on whether the tasks are contracted together or separately.
- The administrative division and institutional set up of the Member State: particularly the role of the Environmental Authorities in relation to the SEA, which may affect whether the SEA is managed and tendered as a separate task.

In the contract the *ex ante* evaluator/SEA experts are responsible to the Managing Authority as the contracting body, but at the same time their work should be of a ‘collaborative’ nature. Being collaborative while keeping an objective critical point of view is a task which requires a good deal of advanced social and communication skills besides the technical expertise. The ToR should take this into account.

The programme is designed and consequently evaluated in stages²⁷ until the final version including the *ex ante* evaluation report (with the SEA Report) is submitted to the Commission. The conclusions and recommendations of the *ex ante* evaluators and SEA experts constitute essential inputs for both the collaboration between them and the Managing Authority and for the negotiations between the Commission and the Managing Authority particularly if their recommendations have not been fully taken up in the programme document.

2.4.4 Documentation of the *ex ante* evaluation process and outcomes in the RDP

As stated in Article 8(3) of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, the detailed rules for the presentation of the elements required in the RDPs will be established through an EC implementing act. In line with the current period, the full *ex ante* evaluation report should be presented as an Annex to the RDP, whilst the RDP text itself should include a section comparable to Annex II, Section 4.2 of Regulation 1974/2006 which will describe how the recommendations from the *ex ante* evaluators have been taken into account in the programme development process.

Throughout the course of the *ex ante* the evaluator is likely to document the dialogue with the programming authorities with a number of statements, comments or recommendations on the RDP. These intermediate documents do not have to be submitted either as part of the final *ex ante* evaluation report or in the section describing the process and recommendations. However, the process of how the evaluators and SEA experts contributed to the evolution of the Rural Development Programme should be documented. This will facilitate the programme approval process as it will explain how and why certain elements are as they are, assisting the EC Desk Officers to understand the logic and structure of the RDP. We recommend presenting this section as follows:

²⁷ As set out above (Part I: Section 2.4.2).

- A description of the process, including timing of main events, intermediate reports, etc. (in relation to the three stages process described in Part I: Section 2.4.2), accompanied by a table listing the specific individual recommendations linked to particular elements showing and how they have been addressed (see example below).

Date	Topic	Recommendation	How recommendation has been addressed, or justification as to why not taken into account
The SWOT analysis, needs assessment			
Construction of the intervention logic			
Establishment of targets, distribution of financial allocations,			

It is recommended that the desired structure of the *ex ante* evaluation report is already specified in the ToR for the *ex ante* evaluation. The suggested report structure is included in the Toolbox (Part III: Section 6).

The key points

- It is vitally important to establish close and strong working relationships between the evaluators and the programming authorities, based on trust and transparency.
- The process of programme design and the *ex ante* evaluation is made more demanding by the requirements of the Partnership Agreement and the various stakeholders who need to be considered. Therefore it is important to analyse and plan who is to be involved, when and how, very carefully in advance.
- It is proposed that the *ex ante* evaluation/SEA should be divided into three distinct stages: (i) the SWOT analysis and needs assessment; (ii) construction of the intervention logic including the budgetary allocations, establishment of targets and the performance framework; (iii) defining governance, management and delivery systems, finalisation of the programme document, integrating the *ex ante* evaluation report.
- There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the procurement of the *ex ante* evaluation; many different configurations and solutions are possible. Establishing the terms of engagement clearly and from the outset of the *ex ante* evaluation process is essential; this should be considered in the design of the terms of reference for its procurement.
- *Ex ante* evaluation is by nature part of a development process. Maintaining the balance between a critical and collaborative attitude; being involved and observing the whole thing from a strictly external point of view, is challenging for the evaluators' skills and also challenging for the relationships between evaluators and Managing Authority. A common basis of understanding is essential here. This can be fostered by devoting adequate time and space to these relationships, apart from technical discussions and exchanges. External facilitation may be helpful in developing constructive relationships.

2.4.5 Specific considerations for stand-alone National Rural Network Programmes

Each Member State shall establish a National Rural Network²⁸, which groups the organisations and administrations involved in rural development in order to:

- increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development, improve the quality of Rural Development Programmes;
- inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities, and foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.

Member States with regional RDPs may submit for approval a specific programme for the establishment and the operation of their NRN supported by the means of EAFRD. In such cases the National Rural Network Programme (NRNP) will require an *ex ante* evaluation subject to the same legal provisions and procedures as any other RDP. Many sections of this guidance document apply also to these programmes, but this section refers specifically to NRNPs.

1. *The ex ante evaluation of the National Rural Network Programme – the purpose*

As in the case of RDPs, the main purpose of the *ex ante* evaluation of NRNP is to accompany the programming process from its early stages including the development of the SWOT analysis referred to in Article 8(1)(b) of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013²⁹, the design of the programme's intervention logic and the establishment of the programme's targets³⁰, in order to improve the quality of its design³¹. In this respect the *ex ante* evaluation shall ensure that the planned interventions reflect the most relevant needs of the territory, specifically in relation to networking activities and at the same time are consistent with CAP 1st Pillar objectives and with the Europe 2020 objectives.

Another important purpose of the *ex ante* evaluation of the NRNP is to ensure that an adequate foundation for future monitoring and evaluation activities has been established. This is a pre-condition for ensuring data and information to assess the programme's results and impacts and allow successful programme steering.

2. *The ex ante evaluation of the National Rural Network Programme – the process*

Financing of the *ex ante* evaluation: Similarly to the RDP, the *ex ante* evaluation of NRNP may be financed from the Technical Assistance envelope on the basis of Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, if a link between the preparatory activities concerned and the activities of the current Rural Development Programme is established, which justifies the continuity of the policy also with respect to Technical Assistance.

One key difference between NRNPs and territorial RDPs is that network programmes do not have to undergo a separate Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Stakeholders to be considered in the *ex ante* evaluation of NRNP: Stakeholders can be defined as all actors who are concerned with (or have a stake in) an action³². The following groups of stakeholders are considered relevant to the interlinked processes of the design of the NRNP and its *ex ante* evaluation:

²⁸ Article 54(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

²⁹ Article 8(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

³⁰ Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

³¹ Article 55(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

³² According to the glossary of key terms of the 'European Synthesis of the *ex ante* evaluations of RDPs 2007-2013'.

- **Managing Authorities of NRNP**, relevant government agencies with specific knowledge linked to rural networks, which are responsible for writing the programme and participating in Partnership Agreement consultations, securing the publicity and facilitating the transparent consultation process with socio-economic partners in programme design, preparing the Evaluation Plan and ensuring/contracting the *ex ante* evaluation and submitting the final programme document together with the *ex ante* evaluation report to the EC services;
- **Socio-economic and institutional partners** involved in the design of the NRNP, as defined in Article 5 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, represent the significant stakeholders' views and interests in the design of the NRNP. They shall be informed about the appraisal of the *ex ante* evaluator in proper time, so that they can consider his/her findings in the development of the programme;
- **Ex ante evaluator(s)** shall carry out the *ex ante* evaluation, being engaged from an early stage in the programming process³³, to accompany and reflect it through its three main stages (i) the analysis and SWOT; (ii) the setting up of the objective hierarchy, the programme targets and the intervention logic; and (iii) the fine tuning of measures and delivery mechanisms;
- **The European Commission** uses the *ex ante* evaluation and the description of the *ex ante* evaluation process and recommendations during the programme negotiation phase between the submission of the NRNP and its approval by means of an implementing act.

Key steps of the *ex ante* evaluation process: As for territorial RDPs the *ex ante* evaluation is an independent task accompanying the programming process until the submission of the NRNP to the EC, and as for territorial RDPs³⁴, it can be conducted in 3 stages:

Stage 1 - the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment, conducted by the Managing Authorities and consulted with socio-economic partners is appraised by the *ex ante* evaluator. The feedback including recommendations is given to Managing Authorities, which consults them with partners. Revisions are incorporated in the RDP;

Stage 2 - the construction of the programme's intervention logic³⁵, ensuring its internal and external coherence, including the budgetary allocations, establishment of targets and the performance framework prepared by the Managing Authorities and consulted with partners is assessed by the *ex ante* evaluator. The feedback of the *ex ante* evaluator, including recommendations is given to Managing Authorities, which consults the partners and makes revisions;

Stage 3 – the Managing Authority defines the governance, management and delivery systems, finalise the programme document, the *ex ante* evaluator provides the assessment of the entire NRNP and gives the feedback including recommendations, finalises the *ex ante* evaluation report. Managing Authority makes final revisions based on the *ex ante* evaluation report and submits the NRNP including the *ex ante* evaluation report to the EC services.

The programme is designed and consequently evaluated in stages until the final version including the *ex ante* evaluation report is submitted to the EC. The conclusions and recommendations of the *ex ante* evaluators constitute essential inputs for both the collaboration between them and the Managing Authority and for the negotiations between the Commission and the Managing Authority particularly if their recommendations have not been fully taken up in the programme document.

³³ Article 77 of Regulation(EU) No 1305/2013

³⁴ Also see Part I: Section 2.4 of the *ex ante* guidelines

³⁵ The construction of the NRNP intervention logic and its assessment is described in detail in the Working Paper on Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes by the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development, July 2010, at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=872FF4F3-F76A-CCF3-63D8-A0B1FB70F601

As for other RDPs the establishment of a **Steering Group** composed of representatives of relevant stakeholders - Managing Authority, Paying Agency, socio-economic stakeholders, evaluators, etc., is recommended which will steer the programme development, and communicate the *ex ante* evaluation results. The tasks of the Steering Group are identical with those for territorial RDPs, except of tasks linked to SEA.

Contractual relationships and division of responsibilities: There are various ways to conduct the *ex ante* evaluation of the NRNP. One option is in-house scenario, e.g. in an independent evaluation unit inside of the responsible ministry. If applying external options, the relationships and division of roles and responsibilities between all those involved in the NRNP design and those in its *ex ante* evaluation should be clearly explained in **the terms of reference (ToR) for the *ex ante* evaluation**³⁶. The ToR specify the conditions under which the tasks related to the *ex ante* evaluation will be conducted, sets up roles and responsibilities, and informs potential *ex ante* evaluators what is expected in respect to content, process and timing. In the contract the *ex ante* evaluators are responsible to the Managing Authority as the contracting body, but at the same time their work should be of a 'collaborative' nature. The ToR should take this into account.

Each option in conducting the *ex ante* evaluation has advantages and disadvantages, as described in the table below:

Option to conduct the <i>ex ante</i>	Advantages	Disadvantages
In house scenario	Efficiently organised and utilised resources Better coordination of processes	Care needs to be taken that full and specific requirements of both exercises are adequately covered May lower the number of stakeholders involved May restrict independency of appraisal
Tendering external <i>ex ante</i> evaluator	Independency of opinion Broader spectrum of stakeholders involved Stronger evaluator specialisation possible	Possible requirement for more resources(financial, management and coordination) More complex management Potential timing processes might be less synchronised

There is no straightforward recommendation regarding which option the Managing Authority of the NRNP should choose in tendering the *ex ante* evaluation. However, when choosing it, the following factors should be taken into account (besides advantages and disadvantages mentioned in the table above):

- The size of the NRNP: if being small in terms of the budget and the scope of intervention it may be advisable to conduct the *ex ante* evaluation in house;
- The legal environment of the Member State: national legal provisions relating to procurement procedures or the contracting process must be followed;
- The administrative division and institutional set up of the Member State.

³⁶ See an example template for ToR for *ex ante* evaluation of the RDP in Part III: Chapter 2 of the Guidelines.

Documentation of the *ex ante* evaluation process and outcomes in the RDP: Part I: Section 2.4.4 of these *ex ante* evaluation guidelines is applicable also for documentation of the *ex ante* evaluation process of the NRNP (if excluding parts on SEA).

All tasks laid down in the Article 55(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 should be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation in the case of the National Rural Network Programmes. However the task described in the Article 55(4) on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is not applicable for the case of the NRNP.

3 SCOPE OF THE *EX ANTE* EVALUATION

This Chapter provides an overview of what is required in the *ex ante* evaluation of Rural Development Programmes, and indicates where detailed guidance related to each element of the relevant legal provisions can be found in Part I: Chapter 2 (Process), in Part II (Subject and Task) and Part III ("Toolbox") of the guidelines.

The relevant legal provisions setting out the requirements for the *ex ante* evaluation are Articles 8(1)(a)³⁷ and 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, and Article 55 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. This chapter addresses each of these in turn.

Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013³⁸ describes the content of the Rural Development Programme and lays down more specifically in Article 8(1)(a) and 8(c)(ii)³⁹ that each Rural Development Programme shall include the *ex ante* evaluation in order to improve its design quality.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide information on the related tasks in Part I: Chapter 2 – “The *ex ante* evaluation process”, page 15, suggesting the entire process should be conducted in three stages: 1) The appraisal of the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment, 2) The appraisal of the construction of intervention logic (external and internal coherence), financial allocations, setting targets and performance framework, 3) The assessment of the entire programme document including governance arrangements, programme management, monitoring, horizontal and specific issues.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines also provide the information on the *ex ante* evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes in Part I: Section 2.4.5, page 25 and in Part II: Section 5.4, page 120. In Part I: Section 2.4.5 the purpose and process, including description of stakeholders, key steps, contractual relations and documentation of the process is provided. In Part II: Section 5.4 the tasks in relation to the *ex ante* evaluation of NRNP are described.

Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 lays down that Member States shall ensure that the *ex ante* evaluator is engaged from an early stage in the process of the development of the Rural Development Programme, including the development of the analysis referred to in Article 8(1)(b)⁴⁰, the design of the programme’s intervention logic and the establishment of programme targets.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on the process in Part I: Chapter 2 - “The *ex ante* evaluation process”, page 15. More detailed descriptions of conducting these tasks are included in Part II (as shown below).

1. SWOT analysis and needs assessment (Article 8(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013)

The analysis of the situation in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) is a prerequisite for the needs assessment and setting of relevant objectives to meet the challenges and needs of the rural population, the agricultural and forestry sector and the rural economy as a whole. The SWOT analysis provides the background against which the interventions proposed can be checked to ensure that they are justified, relevant and adequate in terms of the optimal use of public funds. The SWOT analysis should enable the most important needs that the RDP should address to

³⁷ Article 8(1)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

³⁸ Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

³⁹ Article 8(1)(a), (c) (iv) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁴⁰ Article 8(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

be identified and at the same time establishes the baseline which will be used for monitoring and evaluation of the programme.


SWOT analysis and the needs assessment are two distinct *steps* in the diagnostic process. The SWOT analysis should cover the whole territory and will be an important element in the justification of the choices made between competing demands for support. The needs should be structured along the six EU priorities for rural development and their respective focus areas. The evaluators should draw on their own knowledge of the territory, of the sectors concerned, on past successes and failures, and review the literature including evaluation reports and any additional studies available in relation to it.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluation has to assess the programme-related SWOT analysis, the assessment of needs and logical inter-linkages among them. In other words the *ex ante* evaluator should appraise the trajectory starting from the assessment of the RDP territory description (is it complete, are values included for all the context indicators?), moving on to whether this corresponds to the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and then assessing whether the needs identified match the SWOT.

The *ex ante* evaluator has to ensure that the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment:


- are comprehensive, based on full and appropriate data (context indicators), and provide a holistic picture of the programming area;
- are logically interlinked with the identified needs sufficiently and properly justified by the SWOT;
- are consistent and complementary to that for other ESI Funds' programmes, as shown in the Partnership Agreement;
- are consistent with the SEA;
- integrate the environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation and innovation as cross-cutting priorities of the EU2020 Strategy;
- enable the needs of particular stakeholder groups, people and territories to be differentiated and addressed;
- take account of lessons from past interventions;
- provide the justification for any thematic sub-programmes included in the RDP;
- were developed in collaboration with the partnership referred to in Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

 The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Chapter 1 "SWOT Analysis and the Needs Assessment", page 54, which describes possible methodological approaches, identifies good practice and potential problems, and suggests evaluation questions.

2. The design of the programme's intervention logic (Article 8(1)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 -also linked to Article 55(3)(a), (d) and (f) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013)

The design of the intervention logic is closely linked with the assessment of:

- the contribution of the RDP to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth taking into account national and regional needs;
- the external consistency of the selected thematic objectives, priorities and programme objectives with the CSF, the Partnership Agreement, the first Pillar of the CAP, other relevant instruments and country-specific recommendations of the EU;
- the internal coherence of the proposed programme or activity;
- the links between the intended outputs to the expected results;
- the consistency of the budgetary resources with the programme objectives.

 The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address these tasks in Part II: Chapter 2 of the *ex ante* guidelines: “Relevance, internal and external coherence”, page 59, where links of the RDP Intervention logic to Europe 2020/CSF and CAP are highlighted (Figure 8). Particular tasks of Article 55(3)(a), (d) and (f) are further elaborated in Part II: Sections 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.5 and 1.2.6. (In detail see also Articles 55(3)(a), (d) and (f) in Part I: Chapter 3).


3. The establishment of the programme targets (also linked to Article 8(1)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and in the Article 55(3)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013)

The identification of appropriate quantified targets for those indicators directly related to the achievements of the focus areas is vitally important for measuring the extent to which the original objectives of the programme are actually being met. During programme implementation, progress towards each of the target values will be reported in the Annual Implementation Report.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The responsibility for establishing appropriate target values rests with the Managing Authority. The evaluation team should verify that these values have been effectively defined and also assess the plausibility of the estimates made in relation to the actions and budget proposed, making recommendations for modifications if deemed appropriate.

The evaluation team should assure that the sources of information used are reliable and that the methods proposed for their calculation are rigorous enough.

 The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 3.2 – “The quantified target values for indicators”, page 90, where the purpose, main challenges and solutions/approaches in analysing and verifying established targets for output, result and impact indicators can be found.

Article 55(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article specifies that each programme should be the subject of *ex ante* evaluation, i.e. this includes NRN and framework programmes. Member States are responsible for carrying out these evaluations whose purpose is to improve the quality of design of each RDP.

Article 55(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article stipulates that that *ex ante* evaluation shall be carried out under the responsibility of the authority responsible for the preparation of the programme. It shall be submitted to the Commission at the same time as the programme together with the executive summary. Implementing rules will

specify how the *ex ante* and SEA will be included in the RDP. The *ex ante* evaluation report can be used by the EC services as the input in negotiation of the respective RDP with the Managing Authority.

The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part I: Chapter 2 from the process site, namely in Section 2.4 – “What are the key steps to be considered in the *ex ante* evaluation and in the Strategic Environmental Assessment?”, page 17 which includes guidance on how the *ex ante* and SEA should be documented in the RDP. Further on in Part III: “Toolbox”, useful tools to be used in conducting this task can be found, namely in Chapter 2 – “Template ToR for *ex ante* evaluation”, page 150 and Chapter 6 – “Proposed table of content for the *ex ante* evaluation report”, page 183.

Article 55(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article speaks about the *ex ante* evaluation task to appraise the contribution of the RDP to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth having regard to the selected thematic objectives and priorities taking into account national/regional needs and potential for development as well as lessons drawn from previous programming periods. This reflects the contexts and needs of Europe’s rural areas, which are highly diverse. Although the Europe 2020 Strategy and CAP 2020 provide an overarching vision in pursuing smart, sustainable and inclusive outcomes, fostering innovation and alleviating the pressure on our environment and the planet’s climate, the ways to achieve these goals are as manifold as the rural areas for which the RD programmes are to be developed. The intervention logic of each RDP has to be rooted in the specific needs of the territory, whilst at the same line contributing to the common purpose.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluator examines how the intervention logic of the RDP and the choice of focus areas under the six priorities and the measures chosen in relation to these will contribute to the objectives of EU2020, while addressing the specific needs and potential of the RDP territory. The links should be clear and convincing along the whole results chain. The outcome-orientation of the RDP is not a new requirement, but will be more strongly emphasized than in the current period. Furthermore, policy learning is increased through the requirement to use the lessons from previous programming periods. Specific attention should be devoted to the actions envisaged under RD priority 1, “Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation” which can be considered as a horizontal priority in the EAFRD, supporting all the other priority areas.

The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 2.1 – “The contribution to the Europe 2020 Strategy “, page 60.

Article 55(3)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 lays down the task of appraising the internal coherence of the proposed programme or activity and its relation to other relevant instruments (also Article 8(1)(c) and (m) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013).

Internal coherence

A coherent strategy facilitates the achievement of objectives by taking advantage of potential synergies while avoiding hindrances caused by possible contradictions and gaps.

A policy intervention is considered to be coherent if:

- it clearly defines its objectives and plausibly explains by which measures they can be reached;
- it promotes positive reinforcement between its objectives and measures, while avoiding contradictions and gaps between them.

In the RDPs, internal coherence is demonstrated through the presentation of the intervention logic, showing the selected priorities and focus areas, and the measures selected to achieve them. The selected priorities and focus areas should be consistent with the SWOT and needs assessment.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The analysis of the internal coherence shall

- provide a structured assessment of the programme, checking that the objectives correspond with the European rural development priorities, and demonstrating that the results chain is logically structured;
- appraise the intervention logic as presented, identifying whether the selected priorities and focus areas match the needs assessment;
- assess the coherence between the objectives;
- analyse the degree to which the selected measures are adequate to meet the objectives set forth in the programme; furthermore, to analyse how the various measures complement each other in promoting the achievement of said objectives.

An evaluation of internal coherence should be undertaken both for the programme as a whole, as well as for thematic sub-programmes.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 2.3 “Intervention logic”, page 68, where are described main challenges, practical solutions and assessment tools, as well as suggested evaluation questions.

☞ Further on this legal reference is also applied for the appraisal of:

- Evaluation plan, described in Part II: Section 4.2 – “The procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan”, page 103
- Advisory capacities, described in Part II: Section 4.1 “The adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for programme management”, page 97
- National Rural Networks and National Rural Network Programmes, described in Part II: Section 5.4 – “National Rural Networks”, page 120

See also text in Article 55(3)(d) of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on external coherence.

Examining coherence with Pillar 1 of the CAP is required. ‘Greening’ is the most salient subject, in particular the relationship between greening measures and agri-environment-climate schemes within the RDP, but there are also other issues, e.g. in the field of market measures.

The relationship between the RDP and other strategies and policies, e.g. Smart specialisation, National Roma Inclusion Strategy, Horizon 2020, macro-regional and sea basin strategies should also be reviewed by the *ex ante* evaluator.

Article 553)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article lays down the *ex ante* evaluation task of appraising the consistency of the allocation of budgetary resources with the objectives of the programme and their ability to achieve targets. In the current context of limited resources, the need to prioritise and concentrate is of increased importance. The programme shall demonstrate that the allocation of financial resources to the measures is balanced and appropriate to meet the objectives that have been set. This enhances the added value of public support and promotes a more efficient use of resources toward achieving the objectives and priorities of rural development policy.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

In respect of the consistency of the budgetary resources with the programme objectives the *ex ante* evaluator should examine

- to what extent the expenditures are directed towards the needs and challenges identified in the SWOT and needs assessment;
- in how far the objectives that are more influential and hold a higher strategic value are also allocated a larger portion of the budget;
- the consistency between the unit cost of actions envisaged and the proposed level of expenditure;
- the degree of budgetary consistency across territories and economic sectors; accordingly, those sectors or territories which have been prioritized should be weighted more highly in terms of resource allocation;
- the wider picture, taking into account other policy interventions and sources of support, particularly those from the other CSF funds.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 2.6 – “The consistency of the budgetary allocation with the programme objectives“, page 81 and contains the description of main challenges, and solutions in appraising logical trajectory between the RDP intervention logic and its budget, linking the SWOT analysis/needs assessment, objectives, their external and internal coherence and actual volume of budget expenditures foreseen, at the same time analysing potential risks. Several evaluation questions are suggested in conducting this task. Further on this legal reference is also applied for the appraisal of:

- Evaluation plan, described in Part II: Section 4.2 – “The procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan“, page 103
- National rural networks, described in Part II: Section 5.4 – “National Rural Networks“, page 120

Article 55(3)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(d) of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 lays down the task of appraising the consistency of the selected thematic objectives, priorities and corresponding objectives of the programme with the

Common Strategic Framework, the Partnership Agreement and the country-specific recommendations, which also relates to the external coherence of the RDP as in case of the Article 48(3)(a). This relates to the 'horizontal' interactions between what is foreseen under the RDP, and what is planned under other ESI Funds and sectoral programmes, policy instruments and strategies.

It is important that different instruments, although each having their own specific objectives, work in a complementary manner, supporting the interventions of others, so that synergies are exploited, added-value is created and the sum is more than the individual parts. Conflicting or counter-productive activities should be avoided. The main challenges lie partly in how to evaluate coherence and consistency between programmes in identifying synergies, complementarities or potential conflicts between instruments with very different objectives. In the effort to harmonise policy interventions the following issues shall be underlined:


- negative coordination meaning strict demarcation of operations, which may produce policy gaps and exclude important beneficiary groups;
- shifting the burden of cross-funds coordination down to regional administrations or local development agencies;
- tolerating overlaps or even contradictions as long as nobody denounces the subsequent loss of clarity and efficiency.

The Common Strategic Framework provides an opportunity of cross-policy coordination already at the very top level of policy making. It is now up to the Member States to make appropriate governance arrangements harnessing this opportunity to generate genuine synergy and complementarity.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The evaluator should examine whether the programme takes into account the influence of other policies and programmes, including other ESI Funds' programmes, on its expected results.

A specific complication is how to conduct the analysis when the development of the different ESI Funds' programmes, and of the Partnership Agreement are progressing simultaneously. The minimum requirement in relation to the links with, and the expected influence of, other CSF funds on RDP results and vice versa is that the evaluator should consider the latest available version of the Partnership Agreement, and the RDP section referred to under Article 8(1)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013⁴¹ covering complementarity with other CAP instruments and ESI Funds. If this is not considered to provide sufficient detail, then the evaluator should make appropriate recommendations for improvement to give a clearer picture.

 The ex ante guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 2.2 – “Consistency with the CSF, the Partnership Agreement, country-specific recommendations and other relevant instruments“, page 63. The guidance describes main challenges and provides solutions/approaches on how to appraise the coherence of the RDP objectives linked to CSF thematic objectives and the Partnership Agreement, accompanying them with the set of suggested evaluation questions.

Article 55(3)(e) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article requires the appraisal of the relevance and clarity of proposed programme indicators as composed in the RDP in line with the Article 8(1)(c) and (j) of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013.

⁴¹ Article 8(1)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Indicators are the core of the measurement system and represent tools used to assess how far the expected objectives have been achieved by measures or by the programme as a whole. They are linked together by the causal chains of the intervention logic of the RDP. Indicators consist of several components, including a definition, a value and a unit of measurement. Some indicators provide information on the programme's progress and achievements directly; others require interpretation using appropriate evaluation methods, in order to identify the contribution of the policy intervention.

Rural development policy for the period 2014-2020 will be result-oriented. Therefore the measurement of programme progress and achievements plays a crucial role and the establishment of an adequate measurement system to assess how far the expected objectives have been achieved, based on common and programme-specific indicators is becoming ever more essential.

The following types of indicators can be differentiated:

- **Context indicators**, used to describe the situation in the programme territory, to conduct the SWOT analysis. The list of common context indicators is included in the Toolbox section of this document.
- **Programme-related indicators** are used to measure the achievements of RDP interventions in light of its objectives. Therefore they are also sometimes referred to as objective-related indicators. The following types of programme related indicators are used within the rural development monitoring and evaluation system:
 - ▶ **Output indicators** which are directly linked to the measures and operations (e.g. the number of training days provided).
 - ▶ **Results indicators** which capture the direct effects of interventions and are linked to focus areas (e.g. the amount of renewable energy produced from RDP supported projects).
 - ▶ **Impact indicators**, which are related to the overarching goals of the Common Agricultural Policy, and link it to the EU2020 Strategy (e.g. the rural employment rate). One common set of impact indicators covers both Pillars of the CAP. The impact indicators are also used in describing the starting situation, and for this reason are included within the list of context indicators. For the purposes of these guidelines they are covered in the section dealing with context indicators.
 - ▶ **Indicators used for target setting**, which are a sub-set of the output and result indicators. These will be used to establish quantified targets for each focus area within the RDP. One or more target indicators are defined for each focus area.

There will be a set of common indicators for use in all RDP. These will be specified in the implementing acts. Where appropriate, additional programme-specific indicators should be defined in order to address the specificities of the individual RDP (identified needs, territory, etc.). All proposed programme indicators should be assessed by the *ex ante* evaluator.

For the common indicators, the *ex ante* evaluator should ensure that all the relevant indicators from the common set are included, i.e. all those linked to the specific intervention logic, and the rural development priorities, focus areas and measures included in the RDP. If not all the relevant common indicators are used, the *ex ante* evaluator should identify the gaps, and support the MA in filling them. Where baseline values are appropriate, the *ex ante* evaluator should also examine these, validate them or provide recommendations to the programming authorities on how to correct them.


As for the programme-specific indicators, the *ex ante* evaluator should examine the relevance of those included, i.e. how suitable they are for measuring the specificities of the RDP interventions to which they are linked; the relationship and consistency with the common indicators, and their SMARTness. Where specific additional elements are included in the RDP e.g. additional objectives or focus areas, the evaluator should check that appropriate programme-specific indicators are included to allow these to be monitored and evaluated, and if gaps in programme-specific indicators are found, should also recommend appropriate indicators.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The evaluation team must cover the following tasks:

- First, to determine that the achievements of all rural development priorities and focus areas included in the programme are going to be adequately assessed. The evaluator should check that:
 - *all necessary common indicators are included, identify gaps and support Managing Authority in filling them;*
 - *programme-specific indicators proposed are relevant to specificities of the RDP interventions, their consistency with common indicators;*
 - *programme-specific indicators have been proposed wherever necessary, e.g. where specific additional elements are included in the RDP (e.g. additional objectives or focus areas). If gaps in programme-specific indicators are found, the *ex ante* evaluator should propose how to fill these gaps with appropriate indicators.*
- Second, to determine that the indicators have been defined with sufficient clarity. This applies particularly to the programme-specific indicators, but also to ensuring that the definitions and methods provided in relation to the common indicator set have been fully taken into account. If this is found not to be the case, recommendations for improvements should be proposed to avoid problems in the future (i.e. monitoring, ongoing and *ex post* evaluation).

In conclusion, evaluators should assess whether the proposed programme-specific indicators are SMART: specific, measurable, available/achievable in a cost effective way, relevant for the programme and available in a timely manner.


 The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 3.1 – “The programme indicators”, page 85, providing guidance to assess the relevance and the clarity of the common and programme-specific indicators.

Article 55(3)(f) of Regulation 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(f) lays down the task of appraising the contribution of expected outputs to results. This task represents one of the essential purposes of the *ex ante* evaluation in assessing whether or not the RD programme, in producing outputs, will achieve the expected results in bringing the intended change. In order to do so, the *ex ante* evaluator should assess the intervention logic of the programme as a whole and of each priority taking the opposite path than programming authorities. His/her role is to recognise any gaps and inconsistencies in the cause-effect chains and loops in order to improve the programme’s intervention logic as a crucial element in programme steering and evaluation.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluator should scrutinize the assumptions made to determine how the planned actions supposedly lead to the desired results. If the evaluators deem these links as not convincing, they should consider alternative outputs/actions tested via cause-effect relationships. The more convincing and properly justified alternatives should be recommended by the *ex ante* evaluator to the Managing Authority of the programme. To carry out this analysis, the evaluators should track every step along the results chain (intervention logic).

 The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 2.5– “The contribution of the expected outputs to results“, page 77, explaining how to assess contributions of planned actions and measures to the programme results and targets. The guidance is provided in the reconstruction of intervention logic and assessing assumptions in result chains, which is accompanied with the suggested evaluation questions. Further on this legal reference is also relevant for the appraisal of National Rural Network Programmes, which is described in Part II: Section 5.4 of the *ex ante* guidelines.

Article 55(3)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article lays down the task of appraising whether quantified target values for indicators are realistic, having regard to the support envisaged. This task is also included in Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013. It has been addressed under the section of this chapter related to Article 77 (page 34), where links to the relevant chapters of the *ex ante* guidelines are provided.


Article 55(3)(h) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(h) lays down the task of appraising the rationale for the forms of support proposed in the programme. The key is to find the form of support (e.g. grant, interest rate subsidies, guarantee fee subsidies, prizes, repayable assistance, new financial instruments etc.), most suitable to satisfy particular needs and circumstances, and accommodate specific types of beneficiaries or territories. Designing adequate forms of support (including characteristics such as eligibility criteria) strengthens the internal coherence of the programme.

Another important factor is timing, e.g. for Leader, advance payments can speed up the implementation process which is important since the implementation of local development strategies starts later than most measures due to the time needed to complete the selection procedure for Local Action Groups.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluation should appraise the rationale of the proposed forms of support of the RDP, considering various factors, such as the availability of credit from mainstream sources, the viability of the various sectors involved, specific situation of targeted beneficiary groups, etc. On the basis of this appraisal, the evaluator may recommend an alternative combination of support forms likely to be more relevant to achieve the intended changes.

 The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 2.4 – “The proposed forms of support“, page 72, which provides the guidance to the appraisal of forms of support, its main challenges, their solution and the set of suggested evaluation questions to facilitate the *ex ante* evaluation.

Article 55(3)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 lays down the task of appraising the human resources and administrative capacity and the management of the programme. The implementation and the performance of the RDP will be compromised without adequate resources, organisation and capacity for its management, and administration. Similarly unless the programme is adequately publicised its accessibility and relevance to beneficiaries may be compromised, support may not be delivered where required and targeted, performance will therefore be sub-optimal.

Adequate provision of human resources and administrative capacity for the management of the programme, including the envisioned cooperation among key institutions (such as MA, PA and MC) in the implementation of the programme and the monitoring of its progress is therefore an essential and integral part of the strategy for an effective RDP and should be assessed in the *ex ante* evaluation.

The requirement that the programme should demonstrate that measures have been taken to ensure the availability of sufficient advisory capacity on the regulatory requirements and actions related to innovation⁴²) is also linked to effective programme implementation, through ensuring that potential beneficiaries have access to appropriate advice and support to facilitate their participation in the RDP. This covers all aspects of the programme including Technical Assistance provision, the NRN and monitoring and evaluation.

Extension service and advisory capacities are needed to transfer knowledge and foster the seedbeds for innovation, e.g. in cooperation projects and to assure highest possible standards of environmental sustainability.

Criticisms of the links between the RDPs' design and their implementation were relatively common in the 2007–2013 RDP mid-term evaluation reports as it is in the first stages of implementation that many of the administrative and delivery deficiencies first emerge. Also the collaboration between Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies in securing data required for the evaluation from the monitoring system was often described as a limiting factor for conducting a robust evaluation. The *ex ante* evaluation should seek to pre-empt any such difficulties through the appraisal of the description of the programme implementing arrangements in the RDP, and if necessary to make recommendations aimed at resolving any problems that emerge.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluator should assess the elements included in the RDP corresponding to Article 8(1)(l) and Article 8(1)(c)(vi) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013. If the text does not provide sufficient detail on the human resources and administrative capacity to enable the evaluator to take a view on whether it is sufficient for effective programme implementation, then recommendations for reinforcement of this section should be made. Similarly in relation to the advisory capacity, if the text does not describe the measures taken to ensure sufficient capacity, the evaluator should recommend further development of the description.

Once adequate information is available, the evaluator should assess whether the arrangements and resources described will be sufficient to support effective delivery of the programme as designed, i.e. to implement the measures, numbers of planned operations, timescale, etc. set out in the RDP. In relation to advisory capacity, the evaluator should consider whether there will be adequate capacity to support potential beneficiaries in planning projects, preparing applications, and implementing them, in order to achieve the outcomes foreseen in the RDP.

⁴² Article 8(1)(c)(vi) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 4.1 “The adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for programme management”, page 97, where main challenges and practical solutions including tools for analysis are described. In addition, several evaluation questions are suggested to facilitate the appraisal. The assessment of the monitoring and evaluation system and the Evaluation plan is described in Part II: Section 4.3 – “The procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan”, page 103. National Rural Networks and National Rural Network Programmes are described in Part II: Section 5.4 – “National Rural Networks”, page 120.

Article 55(3)(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article lays down the task of appraising the suitability of procedures for monitoring the programme and collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluations, in order to follow the implementation, achievements and progress towards the established targets. Demonstrating and improving the effectiveness of the policy depends on appropriate monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, each RDP shall include an analysis of needs relating to monitoring and evaluation and a description of the monitoring system and data collection methods, as well as an Evaluation Plan (EP) which is a new element, and for which the minimum contents will be specified in an implementing act.

The monitoring and evaluation system should deliver topical information on the progress and achievements of rural development policy, and assess impact, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of rural development policy interventions. To achieve these goals, key information on the implementation has to be recorded, maintained, and aggregated in respect of a wide range of information demands. A list of common and programme-specific indicators, relating to the initial situation as well as to the financial execution, outputs, results and impacts of the programme will be specified in the monitoring and evaluation system. Member States shall organise the production and gathering of the requisite data and supply the various pieces of information provided by the monitoring system to the evaluators. To this end, individual beneficiaries and LAGs shall provide to the Managing Authority and/or to appointed evaluators or other bodies delegated, all the information necessary to permit monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?


The *ex ante* evaluator is required to assess the suitability of procedures for monitoring the programme, and for collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluations, as well as the content of the Evaluation Plan, and to assess whether adequate resources are allocated to address the identified needs. The *ex ante* evaluation should ensure that there is an appropriate system to record, maintain, manage and report the statistical information on the programme implementation required for the purposes of monitoring, as well as adequate procedures and data collection to gather and maintain key information for evaluation (e.g. common and programme-specific indicators) according to the Evaluation Plan. The *ex ante* evaluator should also assess the completeness of the Evaluation Plan and, as necessary, provide suggestions to improve its quality.

This will require:

- ensuring the adequacy and completeness of data for monitoring and evaluation along the whole programme cycle;
- making sure that the monitoring system is reliable, effectively manageable, compatible with other monitoring systems at national level (e.g. for Cohesion Funds, CAP Pillar 1) and the EU

data processing systems, and flexible enough to respond to varied information demands (not all of them known at the time of *ex ante* evaluation);

- ensuring that the Evaluation Plan conforms to the minimum requirements and is precise and comprehensive enough to set out the evaluation activities and to provide a basis to ensure that the monitoring system will collect appropriate data, and sufficiently flexible for adjusting the needs for information gathering, surveys and case studies which may arise at a later point in time.
- assessing whether the resources allocated are sufficient to respond to the identified needs and proposed activities.
- assessing the links with monitoring and evaluation activities of other funds to check external coherence.

 The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 4.2 – “The procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan”, page 103, where also approaches to assessing data gaps, monitoring approaches, and the assessment of the Evaluation Plan is described. In order to facilitate the assessment, several evaluation questions are suggested for conducting this task.

Article 55(3)(k) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(k) of lays down the task of appraising the suitability of milestones selected for the performance framework in line with the enhanced results-orientation of European rural development policy for the period 2014-2020. This includes the introduction of an *ex post* conditionality to strengthen the focus on performance and the attainment of the Europe 2020 objectives. A proportion of the resources allocated to each programme will be withheld in a performance reserve, to be released upon achievement of defined performance milestones linked to EU2020 objectives set for the programmes included in the Partnership Agreement. A performance review will be undertaken by the Commission in co-operation with the Member States following which performance reserve will be released provided the appropriate milestones have been reached. This performance framework must be included in each programme in order to allow progress towards the defined milestones to be assessed. This is a new element for Rural Development Programmes.

Milestones are *intermediate targets for the achievement of the specific objective of a priority, expressing the intended progress towards the targets set for the end of the period.*

For the RDPs, the intention is to define common performance milestones, linked to each priority. (Although the exact indicators to be used for the performance framework have not been defined at the time of writing, examples of the type of indicator foreseen are "commitments as % of planned expenditure" or "ratio of % planned outputs achieved to % of planned expenditure spent"). The Managing Authorities will have to propose appropriate values for each of the relevant milestones, in relation to the measures, actions and resources programmed for each priority.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The evaluators should assess *the suitability of the milestones selected for the performance framework, appraising whether:*

- the values proposed by the Managing Authority for the milestones used in the performance framework are appropriate and realistic, and

- that achievement of these milestones would give a reliable indication that the programme is on track to attain its objectives.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 3.3 – “The suitability of milestones selected for the performance framework”, page 92, where also a two steps analysis for verification of milestones is proposed, as well as a set of suggested evaluation questions.

Article 55(3)(l) of Regulation 1303/2013

This article lays down the task of appraising the adequacy of planned measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women and to prevent any discrimination, in particular as regards accessibility for persons with disabilities;

In order to promote economic, territorial and social cohesion, the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) establishes that the Union should not only seek to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women, but in general actively combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The inclusion of groups at risk of discrimination into the design and implementation of the RDP will widen both the scope of interventions and basis of support for the programme. The broader the support for the programme the better the prospects will be for a successful implementation.

These principles should be taken into account throughout the programme design, and it is the function of the *ex ante* evaluation to guarantee that this has actually been the case.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The evaluation team will have to

- analyse the programming process and assess the extent to which the objectives of promoting equality and non-discrimination have been taken into account during programme preparation;
- assess the programming documents, verifying that the principles have been properly integrated into the various sub-sections pertaining to the programme;
- assess the expected contribution of the programme in respect of the promotion of equality between men and women and to non-discrimination.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 5.1– “Equal opportunities between men and women and non-discrimination”, page 110, where analytical approaches and their content can be found, as well as the suggested evaluation questions.

Article 55(3)(m) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(m) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 lays down the task of appraising the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development. ‘Sustainable growth’ is one of the three main goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, addressing the global issues: energy and resource scarcity, environmental quality, climate change, the health of people and ecosystems.

‘Sustainable growth’ is one of the three main goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, addressing the global issues: energy and resource scarcity, environmental quality, climate change, the health of people and ecosystems.

In contrast to a wider framing of the term used in the global discourse⁴³, 'sustainable development' is, in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy, focused on the concept of environmental sustainability, including both the resource side and ecosystem services: quality of air, soil, water, food, biodiversity, health of plants, animals and people and impact on climate, as well as life quality and amenities in rural areas⁴⁴.

In respect of monitoring and evaluation, sustainable development *requires compliance with the environmental acquis*⁴⁵. At least 25% of EAFRD funding should be allocated to climate change related objectives.

The central challenge to the sustainability appraisal is the way how it relates to the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluation must assess the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development. This does not only cover the specific actions proposed for support in relation to individual focus areas, but addresses the whole balance of the programme, and aspects such as the availability of sufficient advisory capacity related to sustainable management of the agricultural and forestry sectors and climate action.

This legal provision is also related to the requirement to demonstrate adequate advisory capacity in relation to sustainable development.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part II: Section 5.2 – "Sustainable development", page 113, where to couple it with SEA is suggested. Part II: Section 4.1 on page 97 also includes further guidance on the assessment of advisory capacity.

Article 55(3)(n) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55(3)(n) requires the inclusion of description of measures planned to reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries.

Administrative burden on beneficiaries is mainly linked with the programme delivery mechanism and in more concrete with the management of the project pipeline. The project pipeline starts with call for proposals, and continues with preparing, submitting and assessing applications, contracting beneficiaries, processing requests for payments including conducting controls and on the spot checks, issuing payments, finalising and monitoring projects.

The more complicated and detailed requirements for each of above steps are, the more administrative burden is put on beneficiaries. This can slow down the process of projects and consequently programme implementation or discourage potential beneficiaries to apply for aid. In such a case the programme up take or/and the absorption of funds is endangered with the implications on programme effectiveness, achievements and impact.

⁴³ Addressing the three domains of environmental, economic and socio-political sustainability: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development

⁴⁴ Ecosystem services are defined in the Commission Staff Working Paper on Impact Assessment of CAP2020: SEC(2011) 1153 final/2 from 20th October 2011, (p. 30).

⁴⁵ Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2012) 61 final from 14th March 2012, Part 1, (p.11)

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The role of ex ante evaluation is therefore to assess whether administrative arrangements in relation to programme implementation and planned delivery mechanisms are able to secure the smooth programme up take and effective and efficient absorption of planned funds in line with the programme objectives and the timeline.

Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

This article lays down the task to incorporate where appropriate the requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment set out in the Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and the Council, taking into account climate change mitigation needs

The SEA Directive has the objective *to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes [...] by ensuring that [...] an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.* The legal obligation to carry out an environmental assessment is applied to the RDP mainly by Article 3(2)(a) of the SEA Directive, which states that an environmental assessment shall be carried out for all plans and programmes which are prepared for agriculture among other sectors.

However, an SEA is not required for National Rural Network Programmes.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The information to be provided under Article 5(1), subject to Article 5(2) and (3) of the SEA Directive, is the following:

- an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;
- the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;
- the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;
- any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;
- the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;
- the likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;
- the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;

- an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;
- a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10.
- a non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.

☞ The *ex ante* guidelines provide detailed information on how to address this task in Part I: Section 2.4 – “What are the key steps to be considered in the *ex ante* evaluation and in the Strategic Environmental Assessment?”, page 16 and its content in detail in Part II: Chapter 6 “Strategic Environmental Assessment”, page 128. This description covers the requirements of the SEA Directive, links between programming, *ex ante* evaluation and SEA, public consultations including transboundary consultations and their relations to the decision making on the RDP design, monitoring procedures, relation to the EU environmental policies and the structure of the SEA report. Indicative ToR for SEA can be found in Part III; Chapter 3, page 156.

The overview table of the *ex ante* evaluation linked to legal references

Legal reference	Links to other legal provisions	Chapter in <i>ex ante</i> guidelines	Evaluation subject	Comments
Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 “analysis”	Article 8(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(c)(iv) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Chapter 1	SWOT analysis and needs assessment	Linking the RDP ‘back’ to the territorial needs
Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 , the “design of programme’s intervention logic”	Article 55(3)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Article 8(1)(e), (f) & (g) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(2)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 2.3	Intervention logic, internal coherence	
	Article 55(3)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Article 9(1)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 2.2	External coherence	CAP, ESI Funds and other EU instruments
Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 “Establishment of the programme targets”	Article 55(3)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(1)(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(2)(b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 3.2	Adequacy of indicator target value	
Article 55(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 8(1)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part I: Chapter 2 Part II: Section 5.4	MS shall carry the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation in order to improve the quality of the design of the programme	
Article 55(2) of Regulation (EU) No	Article 8(1)(a) of Regulation (EU) No	Part I: Section 2.4 Part II: Chapters 2 -	<i>Ex ante</i> shall be carried out under	

Legal reference	Links to other legal provisions	Chapter in <i>ex ante</i> guidelines	Evaluation subject	Comments
1303/2013	1305/2013	6	the responsibility of the authorities responsible for programme preparation. It shall be submitted to the Commission together with the programme	
Article 55(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 9(1)(c)(i) & (iii) of the	Part II: Section 2.2	Contribution to EU2020	Linking the RDP 'forward' to the Union's Strategy 2020
Article 55 (3)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(1)(f) & (j) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 2.3	Internal coherence	
Article 55(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 8(1)(c)(iii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 2.6	Consistency of budgetary resources	
Article 55(3)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Article 8(1)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 2.2	External coherence	
Article 55(3)(e) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Article 8(1)(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(2)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 3.1	Relevance and clarity of programme indicators	
Article 55(3)(f) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(1)(c)(vi), (vii) & (viii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 9(2)(b) of the	Part II: Section 2.5	Contribution of outputs to results	
Article 55(3)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 77 of the Article 8(1)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(2)(c) of Regulation (EU) No	Part II: Section 3.2	Adequacy of indicator target values	

Legal reference	Links to other legal provisions	Chapter in <i>ex ante</i> guidelines	Evaluation subject	Comments
	1305/2013			
Article 55(3)(h) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		Part II: Section 2.4	Form of support	
Article 55(3)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 8(1)(m)(i), (ii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 4.1	Adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity, including advisory capacities	
Article 55(3)(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Article 8(1)(m)(ii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 8(1)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 72-79 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 4.2	Monitoring, data collection, Evaluation Plan	
Article 55(3)(k) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	Article 8(1)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 3.3	Suitability of milestones	
Article 55(3)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		Part II: Section 5.1	Equal opportunities and non-discrimination	
Article 55(3)(m) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		Part II: Section 5.2	Sustainable development	
Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		Part II: Chapter 6	Strategic Environmental Assessment	
Article 8(1)(j)(iv) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Article 32-35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Article 55(3)(h) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Article 42-44 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	Part II: Section 5.3	LEADER (CLLD)	
Article 8(1)(c)(v) and 8(1)(o) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013		Part II: Section 5.4	National Rural Networks	

Legal reference	Links to other legal provisions	Chapter in <i>ex ante</i> guidelines	Evaluation subject	Comments
Article 8(2) of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013		Part II: Section 5.5	Thematic sub-programmes	

PART II: MAINLY FOR EVALUATORS

In this section, the 18 *ex ante* evaluation topics are packaged in six chapters, covering the diagnosis of the context and the needs (Chapter 1), relevance, external and internal coherence (Chapter 1), measuring progress and achievements (Chapter 2), governance (Chapter 3), specific themes (Chapter 3) and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (Chapter 3).

The presentation of each topic follows the same structure:

- Purpose and importance: What are the key issues for this topic?
- Requirements: What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?
- Methodologies and practical hints: What are the proposed approaches?
- Good and not-so-good practices: this section is summarised in a quick-reference table presenting “do’s” (i.e. recommended good practice) and “don’ts” (i.e. not-so-good practice) using “smileys”:

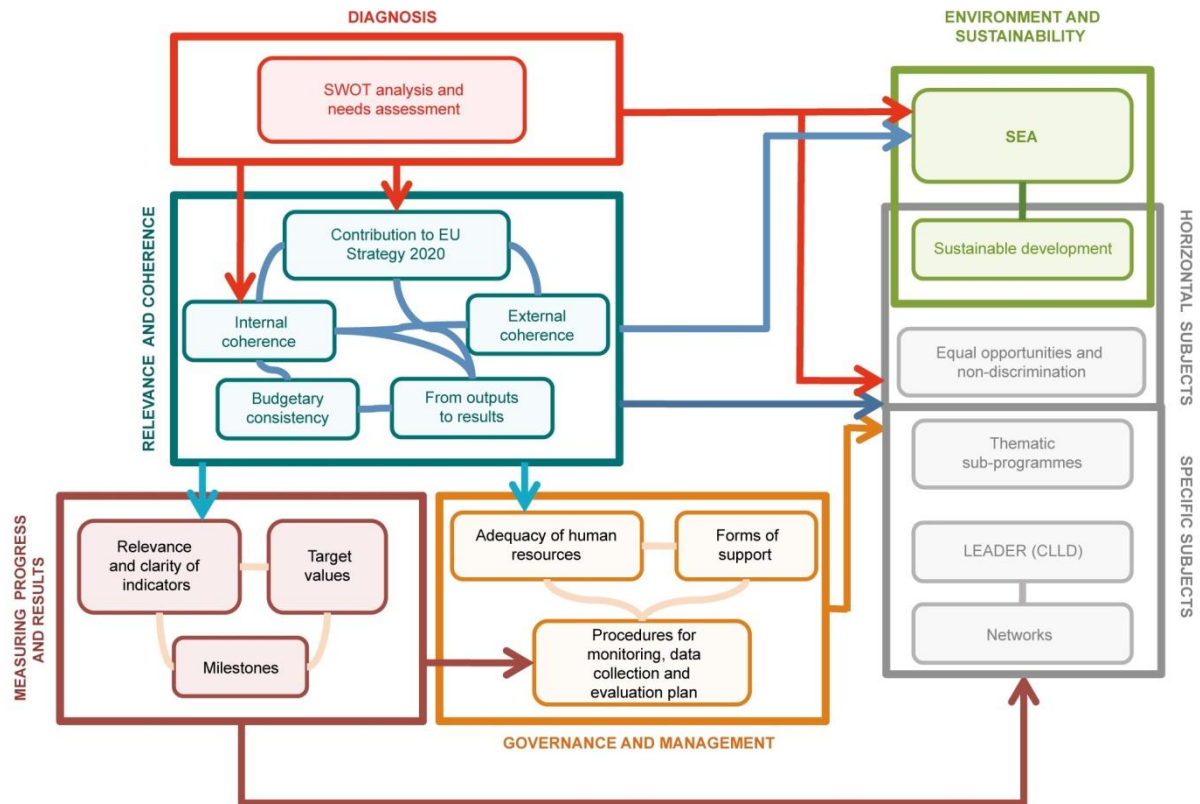


- Legal references
- Further reading
- Suggested evaluation questions

The bigger picture

Before discussing each topic in detail, we present an overview of the work flow which connects them during the whole *ex ante* evaluation process.

Figure 6 Overview on the work flow of the *ex ante* evaluation.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

The *ex ante* evaluation will address and report on each task individually, but many are interlinked, and these links need to be taken into account. The arrows indicate the recommended (chrono)logical sequence, indicating that some topics should be addressed earlier in the exercise. Horizontal subjects (sustainable development; equal opportunities and non-discrimination) and specific subjects (Thematic sub-programmes; LEADER; Networks) are shown in a separate section.

1. SWOT ANALYSIS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT⁴⁶

What are the key issues for the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment?

The analysis of the situation in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) is a prerequisite for the needs assessment and setting of relevant objectives to meet the challenges and needs of the rural population, the agricultural and forestry sector and the rural economy as a whole. The SWOT analysis provides the background against which the interventions proposed can be checked to ensure that they are justified, relevant and adequate in terms of the optimal use of public funds. The SWOT analysis should enable the most important needs that the RDP should address to be identified and at the same time establishes the baseline which will be used for monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluation has to assess the programme-related SWOT analysis, the assessment of needs and logical inter-linkages among them. In other words the *ex ante* evaluator should appraise the trajectory starting from the assessment of the RDP territory description (is it complete, are values included for all the context indicators?), moving on to whether this corresponds to the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and then assessing whether the needs identified match the SWOT.

The SWOT analysis and the needs assessment are two distinct steps in the diagnostic process. The SWOT analysis should cover the whole territory. It will be an important element in the justification of the choices made between competing demands for support. The needs should be structured along the six EU priorities for rural development and their respective focus areas.

The evaluators should draw on their own knowledge of the territory, of the sectors concerned, on past successes and failures, and review the literature including evaluation reports and any additional studies available in relation to it.

The *ex ante* evaluator has to ensure that the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment:

- are comprehensive and provide a holistic picture of the programming area, and are based on appropriate data (e.g. the full set of context indicators plus other information as appropriate). The SWOT should take into account both internal diversity and external links and position in the national/wider context on the other;
- are logically interlinked so that it can be seen that the needs chosen to be addressed by the RDP intervention, are sufficiently and properly justified as the most important by the SWOT;
- that the SWOT is consistent with that carried out for other CSF programmes, and that the needs assessment is complementary to that for other CSF programmes, as shown in the Partnership Agreement;
- are consistent with the SEA;
- integrate the environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation and innovation as cross-cutting priorities of the EU 2020 Strategy;
- enable the needs of particular stakeholder groups, people and territories to be differentiated and addressed;

⁴⁶ Article 55(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(b), 8(1)(c)(iv), 8(2)(a) and 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

- take account of lessons from past interventions;
- the overall SWOT should provide the justification for any thematic sub-programmes included in the RDP;
- were developed in collaboration with the partnership referred to in Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

What are the proposed approaches?

The four consecutive steps (a-d) are proposed in assessing the SWOT and needs assessment in the context of the *ex ante* evaluation.

a. Assessing the completeness of the SWOT

An RDP strategy has to be based on the **complete SWOT analysis** of the RDP territory as a whole and a needs assessment structured around the six EU priorities for rural development and the three cross-cutting European priorities (a. environment, b. climate change mitigation and adaptation and c. innovation). The task of the *ex ante* is to assess whether the SWOT is complete. At the end of this section are examples of evaluation questions linked to the priorities, which could be used to assess the SWOT, making sure that it provides sufficient justification for planned interventions.

The SWOT analysis can be only recognized as complete if it represents a condensed narrative of the baseline situation, and all relevant territorial, sectoral, environmental, social and gender-related potentials and disparities are considered. In this respect it is important to assess if the opinion of stakeholders was taken into account in constructing the complete SWOT analysis.

b. Assessing and improving the indicator framework

The *ex ante* evaluator should assess if the common context indicators are employed in constructing the SWOT and if their baselines are properly established. With regard to any additional programme-specific indicators the evaluator should assess if they reflect the specificities of the given programme territory and sectors. It is possible that after the *ex ante* evaluator's assessment of the SWOT and the employed indicators, additional programme-specific indicators are suggested by the evaluator. All programme-specific indicators should be assessed from the point of their SMARTness⁴⁷.

If the *ex ante* evaluation finds that some common context indicators are not used, these shall be discussed with programming authorities. Unless a justification is provided to explain why some common indicators are not used, the *ex ante* evaluator should recommend their inclusion, and could also propose how they could be used within the SWOT.

The *ex ante* evaluator should also check that the appropriate definitions and official European and/or national data sources have been used for the baseline values of indicators, to ensure consistency in data use throughout the programming period and across.

Where Member States have regional programmes, the programming authorities might have difficulties in obtaining official baseline data for all indicators at regional level. If only national figures are available then regional values should be calculated or estimated to establish baseline values. Here, the task of the *ex ante* evaluator is to assess whether the approach used in calculating or estimating the baseline values of indicators is appropriate and the method used is sufficiently robust.

⁴⁷ SMART – Specificity, measurability, achievability, relevance, timely

c. Assessing the SWOT as the base and justification of the needs assessment

The SWOT analysis is the base for the needs assessment, which identifies the most relevant needs to be addressed by the RDP interventions. In this sense the *ex ante* evaluator shall assess if the SWOT elements are clearly formulated (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), at the level of the RDP territory (national/regional), and consistent among themselves (not contradictory in their formulation).

Only a completed, well formulated, balanced and consistent SWOT analysis, which is based on both common and relevant programme-specific indicators can provide a sound picture of the RDP territory. This is a necessary precondition for identifying the most appropriate needs and for constructing a sound intervention logic for the RDP. Against this background the *ex ante* evaluator shall look at the needs assessment to be addressed via RDP interventions and check whether the selected needs are relevant and sufficiently justified by the SWOT analysis and baseline values of indicators. In case of gaps found in the justification of the needs the *ex ante* evaluator shall recommend to complete and/or amend the analysis and/or the needs assessment.

Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 requires the involvement of *partners in preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of (CSF) programmes*. Hence, we recommend the *ex ante* evaluator to check:

- whether the stakeholders have been adequately involved in the development of the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment (range, relevance and diversity of stakeholders involved, considering their institutional background, territorial levels of scale, gender, etc.);
- if the SWOT represents a condensed narrative of the context baseline situation and a solid base for the needs assessment, which at the same time reflects the stakeholders' opinion.



Several methods for the development of the SWOT, involving the stakeholders could be applied (e.g. Causal Loop Diagram, SEPO window, simplified cross-impact analysis, etc.). The *ex ante* evaluator should check that the methods used to involve the stakeholders in the development of the SWOT were appropriate.

d. Examining the overall consistency

As a last step, the *ex ante* evaluator should confirm that the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment for the RDP are related to and consistent with all the other documents that provide context analysis and needs assessment:

- as far as they are available, the Partnership Agreement, the CSF funds' programmes, the first Pillar of the CAP, and other relevant European and national programmes;

Good and not-so-good practices

	
<p>↑ The <i>ex ante</i> assesses the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.</p> <p>↑ The evaluator makes sure that stakeholders have been appropriately involved in the diagnostic process.</p>	<p>↓ The evaluator lets the SWOT just be an update of the current RDP rationale.</p> <p>↓ The evaluator tolerates that SWOT items irrelevant at first sight are eliminated; that findings are frozen into four boxes without reflecting mutual causation processes, accepts that just the common indicators</p>

↑ The evaluator appraises the logical inter-linkages between the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment.

are used, without taking into account distinct conditions with programme-specific indicators.

↓ The evaluator does not link findings of the SWOT analysis with the needs assessment.

Legal references

- Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 states: *Member States shall ensure that the ex ante evaluator is engaged from an early stage in the process of development of the rural development programme, including the development of the analysis referred to in Article 8(1)(b), in the design of the programme’s intervention logic and in the establishment of the programme’s targets ...*

...which stipulates that each Rural Development Programme shall include...

...an SWOT analysis of the situation and an identification of the needs that have to be addressed in the geographical area covered by the programme. The analysis shall be structured around the Union priorities for rural development. Specific needs concerning the environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation and innovation shall be assessed across Union priorities for rural development, in view of identifying relevant responses in these three areas at the level of each priority.

- The corresponding obligation is included in the Article 55(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, which stipulates the appraisal of *the contribution to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, having regard to the selected thematic objectives and priorities, taking into account national and regional needs and potential for development as well as lessons drawn from the previous programming periods.*

Suggested evaluation questions

In the following table are suggested evaluation questions which can be used in assessing the SWOT and needs assessment, grouped along the six European priorities and corresponding focus areas for rural development.

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture and rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are innovation and innovation systems defined in the RDP? • In how far are the most important needs to be addressed in fostering innovation properly identified?
Enhancing competitiveness in agriculture and enhancing farm viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far are the most important needs to be addressed in restructuring farms properly identified? • In how far has the need for generational renewal been explored?
Promotion of food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far are the most important needs to be addressed in order to integrate primary producers into the food chain properly identified? • In how far have the needs for risk management in agriculture been assessed?
Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far are the most important needs addressed in restoring and preserving biodiversity and in improving water and soil management properly identified?
Promoting resource efficiency and the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far are the most important needs to increase resource

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy	efficiency and shift towards carbon and climate resilient economy properly identified?
Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far have the needs to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas, been properly identified?
Horizontal Objective of the EU Strategy 2020: Pertinent approach towards innovation, environment and climate change is integrated into the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and in how far does the RDP make a contribution towards innovation in agriculture and rural areas? • In how far does the RDP contribute to protect the environment, and to mitigate climate change?
The SWOT analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far does the SWOT reflect all relevant issues, covered in the analysis of the current situation, leaving no important aspect aside nor adding new aspects not covered by the analysis? • How plausibly are the items placed under the four categories, emphasizing cross-links? • In how far are the issues ranked and prioritized in the light of the overall objectives of the EU Strategy 2020 and CAP 2020? • To which extent does the SWOT constitute the base for the needs assessment and a sound rationale for strategic conclusions and the setting of programme objectives?

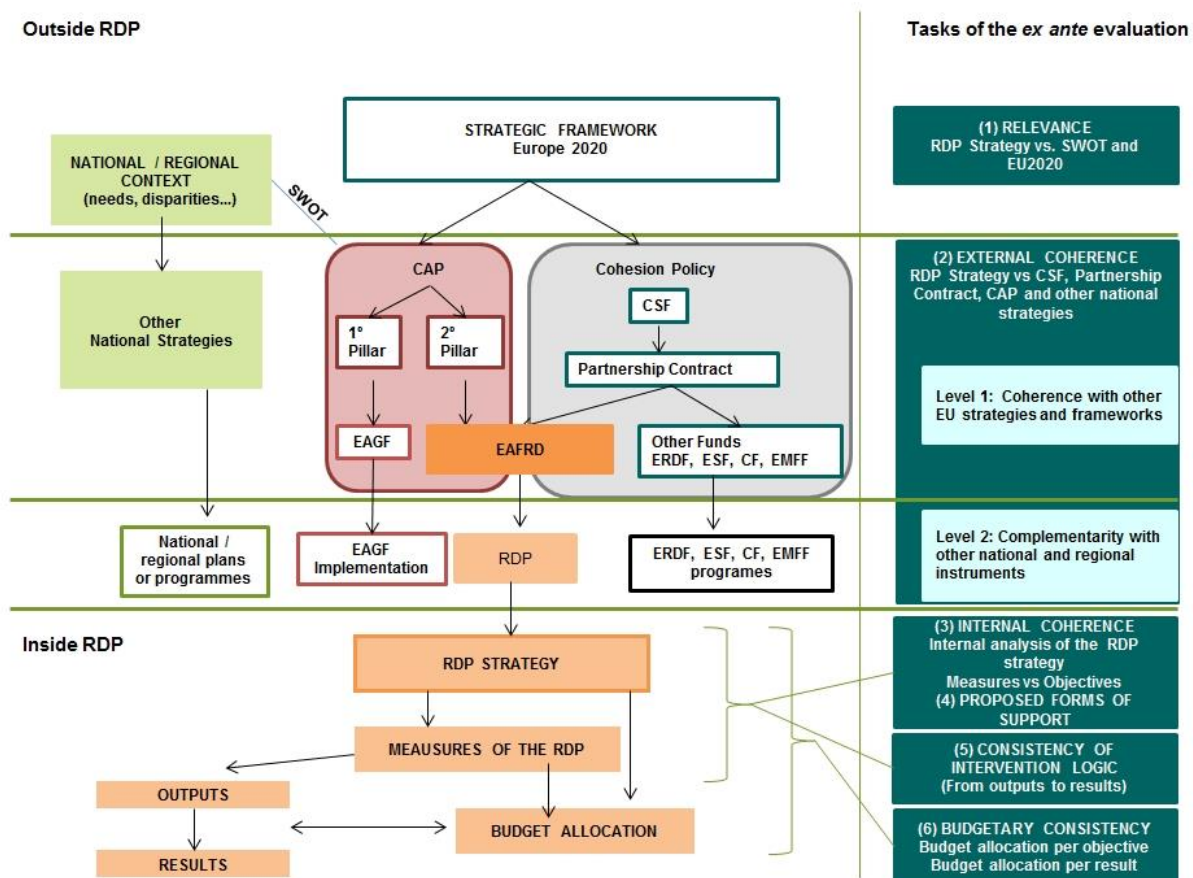
2. RELEVANCE, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COHERENCE

This section deals with the assessment of

- the contribution of the RDP to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth taking into account national and regional needs (Part II: section 2.1);
- the external consistency of the selected thematic objectives, priorities and programme objectives with the CSF, the Partnership Agreement, the first Pillar of the CAP, other relevant instruments and country-specific recommendations of the EU (Part II: section 2.2);
- the internal coherence of the proposed programme or activity (Part II: section 2.3);
- the proposed forms of support (Part II: section 1.2.4)
- the links between the intended outputs to the expected results (Part II: section 2.5);
- the consistency of the budgetary resources with the programme objectives (Part II: section 2.6);

The diagram below brings the five evaluation subjects into one picture (in the right column).

Figure 7 The various levels and dimensions for evaluating consistency and coherence of Rural Development Programmes.



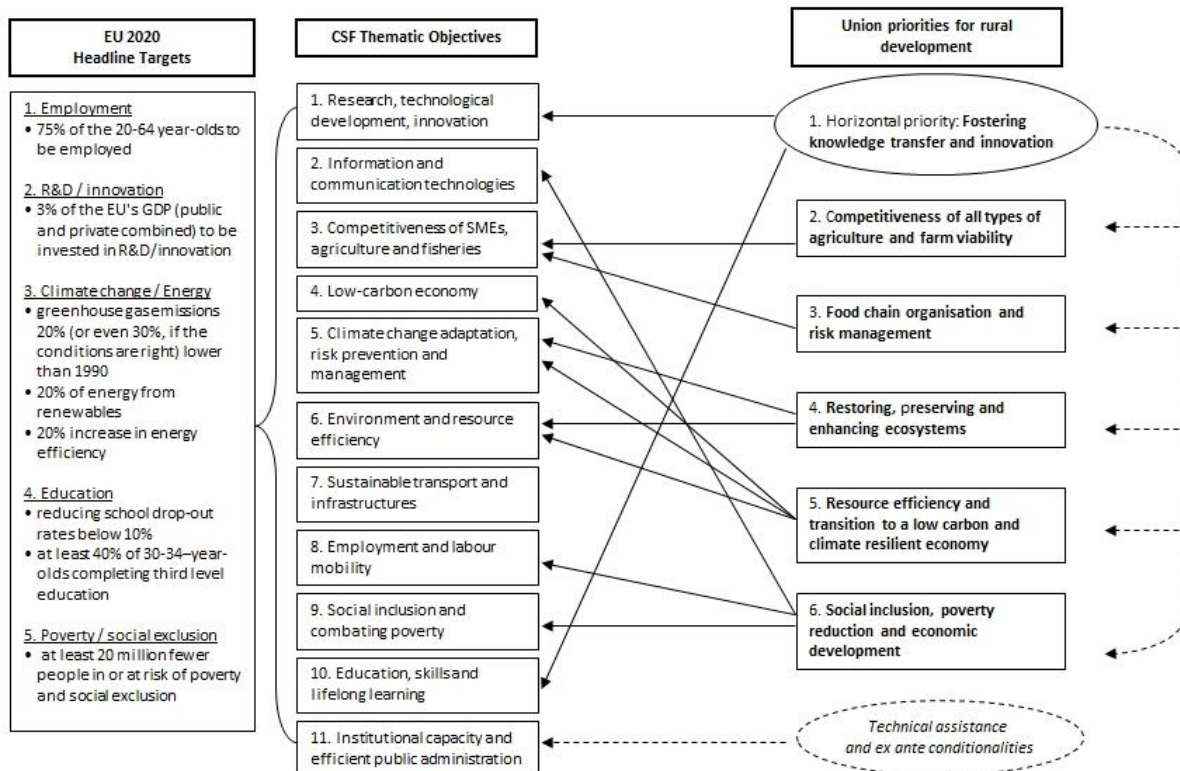
Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

2.1. The contribution to the Europe 2020 Strategy⁴⁸

What are the key issues for this topic?

The contexts and needs of Europe's rural areas are highly diverse. Although the Europe 2020 Strategy and CAP 2020 provide an overarching vision in pursuing smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, fostering innovation and alleviating the pressure on our environment and the planet's climate, the ways to achieve these goals are as manifold as the rural areas for which the RD programmes are to be developed. The intervention logic of each RDP has to be rooted in the specific needs of the territory, whilst at the same time contributing to the common purpose.

Figure 8 Links between rural development priorities and the CSF thematic objectives.



Source: DG AGRI⁴⁹; modified by the Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluator examines how the intervention logic of the RDP and the choice of focus areas under the six priorities and the measures chosen in relation to these will contribute to the objectives of EU2020. The links should be clear and convincing along the whole results chain. The outcome-orientation of the RDP is not a new requirement, but will be more strongly emphasized than in the current period. Specific attention should be devoted to the actions envisaged under RD priority 1, 'Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation' which can be considered as a horizontal priority in the EAFRD, supporting all the other priority areas, as the diagram above shows.

⁴⁸ Article 55(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(c) (ii), (iv) and (v) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁴⁹ 'Key elements of strategic programming of the EU's rural development policy after 2013'. Presentation held by Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann, head of Unit 'Consistency of rural development' in the DG Agriculture, at the workshop 'Strategic Programming and Monitoring and Evaluation for RDPs 2014-2020'. 14 March 2012, Brussels.

What are the proposed approaches?

It is recommended to conduct the analysis of the RDPs contribution to EU2020 together with the assessment of internal coherence which requires assessment of the overall intervention logic of the RDP. The complete picture of interrelated result chains helps identifying inconsistencies. See therefore Part II: section 2.3.

The consistency check should take the following three aspects into account:

- the process of programme development;
- programme objectives and measures;
- governance, management and communication.

The formal requirement for *ex ante* evaluators rather relates to the second aspect. In accordance with good practice we recommend to include the process of programme design (first aspect) and the structural provisions (third aspect) in the assessment of this subject.

Consistency and coherence do not only concern the content of the strategy and of the intended measures. The ways in which stakeholders interact during programme design and implementation are probably more influential, although harder to track.

Following explorative questions can be linked to the three aspects mentioned above and assessed as suggested in the table below:

Aspect	Key questions	How to assess
1. Process of programme development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has been involved in the programming process? How broad, how balanced was stakeholder involvement and how was it organised? • To which extent have “entitlements” from previous measures determined the making of the new programme? 	Reading of minutes and protocols Interviews with stakeholders Focus Groups with stakeholders Social network analysis (for a more profound analysis)
2. Programme objectives and measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To which extent do the programme objectives and planned measures respond to the sectoral and territorial challenges and needs as identified in the analysis and presented in the SWOT table? • How balanced and flexible are the measures (neither too generic nor too specific) so that the targeted beneficiaries can be actually reached and the intended types of activities be triggered? • How are the intended results and planned measures related to national strategic priorities and to the EU2020 Strategy goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth? 	Reading of programme documents Enquiries (with stakeholder interviews) on the assumptions underlying the intervention architecture (e.g. theory of change and others)
3. Governance, management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which provisions (structures and processes) have been made to 	Functional analysis of the steering structures at normative, strategic and

Aspect	Key questions	How to assess
and communication	<p>coordinate implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do these provisions look like at different levels of decision making (national, regional, sub-regional, local)? In how far does the communication from the Managing Authority to the partners and to the wider public (particularly the potential beneficiaries) reflect the integrated approach and the concerted effort to reach the EU objectives? 	<p>operational levels and of vertical interrelationships, looking at the cross-scale interactions (top-down vs. bottom-up, etc.), as well as of communications from the Managing Authority to the partners (e.g. Paying Agencies in delivery mechanism, payment links, etc.) and to the wider public, particularly the potential beneficiaries</p>

- To explore the first aspect (process of programme development) stakeholder involvement and participation should be analysed. The time spent for programming might furnish first pointers. If programming took less time than reasonably required according to the size and diversity of the programming area, it can be assumed that the process has been mainly expedited within the Managing Authority, or by associated experts. The representatives of potential beneficiaries may not have been really listened to.
- The second aspect (programme objectives and measures) links the RDP back to the area's needs and forward to the overarching goals at national and EU level. The backward link relates to the programme's *relevance* which is defined as *the extent to which an intervention's objectives are pertinent to needs, problems and issues to be addressed*.⁵⁰ For the evaluator, this part of the assessment is a balancing act: it is acceptable to recommend for specifications if the RDP leaves too large a margin for interpretation, or to recommend more flexibility if the programme focus seems to be too narrow.

Good and not-so-good practices

😊
<p>↑ The <i>ex ante</i> assesses the RDPs contribution to EU2020 covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.</p> <p>↑ The evaluator reconstructs the programming process and tries to understand stakeholder's perceptions, their interests and mutual relationships.</p>

😞
<p>↓ The evaluator only relies on document analysis.</p>

Legal references

- The subject is addressed by Article 55(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, whereupon *ex ante* evaluations shall appraise *the contribution to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, having regard to the selected thematic objectives and priorities, taking into account national and regional needs*.

Further reading

- DG AGRI: Draft intervention logic for rural development post-2013, and possible associated indicators. Technical Paper for the joint Coordination Committee and Evaluation Expert Committee Workshop on the 15th of March 2012, Brussels.
- Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann, head of Unit 'Consistency of rural development' in the DG Agriculture: 'Key elements of strategic programming of the EU's rural development policy after 2013'.

⁵⁰'Evaluation of EU activities. An introduction'. A Guide from DG Budget, January 2005.

Presentation held by, at the Workshop: 'Strategic Programming and Monitoring and Evaluation for RDPs 2014-2020'. 14 March 2012, Brussels.

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
<p>Contribution to the EU2020 Strategy and its overarching goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, fostering innovation and alleviating the pressure on environment and climate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent the set up intervention logic secures that the selected measures will contribute to the achievement of the regional, national and EU targets? • Who is not sufficiently involved in programme design and implementation, although suggested as relevant partner⁵¹? • Who is not reached by any intervention, although identified as a relevant potential beneficiary? What kind of gaps are there? How can these gaps be neutralised? • How are individual rural development priorities translated into actions and how do they affect the interventions foreseen under the other priorities? • Which provisions (structures and processes) have been made to coordinate implementation? • In how far are these efforts reflected in the Managing Authority's communication to the partners, the potential beneficiaries and the wider public?

2.2. Consistency with the CSF, Partnership Agreement, country-specific recommendations and other relevant instruments⁵²

What are the key issues for this topic?

This section relates to the 'horizontal' interactions between what is foreseen under the RDP, and what is planned under other CSF and sectoral programmes, policy instruments and strategies. It is important that different instruments, although each having their own specific objectives, work in a complementary manner, supporting the interventions of others, so that synergies are exploited, added-value is created and the sum is more than the individual parts. Conflicting or counter-productive activities should be avoided.

The main challenges lie partly in how to evaluate coherence and consistency between programmes which may be designed to serve more or less similar goals, addressing more or less similar beneficiaries in more or less similar areas, and partly in identifying synergies, complementarities or potential conflicts between instruments with very different objectives.

This is not a new aspect, relationships with other policies have always been a key issue for rural development, which is by its nature cross-cutting and holistic, taking a territorial rather than a sectoral approach. However, for the 2014-2020 period, the clearer focus on EU2020 objectives and the establishment of Partnership Agreements at national level to bring together the activities of all CSF funds, strengthen the visibility and importance of external coherence.

⁵¹ Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

⁵² Article 55(3)(d) of the , and Article 8(1)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Different policy segments develop distinct cultures, jargons, regulatory frameworks and behavioural routines. Although the necessity to harmonise policy interventions is widely acknowledged, coordination between the 'policy containers' often remains superficial. Aspects such as different spatial or time scales are of minor influence, although they are often overemphasized in order to obliterate the more fundamental challenges. Solutions may be adopted which address the superficial symptoms instead of the underlying issues, such as:

- negative coordination meaning strict demarcation of operations, which may produce policy gaps and exclude important beneficiary groups;
- shifting the burden of cross-funds coordination down to regional administrations or local development agencies;
- tolerating overlaps or even contradictions as long as nobody denounces the subsequent loss of clarity and efficiency.

The Common Strategic Framework provides an opportunity of cross-policy coordination already at the very top level of policy making. It is now up to the Member States to make appropriate governance arrangements harnessing this opportunity to generate genuine synergy and complementarity.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The evaluator should examine whether the programme takes into account the influence of other policies and programmes, including other CSF programmes, on its expected results.

Examining coherence with Pillar 1 of the CAP is required. 'Greening' is the most salient subject, in particular the relationship between greening measures and agri-environment-climate schemes within the RDP, but there are also other issues, e.g. in the field of market measures.

The relationship between the RDP and other strategies and policies, e.g. Smart specialisation, National Roma Inclusion Strategy, Horizon 2020, macro-regional and sea basin strategies should also be reviewed by the *ex ante* evaluator.

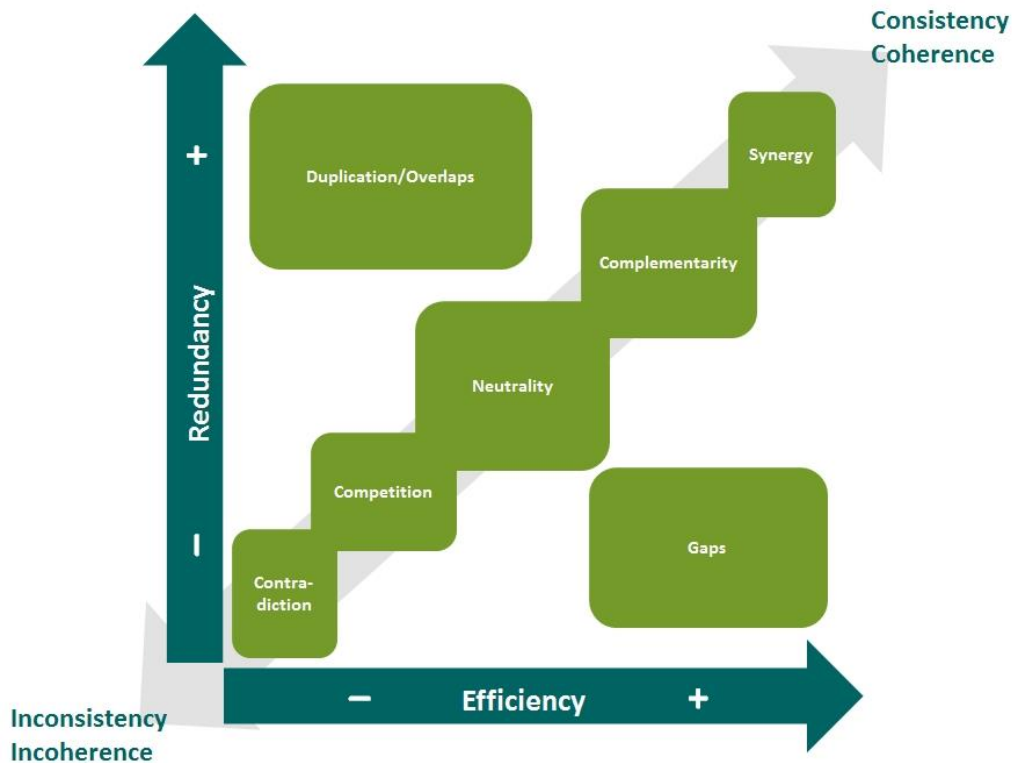
A specific complication is how to conduct the analysis when the development of the different CSF programmes, and of the Partnership Agreement are progressing simultaneously. The minimum requirement in relation to the links with, and the expected influence of, other CSF funds on RDP results and vice versa is that the evaluator should consider the latest available version of the Partnership Agreement, and the RDP section referred to under Article 8(1)(I) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 covering complementarity with other CAP instruments and European Structural and Investment Funds. If this is not considered to provide sufficient detail, then the evaluator should make appropriate recommendations for improvement to give a clearer picture.

What are the proposed approaches?

We have already mentioned that the terms consistency and coherence can be used more or less synonymously.

The diagram, which can also be utilised for assessing internal coherence (Part II: section 2.3) shows a scale between 'inconsistency/incoherence' and 'consistency/coherence' reaching from 'contradiction' on the negative side (bottom left) to 'synergy' on the positive one (right top). Avoiding overlaps can lead to gaps, and avoiding gaps can lead to overlaps. We see both redundancy and efficiency are necessary, but they have to be kept in balance. An overshoot of redundancy leads to duplication and overlaps, an overshoot of efficiency leads to gaps. We recommend using the mental map displayed below as a conceptual reference.

Figure 9 Mapping the possible interactions between different policies and programmes.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

- **Contradiction** means that in view of the expected results one policy intervention is in conflict with another: they exclude or annihilate each other.
- **Competition** means that different support schemes resemble each other (in terms of target beneficiaries and type of activity) but under different conditions. The scheme offering apparently 'simpler' access to funding would crowd out the more 'complex' one.
- **Duplication** means that there are two similar versions of a funding scheme in the same area, addressing similar beneficiaries. This may happen if for example authorities try to boost their influence at the cost of others.
- **Gaps** occur if different authorities demarcate their respective fields of intervention just by negative coordination, leaving relevant target groups unattended; gaps may also occur if potential beneficiary groups are simply neglected.
- **Neutrality** is the absence of any interaction between programmes.
- **Complementarities** are defined by DG REGIO as *the fact that several public interventions (or several components of an intervention) contribute towards the achievement of the same objective.*⁵³
- **Synergies** determine the leverage and knock-on effects of a policy intervention. DG Regio defines synergy as *the fact that several public interventions (or several components of an intervention) together produce an impact which is greater than the sum of the impacts they would produce alone.*⁵⁴ Often synergies come as a surprise, emerging from unexpected interactions between measures or programmes.

Consistency or coherence can hardly be assessed just by reading the relevant documents, although this would accomplish the minimum requirement for the *ex ante* evaluation. We recommend looking at

⁵³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/evalsed/glossary/glossary_c_en.htm#Complementarity

⁵⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/evalsed/glossary/glossary_s_en.htm

the ways in which stakeholders interacted during programme design and how they conceive cross-coordination during implementation. This could turn out to be much more revealing.

Therefore we suggest exploring three aspects of coherence/consistency:

- The first aspect (process of programme generation) should be analysed in respect to the stakeholders' cross-funds relationships and networking practices.
- The second aspect (programme objectives and measures) relates to the complementarities between the different programmes in question.
- The third aspect (governance, management and communication) concerns the coordination mechanisms foreseen to increase overall efficiency through reducing overlaps, filling gaps and dismantling bureaucratic barriers.

Concerning the consistency analysis with CAP Pillar 1, we recommend concentrating on the 'greening' issue and make a first appraisal of other possible interactions, in particular in relation to agri-environment-climate measures.

Although the minimum requirements for the *ex ante* evaluation would be respected by considering the latest available version of the Partnership Agreement, along with the information included in the draft RDP on complementarity with other policies and strategies, evaluators are encouraged to consider other programme documents where they are available.


Aspect	Key questions	How to assess
Process of programme generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who was involved in the programming process? Which stakeholders contributed to designing more than one programme? • To which extent and how has programming been coordinated between funds? In how far was this process structured? 	Reading of minutes and protocols Interviews with stakeholders Focus Groups with stakeholders Social network analysis (for a more profound analysis)
Programme objectives and measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the respective goals and objectives of different programmes (expected results and impacts) coincide, complement or contradict each other? • In how far are the assumptions underlying the respective logic models compatible with each other? • Where are duplications/overlaps, or policy gaps? 	Reading of programme documents Enquiries (among stakeholders) on the assumptions underlying the intervention architecture (theory of change) Consistency analysis of the expected outputs of various programmes (matrix tabulation as used in the scenario technique) ⁵⁵
Governance, management and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which arrangements (structures and processes) have been made to coordinate implementation? • How do these provisions look like at different levels of decision making (national, regional, sub-regional, local)? • In how far have the management and control rules for the first and the second 	Functional analysis of the steering structures at normative, strategic and operational levels and horizontal interrelationships between different public interventions Analysis of the provisions made for public communication in all the programmes addressing the same

⁵⁵In a consistency analysis, the expected outputs of the different programmes which shall be cross-checked are put both on the horizontal and the vertical axis. The cell in which they cross each other is rated (e.g. using five rates: - -; -; 0;+; ++) accordingly to their negative, neutral or positive interrelationships ++ or + rates call for action.


Aspect	Key questions	How to assess
	Pillar of the CAP been harmonized? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How viable and user-friendly is the specific set-up for coordinating Community-Led Local Development between EAFRD, EMFF, ERDF and ESF including ETC? How shall potential beneficiaries be made aware of different forms of public support, from different programmes? 	area and beneficiaries

Coherence and cross-relationships described in the RDP will also be checked by *ex ante* evaluators of Structural Funds and CAP Pillar 1 measures. It would therefore be pertinent to cross-coordinate this analysis provided the time frames of *ex ante* evaluations coincide.

Good and not-so-good practices



- ↑ The *ex ante* assesses the RDPs external consistency covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.
- ↑ The ways in which stakeholders have interacted across funds during programme design are examined.
- ↑ The evaluator verifies how cross-coordination mechanisms are actually utilised and how the stakeholders are putting the cross-funds arrangements, particularly for CLLD, into practice.



- ↓ The *ex ante* only relies on document analysis.
- ↓ The evaluator contents itself with negative coordination (demarcation) without examining more closely the inter-programme interactions and also the possible benefits from apparent redundancies.

Legal references

- The subject is addressed in Article 55(3)(b) and (d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, whereupon *ex ante* evaluations shall appraise *coherence with other relevant instruments and the consistency of the selected thematic objectives, the priorities and corresponding objectives of the programmes with the CSF, the Partnership Agreement and the relevant country-specific recommendations adopted in accordance with Article 121(2) TFEU⁵⁶ and where appropriate at national level, the National Reform Programme.*⁵⁷
- The RDPs' coherence and possible synergies with other relevant instruments are addressed in Article 8(1)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Further reading

- The section on 'complementarity and coordination' (last paragraph) in the Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2012) 61 from 14 March 2012.

⁵⁶ relating to the Stability Pact.

⁵⁷ Article 55(3)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Coherence and consistency with other ESI Funds, the Partnership Agreement, Pillar 1 of the CAP and other EU and national policy instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do certain measures of the RDP interact with other agricultural instruments (CAP Pillar 1)? • How are complementarities described with other CSF funds interventions, and any other EU and national policies operating in the same area or addressing the same beneficiaries? • Who is not reached by any intervention, although identified as a relevant potential beneficiary? How can gaps be neutralised? • Are there unnecessary redundancies which might cause deadweight or loss of efficiency?

2.3. Intervention logic⁵⁸

What are the key issues for this topic?

A coherent strategy facilitates the achievement of objectives by taking advantage of potential synergies while avoiding hindrances caused by possible contradictions and gaps.

A policy intervention is considered to be coherent if

- it clearly defines its objectives and plausibly explains by which measures they can be reached;
- it promotes positive reinforcement between its objectives and measures, while avoiding contradictions and gaps between them.

In the RDPs, internal coherence is demonstrated through the presentation of the intervention logic, showing the selected priorities and focus areas, and the measures selected to achieve them. The selected priorities and focus areas should be consistent with the SWOT and needs assessment.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluation should include an assessment of the intervention logic as presented, identifying whether the selected priorities and focus areas match the needs assessment, and whether the mix of measures proposed for each focus area are likely to support the achievement of the stated objectives.

The analysis of the internal coherence shall

- provide a structured assessment of the programme, checking that the objectives correspond with the European rural development priorities, and demonstrating that the results chain is logically structured;
- assess the coherence between the objectives;
- analyse the degree to which the selected measures are adequate to meet the objectives set forth in the programme; furthermore, to analyse how the various measures complement each other in promoting the achievement of said objectives.

An evaluation of internal coherence should be undertaken both for the programme as a whole, as well as for thematic sub-programmes.

⁵⁸Article 55(3)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 9(1)(f), (l) and (m)(iv) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

What are the proposed approaches?

We suggest conducting the analysis in three steps. We recommend combining the first step with the analysis of the contribution of the expected outputs to the results, which also requires detailed consideration of the intervention logic and the proposed results chains (see Part II: section 2.5).

a. Depicting the hierarchy of objectives

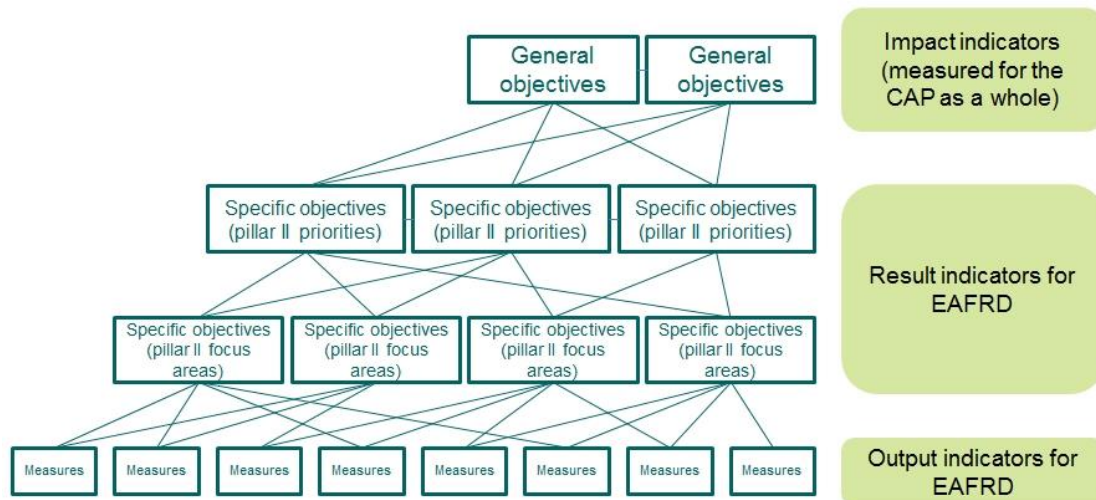
In order to verify that the programme displays a convincing logical structure, and that the objectives are adequately formulated, the *ex ante* evaluator should assess the hierarchy of objectives. The RDPs are expected to contain intervention logic diagrams for each priority included. The different levels of objectives and their relationship to each other should be clearly demonstrated through these diagrams, associated text, and details of the measures included.

One method of checking the coherence of the different levels of objectives is to construct a tree-diagram, as shown below.

The diagram enables the evaluator to analyse the degree of coherence between objectives at different hierarchical levels of the programme. The diagram reveals the presence or lack of logical links connecting the various objectives defined in the programme document. The following examples represent logical links:

- An objective at a lower hierarchical level is the premise for reaching higher level objectives.
- Higher level objectives bestow meaningfulness to lower level objectives.
- Two objectives / effects at the same level are mutually reinforcing.

Figure 10 The tree-diagram of the hierarchy of objectives.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

b. Identifying inter-linkages and interactions between objectives

In the second step the degree of (in)consistencies/(in)coherences between various objectives (at the same level) of the programme is examined. We recommend using the conceptual framework offered in section 2.2 for this appraisal.

To carry out the analysis, we recommend applying the cross-objectives analysis table. This approach also allows the influence of other objectives on the three cross-cutting elements (environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and innovation) to be taken into account.

Table 1 Table for assessing synergies between objectives

Objectives ⁵⁹	Objectives				
	1	2	3	...	n
1					
2					
3					
...					
n					

The diagram allows for estimating the intensity and the direction of links that exist between objectives at the same hierarchy level. To assess the interaction between the objectives, the *ex ante* evaluator can use a rating scale between 0 and 3, whereas 0 means 'no influence at all' and 3 'strong influence'.

The result of this exercise is to determine the degree of influence (active) and sensitivity (passive) for each objective.

The comparative assessment of these results, showing the degree of influence (horizontal score) and sensitivity (vertical score) divided through the averages of horizontal and vertical sets, allows for the classification of the stated objectives into four distinct groups:

- **Objectives with a high degree of influence** are those considered to possess a higher capacity for exerting influence on others than the average while having a degree of sensitivity below average. As such, they may be considered as the leverage points of the programme.
- **Sensitive objectives** are those with an above-average degree of sensitivity paired with a below-average score of influence. Their achievement largely depends on the accomplishment of other objectives.
- **Strategic objectives** are those which have been assessed as above-average both in degree of influence and of sensitivity. As such, they exert a high degree of attraction, while also being themselves conditioned by the remaining objectives. They are to be considered key objectives because of their inherent potential for an elevated multiplier effect.
- Finally, located on the opposite end of the spectrum are **neutral objectives** considered to have a higher degree of independence (defined by below-average influence and sensitivity).

The results of this analysis could reveal untapped potential for synergies. This may lead to a reconfiguration of objectives.

c. Assessing the contribution of measures toward achievement of stated objectives

The goal of this analytical step is to assess the degree to which the selected measures contribute to the achievement of the objectives formulated in the programme.

In order to examine the coherence between envisaged measures and stated objectives, the evaluator could make use of the following table. It links the RDP objectives to the whole range of measures.

⁵⁹ Objectives are placed in the table horizontally and vertically in the same order

The *ex ante* evaluator could apply rating scores ranging between -1 and 3, whereas -1 indicates a potentially negative contribution, 0 neutrality, 1 and 2 different degrees of positive contribution.

Table 2 Diagram for assessing the coherence between measures and objectives

Objectives	Measures				
	1	2	3	...	n
I					
II					
III					
...					
N					

To use this matrix the *ex ante* evaluator has to answer the following questions:

- For a horizontal reading: what are the selected measures that will lead to achieving this objective?
- For a vertical reading: what are the objectives that could be achieved through the implementation of a measure?

Negative scores should be discussed with the programme managers, in order to make according changes. Positive relationships should be expressed in the intervention logic which means that the charts depicting the intervention logic should be consistent with the results of this appraisal.

Good and not-so-good practices

😊	☹️
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> assesses the RDPs internal coherence covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter. ↑ The evaluator depicts the hierarchy of objectives. ↑ The evaluator assesses the interactions between objectives, particularly in respect to synergies, while assuring the absence of contradictions. ↑ The evaluator analyses the degree to which the selected measures are appropriate to reach the RDP objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ The evaluator conceives linear relationships between measures and objectives without considering neither crosslinks nor cross-effects between measures and objectives.

Legal references

- According to Article 55(3)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, the *ex ante* evaluator should examine *the internal coherence of the proposed programme*.

Further reading

- DG AGRI: Draft intervention logic for rural development post-2013, and possible associated indicators. Technical Paper for the joint Coordination Committee and Evaluation Expert Committee Workshop on the 15th of March 2012, Brussels.
- Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann, head of Unit 'Consistency of rural development' in the DG Agriculture: 'Key elements of strategic programming of the EU's rural development policy after 2013'. Presentation held by, at the Workshop: 'Strategic Programming and Monitoring and Evaluation for RDPs 2014-2020'. 14 March 2012, Brussels.

- EuropeAid. Evaluation Guide:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/methodology/guidelines/gba_det_fr.htm

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Consistency of programme objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How clearly are the programme's objectives defined? • How are the logical links and synergies described between the various objectives at the same or different hierarchical levels? • To which extent do the objectives contradict each other?
Programme objectives vs. measures selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How comprehensively and plausibly are the logical links described between the selected measures and the whole range of objectives? • To what extent are synergetic interactions explained between measures for achieving the objectives?

2.4. The proposed forms of support⁶⁰

What are the key issues for this topic?

It is crucial to find the form of support most suitable to satisfy particular needs, and accommodate specific types of beneficiaries or territories. Designing adequate forms of support strengthens the internal coherence of the programme.

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 distinguishes (in Article 66) different forms of support:

- grants
- repayable assistance
- prizes
- financial instruments, or
- a combination of these.

The transformative effect of these instruments depends on concomitant circumstances, application criteria and eligibility rules. For instance, grants obtained under LEADER (CLLD) are contingent on the local partnership and according consultation processes. Getting access to investment funding may be tied to specific training, etc. The support from the RDP may also be utilized to bring beneficiaries closer to new financial instruments (e.g. equity and loan facilities) or according Community Initiatives (potential successors of initiatives like JASMINE⁶¹ and JASPERS⁶²)⁶³.

The Commission is also interested in increasing the volume of funds channelled through “innovative financial instruments”, because they *have the capacity to attract funding from other public or private investors in areas of EU strong interest but which are perceived as risky by investors. A good example is the area of research and innovation. The fact that the EU invests risk capital in a fund or vows to honour part of the risk associated with a certain type of projects can give other public or private*

⁶⁰ Article 55(3)(h) of Regulation (EU) No 1030/2013.

⁶¹ Further information on JASMINE (Joint Action to Support Micro-Finance Institutions in Europe) at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/instruments/jasmine_en.cfm

⁶² Further information on JASPERS (Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions) at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/instruments/jaspers_en.cfm

⁶³ See the Communication from the Commission on new financial instruments for the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/financial_operations/investment/europe_2020/documents/com2011_662_en.pdf

*investors the assurance they need to invest alongside the EU. But there are also important non-financial effects such as promotion of best practices*⁶⁴.

Innovative financial instruments cover a rather broad range of interventions such as participations in equity (risk capital) funds, guarantees to local banks lending to a large number of final beneficiaries, for instance small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or risk-sharing with financial institutions to promote investments in large infrastructure projects (e.g. the Europe 2020 Project Bonds Initiative). Some of these instruments will be irrelevant for funding from EAFRD (e.g. the Project Bonds Initiative), but some will possibly be tried out, such as the instrument geared towards social entrepreneurship and microfinance⁶⁵; all in all their application in the context of rural development will probably remain fairly limited due to their novelty.

Another important topic is the time factor. Particularly in the realm of LEADER, advance payments are an important issue, since the implementation of local development strategies starts later than most measures due to the time needed to complete the selection procedure for Local Action Groups. In such a case advance payments can speed up the implementation process.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluation should appraise the rationale of the proposed forms of support included in the RDP. The external environment, including such factors as the availability of credit from mainstream sources, the viability of the various sectors involved should be taken into account, as should the particular situation of targeted beneficiary groups. On the basis of this appraisal, the evaluator should consider if an alternative combination of the instruments of support might be more likely to support the intended changes, and make appropriate recommendations as necessary.

The objective of the *ex ante* evaluation is to assess whether the form of support (or the combination thereof) proposed is the proper one, i.e. the best response to the needs of the region, the capacity of the beneficiaries and the operating environment of the RDP. The assessment is strongly related to the assumptions on how the expected outputs would contribute to results (Part II: section 2.5) and to the assessment of the internal coherence of the programme (Part II: section 2.3).

This relatively small part of the *ex ante* evaluation may be time and resource intensive, depending on the range and scope of forms of support proposed in the RDP. Evidence on the evaluation of new forms of support, especially of financial instruments is scarce. The use of financial instruments is still characterized by a lack of experience and expertise in the financial sector and products, as well as difficulties with the administrative processes⁶⁶.

The implications of including novel forms of support in the RDP for the managerial and operational capacity of the Managing Authority should not be ignored. If there is insufficient expertise or human resources to manage them well, even well designed and targeted instruments will not achieve their optimum potential and it may be better to restrict to support to more conventional simpler instruments.

Furthermore, it can be expected that the implementation of financial instruments will include financial intermediaries (e.g. funds, cooperative banks, etc.), whose capacity should also be addressed in the course of the evaluation of the delivery mechanism.

⁶⁴ Quotation from the Q&A session on 'innovative financial instruments' of the DG Economy and Finance from 19 Oct. 2011: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/financial_operations/investment/innovative_financial_instruments/documents/qa_innovative_en.pdf

⁶⁵ COM(2011) 662 final from 19 October 2011, p. 12.

⁶⁶ See for example the ADPI Working Paper on EU Financial Instruments: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/55350682/Appropriate-Financial-Instruments-for-Public-Private-Partnership-to-Boost-Cross-Border-Infrastructural-Development-EU-Experience>

What are the proposed approaches?

The methodology to start with is a literature review including research, empirical (e.g. results of a pilot project) and evaluation evidence available from previous and current programming periods and from other national or regional funded programmes.

The choice of the form of support should be backed by an analysis of (i) the challenge that the support will address and of (ii) the capacity of the targeted beneficiaries to absorb the offered form of support.

This analysis should be conducted measure by measure. It should be done together with the analysis of the intervention logic and the assumptions behind the logic model (Part II: section 2.5).

For example, if the identified need is a lack of bank financing to companies, the programmer and evaluator have to consider different forms of financial support and assess which of those would be the most appropriate: grants may be more relevant than loans for micro enterprises to undertake research activities, or venture capital may better respond to the needs of innovative start-ups. On the basis of this appraisal, the evaluator should consider if an alternative 'action mix' might be more likely to achieve the intended results and thus the programme-specific objectives⁶⁷. These alternatives can be developed as 'micro-scenarios' by which the evaluator compares the cost-effectiveness of alternative 'action-mixes'.

Solutions need to be individually tailored to the needs of beneficiaries or areas in concern. Specific solutions also need specific arrangements for the delivery systems. Delivery systems routinely concerned with grant funding will certainly have to be adapted in order to cope with more complex forms of support.

The *ex ante* evaluator should be advocating the quest for simplification and propose that the 'Simplified Cost Option' be widely utilized, specifically to lift the administrative burden from rural development projects in general and particularly LEADER:



Article 67(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 spells out the forms of grants and repayable assistance. In addition to the common method of reimbursing of eligible costs actually incurred and paid, the regulation maintains and extends the present arrangements in applying the simplified costs methods in order to decrease the administrative burden:

- Standard scales of unit costs;
- The maximum grant for lump sums is to EUR 100.000 of public contribution;
- The use of flat-rate financing, determined by the application of a percentage to one or more defined categories of costs
- Simplified costs options from existing EU and national funding instruments for similar types of projects can be used.

The ways of establishing the standard scales of unit costs, lump sums, and flat-rate financing are explained in Article 67(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The Member States can choose the option best adapted to a specific programme or a specific part of the programme among the sets of different methods, taking into account the costs and benefits of each option.

⁶⁷ DG REGIO and DG EMPL: Programming Period 2014-2020. Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy. Guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund, draft, 15 March 2012, p.8).

Good and not-so-good practices

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">↑ The <i>ex ante</i> assesses the RDPs proposed forms of support covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.↑ The assessment is specific to the type of beneficiary, to the territory, to a particular problem to be solved and a particular result to be achieved.↑ As existing evidence is still scarce, the evaluator ensures that the programming authorities draw on or even initiate pilot projects in order to test the effectiveness of different forms of support, specifically of those involving financial instruments.↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator may develop scenarios comparing the cost-effectiveness between different 'action-mixes'.↑ Apart from interviews, the evaluator may involve representatives from financial intermediaries (e.g. funds, cooperative banks, etc.) in stakeholder consultations or focus groups, if such expertise seems to be lacking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator takes for granted that the delivery mechanisms are automatically compatible with the envisaged form of support.↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator recommends the application of new forms of support without examining a test of these forms on smaller scale.

Legal references

- The *ex ante* evaluator should appraise *the rationale for the form of support proposed* (Article 55(3)(h) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013), including financial instruments.
- The preamble of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 states in point (62): *With a view to simplifying the use of the ESI Funds and reducing the risk of error, while providing for differentiation where needed to reflect the specificities of policy, it is appropriate to define the forms of support, harmonised conditions for the reimbursement of grants and repayable assistance, flat rate financing, specific eligibility rules for grants and repayable assistance and specific conditions on the eligibility of operations depending on location.*
- Financial instruments and their operation are defined in the Articles 37-46 and Annex VI of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.
- Article 66 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 specifies that *the CSF Funds shall be used to provide support in the form of grants, prizes, repayable assistance and financial instruments, or a combination thereof.* Article 67 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 further defining specific forms of grants, particularly the simplified ones, while Article 69 addresses specific eligibility rules for grants and repayable assistance.
- According to Article 104 and Article 36 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 Member States should make use of EFRD and ESF to draw up joint action plans and establish delivery mechanisms such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). Although both types of interventions are not foreseen in the EAFRD framework, they might be connected, by specific governance

arrangements, with EAFRD interventions in the same region, particularly LEADER. Article 36 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 foresees that actions carried out as an ITI may be complemented with financial support from the EAFRD or the EMFF.

- Annex II of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 sets out the amounts and support rates (maximum amount or support rates) for different measures.

Further reading

- Programming Period 2014-2020. Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy. Guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund, draft, 15 March 2012, DG REGIO and DG EMPLOYMENT.
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: A framework for the next generation of innovative financial instruments - the EU equity and debt platforms. Brussels, 19 Oct. 2011, COM(2011) 662 final.
- Questions and Answers on 'Innovative financial instruments' from the DG Economy and Finance (Brussels, 19 October 2011):
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/financial_operations/investment/innovative_financial_instruments/documents/qa_innovative_en.pdf
- European Commission: Simplifying Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 (February 2012):
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/simplification_en.pdf
- Willem van der Geest and Jorge Nunez-Ferrer (2011): Appropriate Financial Instruments for Public-Private Partnership to Boost Cross-Border Infrastructural Development-EU Experience. Asian Development Bank Institute Working Paper Series No. 281, Tokyo. Download:
<http://www.adbi.org/files/2011.05.13.wp281.financial.instruments.ppp.infrastructural.dev.eu.pdf>
- European Parliament-Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies (2012): 'Barriers for Applicants to Structural Funding'. Study conducted by Metis, EPRC, University of Strathclyde. Brussels. Download:
<http://www.igfse.pt/upload/docs/2012/estudofactoresFundosEstruturais.pdf>
- Financial Instruments in Cohesion Policy 2014-2020. COHESION POLICY 2014-2020. Factsheet highlighting key elements of the future approach, The European Commission,
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/financial_instruments_en.pdf

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Forms of support proposed for the measures/actions envisaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the form of support chosen coherent with the selected measure, the envisaged action and the specific objectives? • How efficient and how effective will the proposed form of support presumably be? • To which extent have the programming authorities maxed out the opportunities to use simplified cost options?

2.5. The contribution of expected outputs to results⁶⁸

What are the key issues for this topic?

One of the essential purposes of the *ex ante* evaluation is to assess whether or not the RD programme will achieve the expected results and to establish the assumptions which must come to fruition if these expectations are to be met. In order to do so, the *ex ante* evaluator should assess the intervention logic of the programme as a whole and of each priority.

Evaluators follow the opposite logic to that of the programming authorities. Planning and evaluation are like face and verso of the same coin; the cause-effect chain of challenges and weaknesses is the mirror image of the causal chain of objectives and instruments. It is the role of the evaluator to recognise any gaps and inconsistencies in the cause-effect chains and loops in order to improve the programme.

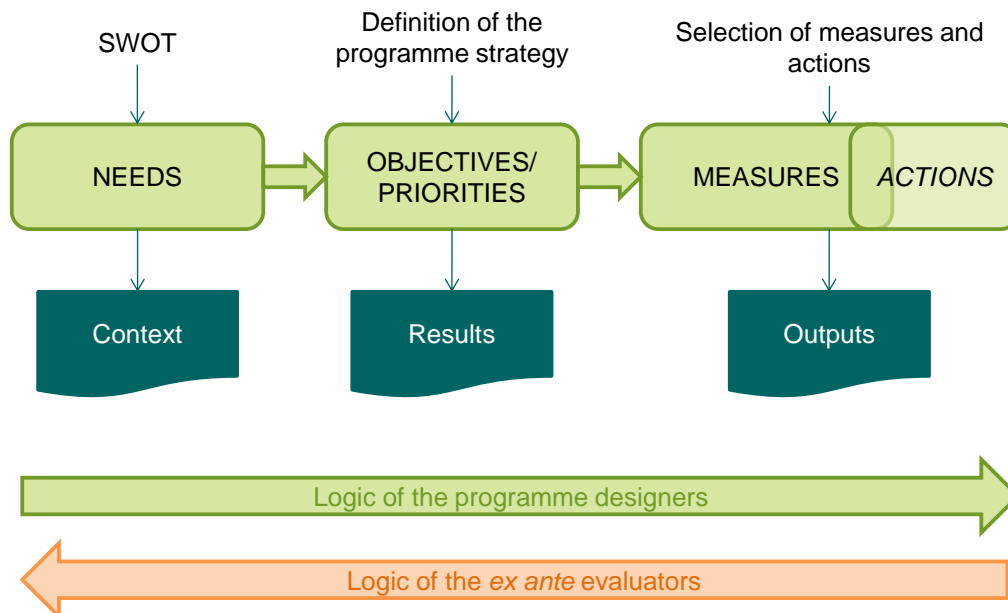
The heart of the intervention logic is the change that the programme intends to bring about in the Member State or region. This change (expressed as intended results) is supposed to be spawned by operations producing outputs.

The intervention logic is a crucial element of the RDP, which will be used for programme steering and evaluation:

- If things work out according to plan, future evaluations will be able to demonstrate in which ways and by which means the programme has actually brought forth the expected results.
- If the outcomes do not confirm the assumptions, future evaluations will be able to use the intervention logic in order to identify the points at which the programme deviated from its expected path.

The following illustration offers a schematic representation of the logic employed by both programmers and evaluators.

Figure 11 Programming and *ex ante* evaluation: working in opposite direction.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

⁶⁸Article 55(3)(f) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(c), 8(1)(m) and 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

By reference to programme documents, reports from previous experiences and other studies and evaluations, the *ex ante* evaluator should scrutinize the assumptions made by the programming team. These assumptions determine how the planned actions supposedly lead to the desired results. If the evaluators deem these links as not being convincing, they should explore whether alternative outputs would be more likely to generate the desired results or whether other actions could more effectively produce the expected outputs. In short, they consider alternative assumptions on cause-effect relationships. If they find more convincing alternatives, the evaluators should include these, together with appropriate justification, as recommendations.

To carry out this analysis, the evaluators should track every step along the results chain (intervention logic).

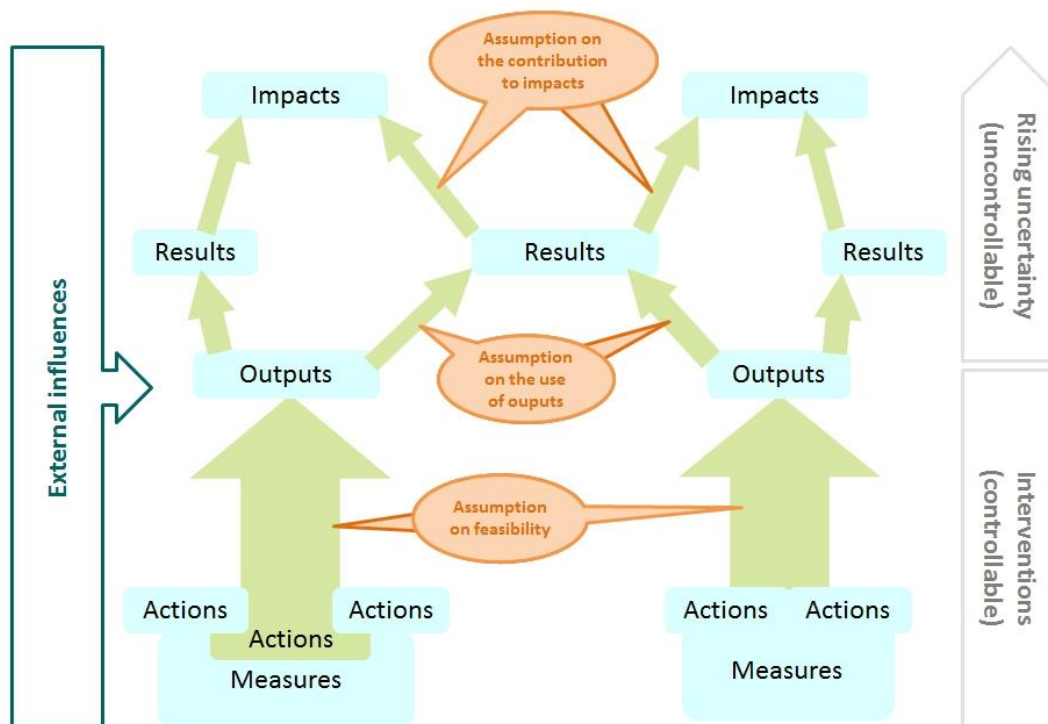
What are the proposed approaches?

Assessing the contribution of expected outputs to results requires zooming in on the intervention logic. If the *ex ante* evaluators have followed our recommendations, the macro-structure of the intervention logic has already been mapped while drawing up the tree of objectives as a first step for assessing internal coherence (see Part II: section 2.3). The first step of the analysis we propose is a more comprehensive version of this map.

a. Reconstruction of the intervention logic

The intervention logic consists of the entirety of assumptions that go into explaining how the intervention is supposed to produce the expected outcomes. This can be visually represented using a diagram that displays all measures/actions, outputs, results and impacts, logically interconnected along a trajectory of cause-effect relationships. We call these trajectories ‘results chains’. Results chains are the ‘molecular strands’ of the intervention logic.

Figure 12 Result chains, the “molecular strands” on the intervention logic.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

If the assumptions on the feasibility of an action under a certain measure prove true, then the expected outputs will be probably achieved. If the assumptions about the use of the outputs by the beneficiaries prove true, the expected results have a good chance to emerge. A similar relationship holds for the contribution of the results to the expected impacts, although this relationship is highly hypothetical, as the intervention constitutes only a minor factor of influence among many others. External influences are taking effect along the whole results chain, although to varying degrees: the envisaged actions should produce the expected outputs with high probability, as this section of the results chain constitutes the domain of the intervention itself.

For instance: support to building a farm dairy (the action) should yield a farm-based dairy unit (output); or providing support to a training session on energy efficiency (action) should bring forth a training session involving a certain number of participants (output).

The relationships between outputs and results are much more elusive. They are subject to assumptions concerning the use of the output by beneficiaries (direct and indirect ones). Only if the dairy products find their way to a remunerative market, there will be a positive change in the farm's gross value added (result); and only if the training participants apply their new knowledge in increasing the energy efficiency of their farm or factory, they will reduce their CO₂ emissions (result).

b. Assessing the assumptions underlying the results chain

Once the intervention logic has been mapped/validated, the evaluator defines a result chain for each measure and links these to the focus areas/priorities⁶⁹, examining the underlying assumptions. As these will often be rather implicit and not retrievable in the documents, it may be worthwhile to do this in conjunction with the programming authorities. Such a dialogue could improve the plausibility of the assumptions and even lead to changes in the programme design.

- The *ex ante* evaluator should review the description of the operations to be supported under each measure, including the identification of the specific territories targeted, the types of beneficiaries, and the planned forms of support.
- Then the evaluator should examine the causal links between the proposed actions, their outputs and the intended results. The question here is whether these actions will lead to the expected outputs, and whether these outputs are conducive to achieving results.
- The evaluators should also explore which external factors could influence the intended results to which degree and into which direction. To do this, the *ex ante* evaluator should take a closer look at
 - ▶ the factors which in the past have produced a higher of degree of divergence from the desired results;
 - ▶ the threats as pointed out in the SWOT analysis;
 - ▶ specific areas such as policy shifts at national level, new economic trends, changes in competitiveness at national and regional level, etc.

⁶⁹ A results chain is defined as a trajectory leading from the measure/action to an impact.

Good and not-so-good practices

😊	☹️
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> assesses the RDPs expected contributions of outputs to results as outlined in this chapter. ↑ The evaluator examines or (if needed) reconstructs the intervention logic and identifies the results chains. ↑ The assumptions underlying the result chains, particularly the ones linking the expected outputs to the results, are scrutinized. ↑ Prior experience is extensively used to check the plausibility of the assumptions made. ↑ The evaluator proposes adjustments if deemed necessary to come to a more realistic picture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluation takes the trajectory from expected outputs to results as proposed by the programming authorities as granted. ↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator does not consider external factors that influence on the intended results (e.g. the risks identified by the SWOT, previous experience).

Legal references

- Article 55(3)(f) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 states that the *ex ante* evaluator shall assess *how the expected outputs will contribute to results*.
- Article 8(1)(c) of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 stipulates that the strategy of each programme shall include the selection of targets pertinent to each of the focus areas of the Union priorities for rural development included in the programme, using as a basis the common indicators referred to in Article 69, and where necessary, programme-specific indicators. It shall also include relevant combination of measures, based on a sound intervention logic that includes an assessment of the intended impact of all selected measures toward the achievement of the established strategy objectives.

Further reading

- DG AGRI: Draft intervention logic for rural development post-2013, and possible associated indicators. Technical Paper for the joint Coordination Committee and Evaluation Expert Committee Workshop on the 15th of March 2012, Brussels.
- EuropeAid. Evaluation Guide:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/methodology/guidelines/gba_det_en.htm
- WWF (2005): Basic Guidance for Results Chains. Foundations of Success. Download:
http://assets.panda.org/downloads/2_1_results_chains_11_01_05.pdf

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Assumptions about contributions of measures/actions to the expected outputs and to results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which assumptions underlie the links between planned actions and outputs? Furthermore, which assumptions link the expected outputs with the results? • On which external conditions hinge these assumptions? Which external factors might jeopardize the assumptions? • How should the intervention logic be reconfigured to reach the

	expected results more reliably and more effectively? Which actions should be reinforced, added or withdrawn?
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2.6. The consistency of the budgetary allocation with the objectives⁷⁰

What are the key issues for this topic?

In the current context of limited resources, the need to prioritise and concentrate is of increased importance. The programme shall demonstrate that the allocation of financial resources to the measures is balanced and appropriate to meet the objectives that have been set.

On the whole, the coherent allocation of available resources not only enhances the added value of public support, but also promotes a more efficient use of resources toward achieving the objectives and priorities of rural development policy.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

In respect of the consistency of the budgetary resources with the programme objectives the *ex ante* evaluator should examine

- to what extent the expenditures are directed towards the needs and challenges identified in the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment;
- in how far the objectives that are more influential and hold a higher strategic value⁷¹ are also allocated a larger portion of the budget;
- the consistency between the unit cost of actions envisaged and the proposed level of expenditure;
- the degree of budgetary consistency across territories and economic sectors; accordingly, those sectors or territories which have been prioritized should be weighted more highly in terms of resource allocation.

It is important to see the wider picture, taking into account other policy interventions and sources of support, particularly those from the other ESI Funds.

What are the proposed approaches?

To meet the challenges set forth above, the *ex ante* analysis should take into account both the internal and the external consistency of the allocation of budgetary resources. Both analyses shall be based on the financing plan included in the programme. As a final step, we also propose to assess the risks inherent to financial support.

The proposed approach is rooted in the premise that, by this point, the following items will have already been analysed as part of the *ex ante* evaluation:

- the relevance of the selected objectives in relation to the analysis and to the SWOT appraisal (Part II: Chapter 1);
- the coherence of the programme in relation to the EU Strategy and CAP 2020, to the ESI Funds, the first Pillar of CAP and other financial instruments and programmes (Part II: sections 2.1 and 2.2);

⁷⁰Article 55(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1) (c)(iii), (h)(i), (h)(ii), (j) and (k) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁷¹ See Part II: section 2.3 (assessment of internal coherence), where we recommend carrying out a cross-impact-analysis of RDP objectives.

- the degree of coherence between objectives as well as the degree of adequacy of the selected measures (Part II: sections 2.3 and 2.5);
- the proposed forms of support (Part II: section 2.4);
- the actual volume of budget expenditures foreseen for the period from 2007 to 2013.

a. Internal financial coherence

The distribution of expenditures in pursuance of the various objectives shall be assessed based on their capacity not only to respond to the specific elements emphasised in the diagnosis, but also to generate synergies.

The budgetary assessment of certain actions would require exploring the relationship between the allocation of funds, the targets set, and the expected unit cost (to be calculated on the basis of the experiences gained during the current period). We recommend restricting this comparative analysis to specific operation-types, because it is extremely difficult to properly select representative costs that would permit a thorough calculation: programme measures tend to include a wide range of actions, making the determination of a common unit cost a particularly complex task.

We propose to proceed in the following way:

- First the *ex ante* evaluators ensure that the budgetary framework is presented in terms of the objectives set forth in the RDP. This should not be a difficult task, as the level of resources allocated to each measure and the linkage of measures to particular objectives is already known, and the RDP will include an indicator plan showing the planned outputs and planned expenditure per measure in relation to each priority.
- Then they look at the intervention logic (which they have comprehensively checked already for the assessment of internal coherence and the contribution of expected outputs to results)⁷² and consider the objectives in relation to the budgetary weight allocated to each objective. Expenditure should be focused on those objectives which are most likely to fulfill needs.
- Should the evaluators have applied the cross-objectives analysis for internal coherence between objectives (Part II: section 2.3) they can show the distribution of expenditures in terms of objective-types: strategic and influential, sensitive and independent. Expenditures should be focused on those objectives which show the highest capacity not only for exerting influence on all of the other objectives, but for generating synergies and knock-on effects as well.
- Finally, we suggest conducting an analysis of the budgetary weight assigned to the various actions according to:
 - ▶ the economic sectors or types of targeted beneficiaries (farmers/non-farmers, gender, public entities/private beneficiaries, etc.);
 - ▶ the zoning of the territory (less favoured areas, Natura 2000 network, or others).

b. External financial coherence

We propose that the evaluators should assess how the financial resources allocated within the RDP are consistent with the Partnership Agreement. Furthermore, we suggest that they examine the relationship between the Rural Development Programme and other ESI Funds (ESF, ERDF, CF, and EMFF) from a financial point of view.

⁷² Part II: sections 2.3 and 2.4

c. Risk assessment

We suggest that evaluators complement the budgetary analysis by assessing the level of risk involved in financial implementation. The goal of this assessment is to identify those measures that, by their very nature, are associated with more complex development processes.



For instance, the actions with a higher potential risk could be (i) the novel ones (e.g. Article 36 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 relating to risk management), (ii) those that in the last period have featured a higher level of de-commitment, (iii) those that entail more complex delivery mechanisms, involving numerous stakeholders (e.g. Article 35 co-operation, or Article 42-44 LEADER), and (iv) those which could attract more demand than expected.

Where possible, the evaluators could propose possible actions, such as amendments that could be made throughout the implementation period, if needed. This is especially important in respect of possible problems concerning absorption capacity, where the tendency can be to switch resources away from poorly absorbing measures, and over-demand, where the tendency can be to switch additional funds into the measure.

In conclusion, the purpose of this analysis is:

- to identify the measures involving a higher risk of implementation not going according to plan;
- to recommend particularly close monitoring of these measures;
- to define pre-emptive measures as for instance: *'if the financial performance has not reached X% absorption by 2017 the design and budgetary allocation of this measure should be reviewed'*.

Good and not-so-good practices

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">↑ The <i>ex ante</i> assesses the consistency of budgetary resources with programme objectives covering all legal as outlined in this chapter.↑ The evaluator examines the budgetary consistency in connection with the internal coherence and the assumptions governing the intervention logic.↑ Internal and external financial coherence are assessed as separate steps.↑ The evaluator undertakes a risk assessment; wherever risks lurk due to possible absorption problems or complexity inherent to particular forms of support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">↓ The evaluator relates the analysis to cost efficiency and avoids any reference to the content and thereby to the relevance (chosen priorities and intervention logic).↓ The evaluator leaves aside the question of risks (e.g. of unexpectedly high or low absorption rates).

Legal references

- Article 55(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 requires the *ex ante* evaluator to appraise the consistency of the allocation of budgetary resources with the objectives of the programme.
- The programming authorities must specify, according to Article 8(h)(ii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, *a table setting out, for each measure, the type of operation with a specific EAFRD*

contribution rate and technical assistance, the total Union contribution planned and the applicable EAFRD contribution rate. Where applicable, this table shall indicate separately the EAFRD contribution rate for less developed regions and for other regions.

- Article 8(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 establishes the indicator plan.

Further reading

- EuropeAid. Evaluation Guide:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation/methodology/guidelines/gba_det_fr.htm

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Analysis of internal financial coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far is the distribution of expenditures consistent with the hierarchy of objectives? • In how far is the distribution of expenditures consistent with the unit cost of the various measures? • How and to which extent have the recommendations of previous evaluations been taken into account (concerning cost unit accounting, absorption capacity...)?
Distribution of expenditures taking into account beneficiaries, regions and thematic areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To which extent does the distribution of programme expenditures, based on beneficiary type and/or region, meet the needs assessed and the priorities established?
Analysis of external financial coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far is the allocation of financial resources through the RDP consistent with the way resources are allocated through other European financial instruments (ESF, ERDF, Cohesion Fund, and EMFF) and through other national or regional financial instruments? • In how far is the allocation of financial resources through the RDP consistent with the way resources are allocated through the CAP first Pillar?
Assessment of risk involved in financial implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which actions are associated with an elevated implementation risk? • Which follow-up measures should be adopted for investments bearing higher uncertainties? • How and to which extent have the recommendations of previous evaluations been taken into account (concerning cost unit accounting, absorption capacity...)?

3. MEASURING PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

This section comprises three evaluation topics:

- The programme indicators (Part II: section 0);
- The adequacy of the quantified target values for indicators (Part II: section 3.2);
- The suitability of milestones selected for the performance framework (Part II: section 3.3).

Their assessment logically links together and besides should be conducted in close connection with the topics discussed in Part II: Chapter 1 (relevance, internal and external coherence). Whilst the first topic has already been a central theme for previous *ex ante* evaluations, for 2014-2020 there is an enhanced focus on target setting compared to previous periods. The biggest difference is the third topic, which is a new element related to the CSF and Partnership Agreement. **The programme indicators**⁷³

What are the key issues for this topic?

Rural development policy for the period 2014-2020 will be result-oriented. Therefore the measurement of programme progress and achievements plays a crucial role and the establishment of an adequate measurement system is becoming ever more essential.

Indicators are the core of the measurement system and represent tools used to assess how far the expected objectives have been achieved by measures or by the programme as a whole. They are linked together by the causal chains of the intervention logic of the RDP. Indicators consist of several components, including a definition, a value and a unit of measurement. Some indicators provide information on the programme's progress and achievements directly; others require interpretation using appropriate evaluation methods, in order to identify the contribution of the policy intervention.

The following types of indicators can be differentiated:

- Context indicators;
- Programme-related indicators.

Context indicators are used to describe the situation in the programme territory (e.g. the share of agricultural area within the total area) and are an essential tool for conducting the SWOT analysis. They can also be used in future evaluations to help identify the extent to which observed changes in the RDP territory were caused by the RDP. The context indicators are addressed in the section on the SWOT analysis and needs assessment, and the list of common context indicators is included in the Toolbox section of this document. They will not be addressed further here.

Programme-related indicators are used in measuring the achievements of RDP interventions in light of its objectives. Therefore they are also sometimes referred to as objective-related indicators. The following types of programme related indicators are used within the rural development monitoring and evaluation system:

- ▶ **Output indicators** which are directly linked to the measures and operations (e.g. the number of training days provided).
- ▶ **Results indicators** which capture the direct effects of interventions and are linked to focus areas (e.g. the amount of renewable energy produced from RDP supported projects).

⁷³Article 55(3)(e) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, and Article 8(1)(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

- ▶ **Impact indicators**, which are related to the overarching goals of the Common Agricultural Policy, and link it to the EU2020 Strategy (e.g. the rural employment rate). One common set of impact indicators covers both pillars of the CAP. The impact indicators are also used in describing the starting situation, and for this reason are included within the list of context indicators. For the purposes of these guidelines they are covered in the section dealing with context indicators.
- ▶ **Indicators used for target setting**, which are a sub-set of the output and result indicators. These will be used to establish quantified targets for each focus area within the RDP. One or more target indicators are defined for each focus area.

There will be a set of common indicators for use in all RDP. These will be specified in the implementing acts. Where appropriate, additional programme-specific indicators should be defined in order to address the specificities of the individual RDP (identified needs, territory, etc.). All proposed programme indicators should be assessed by the *ex ante* evaluator.

For the common indicators, the *ex ante* evaluator should ensure that all the relevant indicators from the common set are included, i.e. all those linked to the specific intervention logic, and the rural development priorities, focus areas and measures included in the RDP. If not all the relevant common indicators are used, the *ex ante* evaluator should identify the gaps, and support the Managing Authority in filling them. Where baseline values are appropriate, the *ex ante* evaluator should also examine these, validate them or provide recommendations to the programming authorities on how to correct them.

As for the programme-specific indicators, the *ex ante* evaluator should examine the relevance of those included, i.e. how suitable they are for measuring the specificities of the RDP interventions to which they are linked; the relationship and consistency with the common indicators, and their SMARTness. Where specific additional elements are included in the RDP e.g. additional objectives or focus areas, the evaluator should check that appropriate programme-specific indicators are included to allow these to be monitored and evaluated, and if gaps in programme-specific indicators are found, should also recommend appropriate indicators.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The evaluation team must cover the following tasks:

- First, to determine that the achievements of all rural development priorities and focus areas included in the programme are going to be adequately assessed. The evaluator should check that:
 - *all necessary common indicators are included;*
 - *programme-specific indicators have been proposed wherever necessary;*
 - *programme-specific indicators proposed are relevant.*
- Secondly, to determine that the indicators have been defined with sufficient clarity. This applies particularly to the programme-specific indicators, but also to ensuring that the definitions and methods provided in relation to the common indicator set have been fully taken into account. If this is found not to be the case, recommendations for improvements should be proposed to avoid problems in the future (i.e. monitoring, ongoing and *ex post* evaluation).

In conclusion, evaluators should assess whether the proposed programme-specific indicators are SMART: specific, measurable, available/achievable in a cost effective way, relevant for the programme and available in a timely manner.

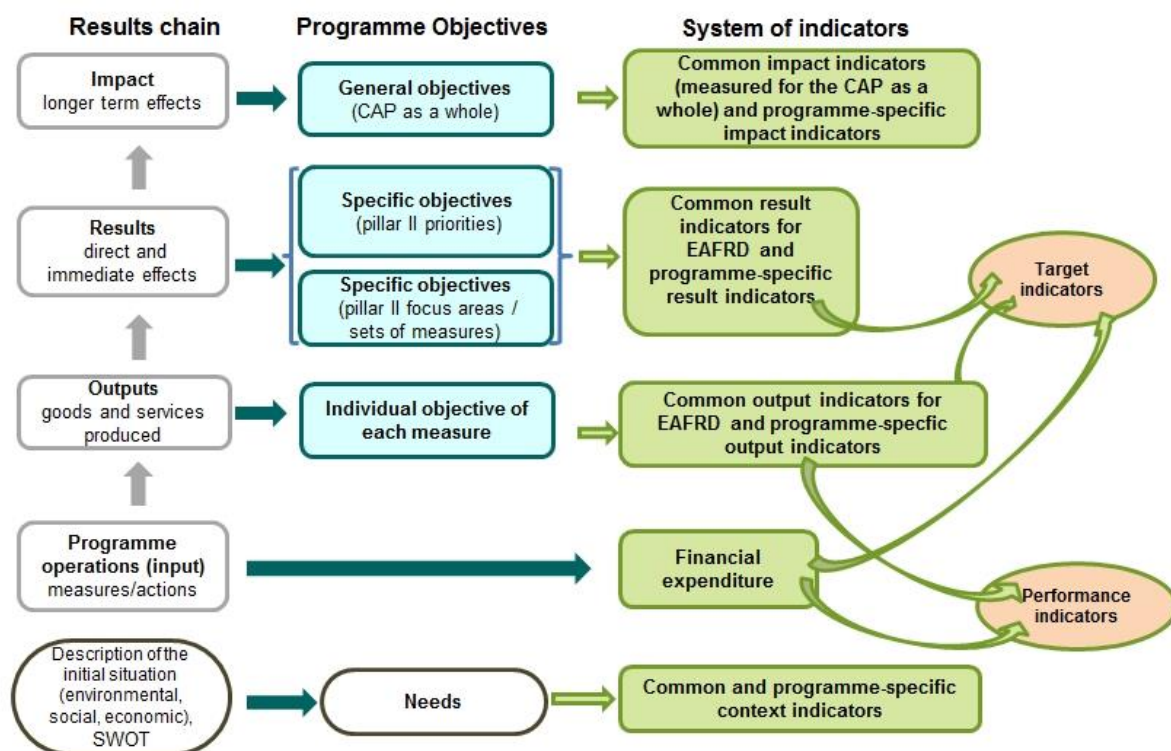
What are the proposed approaches?

As a methodological approach, we propose to subdivide the analysis into two phases:

a. Checking that all relevant indicators are included

The *ex ante* evaluator should examine if all relevant programme indicators – both common and programme-specific, are included, and associated at the right level (output and results, with target indicators used as appropriate); linked to the hierarchy of objectives and the rural development priorities and focus areas. The evaluator should check the common indicator lists to ensure that all those relevant for the priorities and focus areas included in the programme are used. This analysis should go hand in hand with the assessment of ‘Internal coherence’ (Part II: section 2.3) and of the ‘Assumptions on how the expected outputs will contribute to results’ (Part II: section 2.5). This can be illustrated by the following figure.

Figure 13 All types and levels of indicators in a nutshell.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

Following the causal chain of the intervention logic, the hierarchy of programme indicators begins with the **inputs**: financial and/or administrative resources used to generate the **outputs** of programme activities in pursuit of operational or measure-related objectives.

The subsequent **results** are the direct effects of interventions, which should contribute to the desired **impacts** which refer to the overall programme objectives and which – in a well-structured programme – have been set in accordance with previously identified needs.

If the *ex ante* assessment reveals that a specific objective, measure or operation is not linked to any common or programme-specific indicator, additional indicators should be put in place. Vice versa – if the common indicator is not linked to any objective included in the programme it is not necessary.

b. Assessing the clarity of the proposed programme indicators

The SMART-and-CLEAR⁷⁴-check helps assess the suitability of the proposed programme indicators. It will also allow for the different quality criteria of each indicator to be properly examined. This section relates particularly to programme-specific indicators, but the availability of data, and the use of the common definitions and methodology for the common indicators should also be checked.

- **S for 'specific' and R for 'realistic'**: This relates to the match between what the Managing Authorities and the evaluators want to know and what the indicator actually measures. **CLEAR** definitions help: the evaluator should assess if each indicator has a clear title as well as an unequivocal and intelligible definition. Furthermore, programme indicators should allow for a normative interpretation. There must be agreement, for example, that a change into a particular direction is a favourable or an unfavourable one. The 'R' also relates to the target values. These should reflect the changes deemed as desirable and achievable in the intervention logic (see also the following section specifically related to target setting).
- **M for 'measurable', A for 'achievable', R for 'robustness' and T for 'timely'**: Indicators should be as simple as possible (but not simpler than that), and easy to monitor. There must be a realistic possibility to quantify or assign numerical values to the proposed indicators in a cost-effective manner. The calculation methods must be clearly defined. Data sources must be identified. Evaluators should verify that they have been made publicly Available. These sources should be reliable and Robust, preferably official ones, such as Eurostat or national/regional statistical institutes, or information collected directly from programme beneficiaries. Where indicator values are collected by means of surveys, robustness demands that the sample data gathered be representative and that the results are not unduly affected by outliers.

In order to avoid possible bottlenecks or deficiencies in the system, it is recommended that the evaluator call upon previous relevant experiences.

Good and not-so-good practices

😊	😞
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses the programme indicators covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter. ↑ The evaluator examines if the programme indicators are balanced and relevant to determine the achievement of different levels programme objectives, while keeping it as simple as possible. ↑ The evaluator checks if the proposed indicators are covering the actual information need, if they are SMART and CLEAR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ The evaluator tolerates too many or too few indicators, thereby hindering reliable measurement of the achievements made. ↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluation leaves in the dark what the indicators actually indicate, how their calculation can be reproduced, and which sources should be employed to measure the indicator in future evaluations.

Legal references

- Article 8(1)(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 stipulates that the RDP shall include *an indicator plan, broken into focus areas, comprising targets referred to in point (i) of Article 8(1)©*

⁷⁴ **CLEAR**, **A**vailable and **R**obust: these three terms appear under the two bullet points.

and the planned outputs and planned expenditure of each rural development measure selected in relation to a corresponding focus area,

- Article 79 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 states that
 - 1. *a list of common indicators relating to the initial situation as well as to the financial execution, outputs, results and impact of the programme and applicable to each programme shall be specified in the monitoring and evaluation system ... to allow for aggregation of data at Union level.*
 - 2. *The common indicators shall be based on available data and linked to the structure and objectives of the rural development policy framework and shall allow assessment of the progress, efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation against objectives and targets at Union, national and programme level. The common impact indicators shall be based on available data.*
- Article 27 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on the content of programmes stating that *each priority shall set out indicators and corresponding targets expressed in qualitative or quantitative terms, in accordance with the Fund-specific rules, in order to assess progress of programme implementation aimed at achievement of objectives as the basis for monitoring, evaluation and review of performance. These shall include: (a) financial indicators relating to expenditure allocated; (b) output indicators relating to the operations supported; (c) result indicators relating to the priority concerned.*
- Article 55(3)(e) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 requires the *ex ante* evaluation to appraise *the relevance and clarity of the proposed programme indicators.*
- Quality criteria for the content and measurement of indicators are set out in Annex XI of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (*ex ante* conditionalities).

Further reading

- DG Agriculture: Technical paper for the joint Coordination Committee and Evaluation Expert Committee Workshop on the 15th of March 2012: Draft intervention logic for rural development post-2013, and possible associated indicators. Chapter IV provides the list of CAP impact indicators, chapter V the list of common RDP result indicators (including target indicators).
- DG Regio: Programming Period 2014-2020. Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy. Guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation June 2012.

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Relevance of indicator system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How relevant is the system of common and programme-specific indicators? • In how far do the proposed indicators provide the degree of disaggregation needed to incorporate a gender perspective or to adequately reflect the specificities of other communities or geographical areas?
Clarity of individual indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How clearly are the proposed common and programme-specific indicators defined? • How SMART are the proposed indicators: specific, measurable, available/achievable in a cost effective way, relevant for the programme (see above) and available in a timely manner?

3.2 The quantified target values for indicators⁷⁵

What are the key issues for this topic?

The identification of appropriate quantified targets for those indicators directly related to the achievements of the focus areas is vitally important for measuring the extent to which the original objectives of the programme are actually being met.

During programme implementation, progress towards each of the target values will be reported in the Annual Implementation Report.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The responsibility for establishing appropriate target values rests with the Managing Authority. The evaluation team should verify that these values have been effectively defined and also assess the plausibility of the estimates made in relation to the actions and budget proposed, making recommendations for modifications if deemed appropriate.

The evaluation team should assure that the sources of information used are reliable and that the methods proposed for their calculation are rigorous enough.

What are the proposed approaches?

The assessment of target values is meant to be conducted jointly with the analysis of the contribution of expected outputs to results (Part II: section 2.5), as well as to be complementary to the assessments according to Part II: section 4.2 (procedures for monitoring and data collection) which shall assure that there is an appropriate system to record, maintain, manage and report statistical information about the programme.

The first step is to verify that target values have been established by the Managing Authority for those indicators associated with all the focus areas that are included in the RDP. Subsequently, the evaluation team should produce its own set of estimates, drawing on the measures, operations and resources provisionally related to each focus area, in order to be able to assess whether these values are realistic.

The evaluator should determine if the targets are based on a computation of unit costs from previous similar or equivalent interventions supported under EAFRD programmes or other national/regional schemes, or whether they are derived from some other type of analysis (for instance, a pilot project). In certain instances, sectoral standards can be applied, for example, in the field of construction. Alternatively, participatory methods or Delphi interviews can be used to estimate the target values of these indicators.

When an intervention is completely novel, the evaluator should assess the quality of the programming authority's estimate and could suggest a timetable for the revision of targets, for instance, after the completion of the first projects.



The evaluators should not only verify whether the targets reflect the expected effects, but also look at any potentially influential external factors.

Furthermore, the evaluator should assess the plausibility of the targets indicators when compared to corresponding baselines, past experience and relevant trends. In anticipating any event which might

⁷⁵Article 55(3)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

require the revision of target values, the setting of certain checkpoints to revise current objectives might be appropriate (for instance, after the disbursement of 25% of allocated funds).

Good and not-so-good practices

	
<p>↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses the quantified target values covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.</p> <p>↑ Past experiences, specifically the values of the indicators used for monitoring and evaluation during the period from 2007 to 2013, are taken into consideration.</p> <p>↑ The evaluator verifies that methodologies applied and the assumptions made are clear and unambiguous, and constitute a sound reference base for future evaluations assessing the advancement toward the achievement of the objectives.</p>	<p>↓ The evaluator accepts numerical data for target values without verifying their source, nor how they were calculated.</p> <p>↓ The evaluator accepts any target values, how modest or how overambitious they might be.</p>

Legal references

- Article 50(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 stipulates that *annual implementation reports shall set out key information on implementation of the programme and its priorities by reference to the financial data, common and programme-specific indicators and quantified target values, including changes in result indicators where appropriate, and, beginning from the annual implementation report to be submitted in 2017, the milestones defined in the performance framework. The data transmitted shall relate to values for indicators for fully implemented operations and also for selected operations...*
- According to Article 55(3)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, the *ex ante* evaluation should appraise *whether the quantified target values are realistic, having regard to the support form EAFRD envisaged.*
- Article 8(1)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 requires a *description of the strategy which demonstrates that appropriate targets are set for each of the focus areas of the Union priorities for rural development included in the programme, based on the common indicators referred to in Article 69 and, where necessary, on programme specific indicators..., , and relevant combination of measures are selected in relation to each of the focus areas of the Union priorities for rural development included in the programme, based on a sound intervention logic of the programme supported by the ex ante evaluation.*
- relevant combinations of measures are selected in relation to each of the focus areas of the Union priorities for rural development included in the programme, based on a sound intervention logic supported by the *ex ante* evaluation
- Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 stipulates that *Member States shall ensure that the ex ante evaluator assesses the programme's targets.*

Further reading

- Guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy for the Programming Period 2014-2020 (draft), June 2012, Brussels
- Methodological Working Papers for the current programming period of the Fisheries Fund, 2007-2013:

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/eff/official_documents/eff_workingpaper_ex_ante_eval_update_d_en.pdf

- European Rural Evaluation Helpdesk (2010): Working Paper on Assessing the Impacts of the Rural Development Programmes in the Context of Multiple Intervening Factors. Brussels.
- European Rural Evaluation Helpdesk (2010): Working Paper on Capturing impacts of Leader and of measures to improve Quality of Life in rural areas. Brussels.
- European Rural Evaluation Helpdesk (2010): Working Paper on the Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes. Brussels.
- European Rural Evaluation Helpdesk (2008): Guidance Document the Application of the High Nature Value Impact Indicator 2007-2013. Brussels.

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Adequacy of quantified target values for output and result indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To which extent does the programme establish target values for the indicators for the monitoring and evaluation systems? • How coherent are the provided data? How consistent are they with the outputs and results achieved during past experiences? • How clearly are the methods defined by which the target values are calculated and the sources upon which the employed data are based? • In how far have the opinions of the most relevant agents been taken into consideration?
Adequacy of quantified target values for impact indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How coherent are the target values for impact indicators, in respect to anticipated future tendencies and changes, as well as in respect to past experiences? • In how far has the methodology chosen for obtaining impact indicators been sufficiently explained?

3.3 The suitability of milestones selected for the performance framework⁷⁶

What are the key issues for this topic?

The enhanced results-orientation of European rural development policy for the period 2014-2020 includes the introduction of an *ex post* conditionality to strengthen the focus on performance and the attainment of the Europe 2020 objectives. A proportion of the resources allocated to each programme will be withheld in a performance reserve, to be released upon achievement of defined performance milestones linked to EU2020 objectives set for the programmes included in the Partnership Agreement. A performance review⁷⁷ will be undertaken by the Commission in co-operation with the Member States following which the performance reserve will be released provided the appropriate milestones have been reached.

Consequently, a performance framework must be included in each programme in order to allow progress towards the defined milestones to be assessed. This is a new element for Rural Development Programmes.

⁷⁶Article 55(3)(k) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁷⁷ Article 21 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

Milestones are *intermediate targets*⁷⁸ for the achievement of the specific objective of a priority, expressing the intended progress towards the targets set for the end of the period⁷⁹. The evaluators should assess the suitability of the milestones selected for the performance framework⁸⁰.

For the RDPs, the intention is to define common performance milestones, linked to each priority. (Although the exact indicators to be used for the performance framework have not been defined at the time of writing, examples of the type of indicator foreseen are "commitments as % of planned expenditure" or "ratio of % planned outputs achieved to % of planned expenditure spent"). The Managing Authorities will have to propose appropriate values for each of the relevant milestones, in relation to the measures, actions and resources programmed for each priority.

The analysis of the values proposed within the RDP for the milestones is particularly important because:

- 5% of the budget of the relevant funds will be set aside and allocated, during a mid-term performance review, to the Member States whose programmes have met their milestones.
- In addition to the performance reserve, failure to achieve milestones may lead to the suspension of funds, and a serious underachievement in meeting targets for a programme may give rise to a cancellation of funds.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The evaluator must assess whether:

- the values proposed by the Managing Authority for the milestones used in the performance framework are appropriate and realistic and that
- achievement of these milestones would give a reliable indication that the programme is on track to attain its objectives.

What are the proposed approaches?

For each priority a subset of the indicators, defined in common for all RDPs, will be used as milestones within the performance framework⁸¹.

We suggest the evaluation team should conduct this analysis in conjunction with the assessment of the contribution of the RDP to the Union objectives of the EU2020 Strategy (Part II: section 2.1), of the programme's internal coherence (Part II: section 2.3), of the contribution of expected outputs to results (Part II: section 2.5), of the assessment of the indicators (Part II: section 0) and of the adequacy of the defined target values for indicators (Part II: section 3.2).

- **Step one:** The evaluator checks that quantified milestones are included for all priorities covered in the RDP. If milestones are included for priorities which are not included in the RDP, the evaluator should recommend that they be dropped.
- **Step two:** The evaluator assesses whether the values proposed for the milestones offer a realistic indication that the programme is on course to achieve its targets and overall objectives. This will require consideration of factors such as the likely rate of implementation of different measures, the lead-time necessary for some types of scheme to be launched, the lifetime of specific types of projects/schemes, the expected implementation profile of different programme elements, etc. For example, due to the selection process for LAGs, expenditure under LEADER

⁷⁸ For 2018, based on information and assessment provided by the Member States in the AIR submitted in the year 2019

⁷⁹ Annex II of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013



⁸⁰ Article 55(3)(k) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

⁸¹ Article 21 and Annex II of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

tends to be skewed towards the end of the programming period; for multiannual commitments such as agri-environment-climate, each commitment has repercussions for a number of subsequent years; LFA payments tend to be relatively constant over the programming period; some activities require "pump-priming" action from other programme components, for example training or advisory services, before they are likely to be implemented on any scale.

When undertaking the plausibility analysis, the evaluators may consider the rhythm of implementation of the programme in the current period and the available information sources for the proposed milestones.

Good and not-so-good practices

	
<p>↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses the suitability of milestones selected for the performance framework covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.</p> <p>↑ The evaluator considers the rhythm of implementation of the programme in the current period and the available information sources for the proposed.</p>	<p>↓ The evaluator tolerates that artificially low target values are included for the performance milestones.</p>

Legal references

- Article 55(k) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 requires the *ex ante* evaluator to assess *the suitability of the milestones selected for the performance framework*.
- Article 21 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on the performance review states:
 1. *The Commission, in cooperation with the Member States, shall undertake a review of the performance of the programmes in each Member State and 2019 (the 'performance review'), with reference to the performance framework set out in the respective programmes. The method for establishing the performance framework is set out in Annex I.*
 2. *The performance review shall examine the achievement of the milestones of the programmes at the level of priorities, on the basis of the information and the assessments presented in the progress reports submitted by the Member States in the year 2019.*
- Article 50 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on annual implementation reports states:
 1. *From 2016 until and including 2013, each Member State shall submit to the Commission an annual report on implementation of the programme in the previous financial year. Each Member State shall submit the Commission a final report on implementation of the programme ... by the deadline established in the Fund-specific rules*
 2. *Annual implementation reports shall set out key information on implementation of the programme and its priorities by reference to the financial data, common and programme-specific indicators and quantified target values, including changes in the value of result indicators where appropriate, and, beginning from the annual implementation report to be submitted in 2017, the milestones defined in the performance framework. The data transmitted shall relate to values for indicators for fully implemented operations and also, where possible, having regard to the stage of implementation, for selected operations. They shall also set out a synthesis of the findings of all evaluations of the programme that have become available during the previous financial year, any issues which affect the performance of the programme, and the measures taken. The annual implementation*

report to be submitted in 2016 may also set out, where relevant, actions taken to fulfil ex ante conditionalities.

- Article 125 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on functions of the Managing Authority states: *support the work of the monitoring committee referred to in Article 47 and provide it with the information it requires to carry out its tasks, in particular data relating to the progress of the operational programme in achieving its objectives, financial data and data relating to indicators and milestones.*
- Article 142 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on the suspension of payments states:
 1. *All or part of the interim payments at the level of priority axes or operational programmes may be suspended by the Commission where (f) there is evidence resulting from the performance review that there has been a serious failure in achieving that priority's milestones relating to financial and output indicators and key implementation steps set out in the performance framework subject to the conditions set out in Article 22.*
- Article 8(1)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 stipulates that the RDP shall include *-for each ex ante conditionality, established in accordance with Article 19, and part II of Annex XI to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 for the general ex ante conditionalities, and in accordance with Annex V to this Regulation, an assessment of which of the ex ante conditionalities are applicable to the programme and which of them are fulfilled at the date of submission of the Partnership Agreement and the programme. Where the applicable ex ante conditionalities are not fulfilled, the programme shall contain a description of the actions to be taken, the bodies responsible and a timetable for such actions in accordance with the summary submitted in the Partnership Agreement.*

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content or issue addressed	Suggested evaluation questions for the ex ante evaluation
Indicators selected for performance framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all the required indicators used? • Are any superfluous indicators included?
Defined milestones and targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How plausible are the defined milestones and targets? • How consistent are the defined milestones and targets with those from other CSF programmes?

4 GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS, PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

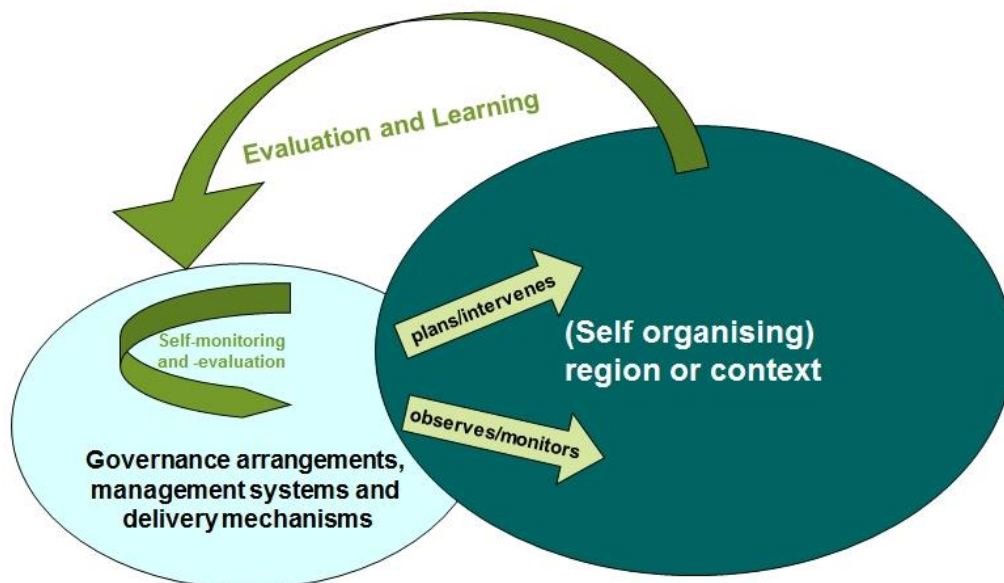
This section comprises two evaluation topics:

- the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for programme management, including the availability of sufficient advisory capacity;
- the procedures for monitoring and data collection, including the Evaluation Plan.

Put another way, this section mainly deals with the implementation, steering and learning capacity of the Managing Authority and other bodies responsible for programme implementation, and the support that is available for potential beneficiaries.

From a systemic perspective, a public intervention can be defined as the intervention of one system (called the governance system) into another system (called the socio-economic context, the region, etc.). The intervention is legitimized by a prior agreement on the changes which should be induced in response to this intervention. In our diagram, the governance system (which articulates itself as a governance arrangement straddling over several levels of scale⁸² (hence 'multi-level governance')).

Figure 14 Governance for development: a systemic view.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

Public interventions are always Janus-faced: they comprise two key functions, the **intervention in the narrow sense** (we could also call it 'development support'), and the **observations** preceding, accompanying and following this intervention.

A Rural Development Programme constitutes such a public intervention; therefore the two sections in this chapter relate to these two key functions. Interventions and observations link the 'system of (multi-level) governance' on the left side to the 'socio-economic system' encompassing the

⁸² Practically spoken, the implementation of a regional programme always involves stakeholders representing other levels of scale than that of the region (i.e. EU, national, and even sub-regional levels). Although according to the subsidiarity principle, the main share of responsibility should be owned by the representatives of the level of scale relevant to the operation in question, responsibility is always shared and not exclusive.

beneficiaries, the region and the wider context (as far as relevant) on the right side. The corresponding evaluation subjects are:

- managing and implementing the programme (Part II: sections 4.1 and 4.2);
- observing (i) programme effects (Part II: section 4.2), (ii) the evolution of the context, and (iii) the programme performance.

Evaluation and learning are what makes the system of governance 'adaptive'. For adaptive governance and management systems, it is therefore not enough to uprightly acquit themselves from the duty of programme implementation. They should define and attend various entry points for feedback and embrace the challenge of evaluation.

4.1 The adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for programme management⁸³

What are the key issues for this topic?

Without adequate resources, organisation and capacity for the management and administration of the programme its implementation will be compromised. The best strategic plan in the world is of no value if you cannot deliver it. The translation of the strategy into action will be compromised reducing the effectiveness of the intervention in both physical and financial terms. This will impact adversely on the beneficiaries, but also on those involved in the management, delivery, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the programme. Similarly unless the programme is adequately publicised its accessibility and relevance to beneficiaries may be compromised, support may not be delivered where required and targeted, performance will therefore be sub-optimal.

Adequate provision of human resources and administrative capacity for the management of the programme, including the envisioned cooperation among key institutions (such as Managing Authority, Paying Agency and Monitoring Committee) in the implementation of the programme and the monitoring of its progress is therefore an essential and integral part of the strategy for an effective RDP and should be assessed in the *ex ante* evaluation.

The requirement that the programme should demonstrate that measures have been taken to ensure the availability of sufficient advisory capacity on the regulatory requirements and actions related to innovation⁸⁴ is also linked to effective programme implementation, through ensuring that potential beneficiaries have access to appropriate advice and support to facilitate their participation in the RDP.

Extension and advisory capacities are needed to transfer knowledge and foster the seedbeds for innovation, e.g. in cooperation projects and to assure highest possible standards of environmental sustainability. Advisory capacities are not only embodied in human resources but also in the organisational capacities of the support systems to identify, and to anticipate the demand, to tap sources of cutting-edge knowledge, and to gear the intervention to where it is most likely to generate added value.

Criticisms of the links between the RDPs' design and their implementation were relatively common in the 2007–2013 RDP mid-term evaluation reports as it is in the first stages of implementation that many of the administrative and delivery deficiencies first emerge. Also the collaboration between Managing Authority and Paying Agency in securing data required for the evaluation from the monitoring system was often described as a limiting factor for conducting a robust evaluation. The *ex*

⁸³ Article 55(3)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(m) (i) and 8(1)(m) (iii) of the REGULATION (EU) NO 1305/2013 (Article 9(1)(m) (i), (iii) of the 14th June Presidency compromise.

⁸⁴ Article 8(1)(c)(iv) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

ante evaluation should seek to pre-empt any such difficulties through the appraisal of the description of the programme implementing arrangements in the RDP, and if necessary to make recommendations aimed at resolving any problems that emerge.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluator should assess the elements included in the RDP corresponding to Article 8(1)(l) and Article 8(1)(c)(vi) of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013.

If the RDP text does not provide sufficient detail on the human resources and administrative capacity to enable the evaluator to take a view on whether it is sufficient for effective programme implementation, then recommendations for reinforcement of this section should be made.

Similarly in relation to the advisory capacity, if the text does not describe the measures taken to ensure sufficient capacity, the evaluator should recommend further development of the description.

Once adequate information is available, the evaluator should assess whether the arrangements and resources described will be sufficient to support effective delivery of the programme as designed, i.e. to implement the measures, numbers of planned operations, timescale, etc. set out in the RDP.

In relation to advisory capacity, the evaluator should consider whether there will be adequate capacity to support potential beneficiaries in planning projects, preparing applications, and implementing them, in order to achieve the outcomes foreseen in the RDP.

What are the proposed approaches?

This topic is a new requirement for *ex ante* evaluations of Rural Development Programmes. It is therefore necessary to start with some fundamental considerations.

Scope

The main practical challenge in addressing capacity to implement the programme lies in the potential scope and resultant scale of the task which are not detailed in the regulations but may be expected to include human, physical, organisational and systems (e.g. IT) related resources. Clearly these, their interactions and their effects are likely to be complex and difficult to appraise.

Those elements which are RDP-specific will be subject to *ex ante* scrutiny and influence, others involving mainstream elements of organisation, management or resources may less so. An early task for the *ex ante* evaluators and the programming authorities, is therefore to define this scope and the considerations that need to be addressed.

Perspectives

On what basis should the evaluator make judgements and recommendations?

Concerning the administrative capacities, evaluators are unlikely to have the inside knowledge and awareness of the intricacies of the working arrangements within the various bodies involved and may have rather limited resources for this one task. They also need to take account of delivery staff and beneficiary perspectives as it is these 'development agents' and the 'customers' who are faced with the real administrative or delivery difficulties, but involving them in the early stages of programme development is challenging. The evaluators are therefore likely to depend on the adequacy and availability of relevant resourcing and performance benchmarks. This more limited approach may

have benefits in terms of the proportionality of the effort but in isolation will provide limited ability to predict the effects and effectiveness of the proposals.

Considering the advisory capacities, the evaluator can build on past experiences and try to juxtapose the current state of the capacities with the additional requirements for the future Rural Development Programme. The *ex ante* evaluator will then examine in how far the Managing Authority (i) has planned corrective measures in respect to gaps possibly observed in the past, and (ii) has provided investments for organisational change and enhancement of advisory capacities facing the new challenges. These investments should manifest themselves in the according use of measures under Article 15 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 ('advisory services, farm management and farm relief services'). Measures under Article 15 create or improve the conditions for the targeted and effective use of Article 14 ('knowledge transfer and innovation action'). Specific attention should be paid to the fact that advisory services as addressed under Article 15 are supposed to support agricultural as well as non-agricultural businesses in rural areas.

a. Working with programming authorities on an iterative basis

It is most important that the definition of the scope of this task is undertaken on an iterative basis with the programming authorities and their partners in order to ensure that it is both relevant and valuable.

Partnership working within the development team and between the development team and the *ex ante* evaluators will aid the process in a number of further aspects. Primarily it brings those involved in programme development and delivery together and with the benefit of an external appraisal, such early involvement would represent a significant first step towards effective planning. It provides the fundamental basis for the evaluators to assess the quality and the extent of internal and external partnership arrangements. This then has a number of further benefits for example in

- agreeing on scope, criteria and evaluation questions;
- providing a basis for mapping organisational or staff member involvement;
- agreeing on timelines and the provision of information;
- gaining the insights into operational interactions and intricacies;
- identifying and agreeing on relevant benchmarks and their sources e.g. relevant reports and data;
- enabling the essential iteration between the evaluator and the other stakeholders.

b. Delimiting the evaluative scope of this task

The main focus will be on the adequacy of the programme implementing arrangements and the associated human resources, which, for the sake of good practice, should include

- the designation by the Member State of all the authorities, their functions and responsibilities to include the Managing Authority, Paying Agency, Audit and any devolved or partner delivery arrangements;
- details on the implementation of the LEADER approach and its links with the Partnership Agreement arrangements for Community-Led Local Development;
- the description of the control systems, structural arrangements and procedures for the implementation of the programme, including human resources and administrative capacity;
- project selection procedures, criteria and guidelines;

- publicity provisions including those via the National Rural Network;
- IT systems, arrangements agreed for exchanging and managing the computerised data needed to meet the requirements of the CSF and Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 as regards payments, monitoring, reporting (and specifically including data generation from application and claims processes) and evaluation;
- the capacities of bodies providing knowledge transfer and information services for the economic and environmental performance of farms, forestry holdings and small and medium enterprises in the form of staff qualifications and regular training to carry out this task;
- the Technical Assistance provisions foreseen including the role of the National Rural Network⁸⁵.

c. The considerations that need to be addressed

In appraising these aspects it will be necessary for the evaluators to consider their adequacy in terms of both their qualitative and quantitative dimensions. The key challenge for the *ex ante* evaluator is therefore to identify, define and to ask the right appraisal criteria and questions. These are likely to relate to:

- the gross commitment of human and financial resources;
- evidence of any analysis of resource provision, capability, requirements and needs;
- the extent of coverage of and way in which delivery, monitoring and reporting systems or procedures and mechanisms are structured and organised;
- the appropriateness of the bodies and types of staff involved and the nature and extent of their involvement including the potential for complementarity or contradiction to other activities;
- the interactions of the various elements and the identification and avoidance of potential bottlenecks;
- the challenges posed by the overlapping of programming periods, i.e. during the first two years (when the previous period is still active) and during the last two years of a period (when the next period is already under preparation);
- the approach to internal and external communications and publicity;
- plans to develop or build capacity;
- the ways how knowledge and quality management are addressed; and
- the extent of organisational continuity.

The scope and these considerations need to be addressed in the context of the diversity of different support mechanisms and organisations involved in the delivery, management and administration of the RDP, the way in which the RDP is structured e.g. regarding the packaging of measures and the various types of stakeholder and beneficiary involvement targeted. The proportionality of the effort applied to this task is therefore a clear challenge here.

d. Analysis tools

The *ex ante* evaluator should get the programming authorities to outline the need for human resources from the onset to the closure be set out sufficiently clearly in the programme, considering staff number and capacities, etc.

⁸⁵ Also see Part II: section 5.4

Evaluators may find it useful to draw on previous experience, such as the resources used for implementing the current programme, or other EU or national programmes (e.g, under the Cohesion Fund), or comparisons with other Member States and/or regions.

The evaluator should contribute to the improvement of the proposals either by providing feedback to those involved in programme development or through the provision of guidance, methods or tools, for example

- carrying out, specifying or giving guidance on various targeted analyses e.g.
 - ▶ systems analysis, e.g. incorporating feedback and advice based on the review of previous evaluations;
 - ▶ bottleneck analysis leading to the identification of what and where these might be e.g. in systems, resources, processes and their avoidance;
 - ▶ undertaking a structured risk assessment;
- the development of checklists and other practical tools.



The objective of these, whether undertaken by the evaluator or the programming authorities, is to provide early warning of possible difficulties and recommendations for preventive actions.

e. Specific issues in relation to advisory capacity



The evaluator should expect to find a description of current capacity, and any measures proposed to increase it. This should be assessed in the light of expert knowledge, and the apparent needs within the programme for support, linked to the types of operations proposed (complex operations, such as biogas or sophisticated agri-environment schemes, are likely to require more external support than simple operations such as machinery purchase).

The SWOT analysis and needs assessment may contain additional valuable information on the current state of advisory provision. If any particular weaknesses or threats have been identified, then the evaluator should check that proposals are made to address these. The intervention logic of the RDP, and in particular the support available for reinforcement and use of advisory services and training (including training the trainers) should be coherent with the needs identified, and the capacity required to support effective programme implementation.

Good and not-so-good practices

	
<p>↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for programme management⁸⁶ including the availability of sufficient advisory capacity covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.</p> <p>↑ Evaluators and the programming authorities reach a clear agreement regarding the scope of this evaluation task and work on an iterative basis.</p>	<p>↓ Underestimate the potential scale and importance of this task; approach this as an open ended task.</p> <p>↓ Rely only on a single evidence source e.g. what is specified in the draft RDP, without triangulation between sources.</p> <p>↓ Only compare the measures planned under Article 16 with the provisions offered in the current period, and forget about existing gaps or future needs.</p> <p>↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator does not ensure that</p>

⁸⁶Article 55(3)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(m) (i) and 8(1)(m)(iii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

	
<p>↑ The evaluator assures that the implementation arrangements are adequately described, mapping the types of support and organisational interactions which are proposed.</p> <p>↑ The evaluator ensures that practical and relevant benchmarks are identified for comparison purposes, and that previous evaluation evidence is used where relevant.</p> <p>↑ The evaluator assesses the ways and means the Managing Authority has chosen to respond to gaps assessed in the past and to the requirements of the future RDP, particularly in respect to innovation, environmental sustainability and climate action, and to the widening of the scope of beneficiaries to rural SMEs.</p>	<p>during the planning of human and administrative resources, critical events and periods are duly taken into account (e.g. programme start and end, overlap of programmes, etc.).</p>

Legal references

- Article 55(3)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 stipulates that *ex ante evaluations shall appraise...the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for the management of the programme.*
- Article 8(1)(m)(i), (iii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 specify these structures and arrangements as an essential part of the content of an RDP; as such they are necessarily subject to *ex ante* evaluation. This refers to:
 - the designation by the Member State of all programme authorities referred to in Article 65(2) and, for information, a summary description of the management and control system; and
 - the provisions to ensure that the programme is publicised including through the National Rural Network referred to in Article 54.
- Article 8(1)(c)(vi) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 requires the RDP to demonstrate that measures have been taken to ensure the availability of sufficient advisory capacity on the regulatory requirements and on aspects related to innovation;

Further reading

- European Commission: Staff Working Document: The partnership principle in the implementation of the Common Strategic Framework Funds - Elements for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership. Brussels, 24 April 2012.
- European Commission: Staff Working Document: Impact Assessment of the CAP 2020, Annex 7: Research and Innovation. SEC(2011) 1153 final/2, Brussels, 20.10.2011
- European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies: How to Improve the Sustainable Competitiveness and Innovation of the EU Agricultural Sector. Study produced by the Policy Department B – Structural and Cohesion Policies/Agriculture. Bruxelles 2012.

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
The designation by the Member State of all authorities and summary description of the management and control system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How comprehensive is the description of the management and control system, and how are the requirements of types of support described?
The adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for the management of the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are the proposed levels of human resources and administrative capacities proportionate to the needs of programme management and delivery? To what extent are the skills and capabilities present within the human resources and administrative capacities relevant to the specific needs of programme management and delivery?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have capacity development needs been adequately identified? To what extent are appropriate solutions proposed under the Technical Assistance provisions?
The provisions to ensure that the programme is publicised including through the National Rural Network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are the provisions for RDP publicity appropriate in terms of the relevance of the proposed communication methods or vehicles, their scale and resourcing?
The provisions for advisory capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the projected advisory capacity correspond to the perceived needs?

4.2 The procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan⁸⁷

What are the key issues for this topic?

Rural Development Programmes are subject to monitoring in order to regularly follow the implementation and progress towards the established targets. Demonstrating and improving the effectiveness of the policy depends on appropriate monitoring and evaluation devices. Therefore, each Rural Development Programme shall include an analysis of needs relating to monitoring and evaluation and a description of the monitoring system and data collection methods, as well as an Evaluation Plan (EP) which is a new element in the EAFRD, and for which the minimum contents will be specified in an implementing act.

The monitoring and evaluation system should deliver topical information on the progress and achievements of rural development policy, and assess impact, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of rural development policy interventions. To achieve these goals, key information on the implementation has to be recorded, maintained, and aggregated in respect of a wide range of information demands. A list of common and programme-specific indicators, relating to the initial situation as well as to the financial execution, outputs, results and impacts of the programme will be specified in the monitoring and evaluation system. Member States shall organise the production and gathering of the requisite data and supply the various pieces of information provided by the monitoring system to the evaluators. To this end, individual beneficiaries and LAGs shall provide to the Managing Authority and/or to appointed evaluators or other bodies delegated, all the information necessary to permit monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

⁸⁷Article 55(3)(j) and 56(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(m)(ii) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluator is required to assess the suitability of procedures for monitoring the programme, and for collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluations, as well as the content of the Evaluation Plan, and to assess whether adequate resources are allocated to address the identified needs.

The *ex ante* evaluation should ensure that there is an appropriate system to record, maintain, manage and report the statistical information on the programme and its implementation required for the purposes of monitoring, in particular, information necessary to monitor progress towards the defined objectives and priorities. Moreover, the *ex ante* evaluator has to ensure that procedures and data collection are adequate to gather and maintain key information necessary for the evaluation activities (e.g. common and programme-specific indicators) according to the Evaluation Plan. Finally the *ex ante* evaluator should assess the completeness of the Evaluation Plan and, as necessary, provide suggestions to improve its quality.

This will require:

- ensuring the adequacy and completeness of data for monitoring and evaluation along the whole programme cycle;
- making sure that the monitoring system is reliable, effectively manageable, compatible with other monitoring systems at national level (e.g. for Cohesion Funds, CAP Pillar 1) and the EU data processing systems, and flexible enough to respond to varied information demands (not all of them known at the time of *ex ante* evaluation);
- ensuring that the Evaluation Plan conforms to the minimum requirements and is precise and comprehensive enough to set out the evaluation activities and to provide a basis to ensure that the monitoring system will collect appropriate data, and sufficiently flexible for adjusting the needs for information gathering, surveys and case studies which may arise at a later point in time;
- assessing whether the resources allocated are sufficient to respond to the identified needs and proposed activities;
- assessing the links with monitoring and evaluation activities of other funds to check external coherence.

What are the proposed approaches?

We present three main tasks the *ex ante* evaluators are facing when assessing the data collection devices and methods, the monitoring system, the Evaluation Plan, and assessment of adequate resources.

a. Assess the data needs and help filling gaps

The first step *ex ante* evaluation faces is to assess the data needs, and matching it with the information supposed to be made available by the monitoring system.

The evaluators should help the Managing Authority in assessing data needs for preparing the monitoring reports and for conducting the evaluation activities throughout the programme cycle⁸⁸.

☞ The question here is: Which data required to carry out evaluations are collected in the monitoring system?

⁸⁸ According to Article 67 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

The aim is to identify so-called ‘key information’ *on the implementation of the programme, on each operation selected for funding, as well as on completed operations, needed for monitoring and evaluation, including the key characteristics of the beneficiary and the project*⁸⁹.

The concept of key information is framed by

- the complete list of European common indicators;
- the list of programme-specific indicators including those relevant for thematic sub-programmes;
- the annual implementation report (AIR) including the monitoring tables⁹⁰, the enhanced requirements for the AIRs 2017 and 2019, which require input from evaluations, and the requirements of the performance framework;⁹¹
- the Evaluation Plan⁹².

In addition, the monitoring and reporting requirements of the CSF funds⁹³ have to be met.

Based on the inventory the evaluator will be able to review and, as the circumstances require, adjust the ‘data needs’ indicating the content and source of the information required.

b. Assess and improve the monitoring system

☞ For the second step, the guiding question is: Is the monitoring system suitable?

To estimate possible bottlenecks in the system and recommend preventive measures, the evaluator should bring in the experience gained from previous evaluations.

These bottlenecks could concern the capacity of human resources involved in monitoring, the interactions between the different functions, and the IT systems used for storing and transferring data. They could also concern the managing capabilities and skills of the intermediate bodies, the LAGs, or the beneficiaries. The application forms and reporting templates will need to address the outputs, results and impacts envisaged along the results chain, so that the right data is collected. Past evaluations have shown that often the necessary data has not been collected and/or is often stored in inappropriate or incomplete IT systems, or without the needed reporting software, lacking interfaces with other management systems.

The *ex ante* evaluation should therefore verify that procedures are in place to ensure the robustness of the data. To this end, the evaluator should assess the reliability of the information sources and the methods of data collection (e.g. application forms, surveys of representative samples of beneficiaries, etc.). The evaluator should also examine whether monitoring procedures are likely to ensure the timely collection of the data, having in mind the activities described in the Evaluation Plan.

It is important to ensure proportionate monitoring requirements and to simplify management arrangements at all levels. In order to decrease the administrative burden on beneficiaries, the evaluator should verify whether existing institutional databases have been taken into account to the possible extent, and whether data is being used and managed in a streamlined fashion to avoid it being collected twice.

⁸⁹ Article 84 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

⁹⁰ Article 82(1) and (2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁹¹ Article 82(3) and (4) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁹² Article 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

⁹³ Title VIII of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Finally, the evaluator should ensure that the procedures for monitoring and data collection be aligned with the annual implementation report (AIR) tables and that data is available to all those who need it, for example the Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee: *The Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee shall carry out monitoring of each Rural Development Programme by means of financial, output and target indicators*⁹⁴. It could be useful to share the databases/reporting with other subjects such as the delegated bodies, LAGs, the Paying Agency, the farmers' associations, and the national statistics institute.

c. Assess the Evaluation Plan

☞ For this third step, the guiding question is: Is the Evaluation Plan adequate, in terms of completeness, usability and integration with other information processing activities?

Relating to completeness, the *ex ante* evaluation should assess to which extent the minimum requirements of the EP have been taken into account and developed, and whether they are coherent and appropriate with the needs of the RDP:

- objectives and purpose of the Evaluation Plan;
- governance issues (existence of a steering body; coordination with RDP implementation; management of evaluation under the premises of simplification and flexibility; activation of organisational structures such as the evaluation unit and a Steering Group; quality assurance of evaluations, etc.);
- evaluation topics and activities (according to priorities and focus areas; thematic sub-programmes; cross-cutting issues such as equal opportunities, non-discrimination, sustainable development; areas of specific evaluation needs and interests, etc.);
- data and information (data collection linked to objectives and indicators; IT systems; interfaces with monitoring data and other systems, etc.)
- timeline (according to milestones) and schedule for evaluation activities;
- evaluation approach (outlining the types of approaches proposed for different activities, e.g. surveys, sampling, stakeholder interviews, modelling, Focus Groups);
- coordination (links to other evaluations, Pillar 1, CSF funds, research studies, etc.);
- specific requirements of LEADER (e.g. support for evaluation at the level of LAGs);
- communication (communication strategy; focus and targets, use of evaluation results);
- resources (dedicated budget and resources).

The evaluator should consider whether the topics covered in the EP match with the information needs of the Managing Authority and the EU. The *ex ante* evaluation should also analyse whether it covers the governance process sufficiently, taking into account the involvement of stakeholders, the management, quality assurance, the communication policy, the resources made available and the intended use of evaluation results. Particular attention should be paid to whether the resources allocated will be sufficient to cover the proposed activities and to generate the outputs foreseen.

⁹⁴ Article 72(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

d. Cross-coordination with other observation activities

In close connection with the assessment of external coherence (Part II: section 2.2) we suggest assessing the links with the monitoring, reporting (AIR) and evaluation systems of other CSF funds, and reporting under CAP Pillar 1. The evaluator should check the possibility to conduct common surveys and evaluations across funds. This could for example prove to be very salutary for CLLD/LEADER, or for environmental or territorial impacts of the policy.

Good and not-so-good practices

😊	😞
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses the procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter. ↑ The evaluator lists the information needs, deriving from the objectives hierarchy and the according indicators framework (programme and sub-programmes), the monitoring tables, and the Evaluation Plan. ↑ The possible bottlenecks are appraised on the basis of previous experiences. ↑ The monitoring system design and its user friendliness are assessed. ↑ The evaluator ensures that the application forms are appropriate for collecting the required data and actually entering the monitoring system. ↑ The evaluator makes sure that all concerned parties, particularly the Monitoring Committee, are involved in the assessment, and that the beneficiaries and LAGs are informed and enabled to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator states that it is too early to examine the monitoring system but is confident that it will work when RDP implementation is in full swing. ↓ The evaluator believes that data gathering and updating happens automatically. ↓ The evaluator trusts in the fact that the monitoring will deliver the necessary information for evaluation purposes without cross-checking with the Evaluation Plan.

Legal references

- Article 8 of the states that each Rural Development Programme shall include:
 - (g) the Evaluation Plan referred to in Article 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The Member States shall provide sufficient resources to address the needs which have been identified and to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation;
 - (m) programme implementing arrangements including: (ii) a description of the monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- Article 66(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 states: *The Managing Authority shall be responsible for managing and implementing the programme in an efficient, effective and correct way and in particular for:*

- *(a) ensuring that there is an appropriate secure electronic system to record, maintain, manage and report statistical information on the programme and its implementation required for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation and, in particular, information required to monitor progress towards the defined objectives and priorities;*
- *(g) drawing up the annual progress report, including aggregate monitoring tables, and, after approval by the Monitoring Committee, submitting it to the Commission.*
- *Article 70 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 states: Key information on the implementation of the programme, on each operation selected for funding, as well as on completed operations, needed for monitoring and evaluation, including the key characteristics of the beneficiary and the project, shall be recorded and maintained electronically.*
- *Article 71 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 states: Beneficiaries of support under rural development measures and Local Action Groups shall undertake to provide to the Managing Authority and/or to appointed evaluators or other bodies delegated to perform functions on its behalf, all the information necessary to permit monitoring and evaluation of the programme, in particular in relation to meeting specified objectives and priorities.*
- *Article 76(2) of Regulation E(U) No 1305/2013 states: Member States shall ensure that the evaluations are in accordance with the common evaluation approach agreed in accordance with Article 67, shall organise the production and gathering of the requisite data, and shall supply the various pieces of information provided by the monitoring system to the evaluators.*
- *In view of ensuring the reliability of data and the quality of the analysis provided, the ex ante evaluation should assess the suitability of the procedures for monitoring the programme and collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluations (Article 55(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013).*
- *Article 33(f) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (local development strategies) says: a description of the management and monitoring arrangements of the strategy, demonstrating the capacity of the Local Action Group to implement the strategy and a description of specific arrangements for evaluation.*
- *Article 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 indicates:*
 - *1. An Evaluation Plan shall be drawn up by the Managing Authority for each programme and may cover more than one programme. It shall be submitted in accordance with the Fund-specific rules.*
 - *3. During the programming period, Managing Authority shall carry out evaluations, including evaluations to assess effectiveness, efficiency and impact, for each programme on the basis of the Evaluation Plan and that each evaluation is subject to appropriate follow-up in accordance with the Fund-specific rules. At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the ESI Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority. .*
- *Article 110 of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013⁹⁵ stipulates that a common monitoring and evaluation framework shall be established with a view to measuring the performance of the Common Agricultural Policy. It shall include all instruments related to the monitoring and evaluation of Common Agricultural Policy measures and in particular of the direct payments ..., the market measures ..., the rural development measures ... and of for the provisions of this*

⁹⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 352/78, (EC) No 165/94, (EC) No 2799/98, (EC) No 814/2000, (EC) No 1290/2005 and (EC) No 485/2008

Regulation. This common monitoring and evaluation framework (CMEF) will be set out in a delegated act by the Commission. This implementing act on the CMEF is also announced in Article 67 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

Further reading

- DG REGIO: Guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation. Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy for the Programming Period 2014-2020 (draft). 15 March 2012, Brussels.
- European Evaluation Helpdesk: Guidelines on the Establishing and implementing the evaluation plan of 2014-2020 RDPs at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/library/evaluation-helpdesk-publications/en/evaluation-helpdesk-publications_en.cfm

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Assess and improve the data needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far is the design of the monitoring system based on a thorough analysis of the data needs? • To what extent is the <i>ex ante</i> evaluator involved in the design of the monitoring system? • To what extent is the 'key information' properly described and are its sources identified? • To which extent can the monitoring data be used for carrying out evaluations and in how far have other institutional databases been tapped or integrated as possible sources?
Assess and improve the monitoring system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far have the lessons from previous evaluations been properly taken into account to estimate possible bottlenecks in the system? • How functional are the tools for data collection, storing and processing and which needs for change are there? • How useful is the key information collected (in terms of timeliness, relevance, analytical value, etc.)? • To which extent and in which way will the application forms and project reports be used for gathering data at operational level? • In how far have the intermediate bodies, the Paying Agency, the LAGs been actively involved in the setup and how has their capacity and that of other beneficiaries been developed to make proper use of the monitoring system?
Assess the Evaluation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How adequate is the Evaluation Plan in terms of completeness, usability and integration with other activities linked to other information processing activities? • In how far is the EP and/or other specific guidance documents clear enough in the text and in the capacity to provide practical guidance? • To which extent do the prioritized topics and activities match the specific information needs of the Managing Authority?
External coherence of monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To which extent are there links with other ESI Fund evaluations and monitoring reports (e.g. AIR)?

5 HORIZONTAL AND SPECIFIC THEMES

5.1 Equal opportunities between men and women and non-discrimination⁹⁶

What are the key issues for this topic?

In order to promote economic, territorial and social cohesion, the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) establishes that the Union should not only seek to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women, but in general actively combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The inclusion of groups at risk of discrimination into the design and implementation of the RDP will widen both the scope of interventions and basis of support for the programme. The broader the support for the programme the better the prospects will be for a successful implementation.

These principles should be taken into account throughout the programme design, and it is the function of the *ex ante* evaluation to guarantee that this has actually been the case.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

The evaluation team will have to

- analyse the programming process and assess the extent to which the objectives of promoting equality and non-discrimination, particularly access to persons with disabilities, have been taken into account during programme preparation;
- assess the programming documents, verifying that the principles have been properly integrated into the various sub-sections pertaining to the programme;
- assess the expected contribution of the programme in respect of the promotion of equality between men and women and to non-discrimination.

What are the proposed approaches?

In response to the aforementioned tasks it is proposed that the analysis be subdivided into two phases:

- in the first phase the *ex ante* evaluator should assess how these principles have been integrated into the programme document, examine the quality of the preparatory work done and of the analysis on which the proposed solutions are based;
- the second phase should consist of an analysis of the expected results as well as of the anticipated contribution of the programme to fulfill the principles stated above.

a. The integration of the principles of equality of opportunities and non-discrimination in the programming process

Based on the documents generated during the programming process (i.e. the draft programme and additional documents such as meeting minutes) the evaluation team shall explore the following aspects:

Phase of process	Analysis to carry out
Stakeholder consultations	Verify the participation of associations and/or organisations linked to the promotion of equality of opportunities and to the principle of non-discrimination.

⁹⁶Article 7 and 55(3)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Phase of process	Analysis to carry out
SWOT analysis and needs assessment	<p>Verify whether the situation prior to the intervention has been adequately analysed in terms of gender equality and non-discrimination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the principal difficulties and needs of the particular social sectors been specified during the diagnosis? • Have specific needs and/or demands been included in the SWOT analysis and needs assessment? <p>It is useful to analyse the distribution of beneficiaries during the RDP period 2007-2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On which part of the society was the programme focused? • Who are the main beneficiaries of funding? • Who was left out but should have been included?
Formulation of objectives and targets	Examine if the programme contains specific objectives in line with the equality and non-discrimination principles.
Operational planning	<p>Examine if there are specific actions incorporating these principles, as well as their level of priority. The assessment should be based on their budgetary weight, and the forms of support chosen.</p> <p>Examine if operations having an effect on particular groups or geared specifically toward them are prioritised.</p>
Monitoring and evaluation	Verify that the RDP's monitoring and Evaluation Plan anticipates a measurement of the degree to which the horizontal objective will have been fulfilled; also verify the presence of indicators that may provide information about the impact of the programme on the equality of opportunities between women and men as well as on non-discrimination in both the near- and long-term.

Finally, the evaluator should verify that the programme be devoid of sexist language, stereotypical ideas and images.


b. The expected contribution of the programme to equality of opportunities and non-discrimination

Next, the evaluation team should consider the expected outcomes in respect of these principles:


Analysis from equal-opportunities and non-discrimination perspective	Content of analyses
Relevance of objectives	Determine the extent to which the objectives meet the needs in terms of equality of opportunities and concerning the principle of non-discrimination. In case the evaluation team finds the contextual analysis undertaken from this perspective insufficient, it is recommended that it be completed.
Internal coherence	In case there are various objectives directed toward this end, their degree of coherence should be determined. Verify both the existence of synergies, and the absence of contradictions or other points of conflict. Analyse if activities and/or actions have been developed that correspond to the established objectives.
External coherence	Assess whether the objectives are consistent with those set forth in other plans or strategies related to this field. Determine if the activities directed toward the achievement of the programme objectives are coherent with those established for other European, national or regional interventions.

Analysis from equal-opportunities and non-discrimination perspective	Content of analyses
Expected results and impacts sought for	<p>Verify whether specific goals have been set in pursuance of the stated objectives.</p> <p>Assess the expected results, including any possible impacts which might arise in this area. Assess the expected results by kind of beneficiaries (by sex, and attending to different groups at risk of discrimination).</p>

Good and not-so-good practices



- ↑ The *ex ante* evaluator assesses the RDPs provision for equal opportunities covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.
- ↑ The evaluator analyses the programming process and assesses the extent to which the objectives of promoting equality and non-discrimination have been taken into account during programme preparation.
- ↑ The evaluator assesses the programming documents, verifies that the principles have been properly integrated into the various sub-sections pertaining to the programme and evaluates the expected contribution of the programme to promote equality between men and women and to counteract discrimination.



- ↓ The *ex ante* evaluator carries out only a superficial check on political correctness, i.e. the mentioning of the horizontal objectives in the text without plausible links to concrete considerations and activities.

Legal references

- Article 55(l-m) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 requires the *ex ante* evaluator to assess *the adequacy of planned measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women, to prevent discrimination and to promote sustainable development, in particular as regards accessibility for persons with disabilities.*
- Article 7 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 outlines the content of the horizontal principles.
- Article 66(1)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 requiring the Managing Authority to ensure *publicity for the programme, including through the National Rural Network, by informing potential beneficiaries, professional organisations, the economic and social partners, bodies involved in promoting equality between men and women, and the non-governmental organisations concerned, including environmental organisations, or the possibilities offered by the programme and the rules for gaining access to programme funding as well as by informing beneficiaries of the Union contribution and the general public on the role played by the Union in the programme.*

Further reading:

- Evalsed:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/evalsed/sourcebooks/method_techniques/conducting_impact_assessments/gender/index_en.htm
- Commission Staff Working Document: Elements for a Common Strategic Framework 2014 to 2020. Part II, chapter 9: Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty p.30-34).
- Commission Staff Working Document on ‘The Partnership Principle in the Implementation of the Common Strategic Framework – Elements for a European Code of Conduct on Partnerships’. 25 April 2012, Brussels. The SWD contains a number of good practices from Member States. Point 2.3 (p.8).

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Programme design: stakeholder involvement and consideration of equality and non-discrimination issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which steps were taken to associate relevant stakeholders in the identification of challenges/needs, definition of objectives, decision on the allocation of resources and the selection of actions to be supported? • How are the gender perspective and non-discrimination addressed in the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment?
Contribution of the programme to the equality of opportunities and non-discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent does the programme strategy address the particular needs of groups at risk of discrimination? • Which arrangements are foreseen to provide enhanced support toward equal opportunities and social inclusion?

5.2 Sustainable development⁹⁷

What are the key issues for this topic?

‘Sustainable growth’ is one of the three main goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, addressing the global issues: energy and resource scarcity, environmental quality, climate change, the health of people and ecosystems.

In contrast to a wider framing of the term used in the global discourse⁹⁸, ‘sustainable development’ is, in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy, focused on the concept of environmental sustainability, including both the resource side and ecosystem services: quality of air, soil, water, food, biodiversity, health of plants, animals and people and impact on climate, as well as life quality and amenities in rural areas⁹⁹.

In respect of monitoring and evaluation, sustainable development *requires compliance with the environmental acquis*¹⁰⁰. At least 25% of EAFRD funding should be allocated to climate change related objectives.

⁹⁷ Article 55(3)(m) REGULATION (EU) NO 1303/2013, and Article 8(1)(c)(v) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

⁹⁸ Addressing the three domains of environmental, economic and socio-political sustainability:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development

⁹⁹ Ecosystem services are defined in the Commission Staff Working Paper on Impact Assessment of CAP2020: SEC(2011) 1153 final/2 from October 20th, 2011 (p. 30).

¹⁰⁰ Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2012) 61 final from 14/3/2012, Part 1, p.11.

The central challenge to the sustainability appraisal is the way how it relates to the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The *ex ante* evaluation must assess the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development. This does not only cover the specific actions proposed for support in relation to individual focus areas, but addresses the whole balance of the programme, and aspects such as the availability of sufficient advisory capacity related to sustainable management of the agricultural and forestry sectors and climate action.

What are the proposed approaches?

In order to avoid unnecessary redundancies, the assessment of sustainable development should be effectively coupled with the SEA already at the level of evaluation contracts or as a binding requirement in the Terms of Reference of both *ex ante* evaluation and SEA.



The *ex ante* evaluation should ensure that the baselines for the stipulated indicators have been assessed and targets been set for the relevant indicators under priorities 4 (ecosystems) and 5 (resources) of the RDP. It should also ensure that these issues are paid due attention during the stakeholder consultations. This implies the presence of significant representatives of public institutions and civil society organisations capable to provide the relevant expertise.

The balance of the programme, and the level of resources dedicated to sustainable activity should be considered in relation to the SWOT and needs assessment. This implies close links between this part of the *ex ante* and the assessment of the overall strategy, intervention logic and coherence (Part II: Chapter 1).

We recommend orchestrating the implementation of the SEA in close connection to the *ex ante* evaluation so that the consultation processes required for the SEA can be, as far as possible, aligned with the stakeholder consultations for RDP programming (from the SWOT analysis and the need assessment to the goals/targets setting and further on to the planning of measures/actions). Thematic sub-programmes should be assessed in separate sections.

The *ex ante* evaluator should consider the existing capacity of advisory services, and whether reinforcement is needed in order to provide sufficient support in relation to sustainable development. This is closely linked to the analysis referred to in Part II: Chapter 1 and the guidance there is also relevant.

Good and not-so-good practices

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses the procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter.↑ The assessment of sustainability is possibly covered by the evaluator entrusted with the SEA, interfaces with the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation are clear and effective.↑ The consultation processes are	<ul style="list-style-type: none">↓ Programming authorities and/or evaluators avoid any interlinkages between <i>ex ante</i> evaluation and SEA, and let the <i>ex ante</i> evaluator conduct a full-fledged assessment of the RDP in respect to sustainable development.

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<p>structured in a way that the public consultations during the three main stages of RDP programming (SWOT/objectives, setting/action planning) be aligned, as far as possible, with the consultation processes required for the SEA.</p>	

Legal references

- According to Article 55(m) of Regulation EU (No) 1303/2013, *Ex ante* evaluations shall appraise *the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development*. Sustainable development represents the second of the three goals of the EU Strategy2020 („smart, sustainable and inclusive growth“)¹⁰¹and accordingly coincides with the second goal of the CAP2020¹⁰² *to support farming communities that provide the European citizens with quality, value and diversity of food produced sustainably, in line with our environmental, water, animal health and welfare, plant health and public health requirements. The active management of natural resources by farming is one important tool to maintain the rural landscape, to combat biodiversity loss and contributes to mitigate and to adapt to climate change. This is an essential basis for dynamic territories and long term economic viability.*
- Moreover, all CSF priorities shall contribute to the cross-cutting objectives of *innovation, environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation*. Hence, the overarching importance of environmental issues and climate change mitigation and adaptation should be taken into account during the SWOT and RDP strategy building.¹⁰³
- The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020¹⁰⁴ sets out a number of focused actions, e.g. nr. 8-10 related to agriculture and forestry. The related targets should be considered for RD programming.
- The polluter pays principle set out in Article 192 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU implies that funding should not be used to meet the costs of complying with existing legislation. Support from EAFRD can be provided to land managers where mandatory environmental requirements create area-specific disadvantages. Investments made with the support of the CSF Funds should be resilient to the impact of climate change and natural disasters (increased risks of flooding, heat waves, extreme weather events, etc.).

Further reading

- Agricultural and Rural Convention/ARC (2011): A Communication from Civil Society to the European Union Institutions on the future Agricultural and Rural Policy.
<http://www.arc2020.eu/front/communication>

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
The adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the measures directly addressing the sustainability goal (priorities 4 and 5) fit into the intervention logic? • Which indirect effects on environmental

¹⁰¹ Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/priorities/sustainable-growth/index_en.htm

¹⁰² Meeting the food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future. COM (2010) 672 final from 18/11/2010.

¹⁰³ Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

¹⁰⁴ Communication from the Commission: Our life insurance: The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020. COM(2011) 244 final from May 3rd, 2011.

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
	sustainability have to be expected by the planned measures and by interactions between measures?

5.3 Community-led local development (LEADER)¹⁰⁵

What are the key issues for this topic?

Since its experimental beginnings in 1991, the LEADER Community Initiative has evolved into a policy approach which nowadays plays a pivotal role in rural development at local level. Mainstreamed since 2007 as a compulsory component of Rural Development Programmes, with a minimum funding threshold of 5%, it will continue to play this role with a sharpened focus on methodological and process-related quality criteria. This enhanced emphasis on the LEADER method¹⁰⁶ in the EAFRD goes hand in hand with its integration into the Common Strategic Framework under the denomination Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). CLLD, will be eligible under the other CSF funds only on an optional basis¹⁰⁷, in contrast to the EAFRD which continues to offer this approach under the name LEADER and maintains the 5% threshold of minimum funding.¹⁰⁸

The scaling-up of CLLD as a method of intervention and a mechanism for Cohesion Policy delivery poses new challenges concerning the cross-coordinating of the CSF funds. Wherever CLLD will be applied under ERDF, ESF or EMFF programmes, it will be required to establish joint committees and mechanisms for coordinating *capacity-building, selection, approval and funding of local development strategies and local development groups*¹⁰⁹.

For the coming period, key new issues for LEADER (CLLD) will be:

- the horizontal connection with other CSF funds which will have to be outlined in a specific section in the Partnership Agreement.¹¹⁰ For implementing CLLD, there will be a joint selection committee¹¹¹ involving representatives of the funds involved. Where lead funds are designated for each types of territory in which LAGs are supposed to operate, the lead fund will cover the LAG management and animation costs. Moreover, the contribution of each fund to the actions envisaged by the LAGs, which may concern one or more RD priorities, have to be settled. Finally, monitoring has to be harmonized through common arrangements;
- the vertical relationships between the Managing Authority, the joint selection committee, (possibly) intermediary bodies and the rural territories. They concern the criteria and mechanisms used for the selection of Local Action Groups, the monitoring of outputs and results and the evaluation of impacts of actions carried out under LEADER.

What must be covered in the ex ante evaluation?

Leader is an approach incorporated within the RDPs, and as such the requirements for the *ex ante* evaluation in relation to LEADER are essentially covered through elements of the *ex ante* which have already been described: the SWOT analysis and needs assessment, internal and external coherence, consistency of objectives, outputs and expected results etc.

¹⁰⁵ Article 8(1)(m)(iv) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

¹⁰⁶ The LEADER method is defined as the combined application of the following operational principles: area-based approach, bottom-up approach, local partnership with decision-making rights, multi-sectoral integration, innovation, co-operation, networking,

¹⁰⁷ Article 32(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

¹⁰⁸ Article 59(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

¹⁰⁹ Article 32(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

¹¹⁰ Article 2(a)(i) of Regulation 1303/2013

¹¹¹ Article 33(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

However, due to the specific nature of the LEADER approach, some additional considerations related to the legal framework for LEADER should be taken into account, and these are covered in this section of the document.

What are the proposed approaches?

Evaluating the specificities of the LEADER method¹¹² has always been a particular challenge, and will remain so. However, there is a growing body of experience on which the creative spirits of evaluators can build¹¹³.

a. Coherence and consistency check of CLLD across CSF funds

The *ex ante* evaluators should assess if the LEADER approach and the related institutional arrangements are designed and set up in a way that adequately responds to the territorial needs assessed and the thematic priorities stipulated in the RDP. The *ex ante* evaluator should verify that the set of indicators meaningfully grasp the expected added value of the LEADER approach¹¹⁴.

There is the possibility that CLLD could be designed together with Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), a 'delivery tool' designed for ERDF and ESF, operating on a larger territorial scale and therefore most probably encompassing a number of LEADER areas¹¹⁵. The specific governance arrangements and processes put in action should be scrutinized in terms of their relevance (in respect to the territorial needs), transparency, respect of the LEADER principles and functionality. This analysis requires cross-referencing with other CSF programmes and the Partnership Agreement.

b. Check on the adequacy of structures and processes foreseen for LAG selection and LEADER implementation

The Commission requires that integrated community-led local development strategies are used to implement community-led development (CLLD) which is a bottom-up process. According to Article 32(2) of Regulation 1303/2013, CLLD *shall be led by local action groups .. and ... carried out through integrated and multi-sectoral area-based local development strategies ... and... designed taking into consideration local needs and potential.*

This means that the *ex ante* evaluator should assess

- the rationale behind the delimitation of eligible areas, the rules, mechanisms¹¹⁶ and criteria eventually leading to the selection of LAGs and their local development strategies;
- the description of the institutional arrangements foreseen for LEADER implementation including territorial cooperation, by examining the division of roles and tasks and the sharing of responsibilities between the Managing Authorities, intermediary bodies and the Local Action Groups. The according arrangements should refer to the added value of the LEADER method¹¹⁷, which is mainly regarded as an investment into the social capital and improved local

¹¹² The LEADER specificities are: area-based approach; bottom-up approach; the local partnership with decision-making rights; multi-sectoral integration; innovation; territorial co-operation; networking.

¹¹³ E.g. the European *ex post* evaluation of LEADER I, LEADER II, and LEADER+.

¹¹⁴ European LEADER Observatory (1999): Assessing the added value of the LEADER approach. Rural Innovation dossier nr. 4, AEIDL, Bruxelles.

¹¹⁵ 'Both (ITI and CLLD) seek to engage regional and local actors and local communities in the implementation of the programmes' (Commission Staff Working Document: Elements for a CSF 2014-2020, part 1, p.9.)

¹¹⁶ There are various solutions, from unfettered competition to a concerted area-covering approach; each one has its particular advantages and drawbacks.

¹¹⁷ See also the Court of Auditors' Special Report Nr. 7/2006.

governance capacity. The strategic orientation and arrangements for CLLD should be accordingly included in the Partnership Agreement;

- the capacity of the monitoring and evaluation system to capture the specific results and, insofar ascertainable, impacts of LEADER, both at LAG level, and by aggregation to programme, and subsequently to EU level.

This implies the application of qualitative evaluation methods¹¹⁸, preferably on an ongoing or at least periodic basis (which should figure in the Evaluation Plan), and an active role of the National Rural Network in this process.

The criteria for LAG selection should include provisions for evaluation mechanisms at the level of LAGs.

Good and not-so-good practices

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses the arrangements for CLLD covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter. ↑ The arrangements for CLLD in all the programme documents under the CSF are scanned and appraised according to their coherence on the basis of personal interviews with the respective programme officials. ↑ The evaluator makes sure that the essential mechanisms determining the relationships between the LAGs and the Managing Authority (including possible intermediary bodies) are unambiguously described. ↑ The evaluator examines whether the specificities of the LEADER method are respected or at least not thwarted by particular governance arrangements, and that they are meaningfully grasped by the programme-specific indicators and monitoring methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator just relies on the Rural Development Programme document, without any cross-checking. ↓ The <i>ex ante</i> accepts a blurred description of the selection criteria for LAGs, their local development strategies, and the governance arrangements established for LEADER implementation.

Legal references

- Article 8(1)(m)(iv) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 stipulates *the Rural Development Programme shall contain a description of the approach laying down principles with regard to the establishment of selection criteria for operations and local development strategies that takes into account relevant targets; in this context Member States may provide for priority to be given to SMEs linked to the agriculture and forestry sector;*
- Article 8(1)(m)(v) requires *in relation to local development, where applicable, a description of the mechanisms to ensure coherence between activities envisaged under the local*

¹¹⁸ E.g. case studies, focus groups, repertory grid interviews, heuristic approaches to grasp the evolutionary dynamic of change processes,...

development strategies, the “Cooperation” measure referred to in Article 35, and the “Basic services and village renewal in rural areas” measure referred to in Article 20 including urban-rural links;

- Articles 42-44 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 sets out the definition of LEADER Local Action Groups, preparatory support (LEADER ‘start-up kit’), territorial co-operation activities and the funding of running costs and animation of LAGs.
- Title V (Financial provisions), Article 59(4) and (5) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 determine the fund contribution and thresholds¹¹⁹.
- Chapter II, Articles 32-35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 sets out the framework rules for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)¹²⁰ eligible under all CSF funds, LEADER being its particular manifestation under the EAFRD.

Further reading

- Commission Staff Working Document on ‘Elements for a Common Strategic Framework 2014 to 2020’, part II, chapter 9: Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty, Key Actions for EAFRD (p.32).
- Commission Staff Working Document on ‘Elements for a Common Strategic Framework 2014 to 2020, part I, chapter 4.3: Encouraging integrated approaches to the delivery of the CSF Funds’ (p.9).
- Technical paper for the joint CC and ExCo workshop on the 15th of March 2012: Draft intervention logic for rural development post-2013, and possible associated indicators. Priority 6 (p.14).
- DG Agriculture (2006): Fact Sheet: The LEADER approach. Basic guide, Brussels.
- European LEADER Observatory (1999): Assessing the added value of the LEADER approach. ‘Rural innovation’ dossier nr. 4. Brussels.
- European Evaluation Helpdesk (2010): Working Paper on ‘Capturing Impacts of LEADER and of Measures to Improve Quality of Life in Rural Areas’. Brussels.
- Official Journal of the European Union: Court of Auditors’ Special Report No. 7/2006 concerning rural development investments: Do they effectively address the problems of rural areas? (2006/C 282/01) Brussels.
- Pedro Brosei (DG Agriculture, G1): The framework of community-led local development under the CSF: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/monitoring-evaluation/workshop-03-2012/framework_en.pdf
- Declaration from civil society organisations on CLLD 2014-2020: Community-led local development: Making it a success. <http://ldnet.eu/Community-led%20local%20development:%20making%20it%20a%20success>

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Consistency of Union priorities with specific needs at regional and sub-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the role assigned to LEADER and CLLD related to the priorities for rural development?

¹¹⁹ 80% respectively 90% (in less developed, outermost regions) contribution for LEADER, and at least 5% of the contribution to the RDP. Another threshold is set in Article 31 of the : up to 25% of total public expenditure incurred by LAGs within the local development strategy for *running costs and animation*.

¹²⁰ Description of CLLD: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community_en.pdf

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In how far is the innovation principle translated into selection criteria for LAGs and LDSs? In how far is the role foreseen for LEADER (CLLD) responsive to the needs assessed in the territorial analysis and the SWOT?
Complementarity of CLLD/LEADER with other CAP instruments, Cohesion Policy and the EMFF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How has the joint selection committee for CLLD been established, how is it structured, and how does it function? What is the rationale behind the delimitation of areas eligible for LEADER (CLLD)? On the basis of which criteria have lead funds been defined for certain types of areas, and in how far are there common or different rules in place across all funds participating in CLLD?
Budgetary consistency of LEADER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In how far is the budgetary endowment of LAGs from EARDF consistent with the objectives set in the RDP?
Governance and management capacity of LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In how far are the selection criteria specified in respect to the description of the LAG structure and decision-making processes, and with regard to the quality, the content and the making of the local development strategy? To which extent do the selection criteria reflect the specificities of the LEADER approach (apart from innovation)¹²¹?
The description of the coordination mechanisms between local development strategies and territorial co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How clearly are the institutional arrangements for LEADER implementation, including territorial co-operation described? In which way are the activities (capacity building, networking, etc.) of the National Rural Network Unit linked to the local partnerships and their activities?
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are the outputs, results and impacts of LEADER going to be monitored and evaluated? To which extent are the processes of monitoring and evaluation and the programme-specific indicators matched with those under the other CSF funds?

5.4 National Rural Networks¹²²

What are the key issues for this topic?

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 requires the establishment of a National Rural Network (NRN) in each Member State to bring together organisations and administrations involved in rural development. The NRN will be financed out of the Technical Assistance budget. The partnership created for the purpose of developing the RDP and the Partnership Agreement shall be also part of National Rural Network.

Rural networks and their support structures are established to foster networking and co-operation between rural areas, regions or Member States and between administrations and organisations involved in rural development. Properly functioning, they are key instruments for inter-institutional and cross-scale learning, fostering the exchange of experiences and know-how and the dissemination of

¹²¹ The innovation principle is already referred to in the uppermost right box of this table.

¹²² Article 8(1)(0) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

good practice between rural areas and rural stakeholders, at the same time supporting the implementation of rural policy and fostering local and regional governance in rural areas. Their potential contribution in this respect shall be the subject of *ex ante* evaluation.

For Member States with regional programmes, there are two possibilities:

- The Member State may submit for approval a separate National Rural Network Programme for establishment and operation of their NRN¹²³. Such programmes, with their own separate budget, have to be subject of a specific *ex ante* evaluation at programme level.
- The Member State decides not to introduce a specific separate programme but to establish the National Rural Network as a series of regional rural networks, with national coordination. In this case each regional RDP will contain details of the regional network, which will be financed out of the programme's own Technical Assistance budget¹²⁴, and be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation of the respective RDP.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

The NRNs have a complex remit that covers both the networking role itself, and support for rural policy implementation. In this respect the *ex ante* evaluator should assess, the potential contribution of the National Rural Network to:

A) Rural policy implementation:

- the achievements of rural policy objectives;
- the quality of the RDP implementation.

B) Improved governance in rural areas:

- the capacity building of various groups of rural stakeholders;
- the exchange of experience and transfer of good practice;
- the collection of information and data on actions in the field of rural development;
- the extent of information dissemination;
- the involvement of stakeholders;
- the inclusion of the general public;
- the transnational cooperation initiatives;
- the performance of Local Action Groups;
- the facilitation of the exchange of expertise and good practices on evaluation, the development of evaluation methods and tools, the support of evaluation processes and the data collection;
- the identification of relevant research results;
- the fostering of innovation in rural development.

For separate NRN Programmes, all the tasks laid down in Article 55(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 should be covered (specific points are covered in the following section on proposed approaches to the *ex ante* evaluation). A Strategic Environmental Assessment is not however required for these programmes.

¹²³ Article 54 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

¹²⁴ Article 51(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Where the NRN is included in a territorial RDP, some tasks may be accomplished separately in relation to the NRN, or as part of the horizontal elements of the *ex ante* of the programme as a whole. This will depend largely on how the MA has decided to present the NRN section. For example, a SWOT and needs assessment is required as the basis for determining the appropriate strategy and intervention logic for the NRN. This could however be done either as part of the overall SWOT and needs assessment, or specifically in relation to the network.

What are the proposed approaches?

Assessing the potential contribution of rural networks is closely linked to the assessment of network structures, which can influence the implementation of network activities and consequently also their added value and contribution to the rural policy objectives. For example, the planned arrangements of placing the Network Support Unit in the overall organisational structure of the Ministry or Managing Authority (“in house” - in side of the Ministry, “outsourced” to public institution, or contracted to external provider/company, etc.), its composition of regional structures and their competences, tasks in relation to network activities, etc. play an important role in it and should therefore be assessed in the *ex ante* evaluation.

Additionally – rural networks are a relevant counterpart of the EU level ENRD, EIP and Evaluation Expert Network which are responsible for specific tasks that NRNs then transfer via their structures down to rural stakeholders. The *ex ante* evaluator should therefore also look at how the RDP proposes that this transfer of the EU-wide knowledge and experiences will be accomplished

The *ex ante* evaluator should assess the provisions of the RDP concerning the NRN in relation to the requirements of Article 54 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, and should examine elements such as:

- the planned competence and scope of actions of the network to foster rural policy implementation;
- the planned allocation of financial, human, material resources to conduct the envisioned tasks;
- the arrangement and completeness of the support structures;
- the capacity to implement them.

As mentioned above, the *ex ante* evaluation of the NRN should cover all elements mentioned in Article 55(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. However certain specificities should be highlighted in relation to the *ex ante* evaluation of NRNs, whether the NRN is presented in a separate programme, or as a component of a regional RDP:

- a. **SWOT analysis and needs assessment.** As in the case of a territorial RDP, the *ex ante* evaluator shall appraise the completeness of SWOT, indicator framework, assessment of needs, as well as overall consistency of the analysis. The guidance provided in Part II: Chapter 1 of the *ex ante* guidelines can be used for this purpose. However taking in consideration the aims of the NRN as stipulated in the Article 54(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, the intervention logic of the NRNP will have a different focus than a territorial RDP. Therefore also the SWOT analysis and the assessment of needs should cover issues linked to participation of stakeholders in the design and monitoring of the programme, training, studies and events, exchange of experiences and good practice, cooperation and networking activities, communication of programme results to wider public, etc., considering also the needs of the rural population, the agricultural and forestry sector and the rural economy as a whole. The *ex ante* evaluator should take this into consideration when appraising the SWOT analysis and needs assessment linked to the NRN. Networking activities are likely to have a greater

emphasis on the first rural development priority: “Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas”.

- b. **Relevance, internal and external coherence.** Guidance for appraisal of the relevance, internal and external coherence of the intervention logic can be found in Part II: Chapter 1 NRNPs are specific interventions whose role is to foster attainment of CAP objectives, and rural development objectives in particular. However rural networks also bring additional value to the whole process as a tool facilitating the development of social capital and contributing to the improvement of multilevel governance in rural areas. This specific feature of NRNs should be apparent in the construction of their intervention logic, planned contributions of outputs to results, allocation of budgetary resources, setting of targets and performance framework. The role of the evaluator is to appraise if the specificities of the NRN are properly taken into consideration to ensure the expected added value.
- c. **Relevance and clarity of proposed indicators.** The *ex ante* evaluator should assess the relevance and clarity of all types of indicators – context and programme related: impact, result and output indicators. In this respect Part II: Chapter 31 of these guidelines can be used as a source of general guidance. In line with the specific nature of NRN Programmes, programme-specific indicators would be expected to be included in order to assess the progress of the programme. The *ex ante* evaluator should carefully test these indicators using the SMART approach and appraise their consistency with programme objectives and programme-specific evaluation questions.
- d. **The procedures for monitoring and data collection.** The NRNP represents the specific intervention logic and range of programme-specific indicators, many times defined as qualitative, have to be employed. This creates the specific challenge in establishing the functioning monitoring system especially if qualitative information has to be collected including those for the evaluation purpose. Therefore the *ex ante* evaluator has to assess carefully if the proposed monitoring arrangements suit to tailored made intervention logic of NRNP, programme-specific indicators and needs connected with the future evaluation during the programming period (e.g. specific type of data, their management and specific methods of collection, etc.). Experiences from the evaluation of NRNPs in the current programming period show that it is vital to establish well designed monitoring system already during the programming, in order to avoid later problems with the evaluation. In this respect the role of the *ex ante* evaluator in assessing and improving the system, including filling identified gaps (e.g. missing indicators, or methods for data collection) is crucial.
- e. **The adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for programme management.** Based on the experiences of the 2007-2013 programming period, in which NRNP were implemented for the first time, sufficient human resources and administrative capacity were one of the critical issues for effective implementation of the NRNs. This was especially evident in relation to ongoing evaluation (steering the evaluation, data collection and management etc.). Therefore the evaluator should appraise carefully whether the NRN will be sufficiently resourced to fulfil all foreseen activities. The guidance provided in Part II: section 4.1 of the *ex ante* guidelines should be relevant in this respect.

More detailed guidance for the appraisal of the elements referred to above will be provided in the Guidelines for the Evaluation of National Rural Networks 2014-2020 (forthcoming)

Possible methods for carrying out the analysis of the NRN are included in the table below, linked to relevant evaluation questions specific to NRNs. For other elements (e.g. SWOT, indicators, etc.), the evaluation questions in the relevant section of this guidance document can be used.

Table 3 Suggested evaluation questions and methods in *ex ante* assessment of networks

Topics	Possible questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation	Possible methods
Governance arrangements and delivery mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are stakeholders involved in the networking structure? • To which extent are relevant groups involved like farmers, researchers, advisors and businesses operating in the food sector? • Which arrangements have been foreseen to include the wider public? • Which provisions have been made to support the network evaluations/ self-evaluations? • How should information and data for monitoring be collected? Who is involved? • What kind of support is foreseen for the EIP operational groups during the RDP implementation? • How will the network facilitate capacity building, exchange of expertise and good practice dissemination? 	Interviews, mapping of interactions with flow charts, stakeholder mapping, sociograms, social network analysis, self-evaluation methods (for LAGs)
Management capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively and efficiently are the exchange of experiences, data collection and the flow of information organised? • What procedures are foreseen to identify relevant research activities and results? Who is involved and who is consulted? • What provisions are foreseen for the development of evaluation methods and tools for evaluating rural networks? 	Interviews, Focus Groups, analysis of organigrams, heuristic modelling, stakeholder mapping, sociograms, social network analysis
Available resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far are the Technical Assistance provisions matching the volume of tasks envisaged? 	Output Efficiency Ratio, interviews

Legal references

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 foresees the following support structures:
 - Articles 52 and 54: The European Network For Rural Development and related National Rural Networks;
 - Article 55-57: The European Innovation Partnership network¹²⁵ and the related EIP Operational groups;

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 does not refer directly to the *ex ante* evaluation of National Rural Networks because these are not a common element across all ESI Funds; however as an integral part of the RDP, or as a stand-alone programme, all the horizontal elements of Article 48 apply to

¹²⁵ Article 53 of the REGULATION (EU) NO 1305/2013

networking activities, and in particular the following legal provisions are particularly relevant for the *ex ante* evaluation of NRNs:

- Article 55(3)(b) internal coherence; Article 55(3)(c) consistency of allocation of budgetary resources with the programme objectives; Article 55(3)(f) how the expected outputs will contribute to results; Article 55(3)(i) the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for managing the programme; Article 55(3)(j) the suitability of the procedures for monitoring the programme and for collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluations,

Further reading

- Working Paper on the Evaluation of National Rural Network Programmes (Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Expert Network for Rural Development. July 2010, Brussels).
- Proceedings of the Good Practice Workshop on Rural Network Programmes, 7 February 2012, Brussels: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practices-workshops/national-rural-network-programmes/en/national-rural-network-programmes_en.cfm

Suggested evaluation questions

For this topic, the suggested evaluation questions are included in the table presented in the section on proposed approaches, so they are not repeated here.

5.5 Thematic sub-programmes¹²⁶

What are the key issues for this topic?

The option of creating thematic sub-programmes is a new feature of the rural development policy framework. This novelty provides an enhanced possibility to tailor rural policy to the particular needs of certain rural areas and groups of beneficiaries. The inclusion of thematic sub-programmes will add some complexity to the overall set up of the programme, and could generate added value in the sense of more effective results in the chosen domain. However, it will also increase the administrative capacity required to implement the programme.

What must be covered in the *ex ante* evaluation?

Thematic sub-programmes are structured like micro-versions of Rural Development Programmes. They must contain many of the same elements which the full RDP includes, as set out in Article 8(2) of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, They are geared to complement the main programme by addressing a particular need and for producing a particular result which could not be obtained otherwise. The SWOT, needs assessment, intervention logic, selection of measures, target-setting, the planning of actions, allocation of resources and the delivery mechanisms have to be established separately for each sub-programme.

The *ex ante* evaluation of thematic sub-programmes must therefore address these issues in the same way that they are addressed for the *ex ante* evaluation of the full programme.

What are the proposed approaches?

The *ex ante* evaluator should

- analyse whether the proposed thematic sub-programmes are justified in terms of the SWOT, the needs addressed, and the expected results;
- check the intervention logic of the sub-programme, the expected contribution of outputs to results, and the plausibility of the targets set;

¹²⁶Article 8(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

- ensure that all relevant indicators are used, with programme-specific indicators included if necessary;
- assess in how far the stakeholders, in particular potential beneficiaries, have been involved in the design process;
- assess if the delivery systems of the sub-programme would be more efficient and effective or at least as efficient and effective as if the actions would be carried out under the main programme;
- if the Member State makes use of the possibility of higher support rates (+10%) for the operations envisaged in the sub-programme, assess the justification provided.

Further information on proposed approaches to each of these elements is included in the relevant sections of this guidance document (SWOT analysis, etc.).

Good and not-so-good practices

😊	😞
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses thematic sub-programmes covering all legal requirements as outlined in this chapter. ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> considers also alternatives (e.g. delivery under the mainstream programme) and examines the possible added value in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. ↑ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator assesses if the tailoring of the sub-programme has been accompanied by appropriate stakeholder involvement (particularly potential beneficiaries). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ The <i>ex ante</i> evaluator checks only the relevance and does not question the rationale of the thematic sub-programme compared to mainstream programme delivery.

Legal references

- Article 8(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 states that *where thematic sub-programmes are included in a Rural Development Programme, each sub-programme shall include:*
 - (a) *a specific analysis of the situation in terms of SWOT methodology and identification of the needs that are to be addressed by the sub-programme;*
 - (b) *specific targets at sub-programme level and a selection of measures, based on a thorough definition of the intervention logic of the sub-programme, including an assessment of the expected contribution of the measures chosen to achieve the targets;*

(a) *a separate specific indicator plan, with planned output and planned expenditure for each rural development measure selected in relation to a corresponding focus area.*
- According to Article 8(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 the Commission shall lay down rules for the presentation of the elements described in paragraphs 1 and 2 in Rural Development Programmes and rules for the content of national frameworks referred to in Article 6(3). Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the examination procedure
- Annex III of the exhibits a list of topics and operations for which thematic sub-programmes are particularly relevant.

Further reading

- Any source pertaining to the respective theme.

Suggested evaluation questions

RDP content	Suggested evaluation questions for the <i>ex ante</i> evaluation
Justification of thematic sub-programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why should the specific operations envisaged for the thematic sub-programme bring forth better results than if they would be delivered under the mainstream programme measures? • To what extent could measures/actions envisaged in the mainstream programme produce better results if they would be delivered as a thematic sub-programme?
Completeness and conclusiveness of the description of thematic sub-programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How comprehensively have the analysis and the SWOT been conducted? • To what extent have stakeholders, particularly those representing the potential beneficiaries, been involved in the analysis, the SWOT, the setting of objectives and the design of operations? • How conclusively is the intervention logic described, how responsive are the chosen measures in respect to the needs assessed? • How conclusive is the set of indicators, and how realistic are the targets? • How comprehensively are the planned outputs and expenditures presented in the description of the thematic sub-programme, broken down between public and private?

6 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This chapter shall give guidance to the Rural Development Programme Managing Authorities concerning the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in the *ex ante* evaluation of the Rural Development Programme. According to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, these requirements **should be incorporated** in the *ex ante* evaluation.¹²⁷

6.1 The SEA Directive¹²⁸ requirements

The SEA Directive has the objective *to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes [...] by ensuring that [...] an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.*¹²⁹

The legal obligation to carry out an environmental assessment is applied to the RD Programmes mainly by Article 3(2)(a) of the SEA Directive, which states that an environmental assessment shall be carried out for all plans and programmes which are prepared for agriculture among other sectors. In addition, Article 3(4) brings within the scope of the Directive plans and programmes which set the framework for future development consent of projects not listed in the EIA Directive or in the sectors mentioned in Article 3(2)(a) and which are likely to have significant environmental effects. In the case of RD Programmes, Annexe II of the Directive 2011/92/EU (the “Environmental Impact Assessment” (EIA) Directive) makes reference to “agricultural projects”. In this respect it should be noted that Member States may ask single projects’ developers to undertake specific Environmental Impact Assessments at the level of single projects, in conformity with national legislation transposing the EIA Directive. Moreover, article 3(2)(b) of the SEA Directive requires an environmental assessment to be undertaken for plans and programmes requiring an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive.¹³⁰

6.2 Relations between the RD programming process, SEA, the *ex ante* evaluation and stakeholder consultations

The RD programming procedure examines and suggests interventions. The SEA procedure scans individual outputs of the programme planning procedure and can recommend adjustments to “green” and support sustainability of the RDPs as well as to reduce their negative environmental impacts and threats.

The table below summarizes typical phases of the programming, the *ex ante* evaluation and the SEA process, showing that the three processes are intrinsically interlinked. It is possible to incorporate the SEA into the logic and phases of the programming process. The three processes can be framed as reciprocally emphasizing tools, for the sake of yielding an optimized consolidated Rural Development Programme.

¹²⁷ Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 says: The *ex ante* evaluation shall incorporate, where appropriate, the requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment set out in implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. “Where appropriate” refers to the exclusion of those projects and programmes which are not subject to the SEA Directive. See Article 3(8) SEA Directive on the exclusions: Plans and programmes, the sole purpose of which is to serve national defence or civil emergency; (...) financial or budget plans and programmes” (cf. in certain cases some European Social Fund or Interreg projects).

¹²⁸ Directive 2001/42/EC

¹²⁹ Article 1 of the SEA Directive.

¹³⁰ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992

The earlier the interaction starts, the more consistent and valuable the general RDP programming process and the resultant documents will become. It should be possible to set out one integrated consultation process on behalf of the involved authorities and the interested public. Experiences from earlier processes have shown that joint consultations are useful to all involved parties, considering the fact that those who take part in the discussion might get confused by unconnected consultations for one and the same programming document.

Table 4 Links between typical RD programming, SEA and *ex ante* evaluation stages

Typical RD programming stages	Corresponding SEA stages	Typical <i>ex ante</i> evaluation Steps
Determine the overall objectives of the programming document and the main issues it should address ¹³¹	Determine environmental issues, objectives and indicators that should be considered during the SEA process	Analyse the previous evaluation results (that determine the critical factors affecting implementation and effectiveness of the policy and the types of problems in terms of policy evaluability and monitoring)
Possible consultations with other relevant competent authorities ¹³²	Compulsory consultations with environmental authorities Consultations with the concerned public recommended	
Analyse the programme context ¹³³	Evaluate the current situation and trends and their likely evolution if the programming document is not implemented	Assess the SWOT - the strengths, weaknesses ,opportunities and threats of the territory
Propose RD Programme objectives and priorities ¹³⁴	Assess proposed programme objectives and priorities	Assess the rationale and the overall consistency of the strategy
Propose measures and eligible actions ¹³⁵	Assess proposed measures and eligible actions Assess cumulative effects of the programme as a whole	Evaluation of expected socio-economic impacts and justification of the policy and financial resource allocation
Propose evaluation approach and monitoring system ¹³⁶	Evaluate proposed evaluation criteria system Evaluate proposed monitoring system SEA monitoring indicators	Assess the evaluation and monitoring arrangements
Compile the proposed programming document and hold consultations with authorities and stakeholders ¹³⁷	Compile the environmental report and hold consultations with environmental authorities and the public	Compile <i>ex ante</i> evaluation report

¹³¹ This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 1

¹³² This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 1

¹³³ This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 1

¹³⁴ This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 2

¹³⁵ This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 2

¹³⁶ This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 2

¹³⁷ This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 3

Typical RD programming stages	Corresponding SEA stages	Typical <i>ex ante</i> evaluation Steps
Formal decision on the programming document and inform public about the decision ¹³⁸	Take into account environmental report and results of consultation in decision-making Inform environmental authorities and the public on how the outcomes of the SEA have been taken into account	

6.3 National Rural Network Programmes and the Strategic Environmental Assessment

In accordance with the Article 54(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Member States with several regional Rural Development Programmes¹³⁹ may submit for approval a specific programme for the establishment and the operation of their National Rural Network supported by the means of EAFRD. As such the National Rural Network Programme (NRNP) is the subject of the *ex ante* evaluation as any other Rural Development Programme applying the same legal provisions and procedures as well as most of the tasks as suggested by the Article 55 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. Further on in line with the Article 54(2) of the same Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 the following activities shall be implemented within the scope of the NRNP:

- network management;
- involvement of stakeholders in support of programme design;
- support for monitoring, in particular through collection and sharing of relevant feedback, recommendations and analysis notably from the Monitoring Committees referred to in Article 47 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. Local Action Groups shall also be supported by the National Rural Network for the monitoring and evaluation of the local development strategies;
- provision of training activities for programme implementing bodies and Local Action Groups in the process of formation;
- collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the Rural Development Programmes;
- ongoing studies and analysis;
- networking activities for Local Action Groups and in particular Technical Assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of co-operation among Local Action Groups and the search of partners for the measure referred to in Article 35 (Co-operation measure);
- facilitation of exchanges of practice and experience among advisers and/or advisory services;
- networking activities for innovation;
- a communication plan including publicity and information concerning the Rural Development Programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public;
- provision to participate in and contribute to the activities of the European Network for Rural Development;

¹³⁸ This stage is linked to Part I: section 2.4.2, Stage 3

¹³⁹ Article 54(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

As clearly seen from the list above, it can be assumed that none of the activities envisioned for NRNP will have significant environmental effects in implementing the programme on:

- biodiversity, flora, fauna, soil, water, air, climatic factors;
- population, human health, material assets, cultural (including architectural and archaeological) heritage, landscape;

Having this in mind and in line with the Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required for National Rural Network Programmes.

6.4 Key SEA Phases and Process

The SEA process can be summarized as follows:

- an environmental report is prepared in which the likely significant effects on the environment and the reasonable alternatives of the proposed programme are identified;
- the public and the Environmental Authorities are informed and consulted on the draft programme and the environmental report prepared;
- as regards programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment in another Member State, the Member State in whose territory the programme is being prepared must consult the other Member State(s).

SEA Phase I : SEA Framework

This first stage is crucial in setting the scene, timeline and human resource structures for the implementation of the SEA. All available background information is essential to fuel the discussions and to contemplate options. Moreover, the SEA Directive requires the identification of authorities to be consulted within the SEA. The authorities are those which, by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing the programme. In most Member States the Environmental Authorities cover all the foreseen environmental impacts.

SEA Phase I should be completed before the Stage 1 in *ex ante* evaluation (see Part I: section 2.4.2)

SEA Phase II: Scoping

Setting the scope of the SEA is fundamental for integrating a wide variety of environmental issues into the programme. The concerned Environmental Authority should be consulted at this stage. During the scoping stage, several important issues should be clarified, such as:

- Which areas have to be covered?
- Which environmental issues, including relevant environmental objectives, have to be examined?
- Which periods of time have to be covered?
- Which depth of assessment is required?
- Which data and information are needed (and available)?
- Which methods come into consideration?
- Which alternatives and options should be considered?

- Which entities and experts should be involved in review of the SEA report?

Obviously, many of these questions may not be fully answered at the beginning of the SEA process since information about specific features of the programming document will be gradually generated as the programming process unfolds. In this regard, it is important to recognise that the SEA Directive does not treat SEA scoping as a distinct procedural step; scoping can be carried out through iterative consultations with relevant environmental authorities during the programming process.

In addition, consultation at this stage helps strengthen the consistency of the draft report for the final public consultation. If needed, already at this stage, the RDP Managing Authority may discuss specific issues with other organisations and individuals experts in order to gather additional information and other points of view.

The earlier critical issues are discussed, the easier the decision-making process in the final programming stages will become. Comments and suggestions from different sides may generate further information and prompt fresh questions for the environmental report.

In order to ensure that such consultations are carried out effectively and do not overburden programming teams, the authorities in charge of the programming process may ask the experts that carry out the SEA to organise the scoping consultation on their behalf. In this case, the SEA experts may attach the minutes of various scoping consultations to the environmental report. This type of arrangement ensures the transparency of iterative scoping.

The final consultation of the draft programming document and accompanying environmental report with relevant Environmental Authorities can be organised as a single review process. This will help save time for everyone involved.

SEA Phase II is linked mainly with Stage 1 and 2 of the *ex ante* evaluation (see Part I: section 2.4.2)

SEA Phase III: Environmental Assessment (SEA report)

During this stage the following issues are identified, described and evaluated:

- the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the programme, including
 - ▶ effects on biodiversity, flora, fauna, soil, water, air, climatic factors;
 - ▶ effects on population, human health, material assets, cultural (including architectural and archaeological) heritage, landscape;
- the interrelationships between these factors;
- reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the programme;
- the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with;
- outline of the RD Programme and relationship with other plans and programmes;
- current state of the environment and evolution without the programme (the “zero option”, which means “doing nothing” must be included);
- environmental characteristics of affected areas, including in particular
 - ▶ those relating to the Natura 2000 network;
 - ▶ environmental protection objectives, and how they are taken into account;

- ▶ mitigation measures;
- ▶ monitoring measures.

Determining these relevant environmental issues and objectives is an important starting point that will influence all of the key steps in the SEA process. The issues identified will guide:

- the evaluation of the environmental situation;
- the assessment of specific development objectives and priorities of the programming document;
- the assessment of direct and indirect impacts of proposed measures and eligible activities;
- the assessment of resulting cumulative effects of all proposed measures and eligible activities;
- the evaluation of proposed management system;
- the evaluation of proposed monitoring system.

SEA experts should, in cooperation with *ex ante* evaluators and with relevant Environmental Authorities, identify key environmental issues that are relevant to the RD Programme.

SEA Phase III is linked to all stages of the *ex ante* evaluation (see Part I: section 2.4.2)

SEA Phase IV: Public Consultation and Decision-making

The participation of stakeholders in the SEA process is of major importance. Environmental impacts should not be detached from social, economic and cultural aspects. Taking stakeholders on board during the SEA is vital for incorporating their knowledge and aspirations, and for conducting an ample evaluation of the impacts and of the adequacy of intended operations and mitigation measures.

The definition of the authorities to be consulted is fairly clear: they shall be considered *by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes*.¹⁴⁰

The definition of the public is much broader and more ambiguous as *public affected or likely to be affected by, or having an interest in, the decision-making subject to this Directive, including relevant non-governmental organisations, such as those promoting environmental protection and other organizations concerned*.¹⁴¹

The details of the public consultation arrangements are to be determined by the Member States on the basis of the national legislation transposing the SEA Directive. Public consultation and participation is a generic concept which is characterised by its mode, substantiality, formality and last but not least by the timing in the decision-making process. The final form chosen by the Member States basically reflects the governance setting and the established *modi operandi* of the public sector in each country.

In general, public consultation can be structured into three levels of engagement¹⁴², namely i) information, ii) consultation and iii) cooperative decision-making.

¹⁴⁰ According to Article 3 of the SEA Directive

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*. Transboundary consultations as addressed in Article 7 of the Directive are not addressed in this chapter. In most of the EU funded programmes (except CBC programmes) they were not applied.

¹⁴² Austrian Society for Environment and Technology, (2007), The Public Participation Manual: Shaping the future together. http://www.oegut.at/downloads/pdf/part_publ-part-manual.pdf

With regard to optimizing the SEA process¹⁴³, the following success factors should be considered in relation to the public consultation processes as implemented in the Member States:

Table 5 Success factors in the SEA and the link to public consultation

Success Factor	Good practice experienced in the Member States
Complete integration in the programming process	The literature recommends consultations between the scoping and the final phase.
Stepwise optimisation of programme	In order to integrate substantial changes and to optimize the results, the consultation has to be carried out before the final phase of the SEA process; the integration of the comments should be carried out in the most transparent manner.
Informative, consultative and cooperative public participation	An overly formalistic approach should be avoided. Information alone is not a consultation process. Appropriate time frames and an inviting style of communication should encourage the wider public – not only Environmental Authorities and relevant NGOs – to express their views.
Balanced consideration of the environmental, social and economic effects	While focusing on environmental aspects, social and economic concerns should not be blanked out.
Effective monitoring	Although monitoring is considered to be a rather technical issue with little if any relevance to the public consultation, it should be included.

In a nutshell, the following lessons from the previous programming period should be taken into account:

- integrate the SEA process, in terms of temporally and administratively, in the programming process, e.g. through a single contracting with the *ex ante* evaluation; (see Part I: Section 2.4)
- introduce public consultation early in the process (i.e. in the scoping phase), reaching out beyond the customary authorities and stakeholders;
- ease public participation, even beyond what is foreseen in the national transposing legislation, for instance as good practice by introducing longer consultation periods using both electronic media and public hearings;
- combine SEA with the *ex ante* meetings, in order to infuse also social and economic considerations;
- include monitoring procedures in the consultation process;
- make the consultation process as transparent as possible and put on record in the draft programme.

In the final phase, the SEA report must be made accessible for consultation simultaneously with the draft programme and the *ex ante* evaluation report.¹⁴⁴

When the final RD Programme is decided, the following should be made available to the public, the Environmental Authorities, and any Member State consulted:

- the RD Programme as adopted,
- a statement explaining:

¹⁴³Arbter, K. (2010): Fact sheet "SUP Erfolgsfaktoren": http://www.arbter.at/sup/sup_e.html

¹⁴⁴Article 6(2) and Annex 1 of the SEA Directive

- how the contributions from the public are handled,
 - how they are commented,
 - if they are adopted or rejected,
 - the reasons therefore.¹⁴⁵
- (c) the measures decided concerning monitoring

These processes must be reported in the SEA statement as referred to in Article 9 SEA.

Transboundary consultations

The SEA Directive provides for consultations on programmes that are likely to have significant effects in other Member States (transboundary consultations also take place upon the request of a Member State likely to be significantly affected). Before the adoption of the programme, a copy of the draft programme and the relevant environmental report will be forwarded to the other Member State.

When such consultations take place, the Member States concerned agree on detailed arrangements to ensure that Environmental Authorities and the public in the Member State likely to be affected are informed and given an opportunity to forward their opinion within a reasonable time-frame.

SEA Phase V: Monitoring

The SEA Directive¹⁴⁶ requires that the environmental effects of the implementation of the programme shall be monitored in order, *inter alia*, to identify unexpected adverse effects, and to be able to take appropriate remedial action. This includes the selection of appropriate indicators.

Furthermore, monitoring facilitates the framing of forecasts and the setting up of specific plans.

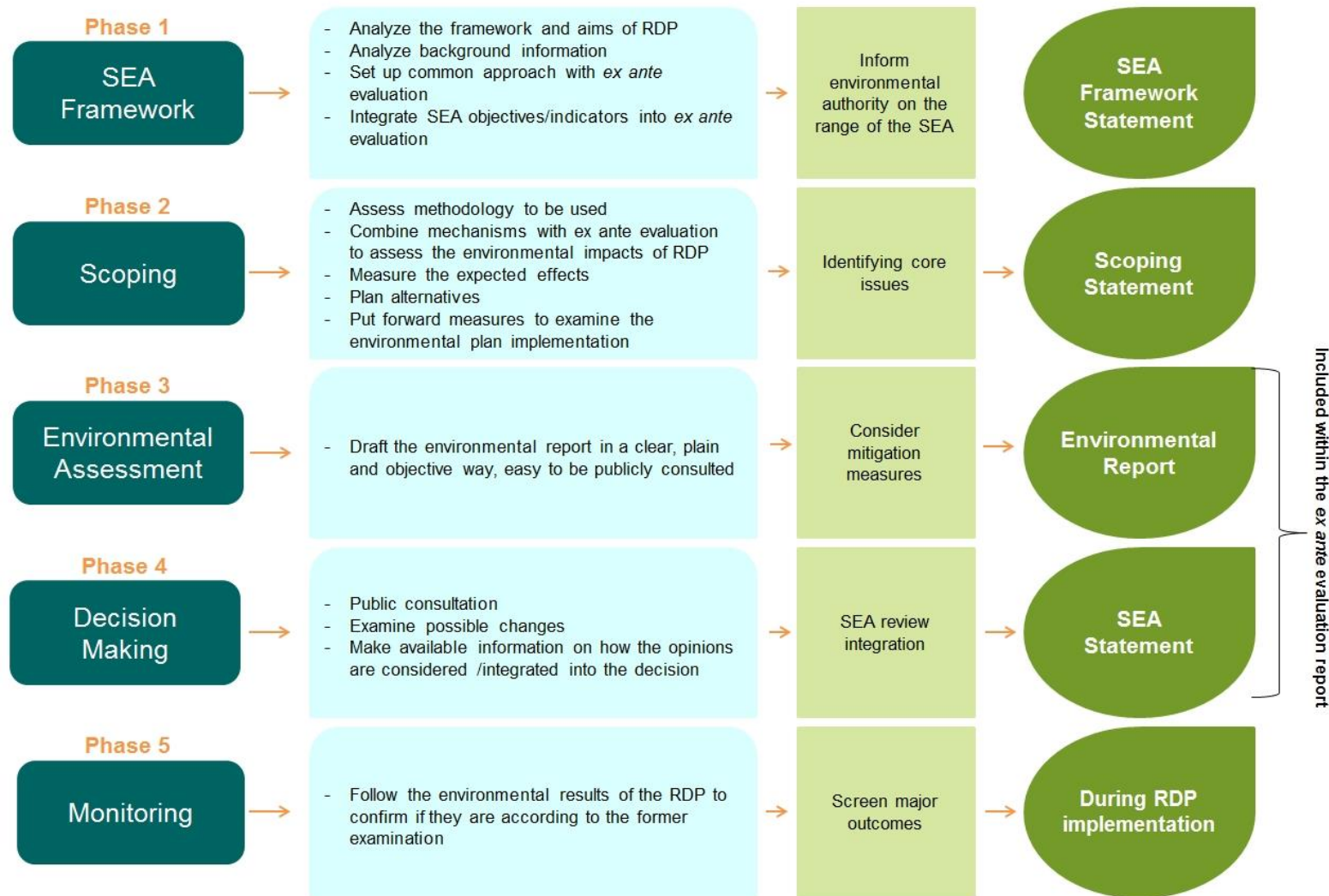
The monitoring and evaluation arrangements established for the RDP must therefore be adequate to fulfil these requirements.

SEA Phase V is linked mainly with Stages 2 and 3 of the *ex ante* evaluation (see Part I: section 2.4.2).

¹⁴⁵Article 8 of the SEA Directive

¹⁴⁶Article 10 of the SEA Directive

Figure 15 The five phases of Strategic Environmental Assessment.



Source: Helpdesk of the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

6.5 The Content of the SEA Environmental Report

The provisions on the environmental report are essentially referred to in Article 2 (Definitions), Article 5 (Environmental Report) and Annex I of the SEA Directive. The environmental report is subject to consultation as mentioned in Articles 6 and 7. The process and results of this consultation must be kept transparent at all times (Article 8 and 9), and it must be of sufficient quality to meet the requirements of the Directive (Article 12).

Regarding the content of the environmental report the SEA Directive mentions the following criteria:

- The report shall only contain relevant information concerning identification, description and evaluation of the likely significant effects on the environment of the implementation of the programme. It should also contain reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives of the programme;¹⁴⁷

The information to be provided under Article 5(1), subject to Article 5(2) and (3), is the following:

- an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;
- the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;
- the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;
- any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;
- the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;
- the likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;
- the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;
- an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;
- a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10.
- a non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.

The environmental report is the essential part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment. Furthermore it shapes the framework for monitoring the impacts of RDP implementation.

To facilitate consultation with the public, as good practice, the SEA report should also include simple reader guidance that makes the report easy to read and helps the RDP Managing Authorities and the *ex ante* evaluators to make appropriate use of it:

¹⁴⁷Article 5 of the SEA Directive

- a table of contents;
- a page number on every page;
- a map showing the area covered by the RDP measures;
- a non-technical (or executive) summary of the information covered in the SEA report; it should be kept in mind that this is often the only available document easy to read for the RDP Managing Authority; it should therefore be written in a simple and clear way;
- the date of publication, and the way the comments on the SEA should be sent, and to whom.

The SEA report and the statement should be a separate section of the *ex ante* evaluation. It will be integrated as a specific chapter of the *ex ante* evaluation report.

6.6 Relation with other EU environmental policies and legislations

There are many linkages between the SEA Directive and other EU environmental policies and legislation. The SEA Directive specifically requires that programmes take into account the relevant environmental protection objectives established at international, EU or Member State level. Many programmes subject to a SEA may also require other types of environmental assessments under different environmental legislations.

In terms of RD Programmes, particular attention, *inter alia*, should be paid to biodiversity and climate change policies and legislation in the context of the SEA.

As regards biodiversity in particular, many programmes, co-financed under the EAFRD are likely to have significant effects on biodiversity and on the Natura 2000 network (e.g. individual sites as well as their connectivity). It is expected that such programmes are likely to require an Article 6(3) appropriate assessment, under the Habitats Directive.

Concerning climate change, the SEA can also bring significant advantages. It could examine how a programme can contribute to the headline '20-20-20' climate target of the Europe 2020 Strategy, as well as how adaptation to climate change could be addressed in the framework of the programme in line with Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 which covers explicitly 'climate change mitigation and adaptation'.

The Commission is preparing Guidance on how to take climate change and biodiversity into consideration in the SEA and EIA processes.

6.7 How to improve the RDP as a result of the SEA

In almost all the Rural Development Programmes of the period (2007-2013) the SEA was carried out during the final stages of the *ex ante* evaluation and elaboration of the programme. The objective of the SEA report was to identify possible negative programme impacts and to make recommendations to minimize these impacts. Seldom were the RDP measures improved in a way that incorporated all the SEA recommendations.

In some cases the results of the assessment and the SEA report raised critical questions in the public consultation phase. In these cases, the SEA report was used by decision-makers to refine their decision-making, thus carrying a considerable weight.

In order to avoid late amendments the SEA should be as much as possible integrated into the programme elaboration and *ex ante* evaluation.

Possibly the most important part of the report is the description of the strategic changes made as a result of the SEA. Some of the changes to the programme may only occur after the SEA report has been written and made publicly available, particularly where the SEA is carried out late in the decision-making process; clearly these cannot be documented in the SEA report. But many changes should already have occurred before that, and should be included in the SEA report. This is an important proof for the reader that the SEA was carried out in the right spirit: that it was a tool for improving the programme, rather than just a snapshot of the programme.

6.8 Further Information on SEA

European Commission: Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32001L0042:EN:HTML>.

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Scottish Executive Welsh Assembly Government Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland. 2005c:A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive - Planning, Building and the Environment. Department for Communities and Local Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/practicalguidesea>.

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UN University: Strategic Environmental Assessment. Course Module SEA Process. http://sea.unu.edu/course/?page_id=47

PART III: TOOLBOX

1. GLOSSARY

A

Administrative burden

Administrative burdens are the cost to business and government of carrying out administrative activities that they would not carry out in the absence of regulation, but that they have to undertake in order to comply with it. In the context of Rural Development Programme implementation administrative burdens are the cost to beneficiaries and intermediate bodies of carrying out administrative activities in order to get support from the programme.

Administrative capacity

Administrative capacity is synonymous to 'administrative and institutional capacity' as defined in the glossary of DG Regio: it relates to the ability of public structures to identify and solve implementation problems. Capacity deals with a set of functional conditions that allow governments to elaborate and implement programmes with better performance. These conditions are shaped by important factors such as human resource characteristics, management strategies, diffusion of ICT applications, etc., but also by strategies aimed at building cooperation between governments and stakeholders, etc.

B

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is the reference to a qualitative and quantitative standard for comparison of the performance of an intervention. Such a standard will often be the best in the same domain of intervention or in a related domain. Benchmarking is facilitated when, at the national or regional level, there is comparative information of good and not so good practice. The term benchmarking is also used to refer to the comparison of contextual conditions between territories.

Beneficiary

A beneficiary is a person or organisation directly benefitting from the intervention whether intended or unintended. Some people may be beneficiaries without

necessarily belonging to the group targeted by the intervention. Similarly, the entire eligible group does not necessarily consist of beneficiaries.

Bottleneck analysis

A bottleneck is a phenomenon where the performance or capacity of an entire system is limited by a single or limited number of components or resources. The target-performance comparison of processes aimed at revealing the bottleneck points is called bottleneck analysis.

C

Coherence

Coherence is the extent to which complementarity or synergy can be found within a programme and in relation to other programmes. The internal coherence refers to the correspondence between the resources allocated to a programme and its objectives. The external coherence refers to the adequacy between the evaluated programme and other related programmes and instruments. In European legal texts or working documents the term is often used equivalently to 'consistency'.

Common indicator

An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. In the context of the rural development policy, the set of common indicators, binding for all Member States, serves to measure achievements and changes at both RDP and European level.

Common Strategic Framework

Common Strategic Framework means the document translating the objectives and targets of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth into key actions for the ESI Funds, establishing for each thematic objective the key actions to be supported by each ESI Fund and the mechanisms for ensuring the coherence and consistency of the programming of the ESI Funds with the economic and employment policies of the Member States and of the Union.

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)

To facilitate the implementation of multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral interventions at sub-regional and local level, the Commission proposes CLLD to strengthen community-led initiatives, facilitate the implementation of integrated local development strategies and formation of Local Action Groups, based on the experience and following the methodology of the LEADER approach. The implementation of CLLD is regulated by Articles 28 to 31 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and further detailed by corresponding provisions in the regulations governing the ERDF, ETC, ESF, EMFF and finally the EAFRD, where CLLD implemented through LEADER.

Competitiveness

Competitiveness is the capacity of a firm (..) to defend or increase its market share against other firms over the medium and longer term, and to generate wealth. The notion of competitiveness can apply to a single firm or to all the businesses in a sector or region. It is directly related to the notion of competitive advantage, an advantage which an enterprise, region or sector must possess or develop if it is to be competitive in a segment of a particular market.

Complementarity

Complementarity is the fact that several public interventions (or several components of an intervention) contribute towards the achievement of the same objective.

Consistency

Consistency is the harmony, compatibility, correspondence or uniformity among the parts of a complex thing. In European legal texts and working documents it is often used equivalently to coherence.

Context

Context is the socio-economic and environmental situation in which an intervention is implemented. The contextual situation and trends are taken into account in programming as well as in programme evaluations.

Context indicator

Context indicators provide information on relevant aspects of the external environment that are likely to have an influence on the design and performance of the policy, e.g. GDP per capita, rate of unemployment, water quality.

D

E

Effectiveness

Effectiveness is the extent to which objectives pursued by an intervention are achieved. An effectiveness indicator is calculated by relating an output, result or impact to a quantified objective.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process by which the likely significant effects of a project or development on the environment are identified, assessed and then taken into account by the competent authority in the decision-making process. It is a systematic process that examines in advance the environmental impacts of proposed development actions and therefore can contribute to better projects from an environmental perspective.

Europe 2020 Strategy

The Europe 2020 Strategy as laid down in the Communication from the Commission (COM [2010] 2020 from 3.3.2010) sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century, with the aim to turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. The EU2020 Strategy is the common reference document for all European policy support instruments for the programming period 2014-2020.

European Cohesion Policy

According to Article 3(2) of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States. In view of the programming period 2014-2020, the

instruments for European Cohesion Policy (the funds EFRD, ESF, Cohesion Fund, EMFF and EAFRD) are brought together under the Common Strategic Framework, regulated by the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. Cohesion policy is a dynamic investment policy of the Union aiming at promoting long-term sustainable growth in European regions through removing barriers to growth and facilitating structural adjustment.

Evaluation governance

Evaluation governance is the set of appropriate institutional arrangements for managing evaluation aimed at ensuring effective processes and for making full use of the information generated by monitoring & evaluation systems. The institutional arrangements must address three requirements: developing a policy and a set of guidelines for evaluation; ensuring impartiality and independence; linking evaluation findings to future activities.

Evaluation management

Evaluation management is the targeted employment of resources and coordination of processes with the aim to carry out an effective evaluation. Evaluation governance sets the institutional frame for evaluation management.

Evaluation plan

The Evaluation Plan sets out the evaluation activities including the institutional arrangements (evaluation governance) and management provisions (evaluation management) for a whole programme implementation period. For the programming period 2014-2020, Managing Authorities of programmes under the five funds covered by the Common Strategic Framework shall draw up an Evaluation Plan. For rural development the Evaluation Plan will be included in each RDP and must conform to the minimum requirements established in the implementing act.

Evaluation question

An evaluation question needs to be answered by evaluators. Evaluation questions are usually posed by those commissioning an evaluation and feature in the Terms of Reference of evaluation projects (...) Evaluation questions have three dimensions: descriptive (what happened?), causal (to what extent is what has happened

an effect of the intervention?) and normative (is the effect satisfactory?).

Ex ante conditionalities

Ex ante conditionality seeks to ensure that the necessary preconditions for investments to flourish are in place. Four types of preconditions can be identified: (i) regulatory, (ii) strategic, (iii) infrastructural-planning and (iv) institutional. Regulatory preconditions primarily relate to transposition of EU legislation. Strategic preconditions are linked to strategic frameworks for investments; while infrastructural-planning preconditions relate to major infrastructure investments. Institutional preconditions aim to ensure institutional effectiveness and adequate administrative capacity.

F

Financial instruments

Financial instruments are Union measures of financial support provided on a complementary basis from the budget in order to address one or more policy objectives of the Union. Such instruments may take the form of loans, guarantees, equity or quasi-equity investments, or other risk-sharing instruments, and may, where appropriate, be combined with grants.

G

Governance

Governance can be understood as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. In contrast to older (narrower) definitions the term does not only indicate what a government does, but also includes structures set up and actions undertaken in partnership with the civil society and the private sector.

Governance arrangement

Governance arrangements include regulatory, institutional and contractual relationships aiming at making the cooperation of public and non-public stakeholders for reaching common goals of public interest more effective.

Institutional arrangements can be understood as governance arrangements consisting of only (public or non-public) institutions, thereby excluding the direct involvement of non-institutional (private and civil-society) stakeholders.

Grant

A grant, a form of support, is a giving of funds for a specific purpose. A grant is not reimbursable, except where the beneficiary has been proven to violate funding rules.

H

Human resources

Human resources are the set of individuals who make up the workforce of an organization, business sector or an economy. The definition includes the treasure of knowledge embodied by these individuals. 'Human capital' is sometimes used synonymously with human resources, although human capital typically refers to a more narrow view; i.e., the knowledge the individuals embody and can contribute to an organization. Likewise, other terms sometimes used include 'manpower', 'talent', 'labor' or simply 'people'.

I

Indicator

An indicator is a tool to measure the achievement of: an objective; a resource mobilised; an output accomplished; an effect obtained; or a context variable (economic, social or environmental). The information provided by an indicator is a quantitative datum used to measure facts or opinions (e.g. percentage of regional enterprises which have been assisted by public intervention; percentage of trainees who claim to be satisfied or highly satisfied). An indicator must, among other things, produce simple information which is communicable and easily understood by both the provider and the user of the information. It must help the managers of public intervention to communicate, negotiate and decide. For that purpose, it should preferably be linked to a criterion on the success of the intervention. It should reflect as precisely as possible whatever it is meant to measure (validity of construction). The indicator and its measurement unit must be sensitive, that is to say, the quantity measured must vary significantly when a change occurs in the variable to be measured.

Indicator value

The indicator value is the measured state of the indicator. For quantitative indicators, it consists of a unit of measurement (e.g. kg, €, hrs....) and the number of units. For qualitative indicators, the indicator value may be expressed in verbal judgements (e.g. yes/no; very good/good, etc.), although these value judgements can also be translated into numbers on a fixed scale (e.g. Likert scale for ratings, from 1 = very weak to 5 = very strong). Indicators may require interpretation/analysis through appropriate evaluation methodologies in order to provide information about the actual effects of the policy intervention.

Innovation

The term innovation can relate to products, processes, organisations, governance arrangements or complex systems comprising all these. For pragmatic reasons it is therefore indicated to define this term within the wide limits of existing definitions, according to the definer's purpose. Here are four examples of well-established definitions.

"The act of introducing something new" (the American heritage dictionary)

"A new idea, method or device" (Webster online)

"Change that creates a new dimension of performance" (Peter Drucker)

"The introduction of new goods (...), new methods of production (...), the opening of new markets (...), the conquest of new sources of supply (...) and the carrying out of a new organization of any industry" (Joseph Schumpeter)

Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)

ITI is a tool to implement territorial strategies in an integrated way. Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 states: 'Where an urban development strategy or other territorial strategy or pact ... requires an integrated approach involving investments under more than one priority axis of one or more Operational Programmes, the action shall be carried out as an integrated territorial investment (an 'ITI').' ITI allows Member States to implement Operational Programmes in a cross-cutting way and to draw on funding from several priority axes of one or more Operational Programmes to ensure the implementation of an integrated

strategy for a specific territory. This basically top-down delivery instrument is designed for the regional level and can be combined with the bottom-up instrument CLLD which in turn addresses the sub-regional and local level.

The key elements of an ITI are: (i) a designated territory and an integrated territorial development strategy; (ii) a package of actions to be implemented; and (iii) governance arrangements to manage the ITI.

The Managing Authority can designate an intermediary body (e.g. local and regional authorities) to carry out management and implementation tasks. Funding for ITI comes from the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and the ESF only.

Interest rate subsidy

Interest rate subsidies, a form of support, are subsidies provided with the aim to lower credit costs for the beneficiary. They help in case of liquidity shortages of basically viable enterprises (e.g. after natural disasters).

Intervention logic

An intervention logic represents a methodological instrument which establishes the logical link between programme objectives and the envisaged operational actions. It shows the conceptual link from an intervention's input to its output and, subsequently, to its results and impacts. Thus an intervention logic allows an assessment of a measure's contribution to achieving its objectives.

J

Joint Action Plan

Joint Action Plans are operations comprising a group of projects as part of an Operational Programme, with specific objectives, result indicators and outputs agreed between the Member State and the Commission. They offer a simplified management and control system geared towards performance. JAPs can be funded from ERDF and ESF only.

K

L

LEADER

LEADER stands for 'Links between actions for the development of the rural economy'. It used to be the name of a Community Initiative (LEADER I: 1991-1993; LEADER II: 1994-1999; LEADER+: 2000-2006) and is currently known as the method by which Axis 4 measures of the current RDP are implemented (2007-2013).

The LEADER method is used for mobilising and delivering rural development in rural communities through local public-private partnerships ('Local Action Groups'). It is designed to help rural people, groups and enterprises, etc. to consider the potential of their area and to encourage the implementation of integrated, high-quality and original strategies for sustainable development. The LEADER method is the mode of delivery stipulated for Community-Led Local Development/CLLD (2014-2020). CLLD continues to be called LEADER in the framework of the EAFRD.

M

Management and control system

Operational Programmes require management and control systems at Member State level. They shall provide for:

- (a) a description of the functions of each body concerned in management and control, and the allocation of functions within each body;
- (b) compliance with the principle of separation of functions between and within such bodies;
- (c) procedures for ensuring the correctness and regularity of expenditure declared;
- (d) computerised systems for accounting, for the storage and transmission of financial data and data on indicators, for monitoring and for reporting;
- (e) systems for reporting and monitoring where the responsible body entrusts execution of tasks to another body;

(f) arrangements for auditing the functioning of the management and control systems;

(g) systems and procedures to ensure an adequate audit trail;

(h) the prevention, detection and correction of irregularities, including fraud, and the recovery of amounts unduly paid, together with any interest. The Member State shall designate for each Operational Programme a managing, a certifying and an audit authority which are responsible for the different components of the management and control system.

Milestones

Milestones express the intended progress towards each rural development priority. For rural development the intention is to define common performance indicators, based on output indicators, to establish the milestones for each priority. The Managing Authorities have to propose appropriate values for each of the relevant milestones, in relation to the measures, actions and resources programmed for each priority.

Milestones should be distinguished from target indicators, although the performance framework constitutes a link between them: 'In cases where the shortfall in the achievement of milestones or targets is significant, the Commission should be able to suspend payments to the programme or, at the end of the programming period, apply financial corrections, in order to ensure that the Union budget is not used in a wasteful or inefficient way.'

Monitoring

Monitoring is an exhaustive and regular examination of the resources, outputs and results of public interventions. Monitoring is based on a system of coherent information including reports, reviews, balance sheets, indicators, etc. Monitoring system information is obtained primarily from operators and is used essentially for steering public interventions. When monitoring includes a judgement, this judgement refers to the achievement of operational objectives. Monitoring is also intended to produce feedback and direct learning. It is generally the responsibility of the actors charged with implementation of an intervention.

Multiannual financial framework

Annual EU budgets are based on the Multiannual Financial Framework agreed between the European Parliament, Council and Commission in an inter-institutional agreement. The financial framework sets the maximum amount of commitment appropriations in the EU budget each year for broad policy areas ('headings') and fixes an overall annual ceiling on payment and commitment appropriations.

N

National Rural Network

National Rural Networks interlink the organisations and administrations involved in rural development. The EAFRD Regulation requires each Member State to set up a National Networking Unit. Member States with regional RD Programmes may run specific programmes for establishing and managing the National Rural Network. Networking by the National Rural Network aims to:

- (a) increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development;
- (b) improve the quality of Rural Development Programmes;
- (c) inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy;
- (d) foster innovation in agriculture.

O

P

Partnership

A partnership is an arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. Partners in the understanding of the Common Strategic Framework are the parties involved in the Partnership Agreement concluded between the Member State and the Commission. According to the legal requirements, these partners shall comprise

(a) competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities;

(b) economic and social partners; and

(c) bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, nongovernmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality and non-discrimination.

These partners, in accordance with the multi-level governance approach, shall be involved by Member States in the preparation of Partnership Agreements and progress reports and in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. They shall also participate in the Monitoring Committees for programmes.

Partnership Agreement

Partnership Agreement means the document prepared by the Member State with the involvement of partners in line with the multi-level governance approach, which sets out the Member State's strategy, priorities and arrangements for using the ESI Funds in an effective and efficient way to pursue the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and which is approved by the Commission following assessment and dialogue with the Member State.

Performance Framework

For each programme under the Common Strategic Framework, a performance framework shall be defined with a view to monitoring progress towards the objectives and targets set for each programme over the course of the programming period. The Commission should undertake a performance review in cooperation with the Member States. A performance reserve should be foreseen and allocated in 2019 where milestones set in the performance framework have been attained.

Prizes

A prize, a form of support, is an award to be given to a person or a group of people to recognise and reward actions or achievements. By means of awarding prizes, the EAFRD signals the Union's recognition of how local development approaches and a transnational dimension can reinforce each other, especially when an innovative spirit is applied. It should do this by awarding prizes to a

limited number of projects which exemplify these characteristics.

Programme-specific indicator

An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor. The set of common indicators, binding for all Member States, serves to measure achievements and changes at programme and European level. Since common indicators may not fully reflect all effects of programme activities, the Managing Authorities in the Member States are asked to complement the common indicator set by defining additional indicators to capture the full range of intended effects of a given programme, in particular for national priorities and site-specific measures. These additional indicators are called programme-specific indicators.

Q

R

Relevance

Relevance is the extent to which an intervention's objectives are pertinent to needs, problems and issues. Questions of relevance are particularly important in *ex ante* evaluation because the focus is on the strategy chosen or its justification.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is the determination of quantitative or qualitative value of risk related to a concrete situation and a recognized threat (also called hazard). In the case of the *ex ante* evaluation of Rural Development Programmes, the risk to be assessed is related to (i) the possibility that a certain measure would not be applied and the corresponding funds not be used, e.g. due to the concomitant administrative burden (risk of inadequacy/inefficiency); or (ii) the possibility that a certain measure does not meet the needs of beneficiaries and/or does not help achieve the intended results (risk of irrelevance/ineffectiveness).

S

SEA Public consultation

The projects and programmes co-financed by the EU (Cohesion, Agricultural and Fisheries Policies) have to comply with the Environmental Impact Assessment/EIA and Strategic Environmental Assessment /SEA Directives to receive approval for financial assistance. Public consultations are a key feature of environmental assessment procedures. They ensure public participation in decision-making and thereby strengthen the quality of decisions. The authorities to be consulted should be considered by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes. The public is defined as public affected or likely to be affected by, or having an interest in, the decision-making subject to the SEA Directive, including relevant non-governmental organisations, such as those promoting environmental protection and other organisations concerned. The details of the public consultation arrangements are to be determined by the Member States on the basis of the national legislation transposing the SEA Directive.

Simplified Cost Option

In order to relieve administrative burden from potential beneficiaries of the Structural Funds, the Commission, in 2009, deviated from the real cost principle applied so far and allowed Member States to claim (i) indirect costs (overheads) on a flat rate basis up to 20% of direct costs of an operation, (ii) standard unit costs and (iii) lump sums. These simplified cost options have been taken up in the Common Strategic Framework 2014-2020 and will be applicable for the five Funds covered by Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

Simplified costs options such as flat rates and lump sums provide the means for Member States to introduce performance-oriented management at the level of individual operations, by reducing errors related to financial management, eligibility rules and audit trail, and by reorienting both implementation and control towards the performance of operations.

Social capital

Following the definition of Ostrom and Ahn (...), social capital is an attribute of individuals and of their

relationships that enhances their ability to solve collective action problems. They distinguish three broad forms that are particularly important in (respect to) collective action: (1) trustworthiness, (2) networks, and (3) formal and informal rules or institutions (...).

Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder mapping is the comprehensive assessment and analysis of stakeholders relevant for a certain domain or issue (e.g. rural development, renewable energies, land use, etc.). The analysis concerns the stakeholders' distinct interests, their relative weight (in respect to various criteria such as power, networking capacity, etc.) and the quality (intensity, harmony) characterizing their mutual relationships. From a pragmatic point of view, stakeholder mapping should not refer to a too large domain (as the complexity grows with the number of stakeholders and relationships). Stakeholder mapping is particularly revealing in facilitated dialogue settings (bringing together various stakeholders and their individual perspectives), and by using visualisation methods.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a similar technique to Environmental Impact Assessment but normally applied to policies, plans, programmes and groups of projects. Strategic Environmental Assessment provides the potential opportunity to avoid the preparation and implementation of inappropriate plans, programmes and projects and assists in the identification and evaluation of project alternatives and identification of cumulative effects. Strategic Environmental Assessment comprises two main types: sectoral strategic environmental assessment (applied when many new projects fall within one sector) and regional SEA (applied when broad economic development is planned within one region). Within the EU, SEA is governed by the provisions of Directive.

Sub-programme

According to Article 9(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Member States may include in their Rural Development Programmes thematic sub-programmes to address specific needs in areas of particular importance to them. Thematic sub-programmes, being distinct programmes embedded in the main RD Programme, may concern

among others young farmers, small farms, mountain areas and the creation of short supply chains. Thematic sub-programmes should also be used to provide for the possibility to address restructuring of agricultural sectors which have a strong impact on the development of rural areas. Managing Authorities may also propose other thematic sub-programmes specifically relevant for their RDP territory. As a means to increase the efficient intervention of such thematic sub-programmes Member States may increase the support rates for measures and operations under the sub-programme by +10%. Annex III of the EAFRD Regulation contains an indicative list of measures and operations of particular relevance to thematic sub-programmes.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The analysis of these four aspects has become the standard method for taking stock of the situation in an area, sector or theme and deciding on strategic priorities, objectives and measures. The SWOT should reflect evidence contained in the baseline and other indicators as well as more qualitative information. Ideally it should take into account stakeholder opinions. The strengths and weaknesses refer to the existing positive and negative attributes whereas the opportunities and threats to the future.

Synergy

Synergy denotes the fact that several public interventions (or several components of an intervention) together produce an impact which is greater than the sum of the impacts they would produce alone (e.g. an intervention which finances the extension of an airport which, in turn, helps to fill tourist facilities, also financed by the intervention). Synergy generally refers to positive impacts. However, for phenomena which are contradictory, or reinforce negative effects, “negative synergy” or “anti-synergy” may also be used (e.g. an intervention subsidises the diversification of enterprises while a regional policy helps to strengthen the dominant activity).

T

Target indicator

For each focus area chosen among the six RD priorities, quantifiable target indicators are defined at Community level. Target indicators should be linked, as directly as possible, to RDP interventions, minimising the effect of external factors. They should be indicators which can be simply and regularly monitored, minimising the data requirements for beneficiaries and administrations, as the values of these indicators will be monitored regularly throughout the lifetime of each RDP. Wherever possible established indicators and methods should be used. For the most part, target indicators will be at the result level, with the exception of Priority 1, which is horizontal and whose results are captured through the outcomes of other priorities. For the focus areas under this priority, the target indicators will be established at output level.

Technical Assistance

With regard to public support programmes or programming frameworks, Technical Assistance is the providing of advice, assistance, and training pertaining to the setting up, implementation and management of the programme. From the Technical Assistance budget, the ESI Funds may support actions for preparation, management, monitoring, evaluation, information and communication, networking, complaint resolution, and control and audit. The ESI Funds may be used by the Member State to support actions for the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries, including electronic data exchange systems, and actions to reinforce the capacity of Member State authorities and beneficiaries to administer and use the ESI Funds. These actions may concern preceding and subsequent programming periods. Up to 0,25% of the EAFRD can be dedicated to Technical Assistance activities such as listed under Article 59 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

U V W X Y Z

2. TEMPLATE TOR FOR *EX ANTE* EVALUATIONS

2.1 Introduction

The Terms of Reference (ToR) define the essential tasks and cornerstones of the *ex ante* evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the programming period 2014-2020. The ToR serve as a basis for the contractual relationships between the evaluator and the Managing Authority and are a point of reference which can be referred to at all times during the work.

In the following we provide an overview of the main points to be covered in the ToR which can be used as a checklist for the Managing Authorities while drafting the ToR for the *ex ante* evaluation.

We present the default ToR section by section, each time adding possible further aspects to consider.

[Text in square brackets means that the respective part has to be adapted to the specific situation, for example to a national or regional programming level, to the respective status of planning, etc.].

Additional comments are put in the box named

Further aspects, comments and considerations

2.2 Default ToR for *ex ante* evaluations including further considerations

Overall purpose of the contract

The object of procurement is the *ex ante* evaluation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) in [Member State or region / regions] 2014 – 2020 according to Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council from 17.12.2013 () and Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council from 17.12.2013 () and national requirements and include [see further aspects, comments and considerations].

Further aspects, comments and considerations

The tasks of the *ex ante* evaluation should be further specified¹ and could for example include:

- the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as a separate part or lot within the tender (see Part III: Chapter 3 presenting default ToR for SEA);
- the contribution to and coordination with the Partnership Agreement at national level according to Article 15 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013;
- carrying out specific thematic studies.

Context

[Member state / Region] will draw up an RDP according to Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 for the period 2014-2020. The EAFRD shall commit to the EU 2020 Strategy through the promotion of sustainable development, supplementing the instruments of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), European Cohesion Policy and Common Fisheries Policy. EAFRD contributes to the achievement of territorially and environmentally better balanced, climate friendly and more innovative agriculture and forestry.

The actual status of the programming of the RDP can be described as follows:
[see further aspects, comments and considerations]

Further aspects, comments and considerations

The programming of the RDP is on the one hand influenced by the progressive specification of the framework conditions, i.e. the multiannual financial framework (MFF), regulations, implementing acts, the Partnership Agreement. On the other hand the political decision-makers, the administration, economic and social partners and the *ex ante* evaluation itself will influence the planning of the RDP. The final design of the new programme can only be decided after determining the financial resources.

The description of the actual planning status could include further information in the following areas:

- EU level: general architecture of the programming process, objectives and priorities for rural development;
- Member State level: previous programmes and evaluations, Partnership Agreement, status of the preparation of the RDP.

Specific objectives of the *ex ante* evaluation

The *ex ante* evaluation is carried out to improve the quality and design of the RDP and to verify that objectives and targets can be reached. It is carried out by independent experts in close cooperation with the Managing Authorities [and other contractors working on e.g. the SWOT analysis and needs assessment, programme planning documents, Partnership Agreement].

The *ex ante* evaluation accompanies the development of all aspects of the RDP [and thematic sub-programmes] in an iterative process including the SWOT analysis, the intervention logic and the definition of objectives and targets.

At the same time the *ex ante* evaluation is the starting point for evaluation during the implementation of the RDP and establishes a basis for effective monitoring and evaluation.

All in all the *ex ante* evaluation shall contribute to a better targeted support for rural development and to support a common learning process related to monitoring and evaluation.

Further aspects, comments and considerations

See also Article 55(1), (3) and Article 38 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, as well as Article 68 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

According to Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 the *ex ante* evaluator is engaged from an early stage (including the SWOT analysis).

Further information about roles and responsibilities can be found in Part I: Chapter 2 of these guidelines.

Legal basis and documents to be considered

All the relevant regulations, guidelines, directives, documents, working papers have to be taken into account in the course of the *ex ante* evaluation in the actual version.

The following documents are fundamental¹⁴⁸:

- [already existing documents at EU-level including drafts]
- [future / expected documents at EU-level]
- [Member-State documents]

🔗 Further aspects, comments and considerations

The ToR should list all relevant documents (including these guidelines) that have to be taken into account, even if not yet available or not yet in force.

Specific tasks / content of the *ex ante* evaluation

The *ex ante* evaluation shall appraise:

- A. All aspects covered by Article 55(3)(a-m) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 including
 - the SWOT analysis and needs assessment;
 - the programme's intervention logic, targets and performance milestones;
 - the expected contribution of the measures chosen to achieve the targets;
- B. [furthermore the following aspects¹⁴⁹:
 - Lessons learnt from the previous programming period;
 - (methods, data sources) of the amount of the premium for the area-based measures (agri-environmental, organic-farming, afforestation);
 - the description of the Evaluation Plan;
 - approaches to further simplification;
 - thematic sub-programmes;
 - specific provisions (on LEADER, networking...)
- C. The programme-specific evaluation questions, which have to be answered by the evaluator:]

🔗 Further aspects, comments and considerations

The tasks under A are defined in the two relevant regulations¹⁵⁰ (see Part II of this guidance for further explanations).

Programme-specific evaluation questions may help focus the *ex ante* evaluation on the specific needs of the Member States.

Methods

In order to arrive at robust and reliable conclusions based on representative data, well-known and tested methods should be used for the *ex ante* evaluation. The *ex ante* report has to explain the used methods and data sources and their implications for the quality of the data and the results. This should allow an assessment of the reliability of the findings of the *ex ante* evaluation and facilitate the provision of usable and sound conclusions and recommendations.

¹⁴⁸ This list is not exhaustive.

¹⁴⁹ Further subjects can be added.

¹⁵⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

In the proposal the applicant has to describe and explain the intended methodological approaches for the *ex ante* evaluation. The *ex ante* evaluation is expected to utilize already existing data as far as possible. The Managing Authority will support the evaluator in retrieving relevant data from other institutions.

The Managing Authority will accompany the realisation of the *ex ante* evaluation and will wish to be kept informed about the status of the evaluation regularly [usually six weeks]. The contractor may be asked by the client to participate in events and to give presentations.

[The assessment of the quality of the *ex ante* evaluation will be based on the following criteria: fulfilment of the tasks described in the ToR, adequate length, adequate methods, robustness of the data, well-founded analysis, clarity of conclusions and feasibility of recommendations.]

🔗 Further aspects, comments and considerations

There are no legal requirements on methods; however, good practice has to be taken into account (see Part II: all sub-sections headed 'What are the proposed solutions?');

Where appropriate, quality requirements may be defined in relation to the applied methods (e.g. prescribing quantitative methods for certain indicators); alternatively, preferred methods can be explicitly defined.

Timing and interactive procedures

The *ex ante* evaluation accompanies the development process of the RDP. It has to be closely coordinated with the other relevant parallel processes (e.g. Partnership Agreement, SEA) and actors. The *ex ante* evaluation is an iterative process which needs to be managed and documented.

The provisional timetable of the *ex ante* evaluation of the RDP is as follows and will be adapted according to changes in the planning process. [provisional timetable for the Member State / region]

The presence of the *ex ante* evaluation is a prerequisite for the submission of the RDP and the Partnership Agreement to the Commission.

[The evaluator's contractual obligations expire only after the approval of the RDP by the European Commission. Necessary adjustments of the *ex ante* evaluation until the final approval of the RDP are carried out by the contractor as required.]

🔗 Further aspects, comments and considerations

The timelines and requirements will result in a significantly longer duration of the *ex ante* evaluation compared to the current funding period.

The way in which Managing Authorities deal with the uncertainties inherent to the fact that the *ex ante* evaluation will, in many countries, be contracted before the legal provisions are finalised, depend on the respective juridical and institutional rules and usances governing the Member State. The proposed clause is just one possibility.

Deliverables

[The deliverables have to be defined according to the specific timetable and tasks of the *ex ante* evaluation]

The result of the *ex ante* evaluation shall be presented in a final report bringing together all elements of the evaluation. The report must be clearly structured and formulated and include an executive summary. This report should reflect the main applied methods, the changes and improvements to the programme which have been made through the evaluation process and a final assessment of the draft programme. The environmental report in the framework of the SEA is an integral part of the *ex ante* evaluation and has to be included as a sub-chapter. The final *ex ante* evaluation will be integrated into the RDP and will be made public.

Further aspects, comments and considerations

- description of deliverables according to the standard phases of the *ex ante* evaluation;
- see Part I: Chapter 2 for further information about reporting and the integration of the *ex ante* evaluation/SEA into the programme;
- the number of copies, electronic version, CD ROM etc. should also be defined in the ToR;
- Maximum pages for the *ex ante* evaluation (e.g. 150 pages, of which max. 50 pages for the SEA, 5 pages for the executive summary (e.g. an additional English translation of the summary)) may be defined.
- The proposed *ex ante* evaluation report structure should feature in the Annex of the ToR. Further down we present a 'proposed table of content for the *ex ante* evaluation report' in Part III: Chapter 6.

For the following three remaining parts of the default ToR only general comments, hints and recommendations are provided because they will be very different for each Member State.

Budget and remuneration

- Concerning the budget required for the *ex ante* evaluation, the draft guidance on *ex ante* evaluation for the Cohesion Policy gives hints concerning the necessary financial volume for *ex ante* evaluation and recommends that some work days are reserved for the evaluators to undertake additional analysis during the negotiations with the Commission on the RDPs. In principle it can be assumed for the *ex ante* evaluation of the RDPs that due to the extended operational time the expenses will be higher than in the actual funding period. The budget size of the *ex ante* evaluation is also closely linked to the methodological requirements and applied methods which shall be taken in consideration in the evaluation of applicants.
- The joint DG Regio/Employment Guidance document on *ex ante* evaluation 2014-2020 indicates that the cost of *ex ante* evaluation undertaken externally may be met with the Technical Assistance budgets from the 2007-2013 programme. Current rules and procedures concerning eligibility and rates of contribution are applicable.
- The ToR should include information
 - a) which costs can be covered;
 - b) how the remuneration is planned along the defined deliverables and the timeline;
 - c) how the deliverables will be approved by the client;
 - d) if and how and on which basis supplementary works would be remunerated in terms of time (prolongation of the task) and in terms of justified complexity of applied methods in favour of high quality of the *ex ante* evaluation. In some cases, the available maximum budget for the

ex ante evaluation is indicated in the ToR, stimulating a performance instead of a price competition.

Required capacities and content of the offer

This part of the tender defines the required capacities and the requested evidence and explanations to check expertise, reliability and capability of the tenderer. This might include: formal qualification of experts involved, their qualification in the field of rural development and related EU policies and their evaluation, multiannual expertise and professional experience in the area of evaluation of Rural Development Programmes, proven results in evaluation of EU rural development policy or other policies (evaluation reports, studies, publications etc.), good communication and collaboration skills, e.g. via proven active participation in international, interregional or other partnership based projects, etc.

Moreover the content of the offer is defined by reference to:

- a) the methodological approach,
- b) the organisation of the work and time plan,
- c) the cost plan,
- d) formal specifications.

Selection procedure

The ToR should indicate how the offers are going to be assessed. Generally, a distinction can be made between eligibility criteria (e.g. company status), selection criteria (criteria to assess the competence of the tenderer) and award criteria (quality and price) to assess the offer. The award criteria (e.g. price, methodological quality, quality of content, quality of expertise offered) can be weighted.

3. INDICATIVE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SEA

Disclaimer: these Terms of Reference are only indicative and do not take account of each Member States' national regulations and requirements.

Note:

The ToR provided here are intended for a SEA to be prepared in the framework of Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020. Explanations or sections to be completed according to individual circumstances are given in [brackets].

Title:

ToR for the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the [name of the programme] in [name of the country/region]

3.1 Background

The European Commission requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be carried out for the preparation of the [name of the programme] and as support to [name of the sector programme].

The programme documents to consider are [mention the main documents and their status or stage of preparation].

[Mention other pertinent background information, such as key stakeholders, legal requirements, etc.].

[Mention any sector programme alternatives that have been agreed between the EC and the partner government for assessment; if no alternatives have been defined, state this as well].

[Explain the reasons why an SEA is required and which decisions it might influence].

3.2 Objectives

The objective of this SEA is to describe, identify and assess the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Rural Development Programme, to be taken into account in its preparation. The SEA will provide decision-makers in the EC and other donors and in the partner country with relevant information to assess the environmental challenges and considerations with regard to the Rural Development Programme [name of the programme]. This information should help ensure that environmental concerns are appropriately integrated in the decision-making and implementation processes.

3.3 Results

The SEA documentation is composed of two parts: a scoping study and an SEA report, the SEA "environmental report". The scoping study will define the issues that need to be addressed in the SEA report, considering the specific context in which the sector programme is being developed and is likely to be implemented. The activities, calendar and budget for the SEA report will be determined on the basis of the conclusions of the scoping study.

The SEA scoping study will deliver the following results:

- a description of the sector programme concerned and its alternatives;
- a brief description of the institutional and legislative framework of the sector;

- a brief presentation of the relevant environmental policy and objectives in the country (taking into account the information provided in the CEP);
- an identification of the key stakeholders and their concerns;
- an identification of the key sector programme-environment interactions;
- a description of the scope of the environmental baseline to be prepared;
- an identification of the impact identification and evaluation methodologies to be used in the SEA report;
- an indication of the time frames, costs and resources needed to carry out the SEA report.

The SEA report will deliver the following results:

- an environmental assessment of the [name of the programme], taking into account the potential environmental impacts of its implementation and its consistency with new rural development policies and objectives;
- recommendations for Rural Development Programme formulation (including performance indicators, use of Technical Assistance and other aid delivery methods) and for sector programme enhancement.

3.4 Issues to be studied

Scoping study

a. Overview of the sector programme and its institutional and legislative framework

The consultants must describe the sector programme under assessment, including any alternatives to be considered and which have been agreed between the EC and the partner government. If deemed necessary the consultants may suggest variants to the alternatives, which must be justified.

A description must be made of the programme's institutional and legislative framework, including the institutions responsible for the implementation of the sector programme, for the management of its environmental impacts and for the SEA process, as well as the relevant environmental policy and legislation.

The specific decisions and process that should be influenced by the SEA must be identified, especially aspects of programme formulation.

An overview must also be given of the wider policy framework related to the sector programme in order to identify other planning or policy documents which will need to be explored in the SEA report.

b. Description of key stakeholders and their concerns

The involvement of stakeholders in the SEA process is a key success factor. The consultant should identify key stakeholders (key groups and institutions, environmental agencies, NGOs, representatives of the public and others, including those groups potentially affected by the likely environmental impacts of implementing the sector programme) in addition to those foreseen in the national legislation transposing the SEA Directive.

Consultants must review records of any national public consultation processes that may have taken place as part of the sector programme preparation process. Based on this review and on additional consultations, they should identify key stakeholders' concerns and values with respect to the sector

programme under consideration. The stakeholder engagement strategy to be employed has to be agreed by the Environmental Authority (appointed by the government) before being implemented in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts or raising expectations that cannot be fulfilled. The strategy should provide stakeholders with an opportunity to influence decisions. If the public is not used to being engaged, particularly at the strategic level, and if there are no precedents, it would be important to include an education component in the stakeholder engagement process.

Due to the large geographical areas that may be covered by the programme, stakeholder engagement could focus on key stakeholders, specifically targeting directly affected and vulnerable groups as well as key stakeholders that may not have been adequately represented in the sector programme preparation. Records must be kept of all consultations and comments received.

c. Description of key environmental aspects to be addressed in the SEA

On the basis of the policy, institutional and legislative framework analysis, as well as the participation of stakeholders, the consultants must identify the key environmental aspects that should be addressed in the SEA report, i.e. the key rural programme-environment interactions that need to be given special consideration and emphasis. Particular attention should be paid to climate change and biodiversity issues. Depending on expected impacts on society and the scope of other studies, there is also a need to determine to which extent social impacts should be assessed.

d. Description of the scope of the environmental baseline to be prepared in the SEA report

Also, on basis of the information obtained above, the consultants must provide indications on the scope of the environmental baseline needed for the SEA report.

e. Recommendations on specific impact identification and evaluation methodologies to be used in the SEA report

Consultants should provide an indication of the impact identification and evaluation methodologies that will be used in the SEA report. Special attention should be given to identifying those environmental interactions that will merit quantitative analyses and those for which qualitative analyses should be carried out. This should be done in integration with the *ex ante* evaluation team.

f. Indication of the time frames, costs and resources needed to carry out the SEA study

The consultants must assess the time that needs to be allowed for the completion of the SEA report. A description and estimation of the resources required (in terms of budget, man-days) must be provided, including a breakdown of costs. If at this stage it is considered necessary to integrate other experts with specific skills, this should be proposed for consideration by the Managing Authority.

SEA report (SEA “Environmental report”)

The scope of the SEA report will be agreed with the Managing Authority and Environmental Authority on the basis of the results of the scoping study. The SEA report will be based on the results of the scoping stage and include an environmental baseline study, an identification of environmental opportunities and constraints, an identification and assessment of the potential environmental impacts, an analysis of performance indicators, an assessment of the institutional capacities to address environmental challenges and conclusions and recommendations (for RDP formulation).

A. Environmental baseline study

A description and appraisal must be made of the current state of the environment, focusing on those key environmental components identified by the scoping study. The trends for the various environmental components must be identified and a projection must be made of the state of the environment in the short-, medium- and long-term in the assumption of no implementation of the sector programme. External factors must be taken into account, including the influence of other sectoral policies. If the “no implementation” scenario is unrealistic the most probable “business as usual” scenario should be selected. The geographical (or mapping) units to be addressed should be described, if relevant.

B. Identification and evaluation of environmental opportunities and constraints

The environmental factors and resources that can affect (positively or negatively) the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the sector programme should be identified, described and assessed for each alternative. These factors may include expected impacts from other sectors or policies. This part of the study should also consider the environmental issues that could potentially be addressed by the assessed programme. The study should assess if the sector programme provides an adequate response to these opportunities and constraints.

C. Identification and evaluation of impacts

The potential environmental impacts and risks from implementing the sector programme must be identified and described for each alternative being studied, taking into account the views and concerns of stakeholders. Their significance should be determined according to their characteristics (e.g. duration, probability, magnitude, mitigability, reversibility) and the sensitivity of the environment. Those impacts which are significant should be assessed in detail taking into account:

- the views and concerns of stakeholders,
- the consistency with transboundary and international if needed
- the socio-economic consequences (especially on vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities),
- compliance with environmental regulations and standards,
- consistency with environmental objectives and policies, and
- their implications for sustainable development.

[More information could be provided on how the methodology presented in the scoping study has been used for impact identification and evaluation].

D. Analysis of performance indicators

Performance indicators proposed by the programme and evaluated during the *ex ante* evaluation should be assessed and revised from an environmental perspective, i.e. their usefulness to identify the environmental effects (positive and negative) of programme implementation. Proposals should be made for the programme performance indicators and monitoring system.

The set of indicators may include:

- ‘pressure’ indicators;
- ‘state’ indicators, for sectors with a direct and major link with key environmental resources;

E. Assessment of the capacities to address environmental challenges

The capacity of regulatory institutions to address the environmental issues, especially the impacts identified, should be assessed.

F. Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders should be engaged throughout the SEA report according to the stakeholder engagement strategy agreed in the scoping stage.

G. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter will summarise the key environmental issues for the sector(s) involved, including policy and institutional constraints, challenges and main recommendations. Recommendations should be made on how to optimise positive impacts and the opportunities to enhance the environment, as well as on how to mitigate environmental constraints, negative effects and risks. They should suggest the selection of an alternative (if more than one alternative is envisaged), potential changes in the programme design, implementation and monitoring modalities, or co-operation actions.

In view of the preparation of a support programme recommendations should be made to specifically support the overall assessment of the programme. If the assessed programme includes projects, recommendations should be made on the need to carry out EIAs of those projects.

The limitations of the SEA and its assumptions should be presented. The recommendations should take into account the views presented by the stakeholders and explain how these were integrated. In the case of concerns that were not integrated in the final recommendations, the reasons thereof should be given.

3.5 Work plan

The work plan should include but not necessarily be limited to the following activities:

- Scoping study
- Fact finding/data collection
- Review of prior public consultations, identification of key stakeholders
- Engagement of stakeholders
- Analysis/preparation of recommendations and Scoping Report
- SEA report
 - ▶ Fact finding/data collection
 - ▶ Field trips
 - ▶ Engagement of stakeholders
 - ▶ Identification and detailed analysis of the potential environmental impacts
 - ▶ Preparation of recommendations to mitigate negative environmental effects (and constraints) and optimise positive effects (and opportunities)
 - ▶ Preparation of recommendations and draft SEA report
 - ▶ Preparation of the final SEA report

On the basis of this draft proposal and the time schedule outlined in the ToR, the consultants must provide their detailed work plan.

3.6 Expertise required

The consultants must specify the qualifications and experience of each specialist to be assigned to the SEA report. The consultants should indicate if/how they intend to use local experts and how they will contribute to the transfer of know-how throughout the study.

Experience in rural development will be an asset, as well as knowledge of programming and *ex ante* evaluation procedures.

For each specialist proposed, a curriculum vitae must be provided of no more than [four] pages setting out the relevant qualifications and experience.

3.7 Reporting

Scoping study

The scoping study must be presented in the format given in Appendix 1.

The detailed stakeholder engagement plan must be presented [two] weeks after kick-off; [number] copies are to be presented to [names and organisations] for comments.

The draft scoping report in [number] copies is to be presented to [names and organisations] for comments by [date]. Comments should be expected by [date]. The company will take account of those comments in preparing the final scoping report. [number] copies of the final scoping report in [language] are to be submitted by [date].

SEA report

The Commission will provide feedback on the scoping study no later than [number] weeks after its delivery, setting out the scope of the SEA report. The SEA report will begin no later than [number] weeks after this date.

The conclusions of the study must be presented in the SEA report in the format given in Appendix 2. The underlying analysis is to be presented in the appendices to this report.

The draft SEA report in [number] copies is to be presented to [names and organisations] for comments by [date]. Within [number] weeks, comments will be received from [list the authorities].

The company will take account of these comments in preparing the final report. [number] copies of the final report in [language] are to be submitted by [date].

3.8 Presentation of the proposal

The proposal must include an understanding of the Terms of Reference and a description of the general approach to the whole SEA in accordance with these ToR, highlighting the following: the proposed methodology for the participation of stakeholders; the proposed approaches for the definition of the environmental baseline; and the proposed methodologies for impact identification and evaluation.

3.9 Time schedule

[Insert indicative time schedule].

The company should respond to this time schedule and indicate in their proposal how they intend to organise the work for this purpose.

3.10 Appendices

Appendix 1. Format for the SEA scoping report

The following text appears on the inside front cover of the report:

This report is financed by the European Commission and is presented by the [name of consultant] for the ... [National Institution] and the European Commission. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ... or the European Commission.

1. Executive summary
2. Description of the sector programme under consideration
3. Overview of the policy, institutional and legislation framework
4. Description of key stakeholders and their concerns
5. Description of key environmental aspects to be addressed in the SEA report
6. Description of the scope of the environmental baseline to be prepared in the SEA report
7. Recommendations on specific impact identification and evaluation methodologies to be used in the SEA report
8. Proposal of timeframes and resources needed for the SEA report
9. Technical appendices
 - I. Stakeholder engagement methodology
 - II. List of stakeholders engaged or consulted
 - III. Records of stakeholder participation.
 - IV. List of documents consulted

Appendix 2. Format for the SEA report

Maximum length of the main report (without appendices): [number] pages.

I Report

1. Non technical summary
2. Scope
3. Background
 - 3.1 Sector programme justification and purpose
 - 3.2 Alternatives
 - 3.3 Environmental policy, legislative and planning framework
4. Approach and methodology

- 4.1 General approach
- 4.2 Geographical or environmental mapping units
- 4.3 Assumptions, uncertainties and constraints
5. Environmental baseline study
6. Impact identification and evaluation
7. Analysis of alternatives
8. Mitigating or optimising measures
9. Indicators and institutional capacities
10. Conclusions and recommendations
 - 10.1. General conclusions
 - 10.2. Recommendations for programme formulation
 - 10.3. Recommendations for programme enhancement
11. Technical appendices
 - Maps and other illustrative information not incorporated into the main report
 - Other technical information and data, as required
12. Other appendices
 - Study methodology/work plan (2–4 pages)
 - Consultants' itinerary (1–2 pages)
 - List of documentation consulted (1–2 pages)
 - Curricula vitae of the consultants (1 page per person)

II Statement

1. List of stakeholders consulted
2. Records of stakeholders' participation
3. Summary how environmental considerations have been integrated
4. How the SEA report and the public consultation have been taken into account
5. Reasons for choosing between alternative options
6. Measures to monitor environmental effects of the RDP

4. INDICATIVE NUMBER OF MAN-DAYS FOR *EX ANTE* AND SEA

The following table shows the **average range of man-days** (min-max) for carrying out the tasks of rural development *ex ante* evaluations and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in the period 2007-2013. The values are the outcome of a quick survey among some *ex ante* evaluators, which were asked to estimate the values based on their experience. These numbers are rough estimations and are by no means representative. The effective number of working days depends on the size of the RDP, the duration of the contract; the extent of services requested; the intensity of interaction between programming authorities and evaluators, etc. Costs for travel, data, logistics, software, additional services, revisions are not included and would need to be added.

RD <i>ex ante</i> and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in 2007-2013				Specificities of programming period 2014-2020		
Working Phase	Task of <i>ex ante</i> (blue) and SEA (green)	Average range of man-days		Corresponding article in legal proposals for 2014-2020 (Rural development Reg. & Common Provisions Reg.)	Remarks	Related chapters of PART II of RD <i>ex ante</i> guidelines
		Min.	Max.			
Inception phase	Kick-off meeting between client and <i>ex ante</i> evaluator	2	4	Not mentioned but recommended		
	Kick-off meeting between client and SEA evaluator	3	5	Not mentioned but recommended		
STAGE 1 : Appraisal of the SWOT analysis and needs assessment	Appraisal of SWOT analysis and needs assessment (completeness of SWOT, baseline values of indicators, soundness of needs assessment)	10	19	Article 77 & 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013		1
	SEA – feedback on environmental issues , depth of assessment, environmental indicators, data and information requirements	9	25	Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		6
STAGE 2: Appraisal of	Assessing the RDP's expected contribution to overarching EU objectives	4	7	Article 55(3)(a) of Regulation (EU) No	To EU2020 Strategy	2.1

RD <i>ex ante</i> and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in 2007-2013			
Working Phase	Task of <i>ex ante</i> (blue) and SEA (green)	Average range of man-days	
		Min.	Max.
intervention logic, budgets, targets, performance framework			
	Assessing the external coherence	5	10
	Assessing the internal coherence (intervention logic)	6	10
	Assessing the contribution of expected outputs to results	5	8
	Assessing the consistency of allocation of budgetary resources with the objectives of the programme	4	6
	Presentation and discussion of above feedbacks to MA	3	4
	Assessing relevance and clarity of proposed programme indicators	5	8

Specificities of programming period 2014-2020		
Corresponding article in legal proposals for 2014-2020 (Rural development Reg. & Common Provisions Reg.)	Remarks	Related chapters of PART II of RD <i>ex ante</i> guidelines
1303/2013		
Article 55(3)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		2.2
Article 55(3)(b) & (f) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		2.3
Article 55(3)(f) of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		2.5
Article 55(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		2.6
Article 55(3)(e) of Regulation (EU) No		3.1

RD <i>ex ante</i> and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in 2007-2013			
Working Phase	Task of <i>ex ante</i> (blue) and SEA (green)	Average range of man-days	
		Min.	Max.
	Assessing the adequacy of indicator values with regards to the proposed resources	4	8
		n.a.	n.a.
	Presentation and discussion of above feedbacks to MA	3	4
	SEA feedback on intervention logic	5	9
	SEA consultations	8	21
	SEA presentation of feedback and consultation results to MA	3	5

Specificities of programming period 2014-2020		
Corresponding article in legal proposals for 2014-2020 (Rural development Reg. & Common Provisions Reg.)	Remarks	Related chapters of PART II of RD <i>ex ante</i> guidelines
1303/2013		
Article 55(3)(g) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	NEW focus: target values need to be assessed	3.2
Article 55(3)(k) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	NEW TASK: add approx. 3 to 4 working days	3.3
Not mentioned but recommended		
Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		6
Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		
Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		

RD <i>ex ante</i> and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in 2007-2013			
Working Phase	Task of <i>ex ante</i> (blue) and SEA (green)	Average range of man-days	
		Min.	Max.
STAGE 3: Appraisal of governance, management and delivery systems (& final programme document)		n.a.	n.a.
	Assessing the proposed forms of support	3	6
	Assessing the suitability of the procedures for monitoring and for data collection necessary to carry out evaluation	6	12
	Presentation and discussion of above feedbacks to MA	3	6
	Assessing the adequacy of planned measures to promote equal opportunities and prevention of discrimination	2	4
	Assessing the adequacy of planned resources to promote sustainable development	2	3

Specificities of programming period 2014-2020		
Corresponding article in legal proposals for 2014-2020 (Rural development Reg. & Common Provisions Reg.)	Remarks	Related chapters of PART II of RD <i>ex ante</i> guidelines
1303/2013		
Article 55(3)(i) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	NEW TASK: add 5 to 12 working days (for interviews, study of filing, info & communication systems...)	4.1
Article 55(3)(h) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		2.4
Article 55(3)(j) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013	NEW focus: includes assessment of Evaluation Plan	4.2
Not mentioned but recommended		
Article 55(3)(l) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		5.1
Article 55(3)(m) of Regulation (EU) No	Link to 6	5.2

RD <i>ex ante</i> and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in 2007-2013			
Working Phase	Task of <i>ex ante</i> (blue) and SEA (green)	Average range of man-days	
		Min.	Max.
	Assessing the arrangements for LEADER	4	7
	Assessing the arrangements for networking	3	5
		n.a.	n.a.
	Presentation and discussion of above feedbacks to MA	3	4
	SEA – drafting of report	14	25
	SEA – presentation of report to MA	3	5
Reporting	Compilation of 1 st Interim Deliverable (end of stage 1)	7	11
	Compilation of 2 nd Interim Deliverable (end of stage 2)	8	14

Specificities of programming period 2014-2020		
Corresponding article in legal proposals for 2014-2020 (Rural development Reg. & Common Provisions Reg.)	Remarks	Related chapters of PART II of RD <i>ex ante</i> guidelines
1303/2013		
Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	NEW focus: CLLD; requires personal interviews	5.3
Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013		5.4
Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013	NEW TASK: additional resources per thematic sub-programme (→ 4 to 10 days per programme)	5.5
Not mentioned but recommended		
Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		6
Article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013		
Not mentioned but recommended		
Not mentioned but		

RD <i>ex ante</i> and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in 2007-2013			
Working Phase	Task of <i>ex ante</i> (blue) and SEA (green)	Average range of man-days	
		Min.	Max.
	Compilation of Final Deliverable <i>ex ante</i> Report (end of stage 3)	11	17
	Translation of <i>ex ante</i> executive summary in English	3	4
	Compilation of Final Deliverable SEA Report	9	13
	Translation of SEA executive summary in English	3	4
Average range of man-days for <i>ex ante</i> 2007-2013		105	180
Average range of man-days for SEA 2007-2013		57	113

Specificities of programming period 2014-2020		
Corresponding article in legal proposals for 2014-2020 (Rural development Reg. & Common Provisions Reg.)	Remarks	Related chapters of PART II of RD <i>ex ante</i> guidelines
recommended		
Not mentioned but recommended		
Not mentioned but recommended		

NB: in addition to these average numbers in the 2014-2020 period, additional resources for NEW EX ANTE TASKS must be added: e.g. for assessing the suitability of milestones; assessing administrative capacity; assessing thematic sub-programmes. These new tasks may require a substantial increase of resource input. For SEA the effective man-days also depend on the national legislation how the SEA directive needs to be implemented.

5. SUGGESTED EVALUATION QUESTIONS

In this section all the suggested evaluation questions are summarized.

<p>The SWOT analysis and needs assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are innovation and innovation systems defined in the RDP? • In how far are the most important needs to be addressed in fostering innovation properly identified? • In how far are the most important needs to be addressed in restructuring farms properly identified? • In how far has the need for generational renewal been explored? • In how far are the most important needs to be addressed in order to integrate primary producers into the food chain properly identified? • In how far have the needs for risk management in agriculture been assessed? • In how far are the most important needs addressed in restoring and preserving biodiversity and in improving water and soil management properly identified? • In how far are the most important needs to increase resource efficiency and shift towards carbon and climate resilient economy properly identified? • In how far have the needs to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas, been properly identified? • How and in how far does the RDP make a contribution towards innovation in agriculture and rural areas? • In how far does the RDP contribute to protect the environment, and to mitigate climate change? • In how far does the SWOT reflect all relevant issues, covered in the analysis of the current situation, leaving no important aspect aside nor adding new aspects not covered by the analysis? • How plausibly are the items placed under the four categories, emphasizing cross-links? • In how far are the issues ranked and prioritized in the light of the overall objectives of the EU Strategy 2020 and CAP 2020? • To which extent does the SWOT constitute the base for the needs assessment and a sound rationale for strategic conclusions and the setting of programme objectives?
<p>Contribution to the EU2020 Strategy and its overarching goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, fostering innovation and alleviating the pressure on environment and climate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent the set up intervention logic secures that the selected measures will contribute to the achievement of the regional, national and EU targets? • Who is not sufficiently involved in programme design and implementation, although suggested as relevant partner? • Who is not reached by any intervention, although identified as a relevant potential beneficiary? What kind of gaps are there? How can these gaps be neutralised? • How are individual rural development priorities translated into actions and how do they affect the interventions foreseen under the other priorities? • Which provisions (structures and processes) have been made to coordinate implementation? • In how far are these efforts reflected in the Managing Authority's communication to the partners, the potential beneficiaries and the wider public?

<p>Coherence and consistency with other CSF funds, the Partnership Agreement, Pillar 1 of the CAP and other EU and national policy instruments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do certain measures of the RDP interact with other agricultural instruments (CAP Pillar 1)? • How are complementarities described with other CSF funds interventions, and any other EU and national policies operating in the same area or addressing the same beneficiaries? • Who is not reached by any intervention, although identified as a relevant potential beneficiary? How can gaps be neutralised? • Are there unnecessary redundancies which might cause deadweight or loss of efficiency?
<p>Consistency of programme objectives and Programme objectives vs. measures selected</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How clearly are the programme's objectives defined? • How are the logical links and synergies described between the various objectives at the same or different hierarchical levels? • To which extent do the objectives contradict each other? • How comprehensively and plausibly are the logical links described between the selected measures and the whole range of objectives? • To what extent are synergetic interactions explained between measures for achieving the objectives?
<p>Forms of support proposed for the measures/actions envisaged</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the form of support chosen coherent with the selected measure, the envisaged action and the specific objectives? • How efficient and how effective will the proposed form of support presumably be? • To which extent have the programming authorities maxed out the opportunities to use simplified cost options?
<p>Assumptions about contributions of measures/actions to the expected outputs and to results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which assumptions underlie the links between planned actions and outputs? Furthermore, which assumptions link the expected outputs with the results? • On which external conditions hinge these assumptions? Which external factors might jeopardize the assumptions? • How should the intervention logic be reconfigured to reach the expected results more reliably and more effectively? Which actions should be reinforced, added or withdrawn?
<p>The consistency of the budgetary allocation with the objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far is the distribution of expenditures consistent with the hierarchy of objectives? • In how far is the distribution of expenditures consistent with the unit cost of the various measures? • How and to which extent have the recommendations of previous evaluations been taken into account (concerning cost unit accounting, absorption capacity...)? • To which extent does the distribution of programme expenditures, based on beneficiary type and/or region, meet the needs assessed and the priorities established? • In how far is the allocation of financial resources through the RDP consistent with the way resources are allocated through other ESI Funds (ESF, ERDF, Cohesion Fund, and EMFF) and through other national or regional financial instruments? • In how far is the allocation of financial resources through the RDP consistent with the way resources are allocated through the CAP first Pillar? • Which actions are associated with an elevated implementation risk? • Which follow-up measures should be adopted for investments bearing higher uncertainties?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and to which extent have the recommendations of previous evaluations been taken into account (concerning cost unit accounting, absorption capacity...)?
The relevance and clarity of proposed indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How relevant is the system of common and programme-specific indicators? • In how far do the proposed indicators provide the degree of disaggregation needed to incorporate a gender perspective or to adequately reflect the specificities of other communities or geographical areas? • How clearly are the proposed common and programme-specific indicators defined? • How SMART are the proposed indicators: specific, measurable, available/achievable in a cost effective way, relevant for the programme (see above) and available in a timely manner?
The adequacy of the quantified target values for indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To which extent does the programme establish target values for the indicators for the monitoring and evaluation systems? • How coherent are the provided data? How consistent are they with the outputs and results achieved during past experiences? • How clearly are the methods defined by which the target values are calculated and the sources upon which the employed data are based? • In how far have the opinions of the most relevant agents been taken into consideration? • How coherent are the target values for impact indicators, in respect to anticipated future tendencies and changes, as well as in respect to past experiences? • In how far has the methodology chosen for obtaining impact indicators been sufficiently explained?
The suitability of milestones selected for the performance framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all the required indicators used? • Are any superfluous indicators included? • How plausible are the defined milestones and targets? • How consistent are the defined milestones and targets with those from other CSF programmes?
The adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for programme management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How comprehensive is the description of the management and control system, and how are the requirements of types of support described? • To what extent are the proposed levels of human resources and administrative capacities proportionate to the needs of programme management and delivery? • To what extent are the skills and capabilities present within the human resources and administrative capacities relevant to the specific needs of programme management and delivery? • To what extent have capacity development needs been adequately identified? • To what extent are appropriate solutions proposed under the Technical Assistance provisions? • To what extent are the provisions for RDP publicity appropriate in terms of the relevance of the proposed communication methods or vehicles, their scale and resourcing? • To what extent does the projected advisory capacity correspond to the perceived needs?
The procedures for monitoring, data collection and the Evaluation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In how far is the design of the monitoring system based on a thorough analysis of the data needs? • To what extent is the <i>ex ante</i> evaluator involved in the design of the monitoring system?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the ‘key information’ properly described and are its sources identified? • To which extent can the monitoring data be used for carrying out evaluations and in how far have other institutional databases been tapped or integrated as possible sources? • In how far have the lessons from previous evaluations been properly taken into account to estimate possible bottlenecks in the system? • How functional are the tools for data collection, storing and processing and which needs for change are there? • How useful is the key information collected (in terms of timeliness, relevance, analytical value, etc.)? • To which extent and in which way will the application forms and project reports be used for gathering data at operational level? • In how far have the intermediate bodies, the Paying Agency, the LAGs been actively involved in the setup and how has their capacity and that of other beneficiaries been developed to make proper use of the monitoring system? • How adequate is the Evaluation Plan in terms of completeness, usability and integration with other activities linked to other information processing activities? • In how far is the EP and/or other specific guidance documents clear enough in the text and in the capacity to provide practical guidance? • To which extent do the prioritized topics and activities match the specific information needs of the Managing Authority? • To which extent are there links with other CSF evaluations and monitoring reports (e.g. AIR)?
<p>Equal opportunities between men and women and non-discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which steps were taken to associate relevant stakeholders in the identification of challenges/needs, definition of objectives, decision on the allocation of resources and the selection of actions to be supported? • How are the gender perspective and non-discrimination addressed in the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment? • To what extent does the programme strategy address the particular needs of groups at risk of discrimination? • Which arrangements are foreseen to provide enhanced support toward equal opportunities and social inclusion?
<p>Sustainable development (details will be covered by the SEA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the measures directly addressing the sustainability goal (priorities 4 and 5) fit into the intervention logic? • Which indirect effects on environmental sustainability have to be expected by the planned measures and by interactions between measures?

<p>Community-Led Local Development (LEADER)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the role assigned to LEADER and CLLD related to the priorities for rural development? • In how far is the innovation principle translated into selection criteria for LAGs and LDSs? • In how far is the role foreseen for LEADER (CLLD) responsive to the needs assessed in the territorial analysis and the SWOT? • How has the joint selection committee for CLLD been established, how is it structured, and how does it function? • What is the rationale behind the delimitation of areas eligible for LEADER (CLLD)? • On the basis of which criteria have lead funds been defined for certain types of areas, and in how far are there common or different rules in place across all funds participating in CLLD? • In how far is the budgetary endowment of LAGs from EARDF consistent with the objectives set in the RDP? • In how far are the selection criteria specified in respect to the description of the LAG structure and decision-making processes, and with regard to the quality, the content and the making of the local development strategy? • To which extent do the selection criteria reflect the specificities of the LEADER approach (apart from innovation)? • How clearly are the institutional arrangements for LEADER implementation, including territorial co-operation described? • In which way are the activities (capacity building, networking, etc.) of the National Rural Network Unit linked to the local partnerships and their activities? • How are the outputs, results and impacts of LEADER going to be monitored and evaluated? • To which extent are the processes of monitoring and evaluation and the programme-specific indicators matched with those under the other CSF funds?
<p>National Rural Networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are stakeholders involved in the networking structure? • To which extent are relevant groups involved like farmers, researchers, advisors and businesses operating in the food sector? • Which arrangements have been foreseen to include the wider public? • Which provisions have been made to support the network evaluations/ self-evaluations? • How should information and data for monitoring be collected? Who is involved? • What kind of support is foreseen for the EIP operational groups during the RDP implementation? • How will the network facilitate capacity building, exchange of expertise and good practice dissemination? • How effectively and efficiently are the exchange of experiences, data collection and the flow of information organised? • What procedures are foreseen to identify relevant research activities and results? Who is involved and who is consulted? • What provisions are foreseen for the development of evaluation methods and tools for evaluating rural networks? • In how far are the Technical Assistance provisions matching the volume of tasks envisaged?

Thematic sub-programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why should the specific operations envisaged for the thematic sub-programme bring forth better results than if they would be delivered under the mainstream programme measures?• To what extent could measures/actions envisaged in the mainstream programme produce better results if they would be delivered as a thematic sub-programme?• How comprehensively have the analysis and the SWOT been conducted?• To what extent have stakeholders, particularly those representing the potential beneficiaries, been involved in the analysis, the SWOT, the setting of objectives and the design of operations?• How conclusively is the intervention logic described, how responsive are the chosen measures in respect to the needs assessed?• How conclusive is the set of indicators, and how realistic are the targets?• How comprehensively are the planned outputs and expenditures presented in the description of the thematic sub-programme, broken down between public and private?
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6. PROPOSED TABLE OF CONTENT FOR THE EX ANTE EVALUATION REPORT

PART I *EX ANTE* EVALUATION REPORT

Executive summary in English

Executive summary in national language

Table of contents

Section I: Introduction

1. Purpose and objectives of the *ex ante* evaluation
2. The description of steps in conducting the *ex ante* evaluation in RDP territory and interaction of the *ex ante* evaluator with the Managing Authority (and SEA evaluator if separate)

Section II: The *ex ante* evaluation report

1. *The assessment of the context and needs*

- 1.1 The SWOT analysis and needs assessment, including lessons learned from previous programming period
- 1.2 Recommendations related to the SWOT and needs assessment

2. *Relevance, internal and external coherence of the Programme*

- 2.1 The assessment of the contribution to the Europe 2020 Strategy
- 2.2 The assessment of the consistency with the CSF, Partnership Agreement, country-specific recommendations and other relevant instruments
- 2.3 The assessment of the programme's intervention logic
- 2.4 The assessment of the proposed forms of support
- 2.5 The assessment of the expected contribution of the measures chosen to achieve the targets
- 2.6 The assessment of the consistency of budgetary allocation with the objectives
- 2.7 The assessment of thematic sub-programmes
- 2.8 The assessment of the provisions for LEADER (CLLD)
- 2.9 The assessment of the provisions for the NRN
- 2.10 The assessment of use of Technical Assistance
- 2.11 Recommendations related to relevance and coherence of the programme

3. *Measuring the progress and the results of the Programme*

- 3.1 The assessment of programme-specific indicators
- 3.2 The assessment of the quantified target values for indicators
- 3.3 The assessment of the suitability of the milestones for the performance framework
- 3.4 The assessment of the proposed monitoring and evaluation system, and of the Evaluation Plan
- 3.5 Recommendations related to measuring the progress and results of the Programme

4. *The appraisal of the planned arrangements for the implementation of the Programme*

- 4.1 The assessment of the adequacy of human and administrative capacity for management

4.2 Recommendations related to implementation of the RDP

5. The assessment of horizontal themes

- 5.1 The assessment of the adequacy to promote equal opportunities, prevent discrimination
- 5.2 The assessment of the adequacy to promote sustainable development
- 5.3 The assessment of relevant advisory capacity
- 5.4 Recommendations relevant to the horizontal themes

PART II Strategic Environmental Assessment

(incorporating the report and the statement)

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I Report

- 1. Executive summary
- 2. Scope
- 3. Background
 - 3.1 Sector programme justification and purpose
 - 3.2 Alternatives
 - 3.3 Environmental policy, legislative and planning framework
- 4. Approach and methodology
 - 4.1 General approach
 - 4.2 Geographical or environmental mapping units
 - 4.3 Assumptions, uncertainties and constraints
- 5. Environmental baseline study
- 6. Impact identification and evaluation
- 7. Analysis of alternatives
- 8. Mitigation or optimising measures
- 9. Indicators and institutional capacities
- 10. Conclusions and recommendations
 - 10.1. General conclusions
 - 10.2. Recommendations for programme formulation
 - 10.3. Recommendations for programme enhancement
- 11. Technical appendices
 - Maps and other illustrative information not incorporated into the main report
 - Other technical information and data, as required
- 12. Other appendices
 - Study methodology/work plan (2–4 pages)
 - Consultants' itinerary (1–2 pages)
 - List of documentation consulted (1–2 pages)
 - Curricula vitae of the consultants (1 page per person)

II Statement

1. List of stakeholders consulted
2. Records of stakeholders' participation
3. Summary how environmental considerations have been integrated
4. How the SEA report and the public consultation have been taken into account
5. Reasons for choosing between alternative options
6. Measures to monitor environmental effects of the RDP

7. DRAFT LIST OF CONTEXT INDICATORS

The list of context indicators for the 2014-2020 period is still under discussion. Most context indicators should be based on available statistical information. In order to provide continuity of analysis, many of the "baseline indicators" used in the current programming period are expected to be maintained. However, some additional indicators may be needed to cover new elements added to the policy framework, and others may no longer be considered relevant. The impact indicators established for the CAP will also form part of the context indicators. The list of context indicators will be included in these guidelines once they are established. In the meantime, for reference and information, the baseline indicators used for the current programming period, as set out in Guidance Note F of the CMEF Handbook, are included below. (Further information on the definition and information sources for each of these Indicators can be found in Guidance Note G of the CMEF Handbook.)

Context indicators
Economic development
Employment rate
Unemployment
Training and education in agriculture
Age structure in agriculture
Labour productivity in agriculture
Gross fixed capital formation in agriculture
Employment development of primary sector
Economic development of primary sector
Labour productivity in food industry
Gross fixed capital formation in food industry
Employment development in food industry
Economic development of food industry
Labour productivity in forestry
Gross fixed capital formation in forestry
Competitiveness
Importance of semi-subsistence farming in NMS
Biodiversity: Population of farmland birds
Biodiversity: High Nature Value farmland and forestry
Biodiversity: Tree species composition
Water quality: Gross Nutrient Balances
Water quality: Pollution by nitrates and pesticides
Soil: Areas at risk of soil erosion
Soil: Organic farming * 24 Climate change: Production of renewable energy from agriculture and forestry
Climate change: UAA devoted to renewable energy
Climate change/air quality: gas emissions from agriculture
Farmers with other gainful activity
Employment development of non-agricultural sector
Economic development of non-agricultural sector
Self-employment development
Tourism infrastructure in rural area
Internet take-up in rural areas
Development of services sector
Net migration
Life-long learning in rural areas
Development of Local Action Groups
Designation of rural areas
Importance of rural areas
Agricultural land use
Farm structure
Forestry structure
Forest productivity
Land cover
Less Favoured Areas
Areas of extensive agriculture

Natura 2000 area
Biodiversity: Protected forest
Development of forest area
Forest ecosystem health
Water quality
Water use
Protective forests concerning primarily soil and water
Population density
Age structure
Structure of the Economy
Structure of Employment
Long-term unemployment
Educational attainment
Internet infrastructure

8. LEGAL TEXTS

Article 55 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

Article 55

Ex ante evaluation

1. Member States shall carry out ex ante evaluations to improve the quality of the design of each programme.

2. Ex ante evaluations shall be carried out under the responsibility of the authority responsible for the preparation of the programmes. They shall be submitted to the Commission at the same time as the programme, together with an executive summary. The Fund-specific rules may establish thresholds below which the ex ante evaluation may be combined with the evaluation for another programme.

3. Ex ante evaluations shall appraise:

(a) the contribution to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, having regard to the selected thematic objectives and priorities, taking into account national and regional needs and potential for development as well as lessons drawn from previous programming periods;

(b) the internal coherence of the proposed programme or activity and its relationship with other relevant instruments;

(c) the consistency of the allocation of budgetary resources with the objectives of the programme;

(d) the consistency of the selected thematic objectives, the priorities and corresponding objectives of the programmes with the CSF, the Partnership Agreement and the relevant country specific recommendations adopted in accordance with Article 121(2) TFEU and where appropriate at national level, the National Reform Programme;

(e) the relevance and clarity of the proposed programme indicators;

(f) how the expected outputs will contribute to results;

(g) whether the quantified target values for indicators are realistic, having regard to the support envisaged from the ESI Funds;

(h) the rationale for the form of support proposed;

(i) the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for management of the programme;

(j) the suitability of the procedures for monitoring the programme and for collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluations;

(k) the suitability of the milestones selected for the performance framework;

(l) the adequacy of planned measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women and to prevent any discrimination, in particular as regards accessibility for persons with disabilities;

(m) the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable development;

(n) measures planned to reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries.

4. Ex ante evaluations shall incorporate, where appropriate, the requirements for strategic environmental assessment set out in Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council taking into account climate change mitigation needs.

Article 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Article 8

Content of rural development programmes

1. In addition to the elements referred to in Article 27 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, each rural development programme shall include:

(a) the ex ante evaluation referred to in Article 55 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013;

(b) a SWOT analysis of the situation and an identification of the needs that have to be addressed in the geographical area covered by the programme. The analysis shall be structured around the Union priorities for rural development. Specific needs concerning the environment, climate change mitigation and adaptation and innovation shall be assessed across Union priorities for rural development, in order to identify relevant responses in these three areas at the level of each priority; (c) a description of the strategy which demonstrates that:

(i) appropriate targets are set for each of the focus areas of the Union priorities for rural development included in the programme, based on the common indicators referred to in Article 69 and, where necessary, on programme specific indicators;

(ii) relevant combinations of measures are selected in relation to each of the focus areas of the Union priorities for rural development included in the programme, based on a sound intervention logic supported by the ex ante evaluation referred to in point (a) and the analysis referred to in point (b);

(iii) the allocation of financial resources to the measures of the programme is justified and adequate to achieve the targets set;

- (iv) specific needs linked with specific conditions at regional or sub-regional level are taken into account and concretely addressed through adequately designed combinations of measures or thematic sub- programmes;
 - (v) an appropriate approach towards innovation with a view to achieving the Union priorities for rural development, including the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability, towards the environment, including the specific needs of Natura 2000 areas, and towards climate change mitigation and adaptation is integrated into the programme;
 - (vi) measures have been taken to ensure the availability of sufficient advisory capacity on the regulatory requirements and on actions related to innovation;
- (d) for each *ex ante* conditionality, established in accordance with Article 19, and part II of Annex XI to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 for the general *ex ante* conditionalities, and in accordance with Annex V to this Regulation, an assessment of which of the *ex ante* conditionalities are applicable to the programme and which of them are fulfilled at the date of submission of the Partnership Agreement and the programme. Where the applicable *ex ante* conditionalities are not fulfilled, the programme shall contain a description of the actions to be taken, the bodies responsible and a timetable for such actions in accordance with the summary submitted in the Partnership Agreement.
- (e) a description of the performance framework established for the purpose of Article 21 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013;
 - (f) a description of each of the measures selected;
 - (g) the evaluation plan referred to in Article 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The Member States shall provide sufficient resources to address the needs which have been identified and to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation;
 - (h) a financing plan comprising:
 - (i) a table setting out, in accordance with Article 58(4), the total EAFRD contribution planned for each year. When applicable this table shall indicate separately within the total EAFRD contribution the appropriations provided for the less developed regions and the funds transferred to the EAFRD in application of Article 7(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013. The planned annual EAFRD contribution shall be compatible with the Multi-annual Financial Framework;
 - (ii) a table setting out, for each measure, for each type of operation with a specific EAFRD contribution rate and for technical assistance, the total Union contribution planned and the applicable EAFRD contribution rate. Where applicable, this table shall indicate separately the EAFRD contribution rate for less developed regions and for other regions;
 - (i) an indicator plan, broken down into focus areas, comprising the targets referred to in point (i) of Article 8(1)(c) and the planned outputs and planned expenditure of each rural development measure selected in relation to a corresponding focus area;
 - (j) where applicable, a table on additional national financing per measure in accordance with Article 82;
 - (k) where applicable, the list of aid schemes falling under Article 81(1) to be used for the implementation of the programmes;
 - (l) information on the complementarity with measures financed by the other common agricultural policy instruments, and by the European Structural and Investment Funds ("ESI");

(m) programme implementing arrangements including:

(i) the designation by the Member State of all authorities referred to in Article 65(2) and, for information, a summary description of the management and control structure;

(ii) a description of the monitoring and evaluation procedures, as well as the composition of the Monitoring Committee;

(iii) the provisions to ensure that the programme is publicised, including through the national rural network referred to in Article 54;

(iv) a description of the approach laying down principles with regard to the establishment of selection criteria for operations and local development strategies that takes into account relevant targets; in this context Member States may provide for priority to be given to SMEs linked to the agriculture and forestry sector.

(v) in relation to local development, where applicable, a description of the mechanisms to ensure coherence between activities envisaged under the local development strategies, the "Cooperation" measure referred to in Article 35, and the "Basic services and village renewal in rural areas" measure referred to in Article 20 including urban-rural links;

(n) the actions taken to involve the partners referred to in Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and a summary of the results of the consultation of the partners;

(o) where applicable, the structure of the national rural network as referred to in Article 54(3), and provisions for its management, which would constitute the basis for its annual actions plans.

2. Where thematic sub-programmes are included in a rural development programme, each sub-programme shall include:

(a) a specific analysis of the situation based on SWOT methodology and an identification of the needs that are to be addressed by the sub-programme;

(b) specific targets at sub-programme level and a selection of measures, based on a thorough definition of the intervention logic of the sub-programme, including an assessment of the expected contribution of the measures chosen to achieve the targets;

(c) a separate specific indicator plan, with planned outputs and planned expenditure for each rural development measure selected in relation to a corresponding focus area.

3. The Commission shall adopt implementing acts laying down rules for the presentation of the elements described in paragraphs 1 and 2 in rural development programmes and rules for the content of national frameworks referred to in Article 6(3). Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the examination procedure referred to in Article 84.

Article 77 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Article 77

Ex ante evaluation

Member States shall ensure that the ex ante evaluator is involved from an early stage in the process of development of the rural development programme, including in the development of the analysis referred to in Article 8(1)(b), in the design of the programme's intervention logic and in the establishment of the programme's targets.

SEA Directive

**DIRECTIVE 2001/42/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL
of 27 June 2001**

on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 175(1) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission ⁽¹⁾,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee ⁽²⁾,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions ⁽³⁾,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty ⁽⁴⁾, in the light of the joint text approved by the Conciliation Committee on 21 March 2001,

Whereas:

- (1) Article 174 of the Treaty provides that Community policy on the environment is to contribute to, *inter alia*, the preservation, protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the protection of human health and the prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources and that it is to be based on the precautionary principle. Article 6 of the Treaty provides that environmental protection requirements are to be integrated into the definition of Community policies and activities, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- (2) The Fifth Environment Action Programme: Towards sustainability — A European Community programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development ⁽⁵⁾, supplemented by Council Decision No 2179/98/EC ⁽⁶⁾ on its review, affirms the importance of assessing the likely environmental effects of plans and programmes.
- (3) The Convention on Biological Diversity requires Parties to integrate as far as possible and as appropriate the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans and programmes.

(4) Environmental assessment is an important tool for integrating environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment in the Member States, because it ensures that such effects of implementing plans and programmes are taken into account during their preparation and before their adoption.

(5) The adoption of environmental assessment procedures at the planning and programming level should benefit undertakings by providing a more consistent framework in which to operate by the inclusion of the relevant environmental information into decision making. The inclusion of a wider set of factors in decision making should contribute to more sustainable and effective solutions.

(6) The different environmental assessment systems operating within Member States should contain a set of common procedural requirements necessary to contribute to a high level of protection of the environment.

(7) The United Nations/Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context of 25 February 1991, which applies to both Member States and other States, encourages the parties to the Convention to apply its principles to plans and programmes as well; at the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention in Sofia on 26 and 27 February 2001, it was decided to prepare a legally binding protocol on strategic environmental assessment which would supplement the existing provisions on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context, with a view to its possible adoption on the occasion of the 5th Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe' at an extraordinary meeting of the Parties to the Convention, scheduled for May 2003 in Kiev, Ukraine. The systems operating within the Community for environmental assessment of plans and programmes should ensure that there are adequate transboundary consultations where the implementation of a plan or programme being prepared in one Member State is likely to have significant effects on the environment of another Member State. The information on plans and programmes having significant effects on the environment of other States should be forwarded on a reciprocal and equivalent basis within an appropriate legal framework between Member States and these other States.

(1) OJ C 129, 25.4.1997, p. 14 and OJ C 83, 25.3.1999, p. 13.

(2) OJ C 287, 22.9.1997, p. 101.

(3) OJ C 64, 27.2.1998, p. 63 and OJ C 374, 23.12.1999, p. 9.

(4) Opinion of the European Parliament of 20 October 1998 (OJ C 341, 9.11.1998, p. 18), confirmed on 16 September 1999 (OJ C 54, 25.2.2000, p. 76), Council Common Position of 30 March 2000 (OJ C 137, 16.5.2000, p. 11) and Decision of the European Parliament of 6 September 2000 (OJ C 135, 7.5.2001, p. 155).

Decision of the European Parliament of 31 May 2001 and Decision of the Council of 5 June 2001.

(5) OJ C 138, 17.5.1993, p. 5.

(6) OJ L 275, 10.10.1998, p. 1.

