

The workshop, organised in partnership with the **Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry**, discussed the state of implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) half-way through the 2014-2020 programming period.

The event explored the **key bottlenecks** encountered by Managing Authorities (MAs) and Paying Agencies (PAs) and **possible solutions** to overcome them.

Participants also discussed the preparations for the **Performance Review** exercise in 2019.

Finally, the workshop provided the occasion to present the recently established **Bulgarian Network Support Unit**.

Event Information

Date: 21 June 2018

Location: Sofia, Bulgaria

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Chair: Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI, European Commission

Participants: 49: including representatives of Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, National Rural Networks and EU institutions

Outcomes: Useful information regarding RDP implementation difficulties, ideas about solutions to overcome them and good practice examples

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-rdp-performance-review_en

State of play of Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020



Guido Castellano and Petr Lapka, DG AGRI, European Commission

The EAFRD is performing relatively well, in terms of actual expenditure, as compared to other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). To date, the average EAFRD implementation rate for the EU28 is 32%, with Priority 4 ('Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems') being the most advanced. However, certain measures are lagging behind, especially under Priorities 3 ('Promoting food chain organisation, animal welfare, risk management'), 5 ('Promoting Resource efficiency, low carbon and climate resilience'), and 6 ('Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction, economic development'). **Long-term investments, energy efficiency related operations, LEADER and 'soft' Measures (Knowledge transfer, Advisory services, Cooperation) show only limited uptakes.** It is important to bring these Measures up to speed, overcoming the identified bottlenecks in due time to avoid re-programming of the performance reserve in 2019. In a way **the Performance Review is a pilot for the post-2020 period as it allows the reallocation of the EU budget to those priorities that have delivered the expected results.**



Overcoming bottlenecks in RDP implementation: Member States' experience



Milen Krastev, Managing Authority, Bulgaria

Major bottlenecks encountered in Bulgaria are mainly related to: **heavy administrative requirements for the beneficiaries**; delays in the management of public calls especially for investment Measures and in the **processing of huge volumes of applications**; and difficulties for the beneficiaries in gaining **access to credit**. In response, the Managing Authority is working to: reduce the paperwork through the implementation of an online application tool; publish a **planning of forthcoming calls**; provide technical assistance to young farmers and small farms; pre-rank the applications; implement a **Guarantee Fund** and advance payments; and speed up the processing of payment claims by the dissemination of guidelines for correct execution of projects.



Marion Schlu"e, Managing Authority, North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany

Consolidating **innovation** (M16.1) with the standards of the PA is a challenge. Partners are required to pre-finance expenses and are reimbursed only upon verification of detailed documentation. To facilitate the process, the Managing Authority has implemented **Simplified Cost Options (SCOs)**, namely lump sums for personnel costs.

Participation in **social inclusion projects** (M16.9), has been low as the involved partners were used to the procedures of the European Social Fund and struggled to adapt to the functioning of the EAFRD. Finally, the implementation of **Technical Assistance** (TA) proved to be too complicated. TA should not be treated as an additional measure of the Programme but as a supporting tool.



[Marcus Stadler](#), Managing Authority, Austria

One of the main difficulties experienced in Austria is with the regulatory obligation of ensuring the **reasonableness of the supported costs**, especially in relation to innovative and multiannual projects. A partial solution proved to be the adoption of reference costs for certain types of common expenditure. In addition, the implementation of **new Measures/Operations** (e.g. 'Investments in social services') is proving difficult as the local administrations involved are not always familiar with the EAFRD functioning. As a solution, **ad hoc guidelines** have been developed. Overall, the RDP is very complex with too many Measures and types of operations which require major coordination efforts and resources.



[Fer Schenk](#), Managing Authority, The Netherlands

With 13 organizations directly involved in RDP management and implementation (the central government and the 12 provinces), 35 organizations providing funds for the national contribution, 20 LAGs, more than 50.000 potential beneficiaries, 1 PA and a broad network of stakeholders, **governance is the key difficulty**. To facilitate RDP implementation, a national model regulation has been adopted to ensure consistency in the work of the different administrative bodies involved. Guidelines have also been developed as supporting tools for tender procedures and the application of selection criteria. In addition, **SCOs** have been used to streamline the implementation of certain measures.

Outcomes of parallel group discussions

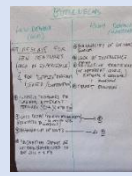


Group 1: 'Preparation for the Performance Review'

Introductory presentation:
[Guido Castellano](#), DG AGRI

Key messages:

- Feasibility studies and ex-ante evaluation are useful tools to set the milestones of the performance framework, although it is difficult to set targets for new Measures;
- Annual goals/targets/milestones are more accurate for reflecting changing conditions and disturbances in the market;
- The Main bottlenecks include: procedural delays; uncertainty about new Measures; delays in public procurement; and the overlap of the previous and current programming periods resulting in a significant administrative burden on the MAs;
- Potential solutions for improving RDP implementation that have been applied in some MSs include: online application tools, SCOs and pre-selection procedures;
- In the future, performance could be measured in terms of contracts signed (financial commitments).



Group 2: 'Efficient project selection process'

Introductory presentations:

[Petr Lapka](#), DG AGRI

[Concepción Cobo](#), MA Andalucía, Spain

[Karīna Afremoviča](#), MA Latvia

Key bottlenecks:

- Lack of experience in the implementation of new Measures and challenging timescales (e.g. M16 - Cooperation);
- Missing legal frameworks at different administrative levels;
- Different timeframes for different Measures making it difficult to combine them (e.g. M1, M2 & M10);
- Reasonableness of costs;
- Non-availability of co-financing;
- Gold plating (an excess of norms, guidelines and procedures at national, regional and local levels).

Identified solutions:

- Sharing experiences, good practices and guidelines;
- Early preparation and good planning;
- Implementing financial instruments;
- Implementing SCOs;
- Better coordination at all levels of governance.

Key messages from the panel discussion and concluding remarks



[Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann](#) and [Mario Milouchev](#), Directors, DG AGRI, European Commission

While EAFRD is on the average performing better than the other ESI Funds, **many RDPs are still lagging behind**. Different obstacles affect RDP implementation, above all: the complexity of governance structures and implementing procedures and the **lack of experience in the implementation of new Measures** such as Measure 16. A performance framework exercise should be used as a management tool from which we can learn, and we should think about how to overcome the bottlenecks identified.



Some practical solutions discussed include: changing implementing procedures; setting up **a two-tier project selection process**; implementing **SCOs**; and exchanging **good practices and solutions** with peers. Efforts should be put in overcoming the bottlenecks in the current programming period, but we also need to look ahead. The workshop marked a further step in the process of **re-designing the CAP delivery process towards a system that better delivers on policy goals and is simpler and less burdensome**.