The New Programming period 2000-2006: 
methodological working papers

WORKING PAPER 2

The Ex-Ante Evaluation of 
the Structural Funds interventions
Foreword

This methodological document is aimed at national, regional or local authorities in charge of programming the 2000-2006 Community structural interventions, and specifically at those responsible for organising evaluation.

It clarifies, in an indicative way, the contents and organisation of an ex-ante evaluation, by reference to current practices. It also highlights the flexibility needed for implementation, according to the nature of the programme evaluated (Plan, SPD, OP, Programming Complement etc.).

The ex-ante evaluation is an interactive process providing judgement and recommendations by experts, separately from the planners, on policy or programme issues. The objective is to improve and strengthen the final quality of the Plan or Programme under preparation. In this regard, this evaluation work has to facilitate a constructive dialogue between the people responsible for a Plan or programme and the experts. Of course, public authorities have the ultimate responsibility for the contents of the final text.

At the end of this interactive process, the ex-ante evaluation constitutes a key element for the understanding of the strategy and the allocation of financial resources (which will be the subject of negotiations with the Commission), stating clearly the rationale and the scope of the choices made. The evaluation is, therefore, an integral part of the programme even if, for reasons of transparency, it would be desirable if the experts' work were included in a separate consolidated document.

The appraisal carried out by the expert evaluators will cover the 6 main elements of a programme:

- Taking account of previous experience;
- The socio-economic context of the intervention;
- The strategic choices and the action priorities selected and their internal and external consistency;
- The quantification of objectives;
- The estimate of the expected socio-economic impact and the allocation of resources;
- The implementation system of the programme.
Each of these elements should appear in the evaluation report, but with a varying degree of precision, according to the principle of proportionality (between major and small programmes). This means, for example, that the expected macroeconomic impacts will be evaluated only when the intervention level is significant compared to the level of GDP. Likewise, the evaluation is cost-effective only when it is applied to aspects that have not been covered at another level of programming (Plan, OP or Programme Complement).

The methodology for ex-ante evaluation developed hereafter covers the whole programming system (Plans, Programmes, Programme Complement), even if the draft Plans submitted to the Commission are only at the level of Priorities and quantified objectives, in accordance with the regulations. Thus, the evaluation process must cover the programming process in its entirety if it is to bring genuine added value and improved quality to the documents to be negotiated between the different partners.
INTRODUCTION: AIM OF EX-ANTE EVALUATION IN THE CONTEXT OF STRUCTURAL POLICIES

In the context of Structural policies, the ex ante evaluation process has a number of objectives:

- An assessment of whether the overall Plan or Programme is an appropriate means for addressing the issues confronting the region or sector:
  - Ex-ante evaluation primarily concerns the analysis of strengths and weaknesses, as well as the potential of the region or the sector concerned. It aims at identifying needs and establishing a ranking among them.
  - It provides the competent authorities with a prior opinion on key issues relating to economic and social development. These might include the structural adjustment of regions lagging behind, social and economic change, modernisation of employment and of educational and training systems, the enhancement of competitiveness, and the creation of employment and wealth.
  - The lessons of past experience are a key element of the ex ante process. These can provide some insight as to the relevance, effectiveness and quality of proposed interventions.

- An assessment of whether the Plan or programme has well defined strategic axes, priorities and objectives and if it reflects an informed opinion as to whether these are relevant and can actually be achieved.
  - The degree of consistency among needs, objectives, activities and their intended results is one of the main concerns of ex ante evaluation, in other words the chosen strategy in relation to the development problems and the justification for the relative weight that each activity is assigned.
  - Equally important are the pursuit of balance and the integration of the priorities of the Plan or programme with their contribution to social and economic cohesion objectives. The same applies to the coherence between regional, national and Community priorities.
A contribution to the quantification of objectives and the establishment of a basis for both monitoring and future evaluation work.

- The results of the ex-ante evaluation – including inputs from the Commission during the negotiation phase - will be central to future evaluations - ongoing and ex post- as well as to the performance monitoring system. The quantification of objectives, targets and the identification of core indicators are particularly important questions in the context of the ex ante evaluation.

An ex ante evaluation should analyse the adequacy of the implementation and monitoring arrangements and help with the design of project selection procedures and criteria.

- A first opinion of the experts should be addressed by the ex-ante evaluation at Plan level, notably with regard to main arrangements and past experience. The ex-ante evaluation should deal with the aspects of project selection procedures and criteria both at Plan as well as Programme Complement level.

The Commission aims to carry out a thorough analysis, notably at the level of the plan before the finalisation of SPD and CSF.

- The relevance, quality and impact of the proposed strategy will be key issues in this appreciation. It will also examine thoroughly the strategy's adherence to those provisions of the Regulation relating to sound and efficient management during the implementation phase. The Commission will draw upon the services of both its own in-house specialists and, where necessary, external experts.
PART I: KEY COMPONENTS OF THE EX ANTE EVALUATION

1. ANALYSIS OF THE PREVIOUS EVALUATION RESULTS

Learning from past experience and results.

Best practice requires that the three phases of evaluation – ex ante, mid-term and ex post – are integrated. The regulations reflect this. Evaluation is conceived as cyclical, its cycle corresponding to the life-cycle of the programme concerned. Previous evaluations represent an important source of knowledge. They often cover similar types of actions since many policies do not change much from one year to another or, indeed, from programme to programme.

- The ex post evaluations from the 1989-93 period and the ex ante, mid-term and final evaluations (bilan) from the 1994-99 period provide information on key issues, such as:
  - The relevance of aims and objectives
  - The effectiveness of the policies and instruments employed
  - The results and impacts on the geographical areas and sectors concerned.

- They also identify difficulties in implementation and critical incidents influencing the effectiveness of the policy.

- Existing evaluations often contain data on physical outputs and, sometimes, results. Combining these data with real costs, it is feasible to obtain unit costs, thus reinforcing financial plans, and contributing to the better design of financial instruments and to better financial planning.

- Thematic evaluations carried out either by the Commission or at national level provide useful information by comparing the effectiveness of policies in specific fields as well as identifying best practice which can, in many cases, be transferable.

- Experience of past programmes in regions in other Member States can also be referred to for the purposes of comparison. Such comparisons can be carried forward into the analysis of strategy, priorities for action and objectives. The ex-ante evaluation can play a key role in this work.

Key issues

The ex ante evaluation should help collate all of the above elements, examine their development and integrate them, as part of the overall process of preparing Plans or programmes and examine how the latter took into consideration previous evaluation

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1 This is not applicable for the newly eligible regions (2000-2006) or regions that became eligible for the first time in the 1994 -1999 period. For these two groups, the experience of other Member States or regions is a useful source of information. In some Member States there exists a solid culture and practice of evaluation outside the Structural Funds interventions, which should be exploited.
results, including previous experience on strategy and programme implementation. It thereby contributes to a better understanding of:

- The relevance of the existing strategy or the need for amendment.
- The effectiveness of existing policy delivery instruments.
- The critical factors affecting implementation and effectiveness.
- The types of problem in terms of policy evaluability and monitoring.

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2. ANALYSIS OF THE STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND POTENTIAL OF THE STATE, REGION OR SECTOR CONCERNED

The most important contribution of the ex ante evaluation is verifying the priority to be assigned to the various socio-economic needs. This ranking of attainable needs is a prerequisite aimed at defining relevant strategic axes and priorities. After the overview of past lessons, it is necessary to carry out a further, in-depth analysis of the socio-economic context.

- Each region, sector or Member State has its own strengths and weaknesses and, in an open economy, is subject to opportunities and threats arising from its own environment. Ex ante evaluation has to analyse these as well as any underlying disparities.

- Ex ante evaluation should start with a concise but comprehensive analysis of the economic and social conditions in the target region, sector, or group. This should include, inter alia, a set of past data on a series of appropriate socio-economic and contextual indicators, in order to facilitate the quantification exercise.

- For some key weaknesses it is important to go further in order to understand the disparities and their causes to establish if these are permanent and structural.

- This stage should be complemented by an analysis of developments in the external environment of the region, sector or field concerned and an appraisal of how these developments influence key weaknesses or strengths. Obviously, it is impossible to foresee developments over a period of seven years. It is perfectly possible, however, to speculate on probable developments at a national, European and international level.

- The regulations foresee three specific appraisals: an appraisal of human resources (see Annex II), an appraisal of the environmental situation of the region concerned, which should address its main strengths and weaknesses to understand the opportunities for, and threats to, economic development in terms of the environmental assets and liabilities of the area (see Annex III). Also, there should be an appraisal of the situation in terms of equality of opportunity between women and men (see Annex IV).

- During the appreciation phase of the Plan, the quality of the analyses made will be appraised and the way these have been fed into the strategy and integrated in the Plan. This will focus primarily on the priority established among the development needs and their translation into objectives and concrete priorities for action.

Past experience and practical issues:

Member States already have experience in socio-economic analysis arising from the previous two generations of Plans and programmes. This analysis was often limited to a description of weaknesses and strengths and was more an obligation deriving from the regulations than an essential part of the definition of strategy. The description was
also rather static and often qualitative. The Commission envisages a more dynamic type of analysis here.

**Key issues**

It is important that at the end of this step there exists:

- A coherent ranking of the main disparities to be addressed.
- An identification of objectives in relation to the priority needs.
- An identification of those factors favouring economic and social cohesion, sustainable development and equality of opportunities between women and men.
3. ASSESSMENT OF THE RATIONALE AND THE OVERALL CONSISTENCY OF THE STRATEGY

Once the question of the main needs and socio-economic problems has been addressed, the ex ante evaluation should help clarify the balance between the combination of policies and activities proposed in the plans, as well as the justification of the choice that has been made.

The rationale of the plan and the chosen policy mix is assessed by checking how each part of the programme ("priority area or axis") will contribute to the objectives. The ex-ante evaluation should help understand to what degree the individual parts of the programme correspond to the priority needs.

Relevance

- The starting point, therefore, is a justification of the priorities according to the global objectives of economic and social cohesion. Employment and competitiveness are the most important of these. To what extent is each priority related and contributory to these overall objectives? The justification of the priorities should take into consideration the nature and the specificity of the three Objectives of the Structural Funds as defined in the Treaty and the regulations.

- The priorities should also be justified on the basis of evolving needs identified on the basis of the main disparities observed in the regions, sectors or groups concerned. The ex ante evaluation should help understand to what degree priorities correspond to the above-mentioned ranking of disparities and needs.

Consistency

- The ex ante evaluation should address the internal consistency between Plan, programme and Programme Complement objectives. The ex ante evaluation should provide an appraisal of the consistency between, on the one hand, the strategic and specific objectives as defined in the Plans, Single Programming Documents and, on the other, the operational objectives as defined at measure level in the Programme Complement.

- Equally, ex-ante evaluation has to address the external consistency of the Plan. Structural policy and interventions should be compatible with national macro-economic and budgetary policy, as well as Community policies and rules.
Past experience and practical issues

- Member States already have experience on this matter so it is reasonable to expect a better evaluation of the rationale of future Plans, compared to those submitted in 1993-94. These questions have also been addressed during the mid-term evaluations. The ex post evaluations of the preceding period and the final evaluations which are underway, offer a considerable amount of information for analysis.

- When the evaluation examines the rationale and consistency of the Plan or programme, it has to start by understanding the official texts – regulations, national policy positions and Community policies and priorities. Access to preliminary studies, previous evaluations and data should also be provided.

- In some cases, it is possible to find a conflict of priorities or even an absence of consistency. The ex ante evaluation should acknowledge these possible discrepancies. It is up to the decision-makers to negotiate a compromise.

Key issues

- The evaluation of the rationale and overall consistency of the strategy are among the fundamental elements in the justification of the policy mix. Both necessitate some demonstration of why particular priorities and spending decisions have been taken.

- The ex ante evaluation should present planners and decision-makers with a clear justification for the share and weight each priority and strategic axis has been assigned.

- The justification of the strategy has to be made at the level of global objectives – Economic and Social Cohesion - based on evolving needs and key disparities, as well as conformity to National and Community policies and priorities.

- The ex ante evaluation should provide an appraisal as to the consistency between the strategic, specific and operational objectives.
4. QUANTIFICATION OF OBJECTIVES

After the definition of priorities, the quantification of objectives, with particular attention paid to strategic and operational objectives\(^2\), is important to the establishment of what a programme is supposed to achieve. Quantification exercises concern both the objectives of the Plan/programmes and key disparities. Quantified objectives constitute the basis for any subsequent monitoring and evaluation of the programme. In addition, key disparities need to be provided in a quantified form.

The quantification of the Plan plays a crucial role for the whole exercise since it is on this basis that the Single Programming Documents, the Community Support Frameworks and Operational Programmes will themselves be quantified. Global and specific objectives are usually quantified at this stage as well. The quantification of measures in the Programme Complement is particularly important, given its central role to the subsequent quantification of operational objectives.

The regulations foresee the application of a logical framework of indicators in line with state of the art practices within the Member States and the experience gained during the last two generations of Structural Funds planning. The classification suggested corresponds to the following chain of indicators:

\[\text{Inputs} \Rightarrow \text{Outputs} \Rightarrow \text{Results} \Rightarrow \text{Impacts}\]

Ex ante evaluation should contribute to the identification of relevant indicators in order to quantify impacts and results at the level of the Plan, programme and physical outputs, and notably at Programme Complement level.

The following graph provides an outline of the links between planning levels and objectives. It is possible that for some interventions there are no such systematic links between levels or in the ranking of objectives.

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\(^2\) For more information, see "Indicateurs pour le suivi et l'évaluation: un guide opérationnel", European Commission, 1998
Planning authorities and decision-makers should set targets, quantified objectives and a timetable for delivery. The ex ante evaluation should assist planners in achieving a satisfactory level of quantification and provide an opinion as to the extent to which an intervention can be evaluated.

It is important for the ex ante evaluation to establish a clear connection between results, outputs and impacts and the causal relationship between them. Finally, the ex ante evaluation should give an opinion on the reliability of the quantification undertaken.

Quantification of certain objectives can sometimes prove difficult. For some areas or sectors, this is the result of a lack of information or of difficulties in quantifying intangible - non-material - results and impacts. The ex ante evaluation should assist the planning authorities in quantifying, as far as possible, the tangible outputs, results and impacts and in establishing proxy indicators and procedures for a close monitoring of intangible effects. Past experience in these areas, the analysis of successes or failures and the opinion of beneficiaries can provide a basis for proxy indicators and benchmarks for monitoring intangible impacts.

The evaluators must also look at the arrangements for collecting data, whether through the monitoring system, by surveys, etc., in relation to the purposes of the data, for example whether it is to be used for the use of the monitoring committee or the evaluation.

**Past experience and practical issues**
The quantification of objectives is one of the main difficulties in planning structural interventions. Even though progress has been made during recent years, greater understanding and agreement on the choice, definition and structure of indicators are needed.

For the new generation of interventions, it is important to avoid badly defined indicators and speculative targets, as they serve no purpose. It is important to define indicators relevant to monitoring and managerial needs, as well as core indicators corresponding to political and strategic aims.

It is also essential to give more importance to indicators which reflect a relatively clear causal relationship and to avoid indicators which are strongly influenced by outside factors. Important in this context is a clear definition as to how indicators are estimated and measured.

Taking into consideration the difficulties, as well as the importance of the quantification exercise, the Commission has produced:

- A framework on indicators related to the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes: a methodological guide.

- A codification of the principal domains of the Structural Funds interventions. This codification provides a coherent presentation of the main areas of Structural Funds intervention.

- A list of examples of possible indicators:
  (a) Examples of possible core indicators
  (b) A more complete list of possible indicators

- The evaluation of socio-economic programmes; indicators for the monitoring and the evaluation of programmes, Programme MEANS, volume II. This deals with methodological issues relating to the definition of indicators and provides lists of indicators for the main areas of the Structural Funds intervention.

**Key issues**

The ex ante evaluation:
• Contributes to the identification of relevant indicators in order to quantify objectives and key disparities, notably in the context of core indicators.
• Verifies the relevance of the suggested indicators for the three levels of objectives - global, specific, operational.
• Assists planners to attain a satisfactory level of quantification for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation.
• Provides an opinion on the reliability of the quantification envisaged and the effectiveness of the procedures for data collection.
• Assists planners to define proxy indicators, identify critical factors and establish procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of those (few) cases where quantification is likely to be problematic.
5. EVALUATION OF EXPECTED SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE POLICY AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES ALLOCATION

Once the consistency of the strategy has been assured, the ex ante evaluation can address the question of expected impacts. The ex ante evaluation has to gather information so as to understand the extent to which the Plan or the programme, along with its expected impacts and results, will contribute to the achievement of general and specific objectives.

The Commission proposes focusing the impact analysis on a short list of topics:

- The first topic is relevant to General Economic and Social Cohesion objectives. The ex ante evaluation and the Plans should indicate clearly to what extent the plan contributes to the following key variables:
  - The GDP of the region concerned
  - Employment
  - Productivity (total factor productivity, or labour and/or capital productivity).
  - Competition (unit labour cost)

These variables are the building blocks of any analysis of Economic and Social Cohesion and real convergence in the case of Objective 1 Plans (such as the Cohesion countries, Southern Italy or Eastern Germany). A projected, counterfactual “with no intervention” situation should be compared with a “with intervention” situation.

In smaller Objective 1 regions, as well as in Objective 2 regions, this impact analysis is likely to be difficult to carry out. It would, therefore, be preferable to focus either on more realistic and simplified models or on concrete analyses of results and impacts at specific strategic priorities and measures level. The impact analysis on employment can follow a more micro-economic approach, on the basis of previous experience of similar actions.

- The second level of impact analysis concerns specific objectives expressed at the level of strategic priorities in the Plan or the programme. It is obvious that the expected impacts and results at this level have to take into consideration the specificity of each Objective – 1, 2, 3 –, the scope of intervention of each Fund, as well as any underlying disparities.

Impact analysis should also be covered at measure level in the Programme Complement, where the essential aspects of the operational objectives are defined.
The third level of impact analysis is related to the evaluation of expected impacts on a limited number of fundamental priorities, notably those concerning the EU’s own policies: impact on environment, equality of opportunity between women and men, as well as SMEs, competitiveness and innovation, employment and the labour market with regard to the European employment strategy. The appraisal of the environmental impact and gender aspects of the strategy and operations should be provided for in the Plan. The latter should also provide information on the level of implementation of Community environmental policy (and rules).

Past experience and practical issues

Impact analyses were probably the weaker points of the previous round of Plans and programmes. This reflected an insufficient quantification of objectives and an often rather general description of priorities, many of which covered a multitude of objectives.

For major Objective 1 Plans, the Commission is in favour of using state of the art macro-economic models. Such models allow the simulation of the complex interdependencies between economic variables at macroeconomic level (See ANNEX I).

For smaller Plans and programmes, quantitative models are less appropriate. The development of such models is probably not cost effective. Often, simple growth computing techniques can be used to produce projections or proxies for a limited number of indicators. It is important that assumptions are clearly stated. In the case of proxies, the evaluation has to include the definition of good proxies for indicators, and, in addition, provide justification of these (e.g. number of assisted firms could be considered a proxy for employment, or GDP etc.).

Key issues

The ex ante evaluation has to demonstrate the sound foundation of the strategy and of the proposed financial resources allocation on the basis of its response to the needs stated as well as its expected impact:

- The weight each priority should be assigned, and the “policy mix” proposed in the Plan or the programme given explicit justification based on expected results and impacts. This should explain, for example, why “actions in favour of SMEs” receive an X% rather than a Y% share of the total spending, or why “human resources” measures receive more resources than “productive sector” etc.

- It should also be illustrated how effective these choices are in terms of reducing disparities, contributing to economic and social cohesion and, finally, demonstrating progress on political priorities. Impact on the environment and equality of opportunity between women and men are key political priorities.
6. QUALITY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

The impact of the policy also depends on the management capacity and on the performance of the implementation bodies. Once the rationale and the impact analysis have been addressed, the evaluation of the adequacy and quality of the delivery mechanisms is the next step.

Decentralised management increases the responsibility of the Member States to guarantee an effective use of the EU subsidies. This is, at any rate, a Treaty obligation and a requirement of Structural Funds regulations.

Regulations include specific arrangements aimed at enhancing management quality and capacity, as well as ensuring effective implementation and evaluation. They also propose that financial resources of technical assistance be used to cover the costs.

The ex ante evaluation has to address the quality of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation arrangements envisaged and assist the planning authorities in order to identify the improvements needed, especially when taking into consideration past lessons.

- Clarify management and implementation responsibilities on the one hand and consultation procedures on the other.

- Appraise the quality of control mechanisms and particularly the transparency and efficiency of the financial pathways.

- Take into consideration specific arrangements for mid-term and ex post evaluations. This concerns the evaluation system both from the data and technical and human resources angle.

- Examine if a critical path exists, particularly for innovative measures.

- Consider if transparent and competitive procedures and criteria for project selection are foreseen so as to achieve the Plan or programme objectives in a cost-effective way.

- Establish the extent to which the legislation necessary for underpinning the programme is already in place and in conformity with community rules, and the administrative system is sufficient for ensuring compatibility with community policies.

The ex-ante evaluation should also review the participation of equal opportunities as well as environmental bodies in the programming process and whether structures are in place for their consultation during the implementation of the programmes.

It is clear that some of these points have to be addressed at Programme Complement level - e.g. selection criteria, including the integration of the equality principle-, whilst other at Plan or programme level.
Past experience and practical issues

- Mid-term evaluations of the current programmes, and ex post evaluations of earlier interventions provide useful information on these issues. Equally, reports of the Court of Auditors can be used to identify some weaknesses.

- The provisions concerning the Performance Reserve and the discussions with the Member States on the application of the Performance Reserve mechanism will address some of these points and give useful and relevant ideas.

- The issues discussed above are included in the SEM 2000 exercise and the orientations on this matter, discussed between the Member States and the Commission.

Key issues

This part of ex ante evaluation should provide the grounds for demonstrating how and why the monitoring and evaluation of the programme will represent an improvement on past interventions.

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<th>Planners and decision-makers should set up action plans reinforcing:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Sound and efficient management and monitoring</td>
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<td>• More competitive procedures for project selection</td>
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<td>• Genuine accountability in line with the demands of national and community regulations</td>
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<td>• More effective monitoring and financial networks</td>
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<td>• Specific attention to innovative operations, either on the requirements for technical assistance or implementation timetable.</td>
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The following checklist, as well as the previous analysis, invites the competent authorities, before they adopt their strategy, to examine:

- The relevance and sound foundation of the strategy, notably the coherence between "ranking of needs, strategic priorities and operational objectives".
- The optimal financial resources allocation, essentially on the basis of the expected impact.
- The adequacy and the quality of the implementation mechanism, giving a new impetus to the principles of Sound and Efficient Management.

Of course, the application of this indicative checklist is flexible, although it is important to pursue the issues covered at Plan and programme level.

### Key Issues of Evaluation Plan for the CSF

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<th>Key Issues of Evaluation</th>
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<th>PLAN for the SPD</th>
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<td><strong>1. Analysis of Previous Evaluation Results</strong></td>
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<td>• Relevance of the existing strategy</td>
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<td>• Effectiveness of existing instruments for policy delivery</td>
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<td>• Lessons from key incidents affecting policy implementation</td>
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<td>• Problems with evaluability and monitoring</td>
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<td><strong>2. Analysis of Strengths- Weaknesses and Potential</strong></td>
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<td>• Coherent ranking of disparities to be addressed</td>
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<td>• Driving factors towards economic and social cohesion and sustainable development and/or conversion</td>
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<td>• Consistency between operational and global objectives</td>
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<td>• Coherence with national and Community policies</td>
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<td><strong>4. QUANTIFICATION</strong></td>
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<td>• Relevance of indicators</td>
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<td>• Reliability of quantification and data selection procedures</td>
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<td>• Yardsticks and specific procedures fields which are difficult to quantify</td>
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<td>• Justification of the policy mix and financial resources allocation</td>
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<td><strong>6. QUALITY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS</strong></td>
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<td>• Identification of necessary improvements</td>
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<td>• Degree of clarification of responsibilities</td>
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<td>• Effective financial networks and control mechanisms</td>
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<td>• Competitive procedures and selection criteria reinforcing efficiency on projects selection</td>
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<td>• Specific arrangements for innovative operations</td>
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A well carried-out ex-ante evaluation at Plan level is an input to programme and Programme Complement preparation and evaluation and often covers part of the ex-ante evaluation which should be undertaken at these levels.

At Plan level, the most important inputs should be a detailed socio-economic analysis, the assessment of the rationale, consistency of the strategy, compatibility of national and Community policies and analysis of the expected impacts and financial resources allocation.

At programme level, the assessment of the rationale, analysis of expected impacts, quantification and quality of the implementation and monitoring requires most effort.

The Programme Complement requires a more limited evaluation activity, notably for the consistency between objectives, the quantification of targets and the relevance of the selection criteria.
PART II: PRACTICAL ISSUES ON EX ANTE EVALUATION: HOW TO CARRY OUT THE EVALUATION

1. EVALUATION TIMETABLE AND PROCESS

The degree of interactivity between ex ante evaluation and policy development depends on the timetable. The foreword of this paper has already stressed the importance of establishing an obligatory and interactive relationship between evaluation and planning.

Establishment of an evaluation process is therefore suggested, which corresponds to the following scheme:

- Analysis of previous evaluation results, as well as of strengths, weaknesses and potential, should precede the definition of the strategy.
- An assessment of the rationale and consistency should be carried out in parallel with policy development and,
- A quantification and impact analysis undertaken in relation to the strategy and priorities planned (including Plan, programme and programme complement).
- A final assessment of the strategic choices and action priorities in the Plan and Operational Programmes, focusing on their probable impacts, the relevance of the quantified objectives, as well as the adequacy of the implementation and monitoring procedures.

This means that some of the work can be carried out before policy development – previous evaluation results, socio-economic analysis, environmental situation – but, the main part of the ex ante evaluation will accompany the development of Plans, notably, the quantification of objectives and assessment of impacts.

2. INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL EVALUATION

In international practice, the role of planners, decision-makers and evaluators is usually separate. Thus, any practice aiming at an independent and objective evaluation is welcomed. Once this principle is respected, the position to be adopted should be determined by the specific needs for expertise in the different areas of activity.

3. ORGANISING THE EVALUATION IN A COST-EFFECTIVE WAY

The above-mentioned checklist (pages 21-22) should not be considered as the basis for a recurrent and exhaustive new evaluation exercise at each level.

Often, the work carried out for a preceding level, can provide the material for the evaluation questions of the following one. For example a good socio-
Economic analysis at Plan level offers essential information for the evaluation at programme level. The same applies for quantification, where the activities of a preceding level inform the following one.

This aspect should be taken into consideration by the competent authorities at the time of developing the terms of reference and the organisation of activities. In this way, not only can the evaluation be cost effective, in accordance with legal requirements - article 40 -, but can also reduce the total time needed for Plan preparation, either for Objective 1, or for Objectives 2 and 3.

**4. RESPECTING THE PRINCIPLE OF PROPORTIONALITY**

The Regulation does not foresee specific arrangements for the evaluation of each Objective. The definition of the key components of the ex ante evaluation follows a linear approach for all of them.

Nevertheless, the evaluation approach and the techniques to be applied to each Objective, plan, and programme have to take into consideration the principle of proportionality. For example, it is often inappropriate to use macro-economic models for the majority of Objective 2 and 3 as well as small Objective 1 Plans, or try to establish the impact on growth of a programme with limited expenditure.

It is also evident that a limited number of indicators is necessary for the quantification of Objective 2 and 3 Plans. This makes it easier to establish a set of core indicators for these programmes than is the case with Objective 1 regional programmes. In contrast, the extent of ex ante evaluation for Objective 1 Plans and Operational Programmes is more important in terms of evaluation of expected impact. Even though it is very difficult to evaluate the aggregate impact programmes in smaller Objective 1 and 2 regions, these regions too should carry out a socio-economic analysis and provide quantified indicators.

For the major programmes comprising a CSF and several Operational Programmes and their Programme Complements, it may be convenient to carry out the ex-ante evaluation of the CSF and of the Operational Programmes and their complements as separate exercises. For smaller programmes in SPD and OP form, a single exercise may be sufficient.

**5. INTEGRATION WITH PLAN OR PROGRAMMES**

Competent authorities are invited to proceed in the light of the content and spirit of the regulations; that means acting on the basis of an interactive relationship between ex-ante evaluation and strategy development.
- If the evaluation has been undertaken in the context of Plan finalisation, it is important to understand how the evaluation results have been incorporated into the strategy and integrated into the Plan or programme. Supplementary evaluation activity is often necessary for the quantification of objectives and expected impact assessment.
- If the ex-ante evaluation is undertaken following establishment of the Plan, it is equally important to understand how the Plan will integrate the evaluation results, notably for strategy improvement.
- Where the evaluation is carried out in parallel with the development of the Plan or programme, it is important for the evaluation to be able to influence policy development and finalisation.

The evaluation is an integral part of the programme. According to the principle of partnership (article 8, par. 2), but also for reasons of transparency and reciprocity on mutual information on evaluation, the evaluators' work should also be sent to the Commission, either as an annex to the Plan, or as a separate document or set of documents.

6. FINANCING

In principle, the cost of ex ante evaluation should be met out of national expenditure. For newly eligible regions in particular, the Member States will have to provide the necessary credits from national resources.

For an existing eligible region, the costs of ex ante evaluation for the forthcoming period (2000-2006) may be funded under the financial resources of current SPD or CSF operational credits. Competent authorities can use either credits available for technical assistance or savings. Current rules and procedures concerning eligibility and rates of contribution are applicable.

Competent authorities have to take into consideration that the ex ante evaluation can be costly. The cost is not always proportional to the expenditure foreseen by the Plan and, for this reason, any disproportionate expenditure should be avoided. Member States can find some guidance on this matter in the MEANS collection, volume I.

7. QUALITY

The Commission invites the competent authorities to ensure the quality of the ex ante evaluation. Authorities lacking quality standards on this topic can profit from the MEANS publication “Quality assessment of evaluation reports: a Framework”.

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3 The expenditure on ex-ante evaluation for the Programme Complement, carried out after submission of the SPD or Operational Programmes is eligible under the new financial plan.
The eight quality criteria are the following:

- **Meeting needs**: does the evaluation adequately address the information needs for preparing a Plan and does it satisfy the Terms of Reference?

- **Relevant scope**: are the programme’s rationale and its expected results and impacts covered?

- **Justified design**: is the evaluation design appropriate to answer key questions on time?

- **Data**: are the used/collected data appropriate and their reliability duly taken into account?

- **Valid analysis**: is the information available subject to appropriate analysis?

- **Credible findings**: Do the findings follow logically from, and are they justified by, the analysis?

- **Impartial conclusions**: are the conclusions fair, unbiased by stakeholder views and operational?

- **Clarity**: Is the report written in a way that is easy to understand?
ANNEX I: MACROECONOMIC MODELLING THE IMPACT OF MAJOR OBJECTIVE 1 PLANS IN THE CONTEXT OF EX ANTE EVALUATION

For the ex ante evaluation of the macroeconomic impact of major Objective 1 Plans (Cohesion countries, Southern Italy and Eastern Germany), only macroeconomic modelling can simulate the complex interdependencies between economic variables at the macroeconomic level. The model should feature both a demand side and a supply side. Improvement of the supply side is the main objective of Structural Funds interventions.

The supply side of the model should include the principal determinants of the productive potential of an economy in a way that reflects the ways in which Structural Funds interventions in areas such as infrastructure, human capital and productive investment influence productive potential. Furthermore, the actual use of productive potential in terms of output and prices is to be defined. As for the demand side of the model, the behavioural equations for private consumption, private investment, and government expenditure as well exports and imports need to be specified.

In view of the importance of estimates of employment effects, the model should also include a labour market, featuring labour demand and labour supply or, alternatively, a wage equation. The relation between wages and employment as well as the determination of the labour force by migration and participation should be defined explicitly.

The government sector should distinguish investment, purchases of goods and services and employment (possibly with a sub-category on education and training), as well as identify the national and EU co-financing of broad Structural Funds categories. By varying the assumed additionality of public expenditure, it should be capable of modelling a situation of EU funding alone as well as of EU funding and national funding together, both excluding private co-financing. In addition, the model should contain a government budget constraint and a specification of transfers to and from the EU so that the opportunity costs of public spending can be taken into account (i.e. the effects of alternative uses of EU and national funds). Finally, the sensitivity of results to changes in Structural Funds spending and in economic policy should be demonstrated. As regards the monetary policy regime, interest and exchange rates can be exogenous and allow for running simulations with fixed nominal interest and exchange rates.

To summarise, the following should be taken into account:

• A macroeconomic model should be introduced, composed of a demand side and a supply side, the latter reflecting the main ways in which Structural Funds interventions in areas such as infrastructure, human capital and productive investment can have impacts;

• The principal variables to be explained by the model are GDP, investment, employment, wages, prices, budget deficit, imports and exports;
• The model should vary the assumptions on additionality for at least the following scenarios: EU funding alone and EU funding and national funding together, both excluding private co-financing;

• The opportunity costs of public spending should be taken into account, i.e. the effects of alternative ways of spending of EU and national funds;

• The sensitivity of results to changes in Structural Funds spending and in economic policy should be demonstrated.
ANNEX II: HUMAN RESOURCES

This annex aims at providing some guidance on how the ex-ante evaluation should deal with the analysis of human resources development and employment and labour market trends required by Article 40 of the General Regulation. It is proposed that this assessment should have a broad scope including not only quantitative analysis (of indicators such as employment creation or unemployment rate projections, for example) but also an element of qualitative appreciation. This appreciation should consider the implications of the national/ regional development strategy on human resources and the labour market, and its linkages with the Community policy emerging on this field through the European Employment Strategy and the National Action Plans.

The analysis of human resources and employment and labour market trends should be integrated in all stages of the ex-ante evaluation. Three different moments are particularly relevant for this analysis: when giving an overview of the initial situation and the context for Structural Funds interventions; at the time of the SWOT analysis, to identify most important needs, risks and opportunities taking into account national labour market policies; when designing the development strategy, to assess the consistency with and the expected impacts on human resources and the labour market situation.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS: LABOUR MARKET TRENDS

This analysis will draw on the work done at national level for the preparation of the National Action Plans (NAP). It will be broader in scope including a regional dimension and sectors not fully covered by the NAP. The main topics to be dealt with are:

- **Socio-economic background**: This analysis should provide an analytical description of the economic context, regional disparities, sectorial changes, changes in production structures, demographic structures and trends, migration, poverty, etc.
- **Description of the national labour market situation and future trends**: This should include an analysis of: employment characteristics disaggregated by gender (youth employment, self employment, temporary employment, employment by sector, employment by education level, changes in the occupational structure of employment, employment forecast); unemployment characteristics disaggregated by gender (unemployment, unemployment by age, unemployment by education and qualification, unemployment by duration, regional differences in unemployment, youth unemployment, long term unemployment), people at risk of unemployment (disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants, people with literacy and numeracy difficulties, ex-offenders etc); quantitative and qualitative skill needs, job deficits and adaptability; characteristics of training and educational supply systems, characteristics of training and educational demand; characteristics of the employment services.
• Definition and quantification of context indicators to be updated in the annual implementation report.

**HUMAN RESOURCES AND LABOUR MARKET POLICIES**

This should include a description of national and/or regional employment and vocational training policies as well as other policies which are relevant for human resource development from an economic and social cohesion perspective (research and development, information society, social exclusion and others...). This overview of national policies should be completed by a SWOT analysis identifying the most important needs, within the main trends identified in the labour market; risk factors and uncertain developments must be highlighted. The following aspects should be considered:

• Give a brief account of national human resources policies in terms of their priorities, recent strategic choices, the political calendar and possible policy changes or reform projects.

• Provide an overview of national and/or regional budgets, in particular the amounts allocated to the implementation of the NAP as well as other relevant budgets (e.g. education, social policy, Research and Development, etc.);

• Institutional aspects: overview of the legal framework (relevant national legislation); description of the administrative set-up (at central and regional level); respective role of public and private (including NGO) institutions in relevant fields.

**DESIGNING THE STRATEGY: ASSESSING CONSISTENCY AND EXPECTED IMPACT**

When designing the development strategy, human resources and labour market aspects should be taken into account in two different moments: firstly when evaluating the consistency of this strategy with the results of the context analysis; secondly when carrying out the assessment of expected impacts.

As regards the former, the consistency of the strategy should be measured taking as a reference the outcome of point 1 above, in particular the description of future trends and their long term implications (comparing with the structure of unemployment; calculating a degree of coverage of the target population; discussing the adequacy to the national/regional profile;). Following the scheme included under point 3 of the Guidelines, the analysis of relevance and consistency of the strategy should examine the implications for human resources in relation to the main needs identified in the SWOT analysis and the priorities defined in the NAP.

Concerning assessment of expected impacts, point 5 of the Guidelines lists a number of topics to be considered. Human resources development and the labour market situation should be taken into account both when defining impacts at macro economic level, and as a horizontal Community policy priority. At this level, impact analysis should refer to the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy: employability, adaptability, entrepreneurship and equal opportunities.
Expected impacts should also be evaluated for each programme and should include the measure level. The ex-ante evaluation should shed some light on expected direct and indirect effects of the interventions on human resources development, employment and the labour market situation. This analysis should take as a departure point a comparison between the socio-economic background as defined in point 1. Taking into consideration the objectives and the quantified targets assigned to each intervention, the ex-ante evaluation should then assess how the interventions proposed in the plan will produce changes in the initial context.
ANNEX III: ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The regulations clearly establish that regional development plans and programmes and SPDs shall be subject to an environmental assessment.

The regulations explicitly require the following components:

- **an appraisal of the environmental situation of the region concerned.** This should provide an environmental situation of the region(s) concerned, together with main strengths and weaknesses to understand the opportunities for, and threats to, economic development from the environmental assets and liabilities of the area. It should also contain the level of implementation of Community environmental policy (and Directives). This is the first stage in the assessment, which, if possible, should be quantified.

- **an appraisal of the environmental impact of the strategy and operations provided for in the Plan and programmes and of the implementation mechanisms.** The appraisal should identify priorities and objectives consistent with opportunities and threats. It should identify the extent to which the programme is attempting to address environmental issues important to regional development, and to actively promote more resource efficient and less resource intensive activities. It also aims at reviewing the draft programme in terms of its conformity with relevant environmental policies and legislation. The appraisal will have to address the likely positive and negative direct impacts on the environment as well as indirect impacts deriving from the increase in economic activity.

Moreover, in conformity with Chapter 6, part I (page 19), the ex-ante evaluation involves an examination of the implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

There is no standardised and generally accepted method for assessing environmental impact. However, the state of the art shows significant progress. In order to assist the competent authorities in complying with regulations and carrying out their own tasks, the Commission proposes such documents as:

- **“The Handbook on environmental assessment of regional development Plans and E.U. Structural Funds programmes”**
  European Commission, DG XI.

- **“The thematic evaluation of the impact of the Structural Funds on the environment”**
  European Commission, DG XVI (forthcoming).

- **“Evaluating socio-economic programmes : Transversal evaluation of impacts on environment, employment and other intervention priorities”**
  MEANS collection, Vol .5.
ANNEX IV: ASSESSING THE PROMOTION OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

According to the new regulation, equality of opportunity between women and men will be promoted by a dual strategy: gender mainstreaming and specific measures targeted at women. The regulation also clearly establishes that the ex ante evaluation of development plans will include an assessment of equality between women and men:

**An appraisal of the situation in terms of equality between women and men**

It should describe the situation in terms of equality, using sex desegregated data. The analysis should include:
- description of differences between women and men in terms of their participation in the labour market by category of economic activity, including data on differences between women and men's participation in different sectors (horizontal segregation) and in decision making positions (vertical segregation), in enterprise, self-employment, and local development support measures;

- information and data on differences between women and men in terms of qualifications and skills and on participation in education and training, including in relation to labour market demand;

- information and data on specific constraints faced by different groups of women and men in accessing and remaining on the labour market, including:
  - availability of care services,
  - availability of transport

- information on consistency between the development plan and the priorities of the National Action Plan for employment.

- information on the results of different actions taken during the previous programming periods, including Community Initiatives (e.g. reference to previous evaluation).

- analysis of possible barriers for women to benefit from and participating in Structural Funds actions

When possible, this appraisal should be quantified and would be the starting point for assessment.

**An appraisal of the implementation mechanisms and the expected impact of the strategy and assistance**

It should identify the extent to which the programme is attempting to address gender gaps and the expected impact, notably on:
– Integration of women and men into the labour market;
– Education and vocational training;
– Establishment of women in business;
– Reconciliation between working and family life.

When feasible, these global objectives should be translated into specific objectives at priority level and into operational objectives at measure level. Ex ante evaluation at the level of Plans and SPDs should identify the relationship and any shortcomings between the different levels of objectives.

In conformity with Chapter 6, part I (page 19), ex-ante evaluation also involves an examination of the implementation and monitoring mechanisms. This appraisal would pertain in particular to:

- Selection criteria should be set up in order to monitor the integration of the equality principle during project selection. The ex ante evaluation has to assist competent authorities to fulfil this task.

- Indicators on how the principle of equal opportunities is taken into account should be established. Some examples of possible indicators are given in the document "Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation". The aim of the ex ante evaluation should assist the competent authorities in identifying benchmarks or critical incidents in order to monitor positive or negative impacts.

There is no standardised method for equal opportunities assessment. However, current practice shows that progress is being made. In order to assist the competent authorities in complying with the regulations as they carry out their tasks, the Commission proposes such documents as:

- **MEANS collection, volume V**: “Evaluation of socio-economic programmes : Transversal evaluation of impacts on environment, employment and other intervention priorities”


- “Indicators for monitoring and evaluation”. Document of the Commission services
ANNEX V: APPRAISAL OF MAJOR PROJECTS

The Regulation defines as major projects, those whose total cost, taken into account in determining the contribution of the Funds, exceeds fifty (50) million Euro.

1. Cost-Benefit Analysis

Article 25 defines that, before approval of the project, the competent authority has to submit to the Commission a cost-benefit analysis. To this end, a guide published by the Commission gives an overview of such an analysis, based on the current practices pursued by International Financing Institutes.

The key elements include the following points:

Clear identification of the project: According to Article 24 of the regulation “A major project comprises an economically indivisible series of works fulfilling a precise technical function with clearly identified aims”.

Objectives: Key socio-economic objectives that the project aims at fulfilling, notably the direct and indirect effects on employment.

Feasibility and options analysis: Why the project chosen is the best option, and information on its own viability and rate of use.

Financial analysis: Based on a reasonable time horizon of life, financial in- and outflows, as well as a forecast of the internal rate of return. Private financing of the project is also a key issue of the analysis.

Socio-economic costs and benefits: Price and wage distortions, external costs, environmental impact, externalities, impact on employment and on balance of the relevant sector, as well as regional development are some of the key issues.

Discounting and Economic rate of return

Sensitivity and risk analysis: This, in broad terms, means whether risks associated with the project have been assessed. This aspect has been one of the main weaknesses up to now and the new regulations require that special effort and attention is given. Balance between the sector and existing or potential overcapacity also has an impact on the profitability and viability of the project.

2. Understanding of Cost-determining Factors.

Often major projects encounter difficulties during the implementation phase because costs are underestimated. Key determinants of initial project costs, as well as factors that change costs over time, should ideally be identified from the very beginning of the project. In order to address this problem the Commission services have published a specific document\(^5\).

\(^5\) "Understanding and monitoring the cost determining factors of Infrastructure Projects", Commission, 1998
ANNEX VI: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. COMMISSION DOCUMENTS


2. MEANS DOCUMENTS

- “Evaluating socio-economic programmes: principal evaluation techniques and tools” Vol. 3 * (EN-FR)
- “Transversal evaluations of impacts on the environment, employment and other intervention priorities” Vol. 5 * (EN-FR)
- “Glossary of 300 concepts and technical terms” Vol 6 * (EN-FR)
- Cahier MEANS: “L'appréciation de la qualité des rapports d’évaluation” (EN, FR)
- “Evaluating the application of the principle of equal opportunities in Structural Funds interventions”, Methodological proposals. (EN, FR)

3. OTHER RELATED COMMISSION DOCUMENTS

- “Understanding and monitoring the Cost-Determining Factors of Infrastructure Projects », Commision, 1998 (EN, FR, DE, EL, ES, IT)
- "Counting the Jobs: How to evaluate the employment effects of Structural Fund Interventions", Commission, 1997 (EN, DE, FR)

* Forthcoming, to be published by the European Community Publication Office (OPOCE).
4. **OTHER**

- "Actes de la Conférence Européenne sur les pratiques d'évaluation en matière de Politiques Structurelles", Document de la Commission


- "A handbook on Environmental Assessment of Regional Development Plans and EU Structural Funds Programmes", Commission Document (EN, DE, FR, EL)