



# **SYNTHESIS OF EX ANTE EVALUATIONS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES 2014-2020**

**9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Expert Group on  
Monitoring and Evaluation of the CAP  
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# Overview

- Evaluation objectives
- Main components of the synthesis:
  - Descriptive overview
  - Evaluation themes
- Evaluation methods
- Main findings and conclusions: 8 topics
- Key recommendations

# Objectives of the evaluation

## Related Regulatory Provision

Syntheses at Union level of the ex ante and ex post evaluation reports shall be undertaken under the responsibility of the Commission. The syntheses of the evaluation reports shall be completed at the latest by 31 December of the year following the submission of the relevant evaluations. [**Article 79**, Ref. (EU) No 1305/2013]

## Objectives of the evaluation

- The synthesis provides an **overall analysis** of the ex ante evaluations of the 115 RDPs and NRNPs 2014-2020, taking into account the **programming documents** and the **strategic environmental assessments**.
- It reports on the **outcomes of the ex ante evaluation reports**, working out **common trends at the European level** but also the **differences between programme areas**. Emphasis of the synthesis is on the **analysis and assessment of specific topics** included in the evaluation themes.
- Beyond **gathering and analysing data**, the synthesis provides founded **judgements** based on analysis and puts forward reasoned **conclusions** and **recommendations**.

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# Main components of the evaluation (1)

- **DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW**

overview of the ex ante evaluation (EAE) reports covering 6 issues:

- 1 – Assessment of the context and needs
- 2 – Relevance, internal and external coherence of the Programme
- 3 – Measuring the progress and the results of the Programme
- 4 – Appraisal of the planned arrangements for the implementation
- 5 – Assessment of horizontal themes
- 6 – Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Synthesis of main conclusions and recommendations; follow-up of recommendations of ex ante evaluations

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# Main components of the evaluation (2)

- **EVALUATION THEMES**

1. **Process** of the ex ante evaluations

2. Intervention logic and **internal coherence**

3. **External coherence** and added value

4. **Six thematic clusters** of actions:

- Investment
- Knowledge transfer, Advisory Services and EIP
- Agri-environment-climate
- Forestry
- Young farmers, Small farmers and Areas with Natural Constraints
- Risk management

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# Methods and tools used

## Source of information:

- the **ex ante evaluation reports** and the **115 RDPs** in the EU 28 MS.  
(note: May 2015: 52 RDPs adopted or ready for adoption, 63 RDP's still in progress)
- Additional information from **Partnership Agreements**, **SEA**, and any relevant national/regional reports and qualitative and quantitative data available.

## Methods:

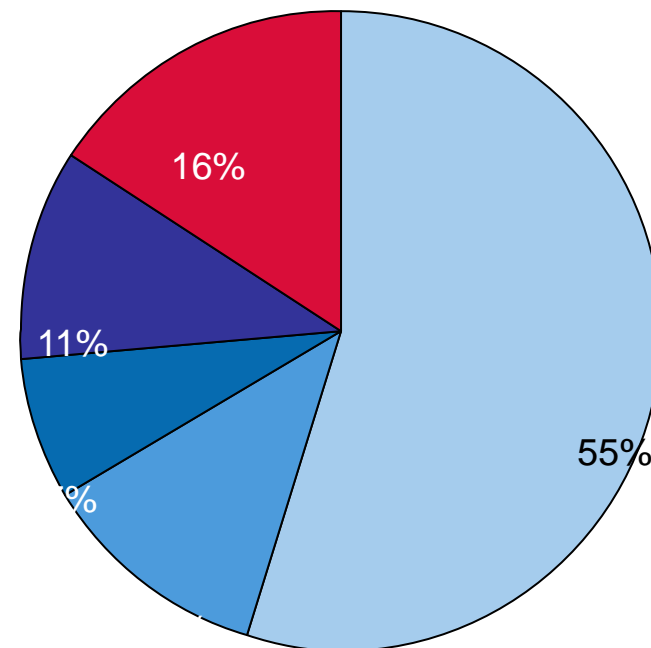
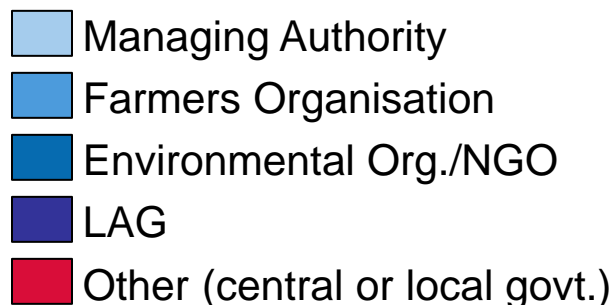
- **Analytical grids and templates** filled in by geographic experts
- **Survey of managing authorities and stakeholders**
- **Case studies** for 6 thematic clusters (ET4), each comprising between 10 and 20 programmes

## Important role of good practice examples!

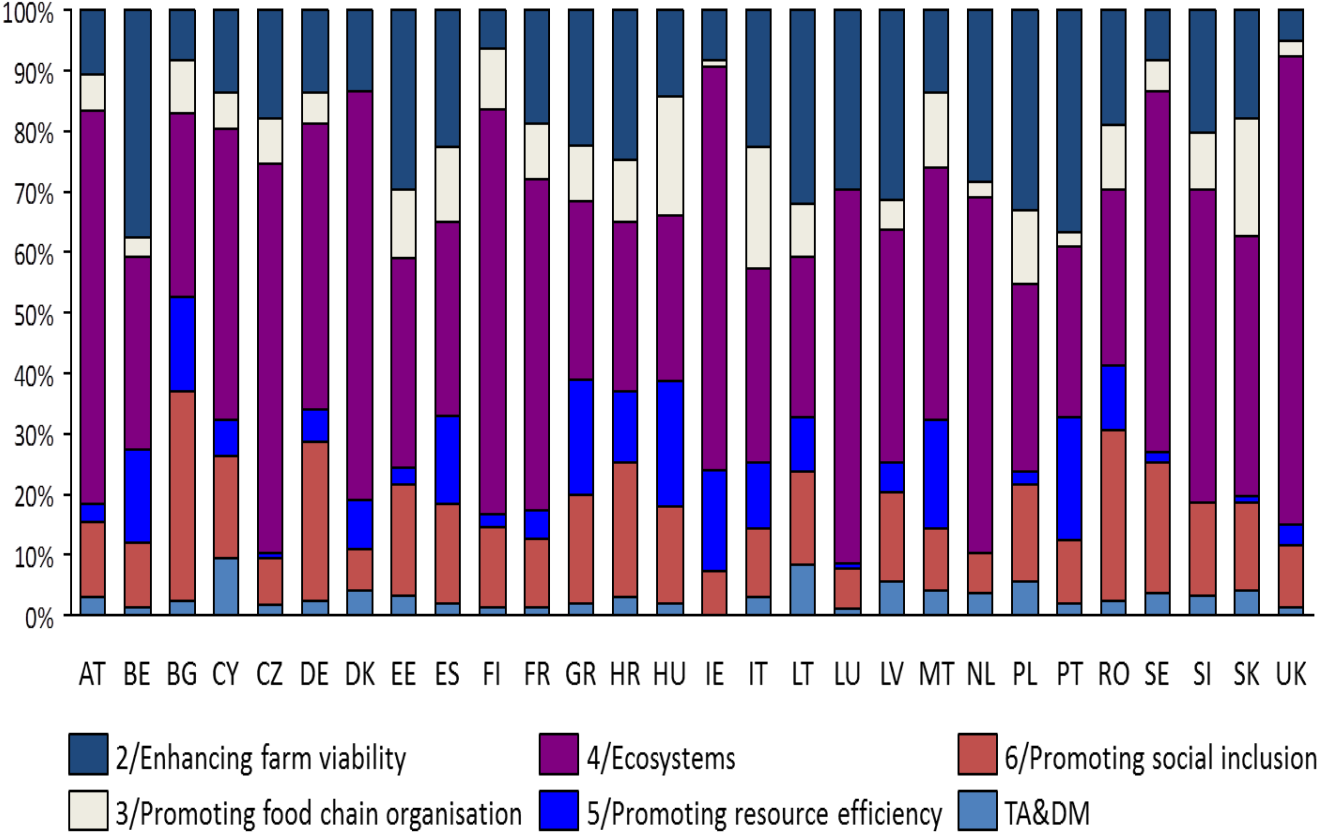
- Based on inputs from geographical experts
- Presented in boxes throughout the report

# Survey scope, participants and response rate

- Scope: cover information gaps in relation to Evaluation Themes 1, 2 and 3
- Standardised questionnaire sent to all Managing Authorities and representatives of major stakeholders such as farmers associations and NGOs
  - Almost 350 representatives from all MAs and stake-holders were finally contacted, and 95 replies were received, which represent a 27.1% response rate.
- The respondents represent 65 countries/regions (56.5%) distributed in the following categories:



# Overview of priorities – by MS



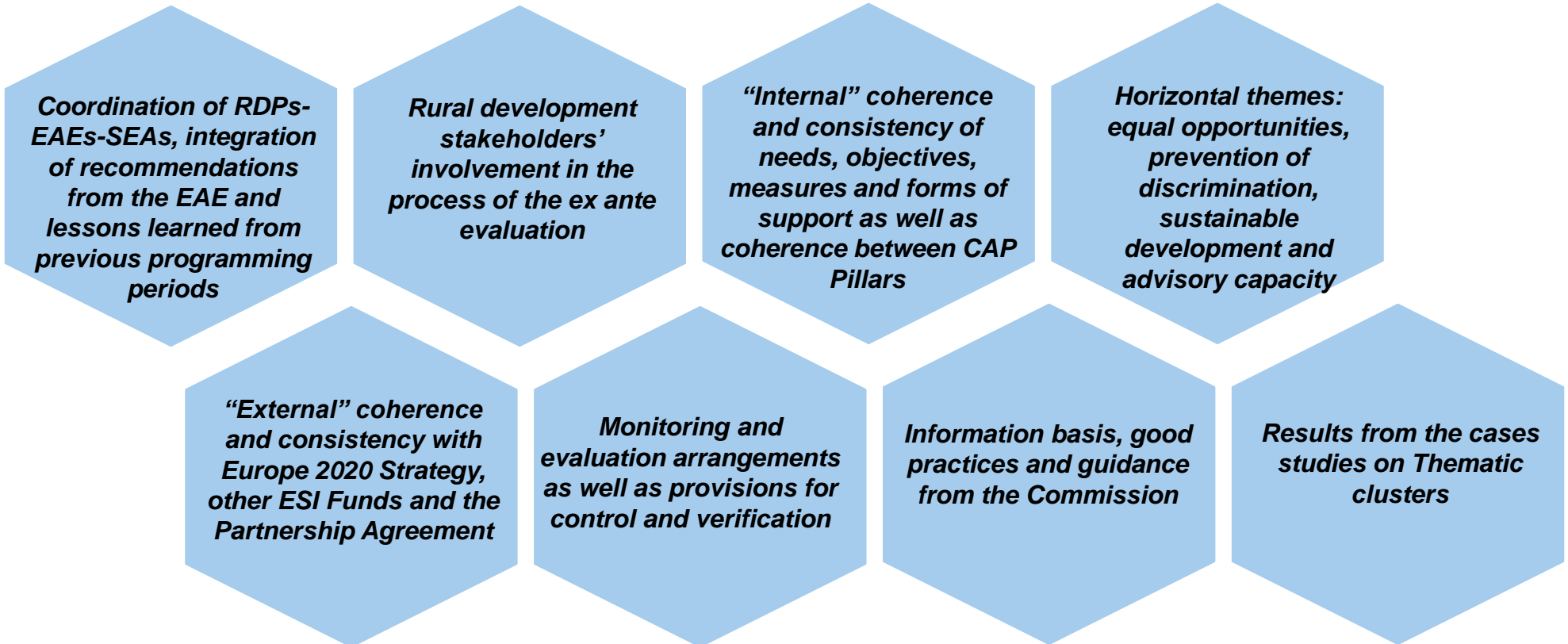
### Main findings

- Priority 4 on *restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry* has clearly been prioritised, as it receives the largest funding allocation in total (43%) and is dominant in 24 countries.
- Priority 2 on *enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture* receives the second largest funding allocation in total (19.7%).
- Priority 6 on *promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas* comes third (16.3%).
- Priorities 3 on *promoting food chain organisation* and 5 on *promoting resource efficiency* have overall received lower allocations.



# Main findings

- Aiming to **enhance the contribution of ex ante evaluation** to the design of sound RDPs – Based on descriptive chapter and 4 evaluation themes
- The findings and conclusions are classified into the following topics:



# Coordination of RDPs-EAEs-SEAs, integration of recommendations from the EAE and lessons learned from previous programming periods (1)

## Key Statement

The recommendations of the EAEs, as well as, the lessons learned from previous programming periods have been widely considered in the RDPs. The cooperation between MA executives, ex ante evaluators and SEA experts has been satisfactory, with potential for improvement through the strengthening of coordination mechanisms.

## Conclusions

- Almost all EAEs describe and assess **all three steps in the RDP design**. Least focus is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> step “Defining governance, management and delivery systems, finalisation of the programme”.
- **Cooperation between MA executives, EAE and SEA experts is satisfactory in 75% of the RDP’s.**
- Synchronisation between RDP, EAE and SEA was **easier when** EAE and SEA are provided by the **same contractor** or by different contractors using a **well-defined cooperation mechanism**.
- The use of **Steering Groups** supporting the RDP design process **is not a common practice**.

# Coordination of RDPs-EAEs-SEAs, integration of recommendations from the EAE and lessons learned from previous programming periods (2)

## Conclusions

- In nearly 2/3 of the EAEs the evaluators have checked that a) all legal requirements for the RDPs external consistency are covered, b) the monitoring system and evaluation plan are suitable, c) the structures and processes foreseen for LAG selection and LEADER implementation are adequate.
- In nearly 63% of the countries/regions, all recommendations of the evaluator have been fully considered in the design and content of the RDPs.
- Potential for improvement: structures and processes for LAGs selection, LEADER implementation

# Rural development stakeholders' involvement in the process of ex ante evaluation

## *Key Statement*

Stakeholders' involvement in the RDP design process should be further enhanced, since their contribution to the identification of differentiated needs has been of crucial importance.

## *Conclusions*

- In 79% of cases, **sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the RDP design process** reported.
- The most significant lesson learned from the previous programming period concerns the **early introduction of public consultation** in the process.

# Horizontal themes: equal opportunities, prevention of discrimination, sustainable development and advisory capacity

## *Key Statement*

Sustainable development is most prominent in the RDPs, while other horizontal themes such as advisory capacity, gender aspects, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, are less emphasised.

## *Conclusions*

- Whereas the assessment of the **adequacy of the RDPs to promote sustainable development and equal opportunities has generally been covered** by the ex ante evaluations, more than half of the evaluators did not assess the relevant advisory capacity due to lack of information.

# “Internal” coherence and consistency of needs, objectives, measures and forms of support as well as coherence between CAP Pillars (1)

## Key Statement

SWOT analysis and needs’ assessment provide a comprehensive and evidence-based picture of the programming areas. Potential for improvement is identified in the following: coordination mechanisms between the two Pillars, monitoring and evaluation plans of the RDPs and the indicator system.

## Conclusions

- For most RDPs, the ex ante evaluators attest that the **RDP objectives** are clearly **defined** and **well related to the needs** established through the SWOT analysis and the needs’ assessment.
- The **distribution of respective expenditures** was found to be **consistent** with the **programme objectives**.
- The main **forms of support** chosen were well-proven instruments like **grants and subsidies**. The **adequacy** of forms of support was **difficult to assess** concisely. Several **EAE reports did not provide sufficient information** for the assessment of coherence between forms of support, measures, actions and specific objectives.

# “Internal” coherence and consistency of needs, objectives, measures and forms of support as well as coherence between CAP Pillars (2)

## Conclusions

- A clear, detailed and **systematic presentation** of the **intervention logic** is often **missing**.
- The presentation and **analysis of the expected impacts is an identified weakness** of the RDPs and EAE reports. **Only 25-30% of the RDPs have been assessed as satisfactory**.
- **Result chains** presenting links between outputs, results and impacts **are missing**, as well as logical links between expected impacts and policy objectives. **The plausibility of the assumed links between planned actions, outputs and results has not been ascertained for more than half of the RDPs**.
- Deficiencies have been found primarily regarding the links between expected **outputs and results**.
- **Half of the EAEs confirm that there is consistency and adequate coordination between the two Pillars** and coordination mechanisms are outlined.

# “External” coherence and consistency with Europe 2020 Strategy, other ESI Funds and the Partnership Agreement

## Key Statement

The formulation of an overall European Strategy (Europe 2020), followed by national strategies regarding the optimal use of ESIF, has ensured the satisfactory coherence of the RDPs with the external policy environment.

## Conclusions

- In the majority of the RDPs, the **objectives** are **closely linked** and contribute to **all three objectives of Europe 2020 Strategy**.
- The **contribution of RDP measures** to the **Europe 2020 objectives** is given but **mentioned less explicitly** in the RDPs.
- As regards the Europe 2020 objectives, the **contribution to inclusive growth is lower** than to smart and sustainable growth.
- **Coordination and alignment between funds is ensured** in 63% of the cases via different mechanisms, most of them being **coordination committees** with representatives of the concerned bodies.
- The increased **need for multilevel policy coordination** at European, country and regional level constitutes an **institutional challenge** for some Member States.



# Monitoring and evaluation arrangements as well as provisions for control and verification

## Key Statement

There is room for improvement regarding the description of monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Provisions for programme control and verification have not adequately been assessed in most of the ex ante evaluations.

## Conclusions

- The **applied indicator system** is often **not specific enough** for evaluating impacts.
- For only 53% of the RDPs the evaluators attested that the **target values for indicators** directly related to the achievements of focus areas are **plausible** and **realistic**.
- **Monitoring and evaluation plans** were assessed as **inadequate** or even **missing** for about 1/3 of the programmes.
- This is mostly linked to the fact that at the time of information gathering for the synthesis (May 2015), **approximately 60 RDPs were still under development**. Developing methodologies for establishing the impacts is often considered a task to be further developed for the **monitoring and evaluation phase** rather than for the phase of RDP design.
- **Only 45%** of the ex ante evaluations **attested to the clarity of the arrangements for control and verification** at the level of measures.
- The **main bottlenecks** identified in EAEs concerned the setting of a **realistic time framework** for evaluations, **accurate explanation and justification of monitoring milestones** and their target values, **human resources** and expertise as well as **governance and communication procedures**.

# Information basis, good practices and guidance from the Commission

## *Key Statement*

There is a potential for improvement of the information basis (information available to the ex ante evaluators) included in the EAEs and the RDPs in order to better answer the evaluation questions. In addition, there seems to be a need to further develop the guidance provided by the Commission. The use and dissemination of good practice examples should be enhanced in order to strengthen peer to peer learning.

# Key Recommendations

## Lessons learned from the previous periods and good practices

**Lessons learned from the previous programming periods and good practices should be disseminated to all countries/regions.**

Examples:

- Procedures related to LAGs selection and LEADER implementation;
- Implementation mechanisms to ensure an integrated approach to territorial development and encourage direct links between CLLD and investments supported by ERDF;
- Systems of extensive collaboration and dialogue between farmers and advisors;
- Solutions regarding the AEC measures implementation;
- Design of risk management sub-measures.

## Co-ordination of RDPs-EAEs and SEAs

- **Mechanisms to ensure a close co-ordination and cooperation between RDP-EAE-SEA should be improved (for 25% for the programmes)**
- **Plans for the evaluation process** should be drafted and followed by all MS to ensure good cooperation and interaction between MAs and ex ante evaluators. This helps to improve reporting on the cooperation between MA executives, evaluators and SEA experts.
- **Steering Groups (or similar bodies) should be established to better monitor the ex ante evaluation process.**

# Key Recommendations

## Stakeholder involvement

- **Stakeholders' involvement** in the ex ante evaluation and the RDP design **should be further enhanced** through the early introduction of public consultation in the process.

## Internal coherence

- ... by a **better (graphic!) presentation** of the **intervention logic**, of the adequacy of the **chosen forms of support**, their **coherence with the measures, actions and specific objectives**, as well as, of the **links between planned actions and expected outputs** and, even more, the **links between expected outputs and results**.
- RDPs should **prioritise needs** (requirement of thematic concentration in CPR).

## Coordination between the funds and better targeting EU2020 objectives

- Demarcation of intervention areas and/or beneficiaries, complementarity and synergies with CAP Pillar I and the ESIF should be improved through the **establishment of coordination bodies** and the **use of common information management systems**.
- With regard to future demographic changes in rural areas, the **RDPs contribution to the objective of inclusive growth should gain more weight**.

# Key Recommendations

## Control and verification, indicator system

- **Appropriate arrangements for control and verification** need to be ensured, (human resources and expertise as well as governance and communication procedures between the involved institutions).
- **Developing methodologies for establishing impacts** is an important task especially in view of the AIR 2019 and ex post evaluation.
- The usage/implementation of the **indicator system** (context, output and impact indicators) and especially the way it is addressed **in the process of RDP design** needs to be improved.
- The **implementation of target indicators** and the **elaboration of target values** which are realistic, verifiable and based on previous experience should be improved.

## Guidance from the Commission

- Further **guidance on the design of new sub-measures** (e.g. in risk management), **indicators, monitoring and evaluation issues, as well as, coordination mechanisms and management structures.**
- **Capacity building and peer to peer exchange** between MAs and other actors involved, through the **dissemination of good practice examples, reflection workshops and seminars.**

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## Report published on-line:

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation/rural-development-reports/ex-ante-rdp-synthesis-2014-2020\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation/rural-development-reports/ex-ante-rdp-synthesis-2014-2020_en.htm)

# Thank you for your attention!

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