EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
REGIONAL POLICY
Thematic development, impact, evaluation and innovative actions
Evaluation and additionality

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
Audit, Controls, Evaluation
Evaluation

The New Programming Period 2007-2013

INDICATIVE GUIDELINES ON EVALUATION METHODS: EVALUATION DURING THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD

Working Document No.5

April 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction: objectives, scope and structure of the working document

Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 outlines **the role of the Commission in providing indicative guidance**[1] on future evaluations (Article 47[5])[2]. This methodological document should, therefore, serve as a reference paper. Member State authorities[3] are encouraged to use it flexibly, adapting the guidance to their own specific needs (e.g. information, strategic or management needs).

EVALSED - the online and interactive resource for the evaluation of socio-economic development (http://www.evalsed.com) - written on behalf of the Commission provides complementary advice and good practice examples, especially as regards evaluation methods and quality standards.

The document has been designed primarily for national, regional and local authorities as they manage Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance in 2007-2013, and in particular for those organising, co-ordinating and carrying out evaluations. Managing authorities may also want to share the document with external evaluators, who should find it useful in performing their tasks (section 5.1).

Regulation 1083/2006 identifies three types of evaluation according to their timing: before (ex ante), during, and after (ex post) the programming period (Article 47[2]).

As for their function, Article 47[2] distinguishes between evaluations of a strategic nature ("in order to examine the evolution of a programme or group of programmes in relation to Community and national priorities") and evaluations of an operational nature ("in order to support the monitoring of an operational programme"). Both types of evaluation can be expressed in a single evaluation report (section 4.1).

This working document applies to evaluations carried out during the programming period, whether of a strategic or operational nature. The term "**on-going evaluation**"[4] will be used, although Regulation 1083/2006 does not use this term. Ex ante[5] and ex post evaluations are the subject of separate working documents.

---

1 In accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 103[2] of the Regulation 1083/2006.

2 If not stated otherwise, all Articles in this working document refer to the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999.

3 If managing authorities or monitoring committees (whose functions are considered in section 5.1) are not specifically referred to, the following terminology is synonymously used to describe the role and activities of the Member States in general: "Member States", "Member State authorities", "Member State administration" or "decision-makers" (often defined more broadly by including civil society).

4 In accordance with Article 86 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRG), the term "on-going evaluation" is used in a wider context and comprises mid-term and ex post evaluation.

5 European Commission (2006): The New Programming Period 2007-2013, Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods: Ex Ante Evaluation, Working Document No. 1.

This working document builds on Member State experience of the mid-term evaluation and its update in the 2000-2006 period, while bearing in mind the regulatory context for 2007-2013[6] and general rules on evaluation as referred to in the Financial Regulation[7] (Article 27[4]) and its implementing rules[8] (Article 21).

The document is composed of four parts:

- The first part reviews past experience with the mid-term evaluation and its update, showing how the lessons learned have influenced the rationale, guiding principles and main features of the on-going evaluation in 2007-2013.
- The second part outlines the regulatory requirements for 2007-2013, including the roles and responsibilities of Member States and the Commission with regard to on-going evaluation.
- The third part describes the focus of on-going evaluation and suggests how the evaluation process could best be planned and designed to serve the strategic and operational needs of decision-makers.
- Finally, the fourth part provides guidance on managing the on-going evaluation process and describes key principles and evaluation quality standards.

2. The nature of evaluation: from mid-term to on-going

The general aim of evaluating cohesion policy is to "improve the quality, effectiveness and consistency of the assistance from the Funds and the strategy and implementation of operational programmes with respect to the specific structural problems affecting the Member States and regions concerned, while taking account of the objective of sustainable development and of the relevant Community legislation concerning environmental impact and strategic environmental assessment" (Article 47[1]).

---

[6] Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1828/2006 of 8 December 2006 setting out rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Regional Development Fund.

[7] Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities.

[8] Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2342/2002 of 23 December 2002 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities.
Interim evaluation mentioned here refers to assessing and examining the human and financial resources allocated to a programme and the results obtained in order to verify that they were consistent with the objectives set. It must be carried out periodically in accordance with a timetable which enables the findings of that evaluation to be taken into account for any decision on the renewal, modification or suspension of the programme. While the approach to **on-going evaluation** takes account of this flexible timetable, it provides for further flexibility as regards evaluation scope and design, adapted to internal demands, and has to be seen in a wider context of planning and managing the evaluation process (section 2).

Regulation 1083/2006 provides for a shift from a concept of mid-term evaluation driven by regulatory imperatives towards a more flexible, demand-driven approach to evaluation during the programming period: **on-going evaluation**. Past experience and the lessons learned have paved the way for the new approach.

Box 1: Lessons learnt from the past experience

Evaluation of the Structural Funds carried out during programme implementation is not a new concept. It was introduced - as a mid-term evaluation (MTE) – for the 1994-1999 period and applied again in 2000-2006.

The 2003 mid-term evaluations[9] were organised and managed in many different ways. They encountered widely diverse ways of thinking and concepts which depended very much on institutional traditions in different Member States. Although some solutions were more effective than others, the general trends reveal an improved quality of evaluation reports (mainly in relation to the analysis of the process-related aspects of implementation) as well as increased involvement of responsible authorities. This exercise demonstrated growing evaluation capacities and knowledge among Member State administrations and marked a further step in partnership with the Commission. Nevertheless, some weaknesses were identified:

- The rigid deadline, leading to evaluations having been launched too early in many cases (notably when Structural Fund interventions started late), and creating a surge in demand in the evaluation market;
- The requirements being too broad, covering all Structural Fund interventions and various and complex evaluation questions, ranging from strategy, to effectiveness and to implementation issues.

Consequently, some evaluations lacked an in-depth analysis of important evaluation questions, especially as regards the results achieved, and were insufficiently adapted to address the specific internal needs of the Member State administrations.

The main lesson drawn from the experience of the MTE was a need for shift towards a more flexible approach, driven by the needs of decision-makers.

This approach was tested - to a certain extent – during the MTE update exercise in 2005. While building on the work of the MTE, the update allowed Member States to narrow the evaluation scope and to focus on areas which were not sufficiently examined in the MTE (especially in relation to the results achieved), rather than to deal again with all the components required by the 2003 exercise. In line with the Commission's commitment to subsidiarity and proportionality, minimum core content was specified in this respect, with managing authorities identifying additional evaluation needs they wished to have addressed in the update and which could add value to better delivery of Structural Fund programmes. Some Member States decided – on a voluntary basis and in parallel with the update exercise – to launch issue-specific evaluations focussing on strategic themes such as, for example, innovation or the environment.

Despite the fact that there was no requirement for the new Member States to undertake a MTE of the Structural Fund assistance during the 2004-2006 period, the majority of them decided to participate actively in this exercise. The underlying idea was to develop evaluation capacity and knowledge within administrations as well as to identify examples of good practice in managing evaluation in accordance with internal demand, e.g., by establishing evaluation plans.

In general, evaluations undertaken in the EU25 during the 2004-2006 period provided some important information on how to further increase the added value of cohesion policy and improve its operation. In particular, the analysis of the results achieved so far has significantly contributed to future programming.

On the basis of the above lessons learnt and capacities developed in 2000-2006, as well as taking account of the existing and forthcoming challenges, the approach to evaluation carried out during the programming period has been appropriately modified within the 2007-2013 regulatory framework[10].

[9] European Commission, (2004): The Mid Term Evaluation of Structural Fund Interventions: Summary Report of the Activities in the Member States.

[10] Regulation 1083/2006 and Regulation 1828/2006.

On-going evaluation is a process taking the form of a series of evaluation exercises. Its main purpose is to follow on a continuous basis the implementation and delivery of an operational programme and changes in its external environment, in order to better understand and analyse outputs and results achieved and progress towards longer-term impacts, as well as to recommend, if necessary, remedial actions.

The proposed approach emphasises the need for stronger links between monitoring and evaluation[11] on the one hand, and on the other, between these two – very often - interlinked exercises and decision-making (sections 3 and 4).

Regular monitoring should provide some of process/operational information (mainly on outputs and results achieved, financial absorption and on the quality of implementation mechanisms) that allows for evaluation to be undertaken, for example, when actual or potential difficulties arise.

However, information on certain strategic aspects, such as socio-economic impact or changes in Community, national or regional priorities affecting an operational programme, cannot be provided by or deduced from the monitoring system and would require a regular follow-up by evaluation. In this case, monitoring data could solely serve as a source of initial/additional information to be further processed and used for analysis and reporting on strategic aspects dealt with by evaluation.

In the light of the above, evaluation will be undertaken and designed in accordance with internal demands in the Member States. Actual or potential difficulties (or other information) as revealed by monitoring[12] could invoke evaluation. Evaluation could also be undertaken to review socio-economic impact and other strategic as well as operational aspects which cannot be analysed solely on the basis of monitoring data.

In this respect, Member States need to be pro-active: in ensuring strong links between monitoring and evaluation and in defining the periodicity/regularity of these exercises in order to guarantee continuous delivery of information and analysis to be used for management purposes. Establishment and further development of evaluation plans is strongly recommended in this respect (see section 4.2, annex 1).

Regulation 1083/2006 provides for flexible arrangements for the **thematic scope**, **design** and **timing** of on-going evaluation[13].

Within this flexible framework, Member States are not limited to evaluations at the level of the operational programme. In fact, they are also encouraged to undertake evaluations

[11] For further information please refer to the following publication: European Commission, (2006): The New Programming Period 2007-2013, Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods: Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators, Working Document No. 2.

[12] If decided by a Member State, monitoring systems for the Structural and Cohesion Funds can contribute to monitoring of the environmental effects in the sense of Article 10 of the 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.

[13] Within this flexible framework, there are two specific cases where evaluation is more precisely referred to in the Regulation 1083/2006 – section 3.1.

by themes/priority axes/groups of actions/major projects or by policy fields (e.g., for ESF interventions) across operational programmes, or within a specific operational programme, as well as of their National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs), as appropriate. Such an approach could help to avoid duplication of effort, enabling, for example, a single evaluation of an aspect which occurs in several operational programmes. Moreover, it could also have the advantage of capturing interactions between operational programmes or of offering a comprehensive picture for further analysis of combined effects of other active policy tools outside the cohesion policy. It is important that such evaluations are undertaken in situations where they add value to the management of the Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance and support the coherence and relevance of the strategies adopted.

A key challenge for the Member States and the Commission is to promote the overall approach to on-going evaluation in the 2007-2013 period described above and to ensure that it is consistently applied across the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

3. Responsibilities for the on-going evaluation

In accordance with the **principles of subsidiarity and proportionality** (Article 13), Member States bear the responsibility for monitoring operational programmes, for carrying out on-going evaluations and for taking corrective measures when problems arise.

The Commission may also carry out on-going evaluations on its own initiative, in partnership with the Member States. However, in line with the above principles, it will only conduct such evaluations where necessary and where they are more effective than evaluations undertaken by the Member States (e.g. strategic evaluations having an EU-wide dimension).

3.1 Member State responsibilities

Box 2: *Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999*

Article 48[3]

Responsibility of Member States

During the programming period, Member States shall carry out evaluations linked to the monitoring of operational programmes in particular where that monitoring reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set or where proposals are made for the revision of operational programmes, as referred to in Article 33. The results shall be sent to the monitoring committee for the operational programme and to the Commission.

Article 33[1]

Revision of operational programmes

At the initiative of the Member State or the Commission in agreement with the Member State concerned, operational programmes may be re-examined and, if necessary, the remainder of the programme revised, in one or more of the following cases:

a) following significant socio-economic changes;
b) in order to take greater or different account of major changes in Community, national or regional priorities;
c) in the light of the evaluation referred to in Article 48(3); or
d) following implementation difficulties.

While Regulation 1083/2006 provides for flexible arrangements with regard to the thematic scope, design, and timing of the on-going evaluation, there are two specific cases in which Member States shall carry it out (Article 48[3]):

a) where the monitoring of operational programmes reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set.

The managing authorities and the monitoring committees - in their role of ensuring the quality of the implementation of the operational programmes (Article 66) - should monitor the financial and physical indicators referred to in Article 37 [1] [c] (output and results indicators defined for the priority axes[14]) and, if decided, any other appropriate indicators established at various programming levels, e.g., at the operational programme or the NSRF levels. This process should be supported by qualitative analysis and discussions of the progress made and the principal achievements as well as other factors which might be crucial for implementation. A qualitative approach should also be applied in situations where quantification is not possible.

On the basis of this analysis, a decision should be taken[15] on whether there is a significant departure (existing or potential) from the goals initially set. Such a departure would require an evaluation to analyse problems and their causes as well as to provide recommendations for corrective actions. It is therefore essential that the monitoring process is reasonably planned and regularly followed to facilitate timely and appropriate modifications to the operational programme[16].

The analysis and use of information from the monitoring system should be linked to the preparation of annual reports on implementation of operational programmes as referred to in Article 67 and in Annex XVIII of the Regulation 1828/2006. Annual targets are optional but would represent good practice and would make it easier to monitor the ongoing performance of operational programmes.

b) when operational programme revisions are proposed

Article 48[3] provides for an explicit link between evaluation and the revision of operational programmes (as referred to in Article 33).

There may be different reasons to re-examine and, if necessary, to revise operational programmes (Article 33[1]), including significant socio-economic changes in the programme environment, major changes in Community, national or regional priorities, implementation difficulties, or where the monitoring of operational programmes reveals a

[14] Including core indicators as recommended in the following publication: European Commission, (2006): The New Programming Period 2007-2013, Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods: Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators, Working Document No. 2 and as stipulated in Annex XVIII of the Regulation 1828/2006.

[15] Management roles are explained in section 5.1

[16] Satisfactory progress in achieving the expected outputs and results – which are reported by the monitoring system - does not necessarily lead to realisation of the planned impact. Evaluation is needed to measure and analyse this (section 2).

significant departure from the goals initially set. In these four cases, the revision of an operational programme should be preceded by an evaluation. It is suggested that the proposal for the revision of an operational programme should be based on a regular monitoring process - supported by qualitative considerations and analytical discussions (taking place, for example, within the monitoring committee) - and any evaluations being undertaken on an on-going basis.

The Commission suggests delivering evaluation evidence only where proposals for revision of operational programmes relate to major changes, which could be:

- **financial** (for example, reallocation of money between different priority axes, for which the Commission's approval is required);

- **content-related** (for example, revision of objectives at the operational programme or priority axis level);

- or **implementation-related** (for example, establishment of new implementation processes or major re-structuring of existing ones).

For small or technical revisions, it is not necessary to provide evaluation evidence.

Besides the two cases laid down in Article 48[3] where evaluation is specifically required by Regulation 1083/2006, the Commission encourages Member States to carry out other evaluations which, according to their scope, design and time-frame, meet internal demands. They could be defined by the Member States in their evaluation plans (section 4.2, annex 1).

3.2 Commission responsibilities

Box 3: *Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999*

Article 49
Responsibility of the Commission

1. The Commission may carry out strategic evaluations.
2. The Commission may carry out, at its initiative and in partnership with the Member State concerned, evaluations linked to the monitoring of operational programmes where the monitoring of programmes reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set. The results shall be sent to the monitoring committee for the operational programme.

The Commission may initiate the evaluation of certain operational programmes (or parts of them, e.g., priority axes or major projects), when the monitoring reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set. This exercise will be carried out in time for the results to inform any adjustments to the operational programme which may be required. Moreover, the Commission will work in partnership with the Member State concerned to ensure exchange of information (including the monitoring data) and proper consideration of recommendations.

In addition, the Commission may carry out on its own initiative strategic evaluations of certain operational programmes (or parts of them), national strategies or strategic themes which have, for example, a particular importance in the context of implementing the Lisbon and Sustainable Development Strategies. The results may be used by the Commission for strategic reporting as referred to in Article 30.

The Commission – besides the responsibility for carrying out its own evaluations - has a role to play in providing guidance on evaluation methods, techniques and data analysis (section 1). Moreover, it will continue to support capacity-building and exchange of experience between Member States in designing and managing their monitoring and evaluations systems, both at strategy and operational programme levels.

4. Planning the on-going evaluation process

4.1 Focus of on-going evaluation

The rationale and focus of on-going evaluations varies depending on the specific needs of the Member States. The demand for evaluation might come both from questions related to general policy (strategic) issues and from questions on more specific (operational) issues. According to these needs, evaluations could either be of a strategic or an operational nature; they may also combine both strategic and operational features[17].

Box 4: Depending on the specific needs of decision-makers and the nature of the evaluation, the Commission suggests focusing on one or more of the following key evaluation issues[18]:

- ***The relevance*** of the Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance, which includes analysis of the objectives of an NSRF or operational programme and their adequacy in relation to changes in the social, economic and environmental context during the programming period.

- ***The consistency*** of the Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance, which aims to analyse, for example, the relationships and complementarities between the different priority axes and their contribution to the objectives of an operational programme. The coherence of the assistance and its synergies with Member States' or regions' policies, as well as with other Community policies, could also be assessed.

- ***The effectiveness*** of the Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance, which involves the analysis of outputs, results and impacts and the assessment of their compliance with the expected objectives in order to understand why there are or may be varying degrees of success in this respect. Particular attention should be placed on the variables explaining the effects of interventions and deviations from the objectives, including the analysis of processes and implementation mechanisms.

- ***The efficiency*** of the Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance, which compares processes and effects to the means and resources mobilised, in particular, the costs of the assistance in relation to its effectiveness. These analyses can be carried out by comparing the costs of operational programmes observed with the costs of other similar interventions and by focusing on areas of implementation difficulty that indicate scope for efficiency improvements.

[17] Please refer to Article 47[2] and section 1 which describe the nature of the on-going evaluation.
[18] For more information please refer to the following publication: European Commission, (2006): EVALSED: the online and interactive resource for the evaluation of socio-economic development (published on the Internet at: www.evalsed.com).

Strategic nature of evaluation

A priority of the new approach to evaluation in the 2007-2013 period is to assess the contribution of cohesion policy to the achievement of the Lisbon goals and to make that contribution more visible.

In this context, on-going evaluation may assess, for example, the macro-economic impact of Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance and the continuing relevance and consistency of strategies at national and operational programme levels, as well as propose their adjustments in line with changes in the socio-economic environment or in Community, national and regional priorities (section 3.1).

It may also focus on specific themes which are of strategic importance for an operational programme (e.g., innovation, the information society, SME development) or on horizontal priorities (equal opportunities, environment). Identification of good practice examples should provide support to improving the strategic focus of the Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance.

The results of such analyses could contribute to strategic reporting requirements, as referred to in Articles 29 and 30.

Operational nature of evaluation

In addition to the strategic dimension, the managing authorities will have to consider more operational aspects of the Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance, i.e. by measuring, assessing and analysing progress in implementation of operational programmes (section 3.1).

Such analysis should aim, *inter alia*, to review the quality and relevance of the quantified objectives[19], analysing data on financial and physical progress and providing recommendations on how to improve the performance of an operational programme, e.g., in terms of efficiency[20] and effectiveness. For that purpose, the indicator and monitoring systems should be well designed and able to provide the relevant quantified data. Moreover, the interface between monitoring and evaluation should be planned in advance to ensure a high quality of information and analysis to inform management decisions (sections 2 and 3.1).

Evaluation should also assess the functioning of administrative structures and the quality of implementation mechanisms, which very often have a significant impact on the overall performance of an operational programme.

[19] In this context, expressed mainly as output and result indicators; impact indicators are more suitable for strategic considerations.

[20] When focusing on efficiency, the evaluation may also refer to strategic aspects as, for example, to different ways of reaching the same socio-economic objectives and achieving the same impact. Such broader considerations of efficiency should primarily be dealt with in the ex ante evaluation. Nevertheless, they could be further developed in on-going evaluation, especially where proposals for the revision of an operational programme are discussed (section 3.1).

4.2 Evaluation plans

Evaluation carried out during the programming period should serve – as far as possible - the needs of decision-makers in implementing Structural and Cohesion Fund assistance. In this respect, planning is crucial to ensure that this overall objective is met during programme implementation.

Box 5: *Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999*

Article 48[1]

Responsibility of Member States

The Member States shall provide the resources necessary for carrying out evaluations, organise the production and gathering of the necessary data and use the various types of information provided by the monitoring system.

They may also draw up, where appropriate, under the Convergence objective, in accordance with the principle of proportionality set out in Article 13, an evaluation plan presenting the indicative evaluation activities which the Member State intends to carry out in the different phases of the implementation.

The establishment of an **evaluation plan** is recommended by the Commission not only under the Convergence objective (as referred to in Article 48[1]) but also under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective and the European Territorial Co-operation objective, taking into account the proportionality principle (Article 13).

The main purpose of establishing an evaluation plan is to provide an overall framework for on-going evaluation and ensure that it is effectively used and integrated as a management tool during the implementation phase.

To this end, an evaluation plan defines the overall co-ordination arrangements for the on-going evaluation process such as, for example, the links between monitoring and evaluation as well as the overall periodicity/regularity of these two exercises (also in the context of fulfilling the regulatory requirements, as referred to in Article 48[3] - sections 2 and 3.1). Member States have total flexibility in identifying areas where evaluations might be necessary, as well as in deciding on their thematic scope and time-frame. In addition, some Member States might find it useful to include in their plans other elements such as evaluation capacity-building (e.g., training programmes), the overall budget for evaluation activities and the deployment of human resources necessary to ensure proper management of the whole process.

It is suggested that evaluation plans cover the whole programming period and include sections - updated or developed on an annual basis - with actual evaluation activities and reports. These sections – as the whole evaluation plan – may also be revised on an ad hoc basis according to the needs of decision-makers or where specific evaluations are required under Article 48[3].

The evaluation plan is intended to be drawn up and agreed by the Member State authorities in charge of specific operational programmes, or those in charge of the NSRF, as appropriate. The Commission suggests that evaluation plans are developed:

- at the national level, defining the overall co-ordination arrangements for the on-going evaluation process in a Member State as well as evaluation activities covering the whole strategy or carried out across the operational programmes, e.g., by themes or priority axes;

and, as appropriate (in accordance with the proportionality principle as set out in Article 13):

- at the programme level, including co-ordination arrangements and covering all or selected activities of an operational programme.

The Commission strongly recommends establishing **steering groups for evaluation plans**, drawn up at the national level or covering major operational programmes. Such groups should consist of various stakeholders (e.g. representatives of civil society, ministries and other administrative bodies) and play an advisory role (for example, by helping develop and co-ordinate evaluation plans or reviewing them regularly). This role could also be played by inter-ministerial or inter-departmental evaluation networks; either pre-existing or which could be established within the Structural and Cohesion Fund management structures in the Member States.

Given the above background, the Commission recommends to the Member States a forward-looking approach: drawing up evaluation plans at a similar time to operational programmes.

A suggested outline of an evaluation plan is presented in Annex I.

5. Managing the on-going evaluation process

5.1 Management roles

The **managing authorities** in each Member State should play a leading role in co-ordinating the on-going evaluation process. They should:

- decide, in consultation with the steering group (section 4.2), on the structure and content of the evaluation plan[21] (annex 1) and ensure the existence of an administrative framework for its implementation;
- ensure that the monitoring data on financial and physical indicators is collected and available; they should also analyse these data (sections 2, 3.1 and 4.1);
- decide – taking account of the opinion of the monitoring committee - to initiate evaluations and provide for that purpose resources from the technical assistance budget;

[21] With regard to the European Territorial Co-operation objective, it is recommended that the monitoring committee draws up and agrees on the evaluation plan and actual evaluations.

- guarantee that evaluation aims are respected and quality standards observed;
- submit evaluation results to the monitoring committee and the Commission.

In undertaking their evaluation tasks, the managing authorities should use, where appropriate, **external expertise** through evaluation contracts or their own internal evaluation capacity (e.g. evaluation units[22]).

External expertise can be contracted in different ways. Two possible scenarios are:

- The managing authorities may decide to establish a **framework contract** for carrying out on-going evaluation of an operational programme by independent evaluators, covering the entire programming period or its major part. However, the framework contract should not be a substitute for the tasks and responsibilities of the managing authorities in implementing the operational programmes.

- On the other hand, they may stipulate **single contracts** for specific evaluations to be carried out in accordance with the regulatory requirements (section 3.1), or the evaluation plan (section 4.2, annex 1), or when decided on an ad hoc basis to meet internal demands.

Past experiences have demonstrated the importance of developing evaluation capacities within managing authorities. Respect for the principle of evaluation independence can be better ensured if the use of third parties to carry out evaluations is complemented by strong internal capacities to plan and steer the evaluation process, as well as the ability to analyse and use the evaluation results in current and future operational programmes.

Moreover, both the independence and the quality of evaluations can be enhanced by establishing **steering groups in charge of each evaluation**[23] which are strongly recommended by the Commission. Their role would be largely technical and could be defined as "guiding the evaluation process". Such a steering group should be responsible, for example, for initiating a specific evaluation in accordance with the evaluation plan, for developing the terms of reference, for identifying and managing any risks associated with the evaluation process and for providing relevant information or advice which may by used by the evaluators. The members of the steering group should include all stakeholders of the operational programme being evaluated, such as, for example, the representatives of the managing authority (including the evaluation unit, which plays a co-ordinating role here), other ministries involved, regional/local authorities, and civil society.

The **monitoring committees** must periodically review and examine the quality and the results of implementation of the operational programme and, in particular, progress made towards achieving targets in terms of financial and physical indicators. Analysis and discussion in monitoring committees should be one of the key drivers of evaluation (section 3.1). The monitoring committees should also be actively involved in analysis of

[22] It is strongly recommended that in carrying out evaluations, they act independently from the managing authority.

[23] It should be noted that these groups are different and/or additional to steering groups for evaluation plans (section 4.2).

the evaluation results and recommendations, as well as using them effectively as a contribution to decision-making.

5.2 Key principles

As laid down in Regulation 1083/2006, there are four main principles that govern on-going evaluation:

Proportionality

This principle (Article 13) should be reflected, for example, in the evaluation plan, by the number and scope of evaluations proposed during programme implementation. These should be in proportion to the scale and resources of an operational programme or "potential risk areas" associated with its implementation.

Independence

In order to ensure the credibility of the results, evaluations shall be carried out by experts or bodies (internal or external) that are functionally independent of the certifying and audit authorities (Article 47[3]). In line with internationally accepted evaluation standards, the Commission strongly recommends that their activities should also be independent from managing authorities.

The interactive nature of the evaluation process requires evaluators to work closely with the Member State authorities in charge of planning or managing NSRFs and operational programmes. However, it is important for evaluators to retain their independence throughout the process, giving expert judgements on different elements of the NSRF or the operational programme. The responsible authorities should respect the fact that the evaluator's role is constructive criticism, with a view to improving the quality of the assistance.

The independence of evaluation can also be enhanced by the presence of steering groups in which various stakeholders are represented (sections 4.2 and 5.1).

Partnership

Partnership is essential for planning, designing and carrying out evaluation. It relies on consultation and participation of stakeholders and provides a basis for learning, openness, and transparency during the whole process.

Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders representing, for example, civil society and regional and local authorities should form part of the methodology of evaluation reports. These stakeholders often have valuable insights, on which the evaluators should draw, especially in assessing the relevance and quality of the strategy or the performance of operational programmes.

In this context, regular communication and information exchange should also be maintained between the Commission and the Member State authorities.

Transparency

It is good practice to publish evaluation reports in the interests of transparency, and in order to stimulate public debate on evaluation findings. The easiest way to do this is to place the entire evaluation report on the website of the NSRF, the operational programme, or the managing authority.

5.3 Quality standards

The Commission invites the competent Member State authorities to ensure the quality of on-going evaluation. EVALSED - the online and interactive resource for the evaluation of socio-economic development (www.evalsed.com) - provides quality standards for both the evaluation reports and the evaluation process, which may be useful.

While the quality standards for the evaluation reports focus on the quality of the final product, the quality standards for the process provide a useful checklist of good practice examples for Member State authorities managing on-going evaluation. Their use can help build evaluation capacity within administrations, particularly in those with limited experience of managing evaluations.

The quality standards are set out in Annex II.

ANNEX 1. Suggested outline of an evaluation plan

It is suggested that the evaluation plan consists of two main parts:

I. Co-ordination

Evaluation plans should propose and explain the overall co-ordination arrangements for the on-going evaluation process, such as, for example, the links with the monitoring system (sections 2, 3.1 and 4.1), main evaluation fields and criteria to decide evaluation topics, the establishment of an evaluation plan steering group, resources allocated, quality control system, publication and availability of evaluation reports as well as a mechanism for a possible revision of the evaluation plan. Some Member States may wish to include other evaluation-related activities which also need to be planned in advance, such as training programmes for evaluation co-ordinators or evaluators. For plans developed at the national level, the possible links and complementarities with the operational programme-related evaluation plans could be demonstrated. Evaluation plans drawn up at the operational programme level could be included as annexes to the national evaluation plan.

II. Actual evaluation activities and reports

This part can be updated or developed on an annual basis, as appropriate[24])

It could cover the following items:

1. Indicative list of evaluations to be carried out (titles);

2. Scope of each evaluation;

3. Main evaluation questions to be considered;

4. Potential use of each evaluation (presentation and distribution of results, monitoring the use of recommendations);

5. Indicative timetable;

6. External or internal evaluation;

7. Financial resources planned for each evaluation;

8. Management structure (including an evaluation steering group – section 5.1).

[24] Some of the evaluation topics may already be defined at an early stage (for the whole programming period). Such topics could stem, for example, from specific issues identified in the ex ante evaluation. Or they could be "potential risk areas" identified on the basis of past experience in the relevant intervention fields.

ANNEX 2. Quality standards[25]

(1) Quality of the Evaluation Report	(2) Quality of the Evaluation Process
Meeting Needs: The evaluation report adequately addresses the information needs and corresponds to the terms of reference.	**Coherent objectives:** The NSRF or the operational programme(s) objectives were coherent and clear enough to facilitate evaluation.
Relevant scope: The rationale, outputs, results, impacts, interactions with other policies, and unexpected effects have been carefully studied (depending on the evaluation scope and evaluation questions).	**Adequate terms of reference:** The terms of reference were well drawn up, proved useful, and did not need to be revised.
Open process: The interested parties (e.g. the stakeholders) have been involved in the design of the evaluation and in the discussion on the results, in order to take into account their different points of view.	**Tender selection:** This was well-conducted and the chosen tenderer was able to undertake the evaluation to a good standard.
Defensible design: The design of the evaluation was appropriate and adequate for obtaining the results needed to answer the main evaluation questions.	**Effective dialogue and feedback:** An inclusive forum and process was created that provided feedback and dialogue opportunities with decision-makers and managers, so improving the quality of the evaluation.
Reliable data: The primary and secondary data collected or selected are suitable and reliable in terms of their expected use.	**Adequate information:** Required monitoring and data systems existed and were made available/were accessed by administrations and partners.
Sound analysis: Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed in accordance with established conventions, and in ways appropriate to answer the evaluation questions correctly.	**Good management:** The evaluation team was well-managed and supported.
Credible results: The results are logical and justified by the analysis of data and by suitable interpretations and hypotheses.	**Effective dissemination to decision-makers:** The evaluation reports/evaluation results were disseminated to steering group members, programme managers, and other decision-makers, who responded appropriately with timely feedback/comments.
Impartial conclusions: The conclusions are justified and unbiased.	**Effective dissemination to stakeholders:** The evaluation reports/evaluation results were suitably disseminated to all stakeholders and where targeted in ways that supported the learning of lessons.
Clear report: The report describes the context and goal, as well as the organisation and results of the NSRF or the operational programme(s) in such a way that the information provided is easily understood. A comprehensive executive summary in one of the main working languages of the Commission promotes dissemination of evaluation results and exchange of good practice between the Member States.	
Useful recommendations: The report provides recommendations that are useful to decision-makers and stakeholders and are detailed enough to be implemented.	

[25] Quality standards were elaborated on the basis of the Communication for the Commission from the President and Mrs Schreyer, C (2002) 5267/1 of 23 December 2002, Evaluation Standards and Good Practice and the Communication to the Commission from Ms Grybauskaitė in Agreement with the President, SEC (2007) 213 of 21 February 2007, Responding to Strategic Needs: Reinforcing the use of evaluation.

ANNEX 3. List of background documents

Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds

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

Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities

Commission Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2342/2002 of 23 December 2002 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities

Communication for the Commission from the President and Mrs Schreyer, C (2002) 5267/1 of 23 December 2002, Evaluation Standards and Good Practice

Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRG)

Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Regional Development Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1783/1999

Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999

Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC)

Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999

Council Regulation (EC) No 1084/2006 of 11 July 2006 establishing a Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1164/94

Commission Regulation (EC) No 1828/2006 of 8 December 2006 setting out rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Regional Development Fund

Communication to the Commission from Ms Grybauskaitė in Agreement with the President, SEC (2007) 213 of 21 February 2007, Responding to Strategic Needs: Reinforcing the use of evaluation

European Commission, (2006): The New Programming Period 2007-2013, Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods, Ex Ante Evaluation, Working Document No. 1

European Commission, (2006): The New Programming Period 2007-2013, Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods, Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators, Working Document No. 2

European Commission, (2004): The 2000-2006 Programming Period, Methodological Working Papers: Working Paper No. 9: The Update of the Mid Term Evaluation of Structural Fund Interventions

European Commission, (2004): The 2000-2006 Programming Period, Methodological Working Papers: Working Paper No. 8: The Mid Term Evaluation of Structural Fund Interventions

European Commission, (2004): The Mid Term Evaluation of Structural Fund Interventions: Summary Report of the Activities in the Member States

European Commission, (2006): EVALSED: the online and interactive resource for the evaluation of socio-economic development (published on the Internet at: www.evalsed.com)