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Revised proposal for minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan to be included in 2014-2020 RDPs

Legal references: CPR Articles 49(1); 49(2)RDR Articles 9(1)(g)(December Presidency proposal); 83(1).

This proposal covers the minimum requirements for the Evaluation Plan (EP) to be submitted as part of the RDP, and approved by Commission Decision. The EP forms part of the future monitoring and evaluation system for rural development. The minimum requirements will be included in the implementing act for the RDR, and as such will be legally binding. Compliance with them will be required for the RDP to be approved. As with all other elements of the RDP, the EP could only be modified through a formal modification procedure.

The implementing act will also specify minimum reporting requirements on the implementation of the EP, which will be included in the structure required for the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs). The reporting requirements, including those for the enhanced AIRs in 2017 and 2019, will be covered in a separate document.

The EP as described here (and in particular sections 1, 4 and 7) is considered to fulfil the requirements of Article 9(m)(ii) as regards the description of the monitoring and evaluation procedures. Therefore no additional separate description of the monitoring and evaluation system will be required in the RDP

In addition to the legally binding minimum requirements, non-binding guidance is being prepared by a Thematic Working Group of the Evaluation Expert Network. This guidance will provide support to the Managing Authorities in drafting the EP, and also in implementing it and reporting on it.

The **purpose** of the EP is to ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken, and that sufficient and appropriate resources are available, in particular:

- to provide the information needed for programme steering and to feed the enhanced AIR in 2017;
- to provide the information needed to demonstrate interim progress to objectives and to feed the enhanced AIR in 2019;
- to ensure that data required for evaluation purposes is available at the right time in the appropriate format;

- to ensure that some minimum consistent evaluation results are provided for all RDPs at key points (2017 and 2019), to allow aggregation across the EU of certain key information as specified in the legal framework (needed for accountability).

The minimum requirements included in the implementing act therefore have to be sufficient to demonstrate that these objectives will be achieved. However, **the EP is not intended to be a management tool specifying in detail all evaluation activities to be undertaken by the Managing Authority**. It is also important to limit the level of detail in the EP to keep the need for RDP modification to a minimum. The EP is not expected to specify the methods that will be used for particular evaluations.

It is recognised that MS have different situations, requirements and organisational approaches. Many MS and regions already have well developed monitoring and evaluation systems, and these should continue to be used. The EP neither requests the creation of new systems nor requires the harmonisation of existing systems to a common approach. It simply provides a mechanism to check that the planned arrangements are adequate, and requires that the elements of the system be described, to demonstrate that the objectives can be fulfilled.

Proposed minimum requirements

It is proposed that the EP should contain seven sub-sections:

1. Objectives and Purpose of the EP

This sub-section should contain a statement of the objective and purpose of the EP. It should be based on the overall EP objectives stated above, but may also include additional specific programme-related objectives if the Managing Authority considers it appropriate to do so.

2. Governance and Coordination

This sub-section should contain a brief description of the organisation of the monitoring and evaluation system for the RDP. It should identify the main bodies involved and their responsibilities. It should explain how coordination of evaluation activities with RDP implementation is organised.

3. Evaluation topics and activities

This sub-section should contain an indicative description of the evaluation topics and activities anticipated for the programming period to support effective implementation and achievement of objectives, and to report on programme achievements, including (but not limited to) fulfilment of EU requirements. It should cover activities needed to ensure that the contribution to objectives of each of the RD priorities and any programme specific elements are adequately evaluated. This would include the assessment of result and impact indicator values and analysis of net effects, thematic issues (including sub-programmes), cross-cutting issues such as sustainable development and climate change, the National Rural Network, the contribution of local development strategies, the added-value of the Leader approach and the partnership principle. It should also include planned support for evaluation at LAG level, It should mention any specific additional activities needed to fulfil the requirements of the monitoring and evaluation system (e.g. further work on developing methodology for specific indicators, such as HNV, or policy areas,

such as innovation or short supply chains, or programme specific indicators and evaluation questions). **Descriptions of methodologies to be used are not required.**

4. Data and information

This sub-section should cover the system to record, maintain, manage and report statistical information on RDP implementation and the provision of monitoring data for evaluation purposes. It should identify the various data sources to be used (e.g. monitoring data, surveys, external data e.g. FADN). It should identify data gaps, potential bottlenecks, and/or potential institutional issues related to obtaining the necessary data (e.g. data protection issues or access to disaggregated data) and propose solutions (with references to activities proposed in the previous sub-section if appropriate). It is recognised that systems may still be in the process of development whilst the RDP is being drafted, but this section should demonstrate that the necessary planning has been done and that the work is underway to ensure that appropriate data management systems will be operational in due time.

5. Timeline

This sub-section should contain the major milestones during the programming period (production of evaluation results required for the enhanced AIRs in 2017 and 2019, and the ex-post evaluation) and an indicative outline of the timing needed in order to ensure that the necessary results are available on time (preparation and launching of major tenders, preparatory work needed on data preparation or methodology development prior to launching evaluations etc).

6. Communication

This sub-section relates specifically to the communication of evaluation findings. It is not a duplication of the communication strategy for the RDP as a whole. It should describe how the results of evaluation activities will be made available to the various target recipients (stakeholders, policymakers etc). Information channels, and information needs for the different target groups should be identified. It should describe the mechanisms established to follow-up on the use of evaluation results.

7. Resources

This sub-section should describe the resources needed and foreseen to implement the plan, including an indication of administrative capacity, data, financial resources, IT needs. It should also describe the capacity building activities foreseen to ensure that the EP can be implemented properly.