



*18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Expert Committee  
on Evaluation of Rural Development  
Programmes*

*20 November 2013*

## 1. Introduction and adoption of the agenda

The Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Committee”, ExCo) met for the eighteenth time in the European Commission’s premises in Brussels on 20 November 2013.

The meeting was chaired by Adelina Dos Reis (Head of Unit AGRI L.4), who welcomed participants and introduced the agenda. In the afternoon the meeting was chaired by Zélie Peppiette (DG AGRI L.4).

## 2. Evaluation Questions: State of play

Eric Nieto (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented the technical comments raised by Member States’ representatives, EC officials and peer reviewers on the Working Document “*Common Evaluation Questions for Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020*”. He also explained how the comments were addressed in the updated document (version 12/11/2013). Zélie Peppiette (DG AGRI Unit L.4) then addressed the comments related to formal and procedural aspects of EQs which are under the responsibility of the European Commission. Furthermore she informed delegates about the next steps for developing the Working Document:

- Elements of the discussion during the Committee meeting and further written comments by MS (by the end of December) will be included in the next update;
- Overlaps in the EQs dealing with climate and environment will be looked at;
- Reporting requirements for 2017, 2019 and ex post evaluation will be considered and clarification will be provided on which set of EQs needs to be answered when;
- Coherence with the implementing regulations and reporting requirements will be ensured;
- MS will receive a revised version of the Working Document in January 2014.

Answers to the questions on formal aspects are summarized below.

### What is the status of the EQ working document?

*It is a non-binding document, intended to support the work of MA.*

### If there is no NRN in place, do the EQs for NRN need to be answered?

*No, Only those EQs related to contents of the specific RDP have to be answered.*

### Can the EQ related to “Synergies among RD priorities and FA” not be answered?

*RD is an integrated policy; measures within a programme should work together so synergies and complementarity need to be addressed. The EQ is therefore not optional.*

### Why are there EQs linked to EU headline targets?

*All EU policies are linked and intended to work together to contribute to the EU headline targets. Although RDPs may be small compared to other funds, they make a contribution. If you target your budget to specific objectives, then some results of the spending can be expected.*

### Who is responsible for answering the EQs? Could the EC answer the EQs for EU headline targets?

*The common EQs are to be answered at the RDP level and are under the responsibility of the MA.*

### Why are the horizontal CEQs on environment and climate change placed under two policy areas: RD cross cutting priorities and CAP objectives?

*The Working Document is built up from elements of the policy requiring evaluation. The structure is to be reconsidered in order to avoid duplication.*

**Do we really need common judgement criteria?**

*The guidance is non-binding. If MS identify more appropriate judgement criteria to answer the questions, they are encouraged to use them.*

**2017 is too early to answer common EQs.**

*Not all CEQs are expected to be answered at the same time: There is a formal requirement to address EQs related to Focus Areas in the 2017 AIR (CPR Article 44(3)), however horizontal EQs related to EU objectives do not have to be answered at this point. In 2019 a first assessment of RDP impacts is required which means that Focus Area related and horizontal EQs need to be addressed. More clarity on the sets of EQs to be addressed at the different reporting moments will be given in the new version of the Working Document.*

**What if a Focus Area (FA) has only secondary impacts?**

*You only have to answer the questions for the FAs that are included in your programme. If you expect significant additional effects on other focus areas, which are not programmed in your RDP, then you are free to look at these effects as well, but it is not a requirement.*

**Will some examples of answers to EQs be provided?**

*No, examples for answers are not foreseen.*

**When will common indicators for TA be presented?**

*The presentation of the full draft of the Implementing Act (IA) is foreseen in the Rural Development Committee (RDC) in December, and this should include indicators for NRNs and TA.*

**Why are the ex ante EQs not included (e.g. on gender, coherence) in the set of common EQs?**

*The ex ante evaluation serves a different purpose, as it assesses whether the programme is logical, if the suggested structure will work and achieve what is expected. The common EQs in the Working Document focus on assessing RDP achievements during implementation.*

**The common EQs on TA are not horizontal. Can they be placed separately?**

*The structure of the Working Document will be reviewed for the January version.*

After both presentations, the MS raised the following comments/questions:

**Level of detail provided in the EQ Working Document**

*Italy expressed concern about the level of detail provided in the Working Document (e.g. EQs at the level of Focus Area, provision of judgement criteria and indicators) and commented that even if the Working Document is of non-binding nature, it would become a benchmark for EC Desk officers and therefore become almost compulsory for Member States.*

*The EC replied that MS are free to consider the information provided on judgment criteria and indicators, and that MA may develop their own judgment criteria. The level of detail in the document is provided in order to support MS. The EQ Working Document has a non-binding nature and this will be made very explicit. However, the set of common EQs is compulsory, and will be included in the Implementing Acts (IA).*

**Regulatory framework for common EQs**

*Belgium asked for a clarification of the regulatory framework of EQs: where is it stated that common EQs need to be answered by MS; and how will the regulatory framework deal with different sets of common EQs for different reporting moments in 2017, 2019, and ex post?*

*The EC highlighted that Art. 74 of the RDR establishes the M&E system for RD. The RDR gives the empowerment to establish Implementing Acts (IAs). The common EQs will be included in the IAs and therefore the common EQs are part of the M&E system. A distinction in the set of EQs to be answered*

*in 2017, 2019 and ex post will be established after a parallel reading of the reporting requirements in the basic and implementing regulations and will be included in the next version of the Working Document.*

#### **Reporting on EQs in 2017**

Austria, Belgium, Poland and Cyprus commented that it would not be possible to provide substantial answers to the common EQs in 2017, as the ‘completed operations’ will be very few at that stage. Furthermore the nature of the common EQs in the Working Document would rather suggest that they should be answered ex post.

*The EC explained that the regulatory requirement to look at programme achievements and progress in 2017 comes from the CPR, so MS should deal with it in the most sensible way possible. The purpose of the 2017 reporting is to look at programme steering, rather than to assess programme impacts. Even if the percentage of money spent is low, in 2017 this spending should have generated some direct results. At this point in the programme cycle there is still the chance to introduce changes in the programme. Therefore the EC expects MS to look at results at the Focus Area level, based on data from application forms, annual payments and monitoring systems, supplemented where necessary by additional data. In line with this approach, only a subset of common EQs needs to be addressed at this point.*

#### **Discrepancy between the common context indicator on unemployment rate and EU2020 targets**

Belgium pointed out that there is a difference in the definition of the age group between the one used for the RD common context indicator on unemployment rate and the one used for the EU2020 targets. Cyprus informed that the Cohesion Fund is applying the age group that corresponds to the EU2020 definition, and therefore the indicator should be corrected for Agriculture and RD in order to be able to calculate context and impact indicators properly across funds.

*The EC replied that the figures are coming from Eurostat, and that there might be an incoherence in standard reporting (min age 16 instead of 20), however details on age breakdown should be available, so it should be possible to calculate the same age group as for EU2020. This will be further checked.*

#### **Evaluation of projects in the transition period**

Poland expressed concern on how to evaluate projects within the transition period, where budget from the new RDP envelope will be spent for projects under the current RDP.

*The EC confirmed that the transition period is going to have an impact on the M&E requirements; the impact of this will be assessed once the transition regulation is finalised.*

#### **Indicators for NRN and TA**

Estonia asked for clarification concerning the expected indicators for TA and NRN: will they be at output, result or impact level and will there be a need to set targets? When will these indicators become available?

*The EC replied that TA/NRN indicators will not have targets, and that they will essentially be at output level. The intention is to present these indicators in the RDC meeting in December.*

### **3. Evaluation Plan guidelines: presentation of the complete text**

Jela Tvrdonova (Evaluation Helpdesk) provided a brief overview of parts 1 and 2 of the Evaluation Plan guidelines and an in-depth description of the newly developed part 3, the Toolbox. The toolbox section of the EP guidelines includes three subsections: (i) Planning tools; (ii) Indicative template of ToR for evaluation and (iii) Glossary of terms. The ‘planning tools’ subsection includes: (a) a time plan for evaluation, summarising evaluation tasks and activities from the start (2014) until the submission of the ex post evaluation (2023); (b) an indicative resource plan for evaluation, assisting MA in planning resources to conduct evaluation tasks and activities on annual basis; and (c) an indicative outline of an

internal EP (non-binding management tool), describing in detail all evaluation steps, tasks and activities to be conducted each year of the programming period and in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

#### 4. Draft implementing rules: latest update

Zélie Peppiette (DG AGRI Unit L.4) explained how the provisions for Monitoring and Evaluation are presented in the draft implementing acts (IA), based on 2 documents: a draft of IA provisions for the Horizontal Regulation (Article 110) and the draft Rural Development Implementing Act (RD IA). While the content is presented for information to the Evaluation Expert Committee, further discussion of the RD IA text will follow in the Rural Development Committee (RDC) on 21 November. The RDC will subsequently vote on the RD IA. The draft RD IA is still an initial incomplete draft which includes a first draft of the Articles as well as the annexes II & III. Further annexes are still to be provided. The draft working document on the implementing act for Horizontal Regulation Article. 110 will be discussed in the meeting of the CAP M&E Expert Group (Pillar I/II group) scheduled for 9 January 2014. Members of this group have been asked for written comments by December 6, and ExCo members were also invited to send any comments by this deadline.

In the RD IA the M&E components are described in Articles 14 (M&E system), 15 (AIR) and 16 (Evaluation Plan) and the M&E related annexes including Common indicators; Technical support for M&E; and Structure and content of AIRs.

The Annex "Technical support for M&E" is a new element and is the equivalent to Article 62(3) of 1974/2006; it will list the M&E guidance produced (or to come) such as:

- Indicator fiches
- *Ex ante* guidelines
- Evaluation Plan guidelines
- Monitoring guidance
- Methodological guidance (EQs, result indicators)

As for the inclusion of the Common Evaluation Questions (EQs) into the methodological guidance, the EC is proposing that the set of common EQs should be a mandatory component of the M&E system, while the guidance document containing suggested judgment criteria and methodology for answering the EQs should remain non-binding.

The representatives of the MSs raised the following questions:

#### Inclusion of guidance in binding IA and mandatory nature of EQs

France, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Poland opposed the inclusion of non-binding guidance in the annexes of the RD IA, as all articles and annexes in IAs become mandatory. Experience of the current programming period shows that legally non binding CMEF documents have become "binding" in practice and are used as a benchmark by EC desk officers. For the common EQs several concerns were expressed in this respect: e.g. how can the combination of mandatory and non-mandatory elements be managed?

*The EC replied that the RD IA needs to be compatible with the Lisbon treaty and the IA serves for providing a sound legal basis. Listing the guidance in the annex of the IA ensure that these documents are a recognised part of the M&E system, but their contents will remain non-binding. There is a need to show to the European Parliament and the Court of Auditors what the RD policy is achieving and how the RD budget is used. To do this, DG AGRI needs to receive consistent information from evaluations. Therefore, a common set of EQs needs to be defined in the Annex of the IA, in order to have a common base of information.*

### Quantification of secondary effects

France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Cyprus and Poland expressed concern about the mentioned requirement for the quantification of secondary effects. Cyprus provided an example about a project under the investment measure having many secondary effects and stated that quantifying all these would result in a very complicated and costly exercise. Poland added that the quantification won't be possible in 2017, Germany commented that indicating secondary effects should be limited to providing flags in the operations database (monitoring exercise) and Belgium asked confirmation that the quantification of secondary effects is only needed at the result level.

*The EC clarified the purpose of the “flags” in the monitoring system for the calculation of secondary effects in evaluation:*

- *the majority of RDP projects have more than one effect, there is a need to find a balance between reality and what can be measured through M&E;*
- *a more “complete” system was discussed in this Committee which would have allowed collection of information on secondary effects and quantification of the contribution of secondary effects to target indicator values on the basis of the monitoring system, however this was seen as too complicated;*
- *a “simpler” system was therefore adopted: each project is programmed under one main Focus Area (contributing to the respective target indicator(s)), secondary effects on other Focus Areas are simply “flagged” in the operations database. The exception is Priority 4 (and carbon sequestration), where interventions can be attributed to more than one Focus Area, and counted against the relevant target indicators.*

*Adopting the “simpler” system however implies that values of target indicators will not show the contribution of the secondary effects, which may be considerable, in particular for investments. Where target indicators have now been set at the output level in order to simplify the system complementary result indicators have been introduced so that the achievements of these Focus Areas can be assessed. Within these Focus Areas there will be two categories of projects: projects that are programmed under the Focus Area, and “flagged” projects that are programmed under another Focus Area but that may have a secondary effect. The evaluator will look at the total group of projects, and should provide values for the total, split by category.*

### Purpose of common EQs

Belgium agreed that an EU aggregate is needed to justify the RD policy, however pointed out that the “to what extent” type of EQs do not provide quantitative answers, and therefore are particularly difficult to aggregate. Therefore Belgium questioned the adequateness of the current set of common EQs for this purpose and asked if there are other ways to justify the RD policy.

*The EC replied that the common EQs are not exhaustive, but represent the minimum information that the Commission requires. MAs may need to establish other EQs appropriate to their RDP content to enable them to answer the common EQs.*

### Information on reporting for building up IT systems

UK asked to receive as soon as possible a list of requirements and key data to capture in reports in order to build the IT system.

*The EC replied that it could consider providing a short overview with all documents, their draft status and web links to help MS keeping track of the most updated information.*



## 5. Synthesis of APR for 2012

Margot Van Soetendael (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented a synthesis of the information included in the Annual Progress Reports (APR) for 2012 concerning ongoing evaluation. A brief summary is presented below:

- Under the chapter "Evaluation systems" contracting issues are mostly covered, and apart from the *ex ante*, *ex post* and ongoing evaluation contracts, a lot of evaluation expertise is hired externally for evaluation studies preparing the *ex post* evaluation and the next programmes;
- Evaluation planning tools for steering and structuring the evaluation process were reported, although with different contents and concepts;
- Evaluation steering groups continue to be used for steering the evaluation process, both for the programme as a whole (e.g. next programming period) as for specific topics (e.g. evaluation of Leader).
- A lot of evaluation activities are going on in the MS: the assessment of impacts in Axis 1 received a major focus in 2012, which is a change compared to 2011 where Axis 2 had the highest number of evaluation activities. Axis 3 and 4 were still less covered than the other 2 axes, however in 2012 an increase for both axes is observed. Yet, horizontal impacts were the least covered.
- Information on data collection showed that new data sources are included and that more focus is put on result and impact level since the MTE (before MTE output level mostly), Axis 1 and 2 are best covered, additional effort would be needed for Axis 3, 4 and the Horizontal issues.
- Networking activities show that direct contact is essential for discussing technical evaluation subjects, that a relevant amount of events took place within and between the Member States, and that evaluators and data providers participated more compared to previous years
- Difficulties mainly related to data collection issues and developing evaluation methods.

The complete Synthesis APR report is expected to be published in January 2014 on the website of the Evaluation Helpdesk.

## 6. Preliminary results of focus groups 2013

In autumn 2013 the geographic experts of the Evaluation Helpdesk are organising focus groups in the MS on the topic:

*Establishing and implementing the Evaluation Plan (EP) of 2014-2020 RDPs:*

- *What did you learn about the set-up and management of monitoring and evaluation in your RDP 2007-2013?*
- *Does the proposed content of your Evaluation Plan 2014-2020 take account of these experiences and meet the needs?*

Out of the 24 focus groups conducted by the date of the ExCo, 6 cases were selected for a poster session. Geographic Experts of the Helpdesk (Jela Tvrdonova for Slovakia and Czech Republic, Carlo Ricci for Italy, Andreas Resch for Austria and Malta, and John Grieve for Ireland) presented to ExCo representatives the main findings of their focus groups and discussed a few key questions. ExCo members then divided into groups to discuss each of the featured focus groups in more detail. Following the group discussions, the main outcomes of the discussions were reported in plenary.

Focus group Czech Republic and Slovakia

*Key questions:* (i) How to improve coordination for evaluation in the next programming period? (ii) How to make sure that data for evaluation will be available?

During the group discussion, it emerged that information on coordination for data collection (including governance aspects) is needed from the programme start. The requirements for data collection and other elements of the M&E system should be defined well in advance to avoid problems later on.

Data collection should be mainly done through application forms and payment requests. It is important to reduce the burden on beneficiaries when collecting data, also exploring additional data sources such as universities, etc.

It was confirmed that counterfactual evaluation remains difficult to conduct due to a lack of data (in particular for Axis 2). The estimation of resources in the EP should therefore be done based on current evaluation experiences and consider the view of evaluators.

#### Focus group Italy

*Key questions:* (i) How to adapt the evaluation plan to specific and evolving needs (ii) How to support capacity building for evaluation?

Participants concluded that capacity building can be enhanced by intense networking among evaluators to support know-how exchange on evaluation and by strengthening communication skills between MA and external stakeholders.

Clarifying the specific needs for evaluation for each RDP well in advance emerged as essential for setting up effective M&E systems. Data and information needs can be identified through a survey (“what”), and methods need to be specified for data collection and calculation (“how”).

Coordination of evaluation actions at Local Action Groups (LAG) level is seen as important, acknowledging that LAGs will not have enough resources to carry out real evaluations, and also self-evaluation will not cover the evaluation needs at programme level.

#### Focus group Ireland

*Key questions:* (i) How strategic is the EP? (ii) How do we build on the commitment and coherence the EP process has created?

The EP is currently not a priority in Ireland, although its importance for evaluation has been recognized. The participants highlighted the importance of involving senior experts as a precondition for capacity building, and to involve a wider group of stakeholders especially for multi-regional countries.

The potential role of National Rural Network as a tool to ensure a continuation of the participatory process and support evaluation once the EP is in place has been stressed.



### Focus groups Austria and Malta

*Key questions:* (i) How to better link evaluation activities to programme implementation? (ii) How to link evaluation topics to the timeline?

The participants discussed the Austrian model for evaluation governance and coordination: Evaluation activities are planned by a triumvirate of the Evaluation Department (which has a steering function), 6 “Priority officers” within the Ministry and the external evaluation teams per Priority from outside the Ministry (public research agencies and external experts). Malta intends to use the NRN in a better way to improve information flows between MA and evaluators

Regarding the timeline, Malta considers the enhanced 2017 reporting as a testing exercise to further prepare a proper assessment of impacts for the enhanced reporting in 2019.

## **7. First draft of the Annual Work Programme 2014 (incl. Thematic Working Group Guidance for 2007-2013 ex post evaluations)**

Hannes Wimmer presented the draft of the Annual Work Programme 2014 (from January 2014 to June 2014) of the Evaluation Helpdesk, including:

- (i) A Thematic Working Group for preparing the *Ex post* evaluation guidelines, developed on the basis of collaborative work between stakeholders, experts, academics and EC officials. Ad-hoc workshops will be organised and facilitated by the Helpdesk. Sounding Board and ExCo representatives will validate the output of this TWG.
- (ii) A Good Practice Workshop on the assessment of climate change mitigation and adaptation, will be held in Cyprus in the second week of February.
- (iii) Support to EC Desk Officers, with the objective of strengthening the evaluation capacity of EC Desk Officers in evaluation;
- (iv) Missions to the MS, to provide targeted information and training, planned in Italy and Luxembourg.

Moreover, during the second quarter of 2014, the Helpdesk will close the project. The expected activities are (a) to provide an update of working papers; (b) to make the website future-proof and (c) to submit full project documentation (deliverables, publications, etc.).

## **8. A.O.B**

### Announcements

- Updates on upload of FAQs document
- Info about RDC-meeting on the next day

### Ex post evaluation deadline

The EC announced the intention to modify the 2007-13 implementing regulation, postponing the deadline for submitting the *ex post* evaluation reports from 31 December 2015 to 31 December 2016, so that the *ex post* evaluations can be conducted after all programmes are completed.

Germany highlighted that all German Länder have already contracted evaluators with contracts ending at the end of 2015, and that this shift will create problems as the analysis work for the *ex post* evaluations has already been carried out on basis of 2010 data. Germany has no intention to add additional analysis work covering the expenditure by 2015 as this would not change the basic impact of the programmes.

*The EC clarified that ex post is defined as the evaluation of an activity after it has been completed. It therefore intends to go ahead with modifying the date for latest submission of ex post evaluation reports, in order to ensure that evaluations can be conducted when programme expenditure is concluded and all projects are finalised. However, if the programme expenditure finishes earlier than 2016, MS are free to conduct the ex post evaluation earlier.*

#### Performance framework and target indicators

France pointed out the need to discuss the performance framework and the target indicators.

*The EC replied that the RDC is responsible for both topics and invited the representatives to communicate via their RDC delegates in order to receive the necessary information during the RDC meetings of 21 and 22 November.*

#### Page limit for SWOT analysis in SFC

Germany asked what version of the SWOT should be the basis for the ex ante evaluation. Given the page limit for the SWOT in the SFC, the officially submitted SWOT is very synthetic and does not allow for a meaningful ex ante assessment. The average length of a German SWOT report is around 150 pages. Cyprus answered that they developed two versions: an extended internal document to use for consultation with socio-economic partners and another one to be submitted on SFC.

*The EC specified that an internal document may be useful for MA and evaluators, but that the EC will consider the ex ante evaluation of the RDP which is officially submitted via SFC. However, as SFC limits may not yet be fixed, MS are invited to raise the issue during the RDC meeting the next day.*

#### Evaluation of 1<sup>st</sup> pillar of CAP

Austria asked when the next meeting is scheduled for the working group on the evaluation of Pillar I.

*The EC replied that the meeting of the CAP M&E group, which will also discuss the draft implementing act for Article 110 of the Horizontal Regulation, is scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2014 (tbc).*

#### Technical Assistance indicators

France is worried about the indicators for TA, as they are completely new and unknown to MS, and asked which expectations the EC has in this respect

*The EC informed that since TA covers around 4% of the programme budget, evaluation is necessary. TA indicators will be developed at the output level of, and no target indicators will be defined for TA.*

#### Personnel change in the Evaluation Helpdesk

The EC informed that Hannes Wimmer, team leader of the Evaluation Helpdesk, will resign from his position by the end of 2013 as he will be moving on to a new assignment within his company. Peter Schneidewind will replace him from January onwards.

#### Good Practice Workshop on climate change

A new Good Practice Workshop on climate change will take place in Cyprus on 10 - 11 of February 2014.

#### Indicator fiches on Europa

A link has been made available for the indicator fiches on the Europa website.

**All presentations are available on the CIRCA platform. The next meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee is tentatively scheduled for 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014.**