

*20th meeting of the Expert Committee
on Evaluation of Rural Development
Programmes*

17 June 2014

1. Introduction and adoption of the agenda

The Expert Committee on Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes (abbreviated to “Evaluation Expert Committee”) met for the twentieth time in the European Commission’s premises in Brussels on 17 June 2014.

The meeting was chaired by Luc Berlottier (Deputy Head of Unit AGRI E.4) who welcomed participants and introduced the draft agenda. Zélie Peppiette (Assistant of Director Deputy General, responsible for directorates F, G and H since 2.6.2014 and before Rural Development Evaluation Manager, Unit E.4) also attended the meeting and assisted the chair person. The draft agenda was adopted, and the topics addressed during the meeting followed the order summarised below. In the afternoon Adelina Dos Reis (Head of Unit AGRI E.4) informed about the future role of the Evaluation Expert Group (point 8 of the agenda).

2. Presentation of the final version of the guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs

Bill Slee and Jela Tvrdonova (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented the final version of the guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs, which is available on the website of the Evaluation Expert Network. The authors stressed the importance of the EU rural policy and its evaluation. Based on the experiences with the mid-term evaluation they explained how the presented guidelines can help evaluators and Managing Authorities to carry out and improve the *ex post* evaluation. Furthermore, they emphasised how the comments on the draft that was presented in the previous meeting of the Evaluation Expert Committee had been addressed in the final version. Discussion:

Content and structure of the guidelines, relation between the guidelines and the Handbook on CMEF 2007-2013

Several Member States (France, Spain, Poland, and Germany) gave positive feedback regarding the guidelines and the latest changes, however they highlighted some still missing elements, e.g. guidance on calculation of the sample size and sample structure, on costs of evaluation, on selection of evaluators and drafting the ToR. Belgium commented on the length of guidelines (200 pages) and asked for clarification about the relationship between the guidelines and the Handbook on CMEF 2007-2013 and its annexes.

*The Commission services (hereinafter 'EC') recalled that the guidelines had been developed in cooperation with Member States. Although the length of the document may seem extensive, its structure allows being selective when reading the guidelines, similarly to a manual or encyclopaedia. The guidelines complement and improve the content of the CMEF Handbook, namely Guidance Note B and they even provide a revised set of common evaluation questions. The EC underlined that the guidelines intentionally do not recommend on the resources needed for the *ex post* evaluation as these will vary considerably between Member States, depending on the size of the programme and on the evaluation methods applied.*

Focus on assessing RDP impacts requiring intense data

France pointed out that the requirement to assess RDP impact is too demanding in terms of data needs and noted that DG REGIO had abandoned this approach. In order to satisfy the data needs for the assessment of impacts, application forms are becoming very cumbersome both for potential beneficiaries and for Managing Authorities who need to cross-check the collected data and information after project completion (e.g. number of estimated jobs does not always equal the number of effective jobs created). Germany stressed the importance and usefulness of counterfactual evaluation, but pointed out that the access to the necessary data is difficult due to data protection issues. The EU should therefore support MS in making available certain kind of data for counterfactual evaluation.

The EC replied that although it is recognized that the assessment of impacts is a challenging task, it was important for DG AGRI to show accountability and positive impacts of rural policy in order to justify EAFRD expenditures to European tax payers. The approach chosen by DG REGIO is different and DG AGRI cannot comment on it. The assessment of impacts is challenging also due to the complexity of rural areas (from the economic, social and environmental point of view) and rural policy itself. That is why guidelines are necessary. During the last programming period (2007- 2013) the CMEF and guidelines produced by the European Evaluation Network have helped to strengthen the evaluation culture. The guidelines for the ex post evaluation of RDPs do not replace the CMEF but complement and improve it. They also provide solid support to the 2007-2013 programming period and the upcoming one (2014-2020).

The EC confirmed that the guidelines offer various approaches to evaluation: quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches and a number of different methods that are more or less demanding in terms of data. The advice is to use mixed approaches and to select methods based on the data availability. The EC underlined that the guidelines should not be seen as a methodological Handbook, as detailed information on methodologies is already available in the evaluation literature. They should rather support and guide various stakeholders in preparing, conducting and disseminating the ex post evaluation.

Proportionality, choice between advanced and naïve methods

Belgium required an explanation of what the authors of the guidelines intended under 'naïve methods' and if they are still sufficient to be used in the assessment of impacts for small measures and RDPs, taking into consideration the issue of proportionality in the RDP evaluation. Spain questioned if small RDPs can show any impact at all, and if it would be possible to conduct common evaluations for several "small" RDPs in order to save costs.

The EC replied that the guidelines define and explain naïve methods (e.g. page 57, naïve before-after estimation). Naïve methods do not take into consideration external factors, influencing RDP results and impacts. As for proportionality, it is true that some measures or programmes with small budget can appear to be less effective and not worth investing in an advanced assessment of impacts. However evaluators should not only consider budget allocations when choosing the evaluation methods as the impact can be disproportionate in relation to the allocated funds. It is important for the evaluation reports to show what, how and why something has happened due to the programme.

In the particular case of regionalised MS, the EC confirmed that each regional RDP must have a separate ex post evaluation, although a joint approach in preparing, implementing and using data could be advisable in order to be cost-effective. For the regionalised MS, evaluation at national level is not required, however, if conducted in addition to programme level evaluations, it could be useful.

Revised set of common evaluation questions (CEQs), clarification on the judgement criteria

Several questions were raised by Member States (Poland, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Belgium) with respect to the revised set of CEQs included in the guidelines, their data need and judgment criteria: (i) Does the new set of CEQs replace the existing set of CEQs of Guidance Note B of the Handbook on CMEF? (ii) How can it be linked to the MTE? (iii) Is the use of the proposed judgment criteria for answering the CEQs compulsory?

EC pointed out that one of the main lessons from the MTE was that the overall number of CEQs was too large and that their content was not entirely consistent with the policy objectives and common indicators. The revised set of CEQs therefore contains less questions and tries to better reflect the EU Strategic Guidelines, the Health Check objectives, the seven common impact indicators and specific issues, such as TA, NRN, Leader at RDP level, and at measure level the contribution of individual measures to axes related objectives. The revised set replaces the CEQs described in Guidance Note B of the Handbook on CMEF and constitutes a minimal set of questions for which the EC expects to

see answers in the ex post evaluation reports. However, Member States are also free to use questions of the original set, in case they are still considered to be necessary for their specific RDP.

The development of judgment criteria specifying the success of the intervention is left to the Members States, who are free to develop them in line with the specific RDP context.

As the common set of indicators is not always fully sufficient to provide answers to CEQs, Member States need to look also for additional data.

Report outline

Germany highlighted that the suggested outline of the *ex post* evaluation report is very different from the one of the MTE report as it does not follow anymore the logic of a measure-by-measure chapter structure. The suggested outline artificially divides method descriptions from answers to evaluation questions and therefore appears to be too academic and less practical for a measure-by-measure screening of the report e.g. by EC desk officers.

EC replied that the new report outline in the guidelines was consulted with EC desk officers, and it replaces the indicative outline of an evaluation report of Guidance Note B of the Handbook on CMEF.

3. Presentation of the draft guidelines on the evaluation of National Rural Networks (NRN)

Jela Tvrdonova (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented the state of play of the draft guidelines document on the evaluation of National Rural Networks (NRN), informing the Committee on the structure and the content of the guidelines and the comments received from the MS.

The guidelines are structured in four main parts: (i) Introduction; (ii) PART I: NRN evaluation context; (iii) PART II: NRN evaluation framework and (iv) TOOLBOX addressing the most relevant evaluation aspects that MAs need to consider when designing the NRNs for 2014-2020. Member States have provided comments to the guidelines, among them technical comments (e.g. need for consistent use of terms, need for cross references within the different chapters and with the legal texts, need for library references, clarification of the non-binding nature of the suggested result indicators and judgement criteria) and comments on the content of the document (concerning e.g. linking operational objectives to the common and network-specific groups of activities, clarification of the counterfactual situation in case of NRNs and description of the difference between NRN added value and indirect effects).

Specific situation of the Spanish NRN in 2014-2020

The Member States appreciated the clarity and consistency of the guidelines. Spain pointed out the particular situation in which the NRN will operate within the national RDP of 2014-2020, together with other selected RD measures. A national RDP will be implemented in addition to the regional RDPs. Spain asked to elaborate on this option in the guidelines in addition to the two options referred to presently: NRN and NRNP. Spain also requested to clarify what the requirements were for the evaluation plan developed under this particular situation.

EC explained that the specific case of Spain came later in the process and that in practice the situation is very similar to NRNP. The objectives and role are the same and the substance of the NRN is also the same. Nonetheless the Spanish set up for the NRN will be mentioned in the guidelines.

Regarding the evaluation plan, the EC suggested to contact the EC desk officers and Unit H.3 (Christophe Derzelle) to see how to meet the SFC requirements in relation to Spanish national RDP.

Common result and impact indicators for NRNs

Spain also asked to clarify how binding the result indicators suggested in the guidelines were, and if the EC could also develop common impact indicators for NRNs, as NRN impacts are difficult to define for Member States.

EC replied that the structure and actions implemented by NRNs are different from one Member State to another making it impossible to define common impact indicators that would fit for all. Therefore only common output indicators are defined for NRNs. Member States should develop their own result and impact indicators taking into consideration the NRN specific context.

4. Notification of the translations of extracts of the Evaluation Plan guidelines

Luc Berlottier (Deputy Head of Unit AGRI E.4.) informed the Evaluation Expert Committee that extracts of the Evaluation Plan guidelines were available in 8 languages (BG, DE, FR, ES, HU, IT, PL and PT) and can be found on CIRCA and on the [Evaluation Expert Network's website](#).

5. Presentation of the outline of the Handbook and brochure on CAP Monitoring and Evaluation for 2014-2020

Patrizia Ganci (intern at DG AGRI Unit E.4) presented the outline of the technical Handbook and brochure on the CAP Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for 2014-2020. The Handbook will provide a complete overview of monitoring and evaluation of the CAP 2014 – 2020. It is structured as follows: a common part for both Pillars (chapters 1 – 7), one part referring to rural development specific issues (chapter 8), and annexes such as the technical documentation (e.g. indicator fiches) and a glossary.

In addition, an explanatory brochure will be developed in order to provide a more “user friendly” insight on monitoring and evaluation of the CAP 2014 - 2020 to a broader public. The full text of the Handbook and the brochure will only be available by the end of 2014; however Member States are invited to send their comments on usefulness and relevance of the outline proposed for the Handbook.

The representatives of the MSs raised the following questions:

Legal basis of the Handbook

Germany asked why the Handbook only refers to Article 110 of the ‘Horizontal Regulation’ (Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013) whereas Rural Development is also part of the ESI Funds and crosslinks to the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013) are missing.

Moreover Germany asked why reporting on the Partnership Agreement performance indicators are not included in the Handbook.

EC informed that the full legal framework for monitoring and evaluation of rural development, including the CPR, will be presented and referenced. The Partnership Agreement indicators are not part of the RDP, and this is the responsibility of PA and Managing Authority, however the whole M&E system is designed also to contribute to reporting on Partnership Agreement objectives.

The EC pointed out that at the moment only the outline of the Handbook was presented. The content would be available and discussed later. The MS's opinion on the outline would be very welcome prior to drafting the Handbook text.

Content of the new Handbook

Belgium pointed out that the Handbook did not clearly show which documents were already shared in draft form with Member States during meetings of Evaluation Expert Committee, RDC or other committees, and which documents were new, e.g. impact indicator fiches. Belgium and Germany also

asked if the performance indicators were included in the Handbook. Spain added that all draft documents discussed and shared with the Member States still did not compile a complete Handbook, e.g. guidelines on the complementary result indicators were not yet available.

The EC confirmed that the annexes (technical fiches) of the Handbook will include documents that Member States received in the various committees (e.g. Annex 5 includes the output indicator fiches discussed in RDC) and clarified that the Handbook is meant to collect and collate the documents into one single document including the last versions of previously produced documents. The EC also confirmed that some guidelines still have to be developed, as it is the case for the complementary result indicators, and cannot yet be included in the current version of the Handbook, and that performance indicators would be included in chapter 6 of the Handbook. In order to keep the Handbook to a reasonable volume, reference links will be provided (e.g. to the guidance document of the ex ante evaluation), instead of copying the full text in the Handbook.

Reference to all translations of key terms in the glossary

Spain asked to include in the glossary of the Handbook the references to all key terms in the other languages as this would facilitate Member States consulting documents in different languages.

EC recognised this need and highlighted that the glossary of the Evaluation Plan guidelines had already been translated into 8 different languages. Nonetheless, the EC will explore the possibilities for further translations however taking into account the limited capacity of the translation services.

Translation of the technical Handbook

Finland asked whether the Handbook will be translated into all EU languages.

EC informed that it will do its best to ensure translation of the Handbook into as many language versions as possible. However, at the moment the EC cannot provide any exact timing when these translations will become available to the Member States.

6. Announcement of the latest Helpdesk documents: climate change and synthesis of APRs

Peter Schneidewind (Evaluation Helpdesk) informed that all the latest Helpdesk documents are now uploaded on the website. This includes all the documents related to the Good Practice Workshop on climate change adaptation and mitigation (newsletter, outcome document and survey results document), the Good Practice Workshop on national rural networks (NRNs) (workshop presentations and newsletter), the synthesis report of APRs 2012 and issue 13 of the Rural Evaluation News in English, French and German.

7. The road to M&E 2014-2020: then and now – what's the verdict?

Hannes Wimmer (Evaluation Helpdesk) presented the process on how evaluation stakeholders, and in particular the representatives of the Evaluation Expert Committee contributed to the design of the new monitoring and evaluation system for the programming period 2014-2020. The starting point was the mind-map on the CMEF, developed in March 2010 by the Evaluation Expert Committee. The achievements with respect to the following topics identified at that time were presented: usefulness, simplification, timing, evaluation during the programming period, analysis and judgement, results and impacts, networking and capacity building, and proportionality.

After the presentation Member States representatives were invited to participate in an interactive session to discuss the above topics, providing their opinion on how the needs formulated in March 2010 were addressed in the new monitoring and evaluation system for 2014-2020. Four posters (grouping the topics by two) were developed and 4 representatives of MS presented the outcomes of to the plenum (see Annex 1).

8. Presentation and discussion on the future role of the Evaluation Expert Committee

Adelina Dos Reis (Head of Unit AGRI E.4) informed the Member State representatives about the future status and role of the Evaluation Expert Committee. The current Evaluation Expert Group will continue but in a different format. The future expert group (a technical expert group) will cover evaluation issues regarding both pillars of the CAP in accordance with Article 110 of the Horizontal Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013). Bringing together evaluation experts for Pillar I and Pillar II, the “new” expert group will provide the opportunity to increase exchanges of experiences and information in relation to evaluation of various topics. Specific Pillar II evaluation issues will continue to be discussed with a focus on practical issues. Pillar I evaluations, which are under the responsibility of the EC, could be presented and discussed within this group. Flexibility in the agenda of the meetings will be important in order to accommodate the needs of both pillars of the CAP. The kick-off meeting of the new expert group is planned in October/November 2014. For the first meeting, the EC will prepare an agenda and welcomes Member States to express their requests in this respect.

The representatives of the MSs raised the following questions:

Why Pillar I and II together?

Germany raised concerns regarding the practicability of bringing together discussions on the evaluation of both Pillars of the CAP within the same expert group, as the two pillars require the involvement of very different experts and separate areas of competence both at Member State and EU level. Germany believes that already before the constitution of the new committee it should be clarified if both Pillars are represented and that at least two Pillar II experts per Member State should always be present for in-depth technical discussions, as it is currently the case.

The EC replied that the future expert group will be co-chaired by Pillar I and II responsible EC officers, and that agendas will be carefully prepared, e.g. when technical issues specific for Pillar II will represent the majority of the points in the agenda the presence of the Pillar I experts could not be needed (to be decided by the MS). The EC is also exploring all the possibilities for the number of experts to be financed for the meetings. However, the CAP policy as designed for 2014-2020 also requires a lot of synergies in the evaluation and improved cooperation between the two pillars, within the Member States, and the Commission services.

Increase involvement of EC desks dealing with rural development

Italy explained that the current Evaluation Expert Committee has gone through an important evolution from 2008 until today; relationships between the Member State representatives, DG AGRI Evaluation Unit and the Evaluation Helpdesk have been built up and considerably improved over the years. The usefulness and efficiency of this committee is recognised by all participants, and the institutional involvement of the EC desk officers dealing with RDPs is the only missing part in this setting. Spain added to this that even wider evaluation stakeholders (RDC, evaluators of other funds, etc.) could be invited to this expert group on a case by case basis when their participation would be an added value.

The EC stressed out that the Evaluation Unit of DG AGRI had invested a lot of effort in order to increase communication between the Commission services involved in the different committees and to provide feedback from the RDC during Evaluation Expert Committee meetings. Increased dialogue and collaboration with EC rural development services could be further explored; however the competence of the different forums should be respected.

Practical suggestions for future expert group and Evaluation Helpdesk

Spain suggested for the future group to agree on a few practical rules, e.g. limiting the number of draft versions of documents up to three, sending out documents at least one week prior to the meeting. Spain also pointed out that the function of the Evaluation Helpdesk has been very useful to support the Member States with their evaluation tasks and to participate in the ExCo meetings.

EC replied that the technical support on evaluation will continue and that terms of reference for a public procurement procedure will be published for a new Evaluation Helpdesk. Tendering, selecting and contracting the new Evaluation Helpdesk needs time; therefore the future Evaluation Helpdesk will not be operational before the beginning of next year. As the current Evaluation Helpdesk finishes its work on 30 June, the next meeting in October/November will not be supported by the Helpdesk.

9. A.O.B

Christophe Derzelle (DG AGRI, Unit H.3) informed the Committee that updated fiches for output and target indicators were available on CIRCA. The fiches are now in line with the RD implementing act. No major changes have been made in the document compared to the previous versions. In relation to the complementary result indicators there will be additional guidelines provided by DG AGRI in future, which will explain the method on how to collect data.

With respect to the information presented, the members of the Evaluation Expert Committee raised the following questions:

Urgency on information about indicator calculations

Germany and Sweden commented on the guidelines for the calculation of complementary result indicators. Having these guidelines is quite urgent, since MS are building the IT system for applications now and it is important to know what information needs to be included in the application forms. If application forms do not collect information from the beginning there will be a data gap for evaluation. The validation of estimations on number of jobs created, information on the amount of working hours, coefficients for calculating the complementary result indicators are examples of concerns that need to be solved on time.

EC clarified that result indicators are not assessed through monitoring, which only collects forecasts through application forms to be later verified by evaluation (e.g. based on a sample). There are differences between the target indicators, for which forecasts have to be collected in the operations database via application forms and the complementary result indicators, which have to be reported for the first time in 2017. In this respect there are differences between:

- *Target indicators for which the forecasts from the application forms needs to be validated by an evaluator e.g. based on a sample: e.g. Jobs created in supported projects (FA 6a and 6b).*
- *Complementary result indicators that are only collected in 2016, 2018 and at the ex post stage based on the real situation: e.g. Change in agricultural output on supported farms/AWU (FA 2a).*
- *Complementary result indicators collected in 2016, 2018 and ex post using coefficients: e.g. (FA 5a, b, c, d). For these indicators standard coefficients are available, however Member States may apply their own coefficients. Some good examples are already available on the Evaluation Helpdesk website (e.g. Good Practice Workshop on climate change, case study of Wales). Application forms and business plans for projects supporting water and/or energy efficiency should include information allowing later application of appropriate coefficients.*

The necessary information for building up the operations database and the application forms is therefore already available.

Guidance on the complementary result indicators

Spain asked if the EC will provide a methodology for calculating complementary result indicators.

The EC replied that complementary result indicators have to be calculated for the first time in 2017 and that guidance will be available in due time. Data for complementary result indicators is not supposed to be collected via application forms but via sampling at later stages of RDP implementation.

Indicators for horizontal themes

Slovenia asked if there will be indicators covering horizontal themes, such as environment, climate change and innovation.

EC replied that no additional monitoring or evaluation tasks are expected for the horizontal themes, as they are already covered by the complementary result indicators.

Guidelines for strategic monitoring reports

Germany asked if updated guidelines can be expected for strategic monitoring reports of 2014 as these reports have to be submitted in October 2014. Member States are already working on the report and need to receive this information as soon as possible.

EC replied that strategic monitoring reporting is on the agenda of the next RDC, however no major changes are expected in the guidelines, so the Member States can use the existing guidelines of 2012 when drafting the report.

The meeting of the Expert Group for monitoring and evaluating the CAP is tentatively scheduled for October/November 2014.