



Rural Evaluation NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

DATA MANAGEMENT FOR EVIDENCE BASED EVALUATIONS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The mid-term evaluation of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes highlighted that problems with data availability and quality were among the most prevalent hindrances to the generation of reliable evaluation results. The legal requirements in the 2014-2020 programming period underline the need for the Member States and programmes to put into place more systematic approaches for evaluation related data collection and the provision of data to evaluators¹. These problems suggest the need for a comprehensive data management strategy developed by the Member States and programmes.

When conceptualising evidenced based evaluations of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), one must not begin with the technical details but instead, first assess the overarching purpose of data management for evaluation. The aim of data management for evidence-based evaluations is to demonstrate the progress, achievements, results, impacts, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the EU's rural development policy. With this stated, one quickly realises that evaluations are both vital to the policy process and challenging endeavours.



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KEEP CALM and start with the basics

RDP evaluations begin with focus area-related and horizontal common evaluation questions (30), which have to be answered at regular milestones during the programming period and reported to EU institutions to meet the information needs at the European level. Evaluation questions are answered by means of a set of common indicators agreed upon between the EC and Member States. The common indicator list encompasses different types of data sets, which are linked to a variety of data sources.

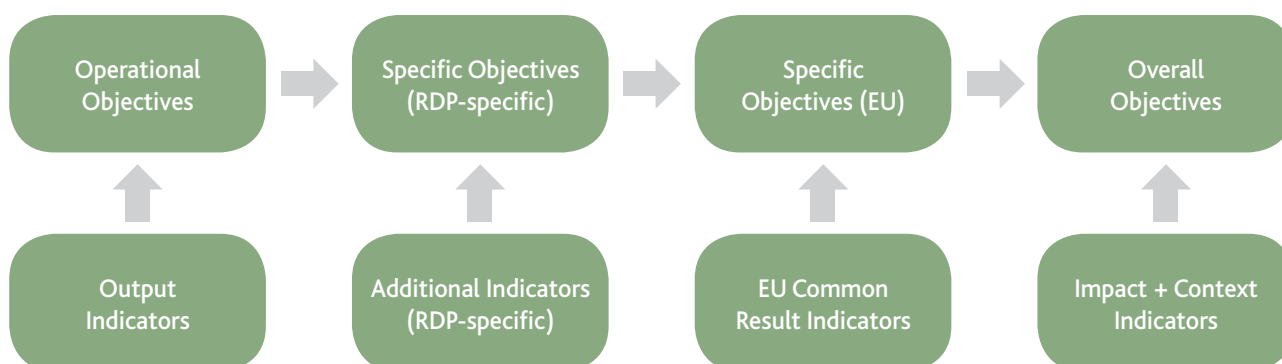
- Output indicators (26) collected from the operations database on beneficiaries.
- Result indicators (25) including the complementary ones: collected through different data sources such as the operations database, secondary data sources, and field research by evaluators.
- Target indicators and performance framework indicators: a subset of output and result indicators, which must be thoroughly matched and synchronised with the operations data.

- Context indicators (45) collected from regional/national/EU statistics.
- Impact indicators (16): form a part of the context indicators set and collect macro data (on the territory, and the sector). Impact indicators are updated together with context indicators. However, impact indicators are also used in the RDP assessment.

The comprehensive sets of common evaluation questions and the related indicator groups were designed to capture the broad thematic scope of the Rural Development Programmes represented by 18 focus areas and numerous key measures. These indicators also reflect an increased focus on a results oriented approach for programmes using EU funds represented by target indicators, the performance framework and the requirement to isolate programme-specific effects measured by result, and impact indicators resulting from other influencing factors.

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INTERVENTION LOGIC



Operations Database

Statistical Data

Secondary databases

Field research by evaluators

OVERARCHING DATA MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Source: Evaluation Helpdesk, 2016



The set of common indicators are designed to meet the reporting needs at the EU level² (for the EC, Council and European Parliament), but they were not devised for a fully developed evaluation at the national or local levels. Therefore, programmes need to develop programme-specific elements to assess aspects that are of particular interest to stakeholders. The European Commission encourages programme bodies to develop indicators “in addition” to common indicators whenever the common indicators cannot fully answer the evaluation questions in a satisfactory manner. A list of roughly 20 to 30 agricultural, environmental and social data sources are necessary to answer the common evaluation questions taking into account programme-specific elements. This leads to specific data needs and an increase in the complexity of the data sources needed for evaluation.

This brief example demonstrates how evaluators must combine common and programme-specific evaluation elements and related data sources to reflect the full intervention logic of programmes and to arrive at robust findings for answering the evaluation questions. The responsibility to put together all the necessary data on time is usually borne by the evaluation team, assisted by the programme bodies collecting project and area based data. Defining more clearly the evaluation process and where responsibilities lie should help to make this arrangement less complicated.



Practical example: evaluating the EQ related to FA 2A

When evaluators assess the classical evaluation question related to focus area 2A (“To what extent have RDP interventions contributed to improving the economic performance, restructuring and modernisation of supported farms?”) they have to undergo different data intensive working steps:

- In order to quantify the common complementary result indicator R2, which is key for focus area 2A (Change in agricultural output on supported farms/AWU), evaluators have to combine different data sources. The net-value of the R2 indicator should also be estimated (e.g. using the operations database, anonymised paying agency data, farm bookkeeping data, standard outputs and FADN data).
- Evaluators must additionally assess the result indicators (e.g. gross farm income) by analysing regional/national agricultural statistics (e.g. farm bookkeeping data).
- Evaluators should collect qualitative information through a survey, e.g. whether farms have increased their market participation with the help of the RDP support to validate or triangulate other statistical information.

Example of data sources to be used for evaluation: SK National

Primary data on beneficiaries:

Information system of the Paying Agency, operations database for projects measures (application forms, payment requests, monitoring tables and ad hoc data collection for evaluation) and IACS for area based measures. This monitoring allows for the collection of data to help construct control groups, annual accounts and production factors.

Primary data on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries:

Information sheets of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development following the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) structure and collecting data from 2600 farms spread across regions and farms structure (well represented). This data collection has been introduced because the SK FADN sample is too small (600 farms only due to the large scale agriculture).

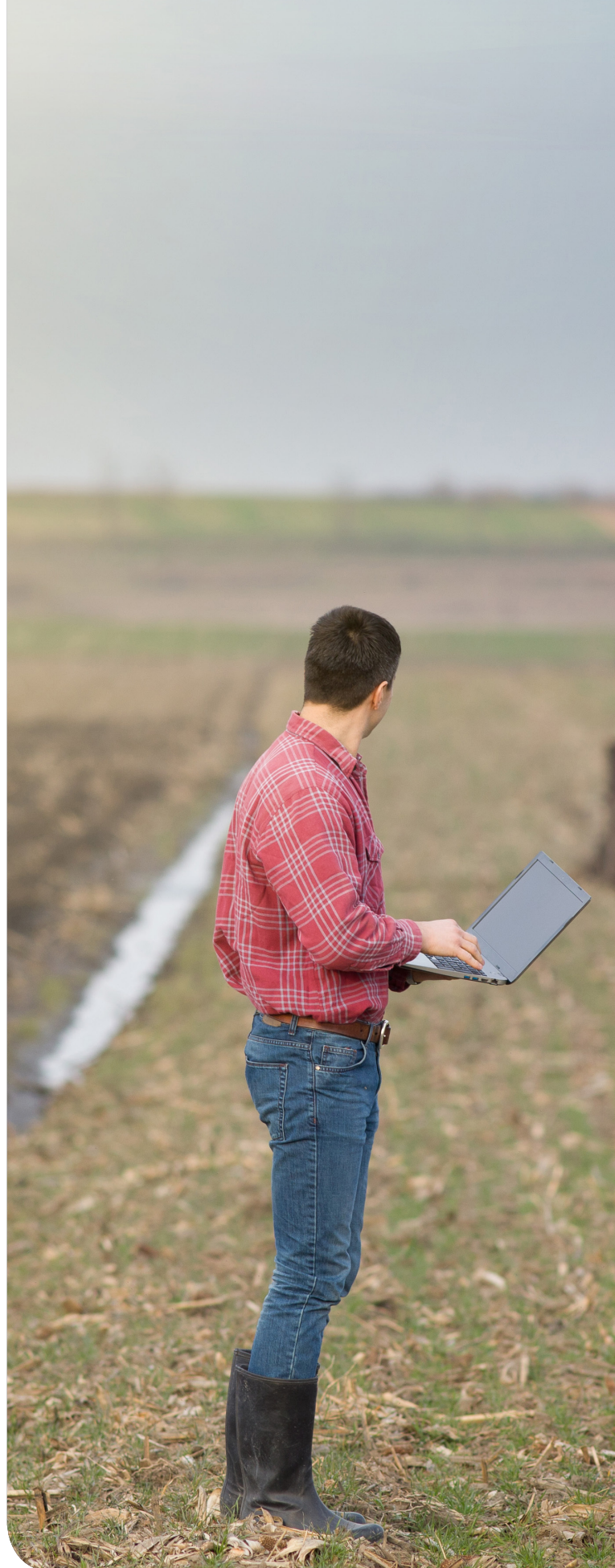
Secondary data:

- Green reports on agriculture and forestry (research institutes)
- LPIS and GIS by the National Agro-Food Centre
- Fertilisers and pesticides - National Agriculture Control Institute
- Underground water quality - Water Management Institute
- Ground water quality - Slovak Hydro-Metrological Institute
- FBI - Slovak BirdLife
- Biotopes and HNV - Slovak Agency for the Environment
- Contextual information - national statistics

Source: Helpdesk EP screening, 2016

Towards a more comprehensive strategy

The European Commission provides detailed guidance for one of the core elements of the data and information system, the operations database. The operations database now faces increased requirements and higher standards in terms of data collection, storage and transmission³ in the framework of the e-cohesion agenda⁴. The European Commission issues detailed guidance (e. g. a data item list for Pillar II, etc.) on how to develop the operations database and when to report data in the annual implementation reports (AIRs). Reporting all activities in relation to the provision and management of the full data set for evaluation in the AIR





(under point c) will make progress achieved more apparent. Moreover, for this programming period, there is a clearer understanding on the data that the Managing Authority (MA) has to collect, compared to that of the evaluator. Typically, the evaluator should only collect data on the complementary result indicators. In practice this division of roles is not always clearly defined, since evaluation related data is also collected in the operations database, which then must circulate back to be validated by the evaluators (e.g. result indicators).

This strategy could be served by developing the evaluation plan in view of a comprehensive data management strategy at the programme level. The same effort that goes into the development of the operations database (driven by the European Commission, supported by the programmes) should also go into the development of an overall data management strategy for the full set of evaluation data required (driven by the programmes, supported by the European Commission).

The EP chapter on data and information is a good starting point to develop a comprehensive data management strategy

The European Commission recommends laying this foundation by including all data sources for evaluation in the RDPs' new evaluation plans (EPs). The EP chapter on data and information is a good starting point to develop a comprehensive data management strategy. This can be achieved by making sure:

- EPs provide detailed provisions on how to address potential data gaps and bottlenecks.⁵
- Programmes and their EPs not only address the operations database, but the full range of data sources needed for evaluations.
- EPs contain information related to the financial resources needed to cover the costs of data collection and management.



KEY TOPICS IN DATA MANAGEMENT FOR RDP EVALUATION

CROSS CUTTING TOPICS IN DATA MANAGEMENT

Development of a data management framework / strategy

- Screening of data sources used for evaluation to answer common and programme-specific evaluation questions
- Establishment of data hubs
- Foster e-cohesion
- Management of data protection issues
- Approaches to fill data gaps and collect missing information
- Collection of evaluation related data in the operations database / monitoring system through application forms, progress reports, payment requests
- Matching of different data sources in order to establish control groups to conduct counterfactual evaluations
- Approaches to identify secondary contributions in the operations database

Organisational arrangements

- Arrangements with data providers to ensure the availability of evaluation data
- Improved coordination of key actors in the data management system

Financial and human resources

- Costs to outsource IT support
- Secure sufficient financial and staff resources for data management
- Provide guidance and trainings to data operators

Implementation

- Quality control of collected data
- On time availability of data for programme steering and reporting needs

Use of collected data

- Data flow to evaluators at certain evaluation points

THEMATIC TOPICS IN DATA MANAGEMENT

Knowledge transfer and innovation

- Information needs to evaluate knowledge transfer and innovation across the RDP
- Set up of control groups in vocational training

Competitiveness of agriculture

- Collection of data after the completion of the investment (2 or 3 years)
- Collection of data to assess secondary contributions

Sustainable management of natural resources

- Availability of environmental data on water, soil, FBI, HNVF
- Availability of geographic information system data on land use and landscape structures

Resource efficiency and climate action

- Availability of environmental data on climate emissions

Local development in rural areas

- Provision of data for LEADER/CLLD evaluation
- Provision of data on the non-agricultural sector



Source: Evaluation Helpdesk 2016



Building inter-institutional bridges

The EP serves as only one valuable building block in establishing a wider data management framework. On an operational level, challenges concerning coordination of all data providers, including non-departmental public bodies, academic research groups, other governmental committees, governmental research groups, think tanks, special interest groups, etc. will also need to be addressed by programmes / Member States through additional arrangements. These bodies have no direct responsibility for monitoring and providing evaluations in the 2014-2020 RDPs. Collecting the research and data from the afore mentioned sources, however, may be relevant to overall evaluation aims and objectives of the programme. Therefore, these bodies will need to be integrated by delivery bodies or the Managing Authority, either through existing contractual agreements or through new arrangements.

In the table to the left cross-cutting and thematic topics in data management are distinguished. Under each category specific points are listed and illustrated with examples.

A comprehensive strategy for future success

Adopting a comprehensive strategy can begin to ameliorate some of the complexities and difficulties of data management. A comprehensive strategy should address the full set of data sources necessary for evaluation and it is the responsibility of Member States and programmes to develop these. Each programme / Member State must develop its own data management strategy to ensure the availability and quality of evaluation data. Data



DON'T MISS OUT!!

To develop this conceptual framework and methods for achieving a comprehensive data management strategy, further discussion and exchange of experiences and good practices between Member States and programmes is proposed. The Evaluation Helpdesk will be conducting the Good Practice Workshop, "Targeted data management for evidence based evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2014-20", 5-6 December 2016 in Bordeaux, France. For more information, email info@ruralevaluation.eu.

management should be planned to suit the specificities of the RDP and the Member State or region, taking into consideration the lessons learnt from the previous programming periods. A comprehensive strategy for data management can serve to bring Member States / programmes closer to realising these goals. ■

1. Reg. 1305/2013 Article 72 (2)
2. Key achievement values of monitoring indicators will be published in the ESIF open data platform and also on the ENRD website
3. Reg. 1305/2013 articles 66, 70, 71
4. Reg 1303/2013 Article 122 (3)
5. Evaluation Helpdesk screening of RDPs' EPs, 2016.

THIRD GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP: 4-5 JULY PALERMO, ITALY

The Third Good Practice Workshop, co-organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk and the Italian National Rural Network, “Methods for assessing impacts of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013: Practices and solutions for the ex post evaluation” took place on the 4-5 July 2016 in Palermo, Italy.



This workshop took place during an important period when most MAs were in the process of considering the ex post evaluation of their respective RDP. The workshop was well attended by 62 participants from 21 different EU Member States including, members of the European Commission, Managing Authorities, other national rural networks, evaluators, researchers and the Evaluation Helpdesk. The good practice workshop provided a forum for these participants to:

- discuss the methodological approaches chosen to assess results and impacts of RDPs 2007-13;
- exchange on the usefulness of the data used and the solutions found to overcome data gaps;
- explore the robustness of the answers to the evaluation questions, and the conclusions and recommendations developed;
- identify quality criteria for sound evaluation reports.

“Organised in a “fringe” region, we could observe and talk about challenges in RD evaluation in different contexts. I liked it a lot!”

Slovenia - Evaluator

The good practice workshop was conducted over one and a half days with introductory presentations made by the European Commission on their expectations for the ex post evaluation. In depth presentations were made on eight practices covering both quantitative and qualitative methods from [Latvia](#), [Sweden](#), [Portugal](#), [Slovenia](#), [Estonia](#), [Austria](#), [Cyprus](#) and [Italy](#) followed by stimulating discussions.

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Key lessons and takeaway points from participants

- Good data availability and efficient data management are crucial for a robust and cost effective evaluation, whose usefulness would increase if based on a common understanding of its purposes and scope among stakeholders.
- Involvement of stakeholders throughout the process can also facilitate better dissemination of evaluation findings.
- Since a single method which is applicable in all contexts does not exist, tailor made methods should be chosen according to the RDP's needs and the available data.
- The Guidelines for the ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs can serve as a valuable support for Member States.

"The presentations from other Member States on their experiences, issues and challenges faced and how to overcome them were really useful".

UK – Managing Authority

The workshop closed with two illustrative presentations by the Evaluation Helpdesk's experts on how to answer the evaluation questions in the ex post evaluation 2007-2013 and how the EC will assess the ex post evaluation reports. This presentation highlighted that the assessment of the ex post evaluation reports would be judged based on the use and compliance of the CMEF's elements (EQs and indicators), the robustness of methods and data used and whether or not the findings appeared to be credible with valid conclusions and recommendations. ■



🗨️ HIGH NATURE VALUE (HNV) FARMING IN RDPs 2014-2020: SURVEY RESULTS OF MEMBER STATES' APPROACHES

High Nature Value (HNV) Farming¹ has been recognised as one of the agri-environmental indicators at the EU level since 2005², becoming further enshrined in the European legislative framework as a requirement linked to a policy instrument. In the current programming period, the HNV farming concept has become relevant for the whole CAP, with the establishment of the HNV farming context and impact indicator³, covering both Pillar I and II⁴.



While in the previous programming period the HNV concept was rather new and Member States mostly concerned themselves with understanding the concept and identifying the extent of HNV farming, in the current period Member States have begun to deepen their understandings while setting up robust baselines for the assessment of both the extent and quality of HNV farming.

What makes the HNV farming indicator special?

HNV farming is the only CAP context and impact indicator for which there is no common methodology explicitly provided at

the EU level, however there is a widely agreed upon definition (i.e. Andersen, et al., 2003). Each Member State should use data and methodologies appropriate to their specific situation. This flexible system allows Member States/regions that have more sophisticated data series, collection methods or capacity to use them, taking into account different physical, historical and political specificities.

While setting up their Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) Member States were asked to establish the basic provisions for the later assessment of HNV farming. This included the need to specify both the approach for identifying HNV farming as well >

as a quantified value for the HNV farming baseline indicator. While a quantified value for C37 is available for nearly all RDPs, the information provided on the approaches taken to identify, monitor and assess HNV farming are rather poor. In order to complement this picture, the Evaluation Helpdesk has carried out in spring/summer 2016 a survey among responsible RDP Managing Authorities to receive more detailed information. The outcomes of the survey are presented in the following sections.

Results of the survey

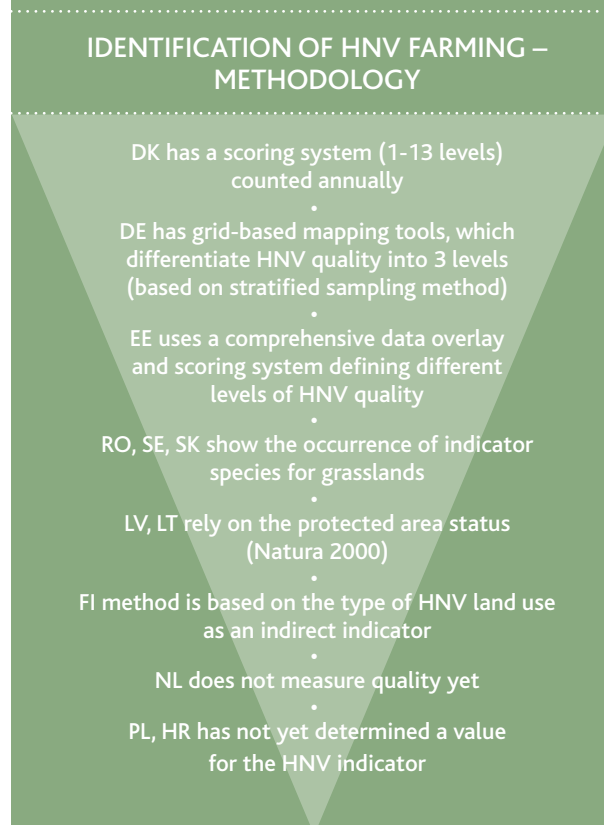
At the level of Member States, the return rate reflects overall a rather good coverage: Replies were received from 25 of the 28 Member States. However, out of 112 relevant regional RDPs, a response was missing from 47 RDPs, reflecting a reply rate of 58%. No answers had been received as of the date of publication of this Newsletter from the RDPs in Belgium-Wallonia, Bulgaria, France⁵, Malta, Portugal-Madeira, UK-Northern Ireland, Scotland⁶ and some Spanish regions⁷. The level of detail of the answers provided and the current status quo, in particular of the monitoring and assessment of HNV farming varies substantially. Based on the survey, the general characteristics of the approaches for the identification of HNV farming are:

- The majority of Member States applied a general classification of 3 different types of farmland to identify HNV farming (Andersen et al. 2003);
- Most Member States arrive at a spatially explicit mapping as a result of overlaying spatial data and identifying sites where relevant criteria are overlapping;
- Commonly used data sources to identify HNV farming are Natura 2000 databases, CORINE, LPIS, and IACS;
- For biodiversity related data, some Member States (e.g. FI, SE, LT) limit their data sources to rather static criteria (e.g. protected area status), while others have chosen a more dynamic approach by using inventory/mapping databases, which identify actual occurrences of the species/habitats (e.g. DK, EE, AT)

Monitoring of HNV farming - extent

Monitoring of HNV farming's extent requires a wide range of data sources including agricultural and land use statistics, IACS and different environmental monitoring data, to fully capture the HNV farming definition and monitoring it. Three different approaches in monitoring the extent of HNV farming can be broadly identified from the survey replies: 1.) Utilisation of secondary data sources

Figure 1: Different methodological levels of sophistication



(e.g. RDP related monitoring data and data from paying agencies, etc.) 2.) building on national biodiversity and habitat monitoring programmes 3.) the establishment of specific HNV farming monitoring programmes.

In terms of the frequency of updates of this information one can see a large difference between Member States, with some updating this data on a yearly basis (e.g. DK, FI, SK) and others updating their data every 2 to 12 years (e.g. BE-Flanders). These differences are largely a result of the different data sources used (e.g. FI uses primarily IACS data, which is available annually, while other Member States use biodiversity monitoring data, which are only collected periodically). Other Member States responded that they had not yet established a dedicated monitoring system for HNV farming.

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Monitoring of HNV farming - quality

In the current programming period it is important for Member States to not only measure the extent but also the quality and trends of HNV farming systems in their territories.

In terms of monitoring quality, RDPs primarily could be placed in one of three categories:

1. Indirect assessments using agricultural land use data (e.g. SI).
2. More direct biodiversity assessment using data from habitat monitoring:
 - changes in habitats and vegetation composition reflect changes in management practices and HNV quality (e.g. EE, ES-Madrid, IE, RO)
 - combination of field inventory and aerial photos with more in-depth monitoring of flora and fauna species of selected grassland areas (e.g. SE)
3. HNV quality monitoring has not been set up in BE-Flanders, ES-Castilla y León, ES-Castilla La Mancha, FI, HR, LV, NL and Portugal-Azores. The survey results, however, suggest that addressing those gaps is not in all cases a question of missing or developing new monitoring approaches to enable quality monitoring. For example, the RDP in the Netherlands reported that the existing monitoring approach to assess changes in the extent of HNV farming could also be used for quality monitoring.

The analysis of the surveys received clearly shows different levels of sophistication concerning the methods selected by each Member State as seen in **figure 1**. The level of sophistication is not necessarily directly correlated with the quality of the method, however, more sophisticated models are often able to capture more factors of both quality and extent of HNV farming systems.

Monitoring of HNV farming - trends

Overall, most Member States have seen the extent of HNV farmland either remain constant over the last programming period or decrease as a share of total agricultural area. Other countries responding to the survey are now establishing baselines, which will facilitate the assessment of trends in the future.

Lessons Learnt

The following lessons learnt can be derived taking into account the different levels of the status quo across the RDPs:

- **Proper HNV farming baselines in RDPs are a precondition for a sound assessment of HNV farming** – it is critical that RDPs give the highest priority to establishing a baseline in order to have a robust basis for future assessments of changes in the extent and quality of HNV farming.
- **Assessments in the changes of extent and quality of HNV farming rely on regular monitoring activities** – this can be achieved through the use of a combination of relevant indicators covering land use aspects and biodiversity

aspects. Combining secondary data sources on land use with environmental monitoring programmes can provide a cost-efficient means of covering dynamic developments of the extent and quality of HNV farming.

- **Constraining factors**, at this time, for the monitoring and assessment of HNV are (1) insufficient baselines, (2) a lack of data and data access, and (3) differing interpretations of the terminology with respect to the definition of HNV farming and HNV farmland. Filling data gaps and updating baselines can be potentially rectified through the integration of the results of the 2007-2013 ex post evaluation and closer collaboration between Managing Authorities, evaluators and scientific institutions.
- **Key criteria for the development of robust methods to assess HNV farming are:**
 - Suitability to the prevailing bio-physical characteristics and farming systems;
 - Ability to gauge dynamic changes rather than static assessment of national designations and bio-physical elements;
 - Strengthened cooperation and exchange between different HNV stakeholders for an improved understanding of the concept and a benchmarking of the chosen approaches. ■



A working document will be published on the website of the European Evaluation Helpdesk, which will present further details on the outcomes of this survey and the lessons learnt from the Evaluation Helpdesk's Good Practice Workshop "Preparing the assessment of High Nature Value Farming in Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020", conducted on 7-8 June 2016 in Bonn, Germany.

1. Read More - [Rural Evaluation NEWS: No 3](#) and [Rural Evaluation NEWS: No 4](#)
2. EEA Report No 6/2005 and COM (2006)508 Final
3. C37 reflect relevant aspects of the general contextual trends in the economy, environment and society that are likely to have an influence on the implementation, achievements and performance of the CAP.
4. I09 look at the effect in the longer term, linked to the general objectives of the CAP.
5. The horizontal regulation (Regulation (EU) No. 1306/2013, Article 110) establishes a common monitoring and evaluation framework with a view to measuring the performance of the CAP. It covers all instruments related to the monitoring and evaluation of CAP measures and in particular direct payments, market measures and rural development measures.
6. France has conducted a study for the identification and establishment of baselines. L'agriculture à «haute valeur naturelle» en France métropolitaine. Un indicateur pour le suivi de la biodiversité et l'évaluation de la politique de développement rural (Poux X., Pointereau P.) SOLAGRO, 2014.
7. Wales provided some information in an email. See also <https://gmep.wales/>
7. The Evaluation Helpdesk still welcomes responses from those RDPs, which still have not responded to the survey.



NEW MODULES FOR EVALUATIONWORKS! 2016

The new content of the modules for EvaluationWORKS!¹ 2016 has been developed during the Third Geographic Expert meeting that took place in Brussels on the 7-8 September 2016, by the Evaluation Helpdesk's permanent team and 20 of its Geographic Experts.

The Geographic Experts act as a relay of the Evaluation Helpdesk in the Member States. They are in direct contact with relevant stakeholders in the Member States and facilitate a two-way flow of information between Member State and EU levels.

Topics for the modules were chosen based on the requests for support received from the Member States and upcoming reporting priorities, specifically those related to the AIR 2017. The meeting was conducted over the course of two days, in which the Evaluation Helpdesk trained its Geographic Experts in relevant content and worked intrinsically together to develop new modules to meet the Member States' needs. Participants further reflected on the main challenges faced

during the EvaluationWORKS! 2015 events and how they could be overcome to make the events more successful.

The training will be offered in a multi-module format to be customised to the specificities of each Member State.



The current content of the modules is:

MODULE 1

GETTING PREPARED FOR REPORTING ON EVALUATION IN AIR 2017

- **SUB-MODULE 1.1 – Evaluation and reporting in the AIR submitted in 2017 – how to understand and conduct the task?**
 - Experiences from previous evaluations (ex post) – key points to be addressed in the current programming period (e.g. data management).
 - Requirements for the evaluation of RDPs, reporting in 2017, how to understand the task, and improve the evaluations in the 2014-2020 programming period.
 - How the Guidelines “Assessment of RDP Results: How to Prepare for Reporting on Evaluation in 2017” can support the improvement of each step of the evaluation (preparing, conducting and reporting on evaluation in 2017).
- **SUB-MODULE 1.2 – Specific challenges for evaluation and reporting in the AIR submitted in 2017**
 - What are the challenges for reporting on evaluation in 2017?
 - How to address challenges?
 - Structure of the SFC template.
 - How to use the Guidelines to fill in the SFC template (including annex 11 – fiches for CEQ).
 - Consulting specific cases in the SFC template chapter 7.

TARGET GROUPS: Managing Authorities, evaluation units and evaluators (if contracted).

MODULE 2

EVALUATION OF LEADER/CLLD

- **SUB-MODULE 2.1 – LEADER/CLLD evaluation at the RDP level**
 - Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD as part of rural development policy – purpose, legal framework, objectives, reporting requirements and reporting via the SFC template.
 - LEADER/CLLD intervention logic in specific RDPs – how to identify it and capture its primary and secondary contributions to the rural development programme and higher level objectives? Related challenges and possible solutions.
 - How to address the assessment of the LEADER method delivery and added value of LEADER – plenary discussion (optional).
- **SUB-MODULE 2.2 – LEADER/CLLD evaluation at the local level**
 - Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD as the rural development policy instrument to address the needs of specific rural areas - purpose, legal framework and objectives.
 - Capturing the LEADER/CLLD effects at the local level via the assessment of the:
 - CLLD strategy
 - LEADER method
 - LEADER added value
 - Small group exercises on:
 - The development of evaluation questions and indicators specific to the local level
 - Data needs and potential evaluation methods
 - Organising the self-assessment and external evaluation at the local level

TARGET GROUPS: Managing Authorities, Local Action Groups, and evaluators.

The yearly capacity building event, **EvaluationWORKS! 2016**, aims to strengthen the evaluation capacity among the rural development evaluation stakeholders in the Member States. EvaluationWORKS! 2016 will be conducted in the Member States between the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017. ■

1. Read more: [Rural Evaluation NEWS No 2](#)



EVALUATION PLAN BASELINE ASSESSMENT AND ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2016 SCREENING

Background

From April to September 2016 the Evaluation Helpdesk conducted an assessment of the evaluation plans (EPs) included in each Rural Development Programme (RDP) and of the progress made in the implementation of the RDP's EP in 2014 and 2015, reported on in the annual implementation reports (AIRs) 2016. The progress of the implementation of the EP will be assessed every year on the basis of the submitted AIRs and is used as an input to the EU-summary report.

The evaluation plan is a new element within the rural development monitoring and evaluation system for the programming period 2014-2020, and is a formal requirement for RDPs. They have been drafted in accordance with the minimum requirements outlined in the Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2013 and are structured in 7 sections.

Methodology

The Evaluation Helpdesk developed two screening tools to extract relevant information. Geographic experts analysed the documents (115 EPs and 115 AIRs) in July 2016 and filled the screening tools which were then analysed, summarised and interpreted by the permanent team of the Evaluation Helpdesk.

Key findings

The baseline assessment of the evaluation plans showed that the degree of detail given by Member States and regions varies significantly (e.g. in terms of the length of the EP ranging from 2 pages in ES-Cantabria up to 29 pages in ES-Catalonia). Additionally, variances can be seen in the level of detail provided across the 7 sections (e.g. information regarding the financial and staff resources is less specific than the information related to governance and coordination).

With regard to the quality of the evaluation plans it can be concluded that the provisions made for monitoring and evaluation in the RDPs overall are adequate in approximately 80% of the EPs. This infers that these EPs ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken and provide information needed for programme steering, for the enhanced

annual implementation reports to be submitted in 2017 and 2019 and the ex post evaluation. These plans further ensure that data needed for RDP evaluation is available.

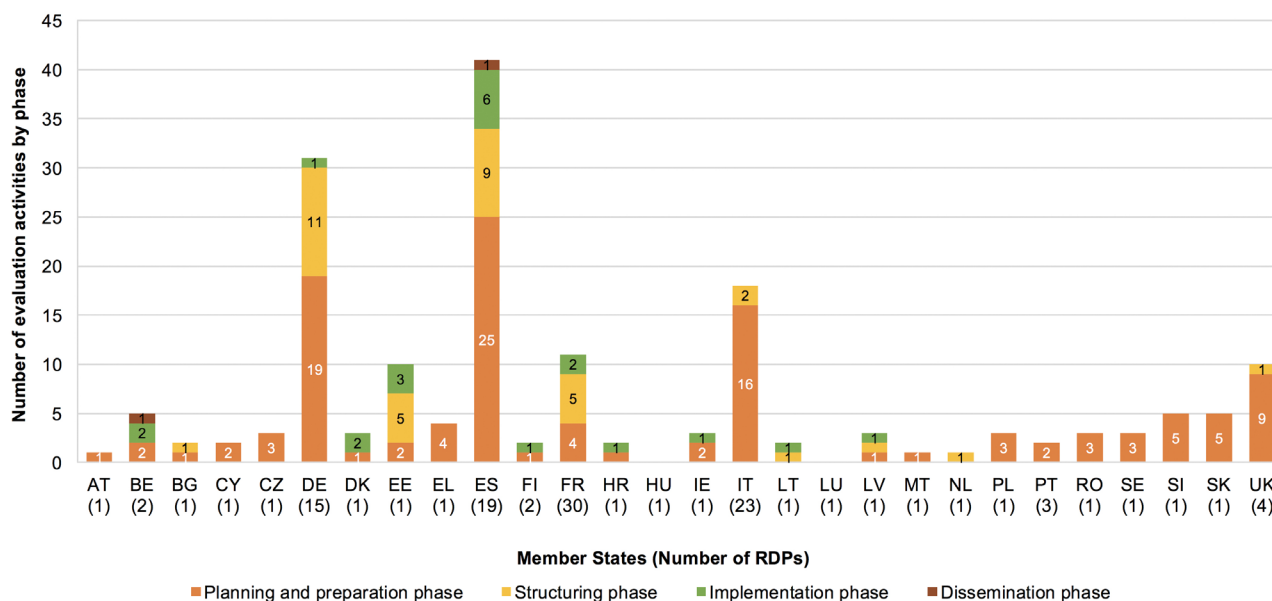
STRENGTHS have been identified as:

- the clear commitment given to the Common EP objectives,
- the efforts to describe the set-up of the evaluation-related governance system in the RDPs,
- the increased concern with regard to ensuring the quality of the evaluation by making use of non-mandatory evaluation steering groups,
- the careful planning of provisions to disseminate evaluation findings to appropriate target groups.

WEAKNESSES have been identified with respect to

- the vagueness of the specifications on the resources used for monitoring and evaluation,
- the unclear timeline of evaluation activities besides those required by the legal framework,
- missing methodological specifications and the descriptions of mechanisms how these will be completed.

Number of reported evaluation activities per Member State and phase



Source: Screening of AIR 2016 (Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development, 2016)

Based on the information reported in the AIRs submitted in 2016, it can be concluded that the main progress in the implementation of the EP took place in the planning and preparation phases of the evaluations (e.g. making the governance-arrangements for monitoring and evaluation operational and contracting evaluation experts). The most advanced RDPs, in terms of process, have entered into the structuring phase of the evaluation activities (e.g. conceptualisation of the evaluation approach, review of evaluation questions and indicators).

Problems and issues identified in this analysis include an overall scarcity of reporting on evaluation activities (even on preparatory activities), which could lead to late tendering procedures in many Member States and the absence of quality data for the evaluation. Common standards for filling in chapter 2 of the AIR are missing and potentially lead to misinterpretations (e.g. the number of stakeholders reached from evaluation activities reported).

The evaluation activities reported, as seen in the graph, mainly concern the planning and preparation phase of evaluations. With regard to this phase, 116 activities were reported in the AIRs submitted in 2016, (e.g. the preparation of Terms of Reference and tendering procedures, set-up of administrative arrangements, etc.).

- 37 RDPs carried out evaluation-related activities of the structuring phase (e.g. review of evaluation questions and indicators, or the development of an evaluation approach and methods).
- 23 RDPs also reported activities from the conducting phase of the evaluation.

- 8 RDPs did not report on evaluation related content at all
- 3 RDPs reported primarily on content relating to the ex-ante evaluation, or dissemination activities.

Specific areas to be observed

Based on the outcomes of the screening of evaluation plans and annual implementation reports 2016 several key areas can be identified in order to ensure that the evaluation activities are progressing in a timely fashion.

(1) Governance

- Evaluation experts (independent) should be contracted in view of the evaluation activities necessary for the AIR 2017.

(2) Data management

- Data needs should be clarified. Data management systems, which are able to meet the data needs of the evaluators in time for the evaluation should be established.

(3) Timing

- Preparatory steps made by the MA should be carried out in view of the evaluation activities needed for the enhanced AIR 2017 (e.g. systematic review of the evaluation questions, indicators, data sources, etc.). ■



ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS (AIRs)

Annual implementation reports are the key tool for Member States to report on the implementation of their Rural Development Programmes to the European Commission.

When?

- Starting in June 2016 and each year thereafter until 2023, Managing Authorities submit to the European Commission the reports covering the activities and achievements of the previous financial year.
- Two enhanced AIRs submitted in 2017 and 2019 combine both monitoring and evaluation elements. The monitoring elements of the enhanced AIRs are identical to the standard AIRs. However, more evaluation elements are included as the programming period advances.

What?

- The content of the **annual implementation report** is structured in **10 sections**, including 2 sections dedicated solely to evaluation.
- Section 2 informs each year on the progress in implementing the evaluation plans (modifications, evaluation activities, data management, completed evaluations, evaluation findings, communication and follow-up given to evaluations).
- Section 7 of the enhanced AIR submitted in 2017 and 2019 covers evaluation findings. In 2017 the answers to the focus-area related evaluation questions and evaluation questions related to other aspects of the RDPs are provided. In 2019, additionally the answers to evaluation questions related to Union level objectives are included.

How?

- AIRs are **electronically** submitted through the SFC templates, which are composed of structured tables covering all required contents.
- Points 2 and 7 of the SFC template are primarily concerned with evaluation.
- By contrast to previous programming periods, the Member States' evaluation reports are no longer sent to the European Commission and annexed.
- The structured information collected in sections 2 and 7 are the principal information sources used for judging the progress of the evaluation activities and the results assessed.

Who?

- Reporting in the AIRs is in the responsibility of the **Managing Authority**.
- While RDP evaluations must be carried out by internal or external experts that are functionally independent from the Managing Authority the latter is the "owner" and therefore responsible for the reporting itself (i.e. summarising the main findings and filling it into the SFC templates).



CALENDAR - WHAT'S ON?

September 2016:

- **BE – 7-8 September 2016 - Meeting of the Evaluation Helpdesk's Geographic Experts:** The Helpdesk's permanent team and Geographic Experts met to formulate the new modules to be offered for EvaluationWORKS! 2016. The Helpdesk also briefed its experts on their recent activities and to reflected on the past years capacity building events. [Read more >>>](#)



- **LV – 12-13 September 2016 - Nordic Baltic Rural Network Meeting:** The Helpdesk presents the outline of the content of the 3rd Thematic Working Group on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. [Read more >>>](#)

- **BE – 13-14 September 2016 - 1st Meeting of the Sounding Board of the Thematic Working Group on the Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD:** The Helpdesk invited rural evaluation stakeholders to comment on the content and structure of the upcoming Guidelines on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. [Read more >>>](#)



October 2016:

- **AT – 21 October 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)

- **BE – 25 October 2016 - 6th EU Rural Networks' Steering Group:** The Helpdesk provided input to the Steering Group related to the Cork priorities, primarily that, the EU monitoring and evaluation system has a key function in improving policy performance and accountability. Furthermore, selected highlights and activities of the Evaluation Helpdesk annual work programme were presented to the group. [Read more >>>](#)



- **BE – BE-VL & NL – 27 October 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)

November 2016:

- **HU – 08 November - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)
- **HR – 16 November 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)

- **BE – 18 November 2016 - 10th Meeting of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the Common Agricultural Policy:** The Helpdesk presents the state of play of the Guidelines on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD and the modules for EvaluationWORKS! 2016. Further announcements include the upcoming Good Practice Workshop on data management. [Read more >>>](#)

- **CZ – 23 November 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)
- **DK – 24 November 2016 – EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)
- **LT – 29 November 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on evaluating LEADER/CLLD. [Read more >>>](#)

December 2016:

- **BE – 1 December 2016 - EU's Rural Networks' Assembly:** The RN's Steering Group will present to the Assembly on the activities of the two networks and three support units, the Evaluation Helpdesk, Contact Point and EIP AGRI Service Point. [Read more >>>](#)

- **MT – 2 December 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)

- **FR – 5-6 December - Good Practice Workshop on Data Management:** Organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk and the Nouvelle Aquitaine Region. This Good Practice Workshop provides a forum for Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, LAG-representatives, data providers and evaluators, to: discuss the approaches for data management in RDPs 2014-2020, exchange on the availability and quality of the data to be used for the AIR to be submitted in 2017 and beyond, and reflect about potential data gaps and bottlenecks in data management and the solutions to overcome them. [Read more >>>](#)

- **SE – 6-8 December 2016 - Achieving Results the CLLD Way:** Putting the Method to Work: The Evaluation Helpdesk will welcome participants to discover more about LEADER/CLLD evaluation, and the Helpdesk's forthcoming Guidelines on LEADER/CLLD evaluation. [Read more >>>](#)
- **SI - 15 December 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)
- **FR – 16 December 2016 - EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)
- **FI – 19 December 2016 – EvaluationWORKS! 2016:** Helpdesk capacity building event on reporting for the AIR 2017. [Read more >>>](#)



Send your questions to:

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The Evaluation Helpdesk works under the supervision of Unit E.4 (Evaluation and studies) of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily express the official views of the European Commission.

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