

# CAP Strategic Plans: Monitoring Committees

## Thematic Group - 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting

The first meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) enabled members to share their experiences of Monitoring Committees, highlight examples and discuss enabling factors for their effective operation.



**Flavio Conti, DG AGRI** Unit C1, CAP Strategic Plans coordination, provided an [overview of the Partnership Principle](#). He emphasised the need for on-going effort from public authorities and partners at all levels to ensure transparency and the effective involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs), particularly through Monitoring Committees (MCs).

Flavio stressed the importance of sharing practices and experiences, including learning lessons about stakeholder engagement from the other cohesion funds. He also stressed the vital importance of co-operation between public authorities as well as between public authorities and the wider stakeholder community to ultimately make sure that the actual needs of the targeted rural territories and citizens are addressed.

Flavio highlighted various good practice examples observed by the European Commission (EC) during the setting up of the new CSP Monitoring Committees and outlined key provisions of the European Code of Conduct and the role of the European Community of Practice on Partnerships (ECoPP) for exchanging good practice across Member States and between practitioners. He also highlighted the roles of others, including National CAP Networks, in organising thematic activities and bringing stakeholders together.



**Roxana Bedrule, DG REGIO**, then elaborated on the work of the ECoPP and the work that it had done on exchanging experiences and stimulating capacity building on the Partnership Principle. Roxana went on to say that the role of MCs had been discussed often, with members coming up with concrete recommendations to strengthen the role of collective bodies, such as the MCs. Roxana acknowledged that improving the quality and building a culture of working as a partnership was complex and necessary if issues are to be comprehensively and systematically addressed across the partnership ecosystem.

### Group Discussion Highlights



Members were split into three groups over two discussion rounds, which began with selected TG members offering their perspectives to stimulate discussion. The first round **explored their experiences of Monitoring Committees and identified good examples**. The second round focused on factors **enabling the effective operation of Monitoring Committees**.

### Event Information

**Date:** 25 September 2023

**Location:** Virtual meeting

**Organisers:** CAP Implementation Contact Point

**Participants:** 44 individuals from 19 Member States across a range of organisations, including Managing Authorities (MAs), Paying Agencies, National Networks, researchers, NGOs, producers and the European Commission.

**Outcomes:** Exchange of experiences on the establishment and operation of Monitoring Committees and insights into approaches to support the effective operation of Monitoring Committees.

**Web page:** [1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Thematic Group on CAP Strategic Plans: Monitoring Committees](#)

Members reflected on their own experience on the establishment and operation of Monitoring Committees, including in the current programming period. Some TG members referred to the establishment of shadow Monitoring Committees while CSPs were being developed. Their membership was drawn from pre-existing Monitoring Committees for the implementation of Rural Development Programmes. These shadow committees then developed into Monitoring Committees for the CSPs, including with new members recruited (often through an open call) to cover new interventions within the CSP (under both the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) & the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)). In many cases, new members were also considered in terms of ensuring a more balanced representation of stakeholder types on the committee. Members were cognisant of the need to ensure that there is a gender balance, including member organisations having both a male and a female representative in the committee.

It was considered important to understand more about new members, particularly those stakeholders from the EAGF and to build capacity within the committee. Field visits, coffee breaks and informal discussions were considered vital to develop relationships and to keep meetings interesting and members engaged. However, the promotion of informal engagement was not always possible due to time constraints. It was acknowledged that networking at all levels was very important to support exchanges and to aid understanding of interventions within the CSP. TG members also elaborated on how the outcomes of engagement with representatives from the wider stakeholder community fed into the work of the Monitoring Committee.



Members acknowledged the need to ensure that meetings focused on the needs and expectations of members in terms of clarity of language, format, frequency and timings. Ensuring that meetings were as productive as possible was also highlighted, for example keeping them focused on strategic issues and leaving technical detail to discussions in small groups outside the main meeting (including for evaluation). It was also suggested that involving an independent facilitator to lead the meetings, animate the discussions and make sure that all voices are heard could help keep people engaged. Sharing documents, data and briefing members, in good time, in advance of meetings, were also deemed important to allow MC members to make meaningful contributions during the meetings.

Members recognised that Monitoring Committees were currently concerned with modifications of the CSPs, which, in many cases, were being processed using written procedures due to time constraints. For some, this time constraint has been managed by taking advice from Monitoring Committees to negotiations with the EC and feeding back any changes required.

Members also raised several points about the role of regional Monitoring Committees and their relationship with the national Monitoring Committee under the current programme. Members felt that, whilst LEADER Local Action Groups and the wider rural development voice is heard and acknowledged at the regional level, this was not necessarily the case at national level, leading to tensions within the governance of the CSP. Members felt it important to understand the dynamics of national CSPs and how they are implemented in regionalised countries, suggesting the need for clear sets of rules to better understand how regional and national Monitoring Committees interact and work together.

## Reflections from TG Members



A panel of TG members composed of **Francesca Toffetti (MA, Piemonte, Italy)**, **Victor Nagy (MA, Hungary)**, **Christian Gaebel (German Farmers Association & the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations (COPA), Germany)** and **Tatiana Nemcova (Birdlife Europe, Slovakia)** then reflected on the key points and themes emerging from the group discussions.

Panellists agreed that the most valuable way of supporting the effective operation of Monitoring Committees was to exchange information and apply the practices and lessons learned from others without the need to update legislation governing the operation of Monitoring Committees.

To that end, panellists welcomed the many good examples from Member States during the group discussions. Panellists suggested

that much was yet to be done to ensure that representation on Monitoring Committees was balanced, the key challenge being the identification of the right stakeholders in the first place. Panellists suggested that guidance on the selection of members would help to make sure that MAs understand how to identify new stakeholders (particularly those from the EAGF) and provide the enabling conditions to allow MC members to engage effectively with their peers. It was understood that appropriate selection methods are something that ECoPP is addressing.

It was considered that a prerequisite of effective engagement is the need for members to understand and 'own' the functions of the Monitoring Committee if they are to be effective in their roles. Effective engagement also relies heavily on the availability of capacity and capacity building. There was consensus on the need to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, with effective activation and participation being at the core of the Monitoring Committee's work. Such Committees have to be communities that have an effective relationship with the Managing Authority and always have to be able to freely give feedback about decisions, processes and the implementation of interventions.

The panel echoed much of what the earlier discussions had said on the need for physical meetings and farm excursions to build relationships and strengthen connections and understanding of each other's perspectives.

Monitoring Committees need to understand their responsibilities regarding communication and particularly understand the need for effective communication. Good communication is vital for getting information (e.g. on procedures, programming amendments) to the right people in the right place and with enough time to digest and form views. Getting this wrong may have a negative impact on the decision-making process and on the overall implementation of the CSP. Monitoring Committees also need to ensure that stakeholders understand and know about the general and specific objectives across the entirety of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), not only the ones responding to their particular interest.

## Next steps

Members considered the format of the next TG meeting and subsequently decided that it will be held online. Members also agreed that four broad topics (Implementation models, role of National Networks, stakeholder engagement & national/regional co-ordination) will be discussed informally at various points before the next TG meeting.

