

Thematic Group on CAP Strategic Plans: Monitoring Committees

**Summary & suggested actions for the effective
setting-up and functioning of Monitoring
Committees.**

April 2024



Introduction

The [Thematic Group](#) was formed in Autumn 2023 with TG members meeting formally and informally to exchange experiences on the design and operation of Monitoring Committees (MCs), including sharing examples from current and previous programming periods. TG Members also considered how best National Networks (NNs) could effectively support the operation of MCs.

This summary and suggested actions below reflect the views of TG Members and are centred on the key themes identified by TG members, namely: implementation approaches, stakeholder engagement, regional MCs and the role of NNs. This paper and the inputs collected by the TG are intended to inspire all those involved in the work of MCs to consider how best to strengthen implementation of CAP Strategic Plans.

Implementation approaches

Overview

In some Member States (MS), MC members were heavily involved in CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) development and as a result have a degree of ownership over implementation. However, the consensus amongst TG members was that MCs generally have less influence on implementation decisions than in the previous programming period. MCs previously approved Rural Development Programme (RDP) amendments but now tend to only offer opinions to Managing Authorities (MAs) which is in line with the basic rules established by the new CAP legal framework. Members understood that nothing prevents Managing Authorities from introducing higher standards in the MC procedure should they wish to do so. This loss of influence has been confusing and frustrating for some, particularly where a feedback loop from the MA to the MC is absent. In many cases it is unclear how much influence MCs have on CSP implementation; and MC procedural documents collected and reviewed during the work on this TG make no reference to the MA's decision-making processes.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Despite this, the importance of MCs' role in holding MAs to account for their performance was emphasised, in particular with regard to analysing results data and highlighting any gaps and unmet needs in CSPs. However, concern was expressed that in previous programming periods results data have been presented to MCs without an adequate explanation as to why some targets have not been met (e.g. for



agroforestry). MCs should therefore carefully consider if an indicator clearly demonstrates progress against an intervention's objective. On occasions, an ad-hoc expert thematic group (sub-group of the MC) may be the most appropriate forum for such detailed indicator discussions as these are regarded as an efficient and focussed way to discuss complicated issues that may not enlighten all MC members.

Information Flows

Several TG members highlighted the various issues around how MAs can attract new members onto the MC. Members also emphasised the importance of the informal exchange of information between MC members, which helps them to understand each other's perspectives and roles. Face-to-face meetings and visits to projects undertaken alongside MC meetings can motivate people, enhance engagement and foster transparency. Information exchange can also be enhanced by the participation of CSP MAs and MC members in different MCs (e.g. Cohesion Funds, Regional Funds, Maritime Fund). Training and capacity building to enhance members' role is also desirable in several MSs, in particular for EAGF stakeholders (e.g. those interested in direct payments) and those from small voluntary organisations.

Examples of Implementation Approaches

Two German examples cited as good implementation practice were discussed. A regional MA surveyed social and economic partners to ascertain their expectations from the MC's work and how they hoped to engage with it. The survey's findings will help ensure their expectations are understood and met. Secondly, a platform of environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) was supported to prepare joint statements during the CSP preparation process; rather than up to 50 different statements and opinion papers being submitted, one co-ordinated and consolidated statement helped inform the CSP's development.

Suggested Actions

- Roles and responsibilities of the MC members should be clearly set out and genuine opportunities to contribute effectively and ensure their perspectives are valued (e.g. the above could be envisaged in the MC procedures).
- MC member engagement would be enhanced if it was made clearer how opinions submitted influence MA's decision-making and if an appropriate follow-up was provided ensuring the correct informing of the MC.
- MCs have an important role in holding MAs to account, and particular scrutiny should be paid to the intervention logics of CSPs and the rigour of setting target



values. On occasion, expert thematic groups (perhaps as sub-groups of the MC) may be the most appropriate forum for detailed discussion.

- The value of informal information exchange alongside formal meetings is clear, as it can help build a shared understanding of other members' roles and perspectives. This is particularly pertinent given the need for greater integration of EAGF stakeholders.
- Visits to projects alongside MC meetings can help provide such opportunities and enhance motivation and engagement and this should be encouraged.
- Operation of the MC could be enhanced by facilitating the participation of CSP MA staff and members from MCs of other programmes to exchange experiences and lessons learned.
- The development of EU level guidance on the selection of MC members would help to make sure that MAs understand how to best identify new stakeholders and provide the enabling conditions to allow them to engage effectively with their peers.
- A national level online portal to enable MC members to access meeting documents and engage in themed discussions would be a welcome development.

Stakeholder engagement

Overview

MCs' decision-making function in the implementation process is often less clear than in the previous programming period, being more focussed on stakeholder consultation, information provision and relationship building.

It was recognised that whilst partnership working is complex, it is nevertheless vital if strategic challenges are to be comprehensively and systematically addressed by partners involved in CSP implementation. This relies on effective networking coupled with transparency around decisions and processes.

The advisory role of MCs was in most cases seen to be positive. For example, in Wallonia, the change in the MC's role has made it easier for MAs to involve environmental organisations who may hold different views on topics in the discussions. While all MC stakeholders are given an opportunity to speak in meetings, agenda time is a limiting factor, e.g. if 50 representatives were to actively participate.



The role of National Networks

NNs play a key role in bringing together different stakeholder types and fostering engagement. In Italy, the NN continues to support significant stakeholder engagement, including with representatives from the agricultural sector and environmental organisations. Overall, circa 100 institutional stakeholders from the national, regional and local level are engaged in the MC and its Working Groups. The first CSP MC took place in June 2023, and as before farmers were mainly represented by Producer Organisations. However, the inclusion of both funds in the CSP has presented the Italians with an expanded challenge for stakeholder consultation from both funds' perspectives. Alternative ways of engaging with farmers are being explored, to reduce the reliance on producer organisations.

The view was expressed that stakeholder engagement could be channelled through NNs and not only through the MC. There is often a high level of joint membership between the two, for example in Greece, but here the focus of the MC's role is formal decision-making compared to a more informal, personal, and ongoing stakeholder engagement, facilitated through the auspices of the NN.

Regional Dynamics

In some MSs, both national and regional MCs have been 'over-subscribed', and efforts have been made to keep those seeking but not selected for membership as engaged as possible. For example, an open call for expressions of interest in MC membership took place in Germany. To ensure discussions are manageable, active membership was limited to 50 persons with a balance of sectors and genders represented. Those who were not selected were invited to organise themselves into groups and a MC member was selected to represent their views. The same 'federal' approach has also been facilitated in regional MCs and has been met with widespread approval.

Resourcing

The facilitation of stakeholder engagement can be a challenge when there is a high turnover of staff in key administrative positions. An example collected by the TG highlighted that in Greece, work streams are disrupted when a member of MA staff or a political appointee changes role, and the time that has been invested in building such a working relationship is lost.

One more example collected, indicated that in Greece some NGOs lack the engagement capacity or interest to actively participate in the MC. To address this,



knowledge gained from the previous programming period is being used to select the most active NGOs, and some organisations that did not have voting rights in the previous programming period have been granted these rights.

Suggested Actions

- Stakeholders should be proactively engaged by CSP MAs during policy formation to enhance ownership during implementation.
- Inviting feedback continuously during the whole programming period, rather than solely during a mid-term review, will help enhance stakeholder engagement and motivation.
- The regular utilisation of written procedures can give representative organisations an opportunity to share their views throughout implementation.
- Ongoing informal stakeholder discussions should also be initiated and take place regularly between MC meetings, to build relationships, and to enhance members' understanding of roles and appreciation of others' perspectives.
- Stakeholder engagement in detailed policy formation works best with a small group of participants who have a particular knowledge or interest in a subject, and who then share their views with the MC.
- The EU CAP Network should support the engagement of stakeholders at EU level discussions, and disseminate the outcomes of such discussions for the benefit of all, including small NGOs.

Regional Monitoring Committees

Overview

There was general agreement that the role of regional MCs, and their relationship with the national MC, is not yet straight-forward. The perception of several regional MAs is that their perspective is not always heard at the national level, leading to tensions within the governance of the CSP.

While a new delivery model has superseded the previous regionalised system in several MSs (e.g. Italy, France, Germany, Spain), the practical implications of this change are still being understood, e.g. national level governance coupled with regional implementation of some interventions. Several TG Members indicated that the importance and clarity of regional MCs role has reduced because of the implementation model change. There has been an increased level of complexity



accompanied by reduced flexibility to respond to regional needs. In France, for example, most regional stakeholders feel that while they were consulted in CSP design, their needs have not been fully reflected in its implementation.

Reaching consensus on the activities that should be conducted by MCs at the central and regional levels is an ongoing challenge. In particular, there have been occasions where national EAGF interventions have conflicted with regional agri-environmental measures. In Italy, regional MAs are now required to discuss a proposed modification with the national MA. They are also required to seek agreement with other regions who may be seeking alternative modifications. This has resulted in tensions between national and regional MAs.

Stakeholders felt that it was sometimes unclear how much integration and information exchange takes place between national and regional stakeholders. A clear mechanism is necessary to enable the exchange of opinions and ideas. Specifically tasked joint expert thematic groups could enable national and regional stakeholders to come together to solve problems. An online platform has been created in Germany to enable protocols and meeting minutes to be uploaded. There may also be scope for informal discussions within and between member organisations in the MC to help address implementation challenges.

Regional MAs consider that it would be useful for them to have direct contact with the European Commission to discuss CSP implementation issues. The desire was expressed for a European level Working Group to be dedicated to regional implementation. This would enable the exchange of best practice and could propose solutions to the challenges arising from the new delivery model. Procedural clarity is needed to make regional CSP implementation and modification easier in the future.

Suggested Actions

- Clarity of roles and procedures amongst regional stakeholders is an urgent need in several MSs requiring agreement as how regional needs are adequately addressed through the CSP modification process. Procedural clarity may be enhanced with more detailed MC Rules of Procedure.
- Regional MCs should be represented at the national level and vice versa to ensure proper integration. This would allow for a unified approach to ensure all voices are heard throughout the process.
- Certainty over the extent of integration and information exchange between the national and regional levels could be improved by mandating expert thematic



groups to bring national and regional stakeholders together to ensure more efficient and inclusive discussions.

- Having well-defined roles for both national and regional MCs, along with an online platform dedicated to information exchange, can significantly improve coherence across the system. This allows everyone involved to understand their responsibilities, stay informed, and work together.
- An EU-wide Working Group dedicated to regional implementation could help facilitate the exchange of best practice and develop proposals to address the challenges arising from the new delivery model.
- Clear EU level guidance is needed to help MS to understand how regional and national MCs can interact and work together.

National Networks

The NN's role and potential as a connector between stakeholders and the MC is highly valued. Contributions to timely communication and training facilitation can help enhance interest and engagement amongst stakeholders. NN's significant role in enhancing the operational effectiveness of MCs is best exemplified by the ways in which they ensure that a wider range of stakeholders can express their views on CSP implementation. This can include those who are not members of the MC.

In some MSs, NNs are included as formal members of the MC (e.g. Italy, Ireland, Belgium-Flanders, Latvia) whilst in others they are not (e.g. Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland). The extent to which NN members promote the networking elements of the CSP to inform implementation, as opposed to promoting their members' wants and needs, appears to also be a mixed picture, but its role is not directly linked to its membership status.

The Swedish NN was previously a member of the MC, in the current period it was not a member at first but has subsequently been informally co-opted. It is too soon to know how the new arrangement will be implemented. Discussions between the MC and the MA remain more co-operative with the NN supporting the MA to reach target groups and evaluate progress.

In both Estonia and Finland the new NN is no longer a formal member of the MC. In Estonia, NN members still receive information about MC meetings, but do not submit opinions and don't take part in all aspects of the MC's work. In Finland, a NN representative gives an update of activities and any issues arising at every MC meeting. It was hoped there would be feedback from the MC to the NN steering group



to guide its work plan, but despite some overlap of membership, feedback is yet to be received. It is acknowledged that there is a need to find new ways to facilitate such feedback.

Informal NN activities in Italy are helped by the fact that the NN shares premises with and meets MA colleagues responsible for CSP implementation daily. Day-to-day interactions with stakeholders are facilitated by the NN to ensure stronger coordination with and between regions. For example, the network is organising a session with all the Italian regional MCs represented.

In Ireland, the MA regard the NN as a source of informal support and as a vital communication facilitator. It is envisaged that in the future, input from the NN to MC meetings will include setting out how their activities support CSP implementation.

In Flanders, the Flemish NN recently helped organise a visit to a farm project alongside a MC meeting, this support gave 20 of the MC members an insight into how different measures work in the field.

In Belgium-Wallonia, the NN gives feedback to the MC on network activity. Processes are integrated and informal links are utilised.

In Luxembourg, as in Wallonia, the MC and NN is coordinated by one committee. In both cases the same MA staff manage network activities and CAP implementation. Despite the complexity caused by the integration of Pillars 1 and 2, joint coordination appears to work well. As elsewhere, the MC's broader remit in this programming period has made meeting agenda's very full, and extensive preparation is needed before each meeting.

In Lithuania there is also some degree of common membership between the MC and NN. The NN supports the MA in arranging MC meetings, working as an MC secretariat. The Latvian and Slovenian NNs also provides technical support to MC meetings. Even though the NN is not a member of the MC in Poland, its action plan states that it will undertake research and analysis for the MC.

Suggested Actions

- NNs could organise online meetings and technical briefings to explain what is behind the CSP, e.g. share what is not working and plans for improvement. This would help enable a more balanced input from the members/stakeholders, foster transparency and understanding among all stakeholders.



- NNs could support MAs by encouraging them to take a step back and consider the “why” and “who” which lies behind their actions. This strategic thinking would help ensure everyone involved can contribute effectively.
- NNs play a crucial role in communicating about the CSP. Having them as members of the MC can contribute to involving those stakeholders not represented in the MC by bringing their voice into the discussion.
- NNs can also further disseminate information through case studies and facilitate informal discussions, but also provide data, analysis and annual implementation results to MAs for informed decision-making.
- NNs can help to bridge the gaps between the national and regional levels regarding CSPs.
- NNs role can significantly contribute to the effectiveness and smooth operation of MCs, ultimately leading to a better implementation of the CSPs.
- A feedback loop from the MC to inform the work of the NN and vice versa could be facilitated.
- Elsewhere, the information flow from small NN meetings to the MC needs improving to help stakeholders to know what and why they are discussing a topic and how it will influence decisions.
- NN’s support for field visits which facilitate informal engagement is highly valued by MC members and ongoing informal exchange should be encouraged wherever possible.
- It is important to fully understand the influence of the MA on MC membership, for example whether those who attend on behalf of National Network Support Units (contracted or employed by the MA) or are other NN members/stakeholders.

Final Conclusions

There is little doubt that effective Monitoring Committees are vital to the successful implementation of any funding programme and particularly for those funded by public money. In the case of CSPs it is incumbent on MAs to capitalise on the opportunity that the presence of an MC affords in terms of ensuring that the right decisions are made at the right time, by the right people, at the appropriate level and implemented in a way that meets the needs of all those in the CSP ecosystem. To that end MAs should also consider how best to include and utilise the expertise of NNs, stakeholder organisations, MC members and Ministries.



Work and good governance within CSPs should also be informed by transferable good practices such as those from other EU funding programmes. To achieve this the participation of relevant MS representatives and MC members in the [European Community of Practice on Partnership \(ECoPP\)](#) should be encouraged and supported.

Disclaimer

This paper has been developed with the involvement of members of the EU CAP Network Thematic Group on CAP Strategic Plans: Monitoring Committees from several EU Member States as part of the work carried out by the CAP Implementation Contact Point during and between thematic group meetings. The information and views set out in this document do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission.

