



Rural Evaluation **NEWS**

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT



WHAT AN IMPACT!

Evaluation Activities in 2019:

Highlights and outlook from the Member States



In June 2019, the RDP Managing Authorities submitted the 2019 enhanced Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) to the European Commission. These AIRs include not only information on the implementation of the evaluation plan (EP) but also include evaluation findings. In 2017, these findings focused on results, while in 2019 these findings focus not only on results, but also, impacts. The 2019 AIRs build on previous reports submitted and are vital in that they provide an even more comprehensive picture of how Member States are progressing in the implementation of their evaluation plans and the impacts they are having.

Member States have been busily working in preparation for the AIR 2019 by conducting a variety of evaluation activities and contracting various thematic evaluations and studies. The European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development has analysed Chapters 2 and 7 of the AIRs of all RDPs to summarise the progress made in implementing the evaluation plans and the contributions made up to December 2018 towards achieving the RDP priorities, CAP objectives, and EU 2020 headline targets.



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So many activities so little time!

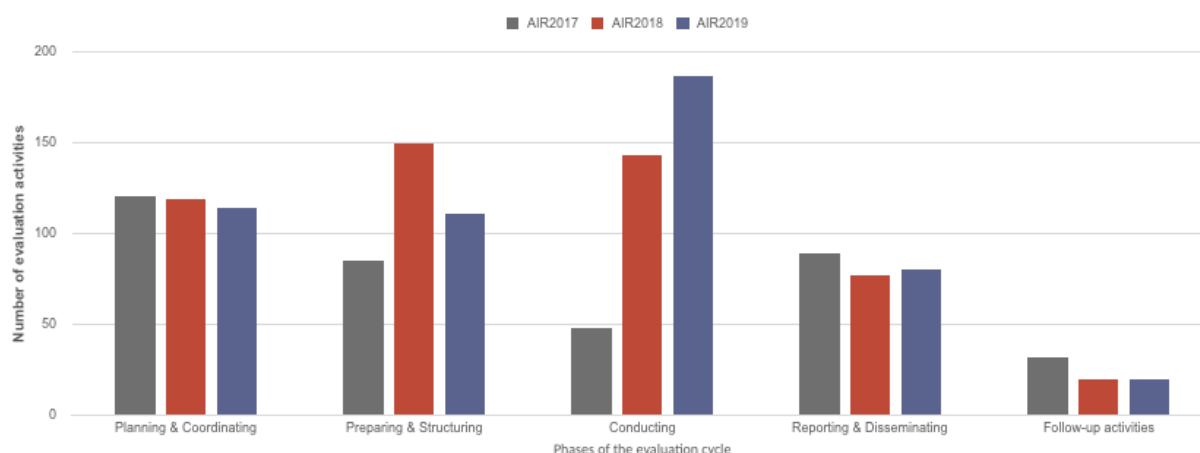
Member States have made a large increase in evaluation efforts in the last year to assess and report RDP achievements and impacts along with progress in implementing the policy. Throughout the Member States Managing Authorities have been conducting many activities related to data and the provision of data for evaluations. This in turn has supported an increase in evaluation activities in preparation for reporting on the AIR 2019. At the same time, Member States evaluation plans have become more stable with less Member States making modifications to their evaluation plans than in past years.

Most evaluation activities undertaken in the last year have been undertaken with a view of completing and submitting Chapter 7 of the enhanced AIRs 2019. Figure 1, shows the distribution of evaluation activities across different phases of the evaluation cycle and different reporting periods. The number of activities has largely increased compared to the enhanced AIRs submitted in 2017.

The number of evaluation activities in AIRs 2018 and 2019 has largely been the same, however, there has been a significant difference in relation to the nature of the activities undertaken. Member States in 2019 have undertaken more activities on the actual implementation of evaluations (collecting data, applying analytical methods, and assessing RDP achievements and impacts) with a view to reporting and disseminating evaluation findings and taking follow-up actions.

In terms of data management activities in 2019 Member States can be seen as largely moving from the planning data arrangements phase of activities to now focusing more than two thirds of their efforts on activities related to preparing data systems (e.g. developing tools to fill data gaps) and implementing data collection and analysis (e.g. triangulating data, visualising trends).

Figure 1: Evaluation activities across the main phases of the evaluation cycle and across different AIRs submitted in 2017, 2018 and 2019



Source: Screening of AIRs Submitted in 2019 (European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (2019))



Evaluations coming to a city near you!

Among the various evaluations Member States have conducted during the lead up to 2019 many Member States have made thematic assessments related to RDPs 2014-2020. Furthermore, Member States contracted many studies related to various rural topics, such as precision farming in agriculture (e.g. BE Flanders), generational renewal (e.g. IT Campania), or rural tourism (e.g. SE).

Sustainable management of natural resources and climate actions: A large proportion of thematic assessments undertaken in the lead up to 2019 reporting concerned this topic. For instance, Spain (La Rioja) carried out a [study](#) to improve the methodology and definition of High Natural Value farming areas based on cartographic elements, Greece conducted an [evaluation](#) of the RDP's effects on the prevention of soil erosion and improvement of soil management and Lithuania [assessed](#) the RDP effects on climate change through indicators related to renewable energy.

Viable food production: Latvia conducted an [analysis](#) on the RDP support to the development of large farms, Germany (Baden-Württemberg) [assessed](#) the RDP impact on farm diversification, Finland (Mainland) conducted an [assessment](#) of the RDP's effects on fostering the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and Germany (Niedersachsen-Bremen) assessed the effects of RDP measures supporting animal welfare, specifically on [chickens](#) and [pigs](#).

Balanced territorial development: Completed evaluations in this area mostly dealt with LEADER/CLLD. UK Scotland [assessed](#) the economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of LEADER on rural communities, Ireland contracted [case-studies](#) on LEADER contributions to cross border cooperation, renovation of community buildings, smart villages and towns, festivals, small businesses, community-led planning, preserving local heritage, employment and training services and integrated rural urban transport.

Knowledge transfer and innovation: In-depth assessments on these topics were completed by Germany (Hessen) who [assessed](#) the implementation of the European Innovation Partnership –

AGRI and Finland (Mainland) who made a specific [evaluation](#) on Measure 02 (farm advisory services).

Lastly, thematic assessments were made in relation to **various RDP aspects**, for instance, Spain (National) carried out an [assessment](#) on the National Rural Network; Poland conducted an [evaluation](#) of the RDP selection criteria and Italy (Lombardia) carried out an [analysis](#) of the conditions to evaluate RDPs 2014–2020.

Member States also considerably increased their communication activities in relation to publicising evaluation findings in 2019. In terms of outreach, stakeholders were mostly reached through websites, and a smaller share of stakeholders through other communication channels (newsletters, social media, evaluation reports, as well as internal and open meetings, workshops, conferences and seminars). Most communication activities conducted by Member States were addressed to the general public or an array of evaluation stakeholders. The remaining share of communication activities were specifically targeted to selected target groups, such as the RDP Monitoring Committee, Local Action Groups, national and regional authorities, researches and thematic experts, evaluators, National Rural Networks and rural associations.

So, you did all that but what do your evaluations show?

While Chapter 2 of the AIRs provides us with an understanding of what activities have been conducted, Chapter 7 of the AIRs submitted in 2019 provides us for the first time with a real snapshot of not only what RDPs are achieving under each of the respective priorities and focus areas but also how they contribute to the Union level objectives, namely the CAP objectives, and the EU headline targets for biodiversity and smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. The majority of the RDPs systematically dealt with the assessment of focus areas, priorities, and other RDP aspects (Technical Assistance, National Rural Networks) by answering the related common evaluation questions from 1 to 21.

Compared to 2017, the answering of the related common evaluation questions (CEQs) has been much more complete and based on more substantial evidence. When achievements were not assessed nor reported, this was often due to the low level of RDP uptake, the absence of measures programmed primarily under the respective focus areas, or the lack of data to carry out more sensitive and robust evaluation methods.

Similarly, a high proportion of RDPs answered also for the first time to the common evaluation questions from 22 to 30 related to the contributions to union level objectives and targets. However, here most of the RDPs encountered challenges in providing net values for the common CAP impact indicators and in the assessment of RDP contributions towards the EU's headline targets. Nevertheless, a good number of RDPs were able to demonstrate the RDP's contributions on the basis of various evidence assessed with optimal and alternative approaches, depending on the specific situations in terms of data availability, level of implementation and evaluation resources. The application of robust quantitative methods, such as a counterfactual analysis or modelling techniques was still limited across RDPs, but an overall increase was seen compared to the previous enhanced AIRs submitted in 2017.

Overall, the AIRs submitted in 2019 showed that RDPs implementation moved forward and made considerable progress in terms of realised expenditure and achievements of targets set up for the focus area objectives, although there are very strong differences across various RDPs, or across the focus areas of the same RDP. At the level of priorities and focus areas, most of the RDPs systematically assessed and reported achievements in the answer to the related common evaluation questions.

Compared to the enhanced Annual Implementation Report in 2017, Managing Authorities and evaluators have considerably increased their efforts in applying evaluation methods that can capture RDP results and impacts. This is reflected in the number of RDPs providing answers to focus-area related CEQs. Here, the picture is much more complete compared to the situation in 2017. Moreover, a high share of RDPs systematically assessed and reported achievements and backed up their evaluation findings with various types of evidence (mostly with quantified common target indicators in combination with additional qualitative and quantitative information).

The robustness and sensitiveness of the evaluation approaches varied across the EU. Member States reported on multiple factors, that increased or limited the quality of their evaluation findings (e.g. size of RDP budget, level of RDP uptake, evaluation capacity and resources, data availability). Nevertheless, numerous good practices in the used methodologies could be identified. The application of counterfactual assessments (e.g. PSM, DiD, models) was frequently reported in the answers, especially for

the assessment of socio-economic and sector-related impacts. RDPs made consistent use of qualitative methods to triangulate quantitative findings or to fill data gaps (e.g. case-studies, questionnaires, surveys, focus-groups). Additional indicators were also used to complement common ones, which shows the capacity to capture different aspects of the RDP's effects.

Learning from Evaluations to support better implementation

Many Member States not only conducted various evaluations in 2019 but also used the results of these evaluations to make changes to their programmes in order to achieve better implementation and results. Some of these follow-up actions include:

- **Improving the RDP delivery mechanism and implementation:** aligning timelines and streamlining procedures designing or updating the RDP communication strategy and optimising administrative procedures for the selection of beneficiaries.
- **Adjusting the RDP's intervention logic:** revising the selection criteria, modifying the financial allocation of the RDP's measures or withdrawing some sub-measures.
- **Improving RDP's monitoring and evaluation system:** coordinating the collection and provision of data between regional authorities and Local Action Groups, adapting the operational data base and refining the definition and methodology to assess High Nature Value farming areas.
- **Preparing the CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027:** developing the rates of support for organic farming in the new financial period, training farm advisors with a view of providing better advisory services in the post-2020 period and drawing lessons learned from the experiences of the RDP selection criteria.

Lessons for the future

Ultimately, while a high proportion of RDPs made progress in demonstrating the achievements of results under the specific rural development priorities, the assessment of RDP net contributions was generally limited and will require more time, data, capacity, and higher levels of implementation to be fully realised. Nevertheless, Member States are using the results of their evaluations to support follow up actions to improve implementation and good practices in this reporting period shall be used with a view towards preparing the ex post evaluation foreseen in 2023. ■



Send your questions to:

info@ruralevaluation.eu

Tools to support the ex ante appraisal of the intervention strategy, targets and milestones of the CAP Strategic Plans

Currently Member States are preparing new CAP Strategic Plans, which will help to programme the interventions to be carried out in 2021-2027 under the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

A comprehensive and well-structured intervention logic for the CAP Strategic Plan is a crucial element, for the design of interventions in order to address Member States' needs and how they will contribute to the CAP specific objectives and by ensuring positive results and impacts. The ambition to meet programmed objectives and the way to measure progress towards defined achievements is expressed through quantified targets and milestones, which are set for each relevant result indicator.

In the new CAP 'delivery model', Member States are provided greater responsibility and are more accountable as to how they meet their objectives and achieve their agreed targets. Therefore, it is important to assess whether the quantified target values for the results are calculated properly and are realistic based on the amount of allocated inputs, planned outputs and results. This is one of the tasks of the ex ante evaluation as stipulated in the legal proposal for the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation¹.

The Evaluation Helpdesk in the framework of the Thematic Working Group 7, 'Preparing for the ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan', has developed a tool to support ex ante evaluators by proposing a structured approach for the appraisal of the quality of the calculation of target values and milestones taking into account various critical factors. This tool suggests following a six-step approach as seen in Figure 1:

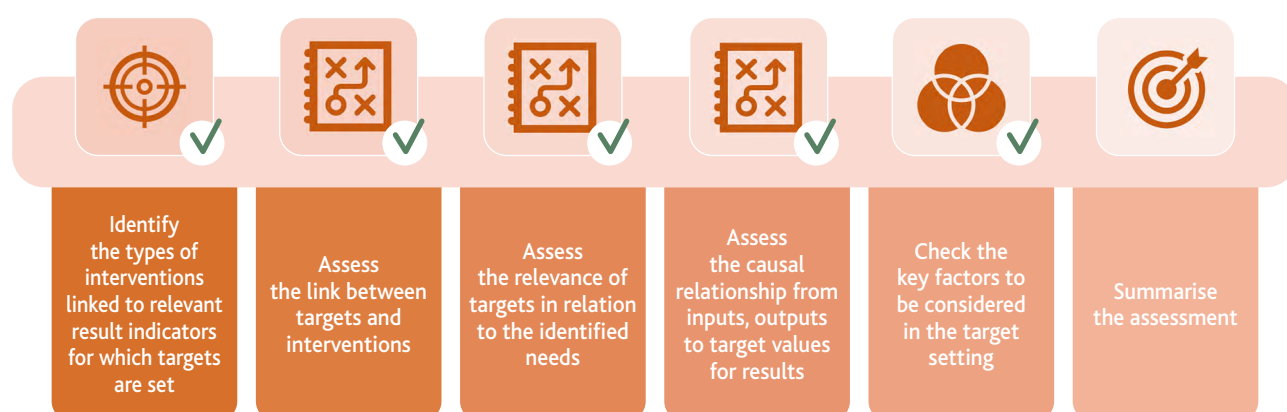
The tool provides some examples of analytical tables that can serve to help assess the links between targets and other related elements of the CAP Strategic Plan (e.g. interventions, identified needs). Indicative checklists that cover key information to be considered while appraising the targets which have been set and linked to the achievement of the objectives of the CAP and to the interventions which will allow for reaching those targets are also provided.

For example, the checklist of possible factors to be considered when setting targets includes key information related to the financial allocation of the interventions, past experiences and lessons learned on setting targets, financial capacity and experience of beneficiaries, estimation of targets, administrative issues and specific issues related to climate change, natural resources and the environment. ■

This tool among other tools developed to support ex ante evaluators of the CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027 are published on the Evaluation [Helpdesk's website](#).

1. (COM/2018/392 final)

Figure 1: Steps for structuring the appraisal of the quantified target values and milestones.





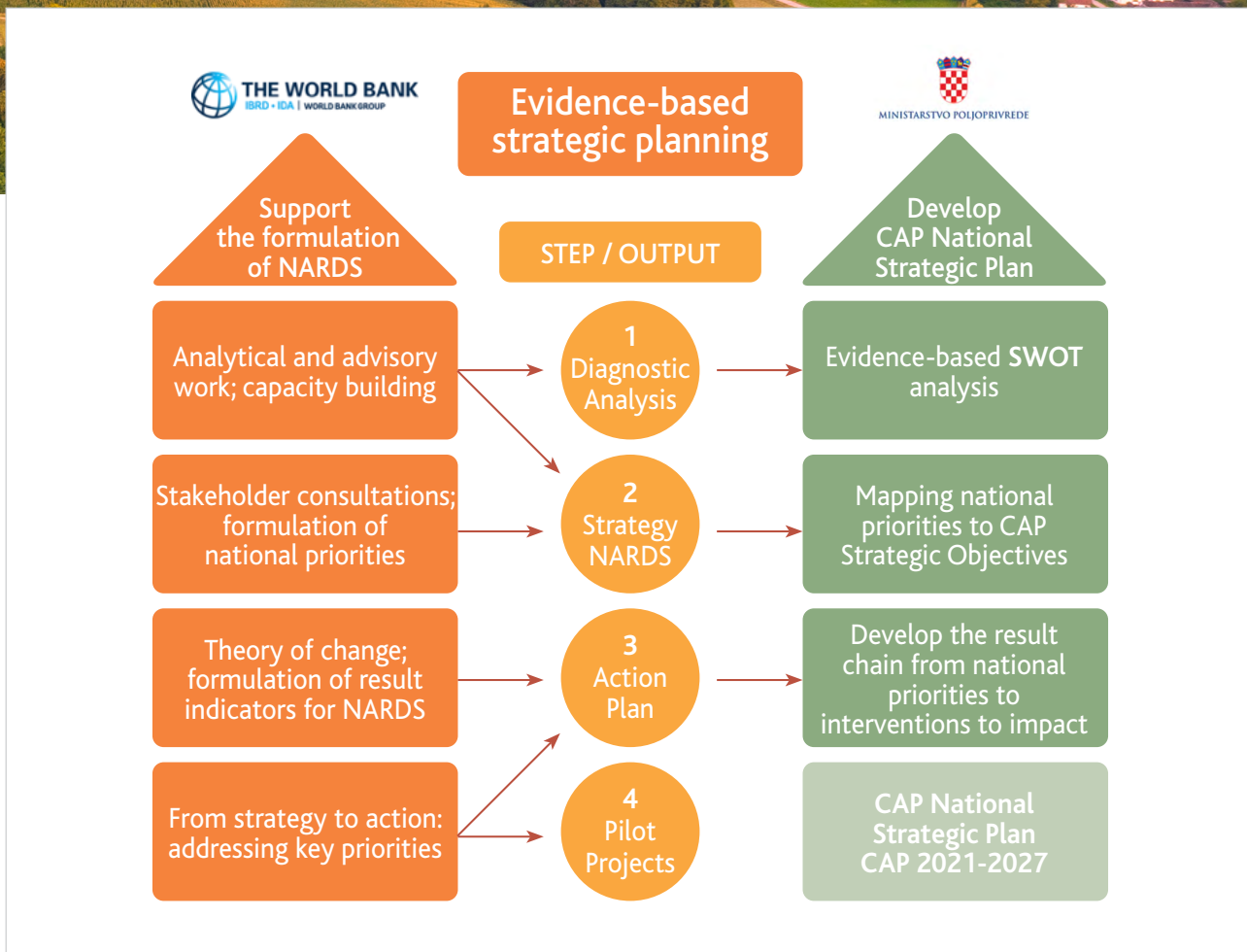
Towards the New Delivery Model: From the Croatian National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy to the country's CAP Strategic Plan

As EU Member States begin to prepare for the next programming period by working on their SWOT analyses and needs assessments, different approaches and methodologies to assess the current situation for agriculture and rural development can be adopted. The Ministry of Agriculture in Croatia together with the World Bank have formulated an evidence-based approach to strategic planning, comprising 4 interrelated steps (see figure). As a first step, a thorough diagnostic analysis of the situation of agriculture and rural development in Croatia was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This analysis is a good example of the formulation of a concrete strategic baseline for designing the CAP Strategic Plan. This experience was presented at the 18th meeting of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP.

From EU accession to CAP Strategic Plan

In 2013, Croatia became a European Union Member State and with this new status, embarked on a journey to modernise its agricultural sector. To achieve this goal, a national legal framework for strategic planning was established in order to harmonise a variety of strategic documents, provide a common framework for indicators and reporting and adopt a system for monitoring and

evaluation. This legal framework provides a back bone in which Croatia has further built its National Development Strategy, which in turn provides the foundation for its National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy (NARDS), which will shape its future National CAP Strategic Plan.



Working Steps of the analysis

In order to understand the general economic performance of the agricultural sector and the effects of policy choices, quantitative analyses focused on the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of public spending in agriculture and rural development were conducted. These analyses were complemented by assessments on various topics such as climate change, agricultural finance,

risk management, AKIS, food safety, bio-economy, etc. and their implications on sector performance. Based on the results of this in-depth analysis, 14 critical challenges for agriculture and rural development in Croatia were identified and an online survey formulated to seek stakeholder's opinions. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture disseminated the survey by sending letters to every registered farmer in the country. Survey results

were used to identify 9 priority challenges which were discussed in-person at stakeholder workshops. Identification of emerging priorities from these workshops have been used for the formulation of strategic needs of the sector as a basis to define the strategic vision of the NARDS (Step 2).

Highlights of the diagnostic analysis

While agri-food generates significant economy-wide effects in Croatia, farm incomes seem to be highly dependent on subsidies compared to the EU average. The analysis shows that improvement in agricultural productivity since EU accession has been slow and that key structural challenges remain. Indicatively, the fragmented production structure and/or constraints on market and credit access for small producers have inhibited the transformation process of agriculture. This, in turn, has led to a weakening in the competitive position of Croatia's agricultural sector. Furthermore, although absorption of rural development funds has considerably improved in the last 2 years (33%), variations in the uptake of different measures remain, which limits the scope of impact of the program.

Efficiency

Technical efficiency of Croatian farms (their ability to effectively use inputs for the production of an output) is found to be low, however, scale efficiency is very high. Small farms are the technical efficiency champions but transitioning to larger production units still remains a significant challenge. Size influences efficiency negatively when farms grow from small into medium, and positively when they grow from medium to large. Subsidised farms underperform non-subsidised ones and there's limited capacity of decoupled payments to induce efficiency improvements. Impacts of coupled support on technical efficiency is clearly negative. Rural development support for investments is found to lead to improvements in the technical efficiency of farms, while IACS Rural Development support does not.

Effectiveness

In terms of effectiveness, medium scale farms seem to be catching up with larger and smaller ones. Rural development support (investments) matters for improving the effectiveness, especially if it induces innovation. Nevertheless, there seems to be a 'productivity paradox' where in the short run, adoption of new technology might result in significant adjustment costs, mainly attributed to organisational and human factors. Effectiveness can be improved by stimulating technical change and rural development support seems to matter a lot for improving effectiveness.

Equity

In terms of equity, public support in agriculture does not seem to be equitably distributed and total Pillar I and II support seems to be highly concentrated in 7 of the 21 counties. The county-specific distribution of Pillar II support is less concentrated than Pillar I and total support. This has often led to support not always targeting counties with low GDP per capita and high shares of the population at risk of poverty.

Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The outcomes of the analysis and stakeholder consultations gave rise to very similar results concerning the critical challenges and potential responses:

- **Target direct (decoupled) payments:** They will only have the intended effect (income smoothing) and induce economic impacts if provided to poorer/smaller producers.
- **Coupled support:** Reconsider the share of coupled subsidies in the support envelope and their sectoral distribution.
- **Target interventions:** Combine targeted decoupled payments with targeted rural development support which promotes farm investments and innovation.
- **Integration:** Maximise economy-wide effects through building stronger linkages across the agri-food value chain and beyond.
- **Mainstreaming climate actions** into production decisions is a smart development approach and an economic opportunity for Croatia.

Future Actions

The results from the diagnosis analysis are used by the Ministry of Agriculture for the formulation of their evidence-based SWOT analysis. They are also the key input to the formulation of the strategic needs and priorities of Croatia (under Step 2), which will then be mapped to specific interventions and CAP Strategic Objectives (Step 3) for the design of the overall CAP Strategic Plan of Croatia. Several strategic needs will also be addressed by formulating pilot projects to identify specific actions to improve sector outcomes (Step 4). ■



Find out More! The Diagnostic Report

<https://poljoprivreda2020.hr/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Dijagnosticka-analiza-Poljoprivreda.pdf>

<https://poljoprivreda2020.hr/preuzimanja/dokumenti>



EvaluationWORKS! 2019

The Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs), which were submitted by the Member States by June 2019 have been a major evaluation milestone and for the first time, impacts have been assessed. In last year's capacity building events participants focused their discussions on what would be reported and the possible approaches and methods for assessing RDP impacts.

This year's EvaluationWORKS! 2019 events will now follow-up and see what went well and what needs to be improved with a view to the ex post.

At the same time, Member States will be in the stage of preparing the ex ante evaluation of their CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027. It is therefore vital that in this moment that we discuss the key lessons learnt on the functioning of the current Monitoring and Evaluation system and also reflect on what needs to be considered in the ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027.

In order to achieve this goal, the Evaluation Helpdesk's EvaluationWORKS! 2019 yearly capacity building events with the topic 'From the AIR in 2019 to the ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan' will cover the following possible modules:

- 'AIR 2019 reflections and follow-up'
- 'Introduction to the PMEF for the CAP post 2020'
- 'Ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan'

These events will be carried out from September to November 2019 in the Member States' local language(s) by the Helpdesk's network of Geographic Experts and will be adapted to meet the needs and specificities of each Member State. ■

Want to learn more about
EvaluationWORKS! 2019?

Visit the [Capacity Building Section](#) on the
Evaluation Helpdesk's website





Solving evaluation challenges through collaboration:

Experiences from the Slovenian evaluators of the AIR submitted in 2019

The Evaluation Helpdesk talked with Gregor Skender, Manager at Deloitte Consulting Slovenia, who was the lead Evaluator for the AIR 2019 to find out what went well and what challenges they faced.



1. After the AIR submitted in 2017 what were the major lessons learned and how did this help you prepare for the AIR in 2019?

Being involved in the preparation of the evaluation report for the AIR in 2017 has made the learning curve a lot shorter. Knowing the data structures (including its pitfalls and data gaps) we were able to adjust the methodology with a Plan B, whereby we used micro-level data for the assessment of macro trends, for example, by using narrower data sets on local areas to test the impacts on biodiversity, or expert assessments of trends at the level of water bodies to assess impacts on water quality. Also, the complexity of the process of the evaluation was mitigated by focusing on those elements of the evaluation that are most important for the findings

and conclusions, such as, the analysis of biodiversity at the micro level, an in-depth analysis of FADN data and the use of shorter and more focused surveys for beneficiaries.

2. How did you structure your evaluation process and create synergies?

The overall complexity of the evaluation process makes it hard to 'see the forest from the trees'. One of the reasons is the fact that there is a large number of evaluation questions (not only common, but also additional evaluation questions), which have overlapping topics in the case of Slovenia. We have tried to overcome this issue by providing a logical map of links between questions in order to avoid duplication of work and efforts. We also created a clear

distribution of work by areas for all the thematic experts involved such as, biology, agrarian economy and so forth, which was then overseen by a central project management team. We conducted regular project team meetings and calls, particularly for members whose areas of expertise overlapped (e.g. environmental issues related to emissions of ammonia and nitrates in waters) in order to achieve the best results in the most efficient way by drawing on all team members knowledge.

3. Which areas of the AIR submitted in 2019 could you effectively quantify in terms of impacts and programme achievements?

In general, we were able to quantify the impacts for socio-economic indicators where we could effectively use national statistics and implementation data. Concerning the environmental impacts, we were able to partially quantify the impacts for biodiversity at the level of individual protected areas, however, it was more challenging to achieve a representative sample for the Farmland Bird Index and to quantify other environmental impacts, such as those related to water.

4. What has been the biggest challenge for you in terms of the assessment and quantification of RDP impacts in the context of the AIR 2019?

The biggest challenge was insufficient or unavailable data that was required in order to properly calculate the impact indicators. For example in calculating impact indicators I.01, I.02, I.03, the effect of the RDP on productivity was not yet apparent, as there was not enough FADN data available for the recipients of M04.1 sub-measures during the evaluation for the AIR in 2019 and in some cases, the quality of the data at the start of reporting was difficult to assess. Therefore, the effect on supported farms is expected to be visible in the coming years of the implementation of the RDP, as indicated by FADN data and control group results.

We also had difficulties calculating impact indicators I.14, I.15 and I.16. impact indicators such as the poverty rate and GDP per capita are not monitored at the municipal level (NUTS 5), which makes it not possible to calculate the prescribed impact indicators. Therefore, these indicators can only be monitored at a higher territorial unit (NUTS 3), but the net effects of the RDP's contribution to rural development (territorial development and jobs) may be lost if this is the case.

When calculating impact indicator I.11, we were faced with a lack of spatial distribution data for gross nitrogen balance (GNB-N) and gross phosphorus balance (GNB-P) measured in kg N/ha/year.





5. How did you overcome these issues?

The important element in overcoming these issues was the involvement of subject-matter experts, which were able to provide an expert assessment and interpretation of the results. People working in the field of agriculture and environment were part of the project team, which was comprised of 18 members from various fields of expertise. For example, the analysis of FADN data was performed by agrarian economists, emissions from agriculture was assessed by experts in agricultural environmental impacts, LEADER initiatives were assessed by a rural development expert, while biologists and chemists handled evaluation questions related to biodiversity and water quality.

Also, ongoing assistance and collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture was crucial. We were able to establish a partnership, whereby issues were resolved throughout the process (e.g. data requests, explanations regarding data quality and robustness). What was also important was an ongoing collaboration with all stakeholders (e.g. other state authorities, NGOs and individuals), who were able to express their opinions and views at every stage of the evaluation process. This resulted in a smoother approval process and reduced number of iterations.

6. In which ways has the evaluation carried out in 2019 been useful for your Managing Authority?

We believe the evaluation was the most useful in terms of recommendations. Through performing the evaluation, we found areas which are not functioning well and were able to provide the Managing Authority with useful insights on how to address these areas, such as, through optimisation of their administrative work, and how to improve the collection of data which can then

result in a better evaluation and monitoring activities. Furthermore, by conducting a survey with beneficiaries we also gained their insights on how they viewed the implementation of measures, trainings and their overall satisfaction, which gives the Managing Authority more room to improve their existing procedures and content in order to better follow the needs of their beneficiaries.

An additional important added value was the review of the implementation of recommendations from the previous evaluation of the enhanced AIR submitted in 2017, as well as a review of the achievements of objectives from the environmental report, providing a link between the ex ante assessment and current practices.

7. What lessons can be learned from this experience for future evaluations?

The data required for the calculation of indicators can become vast and it's hard to have an overview of the whole documentation and also control what data is useful, what is missing and what is not applicable for the calculations. We have learned how to better manage the data and set up a better management plan in order to have a better overview on what data we have and can work with and also how to have a better overview of the evaluation report as a whole. This was built into the inception report, whereby all indicators (common and programme-specific) were allocated clear data sources and calculation methods. We also now know which data is available and which is not, so in the future we know better how to set the indicators and eliminate those for which we know are not possible to be calculated. Nevertheless, we believe the evaluation in the future should focus on a limited number of key topics, whilst ad-hoc, specialist evaluations should be used to cover specific questions. ■



The Eleventh Good Practice Workshop: Appraising the intervention strategies under the CAP: experiences and outlook

The eleventh good practice workshop took place in Rome, Italy on 15-16 October 2019. It brought together 86 participants from 24 Member States, including RDP Managing Authorities, evaluators, EU level representatives (e.g. European Commission, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk), researchers, National Rural Networks, and other actors. It focused specifically on the key lessons from the experiences of appraising the intervention logic and target setting in 2014-2020 and on practical examples from the preparation of the CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027.



The workshop had the overarching objective to raise awareness for evidence-based policy making by identifying good practices in using evaluation in the programming stage (ex ante evaluation). More specifically it aimed to provide a forum to discuss and learn lessons from the experiences of appraising the intervention logic and target setting, based on practical examples from the current programming period 2014–2020 and to exchange on key principles for the appraisal of the intervention strategy based on practical examples from the preparation of the CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027. Additionally, it aimed to identify

challenges and needs for the appraisal of the intervention strategy of the CAP Strategic Plan and develop suggestions to help Managing Authorities and evaluators in their ex ante evaluation activities.

The workshop benefited from the insights of the European Commission addressing some of the participants key concerns in relation to changes in the ex ante process between 2014 and 2021, challenges in the ex ante evaluation concerning the specific nature of Pillar I and Pillar II interventions and generally how to make the most out of the ex ante evaluation for the design of



strategic interventions. It also offered insights into the appraisal of the intervention logic and target setting through case studies from four Member States from both the current and the new programming period:

- Lessons learned from the ex ante evaluation of RDPs from Spain and France from the current period;
- Lessons from the ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan 2021-2027 in the Czech Republic;
- Lessons from using the theory of change for an impact evaluation in Austria.

Past and current experiences highlight

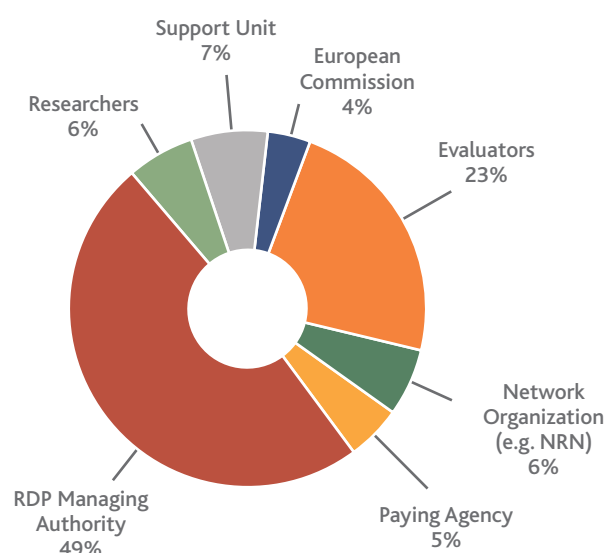
'We need to understand clearly what we are measuring and with what units of measurement in order to calculate targets and milestones. Clarify any doubts or different interpretations at an early stage.'

Evaluator, Spain

'My vision is that every policy designer should have an impact model on the wall, printed in large format, which has to be improved more and more over the years.'

Evaluator, Austria

Participants by role and Member State



Send your questions to:

info@ruralevaluation.eu



THE CASE STUDIES IDENTIFIED SEVERAL KEY MESSAGES FOR EVALUATION STAKEHOLDERS

For the ex ante evaluation to be useful, the careful planning of both programming and the ex ante evaluation is recommended. A short time plan could lead to superficial conclusions.

- The ex ante work should start early in order to assess plausibility of the strategic decisions, especially considering that some choices cannot be reconsidered once announced politically.
- Early, long-term planning based on a system of alerts can be used to accommodate changes in the context, in the typology of projects or in the profile of beneficiaries.
- The use of methods such as the theory of change should be introduced from the beginning, as the starting point of the ex ante evaluation.

Close cooperation and good relationships between the ex ante evaluators and the Managing Authority are crucial.

- The appraisal of targets can lead to reconsidering of the strategy and budget allocation if inconsistencies between targets and needs or objectives are identified. This is why the exercise should not be carried out at the end.
- The ex ante evaluation should be an intertwined and iterative process, including a high involvement of the Managing Authority in the process.
- The transfer of knowledge from the evaluator to the Managing Authority in the preparation of the new period is a key factor, given that some Managing Authorities, especially in regionalised countries, have new responsibilities.
- Interaction between the evaluators and the Managing Authorities improves the ability to justify the priorities during the implementation of the programme.

The experience and research capacity of the evaluator, together with a thorough knowledge of the programme and its context are major success factors in the ex ante evaluation process.

- New/innovative actions are welcome, but challenging as there is no past experience, therefore, the evaluator needs to understand the programme and the development context, while at the same time look for other references.
- The evaluator needs to complement experience with 'field work' and the collection of expert opinions to cover the knowledge gaps.
- Evaluators should have the capacity to use appropriate techniques and models (e.g. based on the theory of change approach) to check the contribution of interventions to specific objectives in the context of the overall shift from a compliance-based to a performance-based CAP.



The outcomes of the case studies, discussions and group work brought together the issues and challenges of Member States for appraising the intervention logic and target setting and culminated into a rich set of practical suggestions for addressing these issues.

Build capacity to identify synergies between Pillar I and II

- Set up a multi-disciplinary team involving experts from both Pillar I and Pillar II in the evaluation team to ensure knowledge about coherence.
- Organise EU level capacity building activities for evaluators.
- Ensure cooperation and regular meetings between administrative departments/ministries/institutions working in Pillar I and Pillar II.
- Involve stakeholders in the assessment of internal coherence for interventions where conflicting results may occur (e.g. young farmers are supported under both Pillars, while digitalisation/modernisation could lead to an outflow of young farmers).
- Provide a toolbox on the links between Pillar I and Pillar II.

Good understanding of the content of specific objectives

- The ex ante evaluation should assess which interventions are more appropriate to the specific objective (e.g. which quality schemes under SO3).
- Look for synergies of interventions to enhance achievements under each specific objective.
- To understand the level of ambition of specific objectives related to the environment, consider the allocated budget, the administrative capacity and the extent to which the CAP addresses the identified needs (based on a comprehensive SWOT).
- Consider a more horizontal assessment of unclear or overlapping objectives (e.g. nutritious and sustainable food (SO9), employment (SO8)).
- Test the concepts of interventions, especially for new interventions, with stakeholders, for example through workshops.

The methodological approach for appraising the intervention strategies

- The starting point should be a good understanding of definitions of result indicators and of the expected achievements for the needs.
- Use evidence-based approaches such as analysis of past experiences and wider relevant experience through literature, statistics, studies and evaluations.
- Use robust methods, such as multi-criteria matrices for assessing coherence and consistency or impact models for assessing the links between specific interventions and objectives.
- Assess the inclusion of LEADER specificities in the design of interventions using the theory of change approach.

Clarifying the link between interventions and results

- Carry out a sectoral and territorial analysis to assess potential links and variations in results.
- Consider the use of experimental models in specific contexts to analyse different scenarios.
- Use insights from past experiences documented in studies and the literature.
- Map all potential links between each specific objective and result indicators, including the influence of external factors and potential risks (theory of change is highly pertinent here).

Addressing data availability issues

- Take stock from the experience in the current programming period for indicators like the complementary results indicators.
- Analyse the current system of Pillar I and Pillar II, identify gaps/overlaps and develop a consolidated IT system, provided there is funding, skills and political commitment.
- Carry out a broader context analysis and if necessary, provide additional context indicators.
- Obtain historical data from FADN to help set target values.
- Access data from other sources to cover data gaps, including the use of other studies, evaluations and the literature.
- Obtain relevant input from representative stakeholders (ask the right questions to the right people).
- Cooperation between the MA and the PA for the provision of the necessary data.

Using evaluations as a way for strategic learning: A conversation with Jurgita Pugačiauskaitė-Butrimienė from the Lithuanian NRN

1. Who contracted this evaluation and what was the purpose of your NRN Evaluation?

As our NSU is located inside the Managing Authority and we do not have any formal 'borders' this evaluation was contracted by the Managing Authority's unit responsible for RDP monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of this evaluation was to learn from past activities implemented in order to better plan future activities and provide recommendations about possible developments for the Lithuanian NRN in the subsequent programming period, specifically concerning the NRN's structure, future scope of activities and tools for implementation among other things.

2. What areas of the NRN's activities were covered in this evaluation?

All the activities of the Lithuanian NRN implemented in the 2014–2020 programming period, including events, seminars, conferences, thematic working groups, LAG trainings and other activities have been covered in this evaluation. Furthermore, the management and resources of our NRN and NSU were also covered. The evaluators assessed how many types of activities have been implemented and how these activities have been received by stakeholders and if they met their needs. Furthermore, since the evaluators who conducted this evaluation also did interviews in other countries who have NRNs with similar structures the information for the Lithuanian NRN was then compared with these other countries (Latvia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia).



3. What were the working steps for the evaluation?

Evaluators first assessed various documents of the Lithuanian NRN, including the Lithuanian NRN's Action Programme for 2016–2020, the Lithuanian NRN's Action Plans (2016, 2017, 2018), mandatory implementation and financial reports which were submitted by the Lithuanian NSU to the Lithuanian PA as well as various other documents (reports, presentations, etc.) accessible in the ENRD website. The results of a previous broad encompassing evaluation from 2014 which looked at the activities from the 2007–2013 period was also reviewed and used in this evaluation. Additionally, a self-assessment conducted in 2018 by the Lithuanian NRN on strategic issues was also considered. After this, evaluators supplemented this information with a quantitative survey of the Lithuanian NRN's stakeholders conducted for the Annual Implementation Reports 2014–2019. The evaluator then used this information along with survey information from other countries to do a comparative analysis. The Lithuanian NRN was compared with other countries with similar network size and structure (Latvia, Estonia, Czech

Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia). This comparative analysis looked specifically at membership in the NRNs, NRN management practices and NRN budget allocation among other things.

4. What were some of the key findings related to Lithuania from the comparative analysis?

This comparative analysis found that the Lithuanian NSU is unique from many other NSUs in that its functions are not delegated to a subordinate body, which was more common in the other countries analysed and that it does not rely on regional specialists. Instead all functions of the NSU

are maintained within the Managing Authority in a more consolidated fashion. The analysis further found that the number of employees in the Lithuanian NSU was significantly lower as it only has 1 employee compared to the average of 5 for other countries. The analysis found that there are both advantages and disadvantages to these different types of structuring the NSU. While the Lithuanian NSU may be more efficient in some ways due to its central nature having a small number of employees could also mean that some activities are limited.

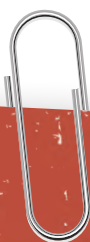
5. What were some of the key findings and recommendations?

The results of this evaluation suggest that NRN members consider events as the most efficient networking tool provided by the NRN. The evaluation suggested that the NRN could try and engage more with local communities and place more attention on supporting rural innovations. Additionally, since the Lithuanian NRN has included the specific objective of contributing to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (policy area 'Bioeconomy') in its action plan, but has only been able to implement relatively few activities related to these objectives, it has been recommended that the NRN limits its future activities to those mandatory objectives for the post-2020 period to make the most of its resources. Lastly, the evaluators have concluded that it is advisable for the Lithuanian NSU to perform a self-assessment every year in December–February in order to better support the preparation of each year's action plan.

6. Will there be any follow-up actions to this evaluation?

The main follow-up actions will be to use this evaluation for the planning of future networking activities, including new thematic working groups to improve the implementation of the Lithuanian RDP and engaging those stakeholders who were identified as being less involved. This evaluation will also be used as a vital input for preparing and programming the activities of the NRN for the next period 2021–2027. ■





Back to Basics: Key ideas for appraising your intervention strategy

The intervention strategy (intervention logic) is at the core of EU support programmes as it shows the logical link between the problem that needs to be tackled (or the objective that needs to be pursued), the underlying drivers of the problem and the available policy options (or the EU actions actually taken) to address the problem or achieve the objective.

The ex ante appraisal of the intervention strategy of the CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027 focuses first on the **relevance and coherence** of the interventions designed and grouped around specific objectives: Are they capable to address the identified needs? Are they based on the evidence from the SWOT analysis? Are they plausibly related to the CAP objectives?

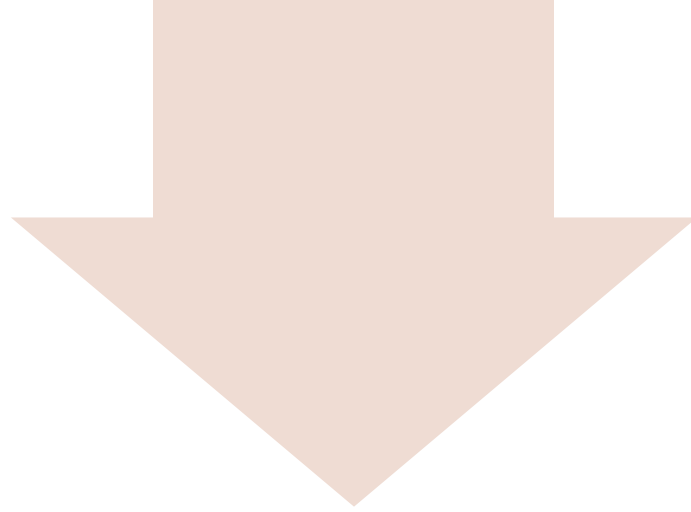
The ex ante evaluation assesses if the interventions are consistent and work in synergy (internal coherence) and looks at their relationship with other relevant policy instruments (external coherence).

The assessment of the **effectiveness and efficiency** of the intervention strategy on the other hand is usually related to the interim and ex post evaluations. However, in the ex ante stage it can already be examined whether the overall design of the interventions and the distribution of the budgetary resources are likely to generate the expected outputs, results and impacts and thus make a noticeable contribution to the achievement of the general objectives of the policy.

For this purpose, the chain of effects between the budgetary inputs for the designed interventions and their expected outputs, results and impacts is assessed. The assessment of the expected effects also helps to check if the target values and annual milestones of the result indicators have been calculated properly and realistically based on the amount of allocated inputs, planned outputs and results.

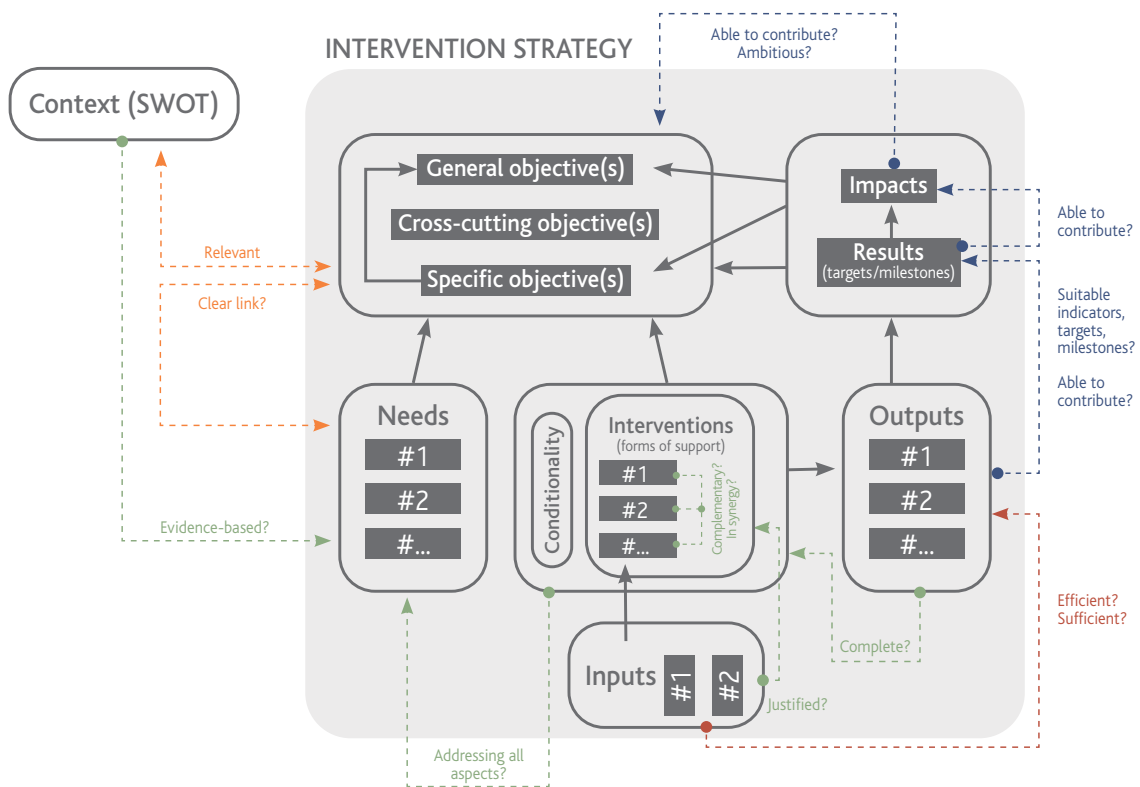
Learn more about the appraisal of the CAP Strategic Plan's intervention strategy, targets and milestones in the [Thematic Working Group 'Preparing for the ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan'](#)





Relevance

Effectiveness



Coherence

Efficiency





UPCOMING AND PAST EVENTS CALENDAR

- **IT – 15-16 October 2019 – Appraising the intervention strategies under the CAP:**
experiences and outlook: Organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk. This Good Practice Workshop provided a forum for Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, data providers and evaluators to discuss different approaches, challenges, and solutions related to appraising intervention strategies under the CAP.
[Read more >>>](#)
- **BE – 21 October 2019 – 12th Rural Networks Steering Group:**
[Read more >>>](#)
- **IT – 5-9 November 2019 – JRC Week on Composite Indicators and Scoreboards**
[Read more >>>](#)
- **BE – 3 December 2019 – 18th Group of Experts for Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP:**
[Read more >>>](#)
- **11-12 December 2019 - How to demonstrate RDP achievements and impacts: Lessons learned from the evaluations reported in the AIR 2019:** The purpose of this Good Practice Workshop is to examine the experiences from the evaluations reported in the AIR 2019 and draw lessons learned for the ex post.
[Read more >>>](#)
- **BE – 16 December 2019 – 6th Rural Networks Assembly:**
[Read more >>>](#)
- **IE – 24-26 March 2020 - International Conference for Realist Research, Evaluation, and Synthesis: Fostering Innovation in Practice:**
[Read more >>>](#)



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