

Guidance note C – Ex-ante evaluation guidelines including SEA

This guidance note presents the guidelines for an ex-ante evaluation of rural development programmes 2007 – 2013 including the requirements for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

The purpose of the guidelines are:

- To provide a synthetic operational tool to draw-up and carry out ex-ante evaluation of rural development programmes
- To give an overview of the methodological framework for ex-ante evaluation;
- To clarify the role of ex-ante evaluation for rural development programmes
- To explain the requirements for and the specific tasks of ex-ante evaluation
- To clarify the requirements concerning the Strategic Environmental Assessment

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1. Introduction

Council Regulation 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development - EAFRD provides the legal framework for the preparation and the implementation of rural development programmes in the Member States for the period 2007 – 2013. Following Art 16 and 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005, ex ante evaluation is an obligatory task in establishing a rural development programme for a geographical region concerned.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide Member States with a synthetic operational tool to draw up and carry out ex-ante evaluation of rural development programmes being a first step within the “Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework”. Ex-ante evaluation aims at improving programmes and contributing to capacity building for future monitoring and evaluation activities.

These guidelines will be part of the “Handbook of the Common and Evaluation Framework” that will provide Member States with a full set of guidance documents covering monitoring, ex ante evaluation and ongoing evaluation.

2. The Regulation on support for Rural Development

The main changes of rural development policies relevant for ex ante evaluation are:

1. A thorough simplification of policy implementation through the introduction of a single funding system, and the modification of programming, financial management and control framework for rural development programmes;
2. The definition of three core objectives for rural development measures (Article 4):
 - Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by supporting for restructuring, development and innovation;
 - Improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management;
 - Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity.

A thematic axis corresponds to each core objective, around which rural development programmes have to be built, whilst a fourth horizontal and methodological axis is dedicated to the mainstreaming of the LEADER approach.

The hierarchy of objectives inherent in Council Regulation 1698/2005 identifies the main priorities for rural development at Community level. It is schematically presented in the following chart:



The Member States have to conceive their rural development strategies in the light of this hierarchy of objectives and, based on the analysis of their own situation, they choose which measures are the most appropriate ones to implement each specific strategy. Rural development programmes will then translate the strategy into action through the implementation of these measures, which are foreseen into the four operational axes (Articles 20, 36, 52, and 63 of Council Regulation 1698/2005).

3. Methodological framework of ex ante evaluation

Ex ante evaluation supports the preparation of proposals for new or renewed community actions. Its purpose is to gather information and to carry out analyses which help to ensure that the policy objectives will be delivered successfully, that the measures used are cost-effective and that reliable evaluation will be subsequently possible¹.

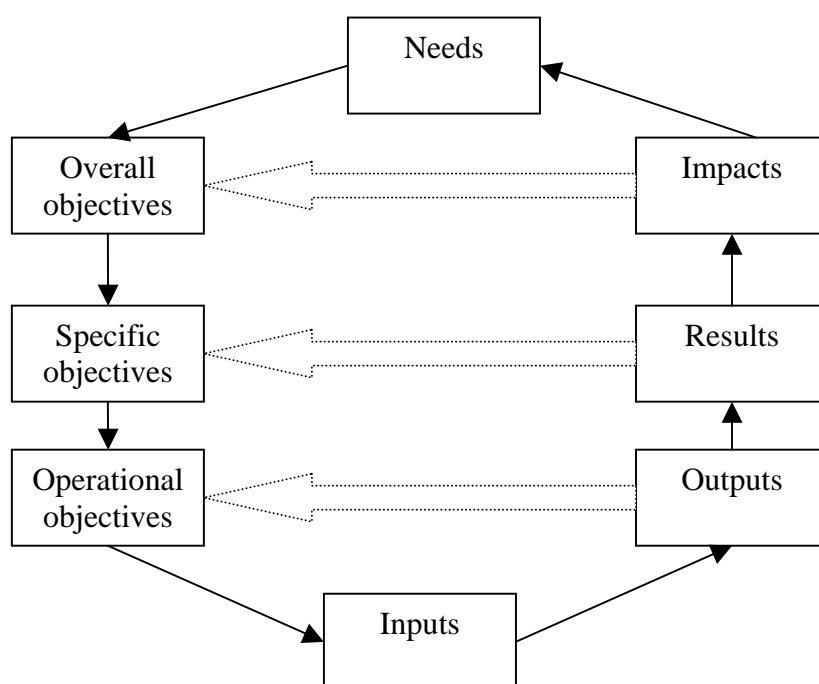
Accordingly, ex ante evaluation in the context of rural development programmes analyses in detail for each programme its underlying strategy and objectives - including baselines, quantifiable objectives and target levels. It takes place before the implementation of the programme, with a view to support programming, and has to be designed to clearly identify needs and development strategies.

¹ *Evaluating EU Activities: a practical guide for the Commission Services*, Directorate General for the Budget, July 2004, page 12.

3.1. The intervention logic

An intervention logic represents a methodological instrument which establishes the logical link between programme objectives and the envisaged operational actions. It shows the conceptual link from an intervention's input to its outputs and, subsequently, to its results and impacts. Thus the intervention logic allows an assessment of a measure's contribution to achieving its objectives.

The different elements of an intervention logic are shown in the following diagram:



Needs relate to socio-economic or environmental requirements to which the programme should respond. The inputs are financial and/or administrative resources, which will generate the outputs and will achieve the intended operational objectives (or measure objectives) through programme activities. The subsequent results are the most immediate impacts of the assistance, in other words the contribution of the operational objectives to the specific objectives.

For example, in the framework of an intervention aiming at improving a production technique in a given area, investments on equipment are examples of output, and the availability of these equipments to assisted farms would be considered as the results. The impacts derive from the results; in the same example, an intermediate impact might be a higher productivity and/or a positive impact on the environment in the area of intervention.

Overall impacts are linked to the overall objectives of the programme and, in a well designed programme, they meet the previously identified needs that led to the implementation of the programme. For the above-mentioned example, an overall impact might be a higher level of

agricultural income or the improvement of competitiveness of farms due to the availability of more efficient production systems.

3.2. Indicators

Ideally, indicators established to measure a programme's progress towards the achievement of pre-defined targets have to be specific, measurable, available/achievable in a cost effective way, relevant for the programme, and timely available.

Ex ante evaluation has to include an assessment of indicators proposed for measuring success of respective rural development programmes. Ex ante evaluation will assess the coherence between these indicators and the programme's targets and ensure that indicators are applied and filled with data in a meaningful manner in order to form a useful basis for monitoring and evaluation.

The "Rules for the Application of Council Regulation 1698/2005" define a list of **common baseline indicators** which reflect Community priorities and objectives. In addition to the common baseline indicators, **programme-specific baseline indicators** shall be defined, at programme level, in view of covering specific national or regional needs, as well as specific national or programme-related priorities.

For both the common and the programme-specific baseline indicators, two types of indicators are distinguished:

First, **context-related baseline indicators** are used to describe the general circumstances of the geographical area covered by the programme. They reflect the socio-economic situation, environmental aspects, or the agricultural structure, and are not directly addressed by the programme. They provide relevant information to assess the weaknesses and strengths of the respective region(s) and concern drivers that may have either a supportive or adverse effect on achieving a programme's objectives.

Second, **objective-related baseline indicators** are used to provide relevant information on the initial situation of the parameters that the programme intends to change. These indicators represent the baseline for the measurement of progress with respect to achieving the programme targets.

Establishing baseline indicators means to measure the situation relevant to the targeted parameters at the beginning of the programme; the change in the baseline indicators over time will thus provides a reference for the assessment of effects (impacts) of the interventions by objective. Objective-related indicators relate to pre-defined target levels, which in turn represent the expected change of the starting situation of a given baseline indicator.

In addition, the "Rules for Application of Council Regulation 1698/2005" foresee seven **common impact indicators** to assess the impact of measures with respect to explicit objectives established by the European Council and the Strategic Guidelines for rural development. The impact of both single measures and the programme as a whole should be assessed against these seven indicators reflecting the contribution in terms of growth, jobs, productivity, biodiversity, high nature value areas, water and climate change. These common impact indicators must, again, be complemented by programme-specific impact indicators.

4. The regulatory framework for ex ante evaluation

As stipulated by Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005,

Ex ante evaluation shall form part of drawing up each rural development programme and aim to optimise the allocation of budgetary resources and improve programming quality. It shall identify and appraise:

- *the medium and long term needs;*
- *the goals to be achieved;*
- *the results expected;*
- *the quantified targets particularly in terms of impact in relation to the baseline situation;*
- *the Community value-added;*
- *the extent to which the Community's priorities have been taken into account;*
- *the lessons drawn from previous programming;*
- *the quality of the procedures for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial management*

Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 states that *ex ante evaluation shall be carried out under the responsibility of the Member States*. Moreover, following Article 84(4) of the same regulation, *evaluations shall be carried out by independent evaluators*.

Ex ante evaluation will also verify to what extent the assistance of the EAFRD is consistent with the objectives of Economic and Social Cohesion and those of the Community support instrument for fisheries in particular (Article 5 of Council Regulation 1698/2005), and the extent to which the proposed implementation system could promote equality between men and women, and prevent any form of discrimination (Article 8 of Council Regulation 1698/2005).

Rural development programmes must duly reflect the strategic approach referred to under the Title II of Council Regulation 1698/2005. In this respect, ex ante evaluation will focus on the extent to which the respective rural development programmes reflect the priorities defined under:

- The “Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development Policy for the programming period from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013” (Article 9 of Council Regulation 1698/2005) setting out, at Community level, the strategic priorities for each axis of rural development programmes;
- The National Strategy Plans for Rural Development, established by Member States on the basis of the Community Strategic Guidelines, identifying national strategies and priorities to be pursued by rural development programmes (Article 11 of Council Regulation 1698/2005);

Ex ante evaluation will also consider the provisions of the Rules for application of Council Regulation 1698/2005 which provide detailed information on the implementation of rural development programmes.

As stipulated in the Rules for the application of Council Regulation 1698/2005, the environmental assessment required by Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes has to be integrated into ex-ante evaluation.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The task of ex ante evaluation is to provide an independent judgement and recommendations on technical and/or policy issues linked to the programme in view of improving and strengthening its quality.

Ex ante evaluation represents the starting point for ongoing evaluation within the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Ex ante evaluation will establish the basis for effective monitoring, mid-term and ex post evaluations, by ensuring that there are explicit, quantified objectives and appropriate indicators reflecting the strategic and operational objectives of the programme.

The interaction between programme formulation and ex-ante evaluation should permit the responsible authorities to develop each component of the programme in the light of the input progressively acquired from the ex-ante evaluation. During the different stages of the programming process, the competent authorities can decide which of the recommendations made by ex ante evaluation to take on board, and which are the changes to be introduced to the programme. This interaction may lead to revisions of programmes. For example, the evaluation of the impact of the strategy might lead to a reconsideration of the policy mix and to a revision of the programme strategy.

Considering its important function to critically review the (draft) programme in relation to strategies and objectives, it is clear that ex-ante evaluation has to be carried out by an ex-ante evaluator who is not directly involved in conceiving, implementing, managing or financing the programme. In any case, validating baselines, assessing target levels, benchmarks and programme-specific indicators are demanding tasks that require expertise in evaluation methodologies. In carrying out these tasks, the experience of professional evaluators will be particularly helpful for programme authorities. Implementing environmental assessment equally requires specific expertise that needs to be covered by independent evaluators.

6. Specific tasks of ex ante evaluation

6.1. Assessment of the programme-related SWOT analysis

The analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis) of the geographical area covered by the programme precedes ex-ante evaluation. It represents the first step to define the strategy of the programme, and aims to bring out the needs of the rural areas concerned. The SWOT analysis refers to the main structural components of rural areas, and has to lead to an appropriate and coherent ranking of disparities that need to be addressed.

The SWOT analysis and the definition of the programme strategy are based on the use of quantified data and appropriate **baseline indicators**.

Ex-ante evaluation has to assess the results of the programme-related SWOT analysis. In this respect Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 requires to:

- *identify and appraise the medium and long term needs.*

In carrying out this task, ex ante evaluation has to:

- assess the completeness of the SWOT analysis;
- analyse causes of disparities identified;
- identify and assess the driving forces towards sustainable rural development;
- contribute to the quantification of context and objective related baseline indicators (common and programme-related) by verifying and, where appropriate, suggesting modifications of the proposed indicators and figures;
- assess and, where appropriate, suggest revisions of the ranking of disparities and priorities assigned to identified needs and their translation into objectives and concrete priorities for action.

6.2. The assessment of programme targets

With respect to ensuring consistency of the proposed programme targets with the strategic orientations of programmes and National Strategy Plans, Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 requires to:

- *identify and appraise the goals to be achieved;*
- *identify and appraise the results expected;*
- *identify and appraise the lessons drawn from previous programming;*
- *identify and appraise the Community value-added;*
- *identify and appraise the extent to which the Community's priorities have been taken into account.*

In view of fulfilling these tasks, ex ante evaluation has to:

- assess the programme related targets as derived from needs and the relevance of the programme objectives (“the goals to be achieved”) to those needs;
- identify and examine the intervention logic of measures, from output to result and to impact, and to assess the extent to which the expected results of measures contribute to achieving the targets identified and to the overall objectives both at community and national level;
- assess the internal coherence of programmes by verifying the balance between the operational objectives of the different measures, with a view to verify the existence of mutually reinforcing interactions and the absence of possible conflicts and contradictions between them;

- take into consideration, where applicable, the lessons learnt from the past programming period, in particular concerning best practices, key incidents affecting policy implementation, the effectiveness and cost–efficiency of measures, and possible measure-specific problems, as identified in evaluation reports or other sources of information.
- assess the extent to which the expected objectives can be realistically achieved with the financial resources allocated to the different measures within each axis;
- assess the extent to which rural development programmes contribute to achieving Community priorities and priorities for intervention defined under the National Strategy Plan, in particular with respect to growth, jobs and sustainability²;
- assess the consistency of rural development programmes with the objectives of Economic and Social Cohesion, and those of the Community support instrument for fisheries;
- analyse the effects of programmes on the environment by applying Strategic Environmental Assessment in line with Directive 2001/42/EC (see Annex II).

6.3. The assessment of expected impacts

On the basis of the information contained into the draft programme documents, Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 requires to:

- *identify and appraise the quantified targets particularly in terms of impact in relation to the baseline situation*

In view of fulfilling this task, ex ante evaluation has to:

- assess whether targets are quantified in a meaningful and verifiable manner, allowing subsequent programme monitoring and evaluation, in particular with respect to the utility and sustainability of the programme;
- assess the correct application of common baseline indicators and the usefulness of programme-specific baseline indicators as well as programme-specific impact indicators reflecting the specific objectives and circumstances of a programme concerned;
- assess expected impacts of measures against baselines; in this respect ex-ante evaluation should pay particular attention to the verifiability of the impacts of the measures concerned.
- verify the functioning of data collection mechanisms in view of ensuring a regular follow up on the trends during different phases of programme reflected in the indicators applied.

² Outcomes of ex ante evaluations as well as related recommendations by ex ante evaluators may lead to revisions of National Strategy Plans.

6.4. The assessment of proposed implementation procedures, including monitoring, evaluation and financial management

With respect to assessing the practical implementation of rural development measures, the monitoring and evaluation system, and the mechanism ensuring a proper financial management of rural development programmes, Article 85 of Council Regulation 1698/2005 requires to:

- *identify and appraise the quality of the procedures for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial management.*

In view of fulfilling this task, ex ante evaluation has to:

- assess the implementing provisions for managing, monitoring, and evaluating the programme with a focus on ensuring a sound and efficient management. This will include an appraisal of risk resulting from possible bottlenecks which might impede implementation of the programme and recommendations for preventive actions;
- ensure, with respect to evaluation, that targets and related indicators are applied in a meaningful manner to form an appropriate basis for monitoring and evaluation of performance;
- analyse difficulties in implementation and critical incidents, in the light of experience gained during the previous programming periods.
- Assess the quality and the extent of partnership arrangements, including the promotion of equality between men and women.

7. Reporting

An indicative outline of an ex-ante evaluation report is given in the following page. This ex-ante evaluation report shall be annexed to the Rural Development Programming Document that will be submitted to the Commission.

Annex 1: Indicative Outline of an Ex-ante Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

- Purpose of the ex-ante evaluation report
- Structure of the ex-ante evaluation report
- Main sources of evidence and information
- Reference to evaluations, audits, studies, or reports of similar interventions

2. What problem is the draft programme expected to tackle?

Based on a critical appreciation of the SWOT analysis, identification and description of:

- Problems, risks and needs in a respective programme area in terms of social, economic and environmental criteria
- Driving forces, strength and opportunities in a programme area concerned
- Causes of disparities identified
- Identification of target groups of intervention and their needs
- Problems not addressed by the implementation of the programme

4. What are the objectives that the draft programme is expected to achieve?

- Overall policy objective in terms of expected impacts
- General, specific and operational objectives and expected results
- Baseline and impact indicators are proposed for measurement
- Coherency between programme objectives and National Strategy Plan
- Baseline and impact indicators proposed for measuring the draft programmes success and assessment of their application

5. What are the measures proposed?

- Lessons learned and evidence taken into account in designing the draft programme
- Baseline (needs and objectives) for the interventions envisaged
- Measures applied to in view of achieving the programme's objectives
- Intervention logic of each measure applied
- Balance among the measure applied in view of objectives pursued

6. What positive and negative impacts are expected from the measures to be applied?

- Expected impacts of the measures to be applied (social, economic and environmental)
- Impacts expected to over time
- Potential conflicts between different impacts
- Stakeholders who are (positively or negatively) affected by the programme

7. Added value of Community involvement

- Subsidiarity and proportionality taken into account in the proposal
- Reference of the draft programme to Community objectives
- Complementarity and synergies of draft programme with other interventions
- Degree of additional (“marginal”) effects that can be attributed to the draft programme

8. Helping to achieve cost-effectiveness

- Assumptions on which the expenditures of the draft programme is based on
- Financial and human resource costs of the draft programme
- Assessment whether expected results can be achieved at lower cost

9. Monitoring and evaluation

- Implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system
- Indicators to be used for measuring inputs, outputs, results and impacts
- System in place for collecting, storing and processing monitoring data

10. The Environmental Report³

³ Annex 2 of these guidelines provides information on how to carry out the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Annex 2: Ex ante Evaluation and Strategic Environmental Assessment

1. Context

Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the so called “Strategic Environmental Assessment” – SEA – Directive) has the objective (Article 1) *“to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes [...] by ensuring that [...] an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment”*.

Whilst programmes co-financed under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (based on Regulation (EC) 1257/1999) were exempted from the application of the SEA Directive, this exemption will not apply to the future Rural Development (RD) programmes which will be funded under the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development from the year 2007 (based on Regulation (EC) 1698/2005).

In the interest of underpinning the integration of the environment into RD programmes and in view of avoiding a duplication of work, the environmental assessment required by the SEA Directive shall be integrated directly into ex-ante evaluations of RD programmes. In this respect, Article 11(2) of the SEA Directive specifies that: *for plans and programmes for which the obligation to carry out assessments of the effects on the environment arises simultaneously from this Directive and other Community legislation, Member States may provide for coordinated or joint procedures fulfilling the requirements of the relevant Community legislation in order, inter alia, to avoid duplication of assessment*.

2 The Requirements of the SEA Directive

The legal obligation to carry out an environmental assessment is applied to the RD programmes mainly by Article 3(2.a) of the SEA Directive, which states that an environmental assessment shall be carried out for all plans and programmes⁴ which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries (and certain other sectors) and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the EIA Directive⁵.

In addition, article 3(2.b) requires an environmental assessment to be undertaken for plans and programmes requiring an assessment under Art. 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive⁶, while article 3(4) brings within the scope of the Directive plans and programmes which set the framework for future development consent of projects not listed in the EIA Directive or in the sectors mentioned in Article 3(2.a) and which are likely to have significant environmental effects.

⁴ Including those co-financed by the European Community.

⁵ In the case of RD programmes, Annexes II of the Directive 85/337/EEC (the “Environmental Impact Assessment” (EIA) Directive) makes reference to “agricultural projects”. In this respect it should be noted that Member States may ask to single projects’ developers to undertake specific EIAs at the level of single projects

⁶ Directive 92/43/EEC.

The strategic environmental assessment required by the SEA Directive has to take the form of an environmental report focusing, among other things, on the expected likely significant effects on the environment of RD programmes. The information to be provided under the report in this respect is detailed in Annex I of the SEA Directive.

The SEA Directive also requires consultation of relevant authorities in Member States having environmental responsibilities as well as the public (including relevant NGOs) likely to be affected by, or with a particular interest in, the environmental effects of implementing the programme. Where relevant, transboundary consultations have also to be ensured.

The consultations must provide an early opportunity to express opinions on the draft programme and the environmental report.

Finally, monitoring arrangements need to ensure a follow up of significant effects of the implementation of the programme.

Programme Authorities are fully responsible for the quality of the environmental report, including the carrying out of consultations, the taking into account of the environmental report and of the results of the consultations in decision making, and the provision of information on the decision.

3. Integrating the SEA Directive requirements into the ex ante evaluation

Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the EAFRD foresees for the new programming period 2007-2013 a comprehensive environmental assessment to be undertaken by Member States in the context of the ex-ante evaluation for each RD Programme.

As part of the development of the programme strategy, Member States are required to assess the current situation of the geographical area that may be affected by the programme, using quantified data, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, disparities, needs and gaps and potential for rural development on the basis of relevant baseline indicators. In the case of environment and land management the draft implementing rules foresee the following requirements:

“Environment and land management: the handicaps facing farms in areas at risk of abandonment and marginalisation; overall description of biodiversity with focus on that linked to agriculture and forestry, including high nature value farming and forestry systems, the situation with respect to the implementation of the Natura 2000 directives in farm/forestland; water quality and quantity descriptions, the role of agriculture in water use/pollution and implementation of the Nitrates and the Water Framework directives; air pollution and climate change and their link to agriculture: GHG and ammonia emissions and link to different action plans/initiatives taken by the Member State/region to contribute in achieving international targets including the Code of Good Practice to reduce ammonia emissions (Convention on Long Range Transboundary Pollution); bioenergy use; soil quality descriptions (water and wind erosion, organic matter, contamination) and protection, pesticide use, organic farming and animal welfare; extent of protective and protected forest areas, forest areas under high/medium fire risk, annual average change in forest coverage. The above descriptions should be supported by quantified data.”

The priority environmental themes relating to which Member States are expected to draw up appropriate rural development measures are set by the “Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development (Programming Period 2007 – 2013)” which define three EU level priority areas, namely: biodiversity and preservation of high nature value farming and forestry systems, water, and climate change. In view of the requirements of the strategic environmental assessment, Member States also need to take account of any other environmental issue of rural development programmes which may affect the environment.⁷

Thus, three of the key tasks of the ex-ante assessment are to:

- (1) Assess the robustness of the analysis of the baseline situation, identification of needs and definition of strategy. (Corresponding to (a)-(e) of Annex I of the SEA directive).
- (2) analyse the anticipated environmental effects of rural development programmes, in respect to the priority areas outlined above, but also in respect of other relevant environmental issues (corresponding to (f)-(h) of Annex I of the SEA directive).
- (3) As for a broad range of measures (e.g. investment aid, compensatory allowances in Less Favoured Areas, agri-environment measures), compliance with mandatory standards is explicitly required, the environmental assessment needs to identify also conformity or conflicts of measures with respect to these environmental standards (corresponding to (f)-(h) of Annex I of the SEA directive).

The “Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework” (CMEF) sets out the provisions for relevant baseline environmental indicators to be established for the measurement and assessment of progress over time within these priority areas (consistent with (i) of Annex I of the SEA directive):

- For the baseline analysis, an extensive list of context and impact related indicators have been established.
- For the assessment of the environmental effects of the programmes, four compulsory common environmental indicators have to be established at programme level, specifically targeted to the assessment of the impact of RD programmes on biodiversity, high nature value areas, water quality, and climate change. In addition, Member States shall choose additional indicators from a pre-established list or add additional programme-related indicators they deem necessary to cover the environmental effects of specific measures.
- Beyond their use for a strategic environmental assessment within the context of ex-ante evaluations, these indicators will allow, during the whole programme life cycle, a continuous monitoring of the environmental situation in the programme area.

4. What needs to be done

To meet fully the requirements of the SEA Directive and the related requirements arising from the EAFRD Regulation, programming authorities will have to ensure the following:

⁷ Criteria for determining the likely significance of the effects of the programme on the environment are detailed under Annex II of the SEA Directive.

- The environmental assessment of RD programmes will be carried out at programme level, and therefore will target the geographical area covered by the programme. The required environmental report will be integrated into a specific chapter of the ex ante evaluation report.
- Ex-ante evaluation will be carried out by independent evaluators. In the framework of the public procurement process for the selection of the independent evaluators, Member States have to take into account the necessary requirements in terms of expertise in the environmental field. The latter have to be duly detailed under the ex ante evaluation terms of reference.
- Consultations of “authorities with environmental responsibilities”, “the public affected or likely to be affected by, or having an interest in, the decision-making”, as well as transboundary consultations will be managed by the programme authorities. Ex-ante evaluators will be involved in the consultation process on request from the competent programme authority.
- Ex-ante evaluators will assess the anticipated environmental effects of rural development programmes, in particular but not exclusively with respect to the three priority areas identified by the “Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development (Programming Period 2007 – 2013)”.
- In line with the requirement to respect mandatory environmental standards, ex-ante evaluators need to assess how Member States have ensured the conformity of programmes with respect to these standards (or avoided conflicts with them).
- The ex-ante evaluators will also assess to what extent the environmental regulatory framework in force (including cross compliance, minimum environmental standards etc.) is likely to mitigate any negative effect on the environment of implementing the programme.
- The ex-ante evaluators will support the identification of, and will assess, environment-related indicators as well as the system put in place for assessing the environmental effects of rural development programmes and propose amendments, where appropriate.
- Environmental assessments within the context of ex-ante evaluations must, in compliance with Annex I of the SEA Directive, include the information required thereof and listed in the box annexed to this guidance document.

Annex I of Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive)

- (a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;
- (b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;
- (c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;
- (d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;
- (e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;
- (f) the likely significant effects⁸ on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;
- (g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;
- (h) an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;
- (i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10;
- (j) a non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.

⁸ These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects