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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION**

of the 2007-2013 rural development programmes – synthesis

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Context

This evaluation provides a synthesis of the findings of the *ex post* evaluations of the rural development programmes carried out in 26 Member States¹ as part of their implementation of the 2007-2013 rural development policy.

1. Effectiveness

Although it was difficult to establish the extent to which positive changes in the various programme areas were due to the measures introduced, the evaluation found that the 2007-2013 rural development programmes were generally successful in improving the **competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector** (rural development objective 1). Investments aiming to improve productivity, efficiency and sustainability were key. Generational-renewal measures targeted the maintenance rather than the creation of farming jobs, particularly in marginal areas.

On the **environment and countryside** (objective 2), Member States/regions reported benefits from the rural development policy, suggesting that although natural resources deteriorated over the programming period, the deterioration would have been worse and land abandonment would have been higher without the common agricultural policy (CAP). The measures had a positive impact, mainly in terms of protecting natural resources and landscape. However, the positive impact in terms of climate change mitigation was a side effect of - rather than a result of - clear targeting.

The programmes improved **quality of life in rural areas and encouraged the diversification of the rural economy** (objective 3) only marginally. Nevertheless, a recent JRC study and most *ex post* evaluation reports found that the CAP contributed to creating new jobs both in the primary sector and in the entire economy, particularly food and tourism.

On **building local capacity for employment and diversification** (objective 4), local action groups² contributed to the objectives under the local development strategies and the rural development programmes only to a limited extent. However, the rural development programmes contributed moderately to building local capacities for employment and diversification through LEADER.

2. Efficiency

It was difficult to provide an overall judgement on the costs versus the benefits of EU-level action. This was mainly due to a lack of robust evidence, as the rural development programmes did not set sufficiently specific objectives and targets, or sufficiently reliable indicators. Member

¹ Croatia did not have an EAFRD financed rural development programme in 2007-2013. Bulgaria did not provide an evaluation during the preparation of the study.

² A Local Action Group (LAG) is a nonprofit, public and private organisation from rural villages having a broad representation from different socio-economic sectors. They deliver support to their respective rural areas especially through the implementation of small-scale projects.

States' evaluations highlighted several factors that limited the programmes' efficiency, namely: (i) shortcomings in the steering structure of the regulatory framework, including the changes resulting from the 'health check' reform, which led to higher costs due to increasing demands for documentation, data and reporting; and (ii) a higher level of controls. Other limitations stemmed from the design of the programmes and measures, as well as insufficient expenditure on some measures.

3. Coherence

Based on the limited evidence available, the coherence of the programmes with the four rural development priorities was judged as small or moderate in most *ex post* evaluation reports. Overall, the programmes did not aim for synergies between the various EU instruments but rather for clear demarcation, coordination mechanisms and avoidance of overlaps between the different funds. Only a few Member States opted for a more strategic and coordinated use of EU funds.

4. Relevance

Overall, the rural development programmes have moderately addressed the needs in the various programme areas. They were moderately relevant for the social needs, namely for basic services and physical infrastructures. They were the least relevant for demographic change. On the economic needs, the programmes were moderately relevant for value chains, added value and integration between sectors. Finally, on environmental needs, the programmes were moderately relevant for natural resources, sustainable practices and biodiversity, ecological structures and habitats.

5. EU added value

Although the question of EU added value was not sufficiently addressed in the *ex post* evaluation reports, based on the overall judgements on the other evaluation criteria, the evaluation concluded that EAFRD funding ensured EU added value to a moderate and variable extent.