European Commission

Mapping and Analysis of CAP Strategic Plans

Assessment of joint efforts for 2023-2027

Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken between July 2022 and June 2023. It maps the choices made by Member States in the approved CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) in relation to the nine specific objectives (SOs) and the cross-cutting objective for the 2023-2027 programming period. It also provides an analysis of the joint efforts made by Member States in relation to these objectives, with specific attention to selected Green Deal targets, by assessing the potential impact of the choices made in the CSPs.

The CSPs have been examined based on the needs identified in the Strategic Plans and the links established by Member States between needs and the interventions designed to address them. The links established in the CSPs between interventions and SOs is a fundamental part of the mapping. The financial allocation, planned outputs and targets set for the funded actions constitute important building blocks for the mapping and analysis, complemented by a qualitative assessment of the design of interventions. In the CSPs, most interventions were designed to address several needs and SOs, and to contribute to several targets simultaneously. As such, describing and analysing the choices and their potential impacts is a complex task. Within the common framework, Member States took different approaches in their CSPs. Different elements of the CSPs are interrelated and there are direct and indirect causal relationships between the various CSP elements and the CAP specific objectives.

At this stage, the potential contribution and joint effort can be established. The actual impacts, and hence the performance of the policy, can only be assessed through evaluation once the Member States report on their implementation.

NEEDS IDENTIFIED AND FINANCIAL ALLOCATIONS

Member States identified over 1,600 needs related to the specific objectives and the cross-cutting objective in the agriculture sector and rural areas. These needs were identified and prioritised, serving as the basis for developing the CSPs. Member States also had to define whether the identified needs were addressed fully, partially, or not at all within the CSPs. This gave Member States substantial flexibility to address needs through other policy tools outside the CAP, reflecting Member States choices regarding tools considered a better fit for the purpose given competing priorities and limited funds. All interventions designed in the CSPs address at least one of the identified needs. Needs related to economic objectives are generally aligned across CSPs and received high prioritisation. Environmental and climate needs had varying degrees of prioritisation across Member States. The needs related to General Objective 3, which strengthens the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, varied more due to varying situations among Member States.

About 2,500 interventions have been designed in the 28 CSPs, supported by EUR 307 billion for the 2023-2027 period. Member States could choose from 14 different types of interventions under Direct Payments, Sectoral support, and Rural Development to address their identified needs. The allocation of EU funds is agreed on in the Multiannual Financial Framework. Thus, an important part of the financial allocation was pre-defined. For the 2023-2027 period, the CAP is supported by EUR 264 billion from the EU budget, and an additional EUR 43 billion from national funds. Including national co-financing, 62% of the total CSP planned expenditure is allocated to Direct Payment interventions, 35% to Rural Development interventions, and 3% to Sectoral support. In the CSPs, Member States provided descriptions and links of each intervention to the specific objectives they aim to target. Rural Development interventions allowed for greater flexibility in design compared to Direct Payment interventions. Most interventions contribute to multiple objectives, highlighting their multifunctionality and the complex challenges they aim to address.

The highest share of the CAP budget has been allocated to the interventions linked to the specific objectives on income support and on environment and climate. The interventions linked to the objective of income support (SO1) were allocated the equivalent of 60% of total CAP budget, of which more than a third simultaneously contribute towards objectives other than SO1. Environmental and climate objectives (SO4, 5, and 6) were allocated 27% each of the CAP budget: most of the interventions were linked to two or all three of the environmental and climate objectives, as the supported farm practices may equally contribute at the same time to several of these objectives. The financial allocation to interventions linked to SO8, which is directly associated with rural development, is about 10% of the total CAP budget. Conditionality (for environment, climate, health and animal welfare, as well as social conditionality) applies to 90% of the Utilised Agricultural Area in the EU on which farmers must respect relevant requirements and standards in order to receive full payments from the CAP. This, however, is not captured by the financial allocation linked to the different objectives. While conditionality is part of the baseline of the green architecture of the CAP Strategic plans, the respect of the conditionality requirements may not be supported through financial allocations.

THE JOINT EFFORT MADE BY MEMBER STATES IN RELATION TO THE CAP GENERAL OBJECTIVE 1

Supporting farmers' income continues to be a priority for Member States. While there has been some improvement in overall agricultural income in recent years, the income gap between agriculture and other economic sectors remains significant in most Member States. On average, agricultural income between 2015 and 2020 was only 45% of the average wage in the economy, with variations between different agricultural sectors and farming systems. Although market earnings constitute the primary source of farm income, support from the CAP still plays a significant role in many sectors and Member States, accounting for an average of 23% of agricultural income in 2020. However, the financial allocations for income support are decreasing compared to the previous programming period in real terms due to the overall reduction of the CAP budget. While the CAP represented 37.8% of the EU budget between 2014 and 2020, it now accounts for 31% between 2021 and 2027. Nevertheless, structural changes in the agricultural sector, such as farm consolidation, mean that the actual support per farm may not decrease to the same extent as the overall budget, as the number of farms decreases as well. Alongside the reduction in CAP allocations, new requirements have been introduced for farmers to receive income support, both through enhanced conditionality and through Eco-schemes, potentially leading to higher costs for farmers. This means that farmers must make additional efforts for environmental or climate purposes to qualify for support. While Member States' choices in their CSPs demonstrate an intention to contribute to overall farm income levels, the CAP reform and the Multiannual Financial Framework imply that there is less budget available for farmer support, and this support comes with more stringent requirements,.

Another feature of the latest CAP reform, underpinned by the choices made by Member States, is the emphasis on more targeted income support for farmers, areas, sectors, or farm practices more in need. Targeting of income support is enhanced through various means, including the BISS (via its territorialisation or application of capping or degressivity), the introduction of Eco-schemes, Complementary Redistributive Income Support for Sustainability (CRISS), and Complementary Income Support for Young Farmers (CIS-YF). Member States allocate a fixed share of their overall allocations to these purposes. Moreover, the choices made in the CSPs indicate an additional level of targeting support, such as introducing eligibility criteria under Coupled Income Support (CIS), expanding sectoral support beyond the Fruit and Vegetable sector, and implementing safeguards to benefit small- and medium-sized farms for several types of interventions. These measures aim at ensuring that support benefits primarily those in need while avoiding disproportionate costs for certain farms. In addition to general income support, by providing additional support to farms in need, a contribution is made towards the objective to maintain agricultural activity where production might otherwise decrease or disappear, for example through the support to areas with natural and specific constraints. Together with risk management support, this can contribute to the overall resilience of the farming sector and the more effective use of public funds by serving policy objectives beyond income support. However, the actual impact of these measures on improving farmers' income and reducing income volatility requires further investigation.

Productivity growth and the adoption of innovative practices and technologies are also prioritised in the CSPs. Agricultural productivity growth in the EU has been slowing in recent years. The reformed CAP offers several options for Member States to strengthen productivity. Close to 400 000 farms are expected to benefit from productive investments, mainly on-farm investments, during the programming period. This represents an increase compared to farmers supported for this purpose in 2021.

The CSPs provide support for strengthened cooperation and coordination among farmers, which can enhance their bargaining power and competitiveness. The CSPs support cooperation between farmers through Rural Development programmes that provide assistance for setting-up producer groups (PGs), producer organisations (POs) and other forms of collaboration, including support for participating in EU and national recognised quality schemes. Member States allocate between 2% to 6% of their total planned expenditure under the CAP to cooperation support, with only a few Member States allocating more than 20% of their cooperation support to the purpose of setting up PGs and POs. Sectoral support is available for established POs in the Fruit and Vegetable sector as well as additional sectors introduced through the reform of the CAP. Around 8% of all farms in the EU, approximately 760 000, will receive CAP support for participating in PGs, POs, local markets, short supply chain circuits, and quality schemes. This represents an increase compared to the previous programming period in most Member States. However, some Member States identified to have higher needs in this regard did not programme support for POs and PGs. Incentives for premium-priced products, such as organic farming and products pertaining to quality schemes, are also included in the CSPs to strengthen farmers' position in the value chain. Organic farming will be supported by all CSPs and quality production through most CSPs.

THE JOINT EFFORT MADE BY MEMBER STATES IN RELATION TO THE CAP GENERAL OBJECTIVE 2, WITH SPECIFIC ATTENTION TO THE CONTRIBUTION TO SELECTED GREEN DEAL TARGETS FOR 2030

The reformed CAP contributes to a higher degree of environmental and climate commitments from the agricultural sector, through enhanced conditionality and requirements to ring-fence funding. All farmers that benefit from area- and animal-based support through the CAP need to respect the enhanced conditionality to receive full CAP support. With the latest reform, enhanced conditionality integrated previous greening requirements raising the environmental and climate baseline that farmers need to respect to benefit from CAP support. This, along with the ring-fencing of funding under Eco-schemes (the voluntary green tool under Direct Payments) and under Rural Development interventions, contribute to an increased focus on environmental and climate objectives. Rural Development interventions such as agri-environment-climate commitments, organic farming, support for sustainable forestry, support for green investments, and Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive (WFD) payments continue to be supported.

The largest financial contribution to advancing towards the environmental and climate objectives comes from Eco-schemes, allocated EUR 44.7 billion or 24% of the total Direct Payment envelope. Agri-environmental-climate and other commitments under Rural Development (Article 70), are allocated EUR 33.2 billion (EU and national co-financing), equivalent to 30% of the total public expenditure allocated to Rural Development. In comparison to the previous greening requirements, the flexibility granted to Member States in designing Eco-schemes allows them to target specific needs in their national contexts. Approaches towards designing Eco-schemes and agri-environmental-climate and other commitments differ across Member States. Some focus on engaging many farmers in a small and incremental, but widespread, change in farm practices, whereas others choose to emphasise more targeted interventions.

Investment support interventions, along with other Rural Development interventions and Sectoral support, also have the potential to contribute to environmental objectives. Over 40% of total public expenditure planned for Rural Development interventions are allocated to green productive and non-productive investments in one-third of the CSPs. Investment interventions have broad designs, supporting various types of green investments. The range of supported farm practices is not always made explicit in the design descriptions of the interventions in the CSPs, making it difficult to assess their potential contribution towards the various objectives based solely on their design. The support for training, knowledge exchange as well as support for innovation in operational groups play an important role in the successful implementation of environmental and climate interventions. Support for areas with natural and specific constraints can also contribute to preserving farmland biodiversity in particular on mountain pastures.

The CSPs contain positive elements in terms of contributing to climate change mitigation, but the overall impact from Member States' choices in the CSPs remains uncertain. Positive contributions from the CSPs are expected particularly in relation to carbon sequestration where, in addition to the contributions from the enhancement of GAECs, the definitions of permanent grassland and eligible hectare include trees and shrubs and other landscape features. Several farm practices beneficial for carbon sequestration are supported, which may contribute to an overall increase of carbon storage. Farm practices that serve the purpose of GHG reduction are included to a lesser extent. Supported through Eco-schemes and ENVCLIM, they primarily include improved livestock feeding strategies and the introduction of livestock limits at farm level while some CSPs indicate that the related needs are covered partially outside the CSPs. In addition, interventions addressing nutrient management will also contribute to emission reduction. Operations prioritised to obtain investment support often include those aimed at improving manure storage and management. Member States have therefore demonstrated intentions to contribute to climate change mitigation. However, considering the magnitude of the challenge as reflected by the identified needs, the contributions from the CSPs may fall short. Further research will be needed to evaluate the actual contributions of the CSPs to climate change mitigation once the implementation of the CSPs has reached a more advanced phase.

About 70% of the financial allocation to CIS support, representing 7% of the total CAP planned expenditure, is allocated to the maintenance of ruminant livestock production and about 15% to the production of protein/leguminous crops. While some of the Member States with environmental hotspots have introduced safeguards for the CIS allocation through livestock density limitations, and while the payment of CIS does not *per se* lead to an increase of GHG emissions, the overall extent to which the climate implications of CIS support to livestock are considered is not clearly outlined in the CSPs. Close scrutiny of the uptake and close interrelations between CIS to ruminants, to N-fixing crops and to other interventions is important.

The CSPs partially address the promotion of renewable energy production, bioeconomy development, and sustainable forestry. While Member States recognise the need for increasing renewable energy production and supporting sustainable forestry, specific actions designed in the CSPs only partially address these needs. Member States often also support these practices through other EU or national initiatives outside the CSPs.

Strategies for adaptation to climate change are acknowledged in the CSPs. Several interventions contribute to improving climate resilience and adaptation, such as support for soil management, landscape features, biodiversity, and innovation. However, the level of detail and explicit consideration of their contribution to this issue is lacking and clear strategic and long-term approaches for climate resilience and adaptation are not clearly outlined.

The CSPs reflect the joint efforts of Member States to address issues related to the use of natural resources. Besides conditionality, support from the WFD payments, Eco-schemes and agri-environmental-climate commitments is directed toward farm practices beneficial for, in particular, water quality and soil management, improved fertiliser and pesticide management, and agronomic measures. Voluntary schemes contribute to air quality improvements through measures like inorganic fertiliser application, manure storage, and feed strategies. Investment support interventions also target air pollution reduction, improved soil management practices, and better pesticide management. Water management interventions, including irrigation efficiency and infrastructure, are supported, although increased areas under irrigation may put pressure on water resources even if safeguards are in place.

Enhanced conditionality and voluntary interventions will likely contribute to the Green Deal ambition to reduce the use and loss of fertilisers and the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 2030. The strengthening of conditionality in comparison to the previous programming period has resulted in an overall baseline increase to address mainly soil and biodiversity preservation, nutrient pollution reduction and sustainable pesticide use. Voluntary schemes focus on improved fertiliser practices, the use of legumes and nitrogen fixing crops, and the implementation of Integrated Pest Management practices. However, the concept of Integrated Pest Management is frequently not supported holistically and in an explicit manner in the CSPs, which may hinder the effectiveness of the implementation. Several CSPs emphasise that efforts to advance towards the Green Deal ambitions extend beyond the CAP and involve elements outside the CSPs.

The CSPs demonstrate increased ambitions to support organic farming, in line with the Green Deal target to have 25% of the EU agricultural area under organic farming by 2030. Member States have designed interventions to convert conventional farming and maintain existing organic farming, with increased financial allocations and area supported from the CAP compared to the previous programming period.

Efforts to contribute towards protection of biodiversity and preservation of habitats and landscapes are reflected in the CSPs. Overall, the combination of the enhanced requirements for GAEC 8, covering landscape elements and non-productive features, together with the choices made on voluntary interventions in the CSPs seem to indicate that there will be an increased contribution from the CAP towards the biodiversity objectives in the 2023-2027 period. There are also indications that the CSPs make valuable contributions towards the target of at least 10% of high diversity landscape features on agricultural land by 2030 as defined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy. However, in some cases, considering the urgency and scale of nature restoration needed on the EU's more intensive farmland areas, as identified from the needs, the financial allocation and the targets set appear limited. The CSPs' actual contributions to biodiversity will require further research to assess the impact of Member state choices once the implementation of the CSPs is in a more advanced phase.

The joint effort made by Member States in relation to CAP General Objective 3

Member States' choices demonstrate a continued effort to contribute to increasing the number of young and new farmers in the coming years. The need for generational renewal is high, given that a significant share of farm managers are 65 years or older. Member States plan to help approximately 368 000 young farmers establish agricultural production over the 2023-2027 period. Many also offer higher support for investments made by young farmers. The financial allocations to young farmers in the CSPs often go beyond the legal requirements, demonstrating the intentions of Member States to contribute towards the objective of generational renewal. Some Member States have introduced support for the setting-up of new farmers who do not meet the age requirement for young farmers. However, the level of effort in addressing generational renewal varies among Member States, with some showing greater commitment than others. The CSPs only partially demonstrate the availability of national initiatives to complement the efforts made for generational renewal through the CAP.

Despite positive signs, the overall impact of the choices of Member States in their CSPs on rural development remains uncertain. The highest number of needs identified across the CSPs are linked to the socio-economic fabric of rural areas. Yet, the choice of interventions and financial allocations for the interventions designed to address the socio-economic needs of rural areas do not correspond to this. Due to the availability of other tools to address these needs at both national and EU level, it is plausible that Member States have instead prioritised other objectives to a greater extent within the CAP.

The design of the CSPs suggests that Member States continue to rely on LEADER as the main intervention to strengthen rural areas. LEADER interventions implemented through Local Development Strategies (LDS) have the potential to address several needs of rural areas, including employment, social inclusion, economic growth, rural services, environmental care, climate change, innovation, and competitiveness. There is an overall decrease in the financial allocation for LEADER compared to the previous period in both absolute and relative terms. At the same time, most Member States have set higher ambitions for the coverage of the rural population benefiting from the strategies under LEADER, and so achieving more with less funding poses a challenge. The effective implementation of local development strategies remains to be seen as the selection of LDS is scheduled for 2023, and the approved CSPs only provide an indication of the plans. The design and result indicators of LEADER interventions will be updated following the selection of LDS.

One of the main factors for measuring the contribution of the CAP towards rural development is its contribution to employment. At this point in time, the extent to which the CSPs will contribute to employment in rural areas cannot be established. Off-farm productive investments and support for installation of young farmers and new farmers feature as the most prominent interventions to contribute to the employment and business creation targets. However, LEADER interventions are most frequently identified in the CSPs with a potential to contribute to the employment target, including business creation and bioeconomy related businesses. Yet, as discussed, the contribution from the LDS to the employment target cannot be identified in the CSPs at the time of analysis. Although Member States designed interventions to target employment-related needs, these interventions often also encompass several other objectives, diluting their potential impact on employment.

Support for the development of smart villages by promoting digital, technological and social innovation may also contribute to employment generation, local development and social inclusion. In most Member States, the support for smart villages is part of their LEADER intervention, while very few Member States support them through the dedicated cooperation or investment interventions. Only a few Member States have set targets for smart villages at this stage. This may be explained by the fact that LDS, which may include smart villages, have not yet been selected by the Member States.

While some Member States increased their support to investments in infrastructure and basic services in rural areas, by increasing financial allocations or introducing such support for the first time, the majority of Member States decreased related financial allocation. The overall low financial allocation may indicate that more is done outside the CSPs. However, as the CSPs are not clear in this regard, there is insufficient evidence to draw conclusions in relation to the complementarities between CAP funds and other EU and national funds. For young and female farmers, access to services and infrastructure to sustain a living in rural areas that supports a family are particularly important. Therefore, a lack of progress in this regard may also hinder the advancement towards other objectives of the CAP.

The CSPs can be expected to make a limited contribution to the creation of new rural businesses, including bioeconomy related businesses. New rural businesses can be supported through various RD interventions, including through EIP OGs. Member States indicate that they address needs to support the creation of new rural businesses only partially in the CSPs. The lower financial allocations to investment interventions (farm diversification, non-agricultural activities) and support to LEADER – two of the main types of interventions that contribute to the development of new rural businesses – suggests that the financial effort towards improving rural attractiveness and local development has been reduced in most Member States. There may be efforts made under other EU funds or nationally in this regard, but the evidence provided through the CSPs does not allow for a clear judgement on their contribution.

The introduction of social conditionality for the 2023-2027 programming period constitutes a major change to the previous CAP designs. Member States are required to link adherence to certain legislation on working conditions and occupational health and safety with CAP payments, and they may reduce payments if beneficiaries are not compliant. This system should be established from the beginning of 2025 at the latest, but several Member States will apply it earlier.

This demonstrates a contribution from the CAP to the targeting of employment related needs that focus on the quality of employment.

For the first time, gender equality is part of the CAP objectives. Gender imbalances are a key concern in the EU, including the gender gap in farming and in rural areas. The reformed CAP demonstrates a commitment to make progress in the area of equality for women. Member States mostly chose to address gender inequalities via LEADER and other rural development interventions. One Member State went further by including a top-up to the income support for young female farmers to incentivise the participation of women in farming.

The CSPs also demonstrate an increased ambition to improve animal welfare. The share of livestock units covered by supported actions to improve animal welfare, as well as financial allocations to CAP interventions incentivising animal welfare, have increased compared to the previous programming period, indicating a greater commitment by Member States. However, the identification and prioritisation of animal welfare needs varies among Member States.

The reduction of antimicrobial use is mostly addressed outside the CAP Strategic Plans. Few Member States have set ambitious targets for reducing antimicrobial use through CAP support, and the financial allocation for interventions in this area is relatively low. However, some Member States with high antimicrobial sales have set higher targets for reducing antimicrobial use through the CAP, which could lead to a significant reduction at EU level. It is worth noting that Member States have already achieved one third of the overall reduction target by 2021. The legislation on veterinary medicinal products plays a major role in the advancement towards this objective, and Member States also intend to complement CAP efforts with national policies.

The joint effort made by Member States in relation to the CAP Cross cutting objective

Almost all Member States plan to support innovation through EIP-AGRI and all CSPs support knowledge exchange. The number of EIP-Operational Groups planned per year tripled compared to the 2014-2020 CAP period. Member States' choices have the potential to trigger additional innovation and knowledge sharing, which may be taken up to improve farm practices. At EU level, people are set to benefit from advice, training, knowledge exchange or participation in EIPs through the support of the CAP on more than 6 million instances. However, the low financial allocation (0.1% to 2.7% out of the CAP budget across CSPs) to knowledge related interventions such as skills, training, advice, knowledge exchange, and on-farm demonstrations is surprising and limiting, considering the numerous needs identified in this regard.

The CAP support for the adoption of digital technologies shows rather low ambition, with less than 3% of farms expected to benefit from such support despite small and medium-sized farms facing challenges in accessing digital technologies. Needs can be expected to often be addressed outside of the CSPs, suggesting that the contribution of CSPs will work in complementarity with other sources of funding as described by the Member States in the digital strategies. However, some CSPs include interventions such as Eco-schemes on precision farming, cooperation and knowledge exchange on digital issues, or support for smart villages to address digital gaps.

Concluding remark

The new delivery model of the CAP enabled Member States to develop, for the first time, a needs-based strategy under a common framework for both CAP funds (EAGF, EAFRD). This strategy informed the design of and financial allocation to Direct Payments, Sectoral interventions, and Rural Development interventions. Within the boundaries set by the Strategic Plan Regulation, the Horizontal Regulation and the MFF, Member States tailored the interventions to their national circumstances, jointly addressing the nine specific objectives and the cross-cutting objective defined for the CAP for the new programming period through their national CAP Strategic Plans.

The study at hand provides a comprehensive mapping of the new CAP Strategic Plans and offers a first assessment of the potential joint contribution by the Member States to the CAP objectives. It compiles information from across the 28 CSPs, taking a horizontal view to describe and assess the joint efforts of Member States in light of the nine specific objectives and the cross-cutting objective. Future research, drawing on data from the actual implementation of the CSPs in Member States, will verify, challenge, and complement the findings from this study.

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