



Brussels, 18.10.2019
SWD(2019) 391 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

of the

**Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council
of 17 December 2013
on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural
Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005
concerning the forestry measures under Rural Development**

{SWD(2019) 389 final}

The forestry measures for the 2014-2020 programming period are covered by Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 on the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). They are set out in Articles 21-26 (measure 8) and Article 34 (measure 15) of the regulation.

The evaluation was designed to assess to what extent forestry measures contribute to the objectives and priorities of rural development, in terms of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value. As the measures evaluated are the main source of EU funding for forestry, they are relevant to the implementation of the EU's forest strategy. The evaluation covered EU-28 (with the exception of the outermost regions).

Main findings

Two facts should be borne in mind when considering the main challenges in establishing the results. Firstly, it takes a very long time for forestry projects to produce results. This makes it difficult to appraise properly, with reliable hypotheses, the impact of implementation of the measure whose effects will really become visible within several decades. Furthermore, it should be considered that the 2014-2020 rural development measures have started to be implemented in 2015, and some have suffered significant delays.

The **key drivers** for managing authorities and beneficiaries alike, appear to be successful implementation in previous periods, continuity of well-established support, financial considerations and simplicity of administration. The availability (or lack) of information, support in applying for rural development programme (RDP) schemes, and up-to-date technical advice are all considered important for the uptake of the measures, especially as regards smaller beneficiaries.

Forestry measures as a whole, including horizontal rural development measures implemented in forests such as knowledge transfer and information, advisory services, infrastructure, compensation payment for Natura 2000 and cooperation, are generally assessed as having a positive impact. However, the appraisal of **effectiveness** is limited by the shortness of the implementation period for the forestry measures discussed here (2014-2017), coupled with major delays in implementing the measures in most RDPs. It is also difficult to separate the effects of the forestry measures from other factors such as State Aid and the operations independently funded by foresters.

As regards the assessment of **efficiency**, it is not possible to reach a clear conclusion. This is because it was difficult for the managing authorities to distinguish between the workload and changes associated specifically with the forestry measures and those associated with the RDP as a whole. The same was true of the administrative burden deriving from EU rules and procedures and that generated by national/local rules or by the national/local interpretation of EU regulations. Availability of data, including the financial details of the project supported, limited this analysis. Changes in administrative burden over the two periods fell mainly on the beneficiaries, but also, to a certain extent, on managing authorities. As a result, some managing authorities abandoned forestry measures, preferring to address their forestry needs through state aids with a simplified procedure and, sometimes, higher premiums. The

application process is particularly complex for smaller beneficiaries and for managing authorities. Stronger control requirements and systematic double-checks, for instance, created an additional burden.

Coherence, internally, is evident with other relevant CAP measures aimed at sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and balanced territorial development. However, inconsistencies can arise, notably in the case of land eligibility. As to coherence with policies other than the CAP, forestry measures make a strong contribution to policies including the EU forest strategy and biodiversity and climate policies, as well as to a certain extent soil and water policies. Finally, forestry measures also complement European structural and investment (ESI) funds and associated research and investment programmes.

High **Relevance** characterises the forestry measures with regard to the EU priorities for Rural Development: the RDP framework itself and the need for Member States to address their international commitments strongly focalised the measures on environmental and climate priorities, given the need for EU biodiversity and climate policies to be implemented and targets to be achieved.

The forestry measures provide managing authorities with an appropriate set of instruments to tackle the sector's needs, the most widespread of which are protection from the effects of natural disasters; building capacity among forest holders and encouraging innovation; and improving infrastructure and harvesting capacities to increase local wood supply. Overall, existing rural development measures are aligned with and sufficiently flexible to match these future needs. However, there is some doubt as to whether the budgets available will suffice to address increasing needs during the period in question and in the future, specifically carbon sequestration and biodiversity needs.

The forestry measures have significant **EU added value** in that they make available a budget for forestry that would not otherwise have existed. Some measures would not have received as much funding or would not have been implemented at all had there been no RDP support. This is the main source of funding for EU forests.

Conclusions

The evaluation provides evidence that the forestry measures as currently implemented are contributing to the objectives set for them, especially as regards the EU's forest strategy. It is appropriate for these measures to be part of the rural development under which they can be tailored to needs. This instrument acknowledges the important role sustainable forest management plays in the rural economic and social fabric and the vital contribution it makes to preserving sustainable environmental resources (water, soil, biodiversity etc.) and to climate action. However, the uptake of such measures by beneficiaries is affected by issues such as the administrative burden, consistency of implementation, availability of information/technical advice, payment rate and budget share.

The Commission's CAP proposals for the post-2020 period (COM(2018) 392/393/394 final, of 1.6.2018) took account of the evaluation study's preliminary findings and conclusions. One of the nine CAP objectives specifically addresses sustainable forestry.