

EVALUATION PLAN

within
the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural
Development programme of the Republic of Serbia for
the programming period 2021-2027

IPARD III programme

IPARD Managing Authority
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IPARD



THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
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1. INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of the Evaluation Plan (hereinafter: EP) is to ensure that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities within the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development programme (IPARD) of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: RS) for the programming period 2021-2027 are undertaken, to ensure follow-up of the evaluation recommendation, and to ensure that data needed for the IPARD III programme evaluation is available.

During programme implementation, the EP serves as a reference document for the management, conduct and follow-up of evaluation activities, as well as the basis for reporting in annual implementation reports (hereinafter: AIRs) and Final report on implementation of IPARD III programme. It is therefore a key tool for evaluation during the programming period. The EP forms part of the monitoring and evaluation system under IPARD III programme and outlines how evaluation during the programming period will be conducted and reported.

2. LEGAL BASIS

Legal basis for the evaluation activities of the IPARD III programme are:

1. Financial Framework Partnership Agreement between the European Commission and the Republic of Serbia represented by the Government of the Republic of Serbia on specific arrangements for implementation of Union financial assistance to the Republic of Serbia under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) (Official Gazette of the RS 6/2022 from 12th December 2022), hereinafter FFPA;
2. Sectoral Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the European Commission setting out provisions for the management and implementation of Union financial assistance to Serbia under the Rural Development Programme of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) (Conclusion of Government RS 05 No. 48-2523/2023-1 of 30th March 2023), hereinafter SA;
3. IPARD III programme for the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2027 adopted by EC by Commission Implementing Decision C (2022) 1537 of 9th March 2022;
4. Decree on the management of European Union pre-accession assistance programmes under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) for the period 2021-2027 (Official Gazette of the RS 29/2023).

3. OBJECTIVE AND PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION PLAN

Pursuant to Article 54 of the FFPA, evaluation aims at improving relevance, coherence, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, Union added value, sustainability of IPA III assistance, and synergy with the relevant policy dialogue. The objectives of the programme evaluation are prescribed by Article 54(2) of the FFPA.

Furthermore, the EP should be ensuring that sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities are undertaken, in particular to provide information needed for programme steering, for the AIRs and the *ex-post* evaluation, as well as to ensure that data needed for IPARD III programme evaluation are available.

For the purpose of ensuring sufficient and appropriate evaluation activities and to provide for appropriate resources able to support these activities, pursuant to Article 56(2) of the FFPA and Article 58 of the SA, EP has been drawn up for evaluation within IPARD III programme for the Republic of Serbia for the period 2021-2027.

According to Article 58(2) of the SA, the purpose of the EP is to provide support to IPARD Managing Authority (IPARD MA) and IPARD III Monitoring Committee (IPARD III MC) through:

- (a) examining the progress of the IPARD III programme in relation to its goals by means of result and, where appropriate, impact indicators;
- (b) improving the quality of the IPARD III programme and its implementation;
- (c) examining the proposals for substantial changes to the IPARD III programme;
- (d) the preparation for interim and *ex-post* evaluation.

In order to successfully fulfil these objectives and principles, the evaluation activities within the IPARD III programme will be implemented *targeted*, with diverse and tailored approach: the monitoring and evaluation activity will be targeted on capturing whether the programme is delivering on the identified policy priorities. For this purpose, different evaluation techniques will be used for monitoring and evaluating different aspects of the IPARD III programme. This will also allow sufficient flexibility in annual planning to address evaluation needs as they emerge. At the same time, the evaluation activities within the IPARD III programme will be implemented respecting the *timely provision*: ensure that monitoring and evaluation activity is undertaken at the right time in order to inform all those involved in programme management, policy-makers and stakeholders of the impact and effectiveness of the programme, respecting the *dialogue and transparency* principle: early dialogue between stakeholders for relevant and timely feedback and fostering evaluation transparency, to have the greatest benefits from evaluation report.

4. GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

Managing Authority for IPARD III programme is the Department for Management of IPARD programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management - IPARD Managing Authority. Within the IPARD MA, the Group for Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting of IPARD Programme (GMER) is responsible for the process of evaluation of the IPARD III programme through: drafting EP for the period 2021-2027 in consultation with the EC to be submitted to the IPARD III Monitoring Committee, preparation of Terms of Reference for engagement of independent evaluator, cooperation and support of the evaluation team, management of the quality of the evaluation reports, communication with the EC and IPARD III MC on the evaluation results, dissemination of evaluation results and follow-up of the evaluation recommendations.

If monitoring and evaluation arrangements are understood as the system of actors, activities and mechanisms set up to monitor and assess IPARD III programme implementation, the participants in the IPARD programme evaluation process are the following: IPARD Managing Authority, IPARD III Monitoring Committee, IPARD Agency, independent evaluators, National Rural Development Network, Local Action Groups, data providers and other relevant stakeholders.

The role and responsibilities of involved bodies in the monitoring and evaluation system are described in the following sections.

4.1. IPARD Managing Authority

The IPARD Managing Authority has a responsibility for the organization, functioning and governance of the monitoring evaluation and reporting system and the quality, timeliness and communication of evaluation results. In terms of monitoring, the IPARD MA should set up a reporting and information system to gather financial and statistical information on progress of the IPARD III programme on the basis of information provided by the IPARD Agency, provide the EC with relevant data on selected and completed operations and draw up the AIRs. The IPARD MA also monitors the quality of programme implementation by means of indicators and provides the IPARD III Monitoring

Committee members with information and documents necessary to monitor programme progress. In line with the Article 58 of the SA, the IPARD MA is responsible for drawing up an EP, for ensuring that it is consistent with the monitoring and evaluation system and organises evaluations and related activities on the basis of the EP.

The IPARD MA has to ensure as a minimum the following:

- that *ex-ante* and *ex-post* and interim evaluations are timely and in accordance with the monitoring and evaluation system;
- that EC is informed on each evaluation via AIRs;
- that each year a report on the results achieved under the EP is presented to the IPARD III monitoring committee¹ via AIRs;
- that the results of evaluations are published.

The IPARD MA shall ensure that evaluations under IPARD III programming period are conducted within the time limits laid down in the SA and conform to the EP.

Also, the IPARD MA is responsible for managing all evaluation tenders, facilitating cooperation and access to relevant data amongst the monitoring and evaluation stakeholders, ensuring evaluation capacity building, checking the quality of evaluations, communicating the evaluation results to internal and external stakeholders, as well as to the wider public, following recommendations on evaluation reports and undertaking activities in view of complying with them, as well as coordinating evaluation with programme implementation.

Each year, the IPARD MA will report to the IPARD III Monitoring Committee on conducted evaluation activities of the EP. The report will include assessment of the EP progress, proposed revisions and any necessary reallocation of resources.

4.2. IPARD Agency

The IPARD Agency (hereinafter: IA), as internal data provider, defines the methods of collecting the required data in agreement with the IPARD MA.

For the purpose of IPARD III programme monitoring and evaluation, the IA has the role to:

- Collect information based on documents submitted through applications, information on supported projects and payments, as well as information on conducted controls.

Collection of data is made through the monitoring and evaluation tables given by the EC and additional tables of monitoring indicators within the IPARD III programme, as well as on the basis of other relevant requirements of the IPARD MA.

- Makes relevant provisions and internal procedures to ensure that recipient's reports are prepared on time and at the required scope.

The IPARD Agency shall ensure the setup of an electronic system to store the collected information, as well as establish the electronic recipients' database, with unique reference number of recipients, which will allow data analysis of territorial structure of the support, support per sector, type of investment, type of recipients, etc.

- Secure a timely data flow to the IPARD MA.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding between the IPARD Managing Authority and the IPARD Agency, the data in form of monitoring tables (hardcopy and electronic version) shall be provided regularly as follows:

- All tables at least once a year for the AIR;

¹ Article 58 of the SA.

- All or main tables after each call for proposals to plan the next calls;
- All or main tables before the IPARD MC meeting (semi-annually);
- All or main tables related to the bi-monthly report;
- Other relevant data and information for programme evaluation purpose;
- *Ad-hoc* (upon request of the IPARD MA).

4.3. IPARD III Monitoring Committee

The role of the IPARD III Monitoring Committee is to monitor the efficiency and quality of the IPARD III programme implementation, as well as review the progress in the utilisation of allocated funds towards the set objectives through the use of indicators, and consider and approve the AIRs before they are sent to the EC. Each AIR should include a chapter related to the implemented activities on an annual level from the EP.

No later than one year after adoption of the IPARD III programme, the EP is submitted to IPARD III MC by the IPARD MA. The IPARD III Monitoring Committee shall examine activities and outputs related to the progress in the implementation of the EP and may issue recommendations to the IPARD MA regarding programme implementation and evaluation² and then monitor actions taken as a result of its recommendations.

4.4. Evaluators

All evaluation activities will be carried out by external experts who are functionally independent from the IPARD MA and the IA. Evaluators can gain important insights into the programme and its governance that can help the IPARD MA to improve quality and programme implementation. Evaluators are usually external experts chosen through a tendering procedure. Evaluators will be contracted in accordance with the public procurement provisions (PRAG rules) and financed from the “Technical Assistance” IPARD Measure, or other available sources.

4.5. National Rural Development Network

National Rural Development Network (hereinafter: NRDN) aims to improve the quality of implementation of IPARD III programme, increase stakeholders’ involvement in programme implementation, inform the broader public about the IPARD III programme and potential recipients about funding opportunities, and foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.

Contribution of the NRDN in implementing and achieving the goals of the IPARD III programme from the point of view of evaluation within their cooperation with the IPARD MA of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (hereinafter: MAFWM) can be accomplished through data collection from the field and assistance in promotional activities of the MAFWM on the local and regional level. The National Rural Development Network will also have a role in sharing and disseminating monitoring and evaluation findings, which is to be decided at a later stage.

The National Rural Development Network can be an important source of expertise and capacity building, and can contribute to the development of harmonised approaches to evaluation, such as the establishment of regional proxies when only national data is available for impact indicators.

4.6. Local Action Groups

Local Action Groups (hereinafter: LAGs) are bound to provide information pertinent to programme’s monitoring and evaluation, and also carry out self-evaluations and monitor the development of Local

² In accordance with Article 59(3)(4) of the SA.

Development Strategies (hereinafter: LDSs). Representatives of LAGs also often participate in regional or national level evaluation steering groups or technical working groups. LAGs can bring invaluable local knowledge and contacts, as well as a practical perspective on the monitoring and evaluation process.

4.7. Recipients

Recipients of IPARD III programme interventions are directly involved in the monitoring and evaluation process in two ways. Firstly, individual recipients are often obliged to provide information pertinent to the programme's monitoring and evaluation. Secondly, the organisations representing recipients, such as farmers' unions and small and medium sized enterprises' (SME) associations are important IPARD III programme stakeholders. Organisations representing IPARD III programme recipients are therefore involved in the IPARD III MC.

4.8. Data providers and other relevant institutions and organisations

Data providers may hold data of relevance to IPARD III programme in the broader context, conduct research on relevant topics, be a source of expert knowledge or even collect specific monitoring data for the IPARD MA. Data providers (national statistical office, relevant ministries, research institutes, etc.), as stakeholders in IPARD III programme monitoring and evaluation system, are involved early on in the planning process through their participation in the IPARD III MC.

5. EVALUATION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

Adequate selection of evaluation topics should ensure assessment of programme effectiveness, efficiency and impacts, as well as contribution to general and specific objectives of the programme.

The evaluation activities should ensure timely preparation and conducting of programme evaluations for the purpose of assessing the progress, impact, achievements, effectiveness, efficiency and importance of the IPARD III programme for the rural development in the Republic of Serbia.

The development of this section of EP has taken into account any relevant recommendations of the *ex-ante* evaluation of the IPARD III programme.

5.1. Evaluation topics

Evaluation topics will generally refer to topics related to the establishment of the IPARD III system and topics related to programme objectives.

The evaluation topics affecting the IPARD III system are as follows:

- IPARD III programme implementation system set-up;
- Human resources and general capacity for IPARD III programme implementation;
- Availability of data and IT support;
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting system;
- Administrative simplification.

Evaluation topics in relation to the programme intervention logic, bearing in mind the IPARD III programme general and specific objectives per measure, in order to assess the impact of IPARD support, such as:

- Progress towards the programme general and specific objectives per measure;
- Selection criteria by measure;
- Deadweight;
- Financial allocation by measure and barriers to access to finance;
- Competitiveness of the agri-food sector;
- Job creation and employment in rural areas;

- Specific evaluation topics (vulnerable categories of recipients: women and young farmers, recipients in areas with difficult working conditions in agriculture, environment, NRDN);
- Use of resources from “Technical Assistance” Measure.
- Assessment of results/impacts of programme on environmental public goods (biodiversity, water and air quality, climate change, etc.);
- Assessment of the programme effects on increasing the rural population’s access to rural infrastructure and services;
- The assessment of results/impacts of programme on improving community development and social capital in rural areas.

Furthermore, specific evaluation topics will include follow-up of evaluation recommendations and reporting, communication and dissemination of evaluation results.

These topics will be subject of evaluations in accordance with the current priorities within periodic (*interim*) evaluation during the programme implementation, as well as after programme implementation: *ex-post* evaluation.

5.2. Evaluation activities

IPARD III programme evaluation planning takes place before of programme implementation, hence the value of establishing the EP for the entire program period is very important. Well-structured preparation activities at the start of the programme period are a precondition for a cost-effective and high quality evaluation during the programming period, and ensure a solid basis for the *ex-post* evaluation.

Conducting of evaluation activities as a result should show the progress, impact, achievements, effectiveness, efficiency and importance of the IPARD III programme for the rural development in Serbia. As well, evaluation activities will ensure an adequate analysis of the programme contribution to the objectives.

The types of evaluation activities are determined by the stage of programme implementation.

In order to establish a well-functioning monitoring and reporting system for the programme evaluation purposes, the following evaluation activities are planned at the start of the programming period:

- *A review of data availability for common context indicators (or proxies³) and assessment of weaknesses and gaps in data collection.*

During 2021, a review of data availability, gaps and weaknesses in data collection for IPARD III programme common context indicators (hereinafter: CCI) have been assessed through the programme *ex-ante* evaluation. Besides, the quality of the data has been checked by evaluators in the report: ‘Ongoing evaluation of the IPARD II programme for the Republic of Serbia for the implementation period 2017-2019’ from June 2020. The conclusion was drawn that most of indicators are provided based on solid statistical data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: SORS) and that the largest number of missing data refers to environmental context indicators.

The lack of data for indicators will be analysed in order to identify the appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the proper availability of quality data. Assessment of data availability for context indicators will be done by drawing up a detailed overview of data availability, including assessment of weaknesses in data collection and, if necessary, including other relevant providers in data collection. The relevant institutions will be engaged to collect data, especially for missing data for environmental context indicators, to ensure effective data collection in accordance with common context indicators

³ Also known as an indirect indicator, a proxy indicator is a variable that is used to approximate, or to be representative of, a change or result that is difficult to measure directly.

methodology. During the programme implementation, ongoing monitoring of availability and quality of data will be carried out and any appropriate actions will be taken to upgrade it.

- *The assessment of the established IPARD III monitoring and evaluation system and further development of the system.*

The established system of collecting and storing of data will be assessed at the IPARD Agency. The emphasis will be on assessing the establishment and functioning of the IT software for data collection for reporting purposes in accordance with the entrusted procedures for monitoring within the IA, evaluation and reporting system of the IPARD MA and the IA, as well as on improving the comprehensiveness and quality of data from the monitoring system. This will insure a solid basis for the future evaluation activities.

- *Building-up of evaluation capacities.*

The trainings will be done in accordance with a training plan, which will be based on a proper training needs assessment. In order to assess the training needs, a questionnaire will be delivered to the relevant staff within the IPARD MA and the IA. The results of the questionnaire, the discussion and the staff opinion on their capacity to carry out their job in the best manner will enable to identify the adequate training needs.

Activities linked to evaluation preparations will comprise:

Development of evaluation questions linked to programme intervention logic, definition of judgment criteria and links to indicators;

- Preparation of fiches for monitoring and evaluation programme-specific output and result indicators (POG of the IPARD MA monitoring procedures);
- Identification of additional indicators for programme monitoring and data sources;
- Review of potential approaches to the assessment of programme results and impacts;
- Filling the gaps and addressing identified weaknesses in data collection;
- Preparing Terms of Reference (ToR) for evaluations.

Evaluation activities during the programme implementation will relate to:

- Observation of development trends and context analysis: ongoing observation of changes in the context in which the programme's interventions take place against set baselines (using programme context indicators);
- Progress monitoring in relation to set values of target indicators (including appraisal of sustainability of the established milestones of target indicators), as well as planned output indicators and drawing up relevant chapters of AIRs;
- Assessment of financial allocations by measure and barriers to access to finance;
- Evaluation of progress towards the programme objectives; assessment of programme results, impacts, answering evaluation questions; developing evaluation conclusions and recommendations; using evaluation results to improve programme implementation;
- Agri-environment monitoring and assessment of the programme impact. Special emphasis will be placed on the environmental impact of the programme (after entrustment of the budget implementation tasks and implementation of IPARD measures);
- Assessment of the added value of the integrated approach - by means of LEADER local development strategies and support for evaluation activity undertaken at the LAG level (after entrustment of the budget implementation tasks and implementation of the Measure 5);
- Reporting and communication of evaluation results;
- Follow-up of evaluation recommendations;
- Dissemination of evaluation results;
- *Ex-post* evaluation of the IPARD programme 2014-2020;

- *Ex-ante* evaluation of future rural development programme (after 2027).

Evaluation activities after the programme implementation period relates to the preparation activities for the *ex-post* evaluation of the IPARD III programme and it will be performed within the time frame prescribed by the SA.

The quality of the assessment of measures and programme impacts depends on the quality of data and data management, as well as on the applied evaluation methodology. Whenever possible, an advanced assessment of impacts should be conducted, using counterfactual analysis with recipients and non-recipients of IPARD support to assess the net programme effects.

6. DATA AND INFORMATION

Identifying the data types needed to address common context and programme-specific indicators is one of the key activities in evaluation preparation, in order to make sure that data of sufficient quality is available during the whole programming period.

This section provides a brief description of the system to record, maintain, manage and report on statistical data and information in the context of the IPARD III programme implementation, as well as the provision of monitoring data and information relating to programme evaluation. Also, this section demonstrates identification of data sources to be used, data gaps, potential institutional issues related to data provision and proposed solutions, as well as that appropriate data management systems in order to ensure their operational functionality in due time.

6.1. Programme indicators

A clear definition and understanding of each indicator, together with the data collection methodology to calculate their value, is the basis for implementation of any evaluation.

In the IPARD III programme, the following common indicators significant from the point of view of evaluation are foreseen:

1. Context indicators;
2. Common indicators - target indicators;
3. Output indicators;
4. Result indicators.

6.1.1. Context indicators

Context indicators provide information on relevant aspects of the external environment likely to have an influence on the design and performance of the policy, e.g. GDP per capita, unemployment rate, water quality, etc.

Data for context indicators are collected by the SORS, the Environmental Protection Agency, the national Farm Accountancy Data Network (hereinafter: FADN) database, Eurostat and other relevant data providers. Some of the data for context indicators are not available because they are not collected or monitored in the Republic of Serbia (this primarily refers to some environmental protection indicators), while for some context indicators the national calculation methodology is not harmonized with the Eurostat/ EU methodology. The mentioned gaps and deficiency shortcomings will be subject to assessment with the aim of overcoming them, following the evaluation recommendations.

6.1.2. Common indicators - target indicators

The source of data for quantifying of target indicator values are primarily operational databases managed by the IA. The expected values of programme envisaged indicators are given in the Chapter 6.6. of the IPARD III programme.

6.1.3. Output indicators

These indicators measure activities directly realised within programmes. These activities are the first step towards realising the operational objectives of the intervention and are measured in physical or monetary units.

6.1.4. Result indicators

These indicators measure the direct and immediate effects of the intervention. They provide information on changes in, for example, the behaviour, capacity or performance of direct recipients and are measured in physical or monetary terms. Example: number of jobs created, number of successful training outcomes, etc.

Result indicators are monitored on the basis of data from the operational database of the IA and are provided through the Tables for monitoring and evaluation of the IPARD III programme. Data for monitoring and evaluation in the form of these tables are submitted to the IPARD MA by the IA and serve as a basis for analysis and reporting to IPARD III MC members and the EC on the results and achieved programme objectives. All key data for each activity selected for funding, as well as completed activities, are recorded in an operational database, maintained and updated by the IA. Using data from the delivered reports and monitoring tables for the stated purpose, the IPARD MA draw up semi-annual and AIRs.

At the request of the IPARD MA and/or a contracted evaluator, the IA should, in accordance with the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding between the IPARD MA and IA, cooperate in providing data or providing insight into project documentation, as needed, for the purpose of conducting IPARD III programme evaluations. All recipients of IPARD assistance are obliged to submit data and information for the purposes of IPARD III programme monitoring and evaluation. This includes the provision of data and information by IPARD III recipients, not only through submitted project proposals and process requirements, but also through sample-based research (questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, etc.).

The following data sources and information are important for programme evaluation:

- *Monitoring data*, including data in relation to programme results, collected by and from recipients via monitoring tables or documents (e.g. application forms, payment requests).
- *Disaggregated data* collected from non-recipients (counterfactual analysis) or from sector representative samples (sector analysis) via regular surveys (e.g. FADN, Farm Structure Survey (FSS), country-specific research, etc.).
- *Specific data* regularly collected via institutions which relate to rural development priorities (e.g. Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Economy and other relevant ministries or its agencies).
- *Statistical data* (used for the sector or contextual analysis), aggregated in line with the IPARD III programme requirements.

6.2. External data sources

Given the diverse nature of monitoring the effects of the IPARD III programme, there are a large number of potential external sources of data and information that can be helpful in informing about programme performance and its impact. Some of them are as follows:

- ❖ Statistical data of other organizational units of the MAFWM (Register of Agricultural Holdings, FADN database and other relevant data);
- ❖ Databases from other sources (SORS, FSS);
- ❖ Additional surveys of recipients to capture broader impacts;

- ❖ Evidence from the scientific and research institutes and non-governmental organisations;
- ❖ Independent reviews of the programme provided through public procurement, and
- ❖ other unmentioned external sources of relevant data and information.

7. PERFORMED EVALUATIONS

Under preparation of the IPARD programme for the programming period 2021-2027, the *ex-ante* evaluation of the IPARD III programme was carried out. An *ex-ante* evaluation of the IPARD III Programme, coordinated by Ecorys Croatia, was carried out by the Danish expert Morten Kvistgaard in the period July - September 2021. The objective of the evaluation referred to the contribution to the improvement of programme relevance, coherence, efficiency, as well as effectiveness of EU pre-accession assistance to Serbia under the IPA III Component for Rural Development. The results and recommendations of the *ex-ante* evaluation, as well as proposed activities of the IPARD MA and the IA to address them are included in the IPARD III programme. Complete report of the *ex-ante* evaluation of the IPARD III programme are available on the website of the MAFWM via the following link: <http://www.minpolj.gov.rs/download/Ex-ante-evaluation-report-IPARD-III-Programme-2021-2027.pdf>.

8. PLANNED EVALUATIONS

The IPARD MA shall conduct three separate evaluations over the IPARD III programme period:

1. *Ex-post* evaluation of the IPARD II programme;
2. Interim evaluation of the IPARD III programme;
3. *Ex-ante* evaluation for the next programming period.

Ex-post evaluation of the IPARD III programme will be conducted in the next programming period (approx. 2031).

Each evaluation shall be tendered as a single contract with several groups of activities that will cover the entire previous period of programme implementation (with the exception of *ex-ante* programme evaluation). Evaluation activity work plan within each evaluation contract would be agreed with the evaluator. Number of specific evaluation activities conducted under the contract would depend on the current needs. In general terms, the interim evaluation contract, in addition to assessment of the IPARD III system setup, would be focused on implementation as such. Terms of references for each evaluation will be prepared by the IPARD MA and consulted with the Commission.

8.1. *Ex-post* evaluation of the IPARD II programme

At the latest by the end of the first year after the programme implementation period, an *ex-post* evaluation will be prepared for the IPARD II programme.

Ex-post evaluation of the IPARD II programme will include the following activities:

- Assessment of the effects of the IPARD II programme per measure;
- Assessment of the impact of IPARD support on vulnerable categories of recipients (women, young farmers, recipients in areas with difficult conditions for agriculture);
- Assessment of the impact of the programme;
- Identification of factors that contributed to the success / failure of the Programme;
- Lessons learned.

8.2. Interim evaluation of the IPARD III programme

In the third year following the year of adoption of the first entrustment of budget implementation tasks for the IPARD III programme, an interim evaluation shall be performed.

The evaluation will examine the initial results of the IPARD III programme, their consistency with the *ex-ante* appraisal, the relevance of the targets and programme objectives and the extent to which they have been attained. It shall also assess the quality of Programme monitoring and implementation and the experience gained in setting up the system for implementation of the IPARD III programme. The evaluation contract, in addition to assessment of the IPARD III system setup, would be focused on programme implementation as such. The evaluation shall propose measures to improve the quality of the IPARD programme and its implementation, where appropriate.

This contract would, first of all, take into account the report of the previous evaluation contract in order to follow-up the implementation of the evaluation recommendations. The key evaluation topics covered by this evaluation will be as follows:

- IPARD III system implementation set-up for all the entrusted measures;
- Human resources and general capacity with the recommendations vis-à-vis measures that are not yet implemented;
- Availability of data for the CCI and at the programme measure level and IT support;
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting system;
- Administrative simplification;
- Achieved results against programme indicators;
- Conditions and selection criteria by measure;
- Deadweight;
- Progress towards the programme general and specific objectives per measure;
- Job creation and employment in rural areas;
- Specific evaluation topics (vulnerable categories of recipients: women and young farmers, recipients in areas with difficult conditions for agriculture, environment, NRDN, etc.);
- Specific environmental conditions and achievements under the programme;
- Competitiveness of the agri-food sector;
- Use of resources from “Technical Assistance” Measure.

8.3. *Ex-ante* evaluation for the next programming period

The Evaluation plan within the IPARD III programme period envisage an *ex-ante* evaluation for the programme within next rural development programming period, with the aim to optimise the allocation of budgetary resources and improve programming quality.

9. TIMELINE

The indicative timeframe for implementation of the planned evaluation activities for the IPARD III programme implementation period is given in the table below.

Table 1. Planned evaluations within the IPARD III programming period

Title	Tentative timeframe	Estimated budget amount (EUR)	Reporting
<i>Ex-post</i> evaluation of the IPARD II programme	2024	120,000.00	AIR 2024/FIR
Interim evaluation of the IPARD III programme	2027	100,000.00	AIR 2027
<i>Ex-ante</i> evaluation for the following rural development programming period	2028	90,000.00	AIR 2028
Total for the evaluation within the IPARD III programme period		310,000.00	

Template for more detailed description of each evaluation is given in the annex.

10. COMMUNICATION

This section provides a description of how evaluation findings will be disseminated to target recipients and stakeholders, including a description of the mechanisms established to follow-up on the use of evaluation results. Appropriate activities for disseminating the results of evaluations as well as the assessment of information needs for each target group will be foreseen in the annual evaluation planning. Activities for disseminating the results of evaluations will be developed in cooperation with the organization unit of the IPARD Managing Authority responsible for IPARD III programme promotion and in accordance with the overall communication strategy of the IPARD III programme.

The dissemination of evaluation results will be carried out in two ways:

Internal - targeting employees and decision makers in the IPARD Managing Authority and IPARD Agency, particularly in relation to follow-up of evaluation recommendations and for the overall implementation of the IPARD III programme. Monitoring reports and evaluation results will be shared internally to facilitate effective programme implementation. Externally contracted experts for evaluation, in addition to the elaboration of the evaluation report, will have the obligation to present evaluation results to the IPARD MA and IA, as well as the members of the IPARD III MC and, where appropriate, to the members of the IPA III MC and the National Rural Development Network (after its establishment). Annual reports of the evaluation activities undertaken will be provided to the IPARD III MC stakeholders through AIRs, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the SA.

External - targeting the wider public. In accordance with the principles of transparency of IPA assistance, evaluation reports will be published on the IPARD web page of the MAFWM. In addition to this report, the evaluators will also deliver a summary report with clearly shown results of evaluations, which will also be available to the general public. These summary reports will be presented in a user-friendly way to enable a wide range of stakeholders to easily access information on how the programme is performing and what monitoring and evaluation activities are planned for the future. In addition to the above, the IPARD MA will disseminate information on evaluation to wider public by means of annual implementation reports on the IPARD III programme through publishing on the IPARD web page of the MAFWM. If there is a need, other appropriate tools of public information on IPARD III programme evaluation results will be used (such as newsletters, publications, bulletins, public communications etc.).

11. RESOURCES

An adequate level of human resources for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation is provided within the IPARD Managing Authority under the Group for Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting of IPARD Programme, and within the IPARD Agency under the Group for reporting/ Sector for economic and financial issues. The internal resources shall be supported by specific capacity-building actions financed through IPARD Measure 9, following the training needs assessments.

Financial resources for the evaluation of the IPARD III programme will be provided through the budget under IPARD Measure 9 - “Technical Assistance”, or other available sources.

12. ANNEX

Title of the Contract	
Title of the evaluation	
Description of the main evaluation activities	
Type of the evaluation (system, implementation)	
Implementation Timeframe	
Deadline for the preparation of the ToR	
Expected input (IPARD MA, IA, NAO, NIPAC etc.)	

CHAIRPERSON

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