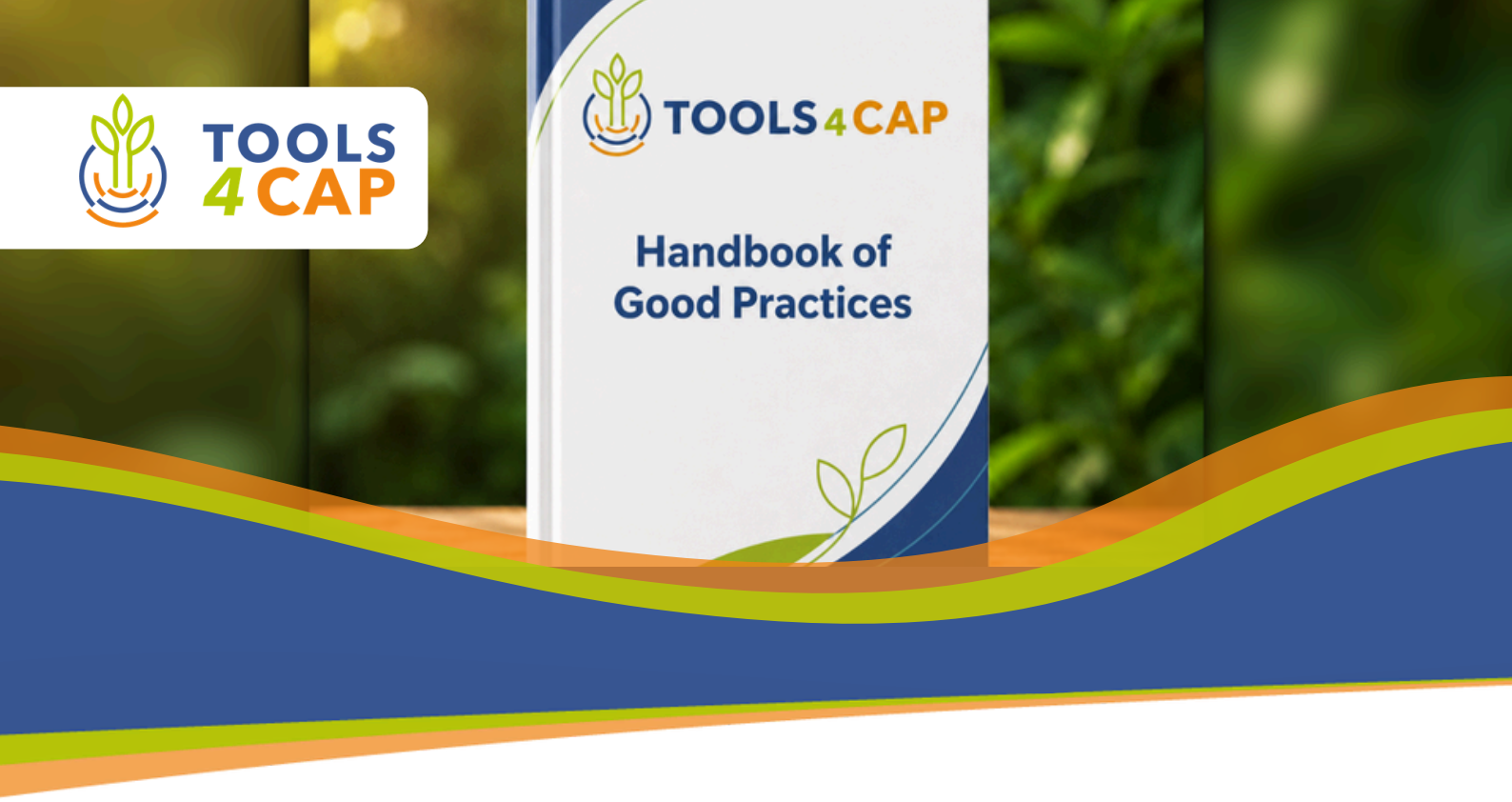

TOOLS4CAP ACADEMY MODULE X

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE NEXT CAP: FROM EVIDENCE TO POLICY DESIGN

Highlights Report

Introduction

On 17 September 2026, the Tools4CAP Academy concluded its learning programme with its tenth and final module, ***"From knowledge to practice: introducing the Tools4CAP Handbook for the next generation of agricultural policy"***. Coordinated by AEIDL, the Academy has delivered ten training modules throughout the project, covering the methods, tools and practical experiences developed within Tools4CAP and their application to CAP strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation.

The final module took place at a time when experience from the current CAP Strategic Plans is providing lessons for policy design and implementation, while discussions on the post-2028 framework are raising new questions about the place of agricultural policy within the proposed National and Regional Partnership Plans. The **Tools4CAP Handbook of Good Practices** provided the main reference for examining these issues from a strategic planning perspective.

The session first explored strategic planning and evidence-informed policymaking, drawing on the principles presented in the Handbook. It then examined how agricultural policy is expected to be planned within the

ORGANISER: aeidl

17 SEPTEMBER 2026

ONLINE

62 REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS from 16 COUNTRIES (Public authorities, governance bodies; researchers; innovators; and other stakeholders relevant to the agricultural sector)

PRESENTATIONS AND RECORDINGS HERE

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Funded by the European Union

proposed post-2028 framework, focusing on coordination, planning, partnership and results. The final part introduced **the Intervention Logic and IOI Matrix** and explained how they can be used to examine the links between policy needs, objectives and interventions. Participants then applied both approaches in a practical exercise.

The module **registered 62 people from 16 countries**. More than **42% of registered participants represented national, regional or local authorities**, alongside representatives of research organisations, universities and other organisations working on agricultural and rural policy.

This module forms part of the Tools4CAP Academy, which aims to provide a framework for capacity building and peer learning by developing an attractive and tailored training programme that meets end users' needs. Tools4CAP, coordinated by Ecorys, is a project embedded in the Horizon Programme and involves 21 partner organisations from 18 EU countries with outstanding expertise in economic, environmental, climate and social issues; new data sources and monitoring technologies; stakeholder engagement; and social, environmental and animal welfare-related data and indicators in agricultural and rural development contexts.

Why a Handbook of Good Practices?

Prof. Emil Erjavec

University of Ljubljana

Professor Emil Erjavec, University of Ljubljana, introduced the rationale and main principles of the Tools4CAP Handbook of Good Practices by posing a practical question: ***How can different methods and tools contribute to improving the quality of policy planning?***

Strategic planning has become increasingly important in the CAP, with agricultural policy progressively integrated into broader strategic planning processes. High-quality planning requires robust evidence, a clear intervention logic, and the administrative and analytical capacity to translate policy objectives into appropriate interventions. However, the availability of evidence and analytical methods does not in itself ensure that they are used effectively in policy decisions.

The Handbook addresses this challenge by bringing together four broad groups of approaches examined within Tools4CAP, including quantitative modelling, statistical and data-based methods, decision-support and participatory approaches, and monitoring and evaluation tools. Its purpose is not simply to describe these methods, **but to help users understand how they can be used within strategic planning and under which conditions they can contribute to better-informed policy choices**.

One of the objectives of the Handbook is to bring policy, research and stakeholder knowledge closer together within the planning process. It is primarily intended for those involved in preparing policy documents and strategic plans at national and EU levels. It can also be used by researchers, analysts, stakeholders involved in policy processes, and academic users.

From evidence-based to evidence-informed policymaking

The presentation also addressed the relationship between the formal logic of strategic planning and the way policy decisions are made in practice. Planning frameworks can be represented as a sequence connecting needs, objectives, interventions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In practice, however, evidence is only one of the elements that feed into the decision-making process, and knowledge and data are not always used systematically.

This distinction is central to **evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM)**. Analytical evidence can strengthen policy design, but **its contribution also depends on institutional arrangements, administrative capacity and interaction between policymakers, researchers and stakeholders**. The challenge is therefore not only to produce evidence, but also to create the conditions in which it can be understood and used throughout the planning process.

Improving strategic planning depends both on the quality of the available methods and evidence and on the capacity to use them in policy decisions. Connecting analytical work with policymakers and stakeholders is therefore an important part of evidence-informed policymaking.

Preparing for a changing planning framework

The discussion also placed these questions in the context of preparations for the next programming period. Professor Emil Erjavec noted that the proposed NRPP framework would represent an important institutional change, with agricultural policy forming part of a broader national planning framework. Member States are also at different stages of preparation, making the questions addressed by the Handbook particularly relevant to future strategic planning, including how evidence is used, how intervention choices are justified and what analytical and administrative capacity is required.

What could the post-2028 framework mean for strategic planning? A policy framework under discussion

Rémi Laurent

Tools4CAP project's coordination (Ecorys)

Rémi Laurent, Ecorys, presented the current state of discussions on the proposed post-2028 framework and what the move towards NRPPs could mean for agricultural policy planning in Member States.

Under the Commission proposal, agricultural policy would be included alongside other EU-funded policy areas within a broader national planning framework. Member States would have greater flexibility in organising their plans and choosing approaches suited to their national and regional contexts. At the same time, planning agricultural policy within a wider framework would require coordination across policy areas, institutions and administrative levels. Specific requirements for agricultural interventions would remain within this framework.

Four aspects of the proposal were particularly relevant to the discussion on strategic planning:

COORDINATION

Bringing different policy areas within one plan increases the need for coordination between ministries, authorities and levels of governance.

PLANNING

The proposed framework is less prescriptive about the planning process, leaving Member States greater flexibility in organising needs assessments, intervention logic and intervention design.

PARTNERSHIP

Preparation and implementation of the plans would involve public authorities, social partners, civil society, research organisations and other relevant actors.

RESULTS

Agricultural measures would be linked to defined intervention fields and output indicators within the wider NRPP framework.

More flexibility, greater responsibility for strategic quality

One of the questions raised by the presentation concerned **the balance between greater flexibility for Member States and the quality and coherence of strategic planning**. A less prescriptive framework may allow administrations to choose methods and approaches suited to their context. It would also place greater responsibility on Member States to ensure that policy choices are based on robust analysis, a clear intervention logic, appropriate indicators and stakeholder participation.

Differences in administrative and analytical capacity could become more relevant if Member States have greater discretion over the methods used for planning. Coordination across policy areas could also become more demanding. Regarding participation, the discussion pointed to the risk that less organised or under-resourced groups may have more difficulty engaging effectively in planning processes.

These issues place analytical capacity, monitoring and evaluation, policy coherence, and the transparent use of evidence at the centre of the discussion on how Member States could use the flexibility available under the proposed framework.

How can greater flexibility be used while maintaining robust evidence, policy coherence, meaningful participation and accountability in strategic planning?

From policy objectives to intervention design

Ilona Rac

University of Ljubljana

Ilona Rac, University of Ljubljana, presented the main groups of tools covered by the Handbook and discussed their use in strategic policy design, including within the proposed NRPP framework. The choice and application of these tools depend on the policy question, the data and analytical capacity available, and the stage of the policy process. Her presentation then looked more closely at stakeholder engagement and decision-support tools and their use in structuring policy problems and considering interactions and stakeholder preferences across different policy fields.

For the practical part of the session, the focus moved to two approaches for examining the relationships between policy needs, objectives and interventions: the Intervention Logic and the IOI Matrix.

The two approaches were then used to examine practical questions in policy design, including **how priorities are translated into policy choices and how the relationships between needs, objectives and interventions can be assessed**.

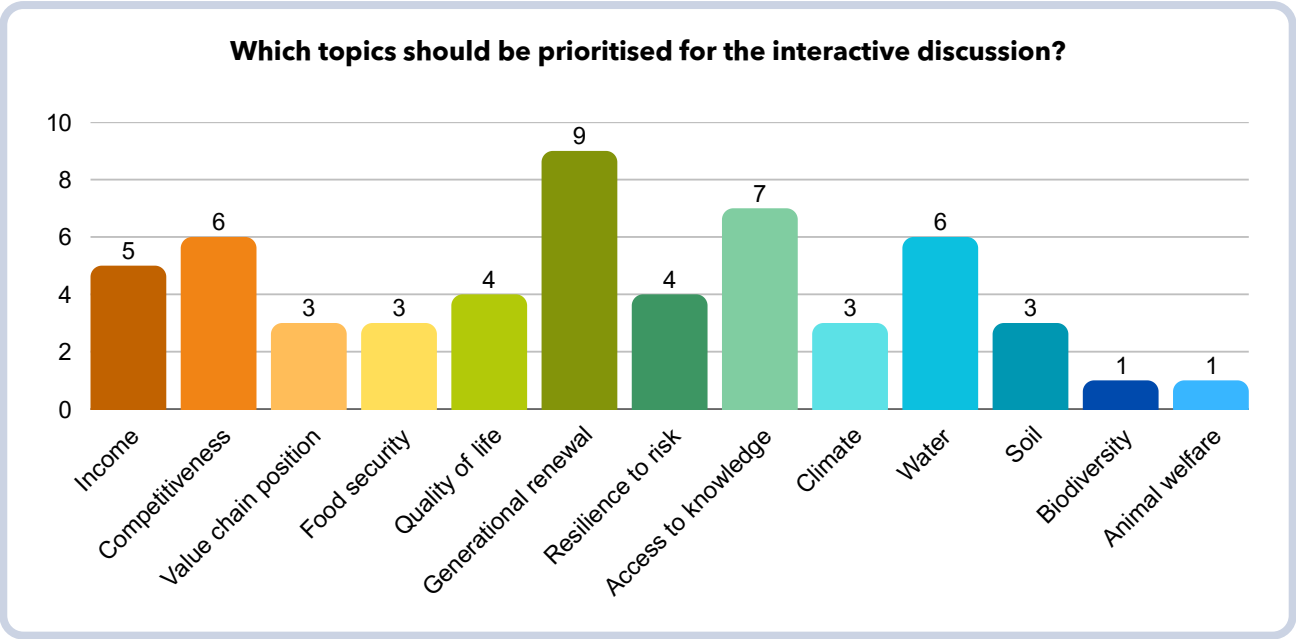
The **Intervention Logic** makes explicit how an identified need or policy objective is expected to be addressed through an intervention and what results are expected. It can be used to check whether the links between needs, objectives, policy actions and expected results are clear and consistent.

The **IOI Matrix** examines relationships across several objectives and interventions. It can help identify how individual interventions contribute to different objectives and where complementarities, tensions or gaps may exist within the policy mix. This is relevant when economic, social and environmental objectives need to be considered together.

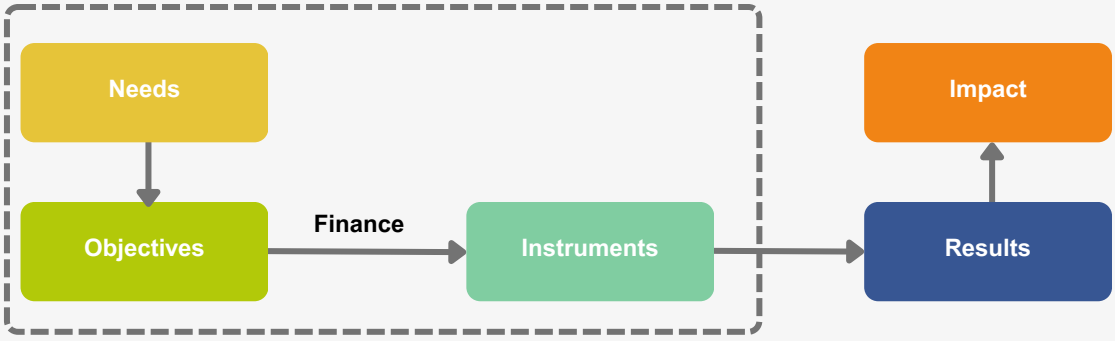
Putting the approaches into practice

Participants first took part in a **short prioritisation exercise** to define the focus of the breakout discussions. They selected up to three policy topics from a list covering economic, social and environmental aspects of agricultural policy, including income, competitiveness, food security, generational renewal, resilience, access to knowledge, climate, water, soil and biodiversity.

Participants then selected policy instruments for each exercise. One instrument was selected for the Intervention Logic exercise and three for the IOI Matrix exercise. The options included different forms of income support, agri-environmental and climate actions, support for young and new farmers, risk-management instruments, investment support, LEADER, and knowledge-sharing and innovation. Based on the results of the prioritisation, both breakout groups worked on **generational renewal**, applying the Intervention Logic and IOI Matrix from different perspectives.



Working through the Intervention Logic



Adapted from Erjavec et al, 2020

The breakout exercise used **generational renewal as the selected topic and knowledge-sharing and innovation as the selected instrument** to examine how an Intervention Logic connects identified needs, policy objectives and interventions.

The discussion illustrated an important tenet of sound strategic management: **the starting point matters**. In a needs-based approach, the construction of Intervention Logic is done by first identifying needs and then examining how objectives and interventions respond to them. In practice, however, policy planning is often done backwards, beginning with objectives, instruments or other elements already defined.

In the practical exercise carried out during the module, selecting the topic and instrument in advance influenced how some needs were formulated: while high capital

capital requirements, administrative procedures and intergenerational disconnect were identified as needs by some, other responses were more influenced by the nature of the selected instrument. Participants were quickly faced with the logical conundrums that occur when choices of instruments for tackling needs are constrained.

At this point, when some elements are already defined, it is useful to **check the logic in both directions**: do the selected interventions respond to the identified needs, and are the needs being identified independently of the instruments already available? This can also reveal needs that are not adequately addressed by the proposed interventions. The logic may therefore need to be revisited several times as needs, objectives and policy choices are clarified.

IN PRACTICE | When using an Intervention Logic:

- Start from the identified needs where possible.
- Distinguish clearly between needs, objectives and interventions.
- Check whether the proposed interventions respond to the identified needs.
- Identify needs that are not adequately addressed by the proposed interventions.
- Revisit the logic as policy choices are refined.

Examining contributions through the IOI Matrix

The second group used the **IOI Matrix** to assess how different policy instruments could contribute to generational renewal. Participants considered **agri-environmental and climate actions, support for setting up young farmers, and knowledge-sharing and innovation**. Their contribution was assessed qualitatively using a seven-point scale ranging from strongly negative to strongly positive.

The exercise showed how different assessments can stimulate discussion about the relationship between an intervention and a policy objective. There was broad agreement that supports for setting up young farmers made a strong positive contribution to generational renewal. Views differed more on agri-environmental and climate actions, with participants assessing their contribution as both positive and negative. The group eventually assigned a neutral score as a middle ground between these different assessments.

The assessment of knowledge-sharing and innovation also raised a question about whether to assess an intervention as currently implemented or to consider its potential contribution under a different design. During the discussion, participants considered how new technologies, organisational approaches and other forms of innovation could potentially contribute to generational renewal. **This distinction between the current intervention and its potential contribution was part of the discussion leading to the final score**.

The plenary discussion also considered how such assessments could be developed further. In a fuller application of the IOI Matrix, different types of expertise and existing knowledge could be considered alongside monitoring information and the perspectives of farmers and other stakeholders.

IN PRACTICE | When using an IOI Matrix:

- Make clear which relationship is being assessed.
- Discuss the reasoning behind each assessment, not only the resulting score.
- Clarify whether the assessment concerns the current intervention or its potential under a different design.
- Use differences between participants to identify assumptions and questions requiring further examination.
- Use available evidence, expertise and stakeholder knowledge to inform the assessment.

Conclusions and wrap-up

- **Good strategic planning depends on more than having evidence available**. Robust evidence, a clear intervention logic and sufficient analytical and administrative capacity are needed to connect identified needs with policy objectives, interventions and expected results. **The challenge is also to ensure that evidence can be understood and used within the policy process**.
- **Evidence informs policy choices but does not determine them**. Evidence-informed policymaking recognises that analytical knowledge is one element of the decision-making process, alongside institutional conditions and interactions between policymakers, researchers and stakeholders. **Strengthening these connections is therefore part of improving strategic planning**.
- **Greater flexibility in planning also places greater responsibility on Member States**. The proposed post-2028 framework could give Member States more flexibility in organising planning processes and selecting methods suited to their context. This increases **the importance of maintaining robust analysis, clear intervention logic, appropriate indicators, coordination and meaningful participation**.
- **Policy-support tools can help examine the reasoning behind policy choices**. The practical exercises showed different ways of examining the relationships between needs, objectives and interventions. The Intervention Logic can be revisited as policy choices develop, while the IOI Matrix can bring different assessments of an intervention's contribution to an objective into the discussion. In both cases, **their application depends on the policy question, available evidence and the context in which they are used.**
- **Different policy questions require different combinations of methods, evidence and knowledge**. Across the Academy modules, participants were introduced to quantitative and qualitative methods, participatory approaches, data and monitoring tools, and practical experiences from different Member States. **Their relevance depends on the policy question being addressed and the stage of the planning, implementation or evaluation process**.
- **The Academy has connected methodological knowledge with its practical use in CAP strategic planning**. Across its ten modules, the programme moved from introducing Tools4CAP methods and tools to examining their application through case studies and practical exercises. **Module X brought these elements together in the broader discussion on strategic planning for the next programming period**.
- **The Capacity Building Toolkit will make the Tools4CAP resources available beyond the Academy**. It will bring together the Academy materials, methods, tools and practical examples developed throughout the project, organised by policy needs and thematic areas. **Users will be able to consult the resources most relevant to the policy task they are working on**.

All presentations and recordings are available at the event page.

Get involved in the project, here.

Or sign up for the newsletter, here.

All training modules of the Academy are available on the website, here.

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