

The 14th NRN meeting – co-organised with the [Romanian Rural Network support unit](#) – brought together participants from 20 Member States, representing 22 National Rural Networks, with some LAGs and project beneficiaries also attending.

The meeting explored ways of boosting cooperation between NRNs and improving the work with local level stakeholders. The event also looked to continue capitalising on the main outcomes and ideas reached during [networX](#), including the development of next steps.

Using the open space methodology, the participants discussed various topics including LEADER and local development, cooperation and innovation.

Meeting Highlights



The second visit, related to the social inclusion strand of the Romanian RDP, was to the children's day care centre 'Sfantul Stelian' set up by The Joy of Hope Foundation. This inspiring initiative uses LEADER support to expand and improve the facilities of the Foundation which offers out of school services (sports, remedial lessons, etc) and counselling for 30 children from disadvantaged local families.

Event Information

Title: 14th NRN Meeting

Date: 13 June 2019

Location: Bucharest, Romania

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point and RO NRN

Participants: 71 participants

Outcomes: Thematic presentations and exchanges on how to boost cooperation among NRNs; the LEADER methodology & working with local stakeholders; discussions on selected topics proposed by NSUs and; the outcomes of 'networX'.

Webpage: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/14th-nrns-meeting_en

The Romanian NSU organised a very successful field trip showcasing two projects funded through the Romanian RDP in Prahova County. This took place the day before the 14th NRN meeting in Bucharest.

The Budureasca Wine Cellar used EAFRD funds to improve its competitiveness working in the primary sector. It is now one of the most modern wine cellars in Romania with a production and storage capacity of 3 million litres of wine per year.

Working with local level stakeholders

Florentina Tudor, Director General for Rural Development, Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development opened the NRN meeting on 13 June by welcoming participants to Romania. She stressed the importance of direct contact with beneficiaries - some of whom were involved in the meeting - and the role of the National Federation of LAGs in increasing the confidence of the rural population. The European Commission, represented by Helen Williams from DG AGRI, reflected on the success of networX and the huge part the NSUs had played in this. She reinforced the importance of connecting with local stakeholders, connecting project beneficiaries and clustering NSUs to take forward the wide range of ideas from networX and ensure they are put into practice.

Ms Adelina Vasile of the Ecoul Campiei Buzaului Local Action Group (LAG) in south east Romania, [shared her experience](#) of working with LEADER in this mainly agricultural region. For this LAG effective communication is key to their work with local stakeholders, and they also encourage LAG members to become directly involved with the Romanian NRN. Adelina illustrated the success of the LAG's integrated local strategy, which had created 50 new jobs. This focuses on farm business and sectoral modernisation alongside social services, inclusion, employment and local heritage work. She highlighted two co-operation projects, a cookbook entitled 'The Joy of Fruit and Vegetables' and the 'Watermelons Festival', organised with four partner LAGs.



A project beneficiary, Ms Michaela Mihalea then spoke about the way her [project](#), Eurocad Solutions, is using GPS technology to gather and collate improved data about land, its ownership, management and transactions. The technology is helping to update the land cadastre, and so add transparency within the land administration system as a key factor for wider economic development. She emphasised the value of the accessible and appropriate LEADER support to her project.

Father Radu Manuel Mihail from The Joy of Hope Foundation, host from the previous day's project visit, joined the participants in Bucharest to further [explain the work](#) carried out at the 'St Stelian' children's day care centre that he and his wife run. The LEADER funding will allow the Foundation to build a second recreation room allowing all 30 children to be on site at the one time. The focus of the work is to support families both practically (e.g. providing laundry facilities) and emotionally, with the aim of helping children out of poverty through education.

A lively panel discussion followed involving four representatives of NRNs, Beatrice Zaharescu (RO), Alistair Prior (UK-Scot), Agata Markuszewska (PL) and Elona Moerdijk (NL) in exchanging on the various ways in which their NRNs interact with different LEADER stakeholder groups. Some NRNs interact with only LEADER Co-ordinators/Managers whilst others get involved in working directly with beneficiaries on the ground. Most of the NRNs work with LEADER stakeholders a bit differently to other stakeholder groupings. This is partly due to their different needs, but also reflects LEADER actors greater experience and expectations of networking. Information is shared via NRN websites (some have interactive pages), meetings, dedicated thematic groups (where a broad range of stakeholders are represented), social media, newsletters, events and by sharing project examples. NRNs also shared the challenges they face e.g. providing support for LAGs with overly ambitious indicators which are very difficult to achieve – there was a call for more 'practical' indicators post 2020.



Development of joint activities & clusters

During the session on ideas for joint cooperation activities for NRNs within geographic clusters, the discussion was split into four different groups – Atlantic, Central, Mediterranean and Nordic-Baltic.

- Participants in the **Atlantic cluster** discussed the overlaps of their thematic work, mainly around generational renewal, innovation and social farming.
- The **Central cluster** mainly brainstormed on the best ways to foster LEADER-related cooperation among networks. The discussion was dominated by a suggested digital platform that would include a common calendar on national LEADER events, up-to-date information on transnational cooperation in each country and space for matching and creating exchanges between different LAGs. Another suggestion was a LEADER conference organised by 5-6 NRNs as a joint project, and a European LEADER Day.
- The **Mediterranean** cluster came up with an idea of organising a joint study trip for NRNs and regional/local communities and stakeholders, including project beneficiaries. A social media platform would be used as a starting engine for this cooperation and lessons would also be taken from the private sector in how to bring this together.
- Participants in the **Nordic-Baltic** cluster presented a very concrete cooperation idea – a meeting of NRNs

with representatives from Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies. It was then proposed that this meeting will be jointly organised by NRNs alongside the Nordic-Baltic cluster meeting in mid-November in Helsinki.



Update on EU Rural Networking activities

The update from the ENRD CP included three main components. A request was made to NSUs for feedback on the potential for Good Practice Awards in 2020 and to finalise submission of

Common Network Statistics for their own rural networking activity. NSUs were also updated on the new NRN Profiles on the ENRD website which they are being given access to amend and update.

The Evaluation Helpdesk provided an [overview](#) of their activities in 2019. Upcoming activities particularly relevant for NRNs include the upcoming Good Practice Workshop and Thematic Working Group 'Preparing for the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan'. The EvaluationWORKS! 2018 events have gathered over 486 participants in different Member States. The 2019 events, 'From the AIR in 2019 to the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan', will be running from September to December 2019 and NRNs are strongly encouraged to participate and to download new publications issued. These include six evaluation guidelines developed in collaboration with the Member States.

The EIP-AGRI Service Point [presented](#) the main outcomes of the Operational Groups (OG) [assessment 2018](#). This assessment focuses on the state-of-play of the setting-up and implementation of the OGs, their results and how these are disseminated, while also reflecting on the support provided by other institutional actors such as Managing Authorities and Rural Networks. The final report contains all these outputs and describes the process and findings from the different research steps.

Interactive exercise on the 'networX' event

The exercise on the next steps from networX asked participants to [consider the actions](#) they were taking, and would take following networX, looking across the six event strands. A summary of some of the responses was as follows:

- Networking for Policy – several actions are being taken to develop Smart Villages in Finland, Lithuania and the Netherlands, including a competition in Finland. Future actions should include helping to further define the overall EU concept of Smart Villages while allowing regional flexibility and demonstrating the value of bioeconomy actions, particularly to farmers.
- Building a Network –NRNs are currently concentrating on CAP strategic plans and understand they will need to look at the planning of new CAP networks, including the involvement of key stakeholders (agricultural, territorial and environmental) going forward.
- Networking with LEADER/CLLD – current actions include LAG staff spending one day per month engaged in rural activity (including on farms) in Romania, and actions to connect NRNs with LAGs. Further action means giving space to the multi-actor approach to connect all actors in the delivery chain (NRNs, MAs, LAGs) and considering new approaches to multi-funding.
- Networking for Evaluation - several NRNs are disseminating evaluation results to inform future strategies and providing information and training for evaluators. Some self-assessment activity has been undertaken and plans are progressing on how to develop new CAP strategies and evaluation plans side-by-side.
- Stakeholder Engagement – NSUs are currently looking to connect with all types of stakeholders including through peer-to-peer events, field visits, agricultural fairs and linking to agricultural colleges. Planned activities are looking at demonstrating success through the use of stories with more audio-visual content, which enables more accessibility and greater targeting.
- Networking for Innovation – examples included looking at mapping the AKIS (UK – Scotland), developing an evaluation of innovation (Sweden) and developing innovation brokers (Finland). Planned actions are to stimulate collaboration between businesses and small farmers, and to communicate that innovation is not only about technical support.

Outcomes and Actions

The meeting showed increasing opportunities for further collaboration between rural networks, building on existing partnerships. These can be complemented by new activities in addressing wider stakeholder needs, as the discussions on using LAGs to connect to project beneficiaries highlighted.

Looking forward, NSUs are keen to improve their own linkages with project beneficiaries and their own Steering

Groups, Monitoring Committees, Paying Agencies and Managing Authorities developing their own CAP Strategic Plans, and would hope to exchange on this and development of national CAP networks in future NRN Meetings.

