ALL Europe shall live - *the voice of rural people*

Report to the Second European Rural Parliament
4-6 November 2015

This report contains the main findings from
the ERP national campaigns in 36 countries,
plus supporting material.

It forms a background paper to the European Rural Manifesto,
which will be discussed, improved and adopted
at the ERP 2015 Gathering in Schärding, Austria.

The report itself will be improved and enriched
by ideas offered at the Gathering
and will be edited and published after the Gathering.



Structure of this Book

The scope and structure of this book are based directly on the ideas gathered from rural people by the national champions and synthesised in their national reports. The contents have been endorsed by the national champions.

The book falls into nine sections.

1. Introduction – the European Rural Parliament
2. Rural Europe, as perceived by rural people

Elements which matter to rural people

3. Rural Communities – the challenge of change
4. Rural services – securing continuity
5. Rural economies – how to sustain and diversify
6. Supporting systems

Implications for policy and action

7. Action by rural stakeholders
8. Action by regional and national governments
9. The European dimension

The core of the book is a rich set of quotations from the national reports and related documents from nearly 40 European countries. These appear as inset paragraphs, held together by a story line which could stand alone as a statement and which is reflected in the draft European Rural Manifesto.

In geographic scope, this report relates to the whole of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean. So, the ideas come from countries which vary greatly in physical circumstance, human culture and political system. This diversity adds to the fascination of the ideas, but also to the difficulty of interpreting what they imply for action and policy. For that reason, in each significant section of the report, the quotations appear roughly in a west-to-east sequence of countries; and, where it seems useful, conclusions are offered by reference to groups of countries – for example the 'old' (pre-2004) EU member states, the new member states, the Western Balkans, the countries around the Black Sea.

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1. Introduction – the European Rural Parliament

1.1. **Origins.** This book, and the European Rural Parliament from which it sprang, are the third-generation outcome of a remarkable movement started in the Scandinavian countries in the 1970's.

In Norway, Finland, Denmark and Sweden, local communities took action to combat depopulation and improve living conditions. There were no elected authorities at this local or village level. Spontaneously, neighbourhood associations or village action groups emerged, acting and campaigning to protect services, to sustain enterprises, to meet local needs. Norway has a very long history of neighbourhood associations. In Finland villages started to act in the 1970s in what was the first embryo of a national village movement.

In 1987-8, the Council of Europe launched its European Campaign for the Countryside, which stimulated thinking about the future of rural areas throughout Europe. Many national campaigns were organised. The Swedish campaign was run by the government and 100 NGOs to stimulate local action and improve rural policies. A result was the creation of village associations, which now number about 5,000; and in 1989 of the *Folkrorelserådet*, or Swedish Popular Movements Council. This adopted the slogan *Hela Sverige ska leva* ('ALL Sweden shall live'), proclaiming the rights of rural people. In 1990 it held the first of (so far) 12 biennial national Rural Parliaments, gathering people from all over Sweden to share ideas, shape campaigns and debate with national politicians.

These Scandinavian initiatives were matched by national campaigns and movements in the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Ireland and Portugal in the same period. But the Swedish experience that caught the imagination of three countries then outside the European Union. Swedish support led to the creation of a village movement in Estonia, with a national organisation *Kodukant* ('our home') set up in 1997. The Hungarian Rural Parliament was created in1998 and the Slovakian in 2000.

At that point, decision-makers in Brussels were working with countries of central Europe on plans for their accession to the EU. The European Parliament wondered – would these countries be ready for the EU approach to rural development, based on partnership between rural people and governments? The Parliament then supported an initiative by the national rural movements in Sweden and Estonia, plus two European rural NGOs, Forum Synergies and ECOVAST, to organise a most unusual event. This was a one-week traveling workshop, half in Estonia and half in Sweden, visiting rural communities and enterprises and debating how the vitality of rural areas could be sustained and enhanced. Taking part were people from civil society and government of all the then accession countries of central Europe – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. The event was a real eye-opener for the participants, and a sharp 'reality check' for government officials and representatives of the European Parliament and Commission.

The impact of this event was such that the organisers decided to launch a campaign to promote the strengthening of civil society in rural areas, particularly in the accession countries of central Europe. In 2000, they set up the PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe, with funding from the C.S.Mott Foundation. They offered support to people in the accession countries, by inviting them to international gatherings, offering expert advice, contributing to seminars etc. Within six years, new national rural networks were created in Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic. These networks joined the PREPARE Partnership, and have actively supported rural initiatives throughout their countries while promoting cooperation between people and government.

In 2005 All Sweden shall live invited many people in these networks to a meeting in Stockholm where the idea of creating a European Village Movement was discussed. This was followed by a meeting in Helsinki the following year, hosted by the Finnish Rural Movement, and led to the establishment of what is now the European Rural Communities Alliance (ERCA), bringing together the rural movements of Scandinavia and Western Europe. Also in 2005, PREPARE published "The Rural Movements of Europe" by Vanessa Halhead, a survey of the origin and activity of the 18 national rural movements which then existed in northern, western and central Europe. Vanessa, who is now the coordinator of ERCA, described the emergence of these movements as a "quiet revolution".

From 2006 onwards, PREPARE turned attention to south-east Europe, including the Western Balkan countries and Turkey. It contacted NGOs in all those countries; supported meetings there, with the aim of strengthening civil society; and invited civil and governmental people from those countries to annual Gatherings, held (each time in a different country) in that region. The outcome is the creation of national rural networks in Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina; and strengthening of civil society in Albania and Kosovo. Now, PREPARE is turning its attention to countries surrounding the Black Sea and has found civil-society allies in all those countries.

1.2 European Rural Parliament – the 2015 campaign

In 2013, ERCA took the initiative, supported by PREPARE, to hold the first European Rural Parliament, which took place in Brussels in November that year. The event was organised by the Nordic group of national rural movements, led by *Hela Sverige ska leva*. 150 people from 30 countries took part in that event. They agreed that the initiative should continue, in order to strengthen the voice of rural Europe.

Responding to this call from rural people, ERCA and PREPARE decided to hold in 2015 a second European Rural Parliament, with wider geographic scope and a stronger message. They adopted the following double objective :

- To strengthen the voice of the rural communities of Europe, and to ensure that the interests and well-being of these communities are strongly reflected in national and European policies
- To promote self-help, common understanding, solidarity, exchange of good practice and cooperation among rural communities throughout Europe.

The double emphasis in this aim should be noted. We wish to ensure that governments, at European and national level, understand and take into account the interests and well-being of rural communities; *and* to encourage rural communities to be active in pursuit of their own well-being.

At the heart of this initiative is **the voice of rural people**. ERCA and PREPARE realised that, as European networks, they could not claim to speak for all rural communities of Europe. If the true voice of rural people was to be heard, that voice must come from the rural people, at grassroots level. So, they decided that there should be national campaigns in every European country, with each campaign focused on organising an 'upward cascade of ideas' which truly draws upon the concerns and hopes of rural people. These ideas could then be synthesised at national level, for use in national campaigning; and then at European level to form a European Rural Manifesto and its expanded form (which is this book), for use in European campaigning.

How to organise the national campaigns ? ERCA and PREPARE turned to the national rural networks in their own membership. Taken together, these account for 23 countries out of the 47 in the Council of Europe area. They all agreed to act as national champions, and to run national campaigns. In the search for national champions elsewhere, the co-initiators turned for help to ELARD, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development, which has members in many countries, including national associations of local action groups. Several of these national associations agreed to act as national champions. For some countries still not covered, other national rural associations or networks were then recruited.

The outcome is that national campaigns have been undertaken in 36 European countries or territories – Albania, Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Kosovo*, Latvia, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Wales. The full list of national champions appears at the end of this book.

> **this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*

The national campaigns varied greatly in depth and detail. Some national champions based their outputs mainly on work done in previous years : for example the Scots relayed the main relevant conclusions from the Scottish Rural Parliament of 2014, which was itself preceded by a widespread national campaign. Others relied mainly on questionnaire processes. The most ambitious organised a series of regional meetings, sometimes followed by a national event. For example, the Portuguese LEADER Network MINHA TERRA organised more than 170 local or regional events, with a total of over 3800 participants. National events included Rural Parliaments in the Swedish-speaking community in Finland, Lithuania, Croatia (for the first time), Bosnia and Herzegovina (also for the first time), Latvia, Estonia, Cyprus (for the first time) and Slovenia Cyprus. Still to come, at

the time of the ERP 2015Gathering is the Rural Parliaments in the Netherlands (November). In some countries which have the least developed civil society network in rural areas, the ERP process has triggered a much more significant networking effort than would otherwise have happened. For example, there are now active moves towards the creation of NGO-based national rural networks in Albania, Austria, Cyprus and Turkey.

> ***Denmark.*** *The primary purpose for gathering ideas, comments and opinions regarding the development in the Danish Rural Districts has been to meet people and organisations locally and as widespread as possible. For a period of three months the purpose has been to meet villages, organizations, public and private partners as well as political counterparts in an open debate about the challenges and potentials in the rural areas. Thus, the Council of Rural Districts has participated in conferences, seminars, workshops, annual meetings and political venues to put the cascade of ideas along with the debate about Rural Districts in front of the discussion around villages. The interest for participating in discussions has been overwhelmingly positive, and many different influences from all levels of society have contributed to the content of the National Report. Thus, the National Report has been formed by the comments and discussions during those activities, and the Report reflects the contributions and cases that make the basis for the Report. (Denmark)*

> ***Poland.*** *Our participants exhibited eagerness in the process. Especially effective and successful were direct meetings, because participants felt that their work was necessary and will be further used. There are many conferences at which important questions are asked, but very often there is sense of doubt in their usefulness. When we told these people that their words will be carried further out in Europe, they really had a sense of purpose. The work is not yet finished. Further preparations for ERP will be made because we sense that the topics have not yet run out. People's energy was awakened, an important introduction was made in these months that paved the way for a wider discussion. We will now draw on the findings of these discussions and refine our questions, propositions and good examples in order to make our participation in ERP strategically important. In the course of these preparations it became evident that Poland is gradually becoming ready for our own Rural Parliament. (Poland)*

> ***Portugal.*** *The ERP2015 process in Portugal was a pioneering and innovative initiative which has become quite demanding, as a result of timing and coordination with local initiatives streamlined by our member Local Development Agencies in preparing their strategies for 2014 – 2020. Meetings connected with these initiatives are the main source of information for this report. With over 3800 participants in over 170 events organised locally, we achieved the bottom-up "cascade of ideas" and ensured the involvement of rural communities. Assembling a summary document with the vision of rural communities has become a major challenge, making the necessary aggregations and highlighting, wherever possible, specific regional or local issues and testimonies of participants. However, we did not aim to get a 'final version' within the period required to contribute to the European process, but rather to make the outputs open and accessible to all, so that they become a national rural visibility tool and can help to strengthen the voice of rural communities, contributing to better national and European policies, taking in consideration the interests and the welfare of these communities. (Portugal).*

> ***Estonia.*** *Kodukant has sponsored Rural Parliaments of Estonian Villages every two years since 1996 to bring together village people, organisations, local and national representatives to discuss problems facing rural development and look for solutions and bring them to te attention of government. These evnts also provide also a good platform for exchange of ideas with people involved in rural development in many European countries. This year's event in August attracted 375 participants, including large delegations from 15 Estonian counties, partner organisations, ministers and other politicians. 20 international guests from 7 countries (Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Netherlands and Germany) took part in the event, enjoyed field visits in Järva County, and held a multi-national workshop "Influence of European policies in rural development". (Estonia)*

This book draws upon the reports submitted by the national champions : quotations from those reports are attributed simply by the name of the country or territory. We draw also upon reports of reconnaissance visits by PREPARE partners to countries around the Black Sea; "The Rural Movements of Europe" by Vanessa Halhead; two other books published by PREPARE, 'Community Spirit Wins' and 'Rural Parliaments'; some other publications, including the report 'The Importance of Small Towns', published in 2014 by ECOVAST (a PREPARE partner); and the report 'Empowering Rural Stakeholders in the Western Balkans', published in October 2014 by the European Commission as an outcome of the ambitious series of traveling workshops and conferences jointly initiated by

PREPARE, the Standing Working Group and the Commission's Directorate for Agriculture and held in April 2014 in Serbia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In order to provide a conceptual framework for the ideas flowing in from each country, we have included some statistical and other data on the state of rural Europe, and on the scope of relevant regional, national and European policies and programmes.

1.3. ERP 2015 Gathering. The climax of the campaign is the ERP 2015 Gathering, to be held on 4-6 November 2015 at the beautiful small town of Schärding in Upper Austria. The first day will be spent on field trips in regions surrounding the venue. This will be followed by two days of workshops and plenary meetings to debate, finalise and adopt the European Rural Manifesto, and to endorse the broad contents of this Book, which can be seen as an expanded version and detailed explanation of the Manifesto.

For that reason, the drafts of the Manifesto and of this Book are sent to all participants before the Gathering, with a request that they come to Schärding ready to contribute to debate on the themes covered in these papers.

The Gathering will be attended by up to 300 people, including delegations from all the countries involved in the cascade of ideas, plus other leading rural organisations and invited representatives of governments, the European Commission, the European Parliament and international organisations.

1.4. Outputs of the campaign. The campaign has been designed to produce outputs at two main levels – national and European.

At national level, in the countries which had national campaigns, the main written output is a synthesised set of ideas which can be used for national action and advocacy, usually with much more detail than appears in the English-language reports used in compiling this Report. In many of those countries, the campaign has sparked interest in rural communities, strengthened the resolve of rural people to take action towards their own well-being, extended the knowledge and raised the profile of the national-champion organisation, and laid a groundwork for future activism, including in some countries the creation of new national networks and the holding of national Rural Parliaments.

At European level, the campaign has strengthened the cooperation between the three co-initiating bodies; widened their network of national partners; and produced, through the national reports, a rich set of ideas which indeed represent the voice of a substantial slice of the rural people of Europe. These ideas are the basis for the two main written outputs of the European campaign, namely :

- The European Rural Manifesto, designed to influence the European institutions and national and regional governments in their attitudes to, and policies for, rural communities
- This Report, which incorporates the main synthesised results of all the national 'cascades of ideas', plus other relevant material.

1.5. Looking ahead

ERCA, PREPARE and ELARD – all of which have seats in the Civil Dialogue Group which advises the European Commission on its policies for agriculture and rural development, and on the Rural Networks Assembly which guides the work of the European Network for Rural Development – expect to use the outputs of ERP 2015 in their subsequent networking, advocacy and other activities.

The national-champion organisations are encouraged to use the national outputs and the European synthesis in their own continued campaigning, advocacy and practical action.

Our collective intention is to continue the campaign on a rolling basis, through collaboration between the three European bodies and a gradually expanding team of national champions. Subject to discussion at the Gathering, we envisage a biennial sequence of European Rural Parliaments, preceded each time by national campaigns and (hopefully) a set of national rural parliaments. The main event might be held in a different part of Europe each biennium, in a similar way to the changing regional locations of the Swedish and Estonian Rural Parliaments.

2. Rural Europe – as perceived by rural people

The ERP 2015 campaign relates to all the rural areas of the European continent, from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the Arctic circle to the Mediterranean. It has not been possible to gather ideas from every part of this great territory, but we have first-hand evidence from over half of the 50+ countries and supporting material from many more.

2.1. **Diversity.** The national champions are acutely aware of the wide diversity of rural areas across Europe, arising from the varied geomorphology, climate and biodiversity of land and sea and from the long history of human activity across the continent. This diversity is reflected in the physical circumstances in which rural communities live, from remote islands to the edge of cities, from mountains to plains, from harsh northern climates to southern heat. It is reflected in settlement patterns, from areas of nomadic culture and sparsely populated regions to densely populated Alpine valleys, deep rural regions, tens of thousands of villages and small towns, and peri-urban communities. Even within single countries, there can be great diversity.

> ***Serbia.*** *Rural areas in Serbia are highly diverse in economic, social and demographic terms, due to differences in their geo-morphological characteristics (mountains, hills and plains), population changes, economic structures, infrastructure, environmental conditions, transport accessibility etc. (Serbia)*

The diversity across Europe is reflected also in variety of cultures, of languages and religion, of social norms and societal structures, all of which factors affect the way that people relate to each other and their assumptions about communal action, communal leadership and the relations between people and authorities of all kinds.

These cultural factors, in turn, relate in complex and variable ways to the administrative structures within which rural communities sit. Some countries, for example, have public authorities at truly local level, such as the village mayors in France who have the power to provide local leadership. In other countries, the smallest local authorities with meaningful powers may be at district level, serving populations of tens of thousands, with no direct presence in the villages. Such distinctions, as this report shows, can profoundly affect the well-being of rural communities and their ability to secure the action needed to enhance that well-being.

Overarching all this physical, cultural, social and administrative variety is the diversity of political systems and ideologies across Europe. In western Europe, the countries within the European Union share a broad commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, support for civil society and for public participation in the shaping of policy. They are committed in principle to promote social, economic and territorial cohesion. They operate within a common market for goods, services and labour, and apply broadly similar approaches to those policy areas and programmes which are of greatest relevance to rural population and economies, such as regional and rural development. But they vary, sometimes quite widely, in the extent to which these principles and policies are applied.

In central and eastern Europe, there is much greater variety in political systems, from those which look east for their alliances to those which look west. There is much interest in many of these countries in the principles and policies of the European Union, particularly those which have candidate or associate status with the EU. Many such counties are in process of adopting the *acquis communautaire* of the EU and developing structures and policies based on, or similar to, those of the EU. This transitional process, at different stages in different countries, greatly affects the operational contexts within which rural communities pursue their lives.

We have borne all these aspects of Europe's diversity in mind in this effort to synthesise and interpret the ideas which have been gathered in so many countries. We have found indeed some striking differences in focus or in emphasis … but also a remarkable degree of commonalty of ideas.

2.2. **Assets for Europe.** The national reports reveal that the wide diversity of rural areas in Europe, described on the previous page, is deeply appreciated by rural people and seen by them as an enormous strength for the future well-being of all peoples in Europe.

Wales. *The value of rural Wales is demonstrated through the economic contribution it makes, its iconic landscapes, its contributions to eco-systems and as the heartlands for Welsh language and culture. In 2010, the Campaign for Rural Wales stated that the rural environment contributes £9 billion annually to the Welsh economy and that the countryside provides work for 1 in 6 people in Wales. All of Wales' internationally iconic landscapes are in rural areas yet some of the most economically and socially deprived areas of the UK exist within close proximity to them. The uplands of Wales are regarded as key to helping to solve our climate change challenge with huge amounts of sequestrated carbon locked up in the woodlands, peat and organic soils of these areas. Rural areas are bastions of Welsh identity, culture and the Welsh language. (Wales)*

Wallonie. *The countryside - with its population, its space, its enterprises and communes – is a trump card for Wallonie and for Europe, well suited to address the new challenges widely identified in the EU2020 strategy (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Latvia. *The countryside and small towns are an integral part of the great, but not yet fully realised, potential that can make a significant contribution to the development, stability and sustainability in our state and across the EU. (Declaration from the second Latvian Rural Communities Parliament, June 2015)*

2.3 Values. Those who live in rural Europe value highly the quality of life which is offered by the countryside, the farms, villages and small towns, the coastal margins and islands, with their relative quietude, stability, local cultures, wildlife, landscapes and healthy environment.

Denmark. *The Rural Districts represent a difference and an alternative to the growing cities. The difference lies in a unique nature; alternative options for personal development; plurality and diversity; influence 'to be' alive; attachment and close relation to the local; the common good; and affordable housing. (Denmark)*

Kommentar [O1]:

Brandenberg, Germany. *In all the villages that we visited, the village inhabitants feel very attached to their villages. They mentioned many features of village life that explain that attachment – the natural environment as a factor of quality of life, care for cultural heritage and local traditions, feeling of security and communality in the community. These factors play a similar role for new settlers as well as for people who have lived in the village since a long time. Nature, quietness and community life are typical 'pull' factors for people tired of city life moving to villages, and these pull factors are mentioned regardless of the age of respondents. (Brandenburg)*

2.4 Vision. Emerging from the national reports is a collective vision for the future of rural Europe, focused on vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities, supported by diversified rural economies and by effective stewardship of high-quality environment and cultural heritage. Rural communities, modelled on that vision, are perceived as major long-term contributors to a prosperous, peaceful, just and equitable Europe.

Portugal. *What are the expectations of the rural people ? The responses to this question focused on the idea of "well-being". People look for "improving the quality of life", "better life", "quiet life" and "hope for a decent future". (Portugal)*

Scotland. *The Scottish Rural Parliament aims to give a new voice to Scotland's many rural communities and interests, and to work with Scottish Government and others to achieve a confident and thriving rural Scotland that is fairer, healthier and more socially just for all. (Scotland)*

Ireland. *Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society. (Ireland)*

England. *Our vision is of **v**ibrant, sustainable, inclusive and diverse rural communities. (England)*

Sweden. *Rural people wish to live and work in a vibrant and thriving local community, with creative cooperation between people, businesses, organisations and authorities; many varied and challenging job opportunities for all people; good possibilities for access to distance learning from home and nearby centres; diversified farming and other enterprises that can exist on a small scale, based on local conditions and opportunities; and with service, both public and commercial, that meets the needs locally. (Sweden)*

2.5 Environment and sustainability. Respect for the environment, and calls for sustainable approaches, figure strongly in some national reports.

Iceland. *Inhabitants have to take nature into account and to realise that it is the driving force behind us, without it we have no future. One of the biggest mistakes humans make is thinking that natural resources are unlimited. They are not. (Iceland)*

Northern Ireland. *Rural citizens should continue to develop their appreciation and understanding of the environment and develop their communities in a sustainable way to safeguard their areas for future generations. (Northern Ireland)*

Sweden. *Changes in climate and economy and need for environmental care make transition into a more sustainable society necessary. Natural resources in rural areas thus become more important and valuable. Extended use of land in sparsely populated regions will be needed again for food and energy production. (Sweden)*

Austria. *Sustainability, living and acting economically in an ecological way, will be the key issue for the future. We have to protect and develop nature and our nature parks, our cultural landscape and respect the international charters of land and forests. Actors in these fields should start a stronger cooperation between themselves and in correlations with public institutions like municipalities, managing authorities etc. Special focus is needed on all themes relating to water, from saving our drinking-water reserves to the usage of water for leisure projects and tourism. To ensure a "healthy" region, more cooperation between all stakeholders is needed. Fostering health-orientated living standards will be the most important basis for ensuring general high living standards. To act ecologically also means to use ecologically produced energy and establish ecological mobility structures. "Smart" mobility will include all affairs in the mobility of the future and include citizens who are living in rural border regions. (Austria)*

Slovenia*. We call for sustainable preservation of the values and traditions of the rural population, which have preserved the balance between mankind and nature for many centuries. Natural resources and the diversity of nature should be protected for the long-term benefit of the broader community (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

2.6 Concerns. However, in very many rural regions, residents are deeply concerned by the narrowness of rural economies, the lack of opportunities for gainful work, the loss of population as young people move away to the cities, the decline in rural services, the suffering of older people, poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged people or ethnic minorities.

Wales. *Rural areas are often denied parity because of their communities are characterised by isolation, poor communication, inadequate service provision, low wages, less disposable incomes, increased costs, a lack of affordable housing and limited job opportunities. (Wales)*

Sweden. *Swedish rural people see a continuing centralisation by closing down or moving local public and commercial service units away from the countryside; people moving away from remote and sparsely populated regions, especially young people for studies and work; on-going urbanisation, especially to university towns and the three Swedish metropolitan areas; a lack of job opportunities in many rural areas, for both low- and high-skilled persons; a lack of infrastructure, for example a slow deployment of broadband capacity and mobile telephone coverage and also too few public transport options. (Sweden)*

Slovenia. *The biggest issues, as determined by the rural population and organisations with seats in rural areas are: depopulation, lack of employment opportunities, weakness of local economies, low profitability of the majority of agricultural activities, abandoning of areas with less favourable farming conditions, reduction of farming areas, exaggerated urbanisation of rural areas, ceasing of a whole array of services in rural areas, and the ever growing cases of poverty and exclusion of certain groups of population. (Slovenia)*

Croatia. *Rural areas are faced with a decreasing number of inhabitants, and especially outflow of young population; unbalanced development and continuous lagging behind in the development of rural areas; increasing gap between the quality of life in rural and urban areas; unused agricultural land and fragmented agricultural holdings; and unrecognised, neglected, uncared for and disconnected development resources of the rural areas. (Croatia)*

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *The rural areas in Macedonia are facing problems like every country that is in process of transition - intensive depopulation, low activity on the labour market, slow restructuring process of the agricultural economy, high percentage of small/ mixed farms with low income. (Macedonia)*

2.7 Positive reaction. These statements of concern, appearing in almost all the national reports, are immediately followed by positive proposals to improve the situation, and a recognition that the rural people themselves must have a leading role on that process. Generally speaking, rural people do not see themselves as victims, but as active stewards of their own well-being.

> ***Cyprus.*** *Instead of focusing on the rural problems which are known, recorded and common in all rural areas in Cyprus (lack of good medical & educational services, lack of incentives for young people , lack of social and recreation incentives to stay and work in rural areas), we focused on solutions, on developing, empowering, training and helping the people who live in rural and deprived areas to have a voice by learning to work first in Teams so that they are not alienated and they can have the voice of a team with much higher impact than the voice of the individual. (Cyprus)*

> ***Bulgaria.*** *The concerns of rural people in Bulgaria are related to the changes they would like to see in their communities. The most significant ones are limited jobs; high unemployment; lack of services, including hospitals, kindergartens, schools and higher educational services; lack of investment; poor infrastructure; and lack of information, training and capacity building. Specific concern was expressed for the strong need for capacity building of the different stakeholders in the rural communities - farmers, NGOs, local authorities and especially young people. Lack of investment and job opportunities is seen as a big threat, leading to migration to big cities and depopulation of the small settlements. (Bulgaria)*

> ***Croatia.*** *Rural stakeholders in Croatia stand for the following key developments:*
> - *ensuring inter-sectoral cooperation and partnership in the decision-making processes at all levels,*
> - *taking into account of differences in the needs, current state and development potential of Croatian rural areas when addressing issues related to rural development,*
> - *ensuring constant assistance and support for building the capacities of rural stakeholders to enable their active participation in the processes of design and implementation of local development plans and strategies. (Croatia)*

2.8 Rights. Indeed, rural people believe passionately that the negatives must be addressed, for the sake not only of the rural communities but also of the whole population of Europe, which depends to a high extent upon the food, timber, fibre, energy, water and minerals produced in the rural areas, upon the contribution of rural enterprises to the common wealth, and upon the contribution of rural areas to amelioration of climate, recreation, health and spiritual well-being.

Accordingly, they assert the right of rural areas and communities to full recognition by all the people and institutions of Europe, to a quality of life and standard of living equal to that of urban populations, and to full participation in political processes.

> ***Scotland.*** *Scotland is fortunate that 95% of its land is rural and this is widely acknowledged as a valuable national asset. However, it is important that those who live and work in rural Scotland are not disadvantaged by challenges arising from their location, and that rural life is sustainable socially, economically and environmentally in the long term and for future generations. (Scotland)*

> ***Wallonie.*** *People in rural communities should not be penalised by the fact of living there. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

> ***Slovenia.*** *The differences between the lifestyles of people in urban and rural areas are decreasing, meaning that the rural population wants to adopt all the advantages of urban living. At the same time, a growing number of people living in cities decide to move to the countryside. The line between the urban and the rural is diminishing, while on the other hand the fast economic development of the urban part of Slovenia, Europe and the globalised world results in the countryside becoming more of a place where people spend their free time and relax. Slovenians want to live and work in the countryside, without being deprived in terms of a quality life standard. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

> ***Iceland.*** *Mutual resources should be managed by communities as close to their origin as possible, with a charge for the right to use these resources. (Iceland)*

2.9 Responsibilities. The national reports place a strong emphasis on the need for action, in order to pursue the vision and to sustain and enhance the well-being of rural communities and economies. There is clear recognition that a prime responsibility for that action rests with the rural people themselves.

Denmark. *The resources in the Rural Districts are first and foremost the people living there. It is from them that the initiative starts to develop. Therefore, it is obvious to begin with the strength locally. Local citizens in the Rural Districts value the spectacular resources in the local societies and often see potentials in the Rural Districts which others cannot see. Thus, the locals are the natural resources to visualise the perspectives for outsiders and potential new settlers to the Rural Districts. (Denmark)*

Latvia. *The European Union's vision of national development plans by 2030 suggests that each person will be self-assessing how to proceed, what to learn and to work. It is absolutely clear that,this is in rural areas, this approach will be needed for each individual. Events like this, with a programme that encourages everyone to find his own place, are very necessary. (Andris Bērziņš, President of Latvia, opening the Latvian Rural Parliament)*

Serbia. *The consultation process was carried out with the idea that the rural communities of Serbia are part of the big family of rural communities of Europe, who aspire to improve their living conditions and to enable future generations to survive on the land of their ancestors. In undertaking the process, we assumed that rural people themselves have the best understanding of their strengths, opportunities and needs; that rural communities should be encouraged and supported to take action in pursuit of their own well-being, and to be constructive partners of governments at all levels; and that the voice must come from the rural people at grassroots level, so that the European Rural Parliament can ensure that the true voice of rural people is heard. (Serbia)*

2.10 Partnership between people and governments. However, it is also realised that the ability of rural people to take that responsibility depends greatly on the cultural and administrative 'climate' within which they must operate. That climate is largely created by public authorities, from local to national and even European level. Accordingly, the call is for an updated, refreshed, innovative partnership between people and governments. The rural people themselves may give leadership and take action towards their own well-being. They can then fairly demand that governments at all levels provide the supportive climate of law, regulation, administration and finance which can nurture and enable this collective self-help.

Bulgaria. *The main stakeholders that have to initiate the changes are considered to be the local and state authorities like municipalities, state administration, managing authorities that need to simplify the rules and procedures, adapt them to the specific conditions and needs of the local community and apply them in a flexible way. The authorities have to be supported by local people, community centres, NGOs, LAGs, local business and farmers. Some respondents also outlined the important role of the EU institutions, European Parliament and its members because the decisions for the objectives and the priorities of the rural development policy framework are taken there. (Bulgaria)*

2.11 The local perspective. This new era of rural vitality can draw upon the rising concern among the people of Europe – and indeed of the whole world – to address the challenges of climate change, to move away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy, to achieve food security, to protect public health, to conserve biodiversity, to foster social inclusion, to reduce inter-ethnic tension and to promote peace.

These worldwide concerns can be reflected in local action in rural areas. But that action will be rooted mainly in an impetus which is especially strong in rural communities, namely a sense of locality. The lives of rural people are rooted in their local community, their local economy, their place. They may experience, and benefit from, the cultural resources of the 'global village' and the mass products of the world economy. But their daily life is local, and they are highly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their local economies, their local services, their local resources and infrastructure. These strengths and weaknesses differ greatly from one rural area to the next.

2.12 Territorial solutions. This local perspective and this variety between areas point to the need for territorial solutions, actions which meet the specific needs of each rural area. The national campaigns provide manifold examples of this. But they also reveal many common elements, which can feed a fruitful exchange of ideas between territories and nations.

Austria. *Modern and attractive rural areas are good in cooperating with a strong multi-sectoral approach. Each sector like agriculture, economy, social and cultural affairs etc. should cooperate in new and innovative*

ways. This will attract the regions and give the citizens a new rural feeling and the motivation to keep staying there. (Austria)

Finland. *The Swedish Rural Parliament in Finland sends a strong message to the ERP15 about the importance of a Place-based Policy and the need for strengthening the local level in the decision making. Place-blind policies are not able to meet the socio-economic or environmental challenges. The local level needs more influence and possibilities to make decisions about their own affairs. Planning is important for development, but the local level needs more power in the process. Local groups should develop the community way of thinking in their activity. We need to build strong partnerships between municipalities and NGOs at local level. (Finland)*

Portugal. *Rural communities identify positive changes in recent years. These include improvement in roads, water supply, sanitation and telecommunications; the rise of small entrepreneurs investing in businesses based on the products and resources of territories, including tourism and differentiated agriculture; an increase in social responses targeted at the elderly; and a growing awareness and involvement of the population in the processes of community development. People referred to the increased capacity of resilience of local populations to overcome the difficulties inherent in these territories; to experiences of cooperation between rural territories in finding new approaches; and to investment in increased academic and professional qualifications of the resident population (Portugal)*

2.13 Defining rural areas. We have not attempted (for the purpose of this report) to define what we mean by rural areas, because the report is based essentially on the views of citizens and other stakeholders who believe their areas to be rural, wherever those areas may fall within the categorisation used by the OECD, the European Commission or national governments. The OECD defines predominately rural areas are defined these areas in which more than 50% of the population lives in 'rural communes', which themselves are defined as communes with population density below 150 inhabitants/Km2. In the EU, This definition was only taken up by a minority of national and regional Rural Development Programmes for the period 2007-2013. EU Member States or regions use a wide variety of territorial definition to target their rural areas. They do so because they have their own historic definitions, or they perceive that the OECD definition cannot portray the socio-geographical or area-specific development needs of the country, or they want a more relevant distinction between rural and urban areas. Almost always, the national definitions of rural areas embrace a higher proportion of national territory and population than are embraced by the OECD definition.

The fact that national governments can use the own definition of rural areas is to be welcomed, because it reflects the 'bottom-up' reality of land use and settlement patterns, and how people perceive themselves. But the formal implications must be recognised. Within the EU, the defined boundary between rural and non-rural lands can mean in practice – at least in some countries – that the rural areas can only benefit from the support through the Common Agricultural policy and its 'second pillar the European Agricultural Fund for Rural development (EAFRD)) and are excluded from support through the Structural Funds (ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund) which have no specific targeting for rural areas.

2.14 Rural Population. The geographic scope of this report embraces, in principle, all of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, with a total population of 852 million. We have not been able to check the population of rural areas as defined by every nation. A crude estimate suggests that something more than one-third of this population, about 300 million, can fairly be regarded as living in rural areas.

3 Rural communities – the challenge of change

3.1 Concerns. In very many rural regions, residents are deeply concerned by the narrowness of rural economies, the lack of opportunities for gainful work, the loss of population as young people move away to the cities, the decline in rural services, the suffering of older people, poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged people or ethnic minorities.

> ***Ireland.*** *Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. (Ireland)*
>
> ***Portugal.*** *Overall, demographic dynamics and social issues bring together the main concerns in most of the country, particularly depopulation caused by rural exodus and the low birth rate; the ageing population; unemployment, and difficulty in job creation; poverty and social exclusion, particularly in young people, elderly people and families where both husband and wife lost their jobs. (Portugal)*
>
> ***Turkey.*** *In terms of social services, 33% of respondent stated the lack of school and studying places in their villages, 20% stated the lack of any health services, 60% stated the lack of sport facilities and playing grounds for youth and children. More than 80% indicated migration of young people from their villages, and said that the main reasons for it are unemployment and lack of education and social facilities in the villages. (Turkey)*

3.2 Population decline. Many of the national reports record the distress of rural communities about the decline of population and particularly the loss of young people.

> ***Netherlands.*** *In general the problems of rural areas in the Netherlands are related to the declining and ageing of the population in the rural area; to the economic crisis and to growing mobility. As a result of these trends, the facilities in the rural area are under pressure and it takes much effort of the people to organise the facilities themselves. (Netherlands)*
>
> ***Denmark.*** *Out-migration from the outer regions of Denmark has intensified in recent years. Rural areas have lost 5.2% of their population since 2009, while the towns with over 20,000 inhabitants have seen a population increase of 7.9%. (Denmark)*
>
> ***Belarus.*** *Currently Belarus suffers from the depopulation of rural areas and small towns, a low level of income of the population living in the regions (with few exceptions), lack of the social infrastructure and the low quality of services provided to the population. Many districts are still loss-making, small and medium businesses develop slowly. Minsk and large cities remain the "centres of attraction" for investments. Least-developed regions and local communities are not attractive for investors. (Belarus report – see Annex 2)*

3.3 Movement into the countryside. This trend of population decline in many rural areas is confirmed by statistics. However, also at work in some rural regions, and particularly in those which surround the great cities of Western Europe, is a process of outward movement from the cities into the countryside. Charalambos Kasimis from the University of Patras describes these conflicting processes in his 2010 paper "Demographic trends in rural Europe", which is focused on countries of the European Union.

> "In the greatest part of the twentieth century the regional pattern of population change in most European countries was characterised by a 'rural exodus' and increasing urbanisation.
> Demographic ageing has been an important issue in the rural regions of some Member States, notably Spain, Greece, Portugal and France, where the rural populations are consisted of a higher proportion of people over 65. The same countries show a relatively low ratio of children (0-15) to pensioners (>65), a low ratio of young adults (15-24) to pensioners, and a high overall dependency ratio (total population/ages 15-64). Thus, it comes as no surprise that the ageing of the rural and farm population and the need to accommodate or reduce the flow of young people out of the countryside has been a serious challenge to the generational renewal and the sustainability of the European rural regions. This development reveals the complexity of the rural labour markets and the social mismatch of the demand and supply of employment. However, from the 1970s onwards 'counter urbanisation' became a common trend in the 'well developed' parts of the world. Together with a parallel process of 'de-agriculturalisation' of rural households and an increasing development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas, these processes contributed largely to the formation of a 'new rurality' characterising more and more the rural regions of Europe." (Kasimis, 2010)

The outward flow of people from cities into the countryside can itself have substantial impacts – for both good and ill – upon the population of the receiving areas. On the positive side, it can bring new customers for rural services and enterprises, and lively people who can contribute to communal life in the villages. On the negative side, it can increase demand and therefore raise prices within the housing market, to the great disadvantage of lower-paid and young people already in the area. This pressure on the housing market is prompting rising concern about the lack of affordable housing in rural areas in the countries of Western Europe.

England. *Rural areas, where average annual earnings are just over £19,000, can be some of the least affordable areas in which to live. Outside of London and the South East, the average cost of a house is £206,000. Mean house prices in rural areas are 11 times the average salary. With the lowest monthly rent for a three-bedroom house in England at £550, families trying to save for a mortgage while paying rent are under increased pressure. We call for a commitment to provide a proportion of affordable housing on all rural developments. A strategic, nationwide approach to affordable rural housing does not appear to be a priority. Rural investment priorities should be linked directly to the delivery of homes of all tenures that enable people to live and work in their area. (England)*

Czech Republic. *The ongoing out-migration of young people troubles rural areas. Numbers of young people leave the region they were brought-up in order to find better opportunities for living in cities. The population is thus getting older and gets into deep social tensions. At the same time, the process of urbanisation has been gaining in intensity, with adverse effects on rural communities. We regards the people who are moving out of the city into the rural as "neo-residents", who sleep in the countryside but do not really live there. They leave for work in the morning and go back to a village at night, without the relationship and emotion of real rural inhabitants. They bring their urban lifestyle with them to the rural communities, do not fully respect the rooted rural models of behaviour, and thus contribute to the suppression of traditional rural values. This lack of a sense of belonging and of solidarity pattern causes fragmentation and loss of unity in the receiving communities. (Czech Republic)*

3.4 Downward spiral. Many of the national reports recognise a 'downward spiral' or 'vicious circle' in the vitality of rural communities, as loss of population leads to reduced viability of rural services and weaker local economy, and the loss of services prompts more loss of population.

Denmark. *The biggest challenge - young people move away to study, lose contact with their network and will never come back again. This leads to a vicious circle in which the tax will disappear, because there are fewer to pay to the municipality. Businesses and services will lack employees and customers, and the municipalities will have fewer tax dollars to prevent even more moving out. According to surveys among students in universities and colleges, the biggest problem for young people that it is too expensive to travel home regularly. Therefore, a concrete solution would be to ensure cheaper options for commuting home at weekends, so the switch to the homeland is retained. (Denmark)*

Lithuania. *Between 2008 to 2013, the rural population decreased by about 9.5%, about the same as the decrease in urban areas. However, the rural population decrease was highest among those under 15 years of age. Decisions to leave rural areas were influenced primarily by the difference in income in urban and rural areas : in 2011, average disposable income per household member in urban areas was nearly 23% higher than in rural areas. Unemployment is an acute problem in rural areas : in 2012, the unemployment rate in rural areas was 17.8%, compared with a national average of 13.3%. Among young people aged 15 to 24, unemployment was 32.9%, which was 6.5% higher than the national average. Moreover, rural residents lack services. Regional and local roads are of poor quality : 50.6% and 64.9% of those respectively are gravel roads. As the rural population decreases, the number of schools and kindergartens in rural areas also falls : between 2008 and 2012, 106 schools and 38 pre-school institutions were closed. Despite recent improvements in water treatment in rural areas, many rural residents, especially young ones, are dissatisfied with the aged dwellings in rural areas. Youth also lack locations for leisure venues. (Lithuania)*

Moldova. *Moldova has the highest share of rural population in Eastern-Europe, with 58% of its people (2 million out a total of 3,560,000) now living in rural areas. However, out-migration is a major problem. Almost 660 thousand Moldovans left the country after 1997. Decrease in job opportunities in rural areas continues to provoke massive out-migration from the countryside to cities and over-seas, led by young and educated people. **The** highest increase of out-migration is found among middle-aged (45-54 years) and young (25-34 years) people with higher education. National data show that during the last 6 years, about 200,000 people left the rural areas <u>each year</u>. EU markets mainly attracted women (housekeepers and nurses), while most*

of the men went to Russia markets to work in the construction industry. These changes have taken a toll on the young and mobile. (PREPARE Situation report on Moldova)

3.5 Loss of young people. In particular, there is widespread concern about the loss of young people from rural areas, and what this loss implies for (inter alia) lack of continuity in enterprises, threats to rural services, and lack of support for old people. This out-migration of young people is prompted by lack of job opportunities, the prospect of low income from very hard work, difficulties of succession to farms or enterprises, lack of credit, lack of cultural activities suited to the young, lack of affordable housing and other factors. Rural leaders recognise that young people may wish to leave home for higher education or to see the world, but hope that some at least will return and settle in their home region. If this is to be secured, incentives must be strengthened by provision of jobs, vocational education, access to housing and to credit and cultural activity, plus specific support to young farmers and entrepreneurs.

Wales. *The rural population aged between 15 and 24 years were more likely than other age groups to migrate and also compared to persons of the same age in the rest of Wales. There is a growing trend of young people leaving their rural homes to find work and wider education and social opportunities, elsewhere in Wales and further afield. This pattern has been examined more widely in the UK and is linked to structural factors such as housing, wages, education, employment and non-economic motivations such as quality of life. Along with net in-migration of older people, this is of concern to Welsh society and government, for the implications it has for the sustainability of rural communities. (Wales)*

Austria. *The biggest challenge facing rural areas will be retaining youth in a given region. Demographic change and the massive migration of young people towards urban and suburban areas is a phenomenon that affects virtually all rural areas. Children and young people must be involved in regional development, special offers for women and young families need to be developed. There must be jobs and opportunities for young people and women. The quality of life of young families and mothers need to be increased. This requires appropriate support structures and the construction of an "Age of competence" for all people living in rural areas. (Austria)*

Hungary. *If current tendencies remain, Hungary has to reckon with an unfavourable change in the age structure of the population in all poor rural regions, the continuous decrease of the active-age population, and the concomitant rise in the number of inactive citizens. As a result of the intensifying migration into urban areas, a strong regional concentration can be expected. The unemployment rate is more than twice the national average in small settlements, which is due to the critical labour market situation. For people with higher qualification it is hard to find a suitable job; and,on the other hand, the employment of low skilled social groups is also very problematic. All this leads to migration in the case of the former, and to unemployment, deviation, and dropping out of the labour market in the case of the latter group. The migration of those with higher qualification results in the lack of a thisstrong knowledge base in the countryside. (Hungary)*

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *Rural areas in Macedonia have unfavourable levels of net out-migration, average 1.45/1,000 inhabitants per year. From 1981 to 2002, the proportion of young people (0 to 19 years) fell from 41% to 32.2%, while that of old people (65 years and more) grew from 8% to 32.2%. Improvement of the age structure in the rural areas should be high on the priority list of rural development policy. Measures like additional help to the young farmers or schemes for early retirement can encourage the farm inheritance process which will increase the entrepreneurship, introduction of innovation, farm modernisation etc. (Macedonia)*

Kosovo. *The out-migration of youth has the effect of increasing the apathy and disappointment of youth to deal with agriculture. (Kosovo)*

Armenia. *Measures must be taken to encourage young people to stay in the mountain areas. Young people need good transport infrastructure, to enable them to visit the towns; high-quality vocational education; and support for entrepreneurship. Action of this sort, which is being promoted by the Swiss Development Organisation, can enable young people to remain independent and to enjoy a good livelihood in the countryside. If all the young people leave the mountains, the land will be consolidated into enormous ranches, with low population and a cycle of decline in rural services. The aim must be to encourage village leadership, to promote a sense of rural identity and pride, to celebrate the warmth that can be found within small communities. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)*

3.6 Age. The out-migration of young people has its counterpoint in an ageing rural population, with a growing proportion of elderly people who need support. With people also living longer, there are growing issues of isolation and loneliness among older people, and growing demands upon the health and social services.

Ireland. *Ireland's ageing population is a growing area of concern .. (there will be) increased financial strain on the country's finances and on all caring services. Research indicates that home-based caring is the preferred option for many families, and is the most cost-effective method for governments. The importance of social activity for the elderly should not be underestimated. Rural isolation has a bleakness about it. It describes the reality of many, mainly older people who live alone and may not come into contact with people for days or even weeks. Social services, including meals on wheels, are plugging the gaps in the system left by the health services, but they cannot continue to do so without adequate support. (Ireland)*

Case study : Shared kitchen, Dolni Vadin, Bulgaria.
In the Bulgarian municipality of Oryahovo, the 'chitalishta' or community centre) of Dolni Vadin village introduced in 2012 a new social service in the form of a "shared kitchen". The village is remote from the municipal centre, down a cul-de-sac road. Most of its population of 200 are over 65 in age. They cannot get access to the respite care service or the soup kitchen in the municipal centre, so they have created this alternative of a shared kitchen. This is an at-home service of food, served several times a week to groups of up to 20 older people, self-organised by the "members" of each shared kitchen, with the choice of meals based on the specific wishes of the participants and cooked by some members who act as chefs. Funding is provided jointly and freely, taking into account the financial means of the members. The community centre supervises the compliance with diets and hygiene requirements, supports members in the preparation of food, stimulates group communication, provides necessary information, encourages the inclusion of new members and the formation of groups, and organises thematic meetings. This system enables communication and social inclusion of elderly people living alone or with a spouse and in small isolated villages. (Bulgaria)

3.7 Older people as volunteers. Older people are seen in some countries as not only needing services but also as contributing to the strength of community life

Brandenburg. *A strong tradition found in almost all the villages is the solidarity and support for the elderly … the care or assistance in purchasing, for visits to the doctor etc. This partly compensates the shortage of medical care systems. An increasing number of "young old", sprightly and qualified seniors play an active role in village life, particularly in those villages where their willingness and experience is managed and organised. Brigades of retired people sometimes provide indispensable support in community projects. (Brandenburg)*

Case Study "The Olympics for the elderly", Czech Republic.
Sunny weather and the general good mood and an excellent number of participants. How simple ! As in previous years. the competitors organised an athletic event comprising of four disciplines - the hammer throw, the tennis ball throw, the long jump and minigolf. Regardless each participant's achievements in a particular discipline, the Olympics was a fruitful gathering. The Olympics event was attended even by people who could only take part in one discipline because of poor health : it did not matter, because at least they had more time to socialize with peers and enjoy a day! (Czech Republic)

3.8 Gender. A number of national reports focused on the needs of women in rural areas.

Slovakia. *Rural women are disadvantaged in many ways in Slovakia. Much of their work - for example in caring for disabled children, disabled people and the elderly - is unpaid. They are not well aware of how to reconcile work and family life. They are little involved in public life. There is inadequate support during maternity and parental leave. To address these issues, it is suggested that :*

- *the value of unpaid work, by men and women, should be formally recognised and assessed, in order to count towards seniority for purposes of social security and towards the calculation of pensions based on the average wage point of the national economy*
- *the same principle should apply to maternity and parental leave*
- *projects to raise the awareness of women on how to reconcile family and working life should be initiated by rural NGOs, in cooperation with municipalities, businesses and other interest groups and organisations*
- *the participation of women in public life should be encouraged by creating favourable conditions*
- *the pilot project "Family and Work" proposed by the Labour Ministry and the Department for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities should be implemented in practice*

- *There should be public consultation on the support needed by people on maternity or parental leave : this should be aimed at a wide audience, not limited to socially excluded groups of citizens (less educated women, youth, the unemployed etc.) or only to educated women in the age group above 29 years. (Slovakia)*

Georgia. *"According to the national statistics office, in 2012, for each one Lari of average nominal monthly salary earned by men, women received 58 Tetri. Even taking into account the fact that women are usually working fewer hours than men, this very large salary gap is an indication of the existing gap in hourly wages too … Gender inequality is thus an issue to be looked at through the prism of the labour market, private sector development, and education policies … While education programmes are likely to encourage young women to join the labour market and start their own businesses, there is a need for government to make sure that employers do not discriminate against women .. and that women are given the opportunity to acquire relevant skills and/to gain access to affordable child care and capital." (ISET Policy Institute strategic plan, Georgia)*

3.9 Reversing the spiral. Many of the national reports point to the need for concerted efforts to 'reverse the spiral' by encouraging young people to stay in or return to the rural areas, sustaining or strengthening rural services, diversifying the local economy.

Portugal. *When asked "How can we achieve the well-being of rural communities ?", people pointed to the need for job creation, particularly for young people; the establishment of companies, mainly through increased value of local products and local resources; and policies that promote the increase of the rural population, especially the establishment of youth and to increase the birth rate. (Portugal)*

Spain. *Proposals for tackling the problem of depopulation in rural areas*

- *Increased accessibility to basic services : improve service delivery*
- *Promote entrepreneurship in disadvantaged areas : support micro-enterprise*
- *Tax incentives, positive discrimination in favour of rural dwellers.*
- *Work towards an ecological economy, combating climate change.*
- *Attract new activities complementary to existing ones : generate 'circular' local economies.*
- *Provide cultural and leisure facilities.*
- *Unlock the use of natural resources, such as pasture lands. (Spain)*

Germany. *We call for measures to a**ttract and retain skilled workers***

- *• education of professionals and holding them in the region*
- *• cooperation with schools and businesses*
- *• ensure (farm)succession in enterprises*
- *• cultivating relationships with "emigrants"*
- *• work-life balance*
- *• employment of women to promote and use their potential*
- *• recruitment and training of migrants (Germany)*

Estonia. *The biggest current problems are deruralisation and urbanisation**.** In order to stop and prevent these processes, the following solutions were offered:*

- *Digital access, fast connections*
- *Active village movement*
- *Attractive rural regions*
- *Multi-functional work places*
- *Possibilities and popularisation of remote work*
- *Support for small enterprises*
- *Support from the public sector to rural population in the form of tax differentiation and cheaper services, e.g. fuel subsidies for transport*
- *An exam to become a town-dweller to make moving to towns more complicated – this is a so- called 'creative' suggestion. (message from Estonian Rural Parliament)*

Slovakia. *A working group discussed the situation of young people in society. They perceived that young people in rural areas are active, engaging in a variety of voluntary and free-time activities (such as blood donation, helping others, organizing various events for their peers, sport and artistic activities.). However, in some areas, the only leisure facilities are pubs : there should more sports faclities, cultural events and informal meeting places. School councils and youth parliaments might be recognised as representative bodies to enable creative dialogue between young people, local authorities and others. Job opportunities*

must be increased : at present, unemployment is high in many rural areas (45% among agro-forestry and veterinary graduates). Education programmes must be better linked to the needs of the local job market, with training in practical skills and opportunities for work experience, improved career guidance, and information for young people about all aspects of life in their region. Scholarships should be introduced to enable disadvantaged young people in remote areas to gain a good education. It was suggested that graduates should be required to work a minimum of five years in Slovakia after graduating with support from state funds. (Slovakia)

- ***Slovenia.*** *(We should) reserve the inter-generational connecting in rural areas, deriving from a family as the basic cell for the upbringing and education of the young generation, while respecting and caring for the elders and the helpless. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

Montenegro. *Almost all the local strategic plans encourage the young to come back to villages and contribute to rural development. The civil sector should insist on as many facilities as possible that would be used by young people who are determined to set up their own business on their own estate. There are already certain facilities and possibilities through the measures of agro-budget, but it is also necessary to establish a set of measures at the local level. (Montenegro)*

Turkey. *Young people tend to migrate to urban areas because of limited employment and income opportunities and lack of educational and social facilities in rural areas. As a result, rural areas lose population, and rural enterprises have difficulty in find a labour force. Participants of the ERP regional meetings proposed some solutions to keep young generations in rural areas.*

- *Government should give priority to the young generation in rural development supports and grants.*
- *Improve educational, infrastructural and social services (schools, health clinics, sport areas, culture centres, children parks etc.) in the villages. Develop social and infrastructural facilities in the rural areas, similar to those in towns. Re-open the school and health clinics in the villages which have been closed in many villages, in order to keep young people in the rural areas.*
- *Give special support to diversify the rural economic activities and employment of young people.*
- *The social insurance fee of young people involved in production in rural areas should be paid by the government. (Turkey)*

3.10 Returning to the countryside. Out-migration from the countryside is not always caused by lack of interest in living there. Many people, who have moved away, or who live in cities, would like to live there if they could find a viable way to do so. A move from town to countryside may be easier for those town-dwellers who have retained 'roots' in the villages, for example through a share in ownership of property and strong family links, as applies in (for example) France. A moving example of this is the exodus from cities caused by the financial crisis in Greece, as jobless people move back to the family farm to seek a livelihood. The village of Sapounekaiko near Tyros, on the rocky southern edge of the Peloponnese peninsular, has welcomed a recent influx of young people seeking to make a living from the land.

Iceland. *Where do you see yourself living in the future? 62% see themselves living in the rural areas but 27% in the capital area. That means about 7% of the people that currently live in the capital area see themselves living in the rural area in the future. (Iceland : results of a national internet questionnaire with 467 responses)*

Lithuania. *In recent years, there has been a new tendency in Lithuania to move from cities to villages, especially to the rural areas close to the biggest cities of the country. In 2012, even 84% of those who moved to reside in rural areas were former residents of Lithuanian cities. The survey of the country's residents in the largest Lithuanian cities shows that even one-fourth of them are willing to reside in rural areas. The opinion of the youth on life in rural areas is even more favourable : even 36% of the surveyed students and school children would like to reside in those areas. (Lithuania)*

Spain. *Proposals to encourage a return to the countryside ::*

- *Campaign to incorporate new populations and restore lost population*
- *Offer tax incentives to rural population; offer support programmes for newcomers*
- *Attract new residents who come from urban areas by improving housing policies*
- *Provide finance for social housing for young people.*
- *Generate new employment opportunities through projects of green economy and innovation.*
- *Encourage young people to stay in rural areas, preparing them properly.*
- *Create jobs for young people providing home care to elderly or assisted or similar formulas*

- *Support start-up entrepreneurs*
- *Be more ambitious for the incorporation of young people into farming lines*
- *Improve delivery of education, health and social services in rural areas*
- *In the health services, offer training for mobility of staff between regions. (Spain)*

Serbia. *Rural areas in Serbia, till the beginning of 1990s, were characterized by a strong out-migratory trend due to the swift growth and development of the other sectors of the economy, as was the case in all European states since the 1950s, and the parallel agrarian exodus. During the 1990s, and because of the severe conflicts and war, population movements in rural areas were quite diverse. Rural areas continued losing population, mainly the mountainous and less fertile areas, but there was, also, an inverse movement of population into the rural areas as well, mainly by internally displaced persons and the urban unemployed. In total, during the period 1991-2002, population in rural areas of Serbia declined by 3.6% compared to an overall 1% decline in the country's total population. (Serbia)*

3.11 Welcome to newcomers. The decline in population, and loss of young active people, is prompting many rural communities to welcome newcomers. The arrival of newcomers, often in significant numbers, has increased over the last decade or more, as shown by Charalambos Kasimis in a paper of 2008 (quoted below). Moreover, migration has been recognised by the European Commission as a necessary process, as expressed in a Green Paper in 2005, which clearly stated that the EU would need 20 million migrants between 2010 and 2030 to cover the decline of its economically active population.

Spain*. We need programmes to attract new populations. Due to the dynamics of ageing itself, the current population is not enough. We must open the door in order to attract those who have gone and also to stimulate new settlers. To this end, we should improve housing and transport services to attract new settlers. (Spain)*

Sweden. *Parts of the European countryside suffer from depopulation. People see that their local community can attract new inhabitants. Immigration of newcomers from other cultures can enrich and give vitality and capacity to these areas. All people, also newcomers from other cultures, are welcome. (Sweden)*

Germany. *We believe that newcomers should be welcome in the country. We wish to :*
- *develop and expand the welcoming culture in all areas*
- *conceive migration as an opportunity for vibrant villages, new cultural impulses, gained professionals*
- *integrate people with an immigrant background into regional development, and build inter-cultural competence*
- *expand inclusion in all areas, with offers for all generations. Everybody is welcome. (Germany)*

Austria*. Rural areas should implement a general framework for all groups of people, with a focus on migrants and young families. Those have to be mobilised to be engaged in social projects. Projects with a social touch should be implemented as comprehensive community projects and create social innovation. (Austria)*

"Strong migration flows to rural regions are a relatively new phenomenon in the European context and they have had a significant and growing impact on peripheral and rural areas. A number of factors can explain this. On the one hand, the restructuring of agriculture has created significant demands for labour which could not be satisfied because of the unfavourable demographic changes in rural areas related to rural exodus and ageing of the population; on the other hand, the indigenous labour rarely has the necessary motivation and mobility for such work and is unwilling to work for low wages and under poor working conditions. Furthermore, the European countryside has, over the past few years, become an arena for the development of non-agricultural activities - manufacturing, tourism, housing expansion, new consumption patterns, connected to leisure and recreation that have increased demand for labour. In such an environment migrants come and fill the gaps left in the rural labour markets by the national population. These gaps are socially defined and regulated rather than strictly economically prescribed. Employees end up in different segments of the labour markets on the basis of their ethnicity, gender and class. For migrants, these sectors consist mainly of agriculture, construction, family handicraft, hospitality/tourism, and domestic services in which they provide their labour for the marginal, least secure, highly exploitative, under-paid and non-insured jobs." (C. Kasimis 2008).

3.12 Refugees and immigrants. The current wave of desperate people from Africa and the Middle East, seeking refuge and new lives in Europe, is provoking thought and action among

people in our networks. These people need help. They have the motivation to create a new life. Many of them come from rural backgrounds. They have skills to offer. Should they not be welcomed in our rural communities, particularly in those places where the population is declining, where schools are closing for lack of children, where skilled and willing workers re needed on farms or enterprises ?

Denmark. *Barbara Diklev is currently working with Syrians and other refugees in Danish rural communities. The experience of the communities that have received them has been highly positive. Many of these people are highly educated, bringing professional skills into the communities. Their children are enabling schools to stay open and are rejuvenating the community. She writes :*

"We presently have 48 centres for refugees in Denmark. Four of these are in Langeland island, and these create jobs for local people. This has no small significance for the inhabitants in this island municipality, which is the poorest in the country measured by income : 33% of the population is on the dole or other public support. The effect of receiving 54 lone refugee children to live in a centre on the Island has created 20 jobs for local people in an area where jobs are scarce. The school in the north of the Island now has a future because of the Syrian families who have been reunited there and whose children go to that school. A football club opened their second football team when 10-15 refugees joined and showed very good football skills..

These positive effects of receiving refugees in a thinly populated area are not the only benefits. Refugees spend a period in such centres, and then go to the municipalities - including Langeland - where they will stay for the next three years. My focus is also on these, long-term residents. Since the refugees will eventually be distributed all over the country, rural areas and peripheral areas included, it is during these three years that the refugees should be convinced to stay. More inhabitants is in itself a good thing, be they with or without education. The educated refugees, however, are sheer gain. We sorely need well-educated people in these areas - craftsmen who wish to start workshops, medical doctors to work as GPs, as well as dentists, lawyers, engineers, accountants. Another peripheral area with many self-employed people needs skilled workers such as engineers. The Government should assess the skills that refugees and immigrants have and match them, where possible, to where these skills are needed. The lack of highly educated professionals is massive in peripheral and rural areas all over Europe - and this lack may be solved by welcoming the academics and scientists who arrive from Syria and elsewhere, very very eager to work and become part of their new society and to contribute there." (Message from Barbara Diklev, chair of Association for Peripheral Areas)

Armenia. *Democracy Today is a small NGO, focused on assisting rural development in 48 different communities on the borders with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. They are very aware of insecurity in those areas, the lack of social security, and the difficulties faced by minority populations and particularly by refugees. They know that many young people wish to stay living in the rural areas, but face discouraging difficulties. So, they seek to build the potential of young people to make a change, to develop their skills, to empower them. One outcome of this work is that they now a network of women and of youth leaders of both genders from about 20 communities, and a regular exchange of news and ideas with that network. A further dimension of their work is focused on peace building and fighting human trafficking across the borders with neighbouring countries, particularly Georgia. This work demands commitment in the long-term, and they have to stitch together funding to sustain it. The peace-building is trans-Caucasian in scope, involving 15 countries or regions. They have much contact with people in Georgia who are working in the same field.*

Georgia. *Much of the work of a leading Georgian NGO, the Civil Development Agency is focused on research related to the rights of minorities and their access to information, education and justice; and on the needs of migrants and their families. It has a €500,000 contract from the European Commission, focused on the needs of Georgian emigrants, particularly those who have moved to Turkey and Greece. For this purpose, CiDA has an active civil society network in 50 villages in Georgia, plus representatives in Turkey and Greece, focusing on families whose members are involved in illegal immigration, the risks they are taking and their needs. CiDA is undertaking case-study research focused on the human rights of those who have integrated; and of the families who are left in the villages and have less access to information about their loved ones than do families in the cities. They use documentary film to tell potential migrants about the communities that they propose to go to. The Ministry of Justice has funded resource centres in the villages, linking to local authority services. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

3.13 Social inclusion. National reports record a variety of aspects of social exclusion, and call for action to address this issue

England. *Nearly one-fifth of England's rural households are classified as of absolute low income. 2.33 million rural households are in fuel poverty, as defined by the government. 36% of rural households are off the mains gas grid, compared with 8% of urban households. A third of rural households live in pre-1930s properties with solid walls, which makes them energy inefficient. Government-backed measures to improve energy efficiency are failing rural families, many of whom live in difficult-to-treat homes or rely on heating oil or LPG, who do not qualify for replacement boilers through a Government cash-back scheme. We call for a review of the rural delivery of the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) energy efficiency programme. (England)*

Portugal. *The inadequacy of social responses, particularly in the areas of mental health and addictions, exacerbated by the economic crisis, were issues also systematically identified in different rural areas. Unemployment of young women was of high concern in some regions, particularly in Centro region. (Portugal)*

Case study : "Shared work crews", Czech Republic
*In relation to the problem of unemployment, the project focused on the people at risk of social exclusion. The Local Action Group has designed a regional concept called "shared work crews". These crews provide the identified individuals with training : the people are then hired as members of teams to maintain public green areas in municipalities in the LAG area. There is also a mobile work crew, which particular municipalities use as necessary. (**Czech Republic**)*

Turkey. *Women and children are the most disadvantaged groups in rural areas. Many villages lack basic social services (schools, health clinics, social centres etc.) and infrastructure. Especially the participants of the Black Sea regional meeting emphasised the lack of infrastructure and social services for the inclusion of disadvantage groups. They indicated the following development needs for disadvantage groups in rural areas:*

- *Schools should be reopened in the villages, and access to health services should be improved to increase the quality of life in rural areas*
- *Children's parks should be established in the villages*
- *Cultural centres for women and young people should be established in the villages for the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. (Turkey)*

3.14 Minorities. Some national reports focused on the needs of minorities.

Georgia. *Georgia has a multi-ethnic population. In 2006, it was estimated that ethnic Georgians formed about 84% of the population. Other ethnic groups include Abkhazians, Ossetians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Pontic Greeks, Jews and Russians. In its strategic plan, ISET Policy Institute comments that "The multi-ethnic makeup of Georgian society requires great care in the implementation of economic and social policies that have a differential effect on different strata of the population. Thus, ethnic issues should be a major concern for regional development strategy (e.g. location of road and infrastructure projects); education policy (to promote Georgian language literacy and increase enrolment in pre-school education in the Armenian and Azeri populated areas); labour legislation (to rule out ethnic discrimination); agriculture (e.g. to promote, cooperation among ethnic minorities); and trade and investment promotion(e.g. trade linkages to Armenia and Azerbaijan could be used as a means of promoting investment and job creation in minority populated regions)." (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

3.15 Roma. Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and some other Central and Eastern European countries have significant minorities of Roma. Some people in the Roma communities are well settled and wealthy, but others are among the poorest, most excluded and often territorially isolated of all Europe's rural people. There is need for change in official attitudes towards the Roma, from a classification based on ethnic principles to recognising them as people with a certain group of needs. They can then be helped in seeking a civilized way of life, with suitable employment and education for their children.

Romania*. Romania is among the countries of central Europe which have a significant population of Roma people. Most of these people are settled in particular places rather than being nomadic. They include different cultures, some of which are hierarchical and wealthy, some extremely poor and socially excluded. They present a particular challenge in terms of achieving social inclusion. (PREPARE situation report on Romania).*

Hungary*. Despite development funds and efforts provided by the EU, territorial and social inequalities are increasing in Hungary since the political change in 1990, as in some other parts of Central Europe. Poverty is*

increasing in some regions, especially in rural regions densely dotted by tiny villages while others which are more aligned to answer actual development challenges are able to take advantage of the internal and external opportunities that are offered in order to prosper. The rural regions left behind are mainly located on the economically depressed north-eastern hills, eastern plains and south-western hilly parts of Hungary. These rural regions suffer from unemployment that runs, without counting with the governmental public work campaigns, as high as 95 per cent in some areas. Many of their inhabitants belong to minority groups, particularly the Roma, who find it impossible to escape a debilitating cycle of poverty, exclusion and discrimination. These regions have potential to ensure good quality livelihood to people who live there. The innovative opportunity would be to implant knowledge and know-how that can enable the region to develop. But the present national development policy increases rural dependency and vulnerability by the new public administration system and too large and long-term public work programmes.

In Hungary, as in some other Central-Eastern European countries where many Roma live, a territorial concentration of the Roma coincides with severe segregation in the poor, peripheral micro-regions. More than 50 per cent of the Roma live within15 per cent of the Hungarian territory, mainly in remote rural areas in north and east Hungary, which since the early 1990s have recorded the lowest rates of permanent employment in the country. A government report of 2006 summarised the problem thus

> *"Due to the negative changes, the competitive individuals and families move out from the depressed areas and their place is taken by poor families, many of them are Roma. Regarding to these statements parallel to each other, the rate of the Roma and the segregation is markedly growing in the concerned areas".*

A strong innovative approach is needed on this field, drawing in the knowledge of experts in alternative development methods and local initiatives. We need new ideas and solutions, and an integrated approach. At present, it seems that rural development policies, at both national and EU level, are heavily focused on economic development; that social problems are seen as the reserve of the European Social Fund; but that social programmes do not operate on a territorial level of a kind that might support the Roma communities. The needs of these communities and other minorities should be addressed by strong cooperation between DG Employment and DG Agri, supported perhaps by an ENRD Focal Point focusing on innovative social-economic initiatives. (Hungary)

Case study : More together for each other, Cserehát, Hungary

Imre Zorro Mata is leading a community-based local initiative that has established a social cooperative in the heart of Cserehát, one of Hungary's poorest regions. The aim is to improve the standard of living of the local people, mainly Roma, by carrying out community activities, providing education and creating jobs. In 1995 Zorro and his wife Kathleen started to cooperate with a Dutch foundation that supports local development in the region. The foundation gave potatoes for the Roma population to grow on Zorro's land. However three years later he and his wife both lost their jobs. They then decided to focus on those activities, such as agriculture and forestry, which were formally their secondary occupations. This led to the setting up of their own foundation, 'More together for each other'. They cleared away the worthless word from the forested areas and distributed the wood among the families of the workers. They started a Saturday school for Roma children, and offered scholarships for Roma and non-Roma young people. They launched several programmes, including a 'Milk for the child' initiative, classes for women on household skills and weaving, and a community donations scheme for potatoes, beans, shoes etc. In 2005 the foundation became involved in the UNDP- Cserehát programme, focused on developing the skills and capacity of local actors in the area and drawing up strategic goals for the future in line with market demands. In 2010, following a decade of hard work, it became necessary to establish a social cooperative and the team applied successfully for a European Social Fund grant. This enabled them to renew the headquarters of the social cooperative, train the workers, purchase new equipment for large work orders, and employ 10 people for a year. Today the social cooperative accounts for between eight and 31 jobs (depending on the season) in the local community, and the alternate-evening school is attended by 45 children. The social cooperative has successfully applied for a LEADER grant, which it will use to buy a new tractor, trailer and machine for chopping wood. The next step would be to install a small factory for producing briquettes for the local inhabitants. The main goal is to be able to employ 30 people throughout the year." (AEIDL report, 'Reinventing Europe through local initiative')

4. Rural Services – securing continuity

4.1 Trends of Change. The historic settlement pattern of rural Europe is one of farms, hamlets, villages and towns, each a distinct entity and separated from each other by distances based on daily return journeys by foot or horseback. Each settlement would have some basic services for its catchment population – shop, pub or inn, meeting hall, church, synagogue or mosque, school – plus, as things became more sophisticated, bank, library, post offices, specialist shops, cinemas, courts, clinics, police stations etc. Seigneurial or elected authorities would be based in the larger settlements, readily accessible to tenants, voters or plaintiffs.

With the establishment of nation states, the growth of cities and the centralising of service providers of all kinds, many services in villages and small towns became satellites or outliers of city-based systems. Of recent years, as commercial profit and budget cuts bite among the service providers, these outlying services have become increasingly threatened. Moreover, access for users to services is no longer confined to foot or horseback : people with cars can readily commute to larger towns or supermarkets to shop or visit the bank, doctor or cinema. The result is a steady shrinkage in services in many villages, and even 'hollowing out' of many small towns as their high street shops are replaced by supermarkets. In many villages, the services which are most crucial to the young or to the old – schools, shops and post offices– are threatened. Each closure can start a vicious cycle of decline, as parents move away from villages without schools and a declining population causes more services to close.

> ***Denmark.*** *"I would like to focus the debate on the development in Rural Districts. It is not about establishing another farm in the countryside. It is that one thinks in sectors and forgets the whole of Denmark. Every time they gather functions in the larger cities, it means moving out of the smaller setteemmts." Jan Petersen, Mayor of Norddjurs Municipality, Denmark*
>
> ***Sweden****. Small rural municipalities that decline in population have problems, and that can lead to municipal mergers all over Sweden. (Sweden)*
>
> ***Czech Republic****. The smaller the municipality, the more limited are the public facilities. Many post offices in remote areas have been closed and moved to bigger cities, so were the schools and medical services. Shortage of medical care systems and caring services in such ageing areas is a cardinal question for the future. Development of relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas can only take place when there is an adequate support of appropriate infrastructure. A postal network provides support in various critical functions through communication, financial services, and other retail services. Moreover, in very many cases the post office, as a hub of a municipality, provides local people with much-needed opportunity to meet the neighbours and other inhabitants. (Czech Republic)*

4.2 Basic village services. In many rural regions, people are fighting against this trend of decline in services, both by protest and by positive and innovative action. There are now many examples of shops, pubs, garages, post offices, public transport and other services run by volunteers within the community; of part-time clinics and libraries; of mobile shops and libraries; of groups of village schools working together to share staff. The national reports include many calls upon national and local authorities, and other service providers, to recognise the right of rural people to reasonable access to all basic services, and to be open to innovative solutions and cooperation with rural communities in order to sustain those services.

The regulations for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development provide a clear mandate for spending of EAFRD funds on rural infrastructure and services. Such spending can reflect one of the six stated priorities for rural development programmes, namely "Social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development, and particularly the measure "Basic services and village renewal in rural areas". This measure supports interventions stimulating growth and promoting environmental and socio-economic sustainability of rural areas, in particular through the development of local infrastructure (including fast and ultra-fast broadband, renewable energy and social infrastructure) and local basic services (including leisure, health, culture and access to information and communication technologies) in rural areas, as well as through the renewal of villages and activities

aimed at the restoration and upgrading of the cultural and natural heritage of villages and rural landscapes.

wallonie, Belgium. *Generally, people living in rural settlements have lower overall access to key services, such as health, transport, libraries, shops and leisure facilities, compared with people living in urban settlements. People are at risk of social exclusion where necessary services such as supermarkets and post offices are not easily accessible and face higher costs in travelling to them. Basic personal services must be accessible to all at a reasonable cost to beneficiaries and to public finances. We must therefore design and organise these services on the basis of rural catchment areas. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Denmark. *Small food stores face the challenge of struggling with bureaucracy. The rules that control their activity are aimed at larger enterprises, with the result that small food stores in outlying areas suffer from a "bureaucracy of rules". Suggested solution – adapt legislation to suit the size of each business. (Denmark)*

Germany. *We call for measure to protect and improve public services, through :*

- *ensuring the availability of institutions for social and utility infrastructure (qualified customised mobility concepts)*
- *promotion of alternative forms of mobility such as e-mobility*
- *improving local supply offers and obtain them (enable jointly organized viable local supply deals; village shops, direct marketing, network of merchants)*
- *ensuring health care and counteract the shortage of doctors in the area (innovative medical supply structures such as technical or mobile solutions)*
- *obtaining municipal infrastructure and adapt to future needs. (Germany)*

Estonia. *Basic services – medical centres, post, banks, schools, shops – are centralised and bad local transportation makes them unavailable. There is need for better co-operation between local municipalities, entrepreneurs and NGOs; for delegation of public services to local agencies; and for public-private partnership. (Estonia)*

Bulgaria. *Participants in the campaign demanded more flexibility, mobility and access for rural people to the main infrastructure, public services, health care and education. Legal regulations should be adapted to enable access to these services. (Bulgaria)*

Croatia. *To provide transparency, different countries in Europe should work together on "small" joint issues such as ATMs and post offices, in order to learning from good practices. (Croatia)*

4.3 Responsibility of service providers. Many respondents to the ERP campaign felt that service providers, in both the public and private sectors, should accept responsibility to sustain services, even in areas of declining population.

Denmark. *"It is crucial that rural areas will have the same terms as the urban municipalities. I'm not looking for affirmative action, but we do not want to be decoupled from the infrastructure, finance and opportunities for fast Internet connections. Do not feel pity for us. We'd rather take care of ourselves, but it requires that we have the opportunity". Martin Damm, Mayor of Kalundborg Municipality, Denmark*

"It is important to have proper conditions all over Denmark to run a business; to focus on moving government institutions and educations outside the largest cities; to build a well-functioning infrastructure and maintain the health services in the Rural Districts." (Steffen Damsgaard, Chairman, Council of Rural Districts, Denmark

Wallonie, Belgium. *Include an obligation to serve rural areas in the management contracts of public enterprises. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Case study : cooperation in police services, Czech Republic.
Municipalities with small populations have only very tiny budgets, so that it is hard for them to sustain their own Police force. So, a group of municipalities have combined their limited financial means together and have a common police force based on public contracts. The Police officer works for a few hours a week in one community or another, and is still on alert to respond to the request of a mayor. This scheme contributes to the security and maintenance of public order in particular villages. One of the officer's duties is to supervise the observance of the ban on passage of vehicles over 3.5 tons through villages. (Czech Republic)

Bulgaria. *Rural municipalities have obligations to maintain the social infrastructure of buildings and facilities for the provision of public services to the population, including health care, cultural and social activities, sports. Mobile facilities serving community needs in the depopulated areas of the small rural settlements should be included as well. Rural municipalities should encourage the accessibility of the local population to*

information infrastructure. The new rural development policy (2014-2020) should focus on investment in the social infrastructure and in specialised infrastructure. The definition of the 'small infrastructure' should include actions for creation and maintenance of the public infrastructure - health care, education, social, cultural, green, touristic, technological, internet accessibility, irrigation infrastructure, etc. (Bulgaria)

4.4 Flexibility and innovation. The desire to sustain basic services prompted participants to call for flexibility among service providers, and for innovative solutions where the normal pattern of service provision is not viable.

***Ireland**. The town of Ferbane in west Offaly was faced with the closure of their branch of the Ulster Bank. The people decided to rally together to stop the closure. Over a thousand people turned out on the streets in protest. They made it clear that this rural hinterland does not accept the wind-down of rural areas, but instead wants to build a long term infrastructure that sustains the area into the future. As of result of their efforts, the Ulster Bank premises re now owned by the community; and the financial services are now provided by the local post office and credit union, strengthening these organisations. (Ireland)*

***Brandenburg, Germany.** Some communities have taken the initiative to set up a village shop for everyday consumption. This is in response to the growing proportion of elderly villagers, who use such stores as everyday communication points, and … the growing interest in fresh, local and regional products. Such shops, operated cooperatively, can remain viable by a high degree of voluntary, unpaid work of village people. An example in another village is a combination of pub and village shop. (Brandenburg)*

***Finland.** Mobile services can help to keep people in the villages and communities. There are examples like mobile libraries, traveling grocers, health buses also. (Finland)*

***Latvia.** Provide support for innovative and effective solutions for implementing and increasing access to services, in order to improve accessibility of services regardless the location in the development centres or areas remote from the development centres. (Latvia)*

4.5 The challenge to rural communities. Rural residents recognise that they themselves may need to take initiative to save and strengthen rural services. This can pose significant challenges for them.

***England.** "Use it or lose it" was the slogan of our national campaign to save the village shops. Communities need advice to be able to plan ahead to replace services that are at risk of closure. Social enterprise creates jobs, boosting the economy. The ACRE Network calls for investment in more 'on the ground' support for rural communities to develop social enterprise solutions for the services they lack. (England)*

***Wales.** Many rural areas in Wales suffer the loss of services, such as community cafés, shops, public transport, social care services and childcare which are vital to local well-being. A key focus for the future will be to identify and test new ways of providing services. This may include shared or mobile service provision, but also new social enterprises and the transfer of services or assets from local authorities to community-based organisations. Taking over assets or services is not easy for communities : they may be apprehensive and want to ensure that this is safe, within a supportive environment, not simply the acceptance of liability. While there are many good practice examples in Wales, there are also examples where asset transfer to the community has failed and placed individuals in vulnerable positions. Support is needed to help communities to work together and set up social enterprises within community venues. (Wales)*

***Montenegro.** Support for the existing services and the social entrepreneurship must stem from the national and local level. The civil sector can significantly influence the initiatives for the provision of support to these services. Social entrepreneurship has an especial importance. The legal framework shall be set for the development of social entrepreneurship at the national level, whereat the civil sector can play the significant role in the creation of the legal solution. The civil sector is experienced in social entrepreneurship, though mainly in the urban areas. In future, the focus will be on the development of this type of entrepreneurship in rural areas. (Montenegro)*

***Serbia**. The last few years have seen a trend by public authorities to reduce services in small villages according to criteria related to number of inhabitants or service users etc. This has negative impact on small villages far from the municipality centres, through loss of services for residents and tourists and also loss of jobs. The civil sector should actively advocate the sustaining and improving of existing services. It should also animate people to understand their own rights and to participate in keeping existing and developing new services. The Law for social protection in Serbia provides a basis for development of social services and for*

employment of local people in the process. The civil sector is experienced in social services development, but mostly in towns : in the coming period, it should extend this activity into the countryside. (Serbia)

4.6 Community centres. Village halls and community centres are crucial elements in the life of rural communities throughout Europe. They can be expensive to maintain and to manage, particularly in areas of dwindling population. Communities accept their own responsibility to find imaginative solutions, including multi-functional use of the centres, but they also call for support from public authorities.

Wallonie, Belgium. *Provide incentives for the multi-purpose use of village infrastructure, such as community centres. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Netherlands. *Government should invest in multifunctional facilities in the small villages. These facilities are very important for the social cohesion; the opportunities to meet each other. Locals invest much time and voluntary work in these facilities and sometimes build and keep the buildings in good condition. But many villages are missing important functions and / or the right quality in these facilities. (Netherlands)*

Bulgaria. *Community centres ('chitalishta') play a vital role for the small rural communities in Bulgaria. They are traditional Bulgarian cultural institutions which originated during the Renaissance and survived through many social changes. They are open to all community members, with general access to their activities. This tradition is still preserved and is adapted to meet the needs of different communities. However, these community centres now face different problems and general lack of funds. Action is needed in order to secure their future. The new Rural Development Programme should offer support to the associations of community centers and to public-private partnerships with businesses. Local Action Groups should be authorised to assist the management and enhancement of community centres with LEADER funds. Traditional festivals may be used to promote community development. A social environment for the elderly population should be fostered. A university curriculum for training and capacity building of the employees of the community centres should be developed. (Bulgaria)*

4.7 Rural Schools. Schools are seen as among the most vital services for retaining the vitality of rural communities. National reports call for the retention of these schools, where necessary through resourceful collaboration between education authorities and the voluntary effort of rural communities.

Denmark. *Rural areas need schools. The school is a fundamental factor in keeping a local community alive and attractive for settlement. Also high schools and other education centres for young people must be placed at decent distances, so it is possible for the young people to stay in their community and not move to the two or three biggest cities in Denmark. Universities etc. can also be more decentralised in order to strengthen the local business community and settlement. (Denmark)*

Wallonie, Belgium. *Formulate specific funding criteria for rural schools. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Netherlands. *The declining number of young people makes it difficult for primary schools to continue. In the Netherlands, there are many primary schools which have a different denomination. Locals want to conserve a primary school in their village and it does not matter to them which denomination the school has : but it is very difficult by law to integrate schools of different denomination. Locals want to have more opportunities by law and a support for the difficult process of helping schools of different denomination or in different villages to work together (Netherlands)*

Poland. *In 1999, a reform of the education system in Poland drastically changed the financing system, forcing many schools in small towns and villages to close. This sparked a feverish movement in many locations where communities did not agree to send their children to other distant towns. One successful solution was to form associations for the purpose of running schools. These involved not only children, parents and teachers, but also other members of the community. Like anything that is done collectively and in a bottom-up manner, these schools often served as catalysts for community-building. Many of them today serve not only as educational institutions. In the absence of other recreation facilities, or sometimes in spite of them, they serve as the main location to hold local events, after-school activities and parties not only for students but also for other inhabitants of the town. (Poland)*

Slovenia. *(We call for) preserving smaller schools and kindergartens in secluded areas with dispersed and rare population by adapting the accepted standards (draft declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

4.8 Learning values. Some national reports focus on the role of schools and educational organisations in helping children to learn about values, such as democracy and the environment.

Case study : outdoor learning, Stramash, Scotland

Stramash use the outdoors as a vehicle for the personal, social, emotional, physical and educational development of children and young people aged 2-20 years, while at the same time ensuring the stewardship of the outdoor environment. Stramash was established in 2009 and has since grown from a small local project into an organisation that employs 30 staff, over 10 active volunteers and has two bases, Oban and Fort William. They operate two pre-school nurseries and also have an excellent reputation in the field of outdoor learning for school age children. In addition, the organisation delivers the only outdoor children's care apprenticeship scheme for young people in Scotland and is the largest provider of outdoor education apprenticeships in the country. (Scotland)

Case study – collaboration between schools and local associations in Denmark

At the Danish Folkemødet in June 2014, the Association of Efterskoler and the Council of Rural Districts agreed on a project of collaboration between 10 Efterskoler around Denmark and people in different associations in their local areas. The project was named Democratic Entrepreneurs and started in January 2015. It is designed to :

- *Strengthen the democratic knowledge, actions and priorities of the students through an increased and more practical focus on the education of democracy on the schools and by establishing collaboration between the schools and the local communities.*
- *Promote collaboration between schools and local communities. The hope is that all involved parties will gain some sort of benefits out of the collaborations and thereby be interested in continuing working together in the local community after the project is completed.*
- *Give the students an experience, which teaches them that an interest and a commitment in the local area and its activities will open an opportunity to be part of a great community and fellowship for them. But they will also be able to see what the local community and its municipality have to offer.*
- *Contribute to learning and a creation of new experiences for the young students that are beyond the traditional education and that will strengthen each student both personally and professionally.*
- *Enable the participating local communities to establish new acquaintances and possibilities for working together with both the school, its teachers, its young people and maybe even their parents in the future.*
- *Help the schools and local people to see that there are great resources hidden in both "worlds", which they can both benefit from. There are great possibilities for involvement of the young people, who can contribute with new ideas, new ways of cooperating, new knowledge and new energy. (Denmark)*

Case study : "SONDAR – The soil Strategy Network in the Danube Region", Czech Republic

Soil is the starting point for all life on Earth, and provides more than 90% of our food. Soils are living systems, which can only perform their functions in the ecosystem and for humans, if their properties remain largely intact. Sustainable cultivation of land in the Danube region can afford a decisive contribution towards soil fertility, preventive protection against flooding and use of soils as carbon storage tanks and thus towards climate protection. The aim of the SONDAR project was to establish a network of increasing responsibility for soil - between scientists and practictitionerse, between administrators and users of land, between education, arts and the entire population. The aim was to involve mainly primary school children in the study of soil protection. The project involved painting the colours of the country. Pupils learned to recognise soil types and to bring natural colours into their paintings. (Czech Republic)

4.9 Health services. Rural people value highly the access to health services at local. This is of particular imprtance to young mothers, old people, the ill and the physically handicapped, who may have the greatest need for medical help but also the greatest difficulty in terms of transport. Increasing specialisation in the health services has prompted health authorities to concentrate those services in the cities. Rural people understand that process, but they expect primary health service to be available in the rural areas.

England. *The rural population is, on average, older and ageing faster than the urban population, with nearly a quarter of all older people live in rural areas. In the next 20 years, the percentage of people over 85 will double. This ageing is creating additional pressure on healthcare providers to deliver in rural areas where health services are further away and a lack of public transport is an issue. Only 55% of rural households, compared with 97% of urban households, are within 8km of a hospital. More than 350,000 (35%) of pensioner households in rural areas have no access to a car or van. The existence of many smaller GP practices (clinics) in rural England is likely to be threatened by the recent withdrawal of the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee, forcing rural residents into making longer journeys for healthcare. The Minimum Practice Income Guarantee for rural surgeries should be reinstated. (England)*

Denmark. *All Danes should have the same opportunities for help and services when it comes to health and survival. Our rural areas have experienced severe centralisation of health services, which have resulted in a*

loss of many clinics and workplaces. Politicians must ensure that there are doctors in all areas of Denmark, both in hospitals and as general practitioners. (Denmark)

Netherlands. *Health care is largely privatised in the Netherlands. Because of the increase in scale, there are big and sometimes bureaucratic organisations who offer health care. Insurance companies gain more influence. But people want more and more to have the care provider close to their home. Village organisations now start health care cooperation and want to organise that older people can get help within the village instead of moving at older age to a city nearby. We think quality is higher and costs are lower by organising part of the health care in the village. The private health care providers do not like this movement, and press the legislators to discourage it by law. We try to influence politicians to make it possible for people to organise health care themselves. (Netherlands)*

Slovenia. *We call for improving the accessibility to services in rural areas, especially by preventing the move of urgent health services to urban centres. (Draft Declaration for Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

4.10 Housing. A crucial factor in enabling young people to stay in rural areas, and newcomers to move into those areas, is the availability of houses with modern equipment and at affordable prices. National reports in some countries point to the need, and the opportunity, to provide more affordable dwellings.

Denmark. *It should be possible for all citizens to get help for funding houses in the rural areas. More people would settle down if banks and credit institutions became more cooperative again. In order to increase the settlement in the rural areas both local and national politicians must help to ensure more job and educational opportunities, decent public transport, digital infrastructure that ensures a fast and stabile mobile and internet coverage, and equal health services to all areas of Denmark. (Denmark)*

Netherlands*. Because of the declining population and the decrease in church attendance, we see a growth of vacancy of schools and churches. Also, there are many milk factories and comparable buildings in the rural area which are without function. For the vitality of the rural areas, it is important to enable such buildings to be converted to new functions such as the housing of younger people who cannot afford to buy houses when they want to settle in their birthplace. (Netherlands)*

Wallonie, Belgium. *Social diversity should be encouraged in the villages. We must therefore promote the construction of housing of various standards, flexible by age and household size. This implies an increase, in rural areas, in the share of rental housing at affordable prices. More than ever before, there is need for public authorities to meet the challenge of ensuring good-quality housing for all rural people : this should the subject of priority investment. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Moldova. *Rural households in Moldova are much less equipped with dwelling facilities than urban households. They all have electricity, but the majority lack hot water, central heating and sewage systems. In 2011, less than 20% of rural households had a bathroom or shower, and less than 10% had a water closet (the same number for urban households were 80% and 75%, respectively). Tap water access and gas facilities are only enjoyed by 35% of rural households. (PREPARE situation report on Kosovo).*

4.11 Cultural activities. In earlier centuries, the rural areas in Europe sustained an enormously rich diversity of traditions in dance, music, festivals and other cultural activity. In some regions, these traditions are thriving today, highly valued by local populations and contributing much to the distinctiveness of localities, regions and nations. Elsewhere, the traditions have dwindled because of social disruption or the ageing of the population. Easy access to global culture through telecommunications leads young people to seek cultural activities of more modern kinds, which are not readily available in many rural areas. The challenge is to offer in each area a mix of traditional and modern cultural activity which will please all ages and sustain the vitality of communities.

Austria. *There is need to regenerate the value of our cultural heritage, starting with good cooperation between towns and rural areas. Some special areas should be given World Heritage status. People active in art and culture should be involved in their development processes : this will enhance a well-rooted and diverse cultural tradition. (Austria)*

Slovenia. *We should take care of the lively throb of cultural life in rural areas. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

Albania. *One of the main concerns of the group of young people we met during the ERP meetings was the*

lack of cultural and social activities in rural areas : they called it 'cultural poverty". For young activists we met, a priority for rural areas and rural towns are cultural and social activities, new cultural amenities and spaces, events around art, culture and lifestyle that will contribute to better, fuller lives in rural communities beyond the basic economic needs. They wish to open and vitalise the culture centres, create open cinemas, create interesting events related to art nature/outdoor sports, lifestyle throughout the year, for youngsters and adults alike. These are simple things that can reverse the café culture or the forced apathy of youth in rural and suburban areas. (Albania)

4.12 Land use planning. The settlement pattern of rural areas in Europe varies according to the physical conditions and social evolution of each territory. But, in essence, it consists of small towns, villages, hamlets and free-standing farms, set within a landscape of farmland, forests, open plains, wetlands, hills and mountains. Historically, the size of settlements was usually related to the capacity of the surrounding land to support the working population; and the need to protect the productive farm or forest land was strongly felt. These two factors created the physical balance between the built-up settlements and the open countryside around them. In the twentieth century, the increased mobility of people, changes in technology and the growth of world trade in food and other products removed the necessity to balance settlement size and the capacity of the land, and unleashed forces of change which can deeply affect the well-being and the shape of rural settlements. Land use planning emerged as a significant element of public policy, in order to direct and control that change. Rural people expect land use planning to be used to protect and enhance the quality of their lives and their environment.

Netherlands. *Government should be flexible in land-use planning to allow necessary development in rural areas. For people seeking their first homes, it can be very difficult to find houses. Lots of young people want to live in their birth village, but cannot find affordable housing. There should be flexibility in processing zoning plans, and in the rules relating to use or construction of buildings in the rural area. It should be made possible to convert farmhouses to private residences, or to construct new shops or workplaces where local communities want them. (Netherlands)*

Wallonie, Belgium. *Land should be used sparingly in rural areas. Outward extension of settlements should be stopped. This implies that villages and hamlets should become denser if they continue to develop. Regional subsidies should not be given to communal development which involves linear extension of the villages. Each new encroachment on farmland and forests must be carefully considered. New uses of such lands should be reversible i.e. it should be possible later to return the land to its natural, agricultural or forestry function without impact on the quality of soil. In particularly fertile regions, no change of use should be permitted on farmland, in order to guarantee our future food supply. The traditional village structure and its old buildings should be valued : to this end, building standards should where necessary be modified. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Germany. *We call for measures to develop <u>vibrant places</u>, through :*
• active shaping of the internal development (strategic vacancy cadastre or the development of new utilization concepts for vacant properties, such as senior-friendly residency)
• internal development support (information, advice and mobilization of the owners, for example, when creating a redevelopment concept)
• where it is necessary, facing vacancy rate with renaturation (renaturation funds)
• obtaining building culture heritage (obtaining the structure forming the overall appearance of the townscape, rehabilitate and, if necessary, development of new usage concepts; rehabilitation of monuments)
• improve the living environment and obtain quality of life in public spaces (barrier-free design of public streets and squares, shared space)
• design and development of socio-cultural town centres. (Germany)

Austria*. We have to think about alternative housing options for young people (across generations, generational justice, city centre ...), strengthen and revitalise town centres, while preserving our architectural and cultural heritage. This requires a common location policy with an integrated inter-municipal spatial planning. The local natural and cultural assets must be experienced and old building renovated and used creatively within villages. For the preservation and reactivation of local centres, regional recreation offers must be developed and incorporated accordingly. Municipalities need to cooperate more sufficiently in administration; new administrative cooperation must be developed and expanded. "Functioning" communities*

can be recognised by coordinated and demand-driven infrastructure offers. City-country side requires intensive cooperation in the areas of regional planning, mobility and other "local partnerships". (Austria)

Poland. *Rural people express fear of urban sprawl, because it can destroy the rural character of villages. Many of our participants expressed pride in their villages and a fear that they might become suburbs, be divided by a highway or otherwise permanently change to the worse by unimaginative modernisation. At the same time modernisation itself is welcomed. Our participants perceived that progress depends upon paved roads, better public transport, or better access to social infrastructure and services. This points to the key issue of "being careful what one wishes for". Local communities must take part in decisions about space management. Luckily there is growing recognition of the need for public participation in shaping policies and making decisions, for example in fields such as water management and the obligatory development strategies for counties (powiat). (Poland)*

4.13 Environmental protection. Land use planning is not enough alone to protect the quality of soil, water, air, wildlife habitats, ancient monuments and other elements in our environment. Many rural people share the rising public concern about loss of diversity, pollution of waters, run-off of agricultural chemicals, massive emissions of carbon and greenhouse gases, the consequences of these for climate change, the impact of that climate change upon life on this planet. They join the call for action at all levels – from local to global – to stop the deterioration of the natural resources and environmental health upon which all living creatures, including mankind, depend.

Brandenburg, Germany. *Nature and environmental protection has such importance for villagers that conflicts may occur. Villagers perceive that they choose, or are required by local authorities, to protect their own environment, only to have external actors arrive and damage that environment, for example by building 'wind farms' near to villages and protected areas. Other forms of "legal land grabbing" are increasing, for example where multinational energy companies buy land from private owners and exploit entire regions by monoculture cropping of biomass for biofuel etc. (Brandenburg)*

Germany. *We call for action to*

- *sustainably use natural resources and secure and restore natural spatial peculiarities (such as orchards) and ecological structures (such as bodies of water, swamps and biotope networks)*
- *raise public awareness of nature and environmental issues (e.g through environmental training courses)*
- *promote cooperation with large protected areas such as nature reservations*
- *promote awareness of climate change, and encourage adaptation and implementation of climate change measures in the energy sector and in the field of climate-friendly mobility (Germany)*

Slovakia*. Rural areas in Slovakia are faced with environmental problems. Some people do not comply with the rules about separate collection of different forms of household waste. They throw out things which could be recycled, increasing the volume of municipal waste. Waste material is dumped illegally. There is no public subsidy for the removal of harmful asbestos roofing material. To solve these problems, there should be :*

- *Improved publicity related to proper collection of household waste, with clear calendars showing dates of collection*
- *Education through schools about the separate collection of different forms of household waste*
- *Provision of disused furniture and other thrown-out equipment to socially disadvantaged families at low cost, through collection centres*
- *Increased criminal penalties for illegal dumping, and clear definition of responsibilities for disposal of illegal landfills (landowner, municipality)*
- *Financial support for the removal of harmful asbestos roofing material. (Slovakia)*

Serbia. *Rural areas of Serbia are rich in ecosystems and biodiversity, including 5 national parks and other protected areas. Environmental pressure from agriculture is not very high due to low input utilization up to now. However, changes in intensity and structure of agricultural production could rapidly make the situation worse. The soil erosion in the hilly land but also in the plain land seems to be an important problem. Another problem is the quality of water that has been deteriorated since the beginning of 1990s, due to lack of obsolete water supply infrastructure and water disinfection. Lack of maintenance in the municipalities' sanitary and sewage systems increase the risk of water contamination. (Serbia)*

4.14 **Urban-rural relations.** Some national reports record tensions between rural communities and nearby urban area, particularly where they fall within the same municipalities. But others are keen to see a new era of positive cooperation between urban and rural areas, assisted by the growing emphasis on linkage and complementarity between European funds - see sections 7.18 and 7.19

below. For example, it is hoped that the linking of Regional and Rural development funds, through Community Led Local Development (CLLD) approach, will enable cities to join with small towns and villages in projects – such as local food systems – which aim to benefit both urban and rural areas alike.

Wallonie, Belgium. *The relations between city and countryside need to be rethought and supported around a truly common project and implemented in cooperative partnership. In a bottom-up spirit, communes should have the freedom to choose their geographic area of cooperation, within which specific solutions for development land, housing and such services can be decided. It should not be necessary to include a major town in this "project territory". (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Brandenburg, Germany. *An overall and mostly unresolved problem in Brandenburg is the loss of independence and self-determination that has been experienced in many villages. In the past, villages were self-reliant municipalities. Then, through municipal reforms in the decade after the political change of 1989, they first lost their paid mayors who were the leader of each villages and then were merged into bigger municipalities, indeed many become part of cities. For three years the small municipalities were allowed to decide with which other they would like to unite or to join. After this time they were forced by administrative decisions of the state to do that step. The effect of this is that village councils, democratically elected by the village people, cannot decide on local matters. Members of local councils have no right to take part in decisions of the municipality parliament, even when they concern their own village. The village population is thus largely excluded from participation in local decision-making. Many see this as a loss of local identity : participation in local self-determination is part of village solidarity and a driving force for civil engagement in village-level projects and actions. So, one of the most urgent demands of villagers is to retrieve local self-determination. Some response to this demand has been found where villages are represented by deputies in the municipal or city council and where the municipality recognises that each village in its territory needs support to sustain its own local identity. One good experience is that the village mayors of villages within a municipality have founded their own 'parliamentary' group, and have become one of the fractions of the municipal council. The objections are particularly strong where villages have become "local parts" ("Ortsteile") of major cities, and are faced with higher personal costs for wastewater, construction of sidewalks etc. according to priorities set by the city council. In such places, villagers cannot benefit from public funds if they cannot cover the demanded co-payment. There should be more room for manoeuvre in the allocation of city finances in such places. (Brandenburg)*

Czech Republic. *Important decisions about rural issues are often taken at higher regional levels, in cities and regional centres. We need to support intensive communication between urban and rural areas, in order to build functional urban-rural linkages and ensure an integrated approach to regional development. We should not separate rural development from regional policy. (Czech Republic)*

Finland. *Local Action Groups in Finland have been active in finding links between rural communities and their neighbouring towns and cities. Smaller and medium-sized towns tend to cooperate well with LAGs. Some LAGs have contracts with town administrations to take care of CLLD activities. Others are in the negotiation phase. Bigger cities are quite autonomous in their actions, but also there some LEADER-type activity is found. Helsinki has so-called 'activity groups', on a voluntary basis without legal entity, which cannot yet be considered as using the full LEADER approach. (Finland)*

Latvia. *We need to intensify media activities to inform on civil initiatives, especially at the national level, in order to build a common understanding of sustainable territorial development and to promote Latvian rural areas and small towns as the value in their diversity, as well as to promote positive examples of development and promotion of rural image. Active residents in rural areas and small towns need to promote rural development initiatives which create a positive, compelling and contemporary image of rural communities and small towns. Develop diverse place marketing campaigns, such as organising competitions, festivals and other modern initiatives for different society groups; create confidence, especially for young people and young families that it is possible and stylish to live in rural areas. (Latvia)*

4.15 The role of small towns. Small towns have crucial importance as social, economic and cultural centres for rural communities. They are often the outermost 'node' of city-based commercial and public services, such as banks, social services, secondary schools and hospitals. However, they are not recognised as a major target of national or European policies and programmes, being perceived as neither rural nor urban. We believe there is a strong case for a mainstream policy focused on small towns, aiming to sustain their vitality and enable them to play a focal role in the social and

economic system that are needed in rural regions, for example in the creation of local food chains, the promotion of renewable energy, or the development of service hubs or incubator centres for SMEs.

Slovenia. *With the relocation of several administrative and economic functions from smaller towns to bigger urban centres and the concentration of services in cities and university centres, the already weak rural areas are becoming even weaker, which contributes negatively to unfavourable migration flows. … When talking about taking care of rural areas, we often neglect the exceptional role of small towns which represent relatively good support with their service to the dispersed population. The vitality of small towns is of key importance in preserving the evenly populated pattern which represents a huge advantage in the ruthless battle for a higher life standard. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

Brandenburg, Germany. *The historic small-town of Wittstock in Brandenburg suffered many years of decay of its architectural heritage when it was part of East Germany. It lost both population and businesses. Since 1990 local administration has tried to combat these losses. The Bürgermeister Jőrg Gehrman comments, "Our small town still possesses a rich architectural, historic and cultural heritage. During my time as Mayor, I have been very keen to promote the town as a centre for the hinterland of villages and rural area and put Wittstock firmly back on the map. I refer to the town as a 'metropole' and a place performing the role that it has always done. It is much smaller than the larger towns and cities which now attract the word 'metropolis', yet small towns like Wittstock carry out the same job of providing jobs, retail centre, services and education and act as a transport hub on a much smaller scale. This has led to a renewed view of the town and has encouraged neighbouring small towns too. Like all small towns we still face threats of more centralization, but like many small towns we are fighting back." (ECOVAST report on 'The importance of small towns')*

Austria. *The small town of Güssing in Burgenland, Austria is capital of a district with about 27,000 people. By 1998 the region was one of the poorest in Austria, unfavourably sited near the border, with no major commercial businesses and poor transport infrastructure. The Bürgermeister Vinzenz Knor comments, "In 1990 experts developed a model for the complete abandonment of fossil-fuel energy in the district. The aim was to supply the town of Güssing and subsequently the whole district with renewable energy from sources within the region, which would bring added value into the local economy. The model comprises heat generations, fuels and electric power. The first steps were targeted energy-saving measures in all buildings in the town centre, which reduced spending on energy by almost 50%. Since then the model has been implemented step-by-step, including a successful bio diesel plant using rapeseed oil, two small-scale biomass district heating systems for part of the town, and finally a district heating system based on wood fuel supplying the whole town. Then in 2001, a biomass power plant was installed which uses a newly developed biomass-steam gasification technology. The aim is to spread know-how and technology to neighbouring municipalities and to supply the overall region with heat, electricity and fuel : for this, an initiative called 'ecoEnergy land' involving 18 communities was founded." (ECOVAST report on 'The importance of small towns')*

5 Rural economies –how to sustain and diversify

5.1 Local and sub-regional economies. Governments speak of macro-economies – the European Common Market, free trade agreements, outward links to other major regions in the world economy. They focus on fostering the ability of companies and sectors to compete in European and global markets. They point to the benefits of mass production and of global supply chains in ensuring supply of food and other goods to an increasingly urban population.

The national reports show that rural people are ready to acknowledge the reality and the benefits of this world trade. But they also wish to assert the legitimacy and the profound importance of another reality, marching alongside and meshing with this macro-economy – namely the existence of thousands of local and sub-regional economies, rich in small and medium-sized enterprises, which do not all need or seek to compete on the global market but which form the lifeblood of communities, particularly in the rural regions of Europe.

These local and sub-regional economies are not 'islands', isolated from the wider economy. They import and they export. But they often contain a high degree of internal trade : they can provide significant and varied employment : they add value to local resources : they provide essential goods and services, without need for long-distance transport : they offer resilience in times of trouble : and they often act as seed-beds of innovation. They merit the support of peoples and governments.

5.2 Sustaining local and sub-regional economies. So, rural people point to the challenge of sustaining the vitality and viability of local and sub-regional economies throughout rural Europe. The nature of this challenge will vary from place to place, but the solutions can draw upon experience in many different sectors – agriculture, forestry, energy production, added-value enterprises, tourism and service industries.

> ***Wallonie, Belgium.*** *Economic activities must be maintained and developed in the villages, based on local resources and respecting the rural environment. Rural communities should gain benefit from the use that is made of these resources. (Fondation Rurale de Walllonie)*

> ***France.*** *The rural areas have experienced significant economic change in recent years. Agriculture and forestry continue to play a major role even if today they are no longer the dominant economic activity in terms of jobs or of value added. Their role may become more important with the development of local economic chains, which constitute a new pool of jobs for territories. The maintenance and extension of other economic activities, including local shops, is also at the heart of territorial issues. (France)*

> ***Slovenia.*** *We cannot imagine vital rural areas without a great diversification of local economies and the diversification of farm income, since job positions represent the basis for living in rural areas. Apart from the increase in the offer of local products, the majority of employment opportunities in rural areas are connected to redirecting extensive agricultural activities towards more intensive activities and eco-farming. The creation of supplementary activities on farms, such as tourism, faces unnecessary administrative obstacles, especially when compared to more developed countries. A more diverse tourism offer in rural areas can provide more jobs for young people. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

> ***Greece.*** *An improved quality of life in the countryside, including the revitalisation of economic activity in mountain and hill areas, the implementation of infrastructure projects and support to the business climate, should be a major strategic priority for the coming years. Particular emphasis should be given to the support of additional tourist activities in conjunction with integrated interventions for rural tourism, as well as to the strengthening of administrative structures and the promotion of the endogenous development potential of rural areas through cooperation. Key priorities should be to build the capacity of Local Action Groups, strengthen farmers setting up for the first time, promote valuable environmental and cultural assets of rural areas as well as the sustainable use of the natural and cultural environment, enhance the promotion and sale of local products and create information centres. (Greece)*

> ***The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.*** *Diversification of the economic activities in the rural areas should increase the possibilities for employment as a source of additional income that will have an influence for improvement of the living standard and the quality of life in rural areas. (Macedonia)*

Serbia. *The employment structure and basic characteristics of labour force in rural areas of Serbia are similar to those in other transitional countries. Age and education structure of rural employees are unfavourable compared to those of the Serbia's general workforce. The rate of unemployment of the active rural population is higher, employment is high in primary and low in tertiary sector. The economic structure of rural areas of Serbia depends largely on the primary sector and the exploitation of natural resources. About 1/3 of the active population in rural areas is employed in agriculture. Agricultural employment shares are among the highest when compared to the EU, reflecting the continuing high importance of agriculture in the national economy and the low diversification of economic activities in rural areas of Serbia, resulting in the lack of alternative employment and income opportunities. Apart from agriculture, the rural workforce is engaged in the food processing industry, wholesale and retail trade, building construction and transport. The manufacturing sector, some other economic and the service sector are still underdeveloped in rural areas. Besides agriculture, the private sector is only recognized in the trade sector. The main limitation for the more intensive development of services and processing is obviously influenced by the non-favourable financial market. (Serbia)*

5.3 Agriculture. The farming structure of Europe is polarised between a relatively small number of large commercial farms and many millions of small family farms. The commercial farms operate within national and global markets, and face the challenge of remaining competitive within those markets, while observing standards of food safety, animal welfare and environmental care. Participants in the ERP 'cascade' acknowledged the importance of the commercial farming industry, and recognised the need for continued support in order to raise the efficiency and competitiveness of this industry.

Greece. *The agricultural industry must become more efficient and competitive. This implies the following action :*

- *Quality control; determination of product quality features; establishment of quality agreements, and of a strict quality control framework*
- *Provision of education and training for farmers, including update of producers' knowledge on certification procedures*
- *Integrated management (technical and organisational innovation) e.g. system of preventive measures in peach production; incentives for development of innovation / product certification; embedding of the role of innovation brokers*
- *Resolution and simplification of bureaucratic processes for setting up producer groups*
- *Decentralised, and on-farm provision of advisory services; improved structures for the provision of expert advice; establishment of agri advisory systems with the participation of the Agricultural University of Athens, municipalities, LAGs, financial Institutions and others*
- *Research that is tailored to producers' needs; stimulation of researchers to publish research results; establishment of research institutes at local level; encouragement of private initiative following direct transfer of research results into the production process*
- *Development of demonstration farms, and experimental fields; initiatives to increase sufficiency and efficiency in the use of water on farms*
- *A programme for the employment of unemployed person on farms*
- *Connection of the agri-food sector with culture and tourism e.g. sale of farm products in ports, cruise ships, hotels and restaurants; introduction of traditional Greek breakfast in hotels; provision of expert advice aimed at building links between agricultural production, culture and tourism sectors*
- *Development of strategies at regional level for the advertising, promotion and distribution of products; advertising of the added value of local products'; promotion of product identity; collective actions by producers and consumers; simplification of framework rules for on-farm product sale; education of consumers*
- *Provision of incentives for the relocation of young people into farming; legislation for accessible farms*

(Greece)

Bosnia and Herzegovina. *In order to improve the long-term competitive position of agricultural producers and establish a key prerequisite for the modernization and restructuring of agricultural production, it is necessary to invest in construction of new and reconstruction of existing production facilities, purchase of new equipment and agricultural machinery, and growing perennial plantations or purchase of livestock with improved genetic performance. In order to increase volume and productivity, in addition to efforts for a more*

efficient use of existing capacity and technology, it is necessary to improve the genetic potential in crop production and livestock rearing, to provide support programmes for production of domestic seed and planting material, to improve reproduction in livestock breeding, to improve procedures and conditions for the import and production of genetic material from abroad. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Austria. *We have to support our ecological economy and give priority to organic food. We need an open and honest food production which is healthy for humans and animals and packaged into unproblematic materials. We need sensitisation for nature and a way of life close to nature. This has to include the awareness of biodiversity, supporting regional products and taste-education with our youngest citizens. (Austria)*

Poland. *Agriculture remains a predominant element of the overall rural economy of Poland. Farm land takes 30% of the country's overall surface; and the combined agriculture and food sector employs 3 million people and contributes over 10% of national GDP and over 12% of Polish exports. Partly thanks to the accession to EU, this sector is undergoing a gradual modernization. The importance of agriculture is gradually falling. In this context, the diversification of rural income sources remains unchangeably a priority. Historically the Polish countryside after the second world war was characterized by mainly small farms, due to the limited spread of communist collectivisation. Work in agriculture cannot sustain such large numbers of people, and the increased achievement of added value to farm products is not enough to support the whole rural economy. So, the creation of new work places not directly connected with agriculture is seen as very important. (Poland)*

Croatia. *In agriculture, the focus should be on quality rather than quantity, with support for local recognisability (branding), eco-production of food, homemade seasonal menus, short supply chains and good relations, developed communication and mutual trust between producers and consumers.(Croatia)*

Sweden. *Less adequate circumstances for agriculture and farming, many production units close down, especially in the sparsely populated areas. (Sweden)*

5.4 Loss of farm labour force. Some national reports recorded regret about the continuing process of growth in the size of commercial farms and heavy mechanization, because of its perceived environmental impact and the reduction in the farm labour force. This regret tallies with the comment – see below – by Charalambos Kasimis in his paper on population trends.

Slovenia. *The need to raise the level of competitiveness in all fields greatly affects also the rural areas. Especially in the field of agriculture, we have been witnessing a long-term and recently accelerated concentrating of agricultural activities on a smaller number of bigger agricultural holdings. In this process, the traditional agricultural structure with a large number of smaller farms, which in the past contributed to a relatively good preservation of Slovenian rural areas, is lost. Bigger agricultural holdings employ less people per surface unit than smaller farms. … (There should be a halt to) the process of abandoning farming on lands with worse conditions for farming and abandoning small farms, and slowing down the trend of concentrating agricultural activities, which is accelerated by market currents (Draft Declaration of the Slovenian Rural Parliament).*

"In EU-25 only 10% of farm holders are younger than 35 years old (European Commission 2006). On the other hand, the continued restructuring and modernisation of Europe's agriculture is expected to place a heavy burden on many rural areas. According to a Communication from the Commission (COM 2006 857 final), on the basis of current trends it is to be expected that in EU-15 some 2 million workers on a full time basis will leave the sector by 2014. In addition, 1-2 million full-time workers may potentially leave the sector within the ten New Member States, and 1-2 million workers in Bulgaria and Romania (European Commission 2007). Particularly those rural areas which are most remote, depopulated or dependent on agriculture face strong challenges as regards growth, jobs and sustainability in the coming years." (Kasimis, 2010)

5.5 Small and family farms. The national reports contain a widespread call for greater attention to be paid to the needs of small and family farms, including those at subsistence level which are currently often 'below the radar' of government thinking and support.

These farms give livelihood and sustenance to millions of families; provide food to local markets; form the staple population of thousands of communities; and sustain traditional ways of life on which the health of the land, landscapes and ecosystems depend. The larger family farms can remain viable by diversifying their activity, adding value to products, cooperating with other farms or with enterprises in food chains. Communities based on the smaller farms may retain viability by forming

cooperatives, adding value collectively to their products, diversifying their local economies and gradual amalgamation of units. These difficult processes of change should be sensitively assisted by governments though support to cooperatives and producer groups, retirement of elderly farmers, support to young farmers etc.

Slovakia. *Existing small farms, and people entering farming, in Slovakia face great difficulties.*

- *The current legislation is very complicated, and often mutually contradictory and does not reflect the conditions of small farmers and entrants to faming. Legislation should be simplified, and differentiated for different levels of farmers and food businesses, including starters.*
- *There are few Slovak food products on the market. In order to support our producers and processors, there is need to promote the sale of Slovak food products in our market, at least 50% of the products in all retail chains.*
- *Inefficient sale of farm products. In order to more effective selling of farm products, their promotion and also ensure their freshness and the quality assurance of the product from a particular manufacturer is necessary to support the implementation of farmers' markets and sale of products from the region in every district town, or even in parishes. Meanwhile it is necessary to create conditions to ensure all health-safety and hygiene requirements. (Slovakia)*

Romania. *During the long period of autocratic government up to 1989, the process of collectivisation was widely applied to land in the plains, where the modern large-scale farming is mainly concentrated. Land in the hills and mountains is still largely used in farming systems developed in earlier times, whereby communities of peasant farmers manage their own small plots or strips of land while sending out their sheep and cattle to graze on common pastures. This history explains the high degree of polarisation in the farm structures of Romania, whereby about half of the total farmland is managed by relatively small number of large and medium-sized farms, and the other half provides a simple or poor livelihood for over 3 million small farms, of which the majority are at subsistence or semi-subsistence level. This is by far the largest national total of small farms within the European Union : in 2010, Romania had 3.86 million farm holdings (31.5% of all holdings within the 28 EU member states), with an average size of 3.4 hectares (Eurostat figures). The European Commission and the Romanian government recognize that the well-being of the small farming communities, and of the land which they manage, is a major challenge which must be faced in policies for agriculture and rural development. The Rural Development Programme for 2014-20 aims to reduce the polarisation within the national structure of farms, by encouraging economic viability of small and medium-sized farms and helping young farmers to enter the farming industry. However, these measures will again be subject to a lower limit of farm size, which may continue to exclude most of the 3 million small farms. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania)*

Bulgaria*. Agriculture and forest management are among the main sources of income in the rural areas. Specific concerns were expressed for the future of the small family farms and processors. Direct food chains are considered as a possible market alternative for these farms. But improvements are needed in the existing legislation in that field and its implementation by the local authorities.*
Small family farms in Bulgaria tend to have lower efficiency, higher employment and more diversified products than commercial farms. Their owners are mostly elderly people, the workers are with lower education and often there is lack of active successors. The future of the small family farm is often decided when the generations change. It is necessary to support these farms in order to secure their continuous existence.
One of the strategic goals for the future thematic sub-programme for small farms of the RDP is the support for restructuring of the family farms, increasing their viability and sustainability. Family farms are the backbone of local communities and their development and improvement of their competitiveness will increase the viability of the rural communities. Facilitating the restructuring and modernization of the small family farms, encouraging their cooperation and integration in the agricultural and food chain should be the focus of the rural development policy in the new programming period. Bulgarian past experience has proven that results can be achieved only if the support is specifically tailored to the needs of the small family farms and is consistent with their investment needs and funding possibilities. (Bulgaria)

5.6 Small farms in the Western Balkans. In the Western Balkan countries, within their mountainous terrain, small-scale family farmers are the dominant stakeholder group in food production, and in the communities and economies in many rural regions. They pursue traditional practices of livestock production, with mountain pastures, hay-meadows, some arable crops and limited processing such as cheese production. Many are operating on a semi-subsistence basis, with limited cash crops, surviving on some sale of products within local markets, plus barter and income

from jobs away from the farm. Farmers tend to be in the older age-groups, and increasingly unsure that their children will wish to take on the hard life with low financial rewards

Responses to the ERP campaign in these countries show a strong desire to sustain the way of life of small family farms, but also a recognition that ways must be found to increase the average income of such families, in order to make that way of life attractive to younger people.

***Albania**. Support should be given for flexible mobile processing technologies that are more adequate and efficient for the size of typical small farms in Albania and that can serve to encourage concrete economic cooperation of farmers. (Albania)*

***Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**. Small-scale family farmers are the dominant stakeholder group in food production in Macedonia. Their well-being, and their capacity to develop their enterprises, are adversely affected by fragmented land holdings, poor soil or other physical factors, old technology, lack of finance, lack of access to markets, agro-ecological conditions imposed by government, low levels of education, high average age of farmers, lack of opportunity for specialised education and other factors. As possible solutions, the stakeholders stated that rural development programmes should support small family farms in improving their technical equipment, raising the quality and food safety of their products, adding value to products, provision of EU export licenses so that advantage can be taken of the Free Trade Agreements. There is need to introduce measures for better environmental protection; to increase awareness of climate change and introduce measures to adapt farming towards it; to improve advisory services and marketing information system for food products produced by small-scale farmers; and to offer credit on more favourable terms. (Macedonia)*

***Montenegro.** Agriculture in Montenegro is based on a great number of small farms. There are almost no possibilities for industrial agriculture in Montenegro, but there are great possibilities for improvement of production on the small farms, raising their awareness in the area of technology, standards for the food safety, products marketing, creating new products, traditional productions and selling on the 'doorstep', the so-called 'silent export' through tourism such as in Montenegro. Therefore, there is a great necessity to support producers in the given categories through the organisation of lectures, study visits and examples of good practice. (Montenegro)*

***Serbia.** Agriculture remains the dominant activity in most rural areas in Serbia, characterized by small farm units, low productivity and low farm incomes. Many farms are at subsistence level, with very small surplus production for the market. Farm productivity is below EU averages, due to the low use of inputs (fertilisers, pesticides, seeds) and of capital (modern machinery and infrastructure). Average GVA/ha of farm land is less than 40% of the EU average. The capacity of the sectors both upstream and downstream of agriculture has declined dramatically during the 1990s : these sectors have high need for modernisation and improved technology. The whole farm-related industry needs reform. Small farms need support to increase their income by growing products suited to the market, and particularly by adding value to those products on the farm or in the locality. Rural development programmes should help small family farms to improve their technical equipment, and to introduce post-harvesting facilities in order to raise the standards of food safety and marketability. There is high need to introduce measures for better environmental protection, to increase awareness and introduce measures to adapt faming towards climate change, to improve advisory services and marketing information systems for the food products produced by small scale farmers, and to achieve more favourable supply of credit. It is important to establish a balance between intensity of production, natural conditions and traditional/local knowledge. Civil society organisations, including those representing producers, could play an important role in supporting local products and sustainable agriculture, through networking, capacity building, promotion of products, securing protection of products through PDO/PGI status etc. (Serbia)*

***Kosovo.** Farmers who took part in the campaign discussions said that the country offers tremendous potential for development of agriculture and livestock. It has meadows and pastures to provide ample food for cattle during the summer; favorable conditions for the development of orchards and for production of raspberries, blackberries, vegetables and other products to meet family needs and serve a broader market, though that market is not very stable. There is potential for development of mountain tourism and agriculture. In Kosovo, about 72% of farmers have up to 1.5 ha of land available and a total of 91% up to 3 ha. Only about 1,500 farmers have 10 or more hectares. Agricultural production and productivity are low as a result of small farms and lack of access to technical expertise, use of old agricultural practices, improper use of inputs, lack of credit and inefficient practices of farm management. Small farms mean that farmers cannot produce enough surpluses for commercialization. A significant part of the production is consumed within households*

and only a limited amount delivered to the market, usually without long-term contractual agreement. The low levels of productivity men that processing factories have to deal with many small farmers whose costs of production and collection are too high to allow the processing industry to be competitive.
The farmers pointed to the lack of road infrastructure in the mountains, and called for the opening of roads to reach pastures in mountain areas. They are not satisfied with the level of agricultural grants and they lack credit for investment. They want support in finding markets for sale of lambs and sheep milk, and the prohibition of unfair competition in the market. They want to see increased cooperation and communication between farmers in local associations.

5.7 Small farms in the Black Sea countries. In some of the Black Sea countries, national independence in the 1990s was rapidly followed by widespread privatization of land among the rural population who had previously worked on collective farms. The result has been the creation of very large numbers of very small and fragmented farms, which do not all have proper titles to land and which are too small to produce (working alone) a viable living. This poses high concern to the rural communities themselves, and to Governments. Initiatives by donors and a non-government organizations are offering solutions to the long-term well-being of these communities, generally through the promotion of cooperatives.

Moldova. *The farming industry is mainly focused on small farmers. The numbers have been shrinking rapidly, from an estimated 385,000 in 1995 to about 200,000 now. 3000 small farmers give up each year. Employment on the farms is still important in the national economy, but is declining in both absolute and relative terms. Agriculture provided for half the jobs in 2000 but only 28% in 2011, workforce in agriculture decreasing by nearly 350,000 people (about 10% of the total population) during the period 2000-2011. The country has much rich arable land, the average soil quality has decreased over the last 30 years, as a result of intensive exploitation an erosion. This this has caused significant diminution of the productivity of agricultural crops and efficiency of agricultural production in much of the country. (PREPARE Situation report on Moldova)*

Ukraine. *In the late 1990s, after a period of decline in some production, Ukraine enacted significant agricultural land reform, dissolving collective and state farms and transfering control to private business. 72.4% of farmland was transferred to private ownership, including 80.9% of arable land. 6.9 million people acquired a land plot. Of these, 6.8 million have received title to land in the form of State Certificates. This . enabled a market in farmland. In 2011 the land plot owners concluded 4.5 million land lease agreements for 17.3 million hectares, constituting 64% of the owned land area. The situation now is that – out of the national farm workforce of 3.4 million, one fifth are working in commercial farms, and four-fifths (2.6 million) are self-employed farming households. In the last five years, the level of self-employed people stabilized at around 2.4 million. But the longer-term prospects are not good, because 75% of the rural population consists of people aged over 60 or under17. The government is acting to sustain the small-farm economy, with measures under the "Programme of Ukrainian Rural Development to 2015" (Cabinet Ministries of Ukraine Decree 1158 dated 19.09.2007). The major objective of this programme is "to ensure sustainability of the rural economy, its competitiveness in domestic and foreign markets, to guarantee food security of the country and to preserve the peasantry as the carrier of the Ukrainian identity, culture and spirituality". Measures under the program include :*

- *support to develop food markets and competitiveness of agricultural productions in the framework of Ukraine's WTO membership*
- *development of SMEs and cooperation in agriculture to encourage job creation in rural areas*
- *a Law to set standards in agriculture and food industry, the rational and ecologically friendly use of land and preservation of rural employment*
- *regulatiions for development and certification of ecological farming and its system*
- *soil conservation, prevention of erosion and the other environmental protection;*
- *development of a national code of sustainable agrarian economy, setting out the rules of good agri-ecological practices. (PREPARE Situation report on Ukraine)*

Turkey. *Most of the respondents have very small areas of farmland - an average is 22 da; the smallest being 2 da and the largest 80 d. 5.7% of the respondents sell no agricultural products. 65.5% sell their products directly to the consumers, 27.6% through mediators, and only 6.9% through cooperatives. They claim that producers get only 52% of consumption prices. The main reasons for low income of farmers are the high prices of agricultural inputs, the lack of organised marketing (through lack of farmers' organisations who might do this), and lack of processing plants in the rural areas. 16% of them stated that new farners' organisations*

are needed in order to increase the income share of farmers, and 8% stated the need for new processing plants. 83% are members of a rural organization. However, in most cases, this is a chamber of agriculture or a producers' union which has compulsory membership but no role in production and marketing. Only a small proportion belong to a cooperative (23%) or an association (15%) which is active in production and marketing. The low level of diversification of the farm economy is illustrated by the fact that only 56.7% of households undertake small processing and handicrafts, mainly for self-consumption, and about half of these households sell such products for extra income.

The farmers would like support from the government in order to increase their income. They give the following reasons why they do not now have that support :

- *Small farmers are not informed about the support available through the Government's rural development programme or the IPARD programme*
- *Rural development supports generally target the big farmers, and no incentives are offered to small farmers*
- *The procedures to apply for rural development grants are very complex and heavy for small farmers, and they cannot afford to apply : to prepare applications, they need to use advisory services which are very expensive for them, because of the lack of farmers' organisations who might help them.*

Rural communities propose following the following actions in order to increase the access of small farmers to support from the government :

- *Small farmers should form cooperatives, unions or associations*
- *Farmers should form farmers' assembly to identify rural development policies*
- *Rural organisations should play a role in informing farmers about the rural development supports, and in preparing application on behalf of small farmers*
- *Rural development supports and grants should be used through farmer organisations rather than individual farmers, and special incentives should be given to farmer organizations*
- *The government should support farmer organizations to employ professional, technical staff*
- *Procedures for applying the rural development grants should be simplified*
- *A special quota of funding, and special incentives, should be adopted for small and young farmers*
- *Farmers should be informed extensively about rural development supports by local government officials.*

The IPARD programme, which now applies to 42 of the 81 provinces in Turkey, should be extended to other provinces, such as Izmir and Giresun, which contain large numbers of needy small farmers

Rural communities and farmers should form powerful organisations, and these organisations should be united under effective organizations and platforms to express their views. These organisations and platforms that represent rural communities should identify their policy proposals and submit to the government. Chairpersons of the Beekeeper Unions of Ordu and Giresun stated during the regional meeting of the Blacksea Region that "when we go to the Ministry of Agriculture with some proposals, we ensure the government to listen to us and to accept our proposals. If the farmers' organisations become powerful, they can affect the policies". (Turkey)

Armenia. *The Deputy Minister of Agriculture outlined the fundamental problem posed by the pattern of 340,000 small farms, of average size between 0.8 and 1.2 hectares, further fragmented into plots. Farms of that size cannot embrace new technology, because they lack land and finance. For that reason, it is vital to promote cooperation between them, as Heifer International and others are doing; and to promote land consolidation, as is happening throughout the world. This must be supported by action in rural development, on a widely-interpreted basis. Fundamental elements of that development are basic rural infrastructure, such as water supplies; advisory services; and development of human and physical capital. There is a strong need for more agricultural specialists, agronomists, food processing experts and entrepreneurs. The aim should be to keep young people in the countryside, by giving them the knowledge and tools that they need in order to stay there. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)*

Georgia. *When Georgia became independent in 1991, the land held by collective farms was rapidly distributed to rural households in an attempt to avoid famine. This desperate goal was achieved as Georgian agriculture quickly recovered. In 1992, the government issued a land reform resolution providing land grants of one-half hectare to individuals, with the stipulation that the land be farmed. Commissions were established in each village to inventory land parcels and identify those to be privatised. By the end of 1993, over half the cultivated land was in private hands, and this proportion has increased in later years. The private sector now produces almost 100% of agricultural output. The universality of land distribution to rural families produced*

relatively small holdings. Thus, only 5% of Georgian farms are larger than 2 hectares; and the other 95% have an average total size of no more than 1.25 hectares of land, which is typically split into 7 or 8 parcels.

Constantin Kabakhizde, a former Deputy Minister of Agriculture, commented that farmers of this small and fragmented nature cannot easily operate on a commercial scale. It is possible to make a living on small area of land, for example by producing culinary herbs in plastic tunnels : but for the generality of small farms life is very difficult, with no incentive to young people to stay in the countryside, and this contributes to emigration. There is need for imaginative solutions, to enable young people to stay in the countryside. For example USAID enabled 4 young farmers to spend six months internship on farms in the USA : one of them came back, opened a nursery for organic berries, processes these into new products and will stay in his village. But the broader scene is not encouraging. The loss of the lucrative wine markets in Russia has put even the larger companies into difficulty, forcing them to seek alternative markets such as Turkey. But still Georgia has a glut of unsellable products such as apples and wine. (PREPARE situation report on Georgia)

5.8 Land registration. In some countries, a crucial need is the urgent completion of land registers and cadasters, to enable transactions in land.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. *In order to manage land policy, it is necessary to establish a cooperation and exchange of information between the ministries responsible for agriculture and institutions which have data about land parcels. Managing land policy can be attained by establishing an Office for land management, land consolidation of agricultural land, creating a Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) and changing the law on inheritance in order to prevent further splitting of parcels during the transfer of property rights to heirs. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

Romania. *The shaping of effective policies related to use of land in Romania is currently constrained by the lack of a national cadaster, and therefore of clarity about titles to land, even in areas where settlements and common-grazing practices have been established for centuries. Uncertainties in this respect inhibit the creation of modern cooperatives and producer groups which could serve the well-being of small farming communities. The same uncertainties are enabling commercial (including foreign) interests to take over land for intensive farming. The effective management of many forests is also inhibited by problems of land title. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania)*

Case Study : management of pastures in Bulgaria

In Kardzhali municipality, Bulgaria, there is a developed Ordinance (under Chapter IV of the Direct Citizen Participation in State and Local Government Act) on the terms and conditions for acquisition, management and disposal of land from the municipal land fund of 2011, which includes also the procedure for using municipal settlement's pastures and pastures. The terms of using municipal settlement's pastures and pastures for animal breeding are defined during a joint annual meeting of the population at the end of the calendar year. These joint meetings are organized for each settlement by the mayor. The joint meeting can decide on the common and individual use of the settlement's pastures and of pastures owned by the farmers or their organisations. There is a list enclosed to the decision, containing data of the farmers and of their organizations registered as legal entities, of their farm animals, data about the physical blocks and parcels of municipal settlement's pastures and pastures and other data, required for obtaining support under the Single Area Payment Scheme, which is agreed upon with the Regional Directorate for Food Safety and with the mayor of the relevant town-hall. The stock breeders submit an application form to the mayor and indicate the size and location of requested land and rental term, depending on the number of animals. Based on that experience and the work done in that field from different NGOs (including STEP) the national legislation for governance and management of municipal pastures (that used to be common pastures in the past) was changed. The latest changes (2015) stipulate that the municipal grasslands can be given only to livestock breeders. (Bulgaria)

Armenia*. In 1990 Armenia became the first Soviet republic to pass a land privatisation law, and from that time Armenian farmland shifted into the private sector at a faster rate than in any other republic. However, the rapidity and disorganisation of land reallocation led to disputes and dissatisfaction among the peasants who received land. Especially problematic were allocation of water rights and distribution of basic materials and equipment*

"There is need for land consolidation, properly funded (which is not now the case) and for a greatly improved cadaster. The freedom to sell land is enabling some vendors to sell their land to neighbours : but this process, which involves hiring both notary and surveyor, is not easy, and the cadaster is inadequate. consolidation will happen, and cooperation will become easier as the individual ownerships become larger. The cooperatives will then increase the bargaining power of farmers, and assist the adding of value." Vardan

Urutyan, General Director, International Center for Agribusiness Research and Education (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)

***Georgia**. Progress in farming reform in Georgia is severely impeded by the lack of a cadaster. Only about 20% of land is currently shown on the cadaster, and this inhibits the creation of a secondary market in land. Uncertainty about title to land can cause chaos, as has happened where (for example) foreigners buy land on the assumption that they have full title and then find that the next village regards it as its own land, which leads to angry dispute. Some new owners even find that there are occupied houses, graves and trees on the land, not properly recorded on sale documents. Such disputes have led to a reversal of the government's earlier policy of encouraging purchase of land by foreigners, such as Iranians (who have bought some large areas of land) and Turks. Following a moratorium on such purchases in July 2013, sales of land to foreigners are controlled by a Government Committee, although it is said that at some farmers get round the rules by buying in the name of Georgian allies. There is clear need for radical improvement of the cadaster; for registration of farm holdings (though farmers can be expected to resist this); for improved statistical data, as the basis for realistic policies; and for a new system of consultation with local communities and compensation to them if their traditional rights are curtailed. If these things can be achieved, a secondary market in land could be expected to boom, because there are smart people in the villages who would buy from their neighbours and produce viable farm units.*

5.9 Diversification of farm incomes. Many small and family farms have diversified their income on or off the farm, and many more wish to do so.

***Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.** Agricultural production is the backbone of the rural economy in Macedonia. However, the farms are small (average 1.5 hectares), and it is difficult for the families to make a living because agriculture is seasonal and has uncertain market. They need to reduce their dependency on traditional farm production as their only source of income. Till now, they have lacked the means to do so, because of the economic changes during the last 20 years including the free market economy, globalisation, increased competition, out-migration from rural to areas, lack of innovation etc. But now, they are increasingly keen to diversify their incomes. Discussion among stakeholders during the national campaign focused on possibilities including adding of value to farm products, rural tourism, gastronomy, cultural and sport activities, crafts, aquaculture, collection of wild herbs, forest fruits, etc. Participants recognised that such diversification will require farmers who are committed to innovation, additional investment, risk, acquiring knowledge, sharing of information and networking. (Macedonia)*

***Bulgaria.** Targeted support and promotion of short supply food chains will enable local producers to reach sustainable levels of value-added food production, improve and diversify employment opportunities, and preserve and enrich the cultural and natural heritage. The existing legal framework rather discourages the development of the farms of the small farmers and the diversification of the marketing channels of their production. That is why many of them to continue to stay in the so-called "gray economy". Laws should be simplified and adapted to the reality and possibilities of the small farmers. There should be mandatory training to assists the compliance of small farms to the existing regulations and their participation in short supply chains. (Bulgaria)*

5.10 Forestry. Over 40 percent of the land surface of Europe is covered in forest. The enterprises which manage and use forests are polarised, in a manner similar to farms, between (on the one hand) large commercial companies serving the mass markets for timber, pulp and woodfuel and (on the other hand) landowners large and small who use the forests for a wide range of purposes, often bringing significant social, economic and environmental benefits to rural communities. We wish to see these benefits sustained and enhanced, notably through the use of woodlands for recreation and tourism, use of local timber in crafts, manufacturing and construction, and expansion of the use of woodfuel.

***Montenegro.** Rural communities in Montenegro mainly use the resources which have been used for a long time. The main activity is agriculture and exploitation of forests. These are rather difficult activities whose outputs are raw materials or semi-finished goods : the added value is usually taken by someone else in the further processing chain. It is therefore important to enable the local stakeholders to recognize the new resources in their community, so as to manage more sustainably and create added value. It is also increasingly important to recognise all the natural resources in the area of green economy and present them appropriately to possible future investors. (Montenegro)*

5.11 Bioeconomy. The wide forests of Finland, and the formidable economic activity which they support, provide the starting point for broader thinking about economic activity based on natural resources. This is seen by the government as enabling the transition from a fossil economy to a bioeconomy as the new wave of economic development.

Finland. *The new elected government would like to strongly develop the bioeconomy. Bioeconomy is seen as a big opportunity for rural economy and businesses - see extract below from the Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy (SYTY, the ERP national champion)*

"The significance of the forestry sector in Finland has been and will be great, as over one half of Finland's bioeconomy today relies on our forests. Timber is more important for Finland than for any other country in Europe. In the bioeconomy, conventional boundaries between sectors are blurred, and new kind of cross-sectoral cooperation is being created. In the future, the bioeconomy based on sustainable exploitation of forests will result in symbiotic relationships between the forest, energy, technology, chemical and construction industries. Finland has set the course for a low-carbon and resource-efficient society and a sustainable economy. It seeks a transition from a fossil economy to a bioeconomy as the new wave of economic development. The aim of the Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy is to generate new economic growth and new jobs from an increase in the bioeconomy business and from high added-value products and services while securing the operating conditions for natural ecosystems. The bioeconomy is not a new industry; it is a combination of several primary production and refining sectors and end-product markets. It includes the use of renewable, bio-based natural resources, environmentally friendly clean technologies and efficient recycling of materials. It relies on renewable natural resources to produce food, energy, products and services. It strives to reduce our dependence on fossil natural resources, to prevent biodiversity loss and to create new economic growth and jobs in line with the principles of sustainable development. The most important renewable resources in Finland are the biomass, or organic matter, in the forests, soil, fields, water bodies and the sea, and fresh water. Ecosystem services are offered by the environment, including binding carbon dioxide and opportunities for recreation. Another key aspect of the bioeconomy is not wasting natural resources but using and recycling them efficiently. (Extract from Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy)

5.12 Energy. Historically, the forests, rivers and coalmines of rural regions have been the source of much of Europe's energy. Only in the last century have these been largely superceded by oil, gas and nuclear power. But now, with rising concern about climate change and the long-term effects of nuclear power upon health, there is rapidly growing demand for renewable energy. The rural areas of Europe are well placed to meet that demand. The national reports call for policies to encourage the production of renewable energy from wind, hydro, solar, heat exchange and woodfuel sources, in ways which respect the environment and which bring direct benefit and employment to rural communities and (in particular) to small farms. This point about local benefit was particularly emphasised.

Sweden. *There should be legislation to enable municipal estate taxation and local refund from exploitation of natural resources such as wind power, hydropower, forests and minerals. (Sweden)*

Brandenburg, Germany. *Village people expressed their dissatisfaction over decisions about the siting of wind turbines … They recognise that these decisions have to be made by the state. But they are disturbed by noise etc. and are afraid of the negative consequences for tourism and for attracting new residents. The land owners, vendors of land and the operators of the turbines have all the economic benefit. Society as a whole and the people living in towns have the general benefit but no burden : villages have the burden but no benefit. Villagers see it as a matter of justice that there should be a tax on operating such installations which brings direct benefit to the given village. (Brandenburg)*

Germany. *We call for measures for the valorisation of regional energies and resources - exploitation of renewable energies, construction of solar registers, expansion of local heating networks operated by citizens and communities; energy saving in mobility, energy efficiency of municipal buildings, energy-saving street lighting (Germany)*

Poland. *Many participants in the ERP national campaign saw the need for new energy solutions – although mainly for economic and self-sustainability purposes. Polish electricity and heat is mainly produced in large coal-fired plants, and is then transported by old and decaying infrastructure with extreme energy loss on the way. Almost any change in this situation could prove very helpful for the environment. There have been some attempts by the government to provide a legal basis for local production of renewable energy.*

However, there seems to be little effort to disseminate these solutions : so, despite widespread needs and hopes, not many people yet participate as prosumers (producer-consumers) in the energy mix. (Poland)

Croatia. *Efficient energy use and production of energy from renewable sources must become an important source of income for rural communities. Such activities are closely tied to agricultural production and rural tourism, offer possibilities of employment, contribute to diversification of occupations, promote energy security and fight against climate change. (Croatia)*

Slovenia. *(We call for**)** sustainable exploitation of natural resources and lowering the carbon footprint of the country as a whole and not only as the burden of rural areas. Only by enforcing a balanced network of renewable energy resources can we enter the world of developed and environment-friendly countries. (Draft declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

Latvia. *In order to increase usage of renewable energy for rural areas (particularly for small farms), to become economically independent as well as to broaden public involvement, it is necessary to :*
- Promote positive examples of existing use of alternative energy
- Distribute the local positive experience at national level in order to encourage creation of small-scale self-consumption alternative energy systems
- Include citizen participation as an essential and determined (measurable) indicator in public consultation related to assessment of the environmental impact of energy projects schemes
- Develop academic recommendations for types of farming which are efficient in use of energy
- Provide priority for small farms from investments of European Fund support which creates production of alternative energy or saving energy resources. (Latvia)

5.13 Community-based energy production. A growing number of rural communities are taking direct collective action to generate renewable energy, through initiatives which enable local decisions and local benefits. There is need for clear advice, guidance and support from government for initiatives of this kind.

Case Study : Gatehouse, Scotland
Gatehouse Development Initiative (GDI) provides volunteering opportunities every week to work on a wide range of environment projects. The main objective of the Initiative is the promotion of the welfare of the community of Gatehouse of Fleet. The GDI has its own small wind turbine which it operates in conjunction with an organic farm and ice cream producer and which has helped them to retain the local library by reducing energy costs. It helped the Community Centre to become self-sufficient by installing photo voltaic panels, air source heat pumps and double glazing. It has turned a redundant tourist information office into a year-round sustainable building for show-casing local crafts and providing affordable office space. (Scotland)

England. *Rural communities tell us they are confused by the complexities of many of the 'offers' available to support community-based energy projects. Consistent messages, channelled through experts on the ground, would significantly help communities to choose the best route. We call for a review of the advice and support available for communities who want to set up renewable energy schemes. (England)*

Wales. *In Wales, a number of renewable energy initiatives are in place. However, it is felt that community-based energy is not well supported in early stages of development. Communities have noted the need to build capacity at community level, organise visits to schemes that demonstrate good practice, seek opportunities for transnational working with other EU countries where renewable energy and in particular community renewables are better developed and to learn how to influence behaviour change. Overall, communities recognise that their role in community energy is long term and that support needs to reflect that fact : typically time frames from start to implementation can be in excess of seven years. Suggested ways of doing this include facilitating and investigating novel ways to encourage and implement renewable energy schemes both on farms and within local communities; facilitating access to energy-efficiency support measures for residents in areas of fuel poverty; and piloting ways to develop new sustainable products linked to agriculture and forestry sectors e.g. bio fuels. (Wales)*

Netherlands. *In the rural area in the Netherlands, there are many initiatives by communities to generate their own electricity, with revenues invested in the community. In the past, there were many rules that made it very difficult for energy-cooperation to work. Now the law has changed, and there is growing interest in generation of, and trading in, electricity in the rural areas. Energy cooperatives can strengthen the economy in rural areas and produce revenues for re-investment in the village or the region. The Government should use enabling law and rules to encourage the creation of such cooperatives. It should also ensure that a substantial part of the revenues from large-scale energy creation in a rural area (such as windmill parks)*

accrues to the inhabitants or the economy of that rural area. It should also create an Investment Fund for creating solar energy in the rural areas. Many villages contain public buildings – such as the community centre, the school; the sports hall – with roofs suited to installation of solar panels. The organisations who own these buildings should be stimulated and enabled, through loans from this Fund, to produce their own energy and thereby gain income. Loans would be repaid over a period into the revolving fund. (Netherlands)

Wallonie, Belgium. *Renewable energy may demand significant investment, which is easier for large industrial groups than for local and regional actors. Such actors face particular difficulty if they place emphasis on local job creation, inclusion and respect for the environment, which may maximise the collective interest but decrease the profitability. Such projects may be unable to get support from credit organisations. The European Union could fix this by facilitating access to financial mechanisms (EIB guarantee or interventions, microcredit etc.) and facilitate the recognition and professionalisation of citizen cooperatives. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Sweden. *Legislation is needed to permit municipal estate taxation and local refund from exploitation of natural resources as wind power, hydropower, forests and minerals. Rural areas that provide natural resources (wind, water, forests and minerals etc.) to the rest of the country don't get compensation for the inconvenience it causes. (Sweden)*

5.14 Added value. Before the industrial revolution, rural communities throughout Europe created locally the processed products that they needed – bread, meat, beer, cheese, cloth, hand tools, furniture, buildings etc. Then the processing shifted increasingly to the cities, and the blacksmith gave way to the forging factory. Now, however, there is growing demand for farm-fresh food, traditional crafts, regional products such as cheese or real ale. Moreover, the need to diversify farm incomes and local economies points to renewed effort to add value to local products. In turn, this prompts the creation of local food chains, farmers' markets, procurement of local products by public authorities. Rural people call for policies to support such activity.

Case study PROVE – Promover e Vender [Promote and Sell]
The PROVE initiative was designed and developed between 2006 and 2009, with the support of the EQUAL programme, by a partnership led by the Associação para o Desenvolvimento Regional da Península de Setúbal, in order to contribute to the marketing of horticultural products. It fostered close relationships between small farmers and consumers through short distribution channels, with the support of ICT. In recent years, through a LEADER cooperation project, PROVE was disseminated by 16 Local Development Agencies, creating 74 groups of farmers spread from north to south of Portugal, involving more than 130 farmers and 5,000 consumers and promoting the weekly sale of 35 tons of fruit and vegetables in 120 existing delivery locations. Turnover has reached €2.6 million per year. (Portugal)

Wallonie, Belgium. *Support the creation of production chains using natural materials for insulation of buildings (hemp, wool, clay, straw etc) by encouraging producers and processors, training workers, encouraging public and private users to choose these insulation materials, paying a premium for insulation, launching social enterprises in this field. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Germany. *We call for strengthening of regional values through*
• diversification of the rural economy and creation of regional supply chains and business cycles
• local products: promoting development and marketing, direct marketing networks, online trading
• regional marketing : image building and marketing the region. (Germany)

Austria. *To ensure enough energy for the future, the regional economy and agriculture needs a strong focus on regional handicraft and food. We have to save and create jobs through innovation and tradition. Spatial planning, supporting the full chain from raw production to marketing activities and selling platforms, should be used to enhance development and local business. We have to develop regional brands and foster regional identity. (Austria)*

Poland. *Poland needs an effective and cohesive legal framework for the production, selling and promotion of local food products, and the shortening of food supply chains. At the moment, Polish legislation requires food producers to abide by many inconsistent regulations which restrict enterprise and unnecessarily complicate the process. The Law recognizes three types of activity – which may roughly translate to direct sale; direct delivery; and marginal local limited food production – which are very similar but which require producers to report to different institutions. There is urgent need for a single all-encompassing law that is not very restrictive and allows for the creation of food cooperativers, simplified reporting and short food supply chains.*

In discussions during the ERP national campaign, a coalition of NGOs has reached broad agreement on very specific legal solutions on this issue and will hopefully be able to press government to adopt these solutions. (Poland).

Czech Republic. *In recent decades, many foreign chain stores have entered the food market, using mainly imported products. This has adversely affected local shops and local producers, who process fresh local food food. Unfortunately, many rural people are not interested in the freshness or origin of the food that they consume, and prefer to buy cheap but harmful products from commercial supermarkets. However, in the cities, the trend of shopping in smaller shops with a range of organic products from local farms is coming back into fashion. Now is the time to support local small producers and retailers, and above all to raise awareness among the rural population about the composition of food and the impact on their health. (Czech Republic)*

Case Study : "LOVE FOOD" Gastronomic Festival, Czech Republic.
Three LAGs work together to organise three food festivals in their regions. These festivals promote local farmers, fruit-growers, fishermen, butchers, bakers, brewers, other food producers and restaurants. The aim is to promote fresh local products from local producers. Visitors of the LOVE FOOD festival can taste and buy local products and can learn about the manufacturing processes and the materials used. (Czech Repblic)

Latvia. *We need to improve local and regional brand support systems, as well as create partnerships between local organisations, municipalities and producer organisations, in order to increase sales of local products and services. We should include local products in shaping tourism offer and place identity. Local governments should support the creation of outlets for local products. Information technology should be used to promote local products and to strengthen local identity. The Government should bring forward legislation to facilitate creation of short supply chains, in order to connect producers and consumers at local level. (Latvia)*

Romania. *In most parts of Romania, the rural economy is still quite narrow, focused on primary production of farm or forest products, with limited activity in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Most of the processing and distribution of products from the larger farms is handled in large towns or cities, rather than in places which could bring added value into the rural economy. Most of the products from the small-farming communities is consumed by those communities or within their extended families and the 'gray' or informal economy. The last two decades have seen the emergence of many social or commercial enterprises focused upon adding value to rural products and diversifying the rural economy, but these do not yet comprise a major or widespread sector of the rural, or of the national, economy. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania)*

Greece*. For the development of Short Supply Chains, the participants on Greece suggested the following action :*

- *Establish professional licenses for the agricultural profession, and create a register of active farmers*
- *Change the culture of cooperation and networking, focusing on young farmers; offer training to farmers on the benefits of partnerships*
- *Promote the setting up of producer groups, networks of farmers / consumers; simplify procedures for setting up producer groups; support pilot producer groups; promote development partnerships with major companies, such as supermarkets; and promote private initiatives for collaboration at local level between producers, restaurants, hotels etc.*
- *Provide advice by experts, specialised in technical issues; set up small local advisory teams, with core teams in each village to provide information through newsletters; build partnerships between Greek agronomic universities for education and training of advisors*
- *Establish a centre for sustainable development; ensure collaboration between researchers and producers; promote the use of research results; and create a research infrastructure for undertaking technical-economic analyses at local level*
- *Develop a national plan for training in specific sectors (production-oriented)*
- *Map local products suited to food chain development; initiate citizen workshops on the development of new products; and link agricultural products with tourism and culture*
- *Promote information, awareness-raising and animation at local level; and raise the awareness of young people, e.g. through school visits to places such as the Olive Museum*
- *Invest in the use of alternative energy sources; and harness agricultural-forestry production residues for energy generation. (Greece)*

5.15 Added Value in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Many respondents in the Western Balkan countries placed high importance on achieving added value to farm and forest products, with links to

local markets and to tourism. This reflects the desire to help small and family farmers, to diversify the rural economy and to prepare their countries for the shock of competition which will come with accession to the European Union. Turkey has similar interest in adding value to farm products.

***Albania**. Local and typical products are seen as important assets for rural economies and for enhancing the attractiveness of rural areas for local people and for tourists. The Albanian rural economy should capitalise on such products, in order to generate new activities and create new jobs, even in peripheral, remote and mountainous rural communities. However, obstacles must be overcome. Consumers lack information about local and seasonal products, and particularly typical products linked to tradition and territory and authoctonous variety : this means that these products do not now have added market value. Producers lack skills and innovation to valorise local and typical products through processing and marketing. To overcome these obstacles, participants suggested the following interventions,*

- *scientific research to map and record local and typical food products at national level*
- *investment in protecting and increasing production local and typical products*
- *information and education campaigns for producers, consumers and businesses*
- *promotion of typical and local products as part of the offer to tourists : this might be done through holding events based on typical and local products across the territory and throughout the year*
- *establishment of food routes, such as wine trails*
- *promotion of local food as part of the unique local experiences of agri-tourism and rural tourism packages*
- *support for revival of in-farm food processing/preservation and creation of new and interesting food products, with direct sale of these products to tourists and local people. This is important especially for villages near main towns, coastal villages or villages in hinterland that are part of touristic routes. (Albania)*

***Bosnia and Herzegovina**. Market improvement need to be achieved through vertical and horizontal connecting of producers, processors and distributors. This would mean organising production for a known buyer, production of food products from local raw materials, provision of more favourable financing sources for producers and processors. Also, it is necessary to identify typical products, valorise them in the market, build their image, improve marketing, and increase the level of production. These products should be recognised by their geographical origin and should meet the standards of product quality. Typical products, especially food, need to fully involve the tourist industry. For farm-based processors, facilitate direct sales on the farm and provide them with support for investments in processing products of high market value. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

Case study : Days of Pelister's products, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The overall goal of the project was to improve the livelihood of the rural population in sub-mountain region through identification, by promotion and sale of local agricultural and hand made products, development of alternative tourism and sustainable use of natural resources, through establishment of a Fair of local products and rural services. (Macedonia)

***Turkey.** Adding value to local products can help farmers to gain an increased share of the price paid by consumers. At present, farmer's share may be only 10% in vegetables and fruits, and maximum 50% in animal products, because these products are generally marketed through mediators and big shopping centres. Farmers do not have direct access to market because they are not organised into groups which would have negotiating power. They are also hampered by high rates of value added tax on farm inputs and the lack of post-harvest plants in rural areas. Participants suggested the following measures to increase the income share of rural producers:*

- *Rural producers should form cooperatives or producer unions that play a role in both production and marketing : these organisations should control the quality of products and create trade marks for their members' products.*
- *Value added tax on farm inputs (fertilisers, pesticides etc.) should be decreased*
- *Local producers' bazaars should be established by the municipalities in district and province centres, so that producers can sell their products directly to consumer,*
- *Sites should be given to producer organisations to establish big shopping centres so that they can have direct access to consumers on behalf of their members*
- *The Law relating to producer unions should be revised so that they can undertake commercial activities on behalf of their members*
- *Producer organisations should be supported to establish post-harvest and processing plants to store, pack and process products*
- *The government should undertake production planning in consultation with producer organizations in order to ensure price stability for agricultural products. (Turkey)*

5.16 Added value to the community. Initiatives to add value to products can also contribute greatly to solidarity and cooperation within rural communities**.**

"Local food systems often go beyond simply providing locally produced food. They are seen as a means to strengthen social cohesion and community development, particularly in areas with fragile economies, such as peripheral and disadvantaged rural regions. In such places, low farm incomes and narrowly-based economies can lead to out-migration, which further undermines agriculture and social cohesion. At the same time, many urban areas – notably those with low-income population – lack access to fresh and healthy food, and are wholly disconnected from the places of food production. Thus town-dwellers may have no knowledge about where and how their food is produced. By connecting consumers to producers, either directly or through shorter supply chains, Local Foods Systems can address both these issues, i.e. the social and economic fragility of rural areas, and the urban need for good food. They can strengthen the links between town and countryside, help consumers to understand where and how their food is produced, give urban consumers access to fresh affordable food, and enable farmers to produce what consumers want and to benefit from an increased share in the final sale price of the food that they produce." (FAAN 2010)

Cyprus. *The Troodos Network of Thematic Centers is involved in many projects for Rural Development which are funded by the EU, the Cyprus Tourism Organisation and the Troodos Regional Board of Tourism as well as the Council of Europe and local community councils. Through the years, we have developed a unique model of sustainable rural development, with 100% community engagement. This is based on a holistic approach, aimed at the social and financial inclusion of all the people of the rural areas and the preservation of the culture and history of each place. Our philosophy is that each village is a unique treasure : we try to preserve this unique jewel, to build a brand around it, and to educate the people of the village about their unique natural and cultural treasures, of which they should feel proud. We help them to work in Teams, to preserve what they have, to upgrade the local products into more competitive ones, and to create new products and points of tourism attraction, which will bring tourists to the village and increase the income of the inhabitants.*
Our local events during the ERP campaign had five Themes - Rose, Hazelnut, Apple, Lavender and Grapes - and were held in five different places in the Troodos area, which is an area long neglected and now given priority by the government. We trained people about the healing properties of these central features, the potential to create new products and ideas from a single fruit/vegetable/herb while promoting their culture and history. As a final stage at each event, they learned how to make their own organic soap, working in small teams, sharing utensils and having fun. In this way, in these deprived areas where people do not work together because they see others as competitors rather than partners, we showed the value of Teams, the synergies and benefits of cooperation, the more powerful voice to be gained by working together. (Cyprus)

5.17 Tourism. Rising levels of leisure, income and mobility provide a growing market for the goods, services and experiences which European rural areas can offer to visitors. Rural authorities and commercial interests in every country wish to see an increase in rural tourism. In a worldwide industry, marketed largely through telecommunications, the challenge for each region is to be distinctive in character and competitive in price and quality, but also to ensure that tourism truly brings economic benefit to the people and enterprises of the region. For this purpose, the wonderful variety of Europe's rural regions – in landscapes, customs, costumes, food, drink, music, recreational opportunities and much else, can be seen as a massive asset.

Wales. *Rural Wales boasts a very high quality environment, with a rich variety of coastal, lowland and mountain landscapes. The natural and cultural environment is a potential economic driver for the country, and communities seek to engage with this opportunity. The All-Wales Community Tourism Network, facilitated by PLANED, gathers information and supports communities who want to further their engagement with tourism at the local level. Communities in Wales feel a sense of place and quite often wish to develop this into an asset for tourism. The main concern of communities is to ensure that this is linked with the strategic direction of Visit Wales, so that iconic destinations are defined through local story telling and therefore local residents and business people naturally become ambassadors for their area. At a local level, communities report that the added value that is represented in truly community-based activities should be recognised and valued through funding and support. Examples include local heritage centres and eco-museums, heritage trails, 'walkers are welcome' campaigns, local festivals and interpretive activity. (Wales)*

Germany. *We call for projects to strengthen tourism in the region, through*
• networking and joint product development of leisure and tourism offers
• ensuring accessibility of tourist facilities

• *expansion of tourism marketing in areas such as regional products or renewable energies. (Germany)*

Austria. *Value-adding tourism means development in a sustainable way by creating interesting packages and offers. Rural areas should focus on families with children. They need to specialise and concentrate on unique selling propositions like water, mountains, nature-parks, forestry etc. Culinary tourism plays a very important role in rural tourism and needs coordination as well as promotion, quality-management and innovation. The future of tourism will be a kind of "soft tourism" and/or "eco-tourism". It will need very strong input to add value in tourism. (Austria)*

Latvia. *Develop inter-institutional and cross-sectorial cooperation in a complex offer at the local level by more efficient use of modern technology, including digitised cultural heritage in order to promote awareness, preservation and targeted use of cultural heritage for raising the public benefit, the potential of the place and achieve success in business. Increase complex cross-sectoral approach in national programmes that support cultural policy, as well as to provide support for schools of tradition, camps focused on cultural heritage, small community museums and other forms of cultural heritage promotion. (Latvia)*

Croatia. *Tourism in rural areas needs to be extended year-round, in order tomsrtregthen the locala economy and to provide extra income for farmers. Creative marketing should be fostered, along with the use of social networks and modern technologies, networking and development of joint destinations, in order to achieve the density and variety of services available. Small tourism should be provided with systematic support in the area of networking, clusters and promotion. (Croatia)*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *Rural tourism in its different forms (agro, village, eco, cultural, religious, sport, gastronomic, hunting, spa etc.) is under-developed. The development of rural tourism is one of the possible means to rejuvenate the rural areas and the rural heritage. It can significantly contribute to creation of jobs, increase cooperation between urban and rural areas, strengthen local and regional structures by introducing public and private partnership and increase public awareness of the value of natural and cultural resources. (Macedonia)*

Montenegro*. In Montenegro, one of the possibilities which have not been valorised so far is rural tourism. It could be a means to achieve more equal development of our regions by attracting some tourists from the southern region to the central or northern part of the country. There are some initiatives, whose experience should be used and promoted as case studies of good practice. There is need for improved legislation in this area, harmonising with the EU and facilitating training in the form of study visits for those who might develop tourist facilities. (Montenegro)*

Moldova*. Tourism is still at a very low level in Moldova, with less than 9000 foreign visitors each year. However, many jobs have been created and incomes improved through the development of agri-tourism. This sector needs further support to reach its full potential. The number of overnight stays in agro-tourist pensions increased .from 372 in 2004 to 11,570 in 2012). Moldova's Tourism Development Strategy is aimed at "boosting the tourist activity in Moldova" by developing domestic and inbound tourism. (PREPARE Situation report on Moldova)*

Case study : Tsaghkunq guesthouse, Armenia*.*
The contribution which tourism can make to rural economies is neatly illustrated by the guesthouse which we visited near Lake Sevan. This guesthouse was opened, within the last two years, by a young man, born in Tsakhkunq village, who graduated in economics, went to Cyprus, learnt to cook, became an expert chef, received an offer of support from a relative would had built a large house in the village, came back to Armenia, married a local girl with computer skills, took over the large house for use as a guesthouse and runs the business with his wife. He contributes to the local economy by buying (for that business) fresh organic food (bread, vegetables, home-made juice, cheese, mountain herbs etc.) and other services from about 20 local households, and by helping other local residents to open up guesthouses (sometimes simply offering beds, while he provides the meals). One example of this local spinoff is an elderly lady who earns $1500 a month from making lavaz bread for his guesthouse. The guesthouse attracts visitors from Armenia and from abroad, who come to see the spectacular landscapes, flora and heritage of the area. The normal charge to visitors is €50 per night per person for bed-and-breakfast.

Georgia. *Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Georgian economy, and has high potential for further development. In recent years, the number of visitors to Georgia increased significantly, contributing to the growth of other tourism-related sectors. In 2014, over 4 million visitors came to Georgia, 40% more than in 2010. Of this total, over 1 million were from Turkey, over 900,000 from each of Azerbaijan and Armenia, over 600,000 from Russia, and the remainder from Ukraine and elsewhere. To foster the development of the*

tourism sector, the Government of Georgia invests heavily in transportation and basic infrastructure, renovation and development of tourism destinations, which then stimulates private investment in the industry. According to the government, there are 103 resorts in different climatic zones in Georgia. Tourist attractions include more than 2,000 mineral springs, and over 12,000 historical and cultural monuments (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)

Case study : guesthouse at Oni, Racha-Lechkhumi Region, Georgia. *A group of guesthouses owners in Oni realised that they need to form an association in order to do joint marketing and attract more tourists. They already provide training for tourist guides, but not many tourists know this region because of its poor infrastructure. Now they are working on creating educational programmes for tourists, and also possible wine trails, culinary trails or mountain walking routes. They have an idea of a project for saving the traditional flute and teaching children to play on it, because there are only two masters left who can make the instrument and play it. A tourist informational office will be opened in Oni next year, which offers the prospect that people will get more information about Racha region. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

5.18 Cultural Heritage. The cultural heritage has been recognised by the Council of the European Union as "a major asset for Europe and an important component of the European project" – see quotation from the Council's Resolution of May 2014 below.

"Cultural heritage plays an important role in creating and enhancing social capital because it has the capacity to inspire and foster citizens' participation in public life; enhance the quality of life and the well-being of individuals and their communities; c) promote diversity and intercultural dialogue by contributing to a stronger sense of "belonging" to a wider community and a better understanding and respect between peoples …..
"Cultural heritage has an important economic impact, including as an integral part of the cultural and creative sectors, because, among other things, it a) constitutes a powerful driving force of inclusive local and regional development and creates considerable externalities, in particular through the enhancement of sustainable cultural tourism; b) supports sustainable rural and urban development and regeneration as illustrated by initiatives by many European regions and cities; and generates diverse types of employment. (Council of the European Union, 2014)

The ERP national reports support the European Council's call for action to protect and valorise the cultural heritage. They also perceive the symbiosis between that heritage and the development of tourism, which can contribute much to local economies, and to the recognition by rural communities of the value of their natural environment and cultural heritage.

Case study : Rota sem Barreiras [Routes without Barriers], Portugal and Spain
Considering that tourism is a social good and should be available to all citizens, including persons with disabilities, and that the regions of Alentejo (Portugal) and Extremadura (Spain) with their culture, heritage and climate have an important tourism potential, four Local Development Associations created a transnational project 'Routes Without Barriers'. Terras Dentro and ESDIME associations in Portugal, and CEDECO Tentudía and ADERCO in Spain, worked together to promote access to tourist sites for people with disabilities. As a result, there are now 164 accessible tourist sites in the four territories, complete with access ramps, handrails, lowered balconies and tables, adapted toilet facilities and reserved parking spaces. This significant gift of access for disabled people to tourist facilities gives added value to those facilities and contributes in parallel to the sustainable development of the four territories. (Portugal)

Germany. *We call for measures to* :
- *reserve and mediate cultural heritage, and to strengthen the "we-feeling" through revival of customs and historical consciousness (intergenerational cooperation, community facilities and meeting places)*
- *promote living crafts*
- *expand cultural centres and render cultural activities visible*
- *maintain cultural landscapes and make them 'come alive' through supporting for action by farmers to maintain these landscapes and to expand landscape preservation farms. (Germany)*

Case study : 'Step by Step true Geopark', Czech Republic "
This project aims to promote of tourism, and to increase the interest of children, youth and the general public in the geological attractions, and the history of mining of mineral resources, in the region. Besides geological phenomena, other important points of interest are to be found in the area, such as nature reserves and archaeological and historical monuments. The geopark unites the promotion of geological heritage to regional development and public interpretation of geological processes, the importance of natural resources and their historic and modern use. (Czech Republic).

Poland. *Tourism, as an economic sector, depends highly on local resources. Discussion during the ERP national campaign showed that people recognise the economic value of the natural environment. The natural environment appeared in discussion mainly when there were NGOs interested directly in ecology. Some other participants did not see the environment as a precious and sensitive resource that should be taken care of, but they did recognise it as an important source of pride and wellbeing for inhabitants and as a crucial resource for tourism. In some inspiring cases, the* creation *of a single well-prepared tourism product allowed for a very intensive social and economic activation of local communities. For example, thematic villages have evidently become a success story in Poland. They still gain in popularity and in some cases have shown remarkable potential for social inclusion, creating jobs, making financial profit and creating a sense of community. (Poland)*

Case study : Telish Tourist Trail, Bulgaria*.*
In 2011-12, the community centre in Telish village (Cherven Briag municipality) pursued the project 'Unique heritage of the oldest history in Telish - bridge to the future', in partnership with the town council, Regional Historical Museum, local businesses and ladies club. The project involved four sponsors, 31 volunteers and much of the population of Telish. They developed a tourist trail, containing every feature that local people appreciate and wish to preserve – a history lesson with lecturer, photos with Russian and Turkish uniforms, relaxing with a cup of herbal tea on the lawn of the local healer 'Baba Sayka' and stories about his herbal remedies, the unique 'Neolithic' exhibition with replicas of many artefacts and pottery, and a rich collection of goddesses from the Bronze Age, visit the open air museum with copies of clay-like Neolithic dwellings depicting everyday life of prehistoric man in our land. The tourism product is already participating in tourism fairs and exhibitions and invites visitors to try a sip of Telish history, spiced with the scent of herbs and aromatic local wine. (Bulgaria)

Case study : Pechova waterfalls, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
The overall goal of the Pechova Waterfalls project, conceived by Local Group for Rural Development (LGRD) of the Municipality of Pehcevo, was to promote natural beauty and traditional products and services near the waterfalls, farms and local road, and to attract investments and visitors. The target group of the project were local producers of healthy food, services providers, owners of the restaurants, motels and owners of private accommodation, who are already involved in rural tourism in this area. The beneficiaries were all tourists and potential visitors of the Malesh region. Investment included six bridges, eight tables and sixteen benches around the waterfalls, four wooden stands close to the waterfalls and beside the Zagorka motel and Malina nursery. The project involved successful cooperation between travel agencies, two motels and five farmers who offered accommodation and good traditional food to tourists. The members of the LGRD and Municipality LED will continue to monitor the follow up activities and try to support them in order to provide sustainability of the achieved results. (Macedonia0

5.19 Small and medium-sized enterprises. A crucial aspect of the diversification of rural economies is the encouragement of small and medium-sized enterprises in fields other than farming. In the **European Union**, many rural regions have flourishing sectors focused on processing of farm and forest products, small-scale manufacturing and service industries of all kinds. These enterprises, located in villages and small towns – and also often in converted farm buildings – can take advantage of the natural resources and clean environments found in rural areas. Some rely only on the local market of rural residents and visitors, but others reach out to wider markets using telecommunications. There is a strong desire among rural communities to sustain and strengthen these sectors, as a counterpoint to the continuing decline of the farm workforce, and in order to offer diversity of jobs to young people as they join the labour market.

Denmark*. No matter where in Denmark a company is placed, it should be possible for the traders to get help in funding an expansion of the company or starting a new one. The financial conditions should not be worse for the company owners in the rural areas than for those in the bigger cities. It is also necessary to ease the Danish laws according to the zones of land and coasts, and to relocate governmental workplaces and higher educations to all regions in Denmark. (Denmark)*

Slovenia. *Smaller organisations and individuals from the private and the non-governmental sectors – even those which lack finances and human resource departments - should have equal access to European funds, which are burdened by administrative obstacles and demand the pre-financing of projects. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

Estonia. *There is insufficient support to small-sized enterprises, including small-sized farms. The problem concerns national levels as well. In order to develop and enhance small-sized entrepreneurship, we should*

- *support business unions, associations and cooperatives*
- *make development plans for small-sized entrepreneurship at national levels, similar to the existing rural development plan, and compare and coordinate them with other EU member states*
- *decrease the current bureaucracy. (Message from Estonian Rural Parliament)*

Lithuania. *For business development in rural areas, the situation is complicated. In 2013, there were about 10,000 small and medium-size businesses (SME's) in rural areas; 78% of these were micro companies. Rural SME's account for only 15.2% of the number of such companies active in Lithuania. Businesses are located mainly in the cities which have larger local markets, better infrastructure, better conditions for entrepreneurship development, higher qualification in the workforce, and wider supply of business consulting services. Business development in rural areas is hampered by the decline in rural population, the low income of that population, and the inadequate supply of qualified labour. The share of residents who live below poverty level (before social benefits, excluding pensions) in rural areas reached 40.3% in 2012 : but the motivation to find jobs and strive for well-being is impeded by long-term payments of unemployment benefits and relatively high level of social benefits compared to the minimum or average wages. In 2012, social benefits accounted for 35.0% cent in general income of rural residents, and 23.0% of urban residents. (Lithuania)*

5.20 SMEs in the Western Balkans. The same desire to support SMEs is found in the Western Balkan countries, from a different starting-point. In those countries, the processing and manufacturing industries were centralised, and then often collapsed after the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation. The re-creation of a non-agricultural sector in rural areas will demand sustained and focused effort over many years.

Albania. *Agriculture is the dominant economic activity in rural areas in Albania. It is organized mostly as small-scale family farms (average farm size 1,16 ha), with a limited number of commercial farms. Furthermore, there is limited economic diversity in rural areas as industry, tourism and other services are under-developed. The central regions around big towns such as Tirane, Durres, Fier and Elbasan have diversified more of their economic activities in rural areas beyond agriculture into industry, construction, trade, hospitality, transport and communication sectors compared to the rest of the country. As confirmed by National Rural Labour Market Study of December 2013, non-farm work is quite limited in rural areas, particularly for woman. Rural youth are in a particularly vulnerable position in the labour market, with low rates of employment. Participants highlighted the need for active policies to support and stimulate job creation both within the agriculture sector but especially in non-farm activities and the service sector in rural communities which at present are underdeveloped. These actions should reflect the diversity of the resources and opportunities available in specific rural territories. A standardised measure would not fit all the country, because of its rich diversity of geographic, natural and cultural heritage assets. Participants also mentioned the difficulties to find good specialists even for specific agriculture processes or agro-processing. (Albania)*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *Production of crafts has a long tradition and is seen as a significant component in the social, economic and cultural life in the rural areas. However, since independence, markets for craft products have been lost, and new technologies have adversely affected that sector. Moreover, those who produce handcrafts tend to have low levels of entrepreneurial and business skills. If this sector is to flourish, significant effort will be needed in raising skills and marketing. (Macedonia)*

Serbia. *There is need to intensify support to entrepreneurs in rural communities, with particular attention to youth, women and social entrepreneurship. Unemployment in rural areas is high (21%), reflecting the lack of employment opportunities. Under-employment seems to be another serious structural problem of Serbian agriculture and rural economy. Rural poverty is likely to be high among unemployed, older people who have remained in rural areas despite the deterioration of social services, farmers in more remote areas far from markets, farmers with very small farms and/or those ones with low fertility land and minority rural populations. The new law about social protection in Serbia provides strong possibilities for development of social services and also social entrepreneurship. This year will be adopted a new Law about social entrepreneurship, which may open up opportunities for community development and for work by civil society organisations. (Serbia)*

5.21 Islands. In many European countries, communities living on islands – often geographically peripheral – face particular challenges in sustaining and diversifying rural economies.

Portugal. *Rural areas of the Azores (Atlantic Archipelago with an Autonomic Status) face specific changes in terms of double periphery, small size and fragmentation of the regional market, costs of transporting people and goods and, recently, the impact of dismantling the milk quota system, bearing in mind the high share of this sector in the regional economy. Madeira (also an Autonomic Region) faces similar challenges, plus the impact of the financial crisis and the reduction in public expenditure required under the Financial Adjustment Plan for that Region. This large reduction in investment in rural areas sharply decreased its competitiveness in global markets. (Portugal)*

Case study : Village shop, Jura

The Isle of Jura is home to 5000 deer but less than 200 people. With no direct car link to the mainland they rely heavily on the services on Islay and the weather-dependent ferry that gets them there. In 2012 Jura faced the reality of losing the island's only shop. Part of village life for 130 years, the shop not only provided access to essential goods but was also a vital part of the social fabric. Following overwhelming support from the community to save the shop, the Isle of Jura Development Trust led the project for a community buy-out and just 6 months after their Community Right to Buy application accepted, completed the acquisition in March 2013. Now, the shop is thriving. Volunteers pay a large part in running the business (well over 2,500 hours recorded), but they are proud to say that all the staff working in the shop are paid employees. (Scotland)

The European Small Islands Federation is the fruit of a successful cooperation between small islands communities. In 2001, six national organisation representing small islands communities in Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Scotland and Sweden decided to form the European Small Islands Network. In 2005, this was formalised into the European Small Islands Federation, and in 2006 its membership expanded to include national associations of islands in Estonia, Greece and Italy. The Federation's members now embrace about 1,200 small islands, with a total of about 343,000 inhabitants. Its main objective is to help small islands communities to remain alive. To this end, it acts at two levels :

- *Local level, aiming at strengthen the cultural identity of islands, by facilitating the circulation of information between its members, enabling comparison on how different countries cope with issues and sharing knowledge*
- *European level, aiming to inform relevant EU institutions and to influence EU policies and rules by increasing awareness and understanding of issues related to small islands. (Extract from the Ferderation's Website)*

6. Support systems

6.1 Infrastructure. Almost all of the national reports place strong emphasis on the importance of adequate infrastructure in supporting viable rural communities and economies in rural areas. For this purpose, infrastructure includes water supplies, sewerage systems, electricity, gas or oil supplies, transport systems and telecommunications. Within the **European Union**, only occasional concern was expressed about the adequacy of water supplies, sewerage systems, electricity, gas or oil supplies : however, there is quite widespread (though variable) concern about the adequacy of transport systems and telecommunications. In the **Western Balkan and Black Sea** countries, inadequacy in many aspects of infrastructure is more widely reported.

> ***Slovenia.*** *The insufficient local infrastructure is right at the top of the hierarchy of rural area issues. Local communities depend on support when setting up the local infrastructure, but have very a limited influence on its construction and maintenance. Water supply and sewerage systems in rural areas have still not been dealt with sufficiently, although there are some exceptions especially on the outskirts of urban centres. The broadband and transportation networks should connect every Slovenian village with the world as fast and safe as possible. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

> ***Romania.*** *Many rural areas also face grave weakness in services and infrastructure. Lack of investment in rural areas dates back to the time of President Ceaucescu, whose 'systematisation' programme involve deliberate neglect, and in a few cases total destruction, of rural settlements in favour of moving peasants into urban 'agri-industrial centres'. There is still a grave lack of modern systems of transport, electricity, telecommunications, water supplies, schools, clinics etc. in many rural regions of Romania. This weakness contributes to a cycle of declining and ageing population, as young people leave the countryside to work in the cities or in other countries. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania*

> ***Moldova.*** *The bad condition of physical infrastructure is a factor limiting development possibilities in rural Moldova. The amount of water supplied to rural consumers was around 10% of the amount experienced in urban areas, while the length of the rural sewage system was 80% less than that of urban areas in 2004-2011. Rural people had one-third of gas supply compared to urban areas in 2011, while the number of telephone lines in rural areas was around 50% of urban areas. Existing physical infrastructure is in high need of repair or reconstruction. The quality and reliability of Moldova's water supply and wastewater services are generally in poor condition, especially in rural areas, where the quality of water does not always meet the hygienic requirements. It is reported that about 10% of samples from urban water supplies and 16% in rural areas are contaminated with coliforms. (PREPARE situation report on Moldova)*

These issues are addressed below by reference first to transport, then telecommunications and e-systems.

6.2 Transport systems in the EU. Large parts of the EU have broadly adequate road networks in te rural areas, though there is often scope for local improvement. But many rural people depend also on public transport systems, sometimes wholly commercial, often either provided or subsidised by public authorities. These public transport system are often inadequate and in recent years have been reduced because of increased running costs and cuts in public finances. This reduction is prompting increased focus on proper public consultation with rural communities on how best to meet the priority needs; and also provoking creative solutions to local needs, for example by community-based systems using minibuses and cars.

> ***Wales.*** *Transport can be an emotive subject for rural communities in Wales. In some areas, the ownership of a car is seen as an increasing necessity. Sometimes, the cost of running the car damages the ability of families to pay for food. Transport is a key feature of every Local Development Strategy in Wales. With increasing cuts to public transport services, they may no longer serve every village, but it is recognised that there should at least be rotational services that visit the community halls in the more remote rural areas. Many residents accept that public transport will not improve, but for some it is a lifeline, particularly for those who are very geographically isolated and who experience multiple social barriers. Local befriending and neighbourhood schemes have been initiated in a number of communities to begin to address these issues. There is often a tension between transport infrastructure development and local economic development. Where new roads are built, bypassing villages, this can do grave damage to small businesses which previously relied on 'passing trade'. (Wales)*

England. *People in rural areas have to travel further and spend a greater percentage of their income on transport than their urban counterparts. In 2008-12, rural villagers travelled an average of 10,000 miles per year, compared with 6,200 for urban dwellers. Coupled with this, essential services are becoming more inaccessible because local outlets have closed due to loss of viability. Those without their own car find themselves at a great disadvantage in their work and daily lives. Less than half of rural households have access to a regular bus service (compared with 95% of urban households). Community transport schemes are under pressure due to increased running costs, difficulties in recruiting volunteers, a reduction in bus services, funding cuts and reduced support from local authorities. Rural areas have an older than average population, hence a higher number of bus pass holders. Some local councils do not reimburse the full equivalent fare to bus companies, so 'tight margins' are being further squeezed. We call for a review of concessionary bus travel in rural areas to balance the needs of users and providers; and for investment in recruiting and training volunteers, especially younger drivers, for community-led transport schemes. (England)*

Scotland. *Rural communities need to be well connected to services through integrated and affordable transport. Many public transport providers operate on a commercial basis and determine their own timetables and prices. However in rural areas transport operators are often subsidised and the local authority has a say over their timetable. A growing number of community transport operators are filling the gaps and providing vital services for rural communities. The ability of rural communities to influence the quality of the transport service depends whether an operator is commercial or subsidised. At the moment, it is often not clear to communities how timetabling, pricing and integration decisions are made. The following measures are needed :*

- *There should be improved communication between transport operators and communities regarding transport developments and efforts to integrate timetables, with opportunities for communities to challenge changes to services.*
- *Commercial transport operators should publish details of how they engage with other transport providers and with the communities they serve when designing or amending services.*
- *Local authorities and bus service providers should consult with communities when making changes to timetables.*
- *The Government should publish Guidance to encourage stronger engagement between transport operators and Local Transport Authorities and the communities that they serve when changes to services are proposed.*
- *The new integrated health and social care partnerships should embed transport in their planning and develop a strategic approach to working with community transport operators in order to provide effective non-emergency transport.*
- *Transport service commissioners should review transport contracting so that the quality of service provided has a higher weighting, include community benefit clauses where appropriate, and make the tender process proportionate for small community transport operators.*
- *The Government should consider how the Scotland-wide bus concessionary fare scheme can best be amended to ensure users of community transport services can benefit from their entitlement to concessions. (Scotland)*

Wallonie, Belgium. *Everyone should be able to live decently and work in rural areas, even without a personal car. The daily journeys are a major headache for rural people, a brake on employment and training. It is a discriminatory factor for certain categories - youth, women, those without cars, the elderly, disabled people etc. We must therefore provide mobile services or resources; offer shared transport to services for people without cars; and invest in new travel formulas (e.g. car pooling, which is well suited to rural areas) and in remote communication, which should apply in rural areas as much as elsewhere. Improving links between major European cities and sometimes simply reducing journey times should therefore not be the only priority in mobility : the Government should provide the budgets required to build and maintain regional and local road infrastructure in rural areas. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Denmark. *A better developed network of roads and public transport in the rural areas, and a development of the Danish ports, would have a positive influence on the development of Denmark. (Denmark)*

"Access to nature has become poorer in parts of Denmark. People move to the country to get fresh air into the lungs and grass underfoot. But access to the countryside, which people go to remote areas to enjoy, has become significantly worse. So families who move to the country, feel that they do not actually have access to the countryside they came for. Although you may have a view to the water a few hundred meters from your house, there is no path down to the beach. You must instead run three kilometres on a road to get there. In this way many villages have become islands where you cannot actually get to and from nature without leaving the busy roads. Proposed solution: Legislation to ensure better access to nature." (Pia Heike Johansen, Lecturer, Centre for Rural Science, SDU, Denmark)

Netherlands. *Budget cuts for public transport reduce mobility in rural areas, particularly for older people. Initiatives by local people to organise local public transport are impeded by problems with trade unions and with the organisations which give the income supplement for volunteers. (Netherlands)*

Austria. *Limited mobilisation is not only a problem for physically handicapped people. Young mothers with pushchairs need level paths. Children need safe walkways on their way to school. There is demand for good hiking and cycling trails etc. Such facilities enhance the living quality on the country-side. (Austria)*

Case study : "Tour de Elbe", Czech Republic
The international bicycle path along the river Elbe runs through many Czech villages. Generally, bicycle paths are mainly used for spending leisure time, skating, cycling or walking with baby carriages. A new trend is the cyclepath linking villages i order to ease traffic congestion in villages and returning people to the sporing mode : that is why many people choose the option to go to their job by bike in the morning. (Czech Republic)

6.3 Transport in the Western Balkans and the Black Sea countries. In these countries, the main focus in the field of transport is on the poor quality of the rural road system, and the need for widespread works to improve that quality.

Serbia*. Infrastructure in rural areas, both physical and social, is poor and underdeveloped, with negativel impact on the quality of life and the competitiveness of rural enterprises. Maintenance and up-grading of rural infrastructure can improve rural livelihoods and is a prerequisite for attracting and retaining investors. Low-cost affordable solutions are required to respond to local needs, as well as to the limited financial capacities of local governments and rural households. Establishment of innovative mechanisms for proper maintenance and of existing infrastructure will be critical, bearing in mind the limited financial capacity of rural households and local authorities. Infrastructure is mainly owned by local authorities, who must strengthen their ability to evaluate their asset base and its condition. A key element in rural community development should be the systematic assessment of the condition of rural infrastructure, and adoption of adequately financed programmes to improve that condition. There should be effective coordination between national and local authorities who are responsible for different categories of infrastructure, plus effective use of natuionala ana EU funds. (Serbia)*

Moldova. *Road networks are in probably the poorest condition among all physical infrastructures in Moldova. An assessment carried out by the Government in 2006 estimated that only 7% of the road network could be considered to be in a good or satisfactory condition, while the remaining 93% was in a bad or very bad technical state. The state of local roads was found even worse, with only some 2% of assessed roads considered in a reasonably good technical state. Although nearly every village in Moldova is accessible through asphalt roads, the bad condition of local and village roads causes damage to vehicles, as well as to the transported products (fruits, vegetables, milk, etc.). This obviously increases transportation costs, but also adversely affects production quality, quantity and sales prices throughout the supply chain. (PREPARE Situation report on Moldova)*

Georgia*. The Regional Development Strategy for Georgia, created and pursued by the Ministry of Regional development and investment, includes a village development programme, with an annual budget of 50 million lari (c.€20 million), which is spent mostly on infrastructure such as roads, water supplies, sewerage, bridges, riverbank protection and kindergartens. MRDI does not wish to go beyond that scope, because the funds are limited and the needs are very big. There is also the Regional Development Fund, with 250 million lari (c.€100 million), which is distributed among municipalities and half of which goes towards improvements in rural infrastructure. Also under the MRDI umbrella on the Roads Department, responsible for major roads; the United Water Company, responsible for water supplies to all urban and municipal centres; and the Municipal Development Fund. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

6.4 Telecommunications. A major factor in the wellbeing of rural economies, services and households is the adequacy, and the imaginative use, of telecommunications. E-systems can overcome a crucial disadvantage faced by rural people, namely the physical distance to the services, supliers ana customers that they need. People can use their computers to find information, to read books, to contact their local authority, to shop or fix their holiday. In many professions, they can work from home instead of commuting. Doctors in remote places can consult specialists in the national capital by computer link. School children and their distant teacher can connect on screen. This powerful tool depends, however, on access to broadband, which is not universally available in Europe's rural areas. We call upon telecommunication providers and public authorities to ensure

equal access everywhere to high-speed broadband; to make imaginative use of this resource in provision of rural services; and to encourage self-help in broadband connection where that is the only solution.

Wales. *Broadband and digital technology feature as a key communication need for the population. In 2013 it was established that 56% of the rural population rated the quality of broadband as poor or very poor. The provision of Superfast Broadband in recent months is set to address this, but service providers indicate that there is a challenge for rural areas to maximise the opportunities from Superfast Broadband. This however, does not present itself in the evidence of need from communities. Local websites are in their infancy in many places, but communities report that they do not fulfil their potential for rural communities, especially in terms of social media, local connectivity or local economic development. The Country Landowners' Association, which represents owners of land, property and businesses in rural England and Wales, said 10% to 15% of the population were still unable to get broadband.*

> *"It is clear that rural areas have fallen behind. If the government is serious about levelling the playing field, it must listen to Members of Parliament and prioritise the hardest-to-reach areas, even if this means diverting new investment into alternative technologies such as satellite," said CLA president Henry Robinson. "Access to fast, reliable broadband and mobile phone coverage is vital for the success of rural business and social inclusion in the countryside. Every home or business that is not connected to the internet is suffering a major disadvantage." (Wales)*

England. *One third of adults in the UK are without access to broadband. Fast, reliable internet access is essential for homes throughout the country to benefit from online services, and for UK businesses to compete globally. The Government should invest in community-focused solutions for our most isolated villages. We call for investment in alternative broadband solutions for communities not covered by the national roll-out. (England)*

Scotland. *Excellent 4G mobile phone signal and superfast broadband are essential services for the future well-being of rural Scotland. However, many people in rural communities do not now receive even basic mobile signal or broadband. This is a severe limiting factor affecting businesses, communities and households in rural areas and contributes to the out-migration of working age people and businesses. Lack of good broadband means businesses will not move into a rural area. Access to superfast broadband and 4G mobile phone signal would enable rural businesses to compete on a national and international scale, thus sustaining jobs and the vitality of rural communities. It would also assist the provision of essential and desirable services, improving quality of life, including the vital ability for people to connect with friends, family and information.*

There are projects underway to improve both broadband and mobile phone signal in Scotland. The Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband Programme aims to provide fibre broadband infrastructure to areas where commercial infrastructure providers have chosen not to develop. 95% of premises in Scotland should have access to fibre broadband by the end of 2017. Community Broadband Scotland has been set-up to provide broadband solutions in areas that are least likely to benefit from the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband. We wish to see broadband of sufficient speeds reach all rural communities as quickly as possible. We call for greater transparency from British Telecom over the delivery rates of broadband to rural areas and in particular clarity over the areas broadband does not reach; and for a Universal Service Obligation for broadband which specifies a minimum speed. The Mobile Infrastructure Project has been allocated £150 million by the UK Government to deliver mobile phone signal to rural areas where there is currently no signal. However, the project is currently two years behind schedule, and there are no plans to provide 100% coverage or to improve 4G coverage. We wish to see this reviewed, in order to maximise the effectiveness of this project for rural Scotland. (Scotland)

Denmark. *All parts of Denmark need a fast and stabile mobile and internet coverage. Without that settlements and companies cannot exist in the modern world. (Denmark)*

Austria. *A very important element in future will be barrier-free access to good internet-connection and excellent web-applications for all rural people to contact their local authorities, to shop or sell their own products online and to visit information platforms. To be barrier-free also means not to be limited in exchange through national borders, so that people have the freedom to travel and can gain access to cross-border farmers' markets and other services. (Austria)*

Croatia. *Use of information technologies decreases the gap between the quality of life in rural and urban areas, removes youth mobility issues, enables setting up of new business relations, decreases the need for intermediary services and opens up wide possibilities for e-education. Integrated conditions for the use of a*

wide range of IT solutions, including systematic training of the population in Croatian rural areas, needs to be ensured as soon as possible. (Croatia)

Lithuania. *Since the implementation of the project RAIN–2, broad-band connection coverage in rural areas has reached 98%. Although the share of households with internet access has increased by 7.5% since 2008, it still remains smaller (40.7%) compared to urban areas (62.2%), and there has been a small tendency of decrease since 2009. Thus, there is still a great demand for decreasing the differences between the opportunities of rural and urban residents to use high-speed internet by solving the "last mile" problem in some rural areas. (Lithuania)*

6.5 Self-help projects in telecommunications. The skills and determination which can be deployed by rural communities are nowhere better illustrated then in the field of telecommunications. If public or commercial suppliers are unwilling or slow to bring broadband services into remote rural areas, then rural communities may be willing to take the initiative themselves.

Netherlands. *For a vital rural area with economic perspective, it is essential to have a fast broadband internet. It is essential for farmers and other enterprises, but also for the healthcare system where consultations are increasingly digital rather than physical. However, while the fast broadband network is profitable in the urban areas, most providers are not interested in the rural area. So, in many villages, there are initiatives by the locals to establish their own cooperation and realise the network by self-activity. Government should support the construction of a fast broadband internet in all the rural areas, by paying the cost in the non-profitable areas or supporting the locals who install broadband themselves. (Netherlands)*

Case study : Self-help broadband, Badenoch, Scotland
Badenoch Broadband and Communications CIC started when their local Laggan exchange suffered a fault which led to intermittent broadband reception. Having realised that their telephone exchange would not be upgraded to bring better broadband under the government scheme, they concluded that a long-distance wireless system was the only feasible option. Over the next two years, volunteers built and configured the first three masts which allowed all those in visual distance to connect to a faster more reliable broadband. In 2014, three further masts were constructed and the network will be further extended to include surrounding villages, with 'superfast' connections. This project shows what a community can do when it works together : any obstacle can be overcome. (Scotland)

6.6 E-services. Electronic systems are now extensively used in many rural enteprises and services, from the control of feed in farm milking-sheds to laser-guided power saws, stockbrokers working on their computers in remote cottages, and e-based 'distance' service in fields such as education and health. Such systems can make a powerful contribution to the speed and efficiency of all manner of processes and transactions, but also help to overcome a crucial historic disadvantage of rural areas, namely the distance between citizens and services or between producers and customers. Intelligent use of the Information Society can improve the quality of life for those living in rural areas, strengthen their competences and skill base, improve business competitiveness and make these areas more attractive for economic activity and inward investment.

Finland*. People and services are moving from rural to urban areas. Tele- and E-activities, mobile services are solutions to keep people in the villages and communities. There are examples like mobile libraries, traveling grocers, health buses and other mobile services. Teleworking is possible in most parts of Finland, but it is not systematic and depends on the employer. There is no specific policy. Also, Finland is not yet totally covered by broadband/optical fibre. (Finland)*

Case study : unified information system, Czech Republic.
A unified information system between municipalities in a particular administrative district they belong to was the main reason for the establishment of "the Technology Centre of Electronic Records Management and internal integration". The project is useful for the state, municipalities and citizens. Thanks to the information and mutual communication the service is faster, flexible and more efficient. Municipalities can share experiences with each other and better respond to new processes of changes. (Czech Republic)

Latvia. *Support the diversification of employment opportunities, including teleworking (working outside the employer's premises using ICT) in order to attract residents to rural areas. Promote business cooperation to develop mentoring and consulting services and to support the creation of common working spaces in rural areas, in order to promote entrepreneurship and strengthening of social capital. In order to enhance society's competitiveness in the labour market, develop education (including life-long learning programs) that promotes*

entrepreneurship and the development of employment. Review the European Union's initiative "Youth Guarantee" to promote effective methods for solving the challenge of youth unemployment. It should focus on actual creating of jobs and youth.

> *"This event (the Latvian Rural Parliament) shows the linkage between the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and every inhabitant in Latvian rural areas. For example, a working group on remote work opportunities using internet technology in the rural areas has a direct relationship with one of the priorities of the Latvian Presidency - digital Europe." (Zanda Kalniņa- Lukaševica, Parliamentary State* Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Latvia)

There is need to ensure continuous web coating and related infrastructure maintenance in Latvia, regardless of the population in the territory, in order to take full advantage of e-environment opportunities by information and communication technologies and promote its active use. This will encourage the development of e-services, e-culture, e-participation, e-health and other e-opportunities. In addition there is need to :

- *disseminate information on e-opportunities, promote an e-opportunities training programme, motivate participation for people of all ages, with a special emphasis on disadvantaged groups particularly in rural areas.*
- *provide professional development for staff involved in e-services*
- *develop a unified and secure, user-friendly and convenient data storage, processing, communications and electronic signing system in active collaboration between e-service providers, in order to ensure full use of e-opportunities*
- *in view of the global opportunities offered by Europe and the world, expand e-opportunities by enabling the use of many languages and ensuring security of data in the data exchange*
- *establish an efficient e-health services system and the meaningful use of it by learning from good practices in Europe, educating citizens and medical personnel for e-Health tools, facilitating secure data exchange and cooperation in e-health between medical institutions and professionals from EU member states. (Latvia)*

Lithuania. *In comparison with 2010, transfer of the main public and administrative services to the electronic space in 2011 has improved and increased by 3.4%. Analysis of the agricultural sector institutions conducted in 2009 highlighted over 160 public services : of these, 63% have been transferred to e-space, but there is stll much be done in this regard. (Lithuania)*

6.7 Finance. A key problem for many small enterprises in rural areas, notably for starter companies and those which cannot offer property as collateral, is securing credit.

Ireland. *The UCIT Group is one of the largest providers of social finance to the community & voluntary sector in Ireland, having invested to date some €50 million in over 350 projects. Our existing access to funds within the Republic for onward investment, solely to community-based entities via socially affordable loans, equates to almost €70 million. UCIT is a not-for-profit, open, membership-based organisation with charitable status, established in 1995 as a response to a decline in government grant aid and the increasing difficulties being experienced by voluntary based groups accessing mainstream finance. (Ireland)*

Sweden. *A growing problem for financing small investments especially within the social economy. (Sweden)*

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *It is essential to improve the access to different financial sources, including banks and informal credit products. The Government could support this through developing mechanisms, like guarantee funds, and encouraging banks to intensify their inclusiveness in providing credit and promoting investment in rural areas. Another possibility is to create a formal financial institution for supporting rural development. (Macedonia)*

6.8 Credit services in the Black Sea countries. Donors, NGOs and governments have initiated significant schemes in some of the Black Sea countries in order to provide credit for farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

Moldova*. Credit remains scarce in rural Moldova, especially for small businesses. Commercial banks tend to "sit on their money", except for large volume projects which assure a guaranteed return. For that reason, the main focus of all projects supported by the UN agency IFAD has been the development and provision of rural financial services. In line with the government's priorities to reduce rural poverty through agriculture and rural development, IFAD provides support to improve the quality of agricultural production and processing. IFAD works to establish market linkages for farmers by providing support for processing, improved value chains, market research, business development services, producers' associations and adaptation to international quality standards in production, processing and packaging. It promotes access to a full range of*

financial services, with particular emphasis on products that support the most vulnerable and poorest people in rural areas. It includes commercial banks in co-finance of small loans and grants for small business projects. . It works on a value chain approach that benefits poor communities and small-scale entrepreneurs.

In view of the large number of Moldovan people who work in other countries and send money to their families at home, IFAD has launched initiatives to harness remittances and the skills of migrants. IFAD cooperates with ARCA through matching grants so as to co-finance investments from remittances from Moldovan workers abroad. These remittances have an enormous potential as development capital. IFAD uses international or domestic remittance services, supporting grants for innovative projects through the Financing Facility for Remittances. The aim is to increase access to remittances in rural areas by enabling local financial institutions to offer this service, either directly or as agents of commercial banks and remittance operators. (PREPARE Situation report on Moldova)

Armenia. *Credit is a key issue for small farmers in Armenia. Loans available to farmers typically carry interest rate of 14%, towards which the government may offer 4% subsidy. A small farmer who wishes to invest $500 for one hectare of drip irrigation may find such a loan difficult to service, particularly if he cannot insure against crop failure or damage such as may be caused by frost and hail in the Ararat Valley. This issue of insurance needs to be addressed in the context of ENPARD : the government is discussing with banks a possible pilot project for an insurance system. (PREPARE Situation report for Armenia)*

Georgia. *The Microfinance Association in Georgia has been operating since about 2001. Its members snow include 18 credit unions and one micro-finance bank, all involved in providing credit to farmers and small food-processing companies. The members now have (between them) 160 branches, many based in villages, offering high-quality financial services. The association's aim is to ensure clean and transparent provision of credit. About 51% of their borrowers are women. They have about 80,000 borrowers, including about 2000 industrial farms, who between them cultivate about a quarter of the nation's arable land; about 20,000 enterprises in the field of food processing; and a growing number drawn from the national total of about 800,000 small farms. 95% of their portfolio is outside the capital, and 65% is rural. About half of the rural lending is to farmers, the other half to micro-businesses or to households (related to housing, health care, education etc.). They are now moving into financing of value-added chains. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

6.9 Advisory Services. Agricultural Advisory services have been a significant feature in rural life in Western European counties for at least half a century. They are a crucial intermediary between governments and stakeholders. They provide farmers and entrepreneurs with technical advice and information about the financial and other support that is available to them. They are still in process of being developed in the Western Balkan and Black Sea countries. They will have a key place in the collective process of modernising and adapting the agricultural and rural economies of those countries. In order to play that role effectively, they will themselves need to keep pace with changes in markets, supply chains, regulations and the like; and also progressively to extend their scope outwards from agriculture to embrace other forms of economic activity in the rural areas, and innovation in all economic fields. They should continue and strengthen their links to other institutions and organisations which offer skills in research and development, training, education and capacity building.

Greece. *The system of provision of Advisory Services to farms was a key element of the 2003 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and should have been implemented from 2007. The objective of the system is to raise the awareness of farmers of material flows and agricultural processes relating to the environment, food safety, health and welfare of animals. It aims to support farmers in meeting the cross-compliance standards of high-quality modern agriculture. Advisory Services in the primary sector and their interdisciplinary support from universities and research centres is essential for the proper functioning of the agri-food system. The connection of the Ministry of Agriculture with the universities and innovation brokers is also a prerequisite. (Greece)*

Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The level of knowledge, and the ability to innovate, among farmers and other rural entrepreneurs should be raised by increasing the availability, and raising the quality and quantity, of professional advisory services in all rural areas, based on partnership between the public, civil and business sectors. These services should be supported by applied research in farm production and rural development, for which increased funding is needed. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *Rural stakeholders report a lack of information and exchange of good practices, which means that many regions in the country are isolated. There is a need for a full national network of rural advisory services which can help rural stakeholders people to gain information, and exchange ideas, about good practice in farming and rural enterprise and the application of new ideas and new technologies. This service should be expert, versatile, multi-disciplinary, demand-driven and decentralised, with strong linkages between service providers and clients. The network should draw upon the expertise and resources of a wide spectrum of service providers, including organisations who can bring experiences and success stories from throughout the country and from other countries. (Macedonia)*

Montenegro*. At present, the main agricultural advisory services are those focused on production of cattle and of herbs. Though they are well organised, these services are burdened with their own activities and do not have the resources to display good practice examples, innovation etc. So, it is necessary to provide support for these advisory services and to widen the range of stakeholders who can benefit from such services. To this end, it is proposed that a national platform be created, to provide information and promote exchange among all stakeholders in rural development. A programme of awareness, information and exchange of ideas and experience is needed. This could include local exhibitions, mini-fairs, study visits and publication of good practice, with widespread inputs from rural stakeholders. (Montenegro)*

Romania. *Romanian does not have an effective nationwide agricultural advisory service. A law to create a private-sector advisory service law was passed in 2010, but the government then changed and no action was taken. Some counties have private-sector chambers of agriculture, which are said to be 'very political, and representative only of the larger farmers'. The present Minister has stated his support for private chambers of agriculture. A two-day seminar between farmers' associations and private and state-owned chambers, held in the end of November 2014, proved to be very fractious, and the decision was made to return to the earlier law, with amendments. The Confederation of Peasant Associations in Romania is losing patience with this dithering over chambers of agriculture. Its President, Alin Bogdan Buzescu, is launching a project for the creation of chambers of agriculture in 18 counties (judeti) in north and north-west Romania. These chambers will have the task of preparing local development strategies and may offer extension services to farmers and others. Time will tell whether this leads to the creation of an effective national system to give advice and other support to all farmers (regardless of size) across the full range of subjects on which they may need that support. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania)*

Moldova. *The National Agency for Rural Development (ACSA) is a non-governmental, non-profit and non-political organization that offers extension services throughout Moldova. The mission of the Agency is sustainable development of rural communities through setting up and developing a professional network of information, consultancy and training service providers for agricultural producers and rural entrepreneurs. It runs the main programmes of Agricultural Advisory Services financed by the Government of Moldova and World Bank. For this purpose, it manages a network of 35 independent service providers, employing about 425 consultants. The services are available to over 60% of the rural population. In addition, ACSA contracts yearly over 300 short term experts of international, national and regional level from research and education institutions and private companies that operate in agri-food industry. ACSA provides services to more than 350 thousands clients every year - agricultural producers, rural entrepreneurs and village inhabitants. New clients have started to benefit from ACSA services recently such as processing companies, enterprises for collecting and storing agricultural products, financial institutions, state organizations, international projects and programmes which operate in rural area. (PREPARE Situation report on Moldova)*

Armenia*. Every province in Armenia has a branch of the national agricultural extension service, which offers advice only on a fee-paid basis, with the client paying 30% and the Ministry of Agriculture 70%. The advisors are based in the capital of the province, and cannot visit villages often. Because of the demand for payment and the need to go to the provincial capital for advice, the service is mainly used by large enterprises and some SMEs, and not so much by small farmers, who tend to seek advice through private extension services organized by NGOs or by consultants. The advice offered by the national extension service relates mainly to technical aspects of farming, including marketing and diversification within the farm, for example linkage between livestock and crops, the focus throughout being on increased viability for each farm. However, it does include training in the management of pastures. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)*

Georgia. *The Government's agricultural extension services are at present based in small offices associated with machinery centres, at municipal level. They are run by small teams of agronomists, vets and phyto-sanitary experts, supported by the Scientific Research Institute. They are focused on agricultural processes and standards, with a view to making farmers competitive. They have no skills in rural development. The Ministry recognises that this network needs to be upgraded.*

The NGO ELKANA commented on the incoherence of agricultural extension services. Some of its own staff left to join the government's extension services, and would like to come back. The government's extension services are effectively competing with those organised by the private or NGO sector, but do not have the skills to offer a rounded services. In ELKANA's view, it would be more efficient if the government supported private services, including those offered by the suppliers of agricultural inputs. This might be achieved through a voucher system. The outcome so far is that not many farmers by using the government's extension services, which are based in the machinery hire centres, partly because the farmers prefer to use old cheap machinery. (Georgia)

6.10 Business support services. Business support is a key theme that emerges from the ERP national campaigns. Many businesses may seek support which goes beyond that is normally provided by the advisory services and which may take the form of premises, credit, advice and financial support towards machinery, equipment, promotion, marketing etc. Such support can have especial value for 'starter' enterprises, i.e those which are newly created. They may need to focus their limited capital and working effort upon the productive process, for example purchase of machinery, processing and marketing : they may therefore welcome the use of convenient rental premises, with office services provided, particularly if there are other small companies working alongside them with whom they can share ideas and possibly cooperate. Business centres of that kind, often called 'incubators', have been created by local authorities or commercial companies or non-profit organisations in many countries.

England. *The rural economy is diverse and dynamic with a mix of large businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises and social enterprises. In order to increase opportunity for start-ups, sustain current employment rates and increase interest in social enterprise projects, investment in dedicated rural business support is required. (England)*

Scotland. *Scotland's rural economy is vital not only for the sustainability of rural areas but to the country as a whole. We need further diversification of businesses. Rural businesses need to be effectively supported to survive, grow and thrive. At present, the business support services in Scotland are tailored to the needs of different regions. People believe that this that these services are not effective in meeting the needs of businesses in some rural areas. The need is for coordinated and accessible enterprise services which reflect the needs and the economy of different regions of rural Scotland. We call for a review of the current economic needs of different regions of Scotland, available wider support mapped across all partners and enterprise support services which reflect these needs. (Scotland)*

Wallonie, Belgium. *Dedicate a policy and specific funding for the development of rural workshops and of business centres suited to house about ten companies. This responds to the needs of companies which wish to set up or expand in rural areas, preserving or creating jobs. This is especially true of small businesses, who are ill-served in industrial estates. This new generation of 'rural workshops' should be designed as versatile spaces, able to accommodate both the food industry and craft businesses, with workshop spaces and shared offices. Such places can encourage cooperation and innovation among those who work there. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Serbia. *There is need to strengthen the system of business support for enterprises of all kinds in rural Serbia. This demands cooperation between public, business and civil sectors, in order to achieve a broader range of competencies and provide a high-quality support service for different business sectors. This must include specialisms, for example in the tourism sector, where the challenge is to raise skills within – and ensure the ability to integrate - many different services and products. (Serbia)*

6.11 Support to young entrepreneurs. Most of the national reports record strong interest among rural stakeholders in measures to encourage entrepreneurship by young people, either in sustaining and strengthening existing enterprises or in creating new enterprises. Behind this strong interest is the desire to stem and reverse the loss of young people from the countryside, and to attract into the rural economy the energy of young people and their willingness to innovate and to apply ideas drawn from their perspective on the modern world. It is recognised that young entrepreneurs can face significant challenges or obstacles, such as the lack of land, premises, machinery or operating capital; lack of business expertise, and the unwillingness of older generations to move aside and allow them to innovate. For these reasons, many respondents suggested measure aimed specifically at young entrepreneurs.

Spain. *Respondents expressed strong concern to enable young people to remain in, or return to, rural areas, to make a decent livelihood and thereby to contribute to the well-being of the rural economies and communities. They suggested the following actions to pursue that that aim :*

- *Launch specific programmes to encourage rural youth to return to rural areas, especially graduates*
- *Offer vocational education and training adapted to the specific skills needed in rural areas*
- *Financial support to young entrepreneurs.*
- *Involve young people in the formulation of rural development policies.*
- *Gain the interest of young people in the natural and cultural heritage and other endogenous resources, and in how these resources can be used in innovative ways to generate employment and income.*
- *Using public funds, create jobs for young people in programmes to combat or adapt to climate change, to conserve the natural environment, to renovate historic buildings and to create affordable housing for young people.*
- *Encourage participation of young people in social networks and cultural activity.*
- *Support entrepreneurship by young people.*
- *Discriminate positively and help young people to settle in rural areas*
- *Provide rural areas of essential services such as broadband. (Spain)*

Wallonie, Belgium*. Support the creation of land banks which, with pre-emptive rights at the request of communes, would buy farmland for granting to young farmers or market gardeners who are focused on achieving high added-value. These purchases of land could also be used to solve problems of flooding or land erosion, and to promote biodiversity and rural development. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Austria*. The big change in the structure of agriculture and forestry as well as the change in new businesses has to be managed through optimised and well-connected business locations which will enable creative industries and motivate young intelligent people to stay in "their" region. The regions have to discover talents and support them in their development and in the development of new products. Rural areas need excellent interfaces between regional employers and (young) people and to motivate local actors starting up with new business ideas and enterprises. A better structure and more public funding are necessary to enhance research and development in rural locations. (Austria)*

Poland. *Rural entrepreneurship however is still marginal. Participants in the ERP national campaign associated new businesses with young people. They identified high social insurance costs (which is the most notable labour cost in Poland, except in agriculture) and taxes as a hindering force. They noted that very few of the programmes for innovative young business-people are applied to rural areas. They suggested that young entrepreneurs in rural areas should be offered long tax-holidays to make entrepreneurship more attractive. (Poland)*

Croatia. *The solution to employment of youth in rural areas should be sought in the area of new business models that lean strongly on the local potential, including the local work force, cultural identity, tradition, resources and needs of the community. Wide possibilities are present in the areas of eco-social economy, information technologies, social innovations and creative and cultural industries which offer employment of local character, motivate the application of fresh ideas and approaches and open space for affirmation of young talent. Support systems need to be developed which will ensure inter-sectoral cooperation, permanent interdisciplinary communication and practice as well as, by means of promotion, education and establishment of targeted funding, encourage initiatives and support social innovations. (Croatia)*

Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Investments should be increased through higher budget allocations for financing agricultural and non-agricultural activities, providing favourable investment loans, especially start-up loans for young people, while, at the same time, putting into operation the existing resources in rural areas (land, water, buildings, equipment, etc.). Participation in training and generally in capacity building in rural areas should be a precondition for obtaining funds for starting a business. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *As in other Western Balkan countries, the labour market in Macedonia is insufficiently inclusive, despite national legislation for equal opportunities in employment. The inclusion of women, young and old workers remains as a major challenge, considering the high rates of unemployment of these groups. The economy is marked by old-fashioned structure and lack of investment. In order to integrate young people in the labour market, there is need to create jobs, to align the education system to the needs of the labour market, to offer internships so that young people can gain experience, and to improve the conditions for them to start their own business. (Macedonia)*

Serbia. *The rural areas in Serbia face the prospect of further severe loss of population. The improvement of the age structure in the rural areas should be on high on the priority list of the rural development policy.*

Measures like additional help to the young farmers and or schemes for early retirement can encourage inheritance of farms, which in turn will open the potential for innovation, farm modernisation etc. Such measures must be complemented by effective systems of vocational education and training, so that the young farmers can truly grasp the opportunities opened to them. (Serbia)

Kosovo. *This region is distinguished for very favourable conditions for the development of agriculture, which can give youth a greater contribution to the improvement of the socio-economic situation of families in this locality. There is need for concrete institutional support for youth of these areas, especially with programmes and projects to advance youth in educational and professional level including trainings and lessons from the field of entrepreneurship, agro-businesses and other concrete fields. (Kosovo)*

Case studies : Young farmers in Kosovo

Bekim Sinani *is a young farmer and lives in Bresane village. Works as a farmer, passes his free time in sports activities. According to him, the youth in this village it is not organized in youth organisations and this is an obstacle for youth activities. Support from institutions for sports or cultural activity has so far been lacking. The main problem is unemployment and lack of projects dealing with the development of tourism, agriculture, improving education and infrastructure for youth activities*

Zenullah Qengaj *is a young farmer and lives in Pllajnik village. He is a student working on a farm. According to him ,the youth in this region has enough potential, but there is no meaningful organisation and for this reason there are not enough activities. Another issue is that youth did not find support from local or central institutions. The basic problem is the lack of financial resources for the implementation of youth activities as well as economic and agricultural activities. (Kosovo)*

This call for support to young entrepreneurs is echoed in the "Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Rural Development programmes" of September 2015 :

"The Youth Guarantee and similar schemes need to be related in rural areas to RDP initiatives so that there is hope for progression and ambition. Investment and training support for young farmers and new entrants is essential. Projects to support and retain young people in rural areas must be a top priority. Young people should be encouraged to take ownership of measures to help themselves. Rural areas need a better succession planning framework room that is legally equitable, accessible and stimulates intergenerational transfers that are sustainable in matching youth with experience." EESC, 2015

6.12 Vocational Education and training. Closely linked to this focus on support to young people is the desire, expressed in many of the national reports to use vocational education and training, as crucial tools to build the capacity of rural communities to sustain their own well-being. A key emphasis is on the generating of skills which are relevant to the needs of employers in evolving rural economies. The European Court of Auditors report on EU-funded vocational training and advice programmes in rural areas, published in October 2015, highlighted poor management procedures by the member states and insufficient supervision by the European Commission. "Training should respond to identified needs and be provided at a reasonable cost by qualified and experienced trainers", said Jan Kinst, the member of the Court of Auditors responsible for the report, "but too often this is simply not happening".

Portugal. *Respondents expressed major concern about human capital in rural areas. There are high levels of illiteracy due to early school leaving and the fact that the most qualified young people leave the rural areas. Vocational training may leave people with inadequate qualifications vis-à-vis what local employers need. The local economic tissue is week, because of low added-value activity and low incorporation of innovation and knowledge, particularly among family farms and local producers. The launch of new businesses is made difficult by the lack of access to credit and lack of support for entrepreneurial innovation (Portugal)*

Wales. *Businesses in rural areas may find difficulty in recruiting a good workforce, not only because of the out-migration of young people but also for the lack of relevant skills in the local population. By encouraging and providing access to skills training and workshops, we can promote traditional and modern skills, and provide opportunities for inter-generational learning experiences. The outcomes can include improved skills; nurtured confidence, self-esteem and motivation; increased aspiration and ambition; enhanced knowledge of availability of business support; increased entrepreneurial spirit; improved awareness of alternative job opportunities; reduced isolation; improved earning capacity, and improved learning capacity e.g. progression to qualifications. Communities recognise the value in skill development. This can range from harnessing their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to identify and implement local solutions to their area's problems, to*

"community ambassador" training for local tourism projects, through to formal accredited land management or other qualifications; delivered in local venues. (Wales)

Wallonie. *Training should be used to facilitate the matching of supply and demand for rural labour. The training could be organised in corporate islets to be modelled more closely on the needs of local companies and could make use of distance learning. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

Czech Republic*. Currently, the partial mismatch between the labour supply and demand is obvious. People with specialist skill are missing in the entire Czech Republic. The highest demand is for technical qualifications, but the core of supply lies in the humanities. This instability implies that additional training and professional qualifications are needed. Moreover, this problem will be greatly multiplied in the future. Recent research shows that, in 15 years' time, half of the jobs will be of kinds that do not exist even today, demanding wholly new types of skill ! But changes in the education, trainings and retraining courses are always delayed : this is perceived as one of the major threats. (Czech Republic)*

Croatia. *Educational programmes at all levels need to be improved by introducing innovation, creativity and more width in the approach, by promoting the feeling of responsibility towards the community, changing the attitude towards different types of work, such as self-employment, volunteering and activism, motivating lifelong learning, additional education and re-qualification. All groups of inhabitants should be motivated to create interest in humane, socio-economic, environmental, historical and cultural aspects of Croatian rural areas. Constant contribution from the academic community is required in order to deal with the issues of development of rural areas. In order for this contribution to result in practical advances and solutions, it is necessary to enrich the higher education curriculums with the necessary knowledge, capabilities and skills of youth for life in rural areas, field work, development of practical capabilities and connections with the local structures; research goals should be aimed at key problems of rural areas and "knowledge bases" on rural areas and rural development should be created which would be accessible to a wide circle of users. (Croatia)*

Lithuania*. Inadequate professional training, lack of qualification and entrepreneurship are among the main reasons for the unemployment of rural residents In Lithuania. This is shown by the fact that, in 2012, 44.3% of unemployed people in rural areas had no educational qualification. On average, young people in rural place less value on education than those in towns : of people aged between 18 to and 24, 11.7% in rural areas have no education and do not seek education, compared with 4% in towns. One reason for this is the growing number of families at social risk in rural areas. Interest in life-long learning is also low in rural areas : only 2.2% of rural residents aged between 25 and 64 took part in formal and non-formal training in four weeks in 2012. (Lithuania)*

6.13 Education and training in the Western Balkans and Black Sea Countries. The national reports from Western Balkan countries revealed a serious concern about low levels of education in many parts of the rural communities, and the urgent need for improved education services, both general and vocational.

Albania*. Increased efforts are needed to direct rural youth to vocational education in specialised areas of agriculture and growing sectors or rural non-farm activities that require or will require work force in the future. These include rural tourism, recreational activities, renewable energy, processing technologies and marketing etc. The premises and especially the curricula of the vocational school need to be improved to respond to needs of businesses in terms of skills, and to channel the rural labour force into specialised activities of growing economic sectors relevant to the development of specific rural areas. Vocational programmes should include training in entrepreneurial skills, to help young people to open their mind to business opportunities. (Albania)*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. In Macedonia, the education rate in the rural areas is very low (10.5% are illiterate and 27% do not have primary education) due to out-migration of young people, lack of schools, isolation of the under-developed villages etc. Only 8% of rural people have had university education : 54% have had secondary school education : the remaining 38% have low levels of skill. Education is the driving force for socio-economic development and for readiness to innovate. The education system plays an important role in the ability of young people to value local products and local tradition. A higher quality of education and lifelong learning processes could reduce the inequalities between urban and rural populations. (Macedonia)*

Romania. *The activities of the National Rural Network, and of NGOs such as PACT, Civitas and ADEPT, offer valuable examples of building the capacity of stakeholders, including subsistence farmers, producer groups, NGOs, entrepreneurs, local authority officials and civil servants. In a changing world, which*

demands new kinds of action and intelligent use of highly varied resources, such capacity-building will be increasingly needed. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania)

Armenia. *Heifer International has supported the creation* ***of*** *rural youth clubs – see case-study example below and has Network of these clubs. Each year Heifer holds a Youth Business Forum, to discuss how young people can contribute to different aspects of the lives of their communities. Youth clubs can be funded either by schools, which have some discretionary funds for extracurricular activity, or by communities : Heifer provides some direct funding. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)*

Case Study : 'Wave' Youth Club at Sevan Town, Gegharkunik region, Armenia. *This is one of the youth clubs in the Heifer network. It has been running since 2002. It offers training in seven different subjects – agriculture, a healthy lifestyle, tourism, logical thinking, environmental thinking, business education and human rights. It has a Youth Business Forum, which encourages members to start small enterprises in the teenage years. One girl is rearing a heifer, another has a small enterprise making paper bags, another has set up a beekeeping business, and a group of members produces the club newspaper. The Club has held a regional camp in Georgia, and received a similar group from Georgia visiting Armenia. Through an exchange with a school in Warsaw, a group spent five days in Poland to study how life is organized in villages. Members of the club undertake environmental work, such as planting of trees and clearing rubbish. Funding or practical help (such as supply of books and animals) has come from Heifer, the Polish Aid Programme and other donors. (PREPARE Situation report for Armenia)*

Georgia. *World Vision Georgia wishes to encourage and enable young people to make a good life in the countryside, rather than migrating to the city. To this end, it advocates vocational training alongside or within the formal school curriculum, and the involvement of young people in community life and decision-making. It believes that this involvement will help young people to unlock their own potential, and that young people are far more capable and open-minded than most adults recognise. It perceives that local authorities, and most adults in rural communities, tend to marginalise young people rather than involving and motivating them. It runs practical projects to encourage enterprise among young people, for example growing and selling vegetables for the benefit of the school. In two regions, it supports 'Citizens Voice in Action' projects to link municipalities and stakeholders, with youth involved as part of the group. With funding from World Vision Hong Kong, it provides training and equipment for beekeeping enterprises run by young people coming back to live in villages. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

6.14 Lifelong learning. Some national reports place strong emphasis on the need for lifelong learning, in order to strengthen not only employment-related skills but also social solidarity and inclusiveness.

Austria. *Rural regions will only have a chance in the future if there are innovative programmes for lifelong learning and for personal development. This requires the establishing of decentralised training nodes that offer people with limited mobility and education a chance to learn. Regional training networks need to secure the next generation of skilled workers for farms in rural areas. Education must stretch across all ages and include talent enhancement. This requires an active regional strategy for lifelong learning and the establishment of regional training opportunities. In order to stop the rural exodus of families, a new approach of "family education" is needed. This involves education targeted at women; and educational models, such as parent-child education, children's holiday programmes and inter-generational learning – 'learning from the grandparents'. Such activity can strengthen social cohesion and solve social problems in advance. (Austria)*

Slovenia. *(Rural communities should) contribute to higher competitiveness of the Slovenian society by greater inclusion in life-long education and the general increase in occupational competences (Draft Declaration of the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

Latvia. *Many active educated citizens live and work in the rural areas of Latvia. We call for increased lifelong learning opportunities for every member of the community. Public involvement in lifelong learning should be promoted, in order to reduce social exclusion and segregation. We urge educational authorities to pursue the following measures :*

- *Provide compulsory education in pre-school and elementary school stage close to the family's place of residence*
- *Promote lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages, consolidating and making the best use of existing resources*
- *Use rural schools and other local public infrastructure and intellectual resources to promote employment, diverse social services and civic participation*

- *Review the indicators for determining the quality of education in order to support implementation of inclusive and innovative education approaches*
- *In the allocation of funding and other support to education, consider community socio-economic indicators and geographical situation, in order to contribute to development of human capital and institutional capacity*
- *Invest in the development of online education in order to support the improvement of the quality of education and enhance the international competitiveness of education to promote the European Union's competitiveness in the global education market and the economy*
- *In order to ensure the preservation of the European values and human solidarity, develop lifelong learning policy and the implementation of activities that contribute to cooperation between various social and age groups*
- *Create united co-ordinated lifelong process in every Latvian municipality by using local resources, also using the existing schools and teachers with the potential of multifunctional lifelong learning centre*
- *Employ lifelong learning coordinators in all municipalities to work with various social groups to involve them in education, to provide training facilities and to support continuous public education process and the competitiveness of the Latvian economy. (Latvia)*

Serbia. *There is need to improve the system of informal education in rural communities. Informal and lifelong education can build the capacity of local people, including the young, to value local products and local traditions. It can reduce the inequalities between urban and rural communities. The experience of civil society organisations in Serbia, plus experience in the European Union, should be used to underpin a national programme of lifelong learning and informal education. This programme will demand the creation of curricula, information about existing programmes, cooperation between educational providers and stakeholders, the training of trainers, and increased support from national and local authorities. (Serbia)*

7. Action by rural stakeholders.

Participants in the ERP 20165 campaign recognise that a prime responsibility to take action rests with the rural people themselves – individuals, households, businesses, groups, whole communities and the organisations through which they act. Collectively, they have the prime knowledge of their needs, their resources, their strengths and weaknesses, the priorities for action to sustain or improve their collective well-being. They can look to governments, and where appropriate to multi-national authorities such as the European Union or the Council of Europe, for support : but they have to merit that support by showing a strong measure of self-help. The day-by-day initiative rests with them.

7.1 Leaders and mediators. For those elements of action which rest directly with individuals or households, no external leadership or mediation may be needed. But where the action involves a wider group, then the key question arises - who will lead, and who will mediate between the group or community and wider agencies whose help it may need to take the action ? The responses flowing in through the European Rural Parliament campaign show that leadership and mediation can come from many different sources; and that these different sources can come into play at different stages in the process of informal action and of deliberate development programmes. To simplify a highly varied and often complex issue, we might identify the following main sources of leadership and mediation :

a. Key individuals, acting with formal authority or by informal initiative
b. Single-purpose local associations
c. Community-level associations or action groups, concerned with general well-being
d. Municipalities
e. Entrepreneurs
f. Cooperatives and sub regional (or wider) associations
g. Non-government organizations
h. Donors, such as foundations or bilateral and multi-national agencies
i. NGO Networks and rural movements
j. LEADER groups and other sub-regional partnerships
k. Regional and national Governments

Examples of leadership and mediation by each of these categories is offered, in turn, below, drawing upon the examples from the ERP national campaigns and related resources.

7.2 Key individuals. European countries vary widely in their social traditions and administrative structures at the heart of rural communities. Some countries – such as France, Slovakia and Turkey – have elected mayors, starostovia, muhtars or equivalent at village level, who can take initiative to meet communal needs, using the powers and resources available to them. In many other countries, elected leaders are found only at the level of larger local authorities or municipalities, and each village may lack an elected leader : in such circumstances, local leadership in communal action may come from individuals who do not have formal status. In rural Sweden, where each municipality may cover hundreds of square kilometres, the village level action groups – now numbering about 5,000 – have arisen from the initiative of individuals, whom the Swedes call ‘fiery spirits’. The contrast between these two types of leadership is well shown by two stories relating to the saving of threatened village primary schools :

> ***France.*** *Some years ago, the village school in La Porcherie, a mountain village in the Haute Cevennes, was threatened with closure for lack of enough children. The Mayor decided to take direct action to solve this problem. Available to him was the empty house of the previous school headmaster. He advertised in national newspapers for a family with a large number of children which would like to move to La Porcherie. Seventy families applied. The mayor chose an unemployed lorry driver from Lille in northern France, with 10 children. The family arrived in a large pantechnicon – father, mother, 10 children, dog, cat and furniture. The father retrained as the village carpenter, and the school was saved.*
>
> ***Sweden.*** *A village on the edge of the Arctic Circle, north of Hemavan, was similarly threatened by the closure of its village school for lack of enough children. Its fate rested in the hands of the municipality, based*

some 60 kilometres away. The villages wanted to keep the school. They asked the municipality, "What will it take to keep this school open?" The municipality responded that they had to save money by reducing the staff. Several villagers volunteered to act as unpaid staff, including an accountant who retrained himself as a blacksmith and teacher in crafts, and a retired lady who taught the children reading, writing and local history. Again, the school was saved.

7.3 Village leaders in Central and Eastern Europe. But in central and eastern Europe, with a combination of large local authorities (with the mayor sitting in a large town, not in any village) and the inherited assumption that leadership will come from central government, there is no tradition of informal leadership. It takes an exceptional person, or a determined group, to give a lead and to inspire communal action in a village – see the examples from Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia below.

***Bulgaria**. Very few of the respondents think that they can play a role for opening new working places and attract investments in the rural area. Our main conclusion is that people in rural areas are demotivated, they are trying to solve their daily problems and secure their existence and they do not believe that they can initiate a change in their community. (Bulgaria)*

Case study : Zlakusa vllage, Serbia

Zlakusa is an attractive village set in a valley among steep hills. It has three crucial assets. The first is a long-established local tradition of using local clay and ground silica to make earthenware pottery, now pursued by 17 families and providing jobs for about 70 people. The second asset is a unique limestone cave in the adjoining village of Potpec, already visited by about 6,000 people a year, from which emerges a river which feeds a series of fish ponds in the valley. The third asset is Sasa Drndarevic, a local man who returned to the village after working elsewhere as a professional engineer. His first action after returning was to create an Ethno Park 'Terzica Avlija', where visitors can see traditional buildings, replica World War 2 schoolhouse, a library of local history and other features. Based in the Park is the Ethno Association 'Zavichaj', which promotes traditional culture, including dance and music for adults and young people. These initiatives encouraged activity by others in the community, including a women's association which runs its own centre selling craft products. The village has secured the opening of its own station on the railway line that runs through to Kraljevo; and created 60 km of walking trails in the locality. The 17 families of potters craft have cooperated to create a shop for direct sale to visitors, and are seeking PDO status for their Zlakusa pottery. In doing these things, the village has had significant support from the Serbian Rural Development Network … and has attracted help from the city; from the United States Embassy, which was 'long-term, flexible help'; from participants in international eco-camps; from the National Employment Bureau, which funded work in the village by unemployed people; and from the national Ministry of Economy and Regional Development. (Serbia)

Case Study : Rezanovce Village School, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

A striking example direct initiative by village communities comes from Rezanovce Village in Kavadarci Municipality. The people of this village, led by the voluntary village council, built an elementary school, using their own funds, the only village in Macedonia to do so. The school, with 80 pupils, is now managed by the municipality. The teachers, who come from the town of Kumanovo, are financed by the Ministry of Education. Parents take part in school activities, and there is a parents' council with nine members. Teaching is in Macedonian and Albanian languages, and the school is involved in many multi-ethnic projects. The school provides a room for a mobile doctor, who comes once a week because there is no clinic in the village. There is no cultural centre, but the local community can use the school for whatever purposes they need. The school has become a social centre for the village, and is trusted and valued by the local population. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")

7.4 Single-purpose local associations. Rural communities in many parts of Europe are rich in the presence of single-purpose local associations, created at village level to pursue a particular purpose. Austria – the host of the European Rural Parliament 2015 – offers the example of the voluntary fire brigades, football clubs and village orchestras which arose in response to the encouragement which Empress Maria Theresa gave to such social entities. Single-purpose activity like this can often form the springing point for wider action to benefit rural communities, as shown by the example from Georgia below. This example shows how rapidly a first initiative can lead on to other creative action to meet the needs of communities. If the courage to take the first step is rewarded by success, this stimulates thinking and action about wider needs.

Georgia. *In the small town of Oni (3,000 population) in the Racha-Lechkhumi Region of Georgia, a group of women were concerned about the well-being of poor people, children, refugees and others in the locality. In 2014, they started informal action to address these needs. They organised a 'doctor bus', which travels around the municipality and offers health checks for children and women, including check-ups for cancer prevention. They organised 'second hand' and 'one toy' actions for poor families and kindergartens. They visited kindergartens together with municipal staff and made a list of needs. They are helping the home for refugees in Oni. They are now planning further action. They would like to establish points for selling their home-made products near touristic places. They hope to renovate a disused school building, with land that which stretches down to the river, and to run summer camps for children there. They have formed links with the National Women's Association, and are thinking of becoming a formal organisation. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia).*

7.5 Community-level associations or action groups. Many of the national networks which have led this European Rural Parliament campaign are rooted in local action and participative democracy. In their membership are thousands of village-level action groups, local associations, cooperatives and other structures which have taken the lead to create communal facilities, to run essential services, to forge cooperation among economic actors. It is clear from the national reports that such initiative will have even greater importance in the future. But it will only be a sustainable basis for communal well-being in rural areas if it is complemented by the continuing action of public authorities in the fields where they have statutory duties, and by an effective climate of support from governments.

Wales. *In Pembrokeshire, community associations are seeking to work with community and town councils to increase community resilience and cohesion by creating a localised infrastructure. PLANED reports that community cohesion relies on strong participation and a structure by which people can be engaged. Drawing on potential future changes in devolution in Wales, there is an opportunity for wider participation. The Welsh Government White Paper notes that 'effective community involvement requires us to establish a framework which allows for greater sharing of power and responsibility between Local Authorities and the communities they serve. This will enable communities to go beyond having their voice heard to actively taking responsibility for the changes and improvements they wish to see in their community. Communities report that they want greater local 'say' and 'ownership', locally directed prioritisation and removal of the tiers that prevent making things happen. Overall communities see a significant opportunity for local knowledge to influence better and more sustainable solutions in an area.' (Wales)*

Case study : Braemar, Scotland

Although remote with just 400 inhabitants, Braemar is a vibrant village. Like all destinations that rely on tourism, the community must continually innovate and refresh what's on offer. Work is ongoing on an action plan to improve services for both local people and for the many visitors to this tiny village surrounded by the challenges and opportunities of the majestic mountains of the Cairngorms National Park. Current projects include running a Creative Arts Festival, a community orchard, improving transport links, raising funds to restore Braemar Castle and progressing Scotland's only World Highland Games Discovery Centre. The village has its own choir, country dance group and a traditional music group as well as pipers and highland dancers. Thanks to pressure by the community, Kindrochit Castle is undergoing extensive upgrading. Moving forward is made possible through a strong community spirit which sees so many people volunteering to support the many village activities, clubs and projects. (Scotland)

Brandenburg, Germany*. Those associations which are concerned with the interests and needs of the entire village play a dominant role in collective action, which is similar to the experiences of the Swedish Village Action Movement. They call themselves village associations, folk culture or cultural association. An outstanding example is the village Reichenow, about 30 km east of Berlin, where the cultural association … runs a small public library, a communication centre for previously integrated citizens, pottery, sculpture workshop, children's workshop, market for gifts (without payment), village festivals, training courses, and communal transport for people without cars.*

The local councils and the mayor, who are elected by the villagers, are the centre of the active village stakeholders. Where they are able, with new ideas and organisational force to mobilise the local community, they will play their role. But this also depends on qualifications and practical experience : the newly elected must have time to learn and to acquire skills. Some give up even in the face of their small possibilities to change things. Once again it was confirmed that interaction of local councils and associations increases the power. Associations have a greater mobilisation power with regard to their members; registered associations

can have better opportunities than local councils to acquire funding for community projects, because of their legal status, (and so can) bring together civic engagement and financial support. (Brandenburg)

Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Participation of the rural population in the implementation of rural development of their areas can only be achieved through animation and capacity building within this population. Rural people need to recognise their needs and interests to come together in associations, cooperatives, local action groups, machinery rings, clusters and other types of organisation. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

7.6 The challenge of strength and continuity. Village associations depend upon voluntary effort and a committed membership. Sustaining their activity over time can be very demanding.

Ireland. *The over reliance on a small number of local heroes remains a problem for many rural communities. These local heroes can disappear over time due to other commitments, illness, ageing, death etc. Collaboration within rural towns and villages has the potential to illuminate succession issues and to expand the distribution of duties with a community setting. (Ireland)*

Netherlands. *In the rural area in the Netherlands, each village has many associations which contribute to the well-being of the inhabitants. You may think on sport; culture; women; church and so on. However, we see there are less volunteers to do things than there were twenty years ago. Also the village organisation is sometimes an old-fashioned organisation that cannot modernise its style of working and has less attraction to new inhabitants and younger people. So, there is need for fresh thinking. Village organisations should look afresh at their role in the future, and the important of that role in the life of the villages and the region. Village people should talk with each other about the future of their villages, more than with the government. The many different organisations in a village can all contribute to the wellbeing of the rural areas. But where the number of active people is shrinking, these organisations may need to work together, combining their energy in order to sustain the activities and services that are needed. They may need to talk about the vision of the future of the village and how to achieve it; to consider the benefits of working together; and to define the things in which cooperation is possible and has benefits for everyone. This process may take time, but is still worth doing. (Netherlands)*

Finland. *Village action in Finland is seen as a strong movement, with about 5,000 village associations. But these associations vary greatly in their strength. A good number of them have nil or minimal membership fees. Their lack of basic financing limits their ability to seek other financial tools and to cooperate with other local actors. Could we think of a process which would lead to large membership of rural people, paying fees for the common good? Locals would pay, but they are also the main beneficiaries of the actions. The change would be quite radical and would be open to objection on the grounds that village action has traditionally been based on voluntarism, that local authorities should do more, and that people who already pay taxes should not expect to give money also to the local development organisation. SYTY has published for the NGOs a guide for self-funding, hoping that it would activate the local actors. We suggest a reversal of thinking, from "What can this NGO offer to me if I pay a fee ?" to "We all are members and I pay the fee for the common good of collective services and acquisitions". If this could be achieved, the village/community would be a stronger actor and partner both politically and financially. Common actions with local authorities and actors would become more feasible and realistic. Public services are disappearing and getting centralised (Finland)*

7.7 Municipalities. Municipalities, whether small or large, tend to be the element of government which is closest to the people. They are therefore well placed, in principle, to understand the needs of rural communities; to be easily approached by citizens for help; and - <u>if they have the powers, resources and willingness</u> – to give a lead in local development and also to act as mediators between the people and higher authorities such as regional and national governments. But the key is the phrase <u>underlined above</u>. Municipalities can play a leading role a local development if they have the powers and resources and are willing to use them. Municipalities around Europe vary greatly in this respect. Even in those countries where municipalities have significant discretionary powers which could be used in the field of rural development, they have often become so constrained financially in recent years that they are obliged to focus so much on limited statutory functions, such as education and social services, that they are unable to act in wider fields where they have only discretionary powers. In some countries, such as Hungary (see below), municipalities are deliberately constrained by central government.

Hungary. *The centralising of public-authority powers in Hungary in recent years has emasculated the municipalities, which previously had responsibility for running local services and which cooperated within*

microregions to contribute towards rural development. Two key stages in the centralizing process were the centralisation of the local school system in 2012, and the reform of public administration in 2013. So the first step, rural communities lost their power to manage and monitor local schools : the national government now decides on selection of local teachers and school directors. A single institution, based in Budapest, is responsible for all technical and methodological decisions related to all local schools (elementary and secondary). The reform of 2013 removed power from both the regional and village levels of local government. Municipalities remain, but are obliged to work in parallel with local governors appointed by central government. Administrative and development powers are concentrated at national and NUTS 3 (county) level : this means that cities and towns have a much stronger voice in decision-making, and that villages no longer have a voice or a self-managed budget. (Hungary)

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *Kruševo Municipality, in a mountainous part of south-west Macedonia, has a population of 9600, of which 40% is rural. The Municipal Council is striving to redeem the serious weakness of the local economy, shown by 34% unemployment, continuing out-migration of young and educated people, 70% reduction in traditional sheep production, lack of business development apart from textiles, and a high proportion of one-person businesses. The council perceives that local people are risk-averse, with a non-entrepreneurial, post-communist mentality, unwilling to work in partnership with others and with a propensity to drop out of projects after the planning stage, leaving implementation to the public sector. The tourism association, active for 2 years during a cross-border project, has lapsed, and tourist numbers are low. To tackle these issues, the Municipality has developed a strategy focused on tourism, the creation of a zone for light industry, attracting foreign investors, business start-up training and support, and improvement of services and infrastructure (roads and water supply) in the surrounding 18 villages. Tourism is seen as the main growth area, because of the fine mountain landscapes and cultural assets. The area offers skiing, hiking, paragliding, health spa, conference facilities and cultural heritage. 560 guest beds are registered by the municipality, plus many private villas. In the last decade, €2.5 million has been invested in tourist facilities : this includes €1.5 million from the government towards skiing facilities, plus funding from US AID, UNDP, World Bank, EU cross-border programmes, and former residents. The Ministry of Agriculture thought that IPARD funding would be well suited to Kruševo, but the Municipality declined it as too complex to use. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")*

Serbia. *Municipalities in Serbia appear to be increasingly willing to take leadership in local – including rural - development. They are in charge of agricultural extension, i.e. advisory services to farmers, which provide a very significant point of contact between government and stakeholders. Many municipalities already have, or are preparing, rural development strategies, which are subject to the approval of the Ministry of Agriculture. For some municipalities, the stimulus for action has come from commercial entrepreneurs who have joined the municipal councils and become mayors or cabinet members responsible for development : to this task, they bring commercial skills and knowledge of the support which enterprises need from the public sector, for example investment in infrastructure or credit subsidies.*
For example, Zoran Radovanovic is part of the third-generation in a family business, Floriva Ltd, focused on commercial production of berry seeds and plants for sale to growers in Ivanjica Municipality, which is an area heavily dependent on agriculture (more than 80% of the workforce), mainly production of soft fruit. He is a Councillor in the Municipality and Head of its Agriculture Development Unit. In that capacity, he has animated local projects such as development of greenhouses for 20 small local fruit growers, with funding from the Turkish Development Agency : he had to lobby the Mayor for a long time to authorise this project. His ambitions for the area include diversifying the local economy and adding value to local berries in the 'fresh fruit' and 'organic' markets. The Municipality has initiated a Potential Local Action Group, which has drafted a Local Development Strategy. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")

Montenegro. *Municipalities in Montenegro can raise local taxes and to put money into local development. The Ministry of Agriculture is encouraging municipalities to prepare their own local development strategies. Among municipalities, only Pljevlja has yet completed such a strategy : other municipalities, such as Budva, Nikšić and Žabljak, are in process of doing so, including public consultation. However, it is not yet clear to many stakeholders how the municipal strategies will relate to the government's action in this field. Officers in the two large municipalities of Nikšić and Pljevlja, which together cover 60% of the country and are mainly mountainous, are extremely concerned about the prospects for the rural areas in their municipalities. They see the rural population, and the farming economy, shrinking. They are trying to help the farming community to diversify and modernise, and to keep young people in the villages : but they have very limited funds for rural development - €120,000 per year for Pljevlja municipality.*
("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")

7.8 Cooperation between municipalities. In countries with relatively small municipalities, such as the communes in France, there can be a strong incentive for municipalities in the region to work together on projects which are larger than any one commune. This cooperation can also be a way to attract funding from central government or from multinational sources.

France. *Each of the Regional Parks (Parcs regionaux naturels) in France has been created by a group of communes, with a double aim of protecting the natural and cultural heritage and promoting the social and economic well-being of a defined area. Each Regional Park Authority, with representatives of all the communes, pursues a development and conservation programme, with finance from the municipalities and also from national funds : some of these authorities also act as LEADER groups. An example of that activity is the creation by the Normandie-Maine Regional Park of the House of the Pear and of the Apple (Maison de la Poire et e la Pomme) at Barenton. This is at same time a trade and information centre for farmers in the region who produce pears, apples and drinks based on them (poirée, cider, calvados) and a visitor centre for tourists. From there, visitors are encouraged to follow by car a series of 'itineraires' to visit the farms and to sample and purchase the food and drinks. Thereby, both the farming economy and the orchard landscape are sustained.*

Georgia. *Three large regions in Georgia – Samtkhe-Javakheti, Imerety and Kakheti – have Regional Development Agencies (RDA's), created by the groups of municipalities and funded by membership fees from each municipality. These RDAs are effectively associations of municipalities. Their role is to support municipalities in investment projects, both between municipalities and across regional or national borders; and to secure the involvement of donors. They participate in the production of Regional Development Strategies, in the context of the programme launched in six regions by Swiss DC and UNDP and by other donors elsewhere, with EU budget support between 2011 and 2013. The Regional Development Strategies are subject to approval by the Ministry of Regional Development and Investment (MRDI), which then provides funds for the implementation of the Strategies, using the Municipal Development Fund (itself funded by the World Bank, European Rural Development Bank and Asian Development Bank) plus a Regional Fund budget of about €100 million managed by the Prime Minister's Committee. The Regional Development Strategies are top-down in character, funded by government and from municipal budgets, with limited participation processes and no formal partnerships with the private and civil sectors. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

7.9 Entrepreneurs. Europe is rich in examples of entrepreneurs who have had the courage and ability to launch an enterprise, using the human and natural resources available in the rural areas, and who thereby bring benefit to other stakeholders in the local community. They can add significantly to the value of products; strengthen the sense of local identity; create precious jobs in the countryside; bring together groups of small producers and offer them contracts which bring stability within the rural economy. In these ways, they can provide crucial leadership in the sustaining and regenerating the vitality of rural economies and communities.

England. *A remarkable example of the social and economic benefits which can come to the rural region through the action of an entrepreneur is the recent building of a motorway service station on either side of the M5 Motorway at Gloucester in England. The station has been created by partnership between the privately-owned Westmorland Company (which already has similar stations in northern England) and the Gloucestershire Gateway Trust. Many of the workers at the station have been recruited from housing estates in Gloucester which have high levels of unemployment. A high proportion of the goods sold in the shop, and of the food served in the restaurant, come from farmers and small enterprises based within a 50-kilometre radius around the station. Two percent of the gross turnover at the station is pledged to be used through the Gateway Trust to support social and environmental causes within the county.*

Romania. *The Transylvania Food Company is a non-profit company focused on adding value to food products in Transylvania. For its supplies of fruit and other raw material, it offers contracts to small growers and payments to pickers among the Roma people. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania)*

Serbia. *The Arilje region of Serbia is famous for raspberries, and has a well-developed chain of production, processing and marketing, led by dynamic entrepreneurs. For example, Drenovac Fruit Processing Company is a modern company, processing to high technical standards, with annual turnover of €1.5 million and 17 full-time employees. It has 'sole supply' contracts with 80 producers, to whom it provides all necessary fertilisers and pesticides plus training in their use to comply with the company's standards. It started as a 'cooling facility', producing Frozen Raspberry for export. Recently the owner, Slobadan*

Obradovic, built a 'freeze drying' facility, the first in Serbia : he wants to invest further, but is impeded by the high cost of borrowing and needs to find the right markets. He would welcome access to government grants. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")

Montenegro. *The wine company 'AD Plantaže'produces 17 million bottles of wine each year. It is the biggest export company in Montenegro, exporting wine to 40 countries, and has won 800 awards at international fairs. It has 700 employees, plus 2000 migrant seasonal workers who harvest grapes from its 2314 ha of vineyard : it also buys grapes from small producers in the region. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *Popova Kula winery, hotel and restaurant in Demir Kapija municipality is an example of local leadership by private enterprise. It is a wholly private initiative, with significant investment, modern production methods and high- quality products. It is centred on production of wine, using grapes purchased on contract from local farmers; and has diversified into a hotel and restaurant, with a total of 27 employees. With other companies, it has formed a local association for ecotourism activities. It is discussing with other local wineries the potential for creating a wine trail in the sub-region. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")*

7.10 Cooperatives and sub regional or wider associations. In some parts of the rural economy, small enterprises are gaining the advantage of working together. Cooperatives and associations can offer greater strength in the market than individual producers can have, and are better placed to exercise influence on the policies of municipalities or of the government.

Montenegro. *Vlado Vukotić runs a cheese factory 'Cevo Katunjanka' in Danilovgrad municipality, Montenegro . This is a family company, with seven full-time employees, using milk supplied on contract by 40 local producers. The company belongs to a cluster of cheese producers in South Montenegro who have formed a cooperative marketing group. Mr. Vukotić has benefited from attendance at seminars and information meetings organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, and is kept well informed by the Ministry and the Chamber of Trade. He would like to be able to draw on a wider supply of good-quality milk, and to see the dairy farmers organised into an association. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")*

Romania. *The Confederation of Peasant Associations in Romania was set up in 2012, by 10 chambers of agriculture or similar organisations involved in agricultural advice or consultancy, in order to provide a voice for the peasants and small farmers of Romania, who have been ill-served by government policies and under-represented in the consultative processes related to those policies. The Confederation wishes to speak for those who own or work on the land, or who act as guardians of high nature value, including the subsistence and semi-subsistence farms. It now has 15 member organisations, representing thousands of members. It is concerned about the plight of millions of small farms, the exclusion of these small farms from government support programmes, and the threat that land (without adequate protection through land titles) will be taken over by business interests or by foreigners, such as those from Germany, Italy Portugal and Spain who are seeking to buy or rent land in Romania. In December 2013, it submitted to the Romanian government and to the European Commission a major strategy paper relating to the shape of the future CAP. It believes that this paper contributed to the objections which the European Commission has stated on the Government's draft Rural Development Programme and which led to significant change. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania*).

Serbia. *Kraljevo Beekeepers' Association in southern Serbia, founded in 1898, now has 170 members, who between them have 6,826 bee hives. The members cooperate in purchasing equipment, training and marketing of their products. They are part of the Beekeeping Association of Serbia, which has over 10,000 members; is in direct touch with government and is able to influence policy; and is a member of NALED, the national alliance of local economic development, which also includes municipalities, banks and farming associations. After successful presentation of their interests at national and city levels, bee-keepers in Kraljevo receive an annual subsidy of 500 dinars per hive from the municipality. Their products are sold through the cooperative organisation Srpska Magaza. They aim to achieve PDO status for honey from their region. ("Empowering rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans")*

Georgia*. The mountain community of Tusheti is a rare example of historic self-government. It consists of three villages, with a total of about 4000 households. The community owns and manages two distinct areas of mountain pastures, using one (near the villages) for summer grazing by sheep and horses and the other (150 km away) for winter grazing of all animals prior to sale – a system which he described as 'pendulum' migration or transhumance. This community is well-organised and prosperous. It has lobbied for the*

highlands to be protected by national park status, and has developed summer tourism in the uplands. The area is only accessible by motor vehicle in the summer, because the highest pass lies at 3100 metres : this serves to protect the area from urban development.

Georgia. *Georgia has no tradition of cooperatives, because the basic unit of business activity has been the family. Recently started is an ENPARD-funded programme to support the creation of cooperatives, with a focus mainly on small farmers, which have an average of 1.2 hectares of land. The necessary law already exists. The government is committed to promote agricultural cooperatives, and the Ministry of Agriculture has set up the Agency for Development of Agricultural Cooperatives. The government issued a Call for Proposals for professional help in policy formulation and training within the scope of this programme, in the context of the Single Framework for EU Support to Georgia 2014-17. The activity can build on an earlier project (about 2008) by CARE International to support rural associations, for example in collecting milk from different farms for sale to processors. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

Case Study : small cooperatives in Racha-Lechkhumi Region, Georgia
The ENPARD programme (which started in 2014) is the main source of grants for farmers and cooperatives. The support takes the form of 80% grants of up to 5,000 Lari (c.€2,000) for individual farmers or 15,000 Lari (c.€6000) for a cooperative. The grants are mostly used for buying agricultural machinery. The largest cooperatives (up to 10 farmers) are growing potatoes, producing meat and beekeeping. Cooperatives can also benefit from a national programme of credit support. For loans with interest rates up to 15%, the government will subsidise the interest, so that some farmers pay only 5%. Grants also offered towards the planting orchards of walnut, apple or plum trees by farmers with more than 1 hectare of land. The government will pay up to 70% of the cost of planting trees, and 50% of the cost of subsequent watering. Each year, a farmer may receive grant of 7 Lari per year for each walnut tree, or 3-4 Lari per year for each apple or plum trees : in total, this grant may amount to about 10,000 Lari (c.€4000) per hectare. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)

7.11 Non-government organizations. Non-government organizations, typically with non-profit status, can play a significant role as leaders and mediators in rural development. They can gain strength and credibility from having a non-party political status, objectivity and expertise. They face the challenge of securing continuity of funding, and the danger of having their objectives distorted by conditions attached to funding. But if they stick to their ideals, they can help powerless rural communities to gain courage and to take initiative to meet their own needs.

Romania. *In Romania, there is significant and growing activity at regional or sub-regional level by individual NGOs, who are battling to make good things happen among local communities. Collectively, these NGOs comprise a field of action which is parallel to that of government, dependent on a variety of financial resources, but of growing importance as initiator and facilitator in rural development. They include (for example) :, :*

- *ADEPT, an Anglo-Romanian NGO based at Saschiz in Transylvania, which has many years of work with small farming communities in the Tarnava Mare district. It has helped small farmers to form producer groups; to add value to farm products, such as production of jam and cheese; to market these products in Sibiu, Bucharest and elsewhere; and to gain access to agri-environment payments (which are not normally available to individual small farmers) by making joint applications.*
- *Civitas Foundation for Civil Society, created in 1992 and based in Cluj-Napoca, which supports rural and regional development by strengthening civil society and the public and private sectors. Its activities include help to small farmers to form cooperatives, which has allowed them to market their goods to food stores in cities such as Cluj; creation of e-centres in rural villages, connecting residents with the Internet and computers for the first time; provision of training in human resource development, plus courses in project management and how to access funding from the European Union; training programmes for public officials in project management, communication, strategic management, human resources and other topics; and a programme for youths between 16 and 24 who are unemployed and not in school*
- *PACT Foundation, which has expertise in community development, mainly in rural areas. In 2002, it launched Community-based Development Projects in 54 local communities in southern Romania, with support from the charities Allavida and Mott Foundation. The instruments included specialist consultancy, training, seed or start-up funding (not repayable), loans and specialist support for projects. The beneficiaries included social enterprises, focused on local people, local material and local skills in fields such as wood products, traditional costumes. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania)*

Georgia. *Hundreds of NGOs and small CSOs are registered in the country. Most of these organizations are established in the frame of programmes funded by International NGOs or other donors. Many of them are the only operational if they secure a project or grant from a donor. However there is a group of about 20 NGOs which have more significant capacity, operating at national or regional level, focused on the real needs of regions, with well-developed practical experience in development work. They can elaborate, implement, monitor and evaluate projects; find efficient and sustainable solutions to meet local needs and challenges; and communicate efficiently with local communities, public institutions and donors to gain their support. However, they are not yet strong in building thematic alliances, cooperating with the private sector or influencing public policy-making. They recognize the need for networking among themselves, but have not yet been able to secure support for such activity from donors or government. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

7.12 Donors. Since the breakdown of the 'Iron Curtain' in 1989, and then the collapse of the Soviet Union, the efforts by newly independent nations to strengthen their institutions and economies has been supported by a wide range of donors, including many foundations in bilateral and multilateral agencies. With their international perspective and expertise, they have often taken the lead in introducing – for example through local or sectoral pilot projects - approaches to development which may later the adopted as mainstream programmes by the host governments. Many donors have placed strong importance upon democracy, human rights, the role of non-government organizations, inclusiveness and sustainability. They have encouraged the people, including rural communities and nongovernment organization, to take an active part in development processes. In these ways they have had significant impact as leaders and mediators. As these ideas take hold, and as governments become stronger – and particularly where the countries accede to the European Union or formal relationships with and as significant financial support from the EU, the donors tend to gradually move on eastwards, leaving governments to pick up their role. This 'rolling' process has brought significant benefits to the receiving countries, and specifically to social and economic development in rural areas, but can also be a source of tension and some confusion as countries seek to absorb, and find coherence, among a multiplicity of initiatives.

Moldova. *Moldova has received financial and developmental support for wide range of donors, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), East European Foundation, Swiss Foundation HEKS, Visegrad Fund, Swedish international Development Agency, Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, Austrian Development Cooperation Agency,UNDP and USAid. As one example, since 1999 IFAD has invested $68.9 million in five programmes and projects, which had an overall cost of $116.3 million. The overall goal of IFAD's strategy in the country is to reduce poverty by supporting the development of a rural market economy that is based on family-owned and managed on- and off-farm businesses. In a country where rural credit remains scarce, the main focus of all IFAD-supported projects to date has been the development and provision of carefully tailored rural financial services. In line with the government's priorities to reduce rural poverty through agriculture and rural development, IFAD also provides support to improve the quality of agricultural production and processing to help raise rural people's incomes and generate employment opportunities. The development of family-based agribusinesses is still in the early stages, but it shows considerable potential, particularly for the production of fruit, intensively grown vegetables and livestock. (PREPARE situation report on Moldova)*

Armenia. *Steady economic progress has earned Armenia increasing support from international institutions. The International Monetary Fund, World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and other international financial institutions and foreign countries are extending considerable grants and loans. Loans to Armenia, which since 1993 exceed $1.1 billion, are targeted at reducing the budget deficit and stabilising the currency; developing private businesses; energy; agriculture; food processing; transportation; the health and education sectors; and ongoing rehabilitation in the earthquake zone. Armenia joined the World Trade Organization in 2003. But a major source of foreign direct investments remains the Armenian diaspora, which finances much of the reconstruction of infrastructure and other public projects. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia.*

Case study. Heifer International, Armenia

- *Heifer International is an American charity, operating in many countries, and gains its name from a charming practical approach, that is to give a heifer (female calf) to a young person or other beneficiary, challenging them to rear the animal until she produces her own calf, which may then be handed on to*

other beneficiaries. Heifer has been operating in Armenia for about 15 years. Its work is based on a simple philosophy. If a person is really poor, give him/her a cow : if he/she has the cow but is still poor, form a cooperative : if the cooperative works, find a market for them. Heifer believes that support should not simply be top-down from governments or even village mayors, but that the formula for support should push a community into realising its own strength. So, Heifer took as a starting point the formula used by the World Bank, which offers 50% funding and expects the community to provide the other 50% (which can be impossible for some communities). It has adapted this to a 50-20-30 formula – 50% from government or from a donor, 20% from the community, 30% interest-free loan from Heifer : the World Bank, which works through the government, doesn't like this formula. With USAID funding, Heifer is focusing on support to milk producers, fruit and vegetable farmers, rural tourism enterprises. Heifer uses three main tools – animals, credit and training. The focus, in some of its projects, is on purchase of machinery, such as tractors, cutters and balers. This basic help can enable a cooperative to enhance production to the point where it can create a sustainable supply (e.g. of grain or milk) and negotiate viable market prices with a major company, thus producing a backward benefit to the farmer-producers. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)

Armenia. *Heifer International has helped to create the following networks of rural stakeholders in Armenia :*

- *Network of rural youth clubs. Each year Heifer holds a Youth Business Forum, to discuss how young people can contribute to different aspects of the lives of their communities. Youth clubs can be funded either by schools, which have some discretionary funds for extracurricular activity, or by communities : Heifer provides some direct funding.*
- *Network of community animal health workers, who are mainly vets.*
- *Network of farmers' organisations. This organises a Cooperative Forum, with 71 agricultural cooperatives in membership, and 150 representatives typically attending the Forum. This is separate from the federation of livestock farmers. The Network last year sent a delegation to Israel, and this year they will visit West Africa, in each case through Heifer links.*
- *Association of rural community leaders. The DIrector of Heifer International commented that some elected Mayors are also good informal leaders. More often, the Mayor is simply the formal head of the community, and the people are the real engine for change : however the people may lack the skills to mobilise themselves. This is where NGOs can come as in, not as prime actors but as facilitators, to plant the seeds of activism. The association of rural community leaders is not legally registered, but is simply a group of people who have taken a leading role in Heifer projects over the years. Every village has a delegate who can react to Heifer initiatives, and can negotiate on behalf of their village. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)*

Georgia. *Georgia has assistance from a large number of international donors. The World Bank, European Bank for Regional Development and Asian Development Bank all contribute to the Municipal Fund. UNDP is contributing to regional development, UNICEF to vocational education. Also active are bilateral donors, such as the Swiss Development Agency, GIZ and USAID, and multinational non-profit donors such as World Vision and People in Need see description below). There is a need for coordination between the activity of different donors, and the donors are pushing the government to take the lead in this.*

Case study : People in Need, Georgia.

The international charity People in Need has been operating in Georgia since 2005. Initially, it focused on preventing illegal migration and supporting business in the Tkibuli region. Over the years, it expanded its portfolio of projects in other regions as well, especially in the west of the country. After the end of the conflict between Georgia and Russia in 2008, it became engaged in immediate humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons from South Ossetia. It also focused on the development of civil society, especially by supporting civic initiatives in the regions, training active students and supporting their cooperation with local authorities. Its largest programme in Georgia is in the area of livelihoods, starting with support for small businesses and farmers and recently focusing specifically on cooperation among of small farmers. Those who apply for grants are offered training in the preparation of business plans. Those who succeed in open competition are then provided with grants to purchase the equipment for their business. Each recipient must re-invest part of the grant value back in their village. People in Need has been involved in the area of social work, with the goal of re-integrating excluded groups of the population, such as refugees and the long-term unemployed. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)

7.13 NGO Networks and rural movements. As described at the beginning of this report, the European Rural Parliament has its origin in a family of national networks of rural NGOs, which vary in character from country to country but which share the aim of empowering rural communities to

address their own development and to lobby for the policy changes which are needed to safeguard their future. The emergence and activity of these networks as described in Vanessa Halhead's report, 'The rural movements of Europe', published by PREPARE in 2005. At that date, Vanessa identified 18 national movements in 16 European countries. Since then, further NGO networks have been created, notably in the Western Balkans. So, rural movements now exist in 22 European countries. Each of these movements seeks to be active in its country, supporting its members, engaging in advocacy and (where resources permit) giving active leadership in aspects of rural development, for example promotion of the LEADER approach. The movements work with each other across borders and at multi-national level. Almost all of them have run national campaigns as part of the European Rural Parliament 2015. Many of them organise National Rural Parliaments.

> ***Denmark.*** *Landdistrikternes Fællesråd (The Council of Rural Districts) is a non-political NGO, bringing together many national associations and organisations in the rural field. It is the most important networking organisation in Denmark. Its role is to coordinate issues on behalf of its members and others in matters of rural development. It is the national expert in gathering, sharing and communicating knowledge and experiences for Rural Districts in Denmark. It delivers information and examples on Rural Districts to the citizens and at political level, in order to promote local development and to lobby for appropriate national policy. It works on two levels – the political level trying to influence the framework conditions of the rural areas, and the local level close to citizens. (Denmark)*
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> ***Netherlands.*** *At the National Rural Parliament, we will bring together the grassroots-initiatives so that they can inspire each other. We want to show to government and politicians that people are very able to organise their own solutions for the problems which they formulated themselves; and we want to influence MP's in the way that they support grassroots initiatives and make it possible for the initiatives to grow and to contribute to the wellbeing of people in the rural areas. (Netherlands)*
>
> ***Croatia.*** *The Croatian Rural Parliament, held for the first time in 2015, represents the start of a dialogue on rural development. We see it as the beginning of a process of contemplation, discussion and agreement on a joint path towards a sustainable future for rural Croatia. The Rural Parliament proved to be an excellent place to hear the voice of rural Croatia, talk about the possibilities and perspectives of rural areas, present good practices and motivate residents to be involved in shaping rural development policy and to strengthen partnerships and links among all sectors. (Croatia)*
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> ***Slovenia.*** *The Rural Parliament represents a modest, yet important contribution towards building equal partnerships on the state level, thus this form of participatory democracy will be maintained by organising rural parliaments at least every second year. The organisation of rural parliaments is based on equal partner relationships of the public, private and non-governmental sectors and should sustainably encourage all the participants towards an active state building. The access to the inclusion in the partnership discussion needs to remain open for all the initiatives, organisations and individuals who are working towards the common good. (Draft declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

7.15 Rural networks in the Western Balkans. The last six years has seen the emergence of civil-society-based Rural Development Networks in most of the countries formerly in the Yugoslav Federation. This process was encouraged by the PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe, and also greatly assisted by the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe. This Group (acronym SWG) represents the Ministries of Agriculture and related government agencies of countries in that region. Its Director Boban Ilic realised the value of CSO-based Networks as intermediaries between government and rural stakeholders, capable of stimulating rural people to take action towards their own well-being and to respond to government programmes.

> ***Bosnia and Herzegovina****. In the last three years, we have been able to bring together a significant number of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina; to create a Rural Development Network, which cuts across the ethnic boundaries within this country; and to hold a first national Rural Parliament. But we wish to see substantial strengthening and extension of the role of CSOs in the field of rural development. This should include :*
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> - *increasing the representation of CSOs in decision-making processes, policy-making and strategy implementation in the field of rural development in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
> - *establishing functional relations, coordination and partnership of CSOs with all stakeholders in rural development*

- *improving the capacity of CSOs so they can effectively contribute to rural development*
- *establishing an adequate system of financing CSOs working in the field of rural development : this may include cooperation between CSOs in use of funds from international projects, from foundations and from institutions on all levels of government. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

Serbia. *In recent years, Serbia has made significant progress in creating a favourable environment for the participation of civil society in the design of rural development policy. But there is still great need to increase the capacity of civil society to participate in the creation and implementation of rural development policy at different levels. This is vitally needed in order to ensure that policies relate to the real needs of rural communities; that citizens can be involved in a bottom-up way in the shaping of policies; and that CSOs and citizens understand, and take part in, the EU integration process of Serbia. Building the capacity of CSOs will involve training; ensuring financial sustainability; developing models of cooperation between local organisations and local authorities; and promoting exchange of good practice between CSOs. (Serbia)*

Kosovo. *The Network of Organization for Rural Development of Kosovo (NORDK) was set up in September 2013. Its membership includes rural members from all resident ethnic groups - Albanian, Serb, Bosnian (Gorani and Torbeshi). In total some 55 individual rural organizations are represented under its umbrella - agricultural cooperatives, farmers' associations, young farmers' clubs, Local Action Groups and women's associations. It is recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture as an official leading network in Kosovan rural development. Its mission is to advance the cooperation of various organisations from rural areas, exchange of experience and information, promotion of rural areas and integrated economic development, strengthening of institutional cooperation for the creation of conditions for sustainable development and improvement of life in rural areas. (Kosovo)*

Albania. *Unlike other Balkan countries, Albania has not yet established a National Rural Development Networks. However, in early 2015 a group of national and local NGOs addressed the need for a national rural platform in line with best practice from member states and more recent National Rural Development Networks established in the other Balkan countries. Two meetings have been held to discuss the establishment of a National Rural Development Network in Albania. A 'road map' for the creation of the network was agreed, and we expect that it will be formally created soon, as a focal point for articulating the voice and interests of rural communities among Albanian citizens and governmental agencies that serve these communities. It will offer to the government to be a partner and channel through which the rural communities and organisations that represent them can be consulted. It will aim to empower civil society organisations, as members of the network, without violating their independence and capacity to direct their own programmes. It expects to promote the LEADER/CLLD approach for rural development; and to take part in multi-national activities with parallel networks in other countries. (Albania)*

7.16 LEADER. The LEADER approach is already widely used throughout the European Union, and under development in many candidate or neighbourhood countries, as a conceptual approach and a formal structure for partnership between civil, private and public sectors at sub-regional level, focused on the creation and implementation of local development strategies. The approach has evolved over the nearly quarter-century since the idea was launched as an EU 'Community Initiative' in 1991. In the present programme period, 2014-20, LEADER is a compulsory element in all regional and national Rural Development Programmes in the EU, with funding in each country to a minimum of 5% of the approved RDP budget and an expected total of over 2,000 sub-regional partnerships, which vary in name but are generically refered to as Local Action Groups. Member states have some discretion in the scale of funding for LEADER (subject to that minimum), the measures to be delivered through the Local Action Groups, the procedures for approval of projects etc.

The ERP national reports reveal strong support among rural people and organisations for the LEADER approach, as a means of securing effective partnership between sectors and articulating and pursuing objectives for local development on a truly territorial basis. But there is also a degree of criticism related to the sometimes cumbersome procedures and perceived restrictions imposed by governments upon the activity of Local Action Groups.

Portugal. *There is a great diversity of experiences and developed initiatives in favour of rural areas and engaging rural communities. For its durability, persistence, extent and impacts, it is considered appropriate to highlight the work of Local Development Associations (LDAs) that in the last 25 years have implemented Local Development Strategies structured by place-based partnerships. The intervention of the LDAs has*

been largely structured by the methodological framework of LEADER (territory, partnership, participation, integration, autonomy, innovation and cooperation) and covers several areas :

- *Promotion of local economies (investment support)*
- *Qualification, education and professional training*
- *Promoting equality, active citizenship and territorial cohesion*
- *Territorial cooperation and sharing of best practices*
- *Promotion of proximity services and local associations*
- *Enhancement of the rural heritage. (Portugal)*

England. *The overall Rural Development Programme for England budget allocated to LEADER for 2014 to 2020 is £138m (c.€187m). We call for the LEADER programme to benefit as many communities across rural England as possible. LEADER is seen as an investment in community-led regeneration in rural England, with strong emphasis on economic growth. This funding must be enabled to impact on all rural communities in LEADER areas and the learning must help communities outside these areas to develop solutions to the challenges they face. (England)*

Poland*. The LEADER programme in its many forms has a history of ten years in Poland. Despite its numerous imperfections, LEADER can be seen as a very successful experiment for Polish rural areas : indeed, some urban centres now try to adopt the LEADER approach. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has actively participated from the beginning and invited the civil society sector to learn the LEADER approach. Many important aspects of that approach have evolved though consultation between the Ministry and LAG and NGO representatives. But further improvements are needed, notably relating to pre-financing for production of Local Development Strategies; simplification of reporting, both for beneficiaries to LAGs and for LAGs to managing authorities; and a greater degree of trust between all concerned. (Poland)*

Finland. *All development should be based on partnership, not on dictation or domination by some partners. The Finnish tripartite system (private, public, inhabitants of the rural areas) in LEADER group boards has been an excellent way to ensure equitable democratic decisions and avoiding overtaking of the activity by a single interest group. However, EU programme policies have for 20 years been considered as problematic because of the separation of sectoral funds – ERDF, ESF, EMFF, EAFRD. The different rules, documents and electronic systems not only create extra bureaucracy, but also place limitations on development and innovation, not to mention the costs of such a show. An effective approach to multi-sectoral and place-based local development demands either a single fund or at least a very well-connected set of funds. Finland has tried to make a poor system work. During the 1995-1999 period, financing from different funds was distributed to applicants through one channel. It was a very well-working multi-fund system where needs and actions had the main role, not the administrative sectoral regulations. Looking ahead, we urge that there should be one fund or channel of financing permitting innovative combinations within the same project. (Finland)*

Latvia*. (We wish to see) more efficient implementation of the LEADER approach by creating synergies with other funding instruments in the Latvian rural area and small towns. Higher ranking should be given to projects supported by public funding that are implemented in partnership between local authorities, NGOs and entrepreneur, in order to stimulate such cooperation. (Latvian Rural Communities Parliament)*

Lithuania. *The potential for solving the problems of unemployment and social exclusion in Lithuania belongs to volunteering, communal initiatives, and partnership, which have been extensively developed in Lithuanian rural areas. 51 Local Action Groups (LAGs) have been active in Lithuania, implementing local development strategies, and bringing benefit to more than 1,700 rural community organisations. The number of rural communities falling within LAG areas has doubled since 2004; and the LAG areas now embrace 99% of Lithuania's rural territory. Most of the rural communities and NGOs take part in the activities of LAGs; and they and the LAGs form part of the Lithuanian Rural Network. This network now has more than 900 member organisations, including municipalities, agricultural organisations, food and forestry sectors and science institutions. The skills of rural communities and other NGOs in project-related activities have been increasing. In the process of implementation of local development strategies between 2007 and 2013, 2,700 local projects were supported, including renovation of buildings and premises in rural areas, strengthening of the material basis of local communities, and organisation of cultural activities. However, only 5.3% of local projects were related to the development of income-generating economic or social activities. (Lithuania)*

Hungary. *The national policy for the programme period 2014-20 is to cover 100% of rural areas by LEADER Local Action Groups. This is encouraging in principle, but the Government's approach appears to be posing significant difficulties for the LAGs. The total budget for LEADER is limited to the minimum 5% of the rural*

Development Programme budget required by the EU. The 7-years budget for each LAG has been decided by an expert group.before the preparation of the local development strategies. The funds available for each LAG, for spending over a notional 7-year period has been fixed at between €1 million and €10 million, including maximum 15% for management costs : this means that a low-budget LAG can only 1 single person to manage the LAG. The Managing Authority plans to allow LAGs to spend the given fund without any time schedule : for this reason, many LAGs plan to spend the approved fund in the first 2-3 years and then cease LAG activities. The Managing Authority has proposed that the LAGs should act as development associations, undertake consultancy work and apply to structural funds with own project proposals : but the lowl-budget LAGs will not have the manpower to prepare applications or do fundraising in in addition to their main work. The Managing Authority does not allow LAGs to pay membership fee to the Association of LAGs (LEADER Egyesületek Szövetsége, LESZ), which has so far been unable to find other financial resources for networking on national level, so its work is seriously restricted. LESZ and the Hungarian LAGs are not represented in the EAFRD Monitoring Committee. LESZ has no information about the planned role of LAGs or the LEADER network in the reorganized or newly established national rural network. (Hungary)

Bulgaria. *The LEADER approach was applied for the first time in Bulgaria in the 2007-13 programme period. There had been a number of gaps in the process of creating an adequate legal framework in Bulgaria : these gaps reflect the differences between the EU's conception of LEADER and the Government's approach. The implementation process imposed by the Government is burdensome and bureaucratic : this caused long delays which discredited the approach. However, efforts made by local actors have produced some positive results which will hopefully provide a basis of the implementation of LEADER in the new programme period 2014-20 and beyond. The lessons learnt should be carefully analysed by the Managing Authority, the Paying Agency and the Local Action Groups, so that timely changes (legislative, institutional, organisational etc.) can be made to ensure much more effective use of public money in the future. (Bulgaria)*

Romania. *The Rural Development Programme 2007-13 included (the first time in Romania) the LEADER measures, and provided a budget of €450 million for creation and activity of Local Action Groups (LAGs). 81 LAGs were created in 2011-12 and a further 82 in 2012-13. Of this total, 152 LAGs were formally recognised by the Ministry, and a further 11 which at first were informal. The LAGs decided to form a National Federation of LAGs, which was welcomed by the government because they wished to deal with a 'common voice' for all the LAGs. The Federation urged the government to give recognition to the 11 informal LAGS, which they did. The Federation now a majority of LAGs in membership. It offers support to LAGs through seminars, training, information and links to the European Union. In the new programme period, the government proposes to allocated about 7% of the Rural Development Programme budget to LEADER, as compared with 5% in both Bulgaria and Hungary. (PREPARE Situation report on Romania).*

Croatia. *The IPARD Programme (pre-accession Programme of the EU for the period 2007-2013) came into effect in 2008. In the context of that programme, the first Local Action Groups were established in 2009 and by the 2013 we had 53 registered LAGs in Croatia. Implementation of the LEADER measure started in 2013 and 42 LAGs were selected by the Ministry of Agriculture. LEADER had been broadly accepted by Croatian rural communities. The idea of strengthening local capacities and resources by linking together a number of neighbouring communities has been well understood and whole-heartedly implemented. It has to be planned as a long-lasting process. We are still facing the urgent need to strengthen the role of rural communities and increase their capacities. (Croatia)*

7.17 LEADER in the Western Balkans and Black Sea countries. The LEADER approach is becoming familiar in the Western Balkans, partly through initiatives of international organisations and non-government networks, and partly through the formal discussion between governments and the European Commission about the introduction of the IPARD programme alongside national rural development programmes. Sub-regional partnerships are emerging, ready to take advantage of LEADER funding when that starts to flow. The LEADER approach can be highly beneficial to these countries, which need to build partnerships and to use the energy of all sectors in the process of territorial development in their highly diverse rural areas.

"There is good reason to governments to allocate resources, through their national rural development programmes or the IPARD programme, for the creation of LEADER-style partnerships in rural sub-regions. This can build upon the work which has already been done to publicise the LEADER approach, to build capacity and to create local partnerships and potential local action groups. Government support for LEADER should be handled in a way that allows partnerships and local development strategies to emerge and evolve

from the bottom-up, with true equality between the public, private and civil sectors." (from report "Empoweting Rural Stakeholders in the Western Balkans")

Albania. *LEADER fits well with Albania's path towards accession to the EU. The creation of LAGs was part of the rural development strategy 2007-2013, but funding and other instruments for supporting them were not made available. Finance is a key issue. There is hardly any money to undertake significant LAG initiatives, including institutional development and projects at local level. The National Strategy for Rural Development 2014-2020 includes LAGs as one priority, and financing of LAGs by IPARD is planned to commence in 2016-2017. (Albania)*

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *The movement towards LEADER-type activity in Macedonia has been led by international agencies and the NGO-based Rural Development Network, rather than by government. International agencies (UNDP, USAID and GIZ) had begun working with municipalities to assist their newly expanded local economic development teams to develop individual strategies : however, these were notably weak in the area of rural development. The Rural Development Network (RDN) then took an initiative, with the support of the Swedish International Development Agency, aimed to help reorient these and other local development strategies towards rural areas. RDN supported the formation of municipality-based multi-stakeholder rural development groups that encouraged local authorities to consider rural development in the scope of their municipal activities. LEADER-like activities were organised to provide examples of what could be achieved through mobilising different stakeholders. Young, relatively well-educated residents of rural municipalities, who were already active in the grassroots NGO sector, became particularly engaged. Synergies have arisen through a combination of awareness raising at all levels, small pilot initiatives at local levels, and rural development sub-strategies adopted by municipal councils and lobbied for by multi-stakeholder groups. Rural development has evolved from being a vague minor priority to being recognized as a significant local responsibility.*

Finally in 2015 LEADER became part of the new IPARD 2 measures. Based on its own previous experience RDN has been working on promotion of the LEADER approach. In 2015, RDN's LEADER activities cover the territory of 4 municipalities (Strumica, Vasilevo, Bosilovo and Novo Selo) in the South-East region. With this process, RDN supported rural communities to develop their capacities for participatory planning and decision-making as a foundation of LEADER methodology and establishment of a LAGs. The stakeholders (public, private and civil sector representatives) coached by RDN have undergone a process of strategic planning, developing LDS and formation of a LAG. Implementation of the LEADER approach should contribute to the development of civil society in rural areas, facilitate good governance through local partnerships and foster socio-economic rural development. The measures should include activities aiming at enhancing the capacity of rural stakeholders, including LAG members, in order to ensure the good management of the LAGs, the preparation and efficient implementation of relevant Local Development Strategies through local projects. (Macedonia)

Serbia. *We look to the Government to provide continuous support to the preparations for full implementation of the LEADER approach in Serbia. This country is highly diversified in geographic and social terms, ranging from lowland areas in the north, to the mountainous areas in the southeast and southwest : the development peocess must take account of that diversity. The LEADER approach, with its concept of territorial partnerships and local development strategies, is highly suited to achieve that aim and to meet the specific needs of different rural communities. The LEADER measure is not yet included in the national programme or the IPARD programme foir Serbia. However, we already have around 30 Local Action Groups based on the LEADER principle. In order to create conditions for the development of rural communities based on a bottom-up set of priorities in the coming period, we need to work on the establishment of mechanisms to implement the LEADER approach within the national programme, up to the moment (probably in 2017) when it can draw on funding from the IPARD programme. (Serbia)*

Georgia. *The LEADER approach is currently being pioneered in Georgia, not by the government but through a €3 million EURAID initiative, implemented by People in Need Georgia, to lay the groundwork for creation of LEADER Groups in three distinct mountainous regions. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

7.18 Community-Led Local Development. For the programme period 2014-2020, the European Union introduced a stronger linkage and complementarity between the four elements of the European Structural and Investment Funds, namely the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Strategies for deployment of these funds are expressed in the Common Strategic Framework at European level, and in National Partnership

Agreements at national level. This new approach is then reflected at sub-regional and local level in the concept of Community-Led Local Development, which enables multi-funded approach to rural and urban development. Some ERP national reports call for governments to apply vigorously the potential for a multi-funded approach to rural development opened up by the CLLD strategy; and particularly to ensure that the mandatory application of CLLD to the EAFRD is used to strengthen Local Action Groups.

> ***Spain.*** *The role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) needs to be strengthened in rural areas. They should be given increased participation in the design of regional, national and European policies. Their funding should be sufficient to enable them to have significant impact on their territory. They should be given greater independence in making decisions on the projects to be supported. Their role in the management of public funds should be expanded in view of the strong experience and track record in achieving social participation. They should be enabled to manage multi-fund operational programmes and to develop comprehensive policies using a variety of funds. They should be empowered to promote and support innovation in rural areas; and to perform entertainment activities that have nothing to do with the management of grants. They should exploit information technology to create regional and national networks of outreach and joint communication, to make better use of staff-time and other resources and to promote e-Government. They should expand their activity in inter-regional and transnational cooperation. (Spain)*

> ***Croatia.*** *In Croatia, the role of Local Action Groups is ongoing and strengthening, with the possibility of using European Structural and Investment Funds for local development. New possibilities of quality relations between the city and its rural surroundings are opening up, which includes the possibility of new jobs and employment, along with the use of European funds. According to the national Rural Development Programme, the development of rural Croatia leans directly towards only the Agricultural and Fisheries funds. The Government of the Republic of Croatia should ensure a fuller access to CLLD in the second part of this development period. (Croatia)*

It is in fact too early to tell whether such strengthening and multi-funding of LAGs will be achieved. Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) can be applied in the four European Structural and Investment Funds. However, only in the EAFRD is the use of CLLD – under the LEADER measure – mandatory. At the time of writing, some of the programmes under these Funds are still pending approval, so it is too early for a complete overview of the use of CLLD by different Member States (MS). However, information collected by the Contact Point of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), shows the following pattern. Only three MS limit their application of CLLD to the mandatory minimum, i.e. to the EAFRD (Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta). The remaining 25 MS plan to use CLLD in at least two Funds. Of these, eleven MS (Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and UK) are planning to use CLLD in all the 4 Funds (at least in some regions), and a further three (Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia) in 3 Funds.

7.19 CLLD in operation. The fact that CLLD can be applied in several Funds at Member State level does not automatically mean that the local communities will be able to benefit from several Funds or that LAGs will be multi-funded. For example, Estonia, Croatia and Ireland envisage CLLD in both EAFRD and the EMFF, but do not allow these two Funds to be combined within a single strategy, so rural and fisheries CLLD areas will have to be separate.

> ***England.*** *In England, the government has decided to split the EARDF funding into two parts, one part to be applied by LAGs who will not have access to multi-funded, the other part to be deployed alongside ERDF and ESF funding through regional boards called Local Enterprise Agencies. The effect of this, coupled with the depreciation in value of the euro vis-à-vis the British currency, is that many LAGs may not have enough funds to operate for the whole programme period, and that potential beneficiaries of EAFRD funding have a confusing overlap of two different funds which they can apply for essentially the same purpose.*

Some MS leave their local actors the option whether to have an integrated strategy using both EAFRD and EMFF or to have separate LAG and FLAG, each with its own funding (and partly covering the same area). Moreover, many MS leave the decision about allowing multi-funding in a Partnership Agreement to the regional authorities, and even if the regional authorities allow this, the local actors may still decide to apply only for one Fund. Many MS plan to apply CLLD in those areas

where experience with the bottom-up approach already exists, i.e. in rural and fisheries areas. However, a few MS intend to open this possibility also for urban areas, where there is relatively less experience with CLLD. The amount of funding available for CLLD varies greatly between MS. In most MS ,the EAFRD represents the highest amount – which is natural taking into account the experience and importance of Leader in many regions – but in some MS very significant amounts have been allocated to CLLD from ERDF (e.g. Czech Republic, Bulgaria), ESF (Romania, Portugal) or EMFF (Spain).

8. Action by regional and national governments.

The national reports, taken together, present a strong and diversified challenge to governments to work with rural stakeholders in realising the high potential of rural areas and honouring the ideals of democracy, inclusiveness, sustainability and high quality of life for all citizens.

> *"Governments alone cannot deliver the real change required to invigorate rural areas. They can provide the legislative and planning framework, the democratic accountability, better public services and catalyst funding. However, it is mostly private business, skilled employees and community enterprises that deliver for people and the environment. To be willing to invest time and resources, people have to be confident that a common vision for a better rural future can be delivered and not hindered by lengthy application processes."*
>
> *Tom Jones EESC member (Wales)*

8.1 A call for action by governments. In the spirit of partnership between people and government, the ERP national champions call for action by governments in the following fields:

- democracy and the rule of law
- institutional strength
- acceptance of the values of rural areas and the rights of rural people
- provision of a supportive climate of law, regulation, administration, fiscal and financial policy
- coherence of policy across a broad field
- appropriate use of subsidiarity and decentralisation of public action
- rural proofing of policies and programmes
- soundly-based rural development programmes, with a strongly territorial approach
- open processes of information and participation for rural stakeholders
- practical instruments for partnership between government and rural stakeholders
- vigorous and flexible use of the LEADER approach and of Community-Led Local Development
- vigorous promotion and encouragement of networking and exchange of experience
- support for the role of CSOs and other key intermediaries.

These points are outlined in turn below.

8.2 Democracy and the rule of law. Many national reports refer, directly or indirectly, to the crucial importance of democracy and the rule of law as the indispensible underpinning of the partnership between people and government, whether in rural or in urban areas. There are calls for the elimination of corruption in Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia and some Black Sea countries. The suppression of non-government organisations and the emasculating of local authorities in Hungary are condemned. In many countries, there is a call for greater openness in government decision-making, and for devolution of decisions to local level.

> ***Bulgaria**. Most of the demands of the rural people to the local, municipal and national authorities are linked to their main functions. The negative opinion for the public authorities related to corruption and stealing is widely spread in Bulgaria. Some respondents even expressed the idea that public authorities should be kept away, even isolated, from the local initiative. But the major demand is for creating a flexible legislative framework, adapted to the local conditions and the needs of the rural communities. The simplification of the rules and procedures, and reduction of the administrative burden, are also seen as important issues that need to be targeted by the local and national authorities. Creating effective dialogue and partnership with the civil sector and the local population is also of high importance. Public authorities should take responsibility for attracting investors, training and dissemination of information, and implementation of projects to improve the life of the rural population. (Bulgaria)*

> ***Scotland.** Scotland needs new democratic structures that are decided, agreed and led by communities. It is one of the most centralised countries in Europe, with local authorities 45 times the geographical size of the European average. Communities do not always feel able to influence decision-making in their local area or at a national policy level. The message from the Scottish Rural Parliament was that without making fundamental and probably structural changes to local democracy, the impact of other activities would be significantly impeded. Community Councils are intended to be the bridge between local authorities and communities. However there are serious concerns about the effectiveness and representativeness of community councils in some parts of rural Scotland. There is need for further grass-roots debate on local*

democratic reform, aiming to empower communities and foster local democratic collaboration. We seek the active engagement of the Scottish Government in the growing movement for change around local democracy; and increased understanding and development of participatory democracy as an approach. Rural communities should be empowered to take action for themselves, enabled to choose their own priorities and solutions, and supported to work on these appropriate solutions : this will create resilience and sustainability The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill gives new powers to communities, both urban and rural. The Land Reform Bill will provide new powers and opportunities to communities. Local communities should be encouraged to use the new opportunities available through these two Bills. (Scotland)

8.3 Institutional strength. The ability of governments to react effectively to the needs of rural communities (indeed to the needs of communities in all areas, urban and rural) depends greatly on the completeness, relevance and strength of institutional structures of all kinds – parliaments, governments, ministries, agencies, judiciary, financial systems. The reactions of participants in the ERP 2015 campaign suggest that, in very broad terms, the institutional systems of Europe – judged from the standpoint of the rural communities who try to relate to them – are stronger in western than in central and eastern Europe. There is clearly room for substantial improvement of institutional structures in many countries, particularly in the Western Balkan and Black Sea regions.

***Bosnia and Herzegovina**. Rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina are affected by*

- *low volume and productivity of production, an unregulated and unorganised market and poor protection of domestic production, as well as poor utilization of agricultural land*
- *inadequate level of employment in rural economy, insufficient association of rural population, poor application of new knowledge and innovations as well as disharmony between organisational, legal and other conditions for the use of EU funds*
- *low representation of civil society in decision-making, policy-making and implementation strategies in the field of rural development, dysfunctional relationships, coordination and partnerships with stakeholders of rural development, and undeveloped capacities and funding system of civil society organizations. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

8.4 Acceptance of values and rights. Many respondents call upon governments to recognise the high value of rural areas in providing homes and livelihood for over 300 million people, and in serving the whole population of Europe through supplies of food, timber, fibre, energy, water and minerals, through the contribution of rural enterprises to the common wealth, and through amelioration of climate, recreation, health and spiritual well-being. They ask governments to affirm the right of rural areas and communities to full recognition by all the people and institutions of Europe, to a quality of life and standard of living equal to that of urban populations, and to full participation in political processes. They ask governments to share our vision of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities, supported by diversified rural economies and by effective stewardship of high-quality environment and cultural heritage, and serving as major long-term contributors to a prosperous, peaceful, just and equitable Europe.

8.5 A supportive 'climate'. Many respondents ask governments to act in a spirit of open-minded partnership with rural communities, and to provide a supportive climate of law, regulation, administration and finance which can nurture and enable collective self-help by the communities and practical and relevant action by public authorities. Key elements in that supportive climate and practical action are shown below.

***Denmark**. Local, regional and national politicians must give better framework conditions for the development and growth in the rural areas. If they do so, the whole country and all Danes will benefit from it. Many people living in the rural areas believe that together we stand strong and that all citizens shall have equal possibilities. (Denmark)*

***Netherlands.** The following requests to government may suggest that people in rural areas are just looking for government to solve all their problems. That is not the reality! Local people have many initiatives, but they meet much resistance and opposition. They want to reduce that resistance through these requests. We ask Government to ::*

- *continue to support with subsidy the well-being and the community facilities in rural areas*
- *invest in multifunctional facilities in the small villages*
- *give space to new concepts and ideas of the locals to organise their public transport*

- *support the construction of a fast broadband internet in all the rural areas*
- *stimulate initiatives of local people by giving encouragement, advice and practical help with fund-raising and solving, and by setting up accessible data-bases of good practice.*
- *give room for experiment, and be flexible in applying the rules*
- *change the focus of official interventions from testing, controlling and verifying to listening, contributing and facilitating local initiatives*
- *support social enterprises in the rural area, for example in the field of health care*
- *be flexible in processing zoning plans and in land-use planning to allow necessary development in rural areas*
- *support initiatives to strengthen the touristic and recreational infrastructure in rural areas*
- *stimulate the production and use of regional products*
- *support bilingual education in the border regions*
- *support social and economic cooperation across the borders with Germany and Belgium*
- *encourage the creation of energy-cooperatives in the rural areas*
- *create an Investment Fund to stimulate the installation of solar panels on the roofs of public buildings in villages.*
- *support the creation of Knowledge Centres in rural sub-regions, through which all who are involved in the wellbeing of the rural areas (inhabitants, companies, farmers, local authorities and others) can share the knowledge of successful ideas and results, and everyone can contribute with his/ her knowledge and experiences. Each centre can be organised by the locals, partly financed by government.*

We ask municipalities to :

- *install (or maintain) a contact officer between government and people who live in small villages*
- *delegate part of the municipal budget to the small villages, to be used by the local people in meeting the collective needs which they themselves identify and prioritise. Giving basic responsibility to the local people in this way is very important for the social coherence of the village and the region. (Netherlands)*

***Latvia**. For the well-bring of Latvia and every one of its citizens, we invite Latvian society, decision-makers and implementers to :*

- *foster a climate in which local leaders emerge and develop*
- *ensure meaningful public involvement in development planning and implementation*
- *delegate a greater share of decision-making rights to local and regional level, thereby ensuring their compatibility with the local context and needs, and increasing ownership of the implementation of the decisions*
- *demonstrate a greater level of confidence in the NGO sector and in society as a whole by supporting their initiatives, reducing formalities, simplifying bureaucratic processes and recognizing the role of the human factor*
- *create financial instruments for solving issues of highest concern to rural communities, thus enabling them to respond flexibly to the diverse needs of individual communities*
- *support NGOs to engage in economic activities, thus ensuring their continuous operation and diversify their incomes which are invested in the local community development and social equality*
- *Encourage the use of non-formal education methods to raise the local community capacity and networking;*
- *Promote young people's understanding of modern economic life of rural areas and employment opportunities and to raise the prestige of vocational education*
- *Use the coefficient of distance for development of different initiatives in order to decrease regional differences and the risk of economical social and participatory exclusion. (Declaration of Latvian Rural Communities Parliament, June 2015)*

***Turkey.** The government should establish a favourable environment for the development of farmers' organisations, especially cooperatives. Special incentives and priority should be given to farmers' organisations in rural development programmes, in order to encourage rural communities and farmers to unite within organisations in which membership is voluntary. A system should be created which allows production and marketing process of farmers to be controlled by the farmer organizations. (Turkey)*

This call for a supportive climate is echoed in the "Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Rural Development programmes" of September 2015 :

"Governments alone cannot deliver the real change required to invigorate rural areas. They can provide the legislative and planning framework, the democratic accountability, better public services and catalyst funding. However, it is mostly private business, skilled employees and social and community enterprises that deliver for people and the environment. To be willing to invest time and resources, people have to be confident that a

common vision for a better rural future can be delivered and not hindered by lengthy application processes." (EESC 2015)

8.6 Coherence of policy across a broad field. Participants in the campaign called for coherence between different aspects of policy across the whole field of government action related to rural areas. Earlier sections of this report reveal that have rural stakeholders are concerned about a wide range of elements of development – local services of all kinds, all sectors of the rural economy, supporting services such as transport, telecommunications, finance, education and training. Some of these issues fall within the normal scope of rural development programmes : others are typically the responsibility of other areas of government, which may have no particular focus on rural areas but whose activities can profoundly affect the well-being of rural communities. The challenge for government is to apply to rural areas those policies and programmes which are needed, in a coherent way.

> ***Slovenia.*** *Vital rural areas should become the goal of horizontally harmonised policies which need to establish the necessary conditions for creating new jobs in rural areas, provide significant housing for young people and contribute to reviving the life in rural areas by hosting more cultural events. (Draft Declaration for the Slovenian Rural Parliament)*

This is a familiar issue for governments within the European Union. In Finland, for example, the government distinguishes between 'narrow rural development', such as the measures funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, from 'broad rural development' which embraces the policies and expenditure of government on roads, transport systems, water supply, sewerage, education, health, social services, electricity, telecommunications and much else. The Rural Policy Committee in Finland brings together the nine ministries or government agencies which are responsible for the different major aspects of public policy which affect rural areas, and also leading non-government bodies representing rural stakeholders, in order to promote liaison between them. The published National Rural Policy embraces the full range of both narrow and broad rural development.

Spending on broad rural development, as defined above, is on a much larger cumulative scale than narrow rural development and can have a vital impact on rural communities and economies. For example, the closure of a secondary school may do more damage to a rural community than five years of narrow rural development can put right : conversely, the opening of a new cottage hospital in a small town may do more good than five years of narrow rural development. So governments, when planning and pursuing their programmes in the broader field, need to be alert to the needs of rural communities. Indeed, all relevant policies and programmes may need to be 'rural-proofed'. i.e. subjected to assessment of their potential impact on the well-being of rural communities.

> ***Latvia.*** *Develop a plan for appropriate use of EU funds, in order to promote effective use of local, national and EU-linked resources, which is based on long-term investment in territorial development and human capacity and quality of life in Latvian rural areas. (Latvia)*

> ***Serbia.*** *There is a need for an adequate inter-sectorial and inter-ministry cooperation in order to keep the rural population in the villages. (Serbia)*

> ***Bosnia and Herzegovina.*** *Government must create organisational, personnel and other conditions for efficient use of EU pre-accession funds. This can be achieved through the creation of operational structures in the sectors of agriculture and rural development, with clear responsibilities on all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina by raising the human resource capacity of organisations working in the sectors of agriculture and rural development, through the adoption and implementation of legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina which is in line with legislation of the European Union, but is also fully adapted to local conditions. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

> ***Georgia.*** *Georgia has a. complex hierarchy of policies for regional and rural development, with (on the one hand) the Ministry of Regional Development and Investment (MRDI) promoting national, regional and municipal development strategies and action plans, and (on the other hand) Ministry of Agriculture bringing forward a national rural development strategy with (at this stage) no regional or municipal dimensions other than in the MRDI family and potentially a LEADER dimension. Many of our interviewees agreed that this is*

messy, and is made even more incoherent by the creation of multiple agencies, including the Cooperative Development Fund. The EU delegation, the British Embassy and others are pressing the government to produce a clear structure. A coherent set of policies, developed by government, must then be linked to the major sources of funding available to government and also linked to the activities of donors and NGOs, who (in different ways and in different regions) are pioneering and pursuing approaches to meeting the needs of rural communities. Alongside this shaping of a coherent national policy framework, there is need for sharpening of the system of delivery. The current cascade of strategies, programmes and action plans at national, regional and municipal level operated by the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure is sensible in theory but quite narrow in thematic scope and unable to provide effective linkage to what is being done by other government agencies, donors or NGOs. It needs to be widened in those respects, and could thus become the vehicle for a truly integrated and locally diversified approach to regional and rural development. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)

8.7 Rural proofing. Since many policies and programmes of government apply across the national territory, to both urban and rural areas, but are often conceived in or primarily focused upon the cities, there should be a robust government system of rural proofing to ensure that these policies and programmes are where necessary flexed to suit the distinct character and needs of rural communities.

***Wallonie, Belgium**. The people of rural municipalities should not be penalized simply because they live there. We must therefore assess the impact upon them of any new measures at regional, national or European level, as is already done, for example, in relation for gender equality. Where necessary, that impact might be offset or alleviated by compensation or modulated application. (Fondation Rural de Wallonie)*

***Scotland.** Rural areas require their own set of outcome measures, monitoring arrangements and measures of deprivation. The impact of our work and that of others can only be effectively measured if the ways in which we measure change are suitable for rural areas. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, for example, is used to make decisions about funding for rural areas but does not always capture smaller pockets of deprivation within a wider area. We call for the use by government of a range of rural outcome measures and monitoring arrangements, in order to effectively evaluate the impact of legislation and other activities on rural communities. (Scotland)*

8.8 Subsidiarity and decentralisation. Many national reports call for the devolution to local level of those activities of public bodies which need to be flexed to meet the specific and variable needs of local communities, particularly where these functions could benefit from partnership between public authorities and civil society.

***Poland.** The ability of local leaders but also regular citizens in rural areas to take responsibility and see themselves as important actors of creating public policies is strengthening. One of many successful instruments employed in Poland that served this purpose are village funds (fundusz sołecki) – a type of very limited (around 1 to 5 thousand euros per year) local participatory budget that in many cases served as an opportunity to create interest and activate local inhabitants. (Poland)*

***Latvia.** Give the function to promote the development of civil society to the local municipalities, in order to facilitate the social, economic and civic activity in rural areas and small towns, as well as to create the opportunity to efficiently invest public resources for strengthening civil society in a legitimate way. Promote the delegation of functions of local municipalities to NGOs, so that NGOs can use pursue those functions in an active way, using local resources and enlisting the energy of local people, including those who are socially excluded or at risk. (Latvia)*

***Turkey.** Municipalities are closer to the local communities than the national or provincial authorities. For this reason, there is merit in transferring the local functions of these wider authorities to the municipalities. (Turkey)*

8.9 Rural development programmes. Almost all the countries covered by this campaign have – or are in process of creating –- rural development programmes (RDPs), at either national or regional level.

Within the EU, these programmes fall within the broad structure set by Regulations for use of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which is closely linked to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The regulations give governments discretion, within stated limits, to move funds (one way or the other) between the CAP and the EAFRD; require that certain measures (or

groups of measures) have at least a stated proportion of the total RDP funds spent on them (e.g. minimum 5% for LEADER); but otherwise give governments a fair degree of discretion as to which measures they will use, and how they will interpret their application, for example in defining the relevant beneficiaries.

The ERP national campaigns were conducted at a time when most of the RDPs within the EU focused on the 2014-20 period, had been drafted, but before many of them had been approved by the European Commission and certainly before they had come into effect. As a result, many of the comments about the RDPs were based on the experience in the previous programme period or on what the respondents expected in the new period.

> ***Bulgaria.*** *Many and different needs still have to be addressed by the rural development policy in Bulgaria. Our rural communities are facing big challenges in their daily life and future existence. The biggest threats are unemployment and depopulation, lack of social services and infrastructure, limited access to information and development opportunities. People living in the rural areas are demotivated and in general afraid to take the initiative of changing their own life. Targeted support at local level is seen as the best approach for solving the problems of our rural communities. "State and local administrations should work for the well-being of the population and not for themselves", said one of our respondents. Decisions and rules have to be simple, flexible and different from place to place, supported and easily understood by the communities if we want a change to happen.*
> *The most common needs and concerns of the rural population in Bulgaria, gathered during our short campaign are :*
> - *Access to social services – hospitals, schools, kindergartens, educational services*
> - *Investments that create new working places, entrepreneurship*
> - *Training, information and capacity building of all stakeholders, including local authorities*
> - *Relevant and effectively enforced legislative framework*
> - *Simplification of the existing rules*
> - *Networking, cooperation and capacity building of the civil organizations.*
>
> *All of these need to be put in the focus of the rural development policy if we want to keep alive our rural communities. (Bulgaria)*

> ***Croatia.*** *On 26 May 2015, the European Commission approved the Rural Development Programme of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2014-2020, with a budget of about €2.4 billion. The Programme has defined 16 measures aimed at increasing the competitiveness of Croatian agriculture, forestry and manufacturing industries, as well as improving the living and working conditions in rural areas. Croatia has decided to allocate 3% of the EAFRD funds to the LEADER/CLLD measure. (Croatia)*

8.10 Rural Development programmes in the Western Balkans. Rural development activity in the Western Balkans is evolving rapidly, through a variety of civil and public initiatives funded by donors, governments and the European Union. The governments have (to variable degree) their own national rural development programmes. In addition, the broad programme of pre-accession support offered by the European Union (IPA) includes an element focused on agriculture and rural development (IPARD) which is gradually being implemented in these countries … with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the reason that its constituent governments are unable to agree a basis for cooperation in this field.

> ***Serbia.*** *There is need for an adequate complex strategy for rural development in order to keep the rural population in the villages. The budget for rural development should be increased and focused on priorities , includng survival or transformation of the small farms, protection of the environment, investments etc.). The national and local authorities should work with civil society organizations to inform and encourage rural stakeholders to grasp the opportunities offered by the rural development policy, in coordination with community development. This should include promotion of the LEADER approach and the formation of Local Action Groups.*
> *As a candidate country, Serbia has access to the IPARD programmes. The IPARD II programme for Serbia was approved by the European Commission in January 2015, with the following objectives :*
> - *To support Serbian farmers in progressive alignment to EU rules, standards, policies and practices in preparation for the country's EU membership*
> - *To support economic, social and territorial development, with a view to a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, through the development of physical capital*

- *To address the challenges of climate change by promoting resource efficiency*
- *To increase productivity, improve the quality of products, and reduce production costs*
- *To improve competitiveness of local producers and to adjust to the demands of domestic and foreign markets.*

Implementation of the IPARD II programme is expect to start in 2016. It will require strict compliance with prescribed rules and meets the required criteria of the users. So, early action is needed to inform potential beneficiaries about the programme, to help them to be ready to use it, and to ensure that the other services they may need (advice, support in making applications, credit services) are in place. CSOs may be able to I play a significant role in this process, especially in the less developed areas, and in the support of small farms. (Serbia)

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. *In the past, development priorities in Macedonia were focused on urban areas and agriculture; and rural young people were generally encouraged to pursue their futures in the towns and cities. But now rural development has become a central priority for Macedonia and this has contributed to a new pluralistic perspective on how rural actors can work together for local economic development. Since 2009, rural development has become part of national development policy in Macedonia. This new perspective on rural development has been stimulated by two changes. The first was the introduction of a law that decentralised significant power to municipalities. This was not initially seen as a way to stimulate rural development. At first the municipalities focused almost entirely on improving utilities and facilities within their small towns : however, this devolved responsibility led them gradually to focus more on local economic development, and this has grown into broader rural development. The second change was the growing realisation that the timetable for accession to the EU was coinciding with a significant shift of EU's internal priorities away from agriculture per se to a broader focus on multi-functional rural development. National actors began to recognize that, in order to benefit from EU accession, the approach to local and national development strategies should synchronize with wider trends in the EU. Most of the investments in the national RDP and in IPARD are flowing into agricultural production and processing with the individual producer/processor driving the activity. However, a broader approach to socio-economic development, based on the LEADER approach, has evolved through the action of other agencies. (Macedonia)*

Albania*. Albanian agriculture is dominated by small-scale farms. Public support to agriculture is at present channelled through the national schemes and the "IPARD-like" programme (co-funded by the government and the EU to the tune of €8.27 million) to improve agricultural competitiveness. The IPARD- like grants focused more on middle to large-scale agriculture and agro-processing enterprises, bringing little benefit to the small-scale family farms. These family farms have difficulty in accessing financial support because of their small size, the unsolved issue of land ownership especially in the north of Albania, and the uncompleted process of land registration and certification.*

However, a new programme, SARED (Support for Agriculture and Rural Economic Development) co-funded by the Danish and German government and implemented by GIZ, provides grants (up to 65% of investment) to farmers for small livestock, fruit trees and nuts, medicinal and aromatic plants, and rural tourism in six mountain regions. This programme is aligned with IPARD, with smaller grants which may be more accessible to small-scale farms, entrepreneurs and cooperatives. It can be used as a stepping-stone for small farmers to prepare for IPARD schemes. This programme is in its first round of grants, with limited geographical coverage.

The priorities for EU financial assistance through IPA II for Albania for the period are set out in the Indicative Strategy Paper for Albania (2014-2020). The indicative IPARD budget for the period 2014-20 is €92 million. The measures in the IPARD programme include support for investments in physical assets of agricultural holdings or in processing and marketing of agricultural and fishery products; farm diversification; and business development. However, the Indicative Strategy Paper for Albania (2014-2020) states that "Agricultural funding remains limited, compared to the needs of the sector and to other countries in the region".

Outreaching to small-scale farmers and rural entrepreneurs will be important for the period 2014-2020. One of the measures in the Inter Sectorial Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2020 (ISARD) is focused on Farm diversification and Business Development. This measure can provide support for innovation and risk-taking in setting up new and diverse business activities in rural areas, thus helping to create new jobs outside agriculture. In addition to the investment grants, it will be important to offer people - especially young men and women farmers - the entrepreneurship skills and mindset needed to innovate and to manage a business activity. (Albania)

8.11 Rural development programmes in the Black Sea countries. In some of the Black Sea countries, there is movement towards production and implementation of national rural development

programmes, and the prospect of help from the European Union through the ENPA programme, with its agricultural and rural dimension ENPARD.

Georgia. *The Association agreement between Georgia and the EU includes reference to support for rural development. ENPARD 1, which finished in 2014, laid the groundwork, including a programme of small grants to farmers and cooperatives. Under ENPARD 2, the Ministry of Agriculture is producing a draft Rural Development Strategy, to be implemented through a Rural Development Programme and appropriate measures. The Ministry wants to take the lead in rural development, which it sees as already a big chapter in the Regional Development Strategy funded by the Ministry of Regional Development and Investment. That strategy includes a village development programme, with an annual budget of 50 million lari (c.€20 million), which is spent mostly on infrastructure such as roads, water supplies, sewerage, bridges, riverbank protection and kindergartens. MRDI does not wish to go beyond that scope, because the funds are limited on the needs are very big. There is also the Regional Development Fund, with 250 million lari (c.€100 million), which is distributed among municipalities and half of which goes towards improvements in rural infrastructure. Also under the MRDI umbrella on the Roads Department, responsible for major roads; the United Water Company, responsible for water supplies to all urban and municipal centres; and the Municipal Development Fund. (PREPARE situation report on Georgia)*

8.12 A territorial approach. Many national reports advocate an increasing emphasis, in rural development programmes, upon a territorial approach, focused on the specific character, resources and needs of each rural sub-region or locality.

Finland*. The Swedish Rural Parliament in Finland sends a strong message to the ERP15 about the importance of a Place-based Policy and the need for strengthening the local level in the decision making. Place-blind policies cannot resolve the socio-economic or environment challenges faced by the rural areas. For example, European Union protection of endangered species creates sometimes serious over-population of these species at local level. By 'place' for this purpose, we mean not only geographical place, but also minorities and socially defined groups. A place-based policy must include a strong rural policy, and must use rural proofing as a necessary tool. Local communities need more influence and possibilities to make decisions about their own affairs. Planning is important for development, but the local level needs more power in the process. Local groups should develop the community way of thinking in their activity. Place-based policy needs governance : we need to build strong partnerships between municipalities and NGOs at the local level. The growing inequality between individuals has also a regional dimension and should be dealt with, for instance in taxation. (Finland)*

Bulgaria. *The preparation and implementation of local development strategies is regarded as a positive instrument, with an increasing role in future rural development policy. These strategies can help the decentralisation process, which has an important role for addressing the problems and the needs of the local people. One participant in our events said, 'The problems of the settlements in South Bulgaria are different that those in the East of the country. The mentality of the people is also different. Therefore the solutions proposed and policy decisions taken cannot be the same'. (Bulgaria)*

Georgia. *The regions and rural areas of Georgia are highly diverse, in terms of topography, climate, ecosystems, accessibility, traditions of land use and of settlement. This diversity implies that policies and actions in rural development must be flexed to suit the specific character and needs of different areas. At the moment, this key principle appears to be quite well understood by donors, but not fully reflected in government policies and programmes. Regions and rural areas also vary significantly in the ethnic make-up of their populations, and in the level of specific needs represented by ethnic minorities, refugees and displaced people. This variation also implies the need for diversified policies, which appears to be more fully understood by donors than by government. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

8.13 Information and consultation. Many national reports call for a much increased use, by governments, of open systems of information and consultation related to public policies and programmes, in order to enable rural stakeholders to participate in shaping the policies which affect them.

Northern Ireland. *Government Departments need to consider how they can actively engage rural citizens in decision making processes, because many people feel that they are remote from both policy development and resource allocation decisions. (Northern Ireland)*

Scotland. *The shift towards a world without fossil fuels makes essential the decentralisation and participation of civil society in the governance.(Scotland).*

Portugal. *A general view among participants was that the national policy does not adequately relate to the realities and needs of the rural areas and rural people When they were asked whether "the concerns and expectations of rural communities are considered in the definition of national policies", the response of the great majority was that they are "not much" considered (77.6%) or "not at all" considered (10.2%). Typical comments were :*

"It is important to involve rural communities in the definition of public policies : government should not only engage and listen to them, but also genuinely respond to their concerns and needs."
"The definition of local and rural development policies is too standardised, not allowing policies and funds to be tailored to the real needs of the territories."

Participants in our meetings focused on the ways by which rural people could be encouraged and enabled to take part in the decision-making which affect their lives. As a starting-point, it was noted that, for historical and societal reasons, the idea of people accepting co-responsibility for the future of their communities is still weak. Typical comments were :.

"Rural communities have little tendency toward cooperation and association for the fight for common causes"
"Most people find it difficult to focus on community concerns, they prefer to expose their individual concerns"
"Rural populations are little involved in the process of making national and European decisions. They tend to scorn the political class and national policies. Still, they are quite active in local bodies. A change of mind-set of both people and institutions is needed. We need to bring them nearer to each other, and to give private companies the incentive to engage with national policies."

In response to the question "How can we bring the concerns and expectations of rural communities into the national public agenda?", respondents offered a range of ideas centred on the involvement of the media, academia and notable people; strengthening the networks of civil society organizations; enlisting the help of local authorities; and the production of a "white paper" to be addressed to policy-makers. The following typical ideas were offered :

"Set up territorial working groups involving several local and national actors - public, private, academia, etc. - to produce a document with policy proposals to be delivered to decision-makers at local and national level. The working groups should be set up according to territorial specificities, for example peri-urban areas or rural areas of low population density. "
"Agents and institutions working in rural areas, such as local development associations, may have a role in coordination and liaison with national public agenda. Local authorities (municipalities and parish councils) should be asked to have an opinion on issues impacting on rural areas. "
"Promote consultation and dialogue between government and local communities"
"Promote political lobbying in a concerted manner by representative organizations at national level."
(Portugal)

Sweden. *Adapt laws to better correspond to conditions in rural and sparsely populated areas. (Sweden)*

Montenegro. *Decentralisation is a very significant principle in the creation of rural development policy. It implies the need to strengthen the capacities of rural stakeholders to take an active part in this process. Different informative and promotional activities are needed in order to raise awareness and to reach a critical mass of local participants. There is also need for continuous communication and cooperation between the research community and those who create and implement policy. The lack of knowledge and information among rural people related to the government's support programmes should be dealt with through a well-structured education system in agriculture and rural development : this demands efficient connections between institutions, advisory service and rural stakeholders. The modules for training and knowledge transfer need to be adapted to the needs of rural stakeholders. (Montenegro)*

Serbia. *All categories of inhabitants must be involved in rural development. Bottom-up and participative planning is an important principle in creating rural development policies. (Serbia)*

Turkey. *Rural people should be able to participate in defining agricultural and rural development policies. A common thought arising from the local and regional meetings was that rural development policies are defined at central level by the government bureaucrats and experts, and the government does not listen to the rural communities. There are two main reasons for that - that representative rural and farmer organisations are too weak to apply pressure on the policy-makers; and that central government has a negative attitude of the*

involvement of civil society organisations. The president of the İzmir Tire Milk Cooperative offered the comment that "There is no farmer representative in the National Parliament" as an indication of the powerless state of farmers and their organisations. The participants of the local and regional meetings proposed some solutions for the improvement of participation of rural and farmer communities in defining and implementation of national rural development policies. (Turkey)

Albania. *Participants in the meetings raised the issue of the collective voice of farmers, their active participation in policies and actions affecting the development of their territories, and the need to organise and strengthen the engagement of local stakeholders in rural development and in dialogue with local and central government. They also voiced the need for dialogue, networking, exchange of know-how and information among farmers, local businesses and local stakeholders. For this purpose, they suggested the creation of Local and Regional Forums, which could be close to stakeholders, could focus on the specific issues and resources in each territory, and could direct engagement among the people and between them and local government. Creating such Forums may be timely in the light of the new administrative and territorial reform in Albania, which creates municipalities embracing both rural and urban territories : the Forums might help to ensure that rural development is high in the priorities of the new municipalities. Both Forums and Local Action Groups could be used to foster local integrated development including rural and urban areas, as well as areas with complementary resources e.g. hinterland and coastal, mountain and plain. They could motivate collaboration and synergy amongst local stakeholders, including individuals, businesses and organisations, and in this way create a model for consensus around development priorities. Creativity and diversity are not easy to find in a small country like Albania, but they are crucial to the long-term development of the country. Dialogue between many stakeholders' and micro projects can boost diversity, creativity and inclusion at the very local level in rural communities. They are key to integrated and sustainable development at the local level. (Albania)*

Armenia. *The Deputy Minister of agriculture expressed support for the principle of involving civil society and the general population, hoping that this will be based on constructive criticism of the rural development programme and active involvement in implementing projects. As an example, he mentioned the consultation process on the Law on Agricultural Cooperation. In the first phase of that consultation, only about 20 people contributed, but then a wider discussion took place in the Public Council of Armenia, which is an informal group of civil society organizations. Many good ideas were offered, which have now been integrated in the Law, to the drafting of which ICARE contributed. He cited also the Eastern Neighbourhood programme which will assist the strengthening of advisory services (both public and private subsidised), and the ENPARD programme which, with funding from the EU and UN agencies, may permit delegation of action to civil society. (PREPARE Situation report on Armenia)*

Georgia. *The custom in Georgia is that people 'keep their head down', knowing that their views will have little impact on government. If the government wishes to have effective public consultation and participation in the building of cooperatives or the shaping and implementation of regional and municipal development strategies, it will have to build a proper consultative system. Small farmers are the most vulnerable group, not accustomed to consultation or cooperation, but now facing the challenge of moving into modern standards of farming. There is need for consultation and strategy-making at community level, and for building skills and accessible finance. The Entrepreneurship Development Agency, set up by the Ministry of Economy, may be capable of outreach and assistance to farmers and SMEs, with support from consultants to provide expertise. (PREPARE Situation report on Georgia)*

8.14 Partnership between government and rural stakeholders. Increased dialogue between public authorities and the rural populations whom they serve can lead on to fruitful partnership between rural stakeholders and government. Such partnership can draw upon the special strengths of each sector – the voluntary effort and local knowledge of the civil sector, the business acumen and resources of the private and commercial sector, and the statutory powers and tax base of the public sector. Partnership depends on openness on all sides; on the evolution of effective structures through which the cooperation can work; and on realism about what each side can contribute to the common work. For example, the willingness of voluntary groups to take on some tasks previously undertaken by local authorities does not imply that those authorities can abdicate their continuing responsibility for the well-being of rural people. There are limits to the energy, and even the continuity, of social enterprises and community groups. Some rural communities simply do not have the resources to take varied initiatives.

Scotland. *We need to involve people in their destiny. We need to develop tools and mechanisms of participation, interaction and cooperation. We need more resources and more autonomy for rural municipalities. Best practice guidance, funding and support should be available to each community in developing their own vision for the future. We seek a change of policy within the public sector to pay funding for community-led projects in advance of expenditure being made, wherever this is not dictated by EU or other externally controlled rules. (Scotland)*

Portugal. *In response to the question "How can rural people and rural communities contribute to improving their own quality of life", respondents called for the promotion of forums, participatory budgets, hearings, increased networking and partnership, and the recognition of positive developments promoted by civil society organisations and local authorities. The promotion of inter-generational dynamics, resource sharing and awareness through the dissemination of projects, experience and good practices were also mentioned, as well as strategies for job creation and wealth. Typical responses were :*

> *"We can improve our quality of life by coming together and committing ourselves around common objectives; seeking and finding support and training. We can improve our quality of life by creating wealth, focusing on diversification of products to offer."*
>
> *"Increasing the participation of people and organisations in local dynamics, contributing with their ideas and actions. Exercising civic and associative actions. Criticizing constructively. The organization of local forums, participatory budgets, consultation of the people to support the common building of strategies and initiatives can be attractive actions and contribute to this purpose (essentially co-responsibility)."*
>
> *"Outlining effective strategies for the attractiveness of foreign investment, thereby creating jobs and improving the quality of life."*
>
> *"Rural communities will always be the repositories of regional identity and thus affirm their presence and importance in their brands and local traditions as well as the strength of their products and practices. These demonstrations have emerged with greater force in recent years almost counter-cyclical with globalisation and can be claimed as examples of perseverance and continuity of local history."*
>
> *"In the context of budget cuts, public service closure and the reduced capacity of the central state and local authorities to invest and stimulate animation activities and social support, rural community organisations can play a key role in community revitalisation and social support : they have proximity and the knowledge of local realities, and can be interlocutors with the local authorities." (Portugal)*

Netherlands. *Government, be aware of the energy you ask of the inhabitants. To support local initiatives is a very important thing for local, regional and national government. However, the group of active citizens is relatively small and government cannot just say that people have to organise themselves the facilities they think are important for their region. Government also has a role to support, to facilitate and sometimes, when there no active citizens, to sustain or create facilities. So, Government, do not throw away the (partial) responsibility. Local authorities could do well to appoint a contact officer between government and small villages. Some municipalities have such an officer, who enables local people and their initiatives to communicate with local government. That officer should have a central position in the local administration, with the task of stimulating and assisting initiatives by local communities which will maintain or improve the well-being of rural people (Netherlands)*

Germany. *We call for a higher level of public participation and civic engagement, through :*
• promotion and qualification of civic engagement and volunteering
• building a participatory culture, use of new methods (online participation, social media)
• inspiring seniors, youth and other groups, to connect and involve them in regional development
• strengthening of associations, safeguarding membership and restructuring. (Germany)

Slovenia. *The responsibility for vital rural areas is equally in the hands of the public, the private and the non-governmental sectors, each of which needs to fulfil its part of the mission towards the common good. Positive changes can be achieved only by including the rural population and those groups which affect the life and work in rural areas the most into decision-making. The inclusion of the local population and the acknowledgement of their initiative according to the bottom-up principle is key. Equal partnership between the state and the local communities is still in the early stages, since the relationship of the state towards the local communities is patronising and dualistic in the sense of a hierarchic relationship and dependence. An equal partnership is based on trust, something lacking in this day and age. Policies based on mistrust are unkind towards the local population and do not contribute to the quality of life. The mistrust is seen mainly in excessive and unnecessary administrative obstacles which we seemingly cannot eradicate. Blaming the European Union is not justified, since we should be able to conquer the task ourselves and let the European*

Union follow the example of small Slovenia at least in this instance. (Draft declaration of the Slovenian Rural Parliament)

Finland. *Important issues to be dealt with in the near future are security issues in remote rural areas, developing service-centres/multiservice points, actions on local infrastructure and housing, amelioration of the quality of life in the villages, ensuring the ombudsman activity and educating new actors. The effects of rural policy, entrepreneurship and local development should be better taken into account in public decision making. The field of action is large and gives opportunities for actors in the civil sector, who may take over tasks which municipalities or enterprises are not willing to realise. But there is a danger in piecemeal activity of this kind, because the energy of volunteers and voluntary bodies can wax and wane. For this reason, it is wise to take wide and long-term view of the tasks involved in local development; and to agree a clear basis for the distribution of those tasks; and where appropriate to formalise the relationship between sectors, for example through contracts between local authorities and NGOs who undertake certain communal tasks. There must sufficient resources and tools for agreed tasks. Bureaucracy should be as simple as possible, particularly for smaller projects. Successful partnership depends upon an equal relationship between the different narties involved. To ensure fair play in such partnership, there can be value in having a community ombudsman, with a role in communication and if necessary adjudication. (Finland)*

Latvia. *There is need to focus on the assessment and continuous development of unique community resources; to support collective sharing of technologies and resources; to introduce hybrid management models that develop public-private partnerships, in order to establish social innovation at local government level providing better public services and local attractiveness (Latvia)*

Bosnia and Herzegovina*. We establish the Rural Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a permanent forum for an active dialogue between the various participants who live and work in rural areas - from individuals to civil society organizations, from economic and social entities to government institutions. We suggest that the Rural Development Network in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to monitor the implementation progress of proposals and conclusions of the First Rural Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that it takes a particularly active part in the implementation of recommendations related to the role of civil society in rural development. In addition, that Network is entrusted, together with other stakeholders, to continue the development of the concept and organization of future rural parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*
We demand that the public sector makes appropriate strategic and operational documents, laws and bylaws from the scope of its jurisdiction, establishes an effective system of operation and provides the necessary resources for financing the implementation of the recommendations from the Declaration. It is required from all levels of government to increase the representation and participation of the civil sector in creating programmes, plans, decisions, and the work of various bodies in the sectors of agriculture and rural development, and also that the civil sector is given a more significant role in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs and plans.
We suggest that the private sector more actively cooperates with the public and civil sectors, undertakes initiatives towards the realisation of investments in the field of agricultural and non-agricultural activities in rural areas, as well as activities in order to raise the level of knowledge and skills in the fields of production technology, entrepreneurship and local economic development.
We encourage the civil sector to carry out activities on engaging and capacity building of the rural population, and to contribute to building partnerships with all stakeholders in rural areas and in particular with representatives of public and private sectors in identifying the priorities and needs of development in rural areas. (Declaration of the First National Rural Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

These calls of partnership between rural stakeholders and governments are echoed in the "Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Rural Development programmes" of September 2015 :

> "To be successful, economic and social partners need resources to continuously engage with their members and governments. As plans vary and evolve there has to be a greater sense of shared ownership of policy and implementation. The monitoring committees need to have a broad based membership that is informed and able to scrutinise effectively. The EESC is committed to facilitating the development of better partnership models with civil and social partners." (EESC, 2015)

8.15 Failure of partnership. A painful illustration of lack of effective partnership between civil organisations and public authorities is provided by the following description of the failure of successive initiatives in a village in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria. *"We created a business centre with an incubator through which we supported the establishment of 20 small businesses. New businesses were supported with microcredits, consultancy, information and other services. Unfortunately after expiration of the contract under which the business centre was set up, the municipality took over our building : we are now still running business centre in a rented building, but without the incubator services. We created a House of Crafts where goods from Bulgarian craftsmen are traded, but unfortunately after highway works our site became desolated and we face difficulties to continue. We created an architecture park in Dyadovo village with a museum displaying a reconstruction of a prehistoric home, plus a ceramics kiln and a pottery. We transferred them to the municipality, but the goal of the project, namely the development of rural and cultural tourism, is not a priority of the authorities. We created a communal center for entrepreneurs with minority descent, where for more than 10 years we provided services to the population. It is no longer functioning because the building, which is owned by the municipality, is in poor shape and the municipality is not willing to renovate it. We developed a project to create a LAG under the LEADER approach, but it was blocked by the mayor, the governor and the Minister of Agriculture. The Governor's order to suspend the project was revoked by the court. We have tried to convince the Minister to revive the project, but whilst the lawsuit was ongoing we missed the deadline to sign the contracts. The municipality is depopulating very fast due to lack of business investment, the lack of work spaces, and poor healthcare : the ill-designed infrastructure is becoming deserted." (Chairwoman of the Business incubator in Nova Zagora, Bulgaria)*

8.16 Networking and exchange of experience. LEADER groups and other sub-regional partnerships, plus the populations that they serve, can benefit greatly from exchange of experience and cooperation in joint activities, both within one country and between countries. In the EU, such networking between LAGs is supported by funding provisions in the LEADER element of the rural development programmes, under the heading 'inter-regional and multi-national cooperation'. The networking is facilitated in many countries by national Networks of LAGs and by the formal National Rural Networks which governments setup under the terms of the EAFRD Regulation; and at European level by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD). Local Action Groups and similar sub-regional partnerships outside the EU have not until now been able to benefit from EU funding to take part in such multi-national cooperation : but many are keen to do so, and the ENRD Contact Point in Brussels has agreed to do what it can to facilitate their involvement in this activity, which can enable them to contribute to, and to gain from, exchange with their counterparts in the EU.

Spain. *Local Action Groups in Spain are keen to engage in transnational cooperation within and outside the EU. They have mind the following countries and topics :*

- *Latin America : transfer of knowledge, new approaches to sustainable economic development*
- *France, Germany, Italy, Greece : consumer education on organic farming, landscape value of the territory, carbon footprint*
- *France : agri-food, agroforestry,cultural and heritage trails*
- *Portugal : energy efficiency, biomass*
- *Germany: renewable energies*
- *Italy : heritage, culture and equal opportunities*
- *Romania : Nature tourism and trekking. (Spain)*

Bulgaria. *As a result of an implemented project, an effectively functioning network will be established, uniting the efforts of over 100 Local Action Groups functioning in rural areas. Work within the network will ensure communication and sharing of knowledge, experience and good practices; diversify the ways to disseminate training techniques and methods; ensure adequate distribution of physical resources; and give access to current information to all members. Thus the interaction and co-ordination between LAGs for a more successful and timely solving of similar problems will improve. The created online platform will support the existing network. Joint communication and knowledge exchange will increase LAG capacity as leading NGOs within rural areas. The improved information exchange between LAGs will improve the awareness of potential beneficiaries, decision makers, local business, young people and others. (Bulgaria)*

Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN)*. This network is a regional grouping of NGO-based rural development networks in the Western Balkan countries. These Networks are actively involved in promoting these processes, stimulating the interest and activity of rural stakeholders, training LEADER-type groups and other activities, and keeping rural development on the political agenda in their countries. BRDN promotes exchange and joint initiatives between the member Networks, and sustains contact with similar networks elsewhere in Europe. There is great interest within these countries in the EU's approach to rural*

development, including the LEADER principles, and sub-regional partnerships built on the LEADER model are increasing in number. BRDN and its members wish to increase their capacities by sharing experience and acquiring knowledge of best practices in rural development. They wish to learn from, and where possible contribute to, the debates and exchanges related to rural development within the Union, and to extend their and good relationships with other networks of the European Union. They seek the participation of LEADER-type groups in the Western Balkan countries in projects of Trans-National Cooperation (TNC) with LEADER groups in the European Union. (extract from message from BRDN to ENRD Contact Point)

8.17 Support for Rural Development Networks. Described earlier were the activities of rural movements or non-government networks in over 20 European counties, both within and beyond the European Union. These networks play a significant role in promoting partnership-based local developments, and in stimulating awareness, networking and active participation among all categories of stakeholder. Governments should recognise the high value of these networks, which as independent non-government organisations can act as objective intermediaries between government and all stakeholders. They merit government support, provided that the support does not threaten their independent status. This support may take the form of contribution towards core costs, whether in money or in kind, or (for example) allocation to the networks of elements of government activity, such as promotion of the LEADER approach or the management of information and consultation processes, with the appropriate resources.

Serbia. *Civil society capacities are crucial for rural development and support rural communities. Programmes for civil society and CSO development must be ensured and also capacity building activities must be established. At the same time, there is a need for continuous communication and cooperation among the civil society, service providers and policy creators and implementers. In this direction, a comprehensive approach is necessary that will ensure all capacities using and respecting local specifies. The media must be actively involved in informing rural population about rural development and his implementation. (Serbia)*

9 The European Dimension

9.1 Messages to Europe. National champions – and, through them, the people involved in the upward cascade of ideas – were invited to take this opportunity to send messages to the people and authorities of Europe. In fact, that opportunity was not widely used, for two apparent reasons. First, many rural people, focused on their local lives, have little knowledge of European policies and affairs, and little interest in seeking to influence those policies at European level. Second, most of the policies and funds that originate at European level are delivered by national or regional governments, and it is to these governments that rural people (as citizens, voters, taxpayers and potential beneficiaries) address their concerns or demands.

> ***Northern Ireland.*** *EU institutions and democracy are remote and inaccessible to EU citizens. The EU needs to fundamentally re-think how the European Institutions can re-engage with rural citizens, especially in peripheral countries before goodwill is damaged further and solidarity between European nations is further undermined. (Northern Ireland)*

> ***Estonia.*** *Public opinion about rural life and values is low, even rural people themselves don`t know about the idea and possibilities of the Common Agricultural Policy. There is need for more effective public information about best practices and possibilities. (Estonia)*

9.2 Raising the voice of rural people. However, the organisations which represent rural people realise how widely and profoundly the lives of rural communities, and the vitality of rural economies, are affected by forces at European and global level, and by the policies formulated at international level in the EU and other multi-national institutions. Rural organisations see that much of what national and regional government do is heavily influenced by such international forces and policies, and they wish to influence those forces and policies on behalf of rural people. They are very aware of the lobbying power of other sectors – urban, industrial, commercial and environmental – and wish to raise the power and the voice of rural people to similar levels within the on-going global policy debate. In turn, they believe that pressure at international level may have impact on what national and regional governments do.

> ***Turkey.*** *The European Commission should put pressure on the government to support farmers' organisations. (Turkey)*

> ***Portugal***. *When asked "Should this debate be taken to European level", A few respondents considered that the problem should be resolved exclusively in the national context ...*
>
> > *We are talking about a national / regional level, that only depends on a coherent and consistent national project. Portugal must discover the potential of its own human and natural resources and organise its scientific, productive and institutional structure to create, process and market its own products, or else remain a country dependent on subsidies and perceived as a place of "sun and beach" with a vast internal forest, an empty countryside, and dozens of overcrowded cities."*
>
> *But otherwise the positive response was nearly unanimous. People pointed to the weight of the Union's decisions on national policymaking, particularly as regards the financing of public policies by EU funds, and also by the fact that different countries have similar problems and there are advantages in sharing solutions and / or find synergies around common actions. Typical responses were :*
>
> > *"It is appropriate that this debate takes place at European level, either in the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee or in the European Parliament. At that level, citizens should be represented by local associations to be actors closer and knowledgeable of the issues. "*
> > *"Without doubt. Of course we are not alone and other regions with similar problems may serve as an example in terms of methodologies. We should cooperate with them. Also at European level should be increased collective awareness of the importance of rural areas for the harmonious development and cohesion."*
> > *Absolutely! Rural communities should see their best players invited to participate in this debate, almost as ambassadors of the "rural cause". These people should be considered by the relevance of their observations and possible solutions, and not for their role in rural society (e.g. President of this or that)."*
> > *"Being a national concern, rural well-being is an issue shared with many European territories. So, at European level, we can say these our common concerns should influence public policy and member states to strengthen the mechanisms to support these territories."*
>
> *Regarding the need to give voice to rural communities at national and European level in order to influence political action, many responses and contributions highlight the role of associations and civil society organisations. This is probably related with the fact that the questionnaire is being applied in the context of the European Rural Parliament, organized by networks of civil society organizations. (Portugal)*

> ***Scotland.*** *We ask you to campaign for and with us on the following issues :*

- *Common Agricultural Policy : broader rural development or environment measures which we can see delivering wider public benefits.*
- *Common Fisheries Policy : given the nature of fish stocks as a common and mobile resource, a European solution, especially to mid and deep-water species, is essential.*
- *Broadband and mobile signal : these are essential services and should be treated as such. We need good broadband speeds and 4G mobile signal even in our most remote communities. Current UK and Scottish plans for these services are inadequate.*
- *Transport : we need access to affordable, efficient transport systems across Europe for both people and products. Investment in this is essential.*
- *Education : more opportunities for education at all ages should be available in rural communities. Rural schools and colleges should be protected.*
- *National funds : in-built encouragement for multi-use land strategies and partnerships between a wide-range of land users would be greatly welcomed.*
- *De minimis rules : the legislation should be reviewed to ensure that the approach taken is sensible, fit-for-purpose and is not a barrier to those rural communities who are seeking to provide essential services (including broadband, mobile and transport) for themselves.*
- *Housing : affordable housing is essential for the survival of rural communities. Holiday and second homes increase the prices of housing and exclude people who want to live in rural communities full-time. (Scotland)*

9.3 Support from the EU. Some national reports call for the European Union to find mechanisms and funds to support the organisations which represent rural communities, or to promote exchange between rural practitioners and officials.

Finland. *Some ideas on possible cooperation between NGO´s and EU institutions are listed below. Our wish is to open the discussion. The European Rural Parliament is one tool, but others could be found.*

- *Opening the discussions and negotiations on cooperation issues – looking for synergies*
- *Cooperation on gathering of information : situation in each country, statistical information etc.*
- *Could national rural networks undertake contractual or case-based tasks for the European Commission, provide country-based or EU-level information, analysis or processing of innovative pilot schemes where needed ? Could they assist the ENRD Contact Point, the LEADER Sub-committee of the Rural Networks Assembly, the Evaluation Unit, the European Parliament, the Regional Committee or ECOSOC ? If so, could this be on a basis of yearly contracts, with flexible tasks as demanded by the client institutions ?*
- *Creating a network of contact persons at different units of the European Institutions*
- *Creation of a European Parliament intergroup on issues of integrated rural development*
- *Cooperation on creation of simple non-bureaucratic tools. (Finland)*

Spain. *We are keen to see that all regions, countries and the EU recognize and appreciate the local community/village level and open better possibilities to simplify funding of local development projects. We hava a keen interest in meeting and cooperating with people from rural areas all over Europe. We support the application of tools such as local economic resource analysis and local transition plans that focus on environment/climate, energy, economic and social issues. We see the possibility of economic development grants in order to promote broad networking and cooperation between national local community/village organisations, as in the European Rural Parliament. (Sweden)*

Spain. *What other deficiencies, problems or weaknesses should be taken into account when drawing up the European rural policies? Respondents suggested that the following action is needed :*

- *Influence the environmental sustainability and social cohesion in rural areas.*
- *Meet the financial requirements of project developers in rural areas.*
- *Facilitate innovation and implementation of pilot actions.*
- *Adapt administrative regulations to the character of rural areas.*
- *Encourage diversity of approach.*
- *Create flexible financial mechanisms and adapt them to new needs.*
- *Study the needs of territories and develop a diagnostic to tell us that actions must be taken into account in each of them.*
- *Provide more facilities to entrepreneurs when they apply for loans.*
- *Give greater autonomy and independenceto the territories.*
- *"Downsize and simplify regulations in rural areas. (Spain)*

Latvia. *We urge cooperatsion between EU institutions and rural stakeholder organisations, in order to :*

- *strengthen the sense of belonging and pride in rural life and work, emphasising the common challenges, the importance of mutual enrichment and progress towards common objectives*
- *promote the exchange of experiences in Europe, contributing to the development of creative expressions in various everyday areas*
- *organize EU-level events that emphasise the cultural heritage of small communities and raise awareness of a diverse European cultural heritage*
- *establish a programme of conservation of cultural heritage and exchange experiences in EU, by expanding the funding available for experience exchanges in the field of cultural heritage. (Latvia)*

Netherlands. *The Netherlands is a small country and the rural areas are largely the parts of the country which share borders with Germany and Belgium. Bilingual education in the border regions gives opportunities to work in the other country and gives opportunities for cooperation and common projects to build a vital rural area on both sides of the border. For this reason, the government should support bilingual education in the border regions, and encourage social and economic cooperation across the borders. (Netherlands)*

9.4. **Support for civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey**. The NGO-based national networks in the Western Balkans and Turkey, who have run the ERP national champions in those countries, hope to secure support from the European Union for their work as leaders and mediators in rural development. They are greatly encouraged that the European Commission fully acknowledges the crucial importance of civil society in promoting democracy and development in the countries of south-east Europe, as shown by the text below from the Call for Proposals within the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2014-2015, which has the overall objective "to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU integration process in the Western Balkans and Turkey by empowering civil society to actively take part in decision making and by stimulating an enabling legal and financial environment for civil society and pluralistic media":.

"Through their lobbying, advocacy and oversight activities at national, regional and local level, civil society can make a substantial contribution to addressing many of the main challenges IPAII beneficiaries are faced to, especially in fields like the democratic governance, the rule of law and fundamental rights, including freedom of expression & association and minority rights. In these and other priority areas identified in this call for proposals (i.e. migration and asylum, reconciliation and social inclusion, etc.), civil society actors and thematic networks can demand for and stimulate enhanced transparency, accountability and effectiveness from public institutions, and facilitate a greater focus on the needs of citizens in policy-making. (European Commission, "Call for Proposals within the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2014-2015")

9.4 EU funds. Some national reports commented on the structure of EU funds or on the use of those funds by national governments.

Estonia. *Estonian farmers get less subsidies then other Europeans. The COMMON Agricultural Policy should be COMMON! The climate in Nordic areas is very different from that in Southern Europe, and subsidy calculating should be take account of this too.*
Bureaucracy is too complicated at EU level (policies and theory do not correspond to practical needs) and too centralised at national levels. Centralisation could be decreased by strengthening and trusting local associations, who should be enabled to work in partnership with policy makers.
There should be greater cooperation between policy makers, executors and beneficiaries : this could be assisted by organising common events, training programmes and sharing best practice.
There is a lack of balance between the funds of European programmes and the interests of people. This means that sometimes officials place more importance on auditing money and monitoring the observance of rules than on common sense and people's actual needs. Better analyses of needs and flexibility of programmes may work towards improving the situation. (Message from Estonian Rural Parliament)

Scotland. *EU funding should be accessible and not overly bureaucratic for organisations, especially smaller ones, to access, monitor and claim. Funds should be paid as projects commence and not in arrears. Funds should be protected so that allocations of funding for rural areas are guaranteed to reach the communities they are intended for without reductions made by national or local governments. (Scotland)*

England. *By 2020, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) will have overseen investment of £12.2bn (c.€16.7 billion) in European Structural Funds, with a focus on growth in the economy. The ACRE Network calls for a fair share of that funding to be spent in rural areas. Small businesses are the backbone of the rural economy*

and should not be overlooked by the investment strategies of LEPs. Recognition by LEPs of the role that the rural businesses and communities can play is vital to ensure equitable investment in rural areas. (England)

***Wallonie**. Without wishing to oppose one against another, we must say that the European funds support almost exclusively urban development. Rural areas also can be SMART and benefit from being supported from those funds, but there are virtually no funds dedicated to rural development. Over time, the funding within the second (rural development) pillar of the EAFRD has been greatly reduced and reoriented towards the diversification of agriculture. The application of European funds by states or regions frequently excludes rural actors, whether by conditions of access or pre-financing which are insurmountable for smaller players or by removing them as potential beneficiaries. For example, the territorial planning measures funded by EFRD in Wallonie exclusively target the urban centres. There is no rural counterpart to programmes such as URBACT. Europe should encourage the widespread application and facilitate the smooth functioning of the strategic tools for rural municipalities. The rural development policy for Wallonie coordinates actions conducted on a rural territory and stimulates dynamism of its actors. Access to European funds for projects embodying such a strategy should be facilitated, or the intervention rate of funding should be increased.*
(Fondation Rural de Wallonie)

9.5 Support for accession countries. Rural communities and enterprises in the Western Balkans are gravely affected already by competition from within the European Union, and must prepare themselves for even sharper competition on accession. But they can feel unable to influence the EU policies. They can fairly ask for a 'seat at the table' as policies are developed, and for recognition of their needs as future citizens of the EU.

***Serbia.** The integration process of Serbia in the European Union is a strong challenge for all rural stakeholders in Serbia. The interests of our rural communities in Serbia are under-represented in national and European debates and in the shaping of policies and programmes. Civil society organisations representing rural communities are trying to establish a strong position in building partnership and managing dialogue with authorities at all levels. (Serbia)*

***Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.** As a candidate country, Macedonia has access to the IPARD programme, of which the aim is (inter alia) to help farmers and other rural stakeholder to modernise their activity, to meet EU food safety, veterinary and phyto-sanitary standards, and prepare for the effective use of EAFRD funds after upon accession. During the first phase of IPARD in 2007-13, the absorption of funds was low with few applications and a high rejection rate (50 to 70%). This failure appears to be caused by lack of necessary documentation, lack of coordination among relevant institutions, lack of credit for co-financing – all of which provoked distrust among the potential beneficiaries - and the fact that funding under the separate national rural development programme was more flexible and acceptable to stakeholders than under IPARD. The government is seeking to address these issues in the second phase of IPARD, with new measures and stronger management and control systems. But clearly there is need to increase the awareness and capacity of potential beneficiaries if the funds are to be efficiently absorbed. This is a task for the advisory services : the National Extension Agency (NEA) and private consultants should be supported to help beneficiaries to apply for IPARD funding. Cooperation between all stakeholders in the Programme is a key element in improving Macedonia's agriculture and rural development and preparing it for accession. (Macedonia)*

***Bosnia and Herzegovina.** When it comes to subsidised and excessive imports, the system should be regulated through protection of domestic agricultural production, establishment of a system for introducing a variety of measures that aim to equalise market conditions. Anti-dumping and countervailing duties should be introduced. There should be continuous needs analysis of the needs of entrepreneurs and citizens, and monitoring of the internal market, and the movement of goods, in order to define critical periods, determine action mechanisms and time frames. Consumption of domestic products should be promoted. In order to increase export opportunities for agricultural products, we need to establish a system to ensure the fulfilment of export standards, with a clear chain of command between institutions in charge of control of food safety and those who monitor standards at the farm and individual producer levels. (Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

9.6 **Policy Reviews at European level.** The Hungarian national champion called for a number of policy reviews at European level.

a. ***The state of Rural Europe** – there should be a programme of research on the present economic and social situation of the rural areas of all EU countries and on EU level, analysing the difference between urban and rural areas. The last similar research was made by OECD about 10 years ago. It would be good to have this research ordered by the Commission and made by independent research institutions.*

b . ***Elimination of rural poverty*** *- A strong innovative approach is needed on this field, with immersion of experts from alternative and local initiatives. An integrated approach, with new ideas and solutions, is still missing. We still feel a hidden approach behind rural development policies (also on EU level), in thinking of policy makers and practitioners including many LEADER managers and decision makers who say that rural development has to focus on economic development and social problems have to be solved by using social workers funded by ESF. Social organizations, social policies, social programmes, social workers and experts are still too far in their thinking and action from the territorial and a healthy economic approach. Recommendation: DG Employment and DG Agri strong cooperation and an ENRD Contact Point focusing on innovative social-economic initiatives.*

c. ***Roma and refugees.*** *There is a risk that the refugee issue will destroys the willingness of politicians to follow the EU Roma strategy. There are many common points between Roma integration and the integration of refugees in Europe (Roma are also 'refugees' of bad development policies within the EU borders). It would be good to have a discussion about this issue.*

d. ***Welcoming newcomers to rural areas***. *Some years ago there was a discussion in frame of the Swedish Rural Parliament. Different rural development stakeholders (politician, policy makers, forest director, agricultural manager etc.) were asked in a roundtable about potential influence and way of integration of newcomers in rural areas. The approach was very positive. Can we do something similar at the ERP 2015 Gathering ?*

e. ***Empowered citizens.*** *For a better and stronger Europe, there is a clear need to empower a new generation of civil society in Europe by more EU level pilots, development resource centres and network focal points. Global grant should be available for initiatives like the European Rural Parliament. . EU citizens living in a small village or a 16-year old kid in a small-town in Hungary do not see the 'face' of Europe, it is not visible enough.*

Annex 1

Campaign partners

Co-initiating bodies

European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) *www.elard.eu*
European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA) *www.ruralcommunities.eu*
PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe *www.preparenetwork.org*

European partners

European Council for the Village and Small Town (ECOVAST) *www.ecovast.org*
Forum Synergies *www.forum-synergies.eu*

National champions

Albania Quodev *www.quodev.org*
Austria PROJECTS4 Müller *www.projects4.info*
Regionalmanagement Kitzbüheler Alpen *www.rm-tirol.at*
Bosnia & Herzegovina Rural Development Network in Bosnia & Herzegovina *www.ruralnamreza.ba*
Bulgaria STEP, Society for Territorial and Environmental Prosperity *http://step-bg.bg/gb*
Croatia Croatian Rural Development Network *www.hmrr.hr*
Cyprus Troodos Network of Thematic Centers *www.lovetroodos.com*
Czech Republic National Network of Local Action Groups *www.nsmascr.cz*
Denmark Landsdistrikternas Fellesråd (Council of Rural Districts) *http://landdistrikterne.dk/*
England Action with Communities in Rural England *www.acre.org.uk*
Estonia Estonian Village Movement *Kodukant* *www.kodukant.ee*
Finland Suomen kylätoiminta ry (Finnish Village Action Association) *www.kylatoiminta.fi*
France La coordination associative de développement durable des territoires ruraux
CELAVAR *www.celavar.org*
Germany Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der LEADER-Aktionsgruppen
www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de
Germany (Brandenburg) Brandenburgisches Netzwerk Lebendige Doerfer
www.nachhaltig-in-brandenburg.de
Greece Greek LEADER Network, represented by LAG ACHAIA SA *www.achaiasa.gr/*
Hungary Hungarian Rural Civil Society Network
Iceland Landsbyggdin lifi ('Rural Lives') *http://landlif.is/*
Ireland Irish Rural Link *www.irishrurallink.ie*
Kosovo* Network of Organisations for Rural Development of Kosovo
**this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*
Latvia Latvian Rural Forum *www.llf.partneribas.lv*
Lithuania Lithuanian Rural Communities Union *www.lkbs.lt*
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia *www.ruralnet.mk*
Moldova Pro Cooperare Regională *www.procore.md*
Montenegro Mreža za ruralni razvoj Crne Gore (Network for Rural Development of Montenegro)
www.ruralportal.me
Netherlands Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen *www.lvkk.nl*
Northern Ireland Rural Community Network *www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org/*
Poland Polish Rural Forum *www.faow.org.pl*
Portugal MINHA TERRA, *Federação Portuguesa de Associações de Desenvolvimento Local*
www.minhaterra.pt
Romania National Federation of Local Action Groups in Romania (*Federatia Nationala GAL Romania-FNGAL*)
Scotland Scottish Rural Action *www.scottishruralparliament.org.uk*
Serbia Network for Rural Development of Serbia *www.ruralinfoserbia.rs*
Slovakia Slovakian Rural Parliament (VIPA SK) *www.vipa.sk*
Slovenia Slovenian Rural Development Network *www.drustvo-podezelje.si*
Spain REDR - Red Española de Dessarollo Rural *www.redr.es*
Sweden Hela Sverige ska leva *www.helasverige.se*

Turkey	Development Foundation of Turkey *www.tkv-dft.org.tr*
Wales	PLANED (Pembrokeshire Local Action Network for Enterprise and Development) *www.planed.org.uk*

Annex 2

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