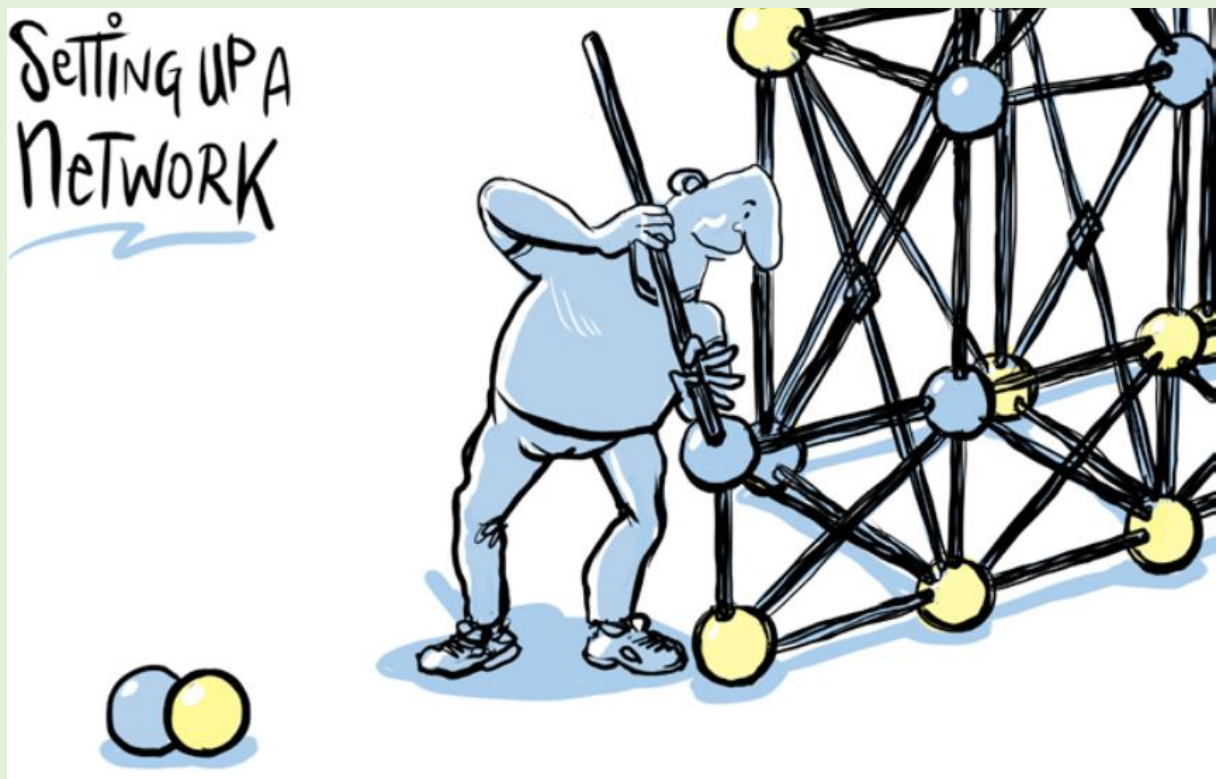


Starting-up the NSUs

The state-of-play of National Rural Networks & Network Support Units



Source of image: NRN Guidebook, 2014 © Drawnalism Ltd

1st NRN Mapping Report - 2014-2020

May 2015

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I. Background

1.1 The role of National Rural Networks (NRNs)

According to Article 54 of the EAFRD Regulation¹ each Member State shall establish a **national rural network (NRN)**, which groups the organisations and administrations in rural development.

During the 2014-2020 programming period, NRNs are required to carry out specific (mandatory) tasks in order to:

- increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development;
- improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes;
- inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities; and
- foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.

NRNs have evolved considerably and gained substantial networking experience since their initial conception during the 2007-2013 programming period. At the same time, many NRNs have gone through important changes, especially at the dawn of the new programming period. Therefore, rural networks and their way of operation are characterised by a high diversity and different level of experience across Europe.

1.2 The purpose of NRN mapping reports

NRN mapping reports are developed by the ENRD Contact Point (CP) in co-operation with Network Support Units (NSUs). The purpose of these reports is to provide an up-to-date picture on the state-of-play of NRNs across the 28 EU Member States (MS). Understanding how other NRNs and NSUs work can help future exchange of experience and mutual learning among rural networks.

This NRN mapping report was developed at the beginning of the 2014-2020 programming period, and therefore focuses on the **'starting-up of NRNs'**. The aim of this report is to assess when and how the 2014-2020 NSUs and rural networks are set up, and how NSUs identify and work with members of the NRN.

1.3 The method of the mapping exercise

The analysis of this report is based on a survey that was carried out among NSUs during early 2015. NSUs received a questionnaire (see *Annex I*) and were contacted by the ENRD CP to follow up or discuss written answers further. This report is the result of the analysis and synthesis of the outcomes of individual rural network questionnaires and interviews.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013

The draft report was circulated prior to the 2nd NRN meeting in Latvia (12 May 2015) and the main findings presented during the meeting. NSUs were requested to validate the data in the draft report, and changes were made based on comments received before end May 2015.

II. The setting-up of the 2014-2020 NRNs

2.1 Scope

The purpose of this part of the mapping report is to describe:

- At **what stage of their establishment** the 2014-2020 NSUs/NRNs are at; whether they have already been set up and operational or still being planned and negotiated;
- **In what form** NSUs are set up; e.g. whether they are established within the MA or outside the MA and whether there is a regionalised structure in a MS;
- What the **main changes** are compared to the 2007-2013 programming period;
- What the current **priority themes and main needs** of NSUs are at the beginning of the programming period.

In the following sections, we summarise the outcomes of the NRN mapping survey with regard to the aspects above.

2.2 Setting-up of Network Support Units (NSUs)

Question 1: Has a NSU been already set up in your Member State/region for the 2014-2020 programming period?

Six categories were defined to describe the 'state of play' of NSU set-up, as follows:

- NSU continues from the past period and operational;
- NSU continues from the past period but not yet *formally* operational;
- New NSU structure was set up and is operational;
- New NSU structure will be set up but not yet operational;
- 2007-2013 NSU is still running, the new NSU will be set up later.

What do we mean by 'new NSU structure'?

An NSU structure is considered to be '**new**' when there are considerable changes in its structure. For instance, an NSU was moved within the MA, whereas before it was outsourced; or the NSU went through restructuring within the MA, e.g. moved to a new department, considerably increased its staff and fulfils new roles & tasks.

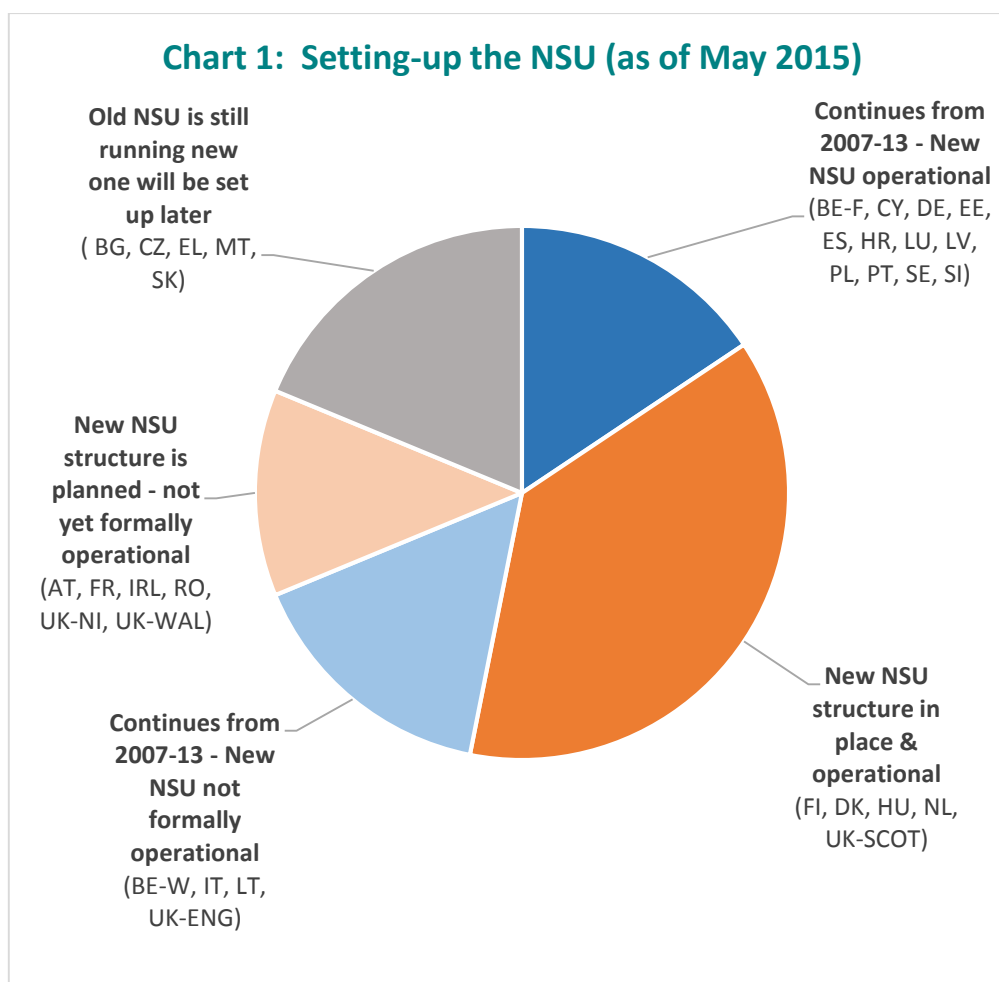
An NSU structure is considered to '**continue from the past period**' when there are no major changes in the (planned) structure. For instance, the NSU operates within the same ministry, essentially carries out the same tasks as before or there are relatively small changes in its planned activities and/or operates with the same (or slightly increased/decreased) staff.



Based on the responses received (see chart below):

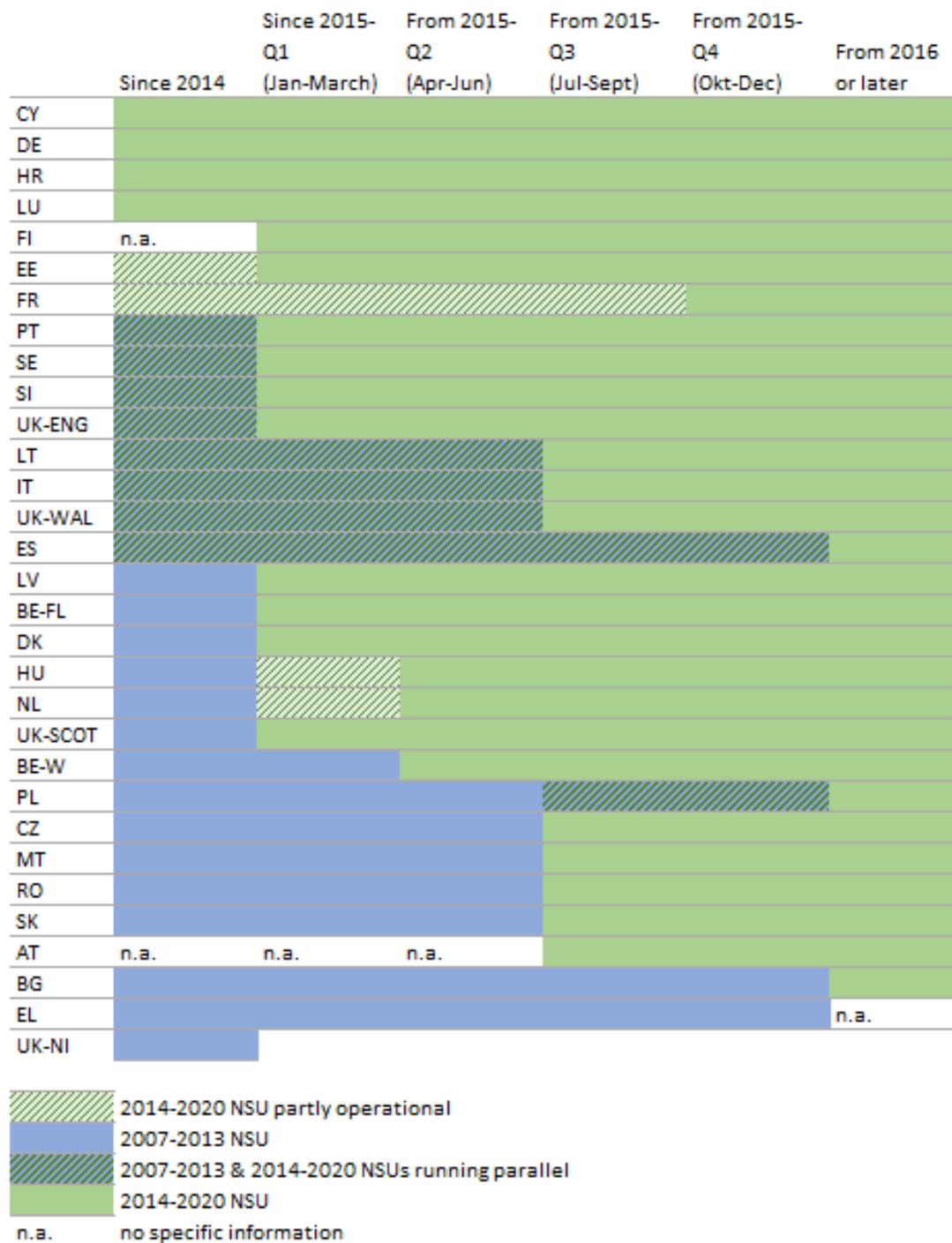
- More than 50% of 2014-2020 NSUs are now **operational** (12 of them continued from 2007-2013 and 5 are operating through new structures).
- In 16% of the cases (5 NSUs) only the **2007-2013 NSUs are (still) running**.
- More than 30% of the 2014-2020 NSUs are **not yet formally operational** (4 of these continue from 2007-2013, and in the case of 6 NSUs new structure is planned).

Darker blue and orange colours indicate networks that are already operational, whereas lighter colours those that are not yet formally operational (as of May 2015). Blue indicates continuity from the previous period, whereas orange indicates new structures.



An **indicative time-line** (until 2016) with regard to the setting-up of NSUs in various MS is also presented in the graph below.

Table 1: Indicative timeline of setting-up of NSUs

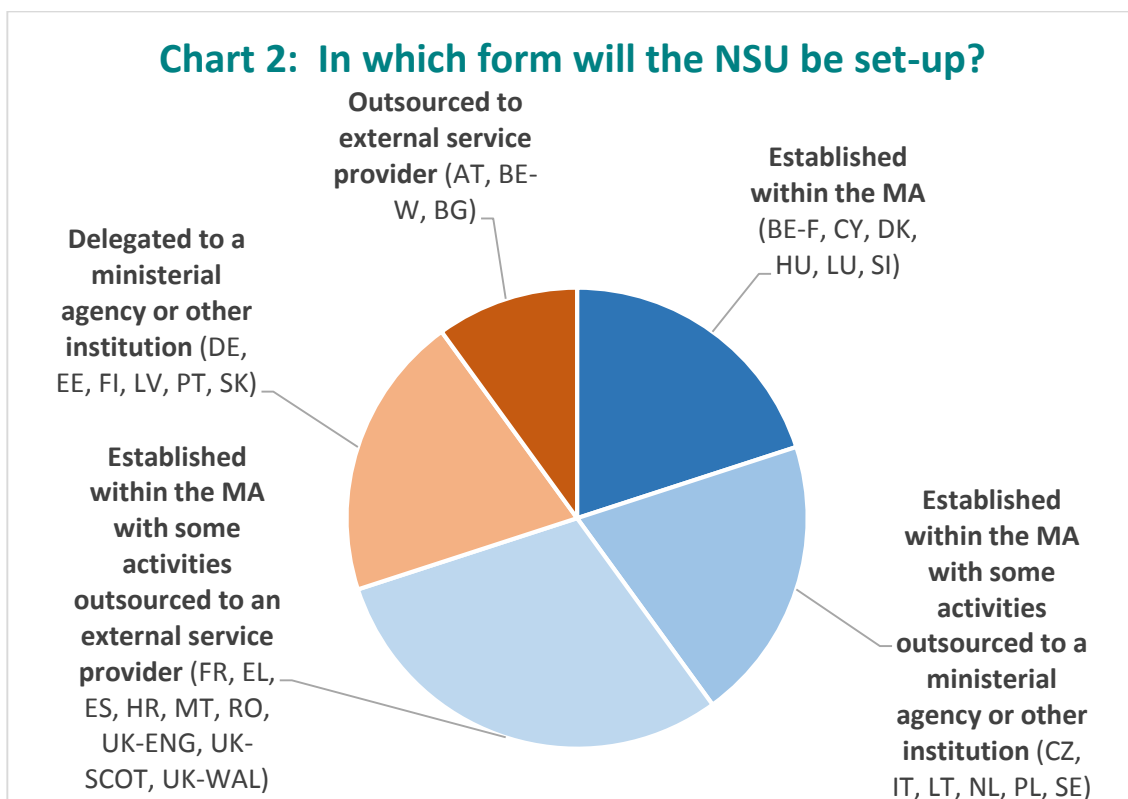


2.3 Outsourced or in-house?

Question 2: In which form is the NSU set up?

Five different forms of NSU set-up were defined depending on the degree and type of outsourcing of NSU activities (see also chart below), namely:

- Established within the MA;
- Established within the MA with some activities outsourced or contracted to a ministerial agency or other institution;
- Established within the MA with some activities outsourced or contracted to an external service provider;
- Outsourced to external service provider;
- Delegated to a ministerial agency or other institution.



As indicated in the chart above:

- **most NSUs** (21, marked in shades of blue) **are established within the MAs**: 6 of them do not outsource activities, 6 of them outsource activities to a ministerial agency or other public institution and 9 of them outsource certain activities to an external service provider.
- 6 NSUs are **delegated to a ministerial agency or other public institution** (lighter orange colour in the chart)
- 3 of the NSUs are **outsourced to an external service provider** (darker orange colour in the chart).

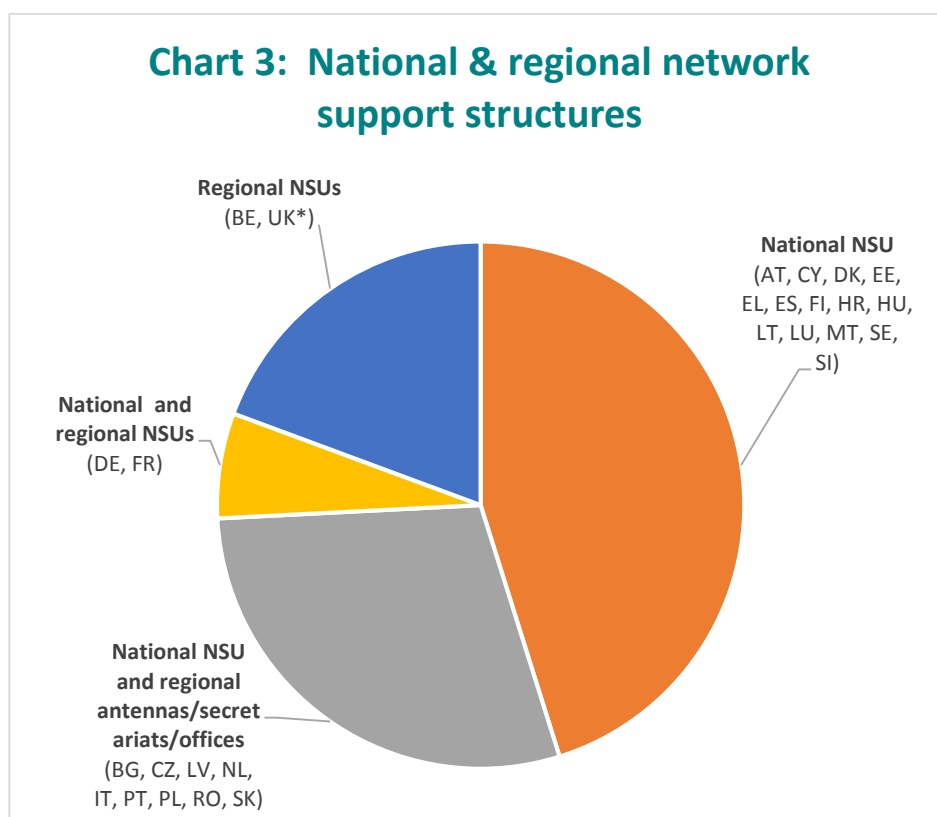
Two-thirds of those NSUs that outsource some (but not all) activities mentioned event organisation and logistics being outsourced; and half of them indicated certain communication-related tasks (from printing and production of publications to more specialised RDP communication tasks). Other types of outsourced activities (each mentioned by 2-3 NSUs) include website management, studies and research, network monitoring and evaluation, regional functions, and capacity building activities (especially for LAGs).

2.4 National and regional network support structures

Question 3: How will the support for national or regional rural networks in your Member State be organised from 2014?

As the chart below shows, national support units dominate the network structures across Europe. Almost **half of the networks (14 NRNs) have national NSUs only**.

9 Member States (MS) have **national NSUs, supported by ‘antennas or offices’** at the regional level. In 2 of the MS (Germany and France) **both national and regional NSUs** are set up. Another 2 MS (Belgium and the UK) have 2 and 4 **regional NSUs** respectively. In the case of the UK there is also a rotating national coordination among the 4 NSUs.



The box below presents two approaches to a regional NSU set-up. France has both national and regional NSUs in almost all of the regions (the latter supporting the implementation of regional RDPs). Bulgaria is an example of ‘softer’ regional support, where regional coordinators are supporting the work of the national level in each of the administrative districts.

Examples of regionalised NSU structures

In **France**, it is foreseen that all regions/programmes but 3 (Alsace, Martinique and Guadeloupe) will establish a regional network (21 Regional Networks in total). As far as the operational structure is concerned, the common pattern is to establish the regional NSU within the regional MA (Conséil Régional). According to the new delegation of responsibilities, the core network competences remain at the national level. In principle, the regional MA remains the main contact point for the NRN at the regional level.



In **Bulgaria**, 28 Regional Coordinators (RCs) are based in each of the administrative districts and support the work of the NSU. RCs keep contacts with local stakeholders, promote the activities and membership of the NRN as well as assist with identification and presentation of good practices of RDP implementation. 20 LAGs are also operating within their specific territory. All of them (RC and LAGs) act as information points and communication channels.

2.5 Main changes in the set-up or activities of the NSU

Qs4&5: Have there been any **significant changes** in the set-up of the NRN or the operation/planned activities of the NRN compared to the 2007-2013 programming period?

The responses to Qs4&5 are summarised in the table below and can be synthesised as follows:

- The most common change (mentioned by 12 NSUs) is that NSUs have started to **integrate innovation** (and support to advisory services) as new activities, with special focus on coordination with EIP-AGRI. A few networks mentioned other types of changes in the scope of activities (e.g. stronger focus on communication in Finland or more focus on RDP implementation in Portugal).
- Other changes are mostly **structural**, including NSUs being moved into new departments, outside of the capital, integrating fisheries, or moving within the MA and/or reducing the scope of outsourcing.
- Finally, changes include increase or reduction in **human and financial resources** of some NSUs.

Changes in the Finnish NSU

A number of changes are being introduced in the Finnish NSU. As far as the thematic scope is concerned, the NSU will integrate EMFF in the 2014-2020 programming period. The communication activities will be strengthened.

The NSU puts special emphasis on empowering network stakeholders, in order to make them 'doers' within the network. For instance, it encourages the actors of the network to implement trainings themselves. New tools, like service packages will be launched.



Table 2: Summary of main changes in NSU set-up and operation

Change	Examples	MS
Focus on innovation	<p>Adapting to new task on supporting innovation and advisory services, new beneficiaries, EIP-Network within wider network (BE-F)</p> <p>New EIP function/specialist and/or network (several)</p> <p>Advisory services (EE)</p> <p>A new sub-network on innovation (EL), Sub-network for EIP-AGRI managed by the agricultural extension service system (PL)</p>	<p>AT, BE-F, BE-W, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, NL, PL, UK-SCOT, UK-NI</p>
New activities (other than innovation)/ approach	<p>Training to LAGs (BE-W); New sub-network on LEADER (EL)</p> <p>Communication activities and stronger communication network activities (FI)</p> <p>Increase in the number of activities (previously mostly focused on LEADER) (HR)</p> <p>Sharing & dissemination of M&E results (BE-W)</p> <p>New tools, like service packages will be launched in order to activate and encourage actors to get more involved in activities (FI)</p> <p>More thematic working groups (PL)</p> <p>More focus on the implementation and execution of RDPs (ES, PT)</p> <p>More focus on water-management for agriculture and collective agricultural-nature management system (NL)</p>	<p>BE-W, EL, ES, FI, HR, NL, PL, PT</p>
Structural changes	<p>NSU is part of a new department (BE-F)</p> <p>NSU is now integrated within PA (FI); Change in the regional structure (now under PA) (CZ)</p> <p>Integrated with EMFF (FI), fisheries stakeholders will form part of an enlarged NRN (SE), co-operation of the NSU with colleagues from the Fisheries Department – 3 FLAGs (CY)</p> <p>Moving out of capital, old staff unlikely to commute - therefore new staff expected (DK, HU)</p> <p>Less outsourcing (CY), previously outsourced now moved within the MA (NL), planned to be moved within the MA (RO)</p>	<p>BE-F, CZ, CY, DK, FI, HU, NL, RO, SE</p>
Changes in human and/or financial resources	<p>Opportunity to increase staff (LU) Enhanced human and financial resources (MT), modest increase in staff, substantial increase in finance (UK-ENG)</p> <p>Increased core resourcing (UK-SCOT)</p> <p>Reduced budget and human resources planned (RO)</p>	

2.6 NRN priority themes & NSU needs

Question 6: What are the **priority RDP themes** that your network aims to cover/ focus on in the coming years through its activities?

When assessing the main RDP themes that networks are working on, it has to be acknowledged that several networks are not yet fully operational and/or do not have an action plan. Some of them are currently exploring possible themes of interest through their members.

Based on the analysis² two types of thematic areas were identified by networks (see details in *Annex II*):

1. Specific themes related to RDP measures:

- Networks primarily plan to focus on **innovation and LEADER/CLLD** (19 & 16 respondent NSUs mentioned both of these themes);
- Other common topics include **agriculture including food chains** (mentioned by 9 NSUs); **environment** (mentioned by 8 NSUs), including bio-diversity/bio-economy, water and waste management and landscape management;
- Finally **social inclusion** and **economic development/competitiveness** (both mentioned by 7 NSUs) and **youth** (6 NSUs) were also identified as key thematic area of NRNs.

2. Cross-cutting horizontal issues:

- **Communication** is the most common theme (mentioned by 8 NSUs), followed by the **launching of RDPs, improving RDP quality and administrative aspects** (mentioned by 5 NSUs).
- Other topics mentioned include **stakeholder involvement** and **Monitoring & Evaluation** aspects.

² Note that during the 2nd NRN meeting in Latvia (12-13 May 2015) key thematic areas that NRNs will focus on in the coming years were identified. For further information visit the 'Events' section of the ENRD website.

The box below presents an example on how thematic issues are identified and addressed in France.

Identification of priority RDP themes in France

A mapping exercise of regional RDPs was planned in order to identify and plan NRN activities according to main needs. As far as the priority themes are concerned **main thematic fields** were identified in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. The General Assembly highlighted several themes as priority for 2014-2020. During the first meeting of the NRN Committee (8 January 2015) **priority themes for the work in 2015** were selected and endorsed by the Ministry as follows:



- Agro-ecology
- Local food and food governance
- Social and solidarity economy
- Circular economy
- Urban-rural links

According to this prioritisation, two types of thematic projects are scheduled in 2015. These projects are thematic initiatives at national level (supported by the NRN) that aim to bring together national/regional actors and create a closer link with regional RDPs. They are framed by calls for projects that can support:

- **Thematic networks** addressing associations, rural networks experts to work on the same subject. These collective projects aim to foster rural development and are called 'collective mobilisation for rural development' (MCDR).
- **Pilot projects with an innovative character** (involving students or university groups, LEADER and EIP group).

Q7: What are the **main needs** of your NSU in the coming year? In which areas could **ENRD support** your work (including training topics, etc.)?

The most common needs and areas where ENRD support is requested (*see detailed information in Annex III*) are:

- **Exchange with regard to specific aspects of RDP implementation and monitoring & evaluation** (M&E), including exchange on the implementation of RDP measures (selection criteria, indicators, control, etc.), exchange between MAs, PAs and other relevant stakeholders and training for advisory services.
- **Exchange of experience among networks** in various forms (NRN meetings, discussion forums, and meetings) was also widely requested. Especially NSUs would like to find out about inspiring networking practices of other Member States. Among others, clarity on the role and co-operation with European Networks was mentioned.
- **Support for innovation** was commonly mentioned, with specific focus on how to set-up operational groups, how to support rural innovation, and how to connect with EIP-AGRI.
- Other support needs are related to **communication** (communication plans, training and tools), exchange and information on **NRN action plans and self-assessment** and

specific **technical guidance, training and tools for NSUs/NRNs** (e.g. training on animation techniques, social media tools and contacts database).

- Further aspects mentioned, include support for thematic exchanges, stakeholder engagement, LEADER/ CLLD and co-operation and good practices.

III. Membership of the NRN

3.1 Scope

The purpose of this part of the mapping report is to describe:

- the **key characteristics of NRN membership**; e.g. whether the membership is open for any stakeholder group or only to certain (invited/selected) stakeholders;
- **which stakeholder groups** are included in the NRNs;
- if there were any changes in the membership compared to the 2007-2013 programming period.

3.2 Membership of the NRN

Q8: Please indicate the basis of your **NRN membership**

Definition of NRN memberships

An NRN membership is considered to be **open** if any stakeholder (group/organisation) can join the NRN, and the NRN membership is not limited. Even when an NRN membership is open, often application forms/membership requests need to be submitted. However, these are rather formal procedures without denying any membership requests.

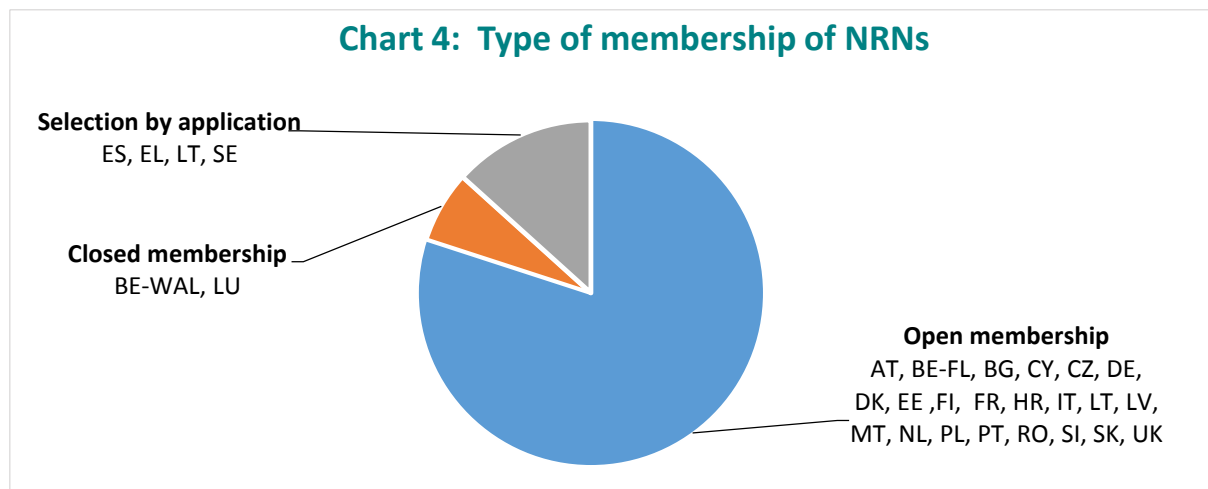


In some Member States, member organisations or individuals are selected by the NSU/MA **based on an application process**.

An NRN membership is considered to be **closed** when only certain (pre-selected) organisations can join the network.

As indicated in the chart below:

- 22 (i.e. almost 80% of) respondent NRNs have an open membership.
- 4 NRNs (Spain, Greece, Lithuania and Sweden) have certain procedures in place in order to assess and approve membership requests (applicants have to comply with certain criteria or fill-in a formal membership form).
- Only 2 NRNs indicated to have a closed membership, Belgium-Wallonia (30 members, in a structure of a permanent commission) and Luxembourg.



Q9: Please indicate which stakeholder groups are members (or will be members) of your NRN

NSUs were requested to indicate the type of organisations/individuals who are part of their membership, based on pre-defined stakeholder categories³. As presented in the chart below, almost all (i.e 90% or above) of the rural networks have the following stakeholder groups as members:

- ✓ Farmers and farmer's organisations
- ✓ Environmental organisations
- ✓ LAGs
- ✓ Local /regional public administration
- ✓ Forester and forester's organisations
- ✓ Research organisations and universities

A lower number (between 70% and 90%) of respondent NSUs indicated that NRN membership also includes local community organisations, national public administration, rural businesses & enterprises, LAG networks, other rural networks & umbrella organisations and business organisations.

Business organisations, regional networks, consultancy firms/private consultants and FLAGS⁴ are members of less than half of the respondent NRNs.

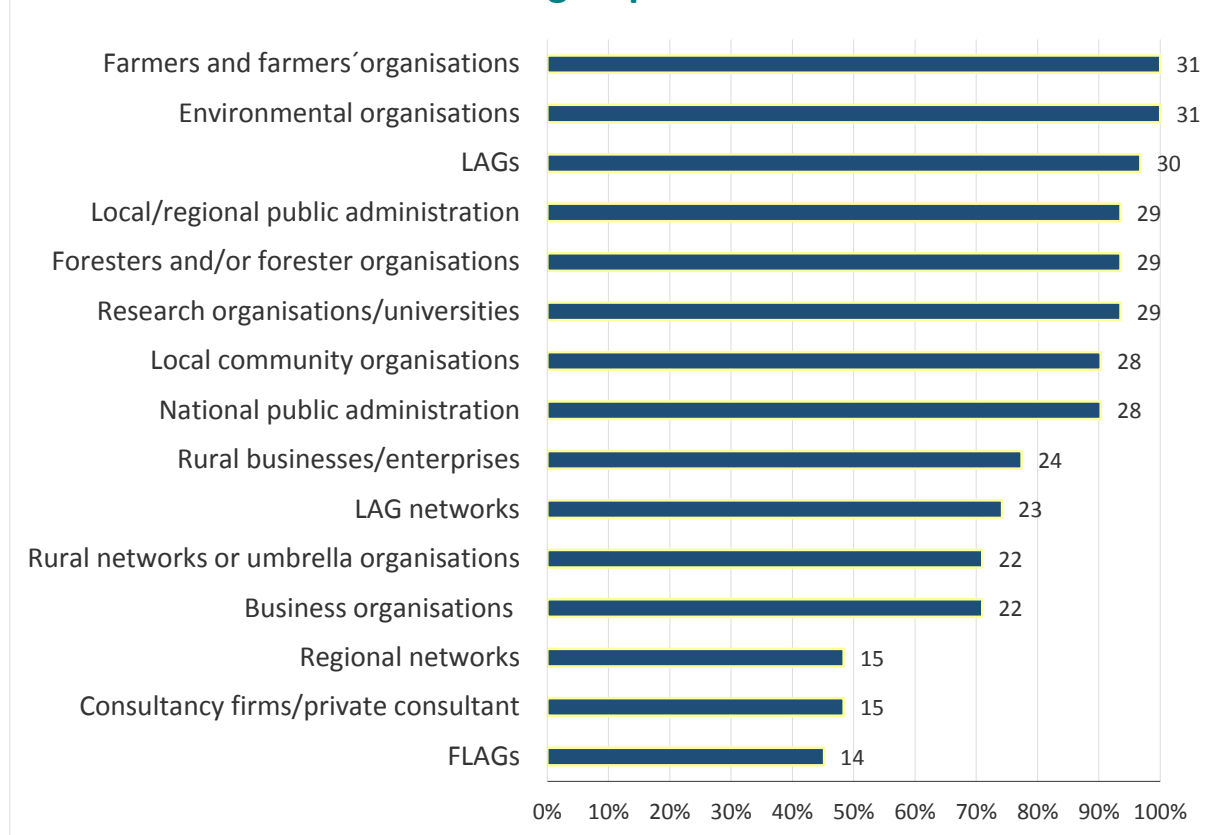
The survey gave the opportunity to indicate "other" stakeholder groups. Youth and young farmers were included as a specific stakeholder group by 7 rural networks (BE-WAL, BG, HR, LV, SE and SI). General public was also identified as a category of its own in the case of two Member States (ES, PT).

Q10: Has there been any significant changes in the membership of your NRN?

³ Farmers and farmer organisations; Foresters and/or forester organisations; Rural businesses/enterprises; Business organisations (e.g. federation of small Businesses, incubators, etc.); Environmental organisations; Local community organisations; LAGs; LAG networks; FLAGS; Consultancy firms/private consultant; National public administration; Local/regional public administration; Regional networks; Rural networks or umbrella organisations/associations of rural stakeholders; research organisations/universities

⁴ Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGS) are present in 24 of the 30 respondent countries (FLAGS are only established in countries with coastal areas).

Chart 5: Stakeholder group members within NRNs



Almost one third (9 out of 29 responding NSUs) envisage membership changes. The nature of changes relate to a great extent to the specific objectives of the NRNs (such as communicating rural development issues to the broader public, improving RDP implementation), the new tasks that NRNs have to carry-out (in relation to fostering innovation, communicating evaluation results), and the new regulatory framework for LEADER/CLLD.

The table below summarises the nature of these changes:

Table 3: Summary of main changes in NSU membership

Membership changes	MS
Inclusion of FLAGs and fishery representatives (involved now in co-operation with CLLD)	PL, SE, UK-WAL
Whole Pillar II stakeholders	UK-EN
SMEs and individuals (due to the partners of operation groups that are required to be members of the Rural Network) and rural economy actors	BG, ES, IT, PL, PT
Public Administration (willingness to improve relationship with a cross/section of departments, other funds and networks)	FR
Stakeholders linked to RDP evaluation processes	FR
Regional networks/local actors (better "field" information and impact)	FR

Membership changes	MS
Universities and research institutes (in relation to fostering innovation and setting-up EIP Network)	BE-FL, BG, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, PL
Economic Development Agencies, Chambers of Commerce	BE-WAL, ES

IV. Engagement of the NRN with various stakeholder groups

4.1 Scope

The purpose of the last part of the survey aimed at identifying:

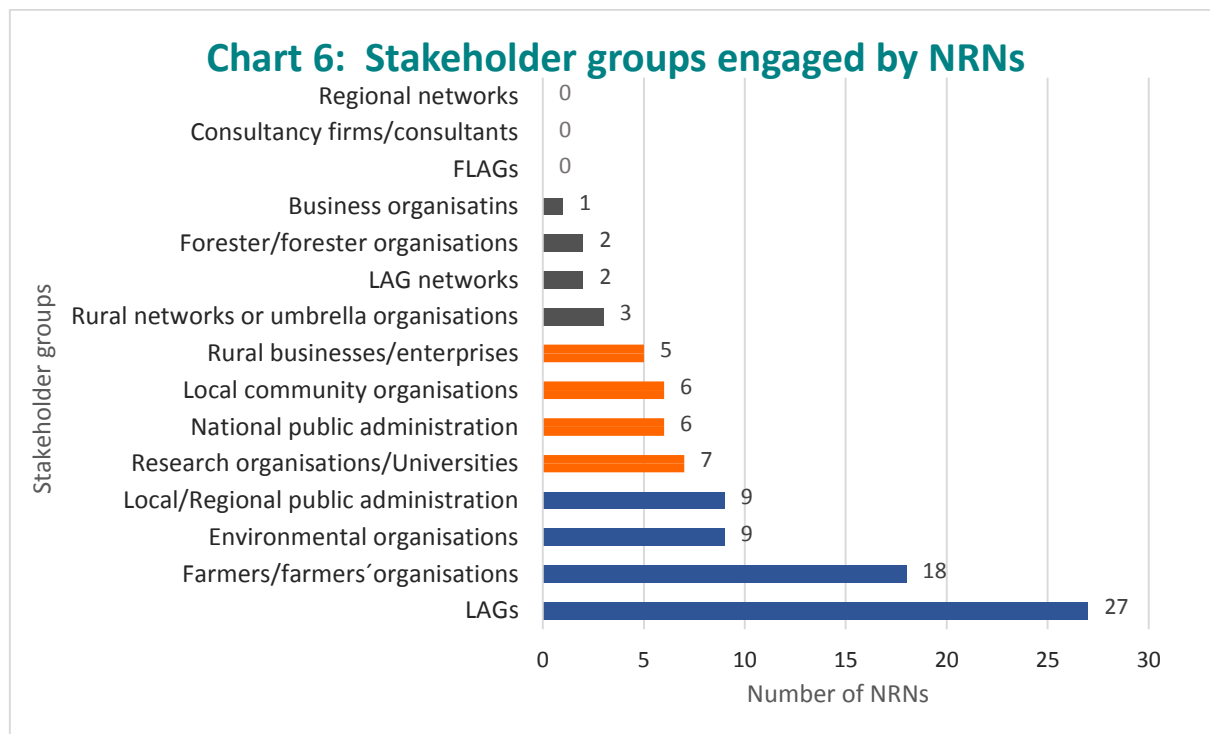
- the stakeholder groups that NRNs engage the most with;
- the ways in which the NRNs engage with these stakeholder groups;
- the expected results of this engagement;
- the main challenges of the NRN with regard to increasing stakeholder involvement in RDPs.

4.2 Engagement of the NRN with various stakeholder groups

Q11: Please indicate which three stakeholder groups do you engage the most with and how?

As the chart below shows, **LAGs remain one of the main target groups** for almost all of the NRNs during the 2014-2020 programming period (90% of respondents included them within the three stakeholder groups that they engage the most with). Farmers and farmer's organisations were mentioned by 60% of respondent NSUs; while environmental organisations and local/regional administrations are identified by 30% of the NSUs as groups they regularly work with.

Other categories of stakeholders were mentioned by less than 25% of NSUs, whereas, FLAGs, regional networks and consultancy firms were not identified as common target groups of NSU activities.



In relation to **how** NRNs engage with these groups, the survey showed that:

- NSUs commonly organise joint activities (e.g. local markets and agricultural shows) with **farmers and farmer organisations**. Other typical activities are thematic exchanges with the participation of farmers (including meetings, thematic working groups, etc.). Some NSUs involve farmers in the NRN structures, and organise regular consultations with them. Few of them mentioned organising trainings for farmers and farmer organisations.
- **LAGs** are most regularly targeted through various events and exchange platforms (including meetings, thematic groups and workshops). NSUs also commonly implement information sharing/awareness raising activities among LAGs, such as LEADER days, study visits and awards, and the collection and dissemination of good practices. Other forms of engagement include training and capacity-building and support for co-operation.
- The most common forms of engaging with **environmental organisations** are information sharing and thematic exchange with regard to various aspects of rural development programming.
- In some of the Member States **local administrations** are in regular contact with the NSU (e.g. networks organise regular consultations with them, and create the link between regional and national bodies)
- Finally, those who regularly involve **research institutes or universities**, typically organise events/meetings and consult them on certain thematic issues (e.g. indicators).

Detailed responses are presented in *Annex IV*.

Leading by example in Germany

In Germany, the NRN work is organised in a problem-and-theme-oriented way, by carrying out consultations to pick up the topics for which the NRN can bring more added value (provide information, collect examples and organise meetings where stakeholders and experts come together).



The principle of “leading by example” stands behind every action, with the idea of bringing the whole system together: picking-up the practical examples and good practices to overcome constraints identified while implementing the programmes.

Q12: Do activities targeted at these groups directly aim to increase their involvement in RDPs?

Most NSUs expect that the engagement with stakeholder groups will increase their involvement in RDPs, but only 50% of the networks provided written answers on concrete expected results from this engagement. Typical results have been classified in the following 5 categories (more detailed responses are presented in *Annex V*):

- ✓ **Raising general awareness** on RDP and funding opportunities;
- ✓ **Mobilisation of stakeholders** with the aim to reach out to specific stakeholder groups and/or creation and strengthening of the capacity of certain groups;
- ✓ **Increasing the understanding of RDPs**, e.g. raising awareness of the RDP structure and opportunities or discuss specific aspects of RDPs;
- ✓ **Improve RDP measures take-up** including information provision and familiarisation of beneficiaries with the content of specific measures;
- ✓ **Improve RDP implementation**, including sharing good practices, working with public authorities, MA and PA, reducing the error rates and adjusting measures to evolving needs.⁵

Q13: What are the main challenges of your NRN with regard to increasing stakeholder involvement in RDPs?

Increasing stakeholder involvement in Rural Development

Increasing the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development is a common objective for the ENRD and the NRNs (according to the Rural Development Regulation No 1305/2013).

This means not only having more engaged stakeholders within the activities of each network, but also that this involvement results in a better understanding of the opportunities of the Rural Development Programmes, and in an improved rural policy implementation.

A good working relation between the NSU and RDP managers is also a key part of the process. For instance, in Bulgaria, the NSU team stressed the importance of the participation of MA representatives to their events and trainings, stressing that “*the results of the discussions have to be taken into account in the RDP design and implementation*”.



⁵ The improvement of RDP implementation often focuses on LEADER/LAGs.

The typical challenges that NSUs face with regard to involving stakeholders more actively in the RDPs are summarised in the table below.

Table 4: Summary of main challenges of stakeholder involvement

Challenge	Range of answers
<i>Identify stakeholder groups and their needs</i>	<p>Identifying the right/crucial stakeholders</p> <p>Creating links between stakeholders from different sectors in order to reach common understanding on certain areas</p> <p>Identifying and defining relevant topics in co-operation with stakeholders</p> <p>Identifying stakeholder specific implementation problems and informational needs (mostly EAFRD related)</p>
<i>Addressing stakeholder needs effectively & developing the right activities</i>	<p>Keeping the network focused on the bigger picture (the whole of Rural Development)</p> <p>Tailor specific activities that concern different stakeholder groups (dealing with the mix of expectations)</p> <p>Being able to tackle the real needs of some stakeholder groups (like LAGs) at the right time</p>
<i>Lack of enthusiasm and understanding (no real demand)</i>	<p>Lack of networking attitude</p> <p>Making stakeholders feel that the NRN is important to them</p> <p>Getting stakeholders interested in the network</p> <p>Getting people enthusiastic on the reasons to be involved in Rural Development activities</p> <p>Showing stakeholders the added value of the network (not everyone understand what the network is and can do for them)</p> <p>Not attiring stakeholders that are already networking through other networks (actors stay in contact regularly in smaller Member States)</p> <p>Persuading beneficiaries to share their experience with others</p>
<i>Reaching certain stakeholder groups</i>	<p>Attracting a younger audience</p> <p>Being able to engage with stakeholders from all parts of the programme and not just LEADER or Priority 6 ones</p> <p>Involving the agricultural sector (many other means of communication, own business-oriented focus in their activities, different views from different Unions/Organizations)</p> <p>Engaging the fisheries sector stakeholders in the rural networking</p> <p>Reaching directly to farmers and researchers for innovation related activities</p>

Challenge	Range of answers
Lack of resources and other institutional constraints	<p>Ensuring sufficient staff (with strong knowledge on CAP and RDPs)</p> <p>Organisational changes</p> <p>Budget constrains (including sudden budget cuts)</p> <p>Involvement of stakeholders is a time/consuming process</p>
Difficulty to create and show a real added value of participation	<p>Creating a real added value for the members as a result of their involvement in the network, and measuring this added value</p> <p>Explaining agriculture and RDP to the broader public (“my” tax money)</p> <p>Reaching a stronger level of dissemination of the networking results</p>

Early involvement - the key for stakeholder engagement

Getting people on board when shaping the NRN programme was identified by the Italian Rural Network as a crucial factor for involving stakeholders in the implementation of the programme.

For the 2014-2020 Programming Period, the biannual programmes’ priorities and activities will be discussed in consultation with a partnership of stakeholders.

“Stakeholders are particularly willing to participate and interact in the network when involved and listened in the very first moments of the programming phase. By shaping the NRN priorities they gain ownership of the activities that will take place to follow the action plan” – says Riccardo Passero from the Italian NRN.



V. Conclusions

The first NRN mapping report of 2014-2020 aimed to analyse how and when NRNs are being set-up for this programming period, with specific focus on how NRNs select and engage their members in rural development.

At the time of writing this report, slightly over 50% of Network Support Units (NSUs)/NRNs are operational, and an additional 16% are still running from the previous programming period. Most commonly the NSUs are set up within the Managing Authorities, which raises a number of challenges with regard to the mandate as well as the division of roles and responsibilities of NSUs. Most Member States operate their NSUs at the national level (in some cases complemented with regional antennas and offices). Only 4 Member States (Germany, France, Belgium and the UK) have regional NSUs.

As far as the changes in the operation and structure of NRNs are concerned, the most common one is the new focus on innovation. However, structural changes also occur in some Member States (including moving the NSU within the MA, to a new government department or to a new location). Similarly, most NRNs plan to focus on innovation & LEADER/CLLD in the coming years. However, other relevant RDP themes (including agriculture, social inclusion and

environment) and methodological aspects (such as communication and launching of the RDPs) were also identified as common focus areas for the NRNs' work.

NRNs particularly requested ENRD support in exchanging about RDP implementation aspects among various stakeholders, supporting exchange and co-operation among NRNs/NSUs and support for communication and NRN self-assessment (including training activities).

Most NRNs have an open membership. Changes compared to the previous programming period are due to new and more specific networking objectives, new types of NRN tasks/activities, and the new regulatory framework with regard to LEADER/CLLD. Farmers/farmer organisations and LAGs remain the target groups that NRNs most regularly engage with.

Typical challenges of stakeholder engagement with other groups include the identification of stakeholders and their needs, developing the right type of activities for specific groups, overcoming a lack of enthusiasm and reaching out to certain (hard-to-reach) stakeholder groups.

Annexes

Annex I: Survey questionnaire to NSUs

Member State:

Name/organisation of NSU:.....

Contact person for survey:

I. State-of-play & set-up of the NRN

[Insert outcomes of the discussions during NRN meeting from the [excel file](#) – and check results]

1. Has a Network Support Unit (NSU) been already set up in your Member State (region, in case of UK, BE and FR) for the 2014-2020 programming period?

	Continues from last period	New structure was set up
2014-20 NSU is operational	Since when?	Since when?
2014-20 NSU is not formally operational	When expected?	When expected?
2007-2013 NSU is still running – 2014-20 will be set up later	When expected?	When expected?

Please describe briefly the state-of-play (e.g. how/in what forms new structures are set up, what are the main changes, etc.):

2. Please indicate in which form you are planning to set-up your NSU: [NB: personalised version is possible based on the results of previous NSU mapping survey]

- Established within the MA
- Established within the MA with some activities outsourced or contracted to a ministerial agency or other institution
- Established within the MA with some activities outsourced or contracted to an external service provider
- Outsourced to external service provider
- Delegated to a ministerial agency or other institution
- Other or comments on the above:

In case there are some activities that are outsourced/contracted, please describe briefly which ones (e.g. event organisation, etc.)

3. How will the support for national or regional rural networks in your Member State be organised from 2014? [NB: personalised version is possible based on the results of previous NSU mapping survey]

- National NSU
- National NSU and regional NSUs
- National NSU and regional antennas/secretariats/offices
- Regional Support Units only
- Other or comments on the above:

4. Have there been any significant changes in the set-up of the NSU in your Member State compared to the 2007-2013 programming period? (e.g. previously outsourced, now moved within the MA, etc.)

5. Have there been any significant changes in the operation/planned activities of the NSU compared to the 2007-2013 programming period? (Please indicate current number of staff within the NSU)

6. What are the priority RDP themes that your network aims to cover through its activities/focus on in the coming years?

7. What are the main needs of your NSU/NRN in the coming year? In which areas could ENRD support your work (including training topics, etc.)?

[II. Membership of the NRN](#)

8. Please indicate the basis of your NRN membership:

- a. NRN is open to all rural stakeholders.
- b. NRN has a closed membership (organisations invited)

[If this is the case, how many members your NRN has approximately?]

c. NRN is partly open: potential members request to be members (and their membership request is evaluated by [please specify])

d. Other or comments on the above:

9. Please indicate (tick the box below on) which of the following stakeholder groups (and/or others) are members (or will be members) of your NRN:

- farmers and farmers' organisations
- foresters and/or forester organisations
- rural businesses/enterprises
- business organisations (e.g. federation of small businesses, incubators, etc)
- environmental organisations
- local community organisations
- LAGs
- LAG Networks
- FLAGs
- consultancy firms/ private consultant
- national public administration
- local/regional public administration
- regional networks
- rural networks or umbrella organisations/associations of rural stakeholders
- research organisations/ universities
- Other (please specify:)

10. Has there been any significant changes in the membership of your NRN? If yes, please specify.

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III. Engagement of the NRN with various stakeholder groups

11. Please indicate which three stakeholder groups do you engage the most with and how (e.g. specific activities, methods, etc.)?

Stakeholder group	Ways of working (e.g. specific activities targeted at this group)
Stakeholder group 1: [type of stakeholders]	
Stakeholder group 2: [type of stakeholders]	
Stakeholder group 3: [type of stakeholders]	

12. Do activities targeted at these groups directly aim to increase their involvement in RDPs? If yes, how (what are the expected results)? If not, what is the main objective of engaging with these groups?

Stakeholder group (same as above)	Expected results with regard to increased involvement in rural development implementation
Stakeholder group 1:	
Stakeholder group 2:	
Stakeholder group 3:	

13. What are the main challenges of the NRN with regard to increasing stakeholder involvement in RDPs?

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Annex II: Priority themes identified by NRNs

Table A: Priority RDP themes identified by NRNs (Q6)

Theme	Specifications	MS	No of MS
Innovation	Innovation will be very important as the NRN will act as the EIP support facilitating the creation of OGs (ES) Intelligent growth (FR- see examples box) Reinforce innovation, sustainability and competitiveness (NL)	AT, BE-W, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LU, LV, NL, RO, SE, SI, UK-ENG, PL, PT	19
LEADER/ CLLD/ LAGs	Rural development through the 26 new LAGs. New jobs and improved living conditions (DK) Promoting co-operation between regions and MS (ES) Training and exchange of knowledge/experience (ES) Multifunding in relation to local and regional development (DE), Coordination of CLLD (SE) Fisheries networking (SE)	AT, DK, EE, EL, ES, HR, LU, NL, PL, DE, RO, SE, SI, UK-ENG, UK-W, PT	16
Agriculture & forestry	Agriculture & innovation in agriculture (BE-W) Local food (EE), Maltese quality produce (MT) Increase competitiveness of farmers (esp. family farmers) and promotion of agriculture among youth (LV) Sustainable livestock (MT) Integrated consulting for farmers (DE) Food chain organisation (HR, FR), local markets and short supply chains (HU)	AT, BE-W, DE, EE, FR, HR, HU, LV, MT	9
Environment	Biodiversity (AT, HU) and ecosystems (HU) Bio-economy (FI) Sustainable growth (FR – see examples box) Renewable energy, carbon conservation, developing new carbon sequestration capacity (HU) Water, waste and energy (MT), improvement of water-quality (NL) Nature and landscape (MT, NL) Increased competitiveness of green businesses/ Nature tourism (SE)	AT, FI, HU, EL, MT, NL, SE, UK-ENG	8

Theme	Specifications	MS	No of MS
Social inclusion/ Inclusive growth	Basic services (AT) Strengthening of social links in rural areas (FR – See examples box) Social inclusion (HR), enhancing social inclusion/ reducing poverty (HU) Civil society including schools and university (IT) Integration of new citizens (SE)	AT, FR, HR, IT, MT, SE, UK-W	7
Economic development/ competitiveness	Competitiveness (EL) Poverty reduction & economic development (HR) Diversification of businesses in rural Ares, increase competitiveness of farmers (LV) Commercial services in rural areas (SE)	EL, HR, HU, IT, LV, NL, SE	7
Youth	Youth (including young farmers) (LV), Rural youth (SE) Young farmers (NL, SI) Young farmers & family farms (RO)	FI, LV, NL, RO, SE, SI	6
Co-operation	Co-operation under Art. 35 (DE)	DE, RO, SI, UK-ENG	4
Other	Climate change and climate protection (AT)	AT	1

Table B: Cross-cutting themes identified by NRNs (Q6)

Theme	Specifications	MS	No of MS
Communication	<p>Communication & organisation of information events (BE-F)</p> <p>Research of possibilities of visualisation and social media (BE-F)</p> <p>Communication plan coordinated with all RDP's Communication Strategy (ES)</p> <p>Enhancing the communication under the RDP from regional to EU-level: activation of communication network and stronger co-operation with regional officers (FI)</p> <p>Communication, animation and support to deliver the 5 main RDP priorities (MT)</p> <p>informing the broader public and beneficiaries about rural development policy and financing options (SI)</p> <p>To inform all the stakeholders about RDP measures, how to implement RDP and show the good practice examples (SK) (PT)</p>	BE-F, CY, ES, FI, MT, SI, SK, PT	8
Launching New RDP	<p>Improve policy quality (CY), Better implementation of RDP (SI)</p> <p>Launching new RDP (FI)</p> <p>Administrative aspects of policy implementation (PA, MAs, LAGs, OGs, administrations, partnerships under M16) (IT)</p> <p>Administrative burden (DE)</p>	CY, DE, FI, IT, SI	5
Enhance stakeholder participation	<p>Greater involvement of stakeholders in RD (SI)</p> <p>Facilitating effective engagement of stakeholders and feedback loop (UK-ENG)</p>	CY, SI, UK-ENG, PT	4
M&E	Preparing LAGs for M&E	BE-F, UK-ENG, PT	3
Other	<p>Activation of regional networks (FI)</p> <p>Network self-assessment (BE-FL, PT)</p>	FI, BE-FL	2

Annex III: Main needs of NRNs in the coming year(s) & requested ENRD support

Theme	Specifications	MS	No of MS
General RDP implementation & M&E	<p>Support for M&E tools (BE-FL), Review RDP evaluation aspects (PT)</p> <p>Good practice and lessons from other MS for eligibility of costs, use of indicators (how to collect, measure, analyse monitoring indicators), control & audit (CZ), (IT)</p> <p>Creation of database/ Comparison of implementation/running/effects with regard to measures between EU MS (pros and cons, how to convince administration, target groups, calls, etc...) (DE, IT, NL), Explanation of RDP measures (FR, IT), Clustering of NRN based on RDPs with same needs (MT)</p> <p>Update on the changes of legislation and new rules (ES)</p> <p>Meetings/exchange for MAs/ PAs and EU representatives targeting RDP measures, aiming at clarifying management and control aspects (AT) (FR) (IT) (NL) (UK-SCOT)</p> <p>Training of multipliers/ advisory services (AT) Co-operation with advisory services (EE), What does co-operation between advisors entail (LT)</p>	AT, BE-FL, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, IT, NL, MT, PT, UK-SCOT	12
Exchange of experience among networks	<p>Facilitate staff exchange (BE-FL)</p> <p>Exchange with other de-centralized countries (FR)</p> <p>Share inspiring examples of networking actions, examples/good practices from NRNs (EL) (NL) (PL)</p> <p>Support networking from different MS/ Organisation of web-NRN meetings (for example every other meeting could be a web meeting) (DE) NRN-Events, seminars, workshops: Networking (AT) Share conditions to organise an NRN meeting (SK)</p> <p>More join up of EIP, ENRD and EENRD (UK-ENG), Training on the interaction with other EU networks (UK-NI)</p>	AT, BE-FL, DE, EL, FR, NL, PL, SK, UK-ENG, UK-NI	10
Innovation support	<p>Co-operation with/for, setting-up of Operation Groups (BG) (EL) (AT) (ES),</p> <p>Stimulate innovation (HR) Promoting innovative approaches (RDP implementation) and benchmarking (BE-W), sharing innovative ideas (FR) support rural innovations and EIP work through network activities (FI)</p>	BG, BE-W, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU,	14

Theme	Specifications	MS	No of MS
	<p>Creating stronger links to EIP AGRI; Information on EIP (FR) (UK-WAL) (UK-NI)</p> <p>Share experience and information on how to integrate innovation in NRN activities/processes (HU) (LT) (SI) (FI)</p>	LT, PL, SI, UK-WAL, UK-NI, PT	
Communication	<p>Tools and tips to develop a successful communication plan, including demarcation of responsibilities among NSU and MA (BG) (LT) (LU)</p> <p>Provision of alternative ideas on RDP communication and communication between NRN members (EL)</p> <p>Training on communication (strategies, including visual identity aspects, web-design...) (ES) (PT)</p> <p>Strategic and operational support to digital and interactive communication (Social media-Twitter, Facebook-, website, participative conferences, webconferences...) (FR) (IT) (PT)</p>	BG, ES, EL, FR, IT, LT, LU, PT	8
Network action planning & self-assessment	<p>How to assess the added value of networking/ self-assessment tools, ENRD data-collection, indicators, monitoring of indicators (SE) (BE-FL) (FI) (PT), Develop further NRN evaluation framework (MT)</p> <p>Exchange on creating and implementing an Action Plan for the Rural Network (CY), Collection/distribution of action plans (practical) of the NSUs (DE)</p>	BE-FL, CY, DE, FI, MT, PT, SE	7
Guidance & training for NSUs	<p>Animation techniques for meetings, seminar organisation, discussion forums (PT), training animation methods & uses (FR), suggestion and material for training topics (UK-WAL)</p> <p>Interactive contacts database (for identifying thematic experts) (FR), Database of thematic experts (MT)</p> <p>Social media/ discussion forums (e.g. to exchange about the implementation of specific measures, etc.) (AT, IT)</p> <p>Foreign languages (ES, PT)</p>	AT, ES, FR, IT, MT, PT, UK-WAL	7
Thematic exchange	<p>Organise working groups on specific topics (e.g. biodiversity, simplification, innovation, communication to and involvement of stakeholders...) (DE)</p> <p>Exchange of experience: integration of new citizens in rural areas, public procurement in short supply chains, rural youth and new rural businesses (SE), Local markets, rural tourism, short supply chains (UK-</p>	DE, FR, IT, SE, UK-SCOT, PT	6

Theme	Specifications	MS	No of MS
	SCOT) Thematic conferences on RDP measures (FR), Meetings on specific RDP measures (IT)		
Stakeholder involvement	Stakeholder engagement (EL) Training on communication skills, motivating stakeholders and members (SI) How to constructively engage with stakeholders (best use of time) (UK-ENG) Development of partnership among NRR members (HR) Feeding and motivation of the Network (NL)	EL, HR, NL, SI, UK-ENG	5
Exchange LEADER/CLLD	on Exchange of experience of multi-funded solutions for CLLD (SE) Information on LEADER choices in other countries (study visits, exchange) (BE-FL) / CLLD practices from countries such as SE, PL (EE) Support (training for LAGs) and face to face events for transnational co-operation (LAGs)/ practical examples on CLLD (DE)	BE-FL, DE, EE, SE, PT	5
Co-operation	Facilitate TNC (EL) Guidance on facilitating co-operation (HR) Assistance in circulating transnational co-operation partner searches (UK-WAL)	EL, HR, UK-WAL, PT	4
Good practice collection	Workshop on selection criteria of Good Practices (BG) Publication/collection of examples what rural development means (regarding practical examples for example concerning CLLD) in the different member states (DE)	BG, DE, EL	3

Annex IV: The ways in which NSUs engage with the most targeted NRN members

Stakeholder group	How		MS	Nº MS
Farmers and farmers organisations	Information sharing & joint activities	Stands in agricultural shows (UK-NI) Organising local markets (SK) Networking between producers from different regions (BG) Benchmarking (BE-WAL) Spreading information on Pillar I-Pillar II and greening (BE-FL)	BE-FL, BE-WAL, BG, CZ, EE, NL, SK, UK-NI	8
	Thematic exchange	Workshops, Meetings, Forums, Thematic Working Groups, Conferences	BE-WAL, LT, LV, MT, PT, SE	6
	Strong representation in NRN structure & consultations	Chair position in the largest thematic working group (SE) Member of the NRN steering committee (SE) Giving attention to small farmers not represented in any other organisation (LV) Every two weeks 4/5 representatives of farmer's organisations are in contact with the NSU (IT) Use their networks to connect to RDP-EIP (NL) Discussions concerning the new programme (LT)	IT, LV, LT, NL, SE	5
	Training	Training activities on innovation brokerage (PL)	CZ, MT, PL	3

Stakeholder group	How		MS	Nº MS
LAGs	Thematic exchange	Workshops, Meetings, Forums, Thematic Working Groups Co-organising Slovenian Rural Parliament (SI) Supporting and managing the CLLD coordination group (SE) Improvement linkages between LAGs, MA, PA (LV)	AT, BE-WAL, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, HR, LU, LV, NL, PT, PL, UK-NI, SE, SI, SK	19
	Information Sharing/Awareness raising	LAG and LEADER project visits (SK) Study trip to Austria (LU) Annual LEADER Day event (LU) Awards (ES, EE) Best practice collection and dissemination (EE) (BG)	AT, BE-WAL, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, LU, SK, HR	12
	Training	Various training activities for LAGs (several of the MS, topics not specified) Support in starting up communication and benchmarking (BE-FL)	BE-FL, BE-WAL, CZ, EL, HR, LU, LT, MT, PL, PT	10
	Support co-operation	to Support joint projects	BE-WAL, PL, MT, LT, PT	5
	Strong representation in NRN structure	in Part of the “Institutional partnership”; One section of the 2014-2020 NRN programme (section 114.1) is dedicated to GALs (IT) Specific Committee to follow LEADER matters within RDPs (FR)	FR, IT, SK	3
	Consultations	Discussions concerning the new programme (LT)	DE, LT, PL	3

Stakeholder group	How		MS	Nº MS
Environmental organisations	Information sharing	Seminars, events Use their networks to connect to RDP-EIP (NL) Annual conference, information campaign and awards (AT)	AT, BG, CZ, DE, NL	5
	Thematic exchange	Increasing co-operation between environmental and agricultural stakeholders could create longer-term benefits for water quality (LU) Discussing issues on programming (constrains and good practice) (DE) Research for common indicators (CY)	CZ, CY, DE, IT, LU	5
	Funding/shaping certain activities	Project implementation/event organisation through a call for proposals (LT)	DE, LT	2
Local/Regional public administration	Information sharing/coordination	Local administrations are daily in contact with the NSU, being informed and consulted concerning the network activities (IT) Aiming at establishing an internal network between regional and national level (FR) Designation of LAG-areas (DK)	AT, BE-FL, DK, FR, IT	5
	Training/Capacity building	Peer-to-peer trainings (FI) Training for advisory and administrative staff (AT)	AT, FI, FR	3
Research Organisations/ Universities	Information sharing	Involvement in EIP seminars, in the corresponding conference of the Greek NRN and in several thematic working groups (EL) Meetings, workshops, events to support the creation of Operational Groups (ES,CY,PT)	EL, ES, FR, PT	4
	Thematic exchange	An agency called “Observatory on rural development” will help to get statistics, trends and expertise on evolution on implementation of RDP (FR) Cross-fertilization meetings (FI)	FI, FR	2
	Funding activities	Project implementation/event organisation through a call for proposals (LT)	LT	1

Annex V: Expected added value of stakeholder engagement with regard to RDP quality

✓ **Raise awareness:**

Raising general awareness on RDP and funding opportunities. (AT, BE-FL, CZ, PT, SI, SK, UK NI)

✓ **Activate stakeholders:**

Activities are carried out with the objective of reaching a wide range of stakeholders, including youth (AT, BG, CZ, EE, SE), local food actors (EE) and small farmers (LV)

Creation or strengthening of organisations and co-operatives (RO)

✓ **Increase RDP understanding:**

Activities are carried out with the objective of raising awareness on RDP structure and its possibilities (AT, CZ, PT, SI, SK, UK-NI)

Specific meetings arranged/scheduled to follow certain matters on the RDPs (FR)

✓ **Improve RDP measures take-up**

Stakeholders familiar on how to submit an application (CZ)

Potential beneficiaries informed about funding opportunities, and consequently more diversified innovative projects and initiatives (ES)

Better co-operation with certain actors to improve take-up of certain measures (PL, referring to research community in relation to innovation)

✓ **Improve RDP implementation**

Increased sharing of good agricultural practice among peers in relation to the challenges (BE-WAL)

Public authorities familiar with RDP challenges (DK)

Improved understanding of the MA and PA about the problems faced by the RDP beneficiaries (BG)

New measures implemented effectively (advisory services for farms, FI)

Adjustment of RDP to evolving needs (MT)

Reduce error rate (AT, SI)

In regards to LEADER:

- Enhanced interregional co-operation and exchange of knowledge (ES)
- The quality and effectiveness of LEADER work improves (FI); effective LEADER implementation (MT) (SE)
- Increased capacity for LAG strategies implementation (PL), and improve LEADER projects implementation (LV)