

Brief for Working Groups

Structure. The Programme of the ERP 2015 Gathering includes, on 5 November, two sessions of Working Groups - 11.00 to 12.30; and 14.00 to 15.30.

There will be 12 Working Groups, each on a stated theme, taking place at the same time in different rooms, either adjoining the Kubin Hall or elsewhere in the town.

Each theme of the morning session will be repeated in the same place, and with the same facilitator and rapporteur, for the afternoon session.

All delegates are being invited to state their desired choice of working group, with order of preference. The organisers will allocate delegates to groups, using their first and second choices wherever possible. The aim is to have, in each group, a similar number of participants, and to achieve a mixture of nationalities and stakeholders

The allocation to groups will be in the packs, and on the labels, given to all delegates on arrival.

Before they travel to Schärding, all participants will receive the draft Manifesto, which will be debated and improved during the Gathering and adopted at the final session; and also the draft Report 'ALL Europe Shall Live', which summarises the ideas gathered during the ERP national campaigns and forms a background document for the Working Groups.

Purpose. The purpose of each Working Groups is to :

- a. focus on one major theme that arose from the national campaigns
- b. clarify the issues involved in that theme
- c. point to the actions and policies which are needed
- d. collect examples of that action and policy, which may contribute to reports to be published after the Gathering
- e. suggest any necessary sharpening of the words in the draft Manifesto.

The rapporteur of each Group will record the outcome and will take part in a team session in the late afternoon of 5 November in order to update the Manifesto for the plenary discussion on 6 December.

Themes. The Working Group themes are :

1. Young people – how to keep them, and enable them to thrive, in the countryside
2. Newcomers, migrants and refugees – the opportunity and the challenge
3. Social inclusion – fighting exclusion, and enabling Roma and other minorities to make a good life in the countryside
4. Village services and infrastructure – how they may be sustained and improved
5. Small and family farms – their future in a changing Europe
6. Diversifying the rural economy
7. The LEADER approach – and the opportunity offered by Community Led Local Development
8. Leadership in rural development – who provides the impulse for change ?
9. Associations and civil society organisations – their role in rural life
10. People and governments – building the partnership
11. Small towns – their role as focal points of rural communities and rural economies
12. Land, energy and sustainability – the 'green' dimension

A short initial brief for each Working Group is offered in the next pages.



1. Young people – how to keep them, and enable them to thrive, in the countryside

Loss of young people. Many of the ERP national reports record the distress of rural communities about the decline of population. They perceive 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 economies, and the loss of services prompts more loss of population. In particular, there is widespread concern about the loss of young people from rural areas, and what this loss implies for lack of continuity in enterprises, threats to rural services, and lack of support for old people.

What causes this out-migration ? Can it be halted and even reversed ?

The reports suggest that the 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.

What are the prospects for young entrepreneurs ? How can they be helped ?

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 measures aimed specifically at young entrepreneurs.

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to young people in rural areas ?

2. Newcomers, migrants and refugees– the opportunity and the challenge

The history of mankind in Europe, from the ancient time when the first people arrived from Africa, has been one of population movements, migrations, upheavals, refugees, creation of new communities and arrival of newcomers to established communities, with all the tensions that go with this constant flux.

Can the decline in population of so many of Europe's rural communities be creatively offset and reversed by welcoming newcomers ?

The ERP national reports show that 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. Moreover, migration has been recognized by the European Commission as a necessary process, as expressed in a Green Paper in 2005, which stated that the EU would need 20 million migrants between 2010 and 2030 to cover the decline of its economically active population.

How can rural areas contribute to the search by refugees for new and settled life ? What will be the gain, and what the possible pain ? What creative action is needed ?

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 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 are needed on farms or enterprises ?



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What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the needs of newcomers, migrants and refugees ?

3. Social inclusion – fighting exclusion, and enabling Roma and other minorities to make a good life in the countryside

How can the EU 2020 goal of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth be expressed and realised in rural Europe ? What more needs to be done to achieve the targeted reduction in levels of poverty ?

The ERP national reports record a variety of aspects of social exclusion, and call for action to address this human tragedy. For some, the focus is on those afflicted by poverty; by physical or mental handicap; or by old age and loneliness. Others focus on the exclusion of women from social and economic activity. There is much concern about the difficulties faced in some countries by ethnic or religious minorities.

How to address the needs of Roma communities ?

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 a large proportion are among the poorest and most excluded of all Europe's rural people. They deserve support, through efforts of development which must be sensitively related to their particular character and needs.

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. (ERP national report from Hungary)

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to social inclusion, and the needs of minorities, including Roma ?

4. Village services and infrastructure – how they may be sustained and improved ?

The ERP national reports record the progressive 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.

How can this decline in village services be halted ?

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. Service providers, in both the public and private sectors, should accept responsibility to sustain services, even in areas of declining population. Rural residents themselves may need to take initiative to save and strengthen rural services, but this can pose significant challenges for them.



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How can infrastructure be brought up to modern standards ?

Almost all of the ERP national reports emphasise the importance of adequate infrastructure in supporting viable rural communities and economies in rural areas. Infrastructure includes water supplies, sewerage systems, electricity, gas or oil supplies, transport systems and telecommunications. Inadequacy in almost all aspects of infrastructure is widely reported in the Western Balkan and Black Sea countries. Complaints about inadequate transport systems are heard in many of Europe's rural regions. There is high concern in many rural regions about the inadequacy of telecommunication systems, which are becoming a major factor in the wellbeing of rural economies, services and households.

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the rural services and infrastructure ?

5. Small and family farms – their future in a changing Europe

The ERP 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 small 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.

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.

In some of the Black Sea countries, national independence in the 1990s was rapidly followed by widespread privatisation 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 non-government organisations are offering solutions to the long-term wellbeing of these communities, generally through the promotion of cooperatives.

How can the contribution made by small and family farmers to the well-being of rural regions and to Europe's broader benefit be sustained in a changing world ?

The larger family farms may 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. But these difficult processes of change will need active and sensitive support from governments, international donors, CSOs and others through measures such as a support to cooperatives and producer groups, retirement of elderly farmers, support to young farmers etc.

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the future of small and family farms ?



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6. Diversifying the rural economy

The ERP national reports show that rural people acknowledge the reality and the benefits of the European common market and its place in world trade. But they also 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.

How can we sustain the vitality and viability of local and sub-regional economies ?

The ERP national reports point to the challenge of sustaining the vitality and viability of local and sub-regional economies throughout rural Europe, and the need to diversify many of these economies. 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.

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the future of local and sub-regional economies in rural regions ?

7. The LEADER approach – and the opportunity offered by Community Led Local Development

The LEADER approach is already widely used throughout the European Union, and is under development in many Western Balkan and Black Sea 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 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.

How can we gain maximum benefit from LEADER and CLLD within the European Union ?

The ERP national reports include some criticism related to the sometimes cumbersome procedures and perceived restrictions imposed by governments upon the activity of Local Action Groups. Some national reports express the hope that governments will apply vigorously the potential for a multi-funded approach to rural development opened up by the CLLD strategy deployed by the European Union; and particularly that the mandatory application of CLLD to the EAFRD will lead to a strengthening of Local Action Groups.

How can we promote application of the LEADER approach in the Western Balkan and Black Sea countries ?

The LEADER approach might 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. It is becoming familiar in the Western Balkans and in some Black Sea countries, partly through initiatives of international organisations and non-government networks, and partly through the IPARD and ENPARD programmes being introduced alongside national rural development programmes with funding from the European Commission. Sub-regional partnerships are emerging, ready to take advantage of LEADER funding when that starts to flow.



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What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the LEADER approach and CLLD ?

8. Leadership in rural development – who provides the impulse for change ?

Participants in the ERP 2015 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.

Who takes the lead in this collective action by rural communities ? Who mediates between different rural stakeholders, and between them and governments ?

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 ERP 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, the report 'ALL Europe Shall live' identifies 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

Does that analysis ring true ? What are the sparking-points and mechanisms of leadership ? How can leadership be enabled and encouraged ?

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to leadership in rural development ?

9. Associations and civil society organizations – their role in rural life

How can Associations and Civil Society organisations be enabled to play a leading role in rural development ?

Associations and Civil Society organisations (CSOs), 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.

What is the role of CSO Networks ?

The European Rural Parliament has its origin in a family of national networks of rural CSOs, which vary in character from country to country but which share the aim of empowering rural communities to



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address their own development and to lobby for the policy changes which are needed to safeguard their future. 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.

What recognition, and what support, should CSOs and CSO networks seek from Governments and from European Institutions?

The ERP national reports urge that 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. For this reason, they may 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.

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the role, and the future viability, of CSOs and CSO Networks ?

10. People and governments – building the partnership

Many of the ERP 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. The hope is that increased dialogue between public authorities and the rural populations whom they serve can lead on to fruitful partnership between rural stakeholders and governments at local, regional and national level.

How we can we build partnership between rural stakeholders and governments ?

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.

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the prospects for increased positive partnership between rural stakeholders and governments ?

11. Small towns – their role as focal points of rural communities and rural economies

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, often being perceived as neither rural nor urban. The report 'ALL Europe Shall Live' states the 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.



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What is the experience of different countries related to the strength of small towns, their role in the life of rural regions, their viability in the face of change ?

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to the future role and well-being of small towns ?

12. Land, energy and sustainability – the ‘green’ dimension

The main focus of the ERP campaign is on the well-being of rural communities – the human dimension of rural regions. But respect for the environment, and calls for sustainable approaches, figure strongly in some national reports.

In the run-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, the rural areas of Europe may play a major role in combatting climate change and sustaining environmental resources. Over 40 percent of the land surface of Europe is in forests, which can capture and sequester carbon and which contribute massively to renewable resources of raw material and energy. Rural areas are well placed to meet the growing demand for 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.

What role for the widespread forests of Europe ? Can they, and other ecosystems, be the basis for transition from a fossil-based economy to a bio-economy ?

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. National reports call for these benefits to be 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. 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-based economy to a bioeconomy as the new wave of economic development.

How can rural areas contribute to, and gain from, the rising interest in renewable sources of 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 may be 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. 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.

What message should the ERP 2015 Gathering send to peoples, governments and European institutions related to land, energy and sustainability ?

ERP2015 Working Group briefs



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