

Outputs of XI. Forum of Rural Parliament in Slovakia

Working group no. 4

Sustainable development of rural areas and local initiatives

From the discussion of the 4th working group the following conclusions, requirements and recommendations for the government, state administration and regional and local self-government emerged at the meeting of the Rural Parliament Forum in Slovakia (October 23, 2020). The main partner in the current situation is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development as well as the Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for Agriculture and the Environment. However, many problems in rural areas also relate to the departments of education and culture, health and social affairs, the economy and the environment. Therefore, it would be best for the countryside to have its own central government body. Overall, the recommendations point to the desperate situation in the Slovak countryside and the need to start addressing it actively:

- 1) Our villages are losing their rural character. Residents of rural and rural areas are losing interest in growing vegetables, fruits and raising livestock. On the other hand, thousands of hectares of land remain unused, thousands of unemployed, but especially young people are not interested in working at home and prefer to go abroad for work and a better quality of life. Therefore, it is necessary to significantly support the creation and expansion of employment opportunities for people living in rural areas, in rural and especially peripheral rural areas of Slovakia.

Responsible: State Administration of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Self-Government regions

- 2) We call for the immediate application and implementation of the LEADER principles in the 2021-2027 programming period. In many European countries, these tools for improving rural life work and have a positive effect.

Responsible: Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of Slovakia, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, Agriculture Paying Agency

- 3) Active labor market policies and job creation in rural regions, outside industrial centers and large settlements in Slovakia, require an increase in funding. System changes are needed to set more appropriate conditions, simplify administration and bureaucracy, make it easier to access resources and set up more targeted and effective assistance. We recommend that part of the wage tax is received directly by the municipality, and that the municipal office be able to make an operational decision on the use of funds according to the needs of the municipality and its inhabitants. The management of the municipality could thus support self-employed persons and create opportunities for their work and tax them once a year with a flat tax.

Responsible: Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Self-Government regions

- 4) The prosperous countryside makes effective use of the tools of the social economy. These are mainly social enterprises, of which mainly agricultural (social farming) can contribute to the availability of social services in rural areas, the interconnection of cities and the countryside, diversification of economic activity and income in small farms, strengthening the local economy and integrating disadvantaged people.
Responsible: Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Self-Governing regions, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport

- 5) It is necessary to support activities that will harmonize the teaching of pupils and students in schools well in advance with the planned needs on the labor market. The practice of graduates as well as employers, self-employed and farmers in rural regions to ensure a properly set subsidy policy. Support programs for the employment of school leavers and the short-term unemployed in order to ensure the continuity of teaching and work performance and not to lose work habits, which are a significant obstacle to the long-term unemployed population entering the labor market. It is important for rural development to popularize agricultural fields of study, which will increase the interest of young people. Young farmers need to gain sufficient experience and a relationship with nature during their studies at secondary schools. This will strengthen the development of agriculture and family farms.
Responsible: Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Self-Governing regions

- 6) We recommend supporting the revitalization of family houses, the construction and operation of rental stabilization apartments in rural regions for narrow-profile professions, such as doctors, veterinarians, teachers, etc. Supported reconstruction of family houses for three-generation housing and construction of local hospitals for people dependent on help can prevent rural displacement and the loneliness of the elderly. In measures to support the socially deprived, give priority to raising the means of subsistence to work, so that they value help more and learn to take responsibility for their education, health, standard of living and the future of their children.
Responsible: Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Self-Governing regions

- 7) In all areas of state administration and local government management, we recommend creating support activities to promote agriculture, family farms and healthy food products. To support regional festivals, fairs, folk traditions, local specialties and ecological projects for nature protection, etc.
Responsible: State administration, Self-Governing regions

- 8) We recommend supporting and conducting information campaigns, educational activities and competitions aimed at raising young people's responsibility for their lives. To focus on the active creation of values through work, to value the opportunity to learn, to strengthen

one's health, not to waste food and not to destroy the values created by the work of other inhabitants. It is important to mediate good practice and examples of solving several problems of the countryside directly by the inhabitants of the municipality, in cooperation with the local government and NGOs. Support civic associations and initiatives to develop community life in rural areas.

Responsible: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Self-Governing regions, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport in cooperation with non-profit organizations, Ministry of Finances

- 9) The municipality must create conditions for the education of leaders from the young generation and for local initiatives of municipalities in rural areas, which point to the possibilities of obtaining new benefits from life in rural areas. To create conditions for the cooperation of various groups of the population, their participation in public affairs, the cooperation of public, private and non-governmental sector organizations, in activities developing sustainable rural areas. The role of self-government is also to provide information campaigns and support for improving the living and working conditions of young people in rural areas so as to stop young people from leaving the countryside.

Responsible: Self-Governing regions in cooperation with non-profit organizations

- 10) Ensuring food self-sufficiency in Slovakia. Actively support the development of family farms at the level of EU countries, including the production and sale of regional specialties. Rural development and farming are hampered by soil fragmentation. For a successful solution of food self-sufficiency, it is necessary to accelerate the action of land consolidation in the Slovak Republic. The development of local supply of own production will require a new approach to the current large-scale production, but also the expansion of the processing capacity of the food industry while addressing the sale of products on the domestic market in connection with the retail sales system. The creation and expansion of employment opportunities for the population living in rural, and peripheral areas of Slovakia through the use of local resources must be significantly supported.

Responsible: State Administration, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Self-Governing regions, Ministry of Finances, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic

After a discussion with members of the Rural Parliament Forum in Slovakia, this paper was prepared by:

Ing. Mgr. Miloslava Jezna, PhD.

23. 10. 2020