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AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

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# EU Rural Networks Strategic Framework and governance bodies

*Networking for sustainable rural development and  
innovation for agricultural productivity and  
sustainability*

Version  
February 2015



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## 1. Context and Purpose of this document

The EU rural development policy for 2014-2020<sup>1</sup> further developed the European Rural Development Network (ENRD) and created the European Innovation Partnership network for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-network), recognizing the added value networks can play in supporting the policy delivery.

Both the ENRD and the EIP network contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy to turn the EU into a smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive economy by supporting the implementation of rural development policy and of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability. Effective networking can bring added value for i) the rural economy, social partners, research and the civil society; ii) Member States' administrations implementing the policy; iii) the Commission and the EU institutions in general.

This document is intended to serve as a **basis for discussing and organizing the activity of all those who are active in both networks**. Its purpose is:

- To provide a unified and commonly understood frame for the operation of the networks.
- To help ensuring coordination between the ENRD and the EIP network.
- To support the bodies governing the rural networks (see section 4 below) to agree on priorities and identify the best tools to achieve the networks' objectives, and to serve as a baseline for the identification of more specific priorities and subjects.
- To guide the network support units in the further elaboration of their activities.

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

The following sections aim in particular at:

- Developing a single strategic framework embracing the objectives and activities of both networks (**Section 2**).
- Highlighting the basic principles for the monitoring and assessing networking activities with regard to the objectives set up by the legislation for both networks (**Section 3**).
- Outlining the organizational structure of the networks and the philosophy at the basis of the new structure (inclusiveness and flexibility), including the proposal for the Steering Group, mandate and composition of the permanent subgroups on LEADER/CLLD and on Innovation, and the provisional calendar of events linked to the governance bodies to be held in 2015 (**Section 4**).

## 2. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks

Within the Europe 2020 Strategy, the ENRD and the EIP network contribute to achieving the three main objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy related to viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and balanced territorial development. The contribution of the ENRD and of the EIP network to the EU political agenda can be further qualified through the specific objectives set out by Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 for each of the two networks.

A **single Strategic Framework** can be developed embracing the objectives and activities of both networks. As its starting point, the Strategic Framework takes the objectives that can be found for the two networks in the Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 (the Rural Development Regulation) and condenses them into three major common objectives:

- o To enhance participation
- o To improve policy quality, and
- o To increase awareness

These objectives form the basic pillars for the coordinated work of both networks over the programming period 2014-2020.

Based on the three general objectives identified and on the specific objectives provided for each network by the Rural Development Regulation, a number of specific objectives have been identified as well as the main types of activities that networks can carry out to reach them.

Table 1 below describes the operational objectives and the respective types of activities in a synthetic manner, so that they could be discussed and used as a reference by all those involved in networking activities.

**Table 1. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks**

General Objectives	Specific Objectives <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i>	Operational Objectives	Types of Activities
Enhance participation	<p><b>Increase the involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation of rural development</b> <i>(Art. 52.2.a)</i></p> <p><b>Establish a dialogue between farmers and research community</b> <i>(Art. 53.2.b – 1<sup>st</sup> part)</i></p>	<p><b>Understanding RD stakeholders and their needs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders diverse needs and potential for involvement in RDP implementation is widely understood</li> </ul> <p><b>Increasing stakeholder capacity for meaningful involvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Networks provide a platform where targeted exchanges take place involving the relevant stakeholders at the most appropriate level</li> <li>Stakeholders have easy access to the information, training, web-tools and other exchange mechanisms required for effective involvement in the implementation of RDPs</li> </ul> <p><b>Promoting adoption of innovations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Findings from research are translated better and faster into practical farming applications</li> <li>Research agendas are based more on actual needs of farmers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Screening of RDPs for stakeholder involvement and measure targeting</li> <li>NRN and stakeholder surveys</li> <li>Thematic Group(s) on stakeholder participation</li> <li>National stakeholder needs and opportunities analyses</li> <li>Seminars, periodicals, magazines, social media exchanges on stakeholder participation</li> <li>Face-to-face meetings with NRNs, RD stakeholders</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted stakeholders involvement</li> <li>EIP-AGRI Focus Groups</li> <li>Seminars and workshops on specific innovation topics</li> <li>Publications, newsletters and media exchanges</li> <li>Face-to-face meetings with farmers, foresters, researchers, NRN and advisors</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks**

General Objectives	Specific Objectives <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i>	Operational Objectives	Types of Activities
Enhance participation	<p><b>Facilitate the inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process</b> <i>(Art. 53.2.b – 2<sup>nd</sup> part)</i></p> <p><b>Facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice</b></p>	<p><b>Knowing how innovation works:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders are familiar with the opportunities to stimulate innovation under the different policies</li> </ul> <p><b>Connecting partners:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders are able to find other stakeholders relevant at national and EU level</li> </ul> <p><b>Cooperating effectively:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different types of stakeholders, research project groups, thematic networks, Operational Groups, cluster initiatives, pilot and demonstrative projects are increasingly and efficiently involved in both networks</li> </ul> <p><b>Diffusing of innovations, projects and practices:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information on successful innovative activities is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in events organised by farmers, foresters, researchers, advisors and NRNs</li> <li>Specific tools designed for this purpose (e.g. presentation for Universities)</li> <li>Identification and use of stakeholders' communication tools and channels</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge exchange and communication tools based on the outputs of stakeholders' mapping</li> <li>Joint actions with stakeholders</li> <li>Participation in events organised by stakeholders</li> <li>Identification and use of stakeholders' communication tools and channels</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular collection, analysis, consolidation and dissemination of RDP</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks**

<p><b>General Objectives</b></p>	<p><b>Specific Objectives</b> <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i></p>	<p><b>Operational Objectives</b></p>	<p><b>Types of Activities</b></p>
<p><b>Improve policy quality</b></p>	<p>(Art. 53.2.a – see also Art. 52.3.c)</p>	<p>more easily available by systematic collection and dissemination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification and dissemination of projects and practices in order to consolidate the learning potential for improving RDPs on the ground</li> </ul>	<p>implementation “good practices”, innovative actions and projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EIP-AGRI Focus Group</li> <li>• Seminars and workshops Publications, newsletters and media exchanges</li> <li>• Identification and use of stakeholders’ communication tools and channels</li> </ul>
<p><b>Improve the quality of RDP</b> (Art. 52.2.b)</p>	<p><b>Increasing awareness of the opportunities and needs for improving RDPs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant stakeholders have a common understanding of the real opportunities for improving RDPs as well as the main needs and organisational hurdles that have to be overcome</li> </ul> <p><b>Identifying promising approaches at EU level:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promising approaches to RDP improvement are identified, analysed and shared rapidly among stakeholders including RDP managers</li> </ul> <p><b>Consolidating and developing communities of practice for improving RDPs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder groups including RDP managers actively exchange and transfer methods and tools for improving RDP quality</li> </ul>	<p><b>Individual, comparative and thematic analyses of RDPs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU level thematic Groups carrying out analyses on specific aspects of RDP implementation</li> <li>• Implementation of joint actions with national and regional rural stakeholders on specific aspects of improving RDP programming and implementation</li> <li>• Setting-up online tools and information sharing and exchange platforms to support ‘communities of practice’</li> <li>• Targeted and active dissemination of results</li> </ul>	

**Table 1. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks**

General Objectives	Specific Objectives <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i>	Operational Objectives	Types of Activities
<p><b>Improve policy quality</b></p>	<p><b>Support the evaluation of RDPs</b> <i>(Art. 52.2.d)</i></p>	<p><b>Informing better RD Policy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networks outputs are used to improve RD policy both now and in the future</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving evaluation capacity of all actors involved in RDP evaluation</b></p> <p>Evaluation stakeholders in the Member States and at EU level have at their disposal relevant methodologies and tools for evaluating RDPs and receive appropriate training for their application.</p> <p><b>Consolidating and developing communities of practice for RDP evaluators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RDP evaluators actively exchange and transfer evaluation methods and tools</li> <li>• Good practices related to rural development policy evaluation are identified, collected and exchanged among practitioners</li> </ul> <p><b>Informing rural development policy decision-making</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation results provide valuable information feeding in future rural development policy development</li> </ul> <p><b>Communicating the benefits of RDPs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is greater awareness of the benefits of RDP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Databases, glossaries and guidance documents on evaluation.</li> <li>• EU-level thematic working groups producing guidance or developing methodologies to address issues related to the evaluation of RDP</li> <li>• Technical support and training activities for RDP evaluation stakeholders</li> <li>• Exchanging knowledge, experiences and good practices on RDP evaluation</li> <li>• Meetings and events related to rural development evaluation</li> <li>• Setting-up communication tools, including electronic, for targeted dissemination of information on evaluation-related topics</li> <li>• Easy-to-follow policy guides and overviews of RD programmes (via</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks**

<p><b>General Objectives</b></p> <p>Increase awareness</p>	<p><b>Specific Objectives</b> <i>as per Regulation (EU) 1305/2013</i></p> <p><b>benefits of rural development policy</b> <i>(Art. 52.2.c)</i></p>	<p><b>Operational Objectives</b></p> <p>for major societal challenges (food security and quality, biodiversity, climate change, jobs, social inclusion, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Success stories from RDP implementation show the impact of RDP on people's lives in a way that is interesting to the media</li> </ul> <p><b>Disseminating and sharing the knowledge generated by the Networks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Networks activities and outputs are communicated and shared in a way which maximises their relevance for and use by stakeholders including RDP managers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Types of Activities</b></p> <p>websites and promotional material)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identification and communication of 'human interest' RDP stories (magazine, Facebook)</li> <li>Identification and dissemination of good practice examples (various channels)</li> <li>Regular communication of news (Websites, Twitter, newsletters)</li> </ul>
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## Main tools available

Different operational objectives can be served by the same type of activity, as emerges from Table 1. The following image presents the main tools available for carrying out networking activities. The Networks' governance bodies will identify the most adapted tools depending on the objective and the circumstances. Three Network Support Units are available to support the operation of rural networks on EU level.



## 3. Monitoring and Assessing the activity of Rural Networks

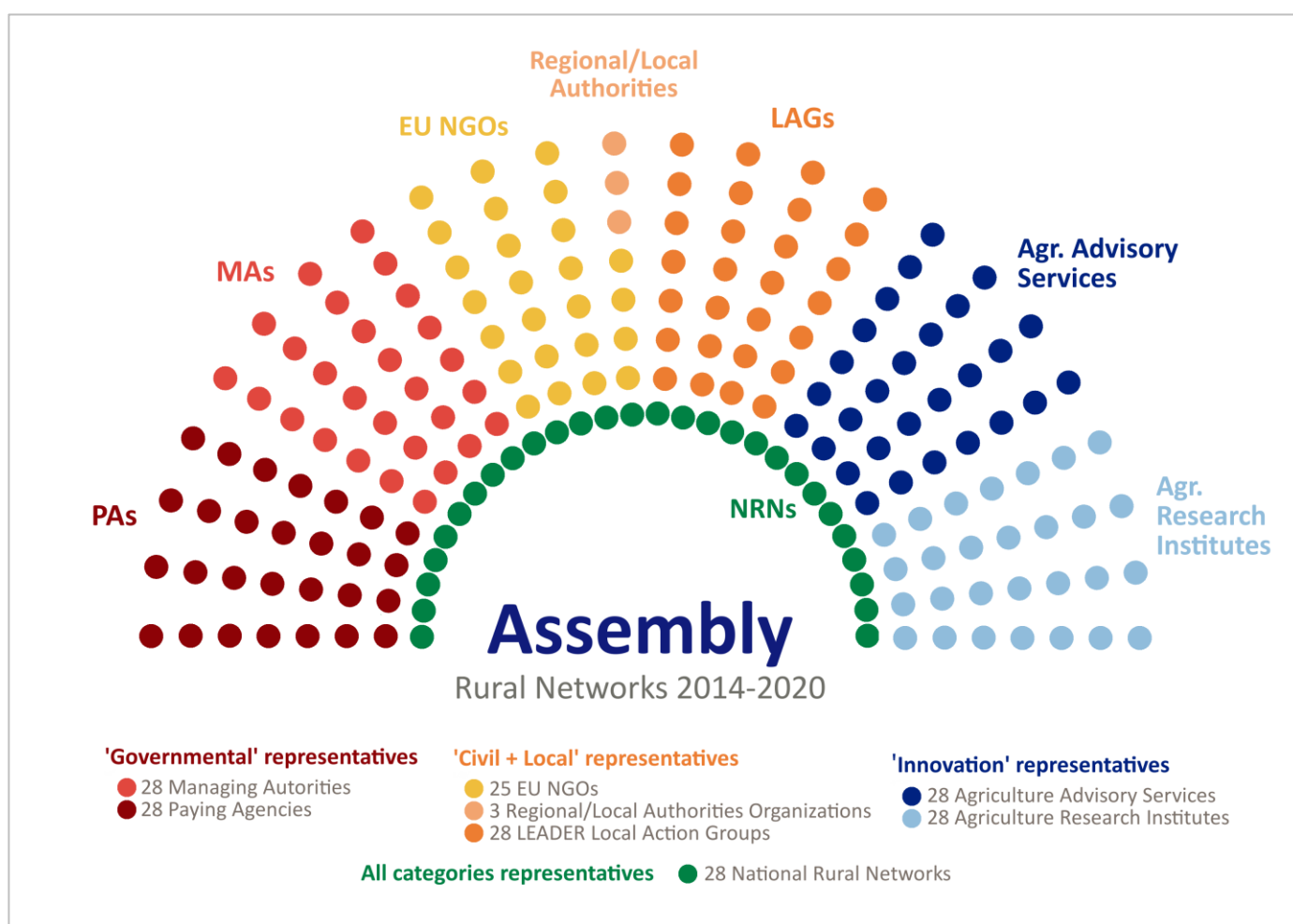
There is a broad consensus that networks and networking have **great potential to add value to EU rural development policy**. However, identifying, demonstrating and communicating this added value in a way that is clearly understandable to a wider audience, is highly challenging.

One important task of the Assembly is to ensure appropriate monitoring and assessment of the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network with regards to the objectives and tasks of both networks. Whereas the details of this activity will be elaborated at later stage, the strategic framework described in previous section sets the basis for clear intervention logic, which will be regularly reviewed.

## 4. Governance of the EU Rural Networks

Rural networks 2014-2020 are governed by a joint structure organized around the three following levels:

**Strategic level:** an inclusive Assembly (196 members) provides the strategic framework (operational objectives, types of activities...) for both Networks; provides for thematic work.



**Operational level:** a Steering Group coordinates activities and thematic work (workplans)



**Thematic work:** the Assembly may set up 3 **Permanent Subgroups** on:

- Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability;
- LEADER and community led local development; and
- the evaluation of rural development programmes.

A large number of stakeholders have already expressed interest in starting the thematic work concerning LEADER/CLLD and Innovation as soon as possible. **Permanent Subgroup on LEADER/CLLD and the permanent Subgroup on Innovation were set up by the Assembly at its first meeting.** The main lines for the composition and the mandate of these two permanent Subgroups are described in the following subsections.

At the current phase of the programming period (beginning 2015), taking into account the evaluation activities already foreseen, it is **proposed to postpone the discussion on the permanent Subgroup on Evaluation** to the next meeting of the Assembly, based on the work of the Steering Group.

In addition to the permanent subgroups, **other flexible subgroups**, thematic groups and focus groups may carry out the "substantial work" of the networks (knowledge development, knowledge sharing on specific topics), consistently with the strategic framework provided by the Assembly.

Three Network Support Units, the **ENRD Contact Point**, the **EIP Service Point** and the **Evaluation Help-Desk**, support networking activities and help facilitating the work of the different governance bodies.

## 4.1 Setting up the Steering Group

### Background

According to the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU on setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership Network, the Steering Group should be composed of maximum 48 members of the RN Assembly (see below).

The tasks of the Steering Group are:

- (a) preparing, implementing and following-up the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network, in accordance with the strategic framework provided by the Assembly;
- (b) coordinating the thematic work in accordance with the framework provided by the Assembly and following-up its implementation;
- (c) assessing on an ongoing basis the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network;
- (d) ensuring the coordination of the work of the Assembly with that of other expert groups and committees established in the context of the civil dialogue on rural development as well as in the context of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and the Fund-specific Regulations within the meaning of that Regulation; (e) reporting to the Assembly as regards its activities.

The Assembly members were asked to indicate whether they would volunteer for the Steering Group. The results for this first call of interest are summarized in Table 2 below (by Article 9 of the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU).

**Table 2: Volunteers for the Steering Group**

Category	Quota	Volunteers
(a) Managing authorities and/or national rural networks	28	28 (16 NRN, 12 MA)
(b) EU-wide organisations referred to in Art 4(1)(d) and (e)	Max 12	25
(c) Managing Authorities in charge of evaluation of RDPs	Max 4	10
(d) Agricultural Advisory Service Providers and/or agricultural research institutes referred to in Art 4(1)(g) and (h)	Max 4	35
<b>TOTALs</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>97</b>

For each of the categories above the Assembly may propose a rotation of the members of the Steering Group.

### Proposal

It was proposed to approach **categories separately**, allowing to identify members according to different principles for different categories, and make it **in cooperation with the relevant stakeholder groups**.

The approach behind the selection process for each category was the following:

- a) **Managing Authorities and/or national rural networks:** can have one representative from each Member State. 5 Member States did not volunteer, and 5 Member States submitted double registrations. In both cases Member States were contacted to have 1 representative per Member State in the final proposal.
- b) **EU wide organisations referred to in Article 4(1)(d)(e)** (maximum 12 members). The Civil Dialogue Group (CDG) was approached to facilitate the selection of organisations from amongst them, as 25 organisations who are also part of CDG have expressed their interest. In cooperation with the CDG chairmanship, the final list of organisations will be proposed, which will base on the strong commitment of the organisations and thematic balance. The organisations representing regional and/or local authorities were asked to express interest separately, as they are not part of the Civil Dialogue Group.

- c) **National authorities in charge of the evaluation of rural development programmes** (max 4 members) have 10 applicants for 4 places. The group was contacted to propose the final list of volunteers for the Steering Group membership.
- d) **Agricultural advisory service providers and/or agricultural research institutes** (max 4 members). As the number of volunteers was much higher than the number of seats, the group was approached to re-confirm their commitments, and give their opinion on different selection options. The majority preferred the rotation principle to be applied, and guaranteeing 2 seats separately for advisory services and 2 for agricultural research institutes. The group was contacted to propose the final list of volunteers for the Steering Group membership.

### Members

The members of the Steering Group were appointed by the Director-General of DG AGRI on 3 February 2015 (see Annex 2) following a proposal of the Assembly of 26 January 2015 reflecting the geographic and thematic diversity of the members of the ENRD and of the EIP network and based on the voluntary commitment of the proposed members.

## 4.2 Setting up the Subgroup on Leader and Community-Led Local Development

### Background

According to the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU on setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership Network, the Rural Assembly may set up subgroups on specific topics related to the objectives and the tasks of the ENRD, **including a permanent subgroup on Leader and community led local development** (Leader/CLLD subgroup). Subgroups shall carry out thematic work on the basis of a mandate defined by the Rural Assembly.

In the ENRD 2007-2013 around 30% of the thematic work was linked to Leader, and around 50% of the external events supported by the ENRD Contact Point were Leader or transnational cooperation (TNC) related. In the current programming period, Leader has specific reference in the ENRD tasks in article 52(3)(h) of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, therefore the involvement of specific Leader stakeholders will remain important.

### Proposal

The Assembly set up the subgroup on Leader and Community-led local development as a permanent subgroup to the Rural Networks' Assembly on its first meeting of 26 January 2015.

The proposal builds upon the positive experience with ENRD 2007-2013 Leader subcommittee as part of ENRD governance structures, responsible for thematic work in the field of Leader and transnational cooperation. The Leader subcommittee gathered a wealth of information and analysis on Leader and TNC and provided for the exchanges on Leader during its 12 meetings and during 4 focus groups working on specific Leader implementation topics.

### **Mandate**

The Leader/CLLD subgroup shall contribute to improving the quality of implementation of Leader in rural development programmes. The subgroup will:

1. Follow the state of play of implementation of Leader and the transnational cooperation.
2. Identify common issues/problems and identify good transferable practices at different levels (European, national, local) in Leader implementation.
3. Monitor Transnational Cooperation projects' implementation both in European Union and with third countries and seek ways to facilitate/improve the TNC.
4. Encourage peer to peer capacity building concerning Leader/CLLD implementation.
5. Identifying good practices and issues/problems in multi-funded CLLD strategies.

The Commission, supported by the Contact Point of the ENRD 2014-2020 can provide support to the work of Leader/CLLD subgroup through making tools available in line with its annual workplan, such as expert work, providing secretariat to the group and organising short term thematic work.

### **Composition and selection of representatives**

The subgroup's activity will focus on exchanges on Leader/CLLD implementation between different stakeholders of the Leader community on European level. This requires broad representativeness of different Leader stakeholder groups. Participation in the subgroup's activities is voluntary, so the composition below sets the possible maximum numbers.

Based on the past experience the most efficient composition is the combination of public entities and local/non-governmental level. Therefore it is suggested to include:

- Managing Authorities who would participate in the subgroup's discussions from the perspective of the policy design and delivery. Their participation is particularly needed in case of discussions on implementation bottlenecks.
- National Rural Networks as they are required to work with capacity building of local action groups and with regards to cooperation on national/regional level, therefore synergies are to be sought with the European level.

- LAGs as new participant group in this period as they are the key actors in Leader implementation.

- The EU-wide organisations as they bring the non-governmental perspective at wider geographical level than LAGs.

Category	Number	Selection
Managing Authorities	28	
National Rural Networks	28	
Representatives of LAGs	28	Selection by the Managing Authorities
EU organisations, including organisations representing municipalities and regions	12	In cooperation with Civil Dialogue Group
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>96</b>	

The intention is to use participatory meeting techniques to involve more participants in discussions.

In addition to that, the representatives of networking and support bodies for local development set up by the ERDF, ESF and EMFF can participate as observers in the meeting (max 6).

### Operation of the subgroup

The group is a subgroup to the Rural Networks' Assembly and thus the Commission expert group. Members of the subgroup shall not be remunerated for the services they render. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by the members of the subgroups shall be reimbursed by the Commission in accordance with Article 6 of Commission Implementing Decision No 2014/825/EU.

Provisionally the subgroup could meet maximum twice a year. If possible, the meetings will be held back to back with other events.



## 4.3 Setting up the Subgroup on Innovation

### Background

According to the Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU on setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership Network, the Rural Assembly may set up subgroups on specific topics related to the objectives and the tasks of the ENRD, including a permanent subgroup on innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability. Subgroups shall carry out thematic work on the basis of a mandate defined by the Rural Assembly. At its meeting of 26 January 2015 the Assembly decided to set up the Subgroup on Innovation.

### Mandate

The subgroup will support achieving the aims of the EIP network - facilitating the exchange of expertise and good practice, establishing a dialogue between farmers and research community and facilitating the inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process – by contributing to the development of the networking activities related to the EIP.

### Composition

All organisations represented in the Assembly can express their interest to become members of the subgroup. In view of the potentially large interest the maximum number of members of the subgroup was increased to 60, maintaining a balance between the three categories of organisations/institutions from the Assembly:

- National Rural Networks and Managing Authorities
- EU wide organisations
- Agricultural advisory service providers and agricultural research institutes

### Frequency of meetings

- 2-3 a year

## 4.4 Timeline for 2015

The current planning for different Rural Networks' **governance bodies** is presented below, with an objective to kick off different activities as soon as possible. 2015 is a year when priorities must be set and stakeholder views listened to.

Both ENRD and EIP will have other events (seminars, meetings, workgroups), which will be presented separately and discussed in detail with the Steering Group.

<b>Indicative planning for meetings of the Rural Networks' governance bodies 2015</b>	
version 24.02.2015	
<b>Event</b>	<b>Timing</b>
1st RN Assembly	26/01/2015
1st RN Steering Group	25/02/2015
1st Sub-Group on Innovation	10/03/2015
1st Leader/CLLD sub-group	21/04/2015
2nd RN Steering Group	12/06/2015
2nd Sub-Group on Innovation	23/06/2015
2nd Leader/CLLD sub-group	24/09/2015
3rd Sub-Group on Innovation	Nov. 2015
3rd RN Steering Group	14/10/2015
4th RN Steering Group	08/12/2015
2nd RN Assembly	09/12/2015

**(NB! dates may change!)**

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**Annex 1: Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU**  
**Annex 2: DG AGRI Appointing Decision of 3 February 2015**

**COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION****of 20 November 2014****setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership network and repealing Decision 2008/168/EC**

(2014/825/EU)

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 <sup>(1)</sup>, and in particular Articles 52(4) and 53(4) thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) A European network for rural development was put in place in accordance with Article 52(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 for the networking of national networks, organisations, and administrations active in the field of rural development at Union level.
- (2) A European Innovation Partnership ('EIP') network was put in place in accordance with Article 53(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 to support the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability referred to in Article 55 of that Regulation and to enable the networking of operational groups, advisory services and researchers.
- (3) It is therefore necessary to adopt rules setting out the organisational structure and operation of both the European network for rural development ('the ENRD') and the EIP network.
- (4) With a view to achieve the objectives of rural networking at the European level set up in Articles 52(2) and 53(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, and to carry out the tasks provided for in Articles 52(3) and 53(3) of that Regulation for the ENRD and the EIP network respectively, it is necessary to set up a Rural Networks' Assembly and to define its tasks and its structure, in accordance with the White Paper from the Commission entitled European governance <sup>(2)</sup>, and in accordance with the Communication from the President to the Commission entitled Framework for Commission expert groups: horizontal rules and public register <sup>(3)</sup> ('Framework for Commission expert groups').
- (5) The Assembly should notably promote exchange and networking among public and private entities active in rural development and innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability. It should ensure coordination between the ENRD and the EIP network, provide the strategic framework for their activity, including the thematic work, and ensure appropriate monitoring and assessment of the same activity. It should propose the members of the Steering Group.
- (6) The Assembly should be composed of national rural networks, managing authorities, paying agencies, organisations active in the field of rural development at Union level, LEADER local action groups, agricultural advisory service providers active in innovation support services linked to operational groups and research institutes active in innovation activities linked to operational groups.
- (7) In order to guarantee an open, transparent and balanced representation, the members of the Assembly who are organisations active in the field of rural development at Union level should be those appointed within the civil dialogue group on rural development in accordance with Commission Decision 2013/767/EU <sup>(4)</sup> (hereinafter 'civil dialogue group on rural development').

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 487.

<sup>(2)</sup> White Paper of the Commission — European governance, 25 July 2001, COM(2001) 428 final.

<sup>(3)</sup> Communication from the President to the Commission — Framework for Commission expert groups: horizontal rules and public register, 10 November 2012, C(2010) 7649 final.

<sup>(4)</sup> Commission Decision 2013/767/EU of 16 December 2013 setting up a framework for civil dialogue in matters covered by the common agricultural policy and repealing Decision 2004/391/EC (OJ L 338, 17.12.2013, p. 115).

- (8) With a view to ensure an effective and efficient organisation of the activity of the ENRD and of the EIP network, in accordance with the opinions of the Assembly, it is necessary to set up a Rural Networks' Steering Group and to define its tasks and its structure.
- (9) The Steering Group should notably prepare, implement and follow-up the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network. It should coordinate the thematic work of the networks and ensure coordination of the work of the Assembly with that of other expert groups and committees established in the context of rural development and of the European Structural and Investment Funds.
- (10) The Steering Group should be composed of managing authorities and/or national rural networks, EU-wide organisations active in the field of rural development, national authorities in charge of the evaluation of rural development programmes, agricultural advisory service providers and/or agricultural research institutes.
- (11) With a view to maintain an open and regular exchange between the ENRD, the EIP network and the civil dialogue group on rural development, the chairperson and the vice-chairpersons of the civil dialogue group should be enabled to take part in the meetings of the Steering Group as observers.
- (12) Rules on disclosure of information by members of the Assembly and of the Steering Group should be laid down.
- (13) Personal data should be processed in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(1)</sup>.
- (14) Commission Decision 2008/168/EC <sup>(2)</sup> provides for the organisational structure of the European Network for Rural Development for the period 2007-2013. That Decision should therefore be repealed.
- (15) The measures provided for in this Decision are in accordance with the opinion of the Rural Development Committee,

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

#### CHAPTER I

#### SUBJECT MATTER

##### *Article 1*

#### **Subject matter**

This Decision sets out the organisational structure and operation of the European network for rural development ('the ENRD') and of the European Innovation Partnership network for agricultural productivity and sustainability ('the EIP network') by setting up an Assembly and a Steering Group, providing for their composition and their tasks and laying down rules for their operation.

#### CHAPTER II

#### RURAL NETWORKS' ASSEMBLY

##### *Article 2*

#### **Rural Networks' Assembly**

The Assembly of the ENRD and of the EIP network, hereinafter referred to as 'the Assembly', is hereby set up.

##### *Article 3*

#### **Assembly's tasks**

The tasks of the Assembly shall be in particular:

- (a) to promote exchange and networking among public and private entities active in rural development and innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability;
- (b) to ensure coordination between the ENRD and the EIP network;

<sup>(1)</sup> Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data (OJ L 8, 12.1.2001, p. 1).

<sup>(2)</sup> Commission Decision 2008/168/EC of 20 February 2008 setting up the organisational structure for the European Network for Rural Development (OJ L 56, 29.2.2008, p. 31).

- (c) to provide the strategic framework for the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network, including the thematic work;
- (d) to ensure appropriate monitoring and assessment of the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network with regard to the objectives set up in Articles 52(2) and 53(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and the tasks listed in Articles 52(3) and 53(3) of that Regulation;
- (e) to propose to the Director-General for Agriculture and Rural Development ('the Director-General') the members of the Steering Group.

#### Article 4

##### **Assembly membership**

1. The Assembly shall be composed of the following members:
  - (a) national rural networks referred to in Article 54 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 (one member from each Member State);
  - (b) managing authorities referred to in Article 66 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 (one member from each Member State);
  - (c) paying agencies referred to in Article 7 of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(1)</sup> (one member from each Member State);
  - (d) EU-wide non-governmental organisations, registered in the joint European Transparency Register, who have been appointed members of the civil dialogue group on rural development pursuant to Decision 2013/767/EU (hereinafter 'civil dialogue group on rural development') and who have expressed their interest in participating in the Assembly (maximum 29 members);
  - (e) EU-wide organisations representing regional and/or local authorities active in rural development, including the connections between rural and urban areas (maximum three members);
  - (f) LEADER local action groups referred to in Article 42 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 (one member from each Member State);
  - (g) agricultural advisory service providers active in innovation support services linked to operational groups (one member from each Member State);
  - (h) agricultural research institutes active in innovation activities linked to operational groups (one member from each Member State).
2. Members referred to in paragraph 1(a), (b), (c), (f), (g) and (h) shall be designated by the respective Member State.

Members referred to in paragraph 1(e) shall be appointed by the Director-General on the basis of a call for applications.

3. Members States' authorities shall nominate the permanent representatives for each of the categories referred to in paragraph 1(a), (b), (c), (f), (g) and (h).

The organisations referred to in paragraph 1(d) and (e) shall nominate their permanent representatives.

4. The members of the Assembly shall be published in the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register') and on the websites of the ENRD and of the EIP network.

5. Personal data shall be collected, processed and published in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 45/2001.

#### Article 5

##### **Assembly's operation**

1. The Assembly shall be chaired by a representative of the Commission. The chair shall convene a meeting at least once a year.

<sup>(1)</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 352/78, (EC) No 165/94, (EC) No 2799/98, (EC) No 814/2000, (EC) No 1290/2005 and (EC) No 485/2008 (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 549).

2. In agreement with the Commission, the Assembly may set up sub-groups on specific topics related to the objectives and the tasks of the ENRD and of the EIP network, including permanent sub-groups on:

- (a) innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability;
- (b) LEADER and community led local development; and
- (c) the evaluation of rural development programmes.

Sub-groups shall carry out thematic work on the basis of a mandate defined by the Assembly.

Non-permanent sub-groups shall be disbanded as soon as their mandate is fulfilled.

3. The Commission's representative may invite experts and observers from outside the Assembly with specific competence in a subject on the agenda to participate in the work of the Assembly or sub-groups on an ad hoc basis.

4. Members of the Assembly, as well as invited experts and observers, shall comply with the obligations of professional secrecy laid down by the Treaties and their implementing rules, as well as with the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of EU classified information, laid down in the Annex to Commission Decision 2001/844/EC, ECSC, Euratom <sup>(1)</sup>. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission shall take all appropriate measures.

5. The meetings of the Assembly and its sub-groups shall be held on Commission premises, unless the chair decides otherwise. The Commission shall provide secretarial services. Commission officials with an interest in the proceedings may attend meetings of the Assembly and its sub-groups.

6. The Assembly shall adopt its rules of procedure on the basis of the standard rules of procedure for expert groups adopted by the Commission.

7. The Commission publishes all relevant documents on the activities carried out by the Assembly (such as agendas, minutes and participants' submissions) either by including it in the Register or via a link from the Register to a dedicated website.

8. The work of the Assembly shall be coordinated with that of other expert groups and committees established in the context of the civil dialogue on rural development as well as in the context of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council <sup>(2)</sup> and the Fund-specific Regulations within the meaning of that Regulation.

#### Article 6

### Reimbursement of expenses

1. Members of the Assembly shall not be remunerated for the services they render.
2. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by the members of the Assembly for their participation in the Assembly's meetings, including the sub-groups, shall be reimbursed by the Commission in accordance with the provisions in force within the Commission.
3. The expenses referred to in paragraph 2 shall be reimbursed within the limits of the available appropriations allocated under the annual procedure for the allocation of resources.

#### CHAPTER III

### RURAL NETWORKS' STEERING GROUP

#### Article 7

### Rural Networks' Steering Group

The Steering Group of the ENRD and of the EIP network, hereinafter referred to as 'the Steering Group', is hereby set up.

<sup>(1)</sup> Commission Decision 2001/844/EC, ECSC, Euratom of 29 November 2001 amending its internal Rules of Procedure (OJ L 317, 3.12.2001, p. 1).

<sup>(2)</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320).

*Article 8***Steering Group's tasks**

The tasks of the Steering Group shall be in particular:

- (a) preparing, implementing and following-up the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network, in accordance with the strategic framework provided by the Assembly;
- (b) coordinating the thematic work in accordance with the framework provided by the Assembly and following-up its implementation;
- (c) assessing on an ongoing basis the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP network;
- (d) ensuring the coordination of the work of the Assembly with that of other expert groups and committees established in the context of the civil dialogue on rural development as well as in the context of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and the Fund-specific Regulations within the meaning of that Regulation;
- (e) reporting to the Assembly as regards its activities.

*Article 9***Steering Group's membership**

1. The Steering Group shall be composed of the following members of the Assembly:

- (a) managing authorities and/or national rural networks (one member from each Member State);
- (b) EU-wide organisations referred to in Article 4(1)(d) and (e) (maximum 12 members);
- (c) national authorities in charge of the evaluation of rural development programmes (maximum four members);
- (d) agricultural advisory service providers and/or agricultural research institutes referred to in Article 4(1)(g) and (h) (maximum four members).

2. The members of the Steering Group shall be appointed by the Director-General following a proposal of the Assembly reflecting the geographic and thematic diversity of the members of the ENRD and of the EIP network and based on the voluntary commitment of the proposed members.

For each of the categories referred to in paragraph 1, the Assembly may propose a rotation of the members of the Steering Group.

3. A member of the Steering Group may be replaced by the Director-General following a proposal of the Assembly where:

- (a) it withdraws from the Steering Group;
- (b) it does not regularly designate representatives for the meetings of the Steering Group;
- (c) it is no longer able to contribute effectively to the tasks of the Steering Group;
- (d) it does not comply with the non-disclosure requirement relating to information covered by the obligation of professional secrecy laid down in Article 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

4. The chairperson and the vice-chairpersons of the civil dialogue group on rural development may take part in the Steering Group's meetings as observers.

*Article 10***Steering Group's operation and meeting expenses**

Articles 5 and 6 shall apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the operation and the meeting expenses of the Steering Group.



## CHAPTER IV

**FINAL PROVISIONS***Article 11***Repeal**

Decision 2008/168/EC is repealed.

*Article 12***Entry into force**

This Decision shall enter into force on the third day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done at Brussels, 20 November 2014.

*For the Commission*  
*The President*  
Jean-Claude JUNCKER

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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Director-General

Brussels,  
H.3 – Ares(2015)408745

**DECISION ON THE APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE STEERING GROUP OF THE  
EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND OF THE EUROPEAN INNOVATION  
PARTNERSHIP NETWORK**

HAVING REGARD to Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU of 20 November 2014 setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership network and repealing Decision 2008/168/EC<sup>1</sup> and in particular Article 9(2) thereof,

WHEREAS:

Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU sets up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership network. It sets up in its Article 7 the Steering Group of the European network for rural development and of the European Innovation Partnership network (hereafter 'the Rural Networks' Steering Group').

In accordance with Article 9(2) of Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU, the Director General for Agriculture and Rural Development shall appoint members of the Assembly of the European network for rural development and of the European Innovation Partnership network (hereafter 'the Rural Networks' Assembly) to the Rural Networks' Steering Group following a proposal of the Rural Networks' Assembly.

During its first meeting on 26 January 2015, the Rural Networks' Assembly agreed on the proposal for members of the Rural Networks' Steering Group according to the categories stated in Article 9(1) of Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU, based on the voluntary commitment of the proposed members and reflecting the geographical and thematic diversity of the members of the European network for rural development and of the European Innovation Partnership network.

The Rural Networks' Assembly agreed on the principle of rotation of members in the Rural Networks' Steering Group.

On the basis of the proposal of the Rural Networks' Assembly,

I HEREBY DECIDE THAT:

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 334, 21.11.2013, p. 98.

The following members of the Rural Networks' Assembly are appointed as members of the Rural Networks' Steering Group:

**1. CATEGORY: MANAGING AUTHORITIES AND/OR NATIONAL RURAL NETWORKS REFERRED TO IN ARTICLE 4(1)(A) AND (B) OF IMPLEMENTING DECISION 2014/825/EU (28 MEMBERS)**

**1.1. Sub-category: managing authorities**

**The managing authorities of (1 member per Member State):** Austria, Croatia, Germany, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden.

**1.2. Sub-category: national rural networks**

**The national rural networks of (1 member per Member State):** Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom.

Member States may swap between sub-category 1.1 and 1.2 while avoiding creating imbalance among both.

**2. CATEGORY: EU-WIDE ORGANISATIONS REFERRED TO IN ARTICLE 4(1)(D) AND (E) OF IMPLEMENTING DECISION 2014/825/EU (12 MEMBERS)**

**2.1. Subcategory: members of the civil dialogue group on rural development**

**10 members for the subcategory** on basis of rotation to be allocated to the below-mentioned 5 clusters by the Chair of the civil dialogue group on rural development ensuring balance among clusters.

- **Cluster 1:** European Liaison Committee for Agricultural and Agri-Food Trade (CELCAA), Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives (COGECA), Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations (COPA), European Landowners Organisation (ELO), European Fur Breeder's Association (EFBA);
- **Cluster 2:** European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Birdlife;
- **Cluster 3:** European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF), European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP);
- **Cluster 4:** European Federation of Rural Tourism (Eurogites), European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME);
- **Cluster 5:** European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), Euromontana, European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA), Prepare, Rurality-Environment-Development (RED).

**2.2. Sub-category: EU-wide organisations representing local and/or regional authorities**

- Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- Peri-Urban Regions Platform Europe (PURPLE).

**3. CATEGORY: NATIONAL AUTHORITIES IN CHARGE OF THE EVALUATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES (4 MEMBERS)**

- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry – Finland
- Association des Régions de France – France
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - Poland
- Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs – United Kingdom

**4. CATEGORY: AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICE PROVIDERS AND/OR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTES REFERRED TO IN ARTICLE 4(1)(G) AND (H) OF IMPLEMENTING DECISION 2014/825/EU (4 MEMBERS)**

**4.1. Agricultural advisory service providers**

- Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment – Cyprus
- Verband der Landwirtschaftskammern e.V. – Germany

**4.2. Agricultural research institutes**

- Wageningen University – the Netherlands
- Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Tecnología Agraria y Alimentaria – Spain



Jerzy PLEWA