

ENRD webinar

21st NRN meeting Highlights report

Highlights report

The 21st NRN meeting, co-organised with the Slovenian Network Support Unit (NSU), took the form of a webinar on 18 November 2021.

The meeting focussed on the state of play of NSUs activity, and how this can be incorporated into the wider work of the ENRD, and the priority themes to be taken forward across a number of thematic and capacity building activities.

The event also provided space to consider how the NSUs can deepen their peer-to-peer exchanges with cluster activity, and agreement was made on how to enable the inclusion of all 27 Member States in future cluster meetings.

The meeting also provided updates on the new contractual arrangements and work of the support units for the European Rural Networks, and on the vital role of networking in the new CAP.

Event Information

Date: 18 November 2021

Location: Webinar

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point and the Slovenian NSU

Participants: 63 NRN representatives from 25 Member States

Outcomes: Shared perspectives on NRN activities and agreed input into future ENRD activity; the further development of peer-to-peer exchanges through cluster activity.

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/21st-nrn-meeting_en

Setting the Scene



The online meeting opened with a [video presentation profiling the Slovenian NRN's work with agri-food and rural development](#). Slovenia's [State Secretary from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Aleš Irgolič](#) presented more details about CAP and rural issues in relation to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and highlighted the Vision's advantages for gender equality, Smart Village approaches and urban-rural partnerships. The importance of coordinating all EU funds was noted as a key tool for promoting rural resilience with reference to the CAP, cohesion policy and InvestEU. NRN positions were also advocated in particular for their contribution to representing positive and accurate impressions of agriculture and in demonstrating rural areas as attractive places to live and work.

[Mario Milouchev, Director for Rural Development, DG AGRI](#) echoed the points made and appreciated the progress made with the CAP and the Rural Vision during the Slovenian

Presidency of the EU Council. The Rural Vision's emergent Rural Pact to be launched in 2021 was underlined and NRNs were encouraged to use this as a steer for continuing their work with involving stakeholders in CAP matters and exchanging between them about their activities, rural action plans and rural proofing experiences in support of the Rural Vision. [Two new ENRD Thematic Groups related to the Rural Vision](#) as well as the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) were also considered pertinent in this context. Remote rural areas' needs were acknowledged with care being promoted to avoid risks of peri-urban data masking the reality of remote rural life.

Mr Milouchev underlined the potential of networking in the future CAP, particularly in involving new stakeholders from Pillar 1. He concluded by confirming the value of networks' capacities to help develop and share solutions for Member States' socio-economic and environmental challenge.

Networking activities – Part I




Jorge Ramirez was introduced to the meeting as the new Team Leader of the ENRD Contact Point. The new roles and team members were [presented](#) with an overview of the Contact Point's expanded role covering Pillar 1 of the CAP, linked to the launch of the new EU CAP Network foreseen during 2022. This presentation also included an indicative overview of anticipated annual work plan priorities for the Contact Point in 2021-2022. It foresees the ENRD continuing to serve as a bridge between DG AGRI and the NRNs supporting actions to: Foster a resilient farm sector; Bolster environment and climate; as well as Strengthen fabric in rural areas. The two existing ENRD and EIP-AGRI websites will continue until a new single CAP network website becomes operational.




This was followed by a practical virtual workshop session where participants contributed updates on NSU activity. A World Café style [virtual facilitation technique](#) successfully harvested a large collection of useful information about NRN interests and involvement with: [Food Supply Chains](#); [Environment and Climate](#); and the [Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas](#). Participants were also interested in AKIS contributions to these topics and NRNs expressed positive ambitions to progress networking within this rural framework.

Networking activities – Part II

 Following on from these interactive sessions, Annika Suu presented new work being progressed by the [EIP-AGRI Support Facility](#) including events on forest innovation and farm performance data. Three upcoming focus groups will network expertise in: pesticides for pomes and stone fruit; digital tools for sustainable nutrient management; and nature-based solutions for water management. Publications in the EIP-AGRI pipeline were also highlighted and NRNs were asked to help publicise all this EIP-AGRI work widely.

Valdis Kudins and Myles Stiffler presented the [ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk update](#) which raised awareness among NRNs about the EvaluationWORKS 2021 events as well as the new content in the ENRD Helpdesk's e-library and [Evaluation Knowledge Bank](#). This includes new technical publications and outcomes from Thematic Work Group 9 'supporting better data for CAP evaluation'. New content from the Helpdesk's Evaluation Knowledge Bank and Back to Basic resources presented including information about the [IMAJINE](#) project and how it can be used to support evaluations. Thanks were expressed to the NRNs for support during the current Helpdesk contract which ends in December. Participants also conveyed thanks to the Helpdesk team.


NRNs in transition

 Helen Williams from DG AGRI presented an [Update on networking in the new CAP](#) describing developments with the legal framework that affect future networking. A European Parliament vote on the CAP Basic Acts in late November would allow the European Council to endorse the package in December. Formal agreements on implementing and delegated acts could follow thereafter permitting the new CAP legal framework to enter into force by the end of 2021.

DG AGRI's presentation signalled that, while there had been several drafting changes, there had not been substantive changes during the co-decision process as regards networking provisions, which would be covered under Article 126 of the CAP Strategic Plans Basic Act. One amendment had supported the safeguarding of institutional knowledge that exists in the current networks. The final 7 Objectives and 9 Tasks of future CAP Networks were presented, and network mandates were confirmed for communication outreach as well as supporting the quality of CSP implementation.

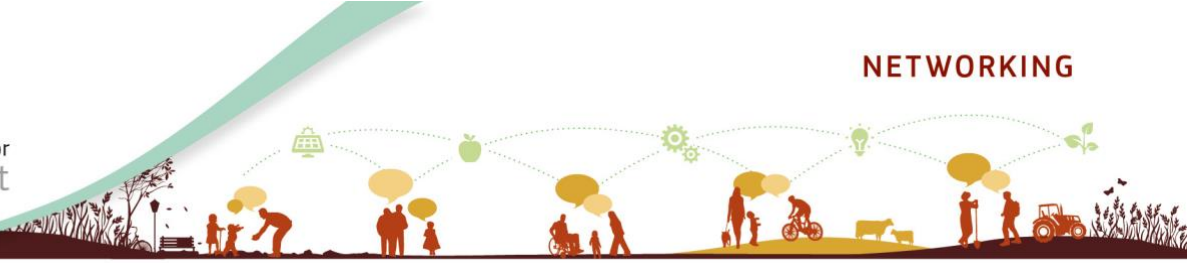
Content of the draft implementing act on CSP content was presented; for national CAP networks a description of the proposed objectives, structure, governance and operation should be provided in the CSP. Three transition processes (for the CAP and NRNs and EU networks) were clarified. Participants were also advised on the completion of contracting for EU-level network support counterparts for the NRNs. This has been designed to ensure no interruption in networking support for the Member States.

NRN Clusters

 Meeting participants worked in groups to consider future networking within the frame of further network clusters. Benefits have emerged from peer-to-peer networking among NRNs from geo clusters in the Nordic-Baltic and Central-Eastern regions.

A common success factor has been the organisation of these cluster meetings and the presence of EU-level representatives from the Contact Point. Clusters can be seen to gain from a central or rotating organiser and inputs from EU-level knowhow can help add-value to the peer-to-peer learning processes in geo clusters.

Participants shared ideas and perspectives about the scope, opportunities, and challenges for further networking and clustering work. Outcomes from the discussions provided clustered feedback on agreed future networking covering the following regions: [Nordic-Baltic](#); [Atlantic](#); [Mediterranean](#); and [Central-Eastern](#), thereby covering all 27 Member States. A concept of cross-cutting thematic clustering was also tabled with AKIS being suggested as a commonality across all CSPs. It was observed that the networks' transition period could be a laboratory for piloting CAP clustering methodologies in 2022.



Conclusions and next steps

In closing remarks, it was stressed that the intention of NRN clusters is not to over-burden existing workloads and countries may be able to take advantage of networking in different geo or thematic clusters.

Neda Skakelja summarised the meeting outcomes from DG AGRI's outlook drawing attention to the value of NRN meetings as effective two-way information channels between Member State NRNs and DG AGRI.

The value of national networks will continue to be recognised in the future and particularly in supporting national stakeholders to successfully implement the CAP's New Delivery Model, and its contributions to the European Green Deal's Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, as well as the Rural Vision and Rural Pact.

The strengths of virtual networking will be built on while pandemic restrictions persist.