Summary of responses from the Macro survey

May - August 2020

Which future do you want in rural areas?



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Methodology

The Survey was opened on the 6th of May 2020, and later updated with 21 different European languages on the 8th of June. The results in this report was collected on the 27th of August.

Languages and context

The questions were elaborated from the Spanish LEADER Network, REDR, and is aiming on the problems and opportunities of Spanish rural areas. However, as rural Europe share many problems and opportunities around, it was decided in the ELARD General assembly to join the initiative from Spanish partners. Since the questionnaire had already been elaborated, the partners only needed to translate the survey and after that, the questionnaire could be launched in 21 languages. The reason for 21 languages only was because of the restrictions made from the homepage which was bought from Spanish partners before the decision to do a Europe-wide survey was taken.

The survey was spread through ELARD-homepage, Newsletter and Facebook, but the important part was played from the national LEADER-networks. Depending on the activity of the Networks, responses from around Europe was given. In total there was 3 436 answers from 26 countries.

Country	Number of participants	Percentage of responses	Inhabitants % total EU January 01, 2017
Austria	102	2,97%	1,72%
Belgium	2	0,06%	2,22%
Bulgaria	122	3,55%	1,39%
Croatia	149	4,34%	0,81%
Cyprus	6	0,17%	0,17%
Czech Republic	25	0,73%	2,07%
Denmark	34	0,99%	1,12%
Estonia	119	3,46%	0,26%
Finland	127	3,70%	1,08%
France	5	0,15%	13,10%
Germany	25	0,73%	16,13%
Greece	202	5,88%	2,11%
Hungary	73	2,12%	1,92%
Ireland	80	2,33%	0,94%
Italy	25	0,73%	11,84%
Latvia	54	1,57%	0,38%
Lithuania	296	8,61%	0,56%
Luxemburg	1	0,03%	0,12%
Netherlands	22	0,64%	3,34%
Poland	372	10,83%	7,42%
Portugal	170	4,95%	2,02%
Rumania	7	0,20%	3,84%
Slovakia	255	7,42%	1,06%
Slovenia	44	1,28%	0,40%
Spain	687	19,99%	9,09%
Sweden	432	12,57%	1,95%
TOTAL	**3 436**		

Given the proportion of inhabitants between countries, the green countries are above their proportion, with extra weight on Latvia, Estonia, Croatia, Slovakia, Sweden, Portugal and Spain.

On the contrary, Germany, France and Italy are big countries that have low response rates.

Also, Great Britain is missing completely in our survey. As language was missing, participants from Georgia, Moldova and North Macedonia could not be identified, but must have answered within the other language-groups.



The survey

The survey is enclosed as Annex 2.

The questionnaire was a mix of different pre-filled options and one free text field.

Three problems need to be pointed out.

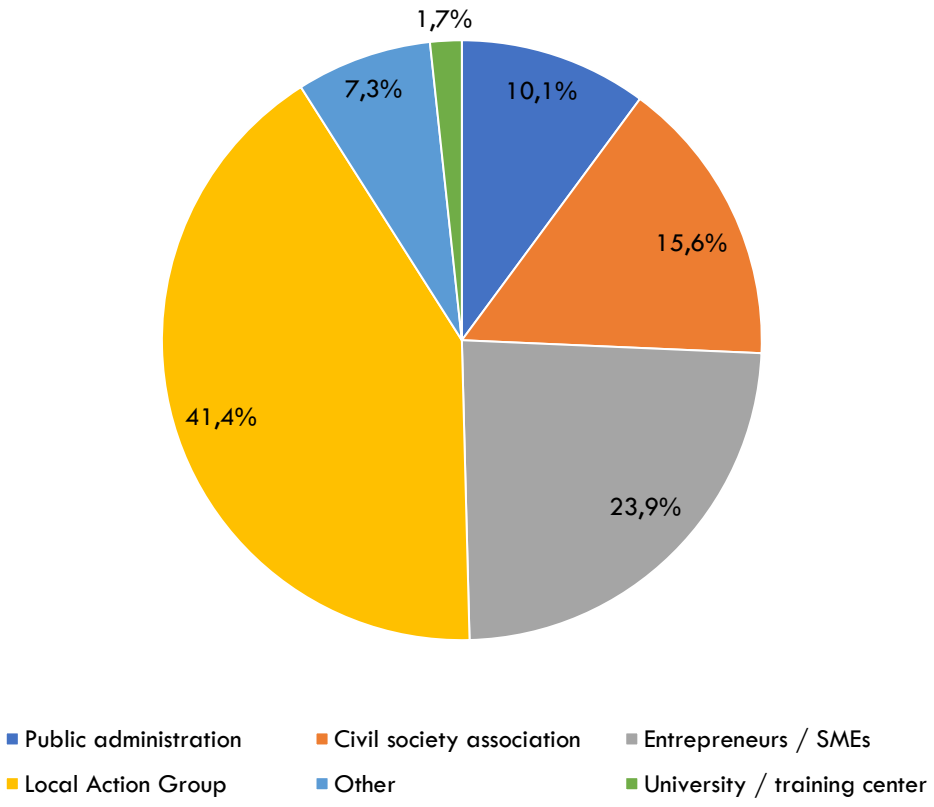
Firstly, when stating Gender there was no possibility for third option. The survey should have taken into account that not all people feel comfortable in defining themselves as male or female, and this needs to be included in future surveys.

When it came to the question "In what way has LEADER contributed to your territory? *Select 5 options*" it was mandatory to choose 5 options, and some participants has stated that they have not agreed on more than 2-3 statements, or any. Therefore, this section should be read with this in mind.

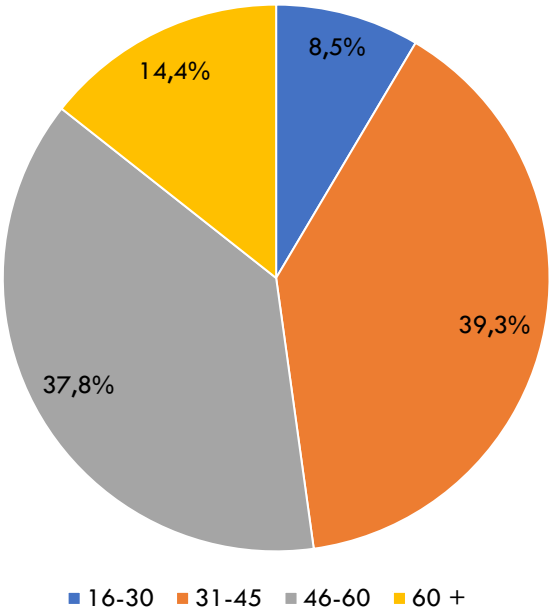
Thirdly, some participants have not felt that the survey was aimed at their local context, because of the broad questionnaire that has a general approach to fit more.

The participants

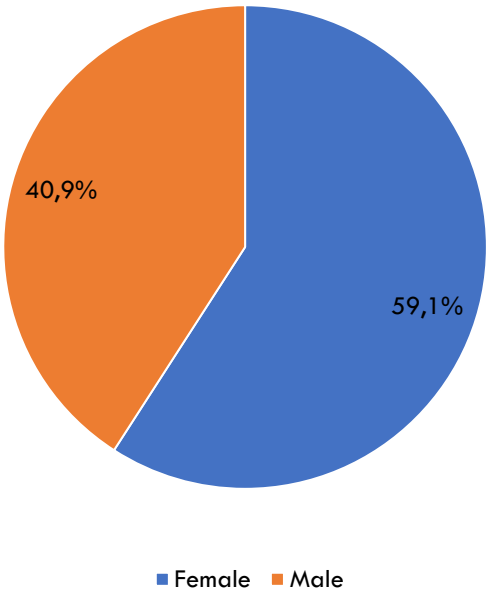
As stated before, there were a total of 3 436 answers, of which 59% are not working in a Local Action Group.



The age of the participants has a good variation, since it approximately correlates to the population European pyramid of 2019:



A larger number of women have answered the survey, as can be seen in the statistics:

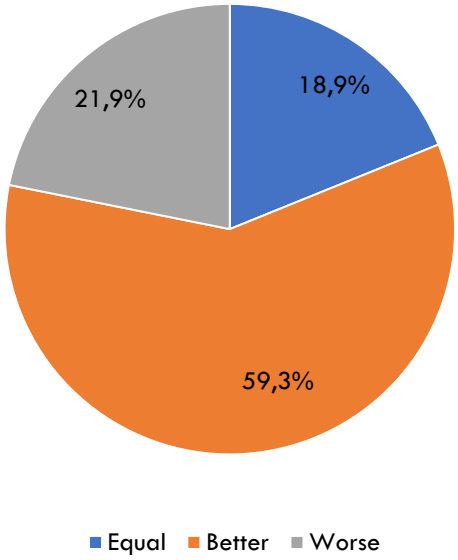


The Answers

Situation in rural areas in the Future

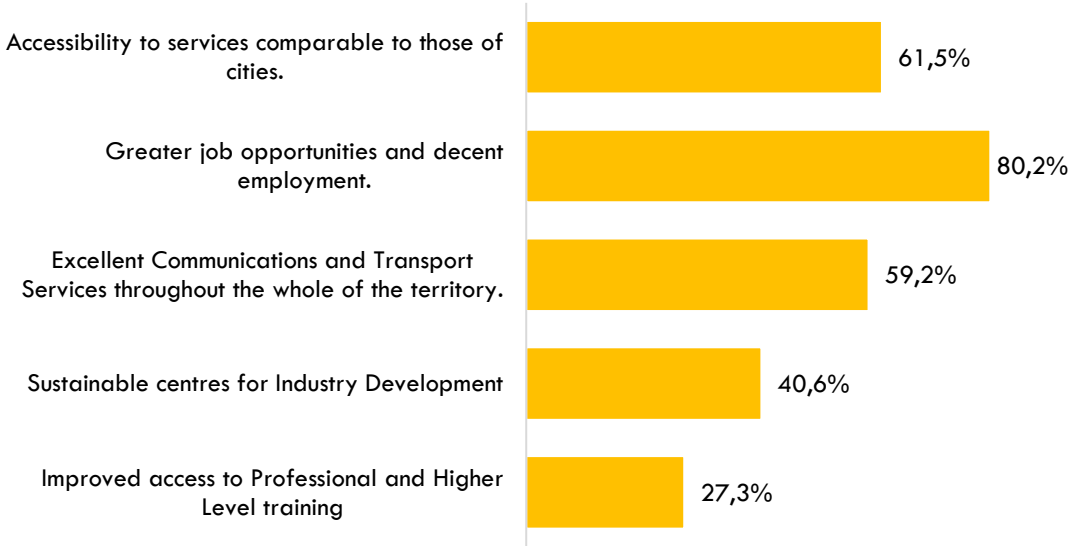
In general, do you think that in 2035 the people in rural areas will live better, worse or the same as today?

The responses show that the majority of respondents believe in a better future. However, 1/5 believes it will stay the same, and 1/5 believes it will become worse.



Looking 15 years ahead...
what three things would you like to see happen?

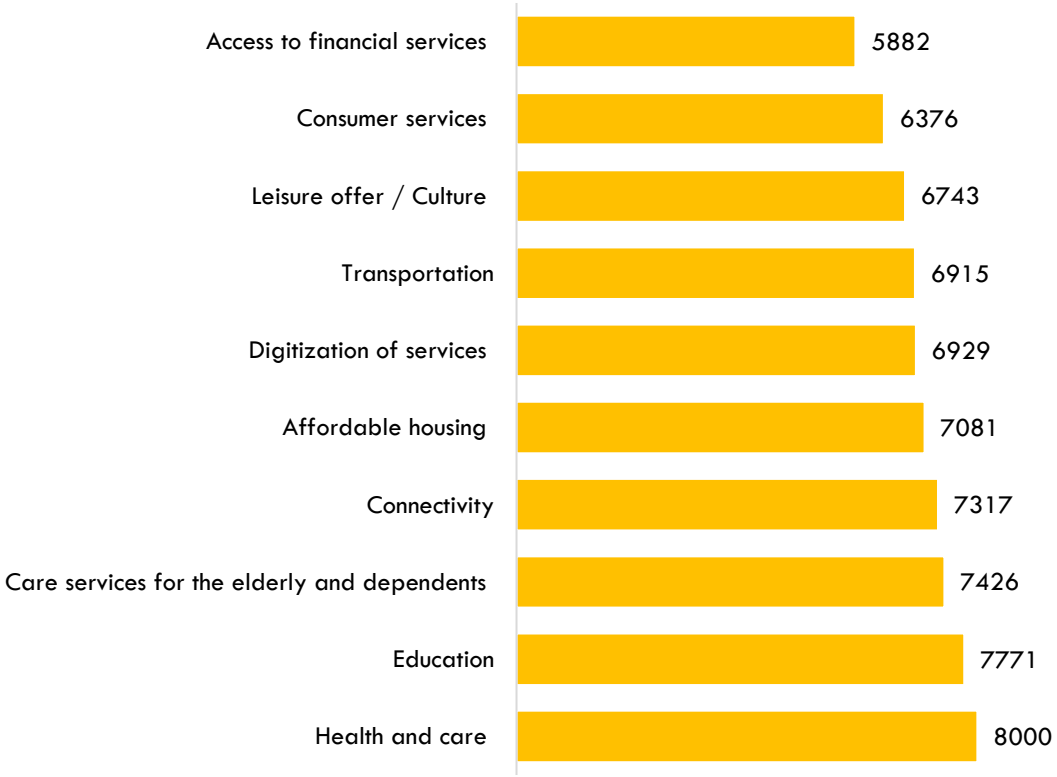
In this question, participants could select a maximum of three, and the percentage shows how many of the participants have chosen this option. "Greater Job opportunities and decent employment" is by far the highest demand with 80,2%. However, this is not true for all countries, for example in Sweden, "Accessibility to services comparable to those of cities" rates the highest.



Most valuable local services

Which of these local services do you value the most?

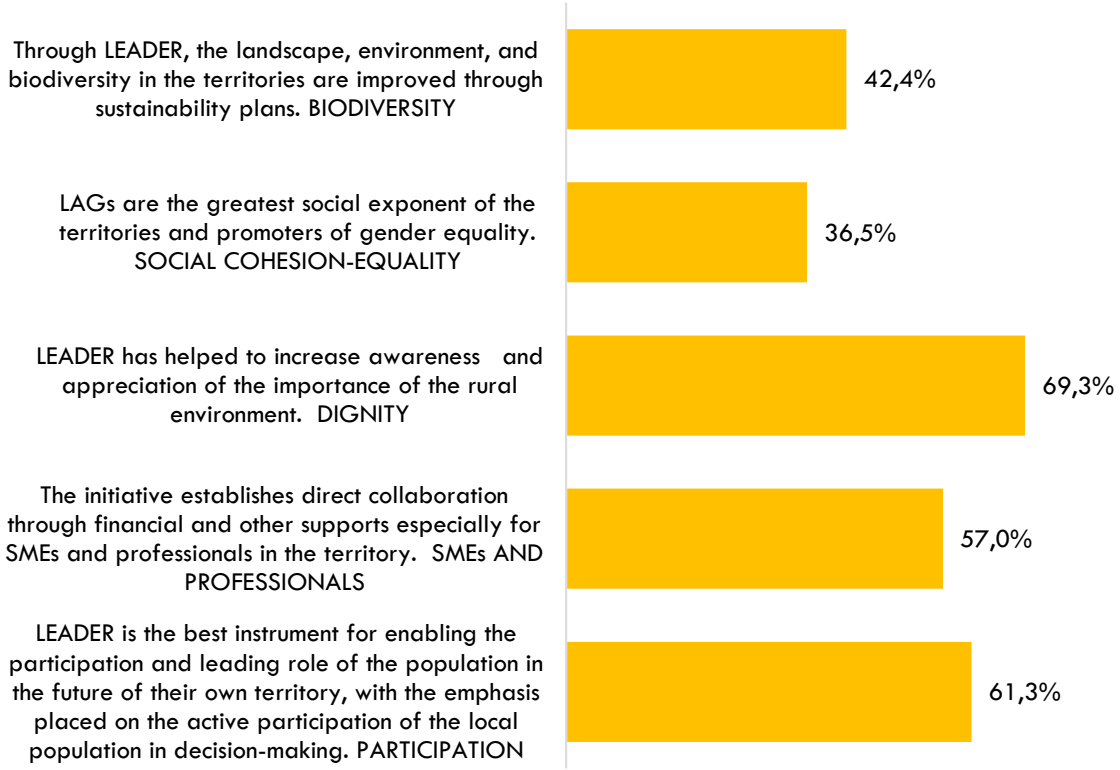
In this question, all local services we to be rated from 1 to 5, where 5 was the highest value. All services are important, but health and care, care for elderlies and education are the most valued. Consumer services and access to financial services is not as important.



How LEADER contributed

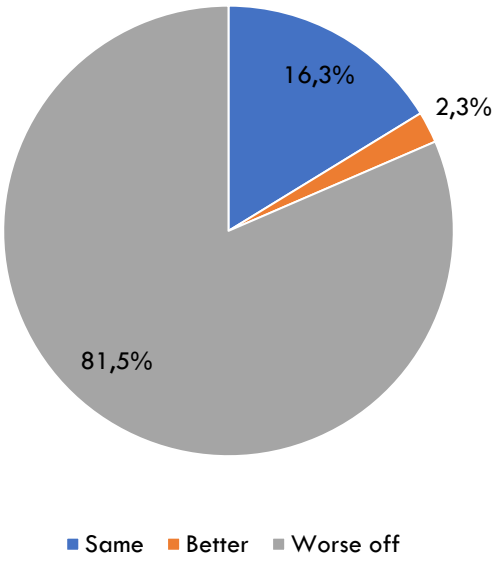
In what way has LEADER contributed to your territory?

In this question, participants were obliged to elect 5 options. This has been criticized from participants who did not want to choose so many, and this should be taken into account when analyzing the results. The 2 ways in which LEADER has contributed the most is DIGNITY, followed by PARTICIPATION.

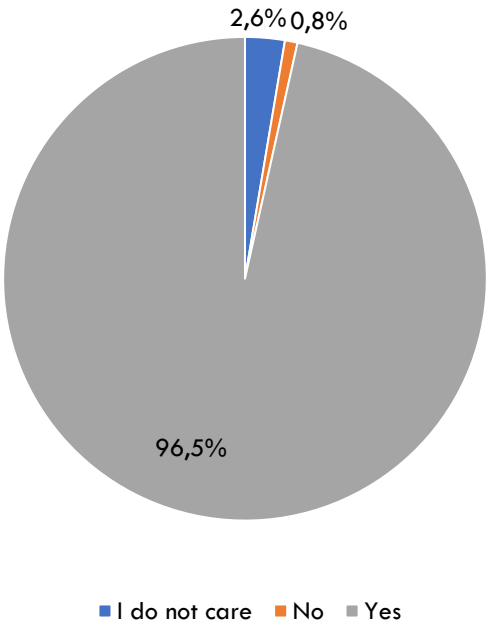


What would your territory be like without LEADER aid?

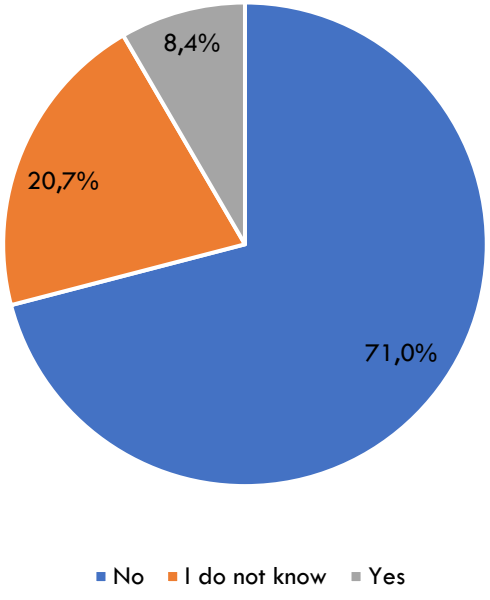
The participants are generally valuing the LEADER-method very positively, as can be seen in this, and also the following two questions.



Would you like your territory to continue receiving resources to promote economic, social and environmental diversity through LEADER and LAGs?



Do you think that, without these resources, your territory would have undergone a similar development at all levels (economic, social, political)?

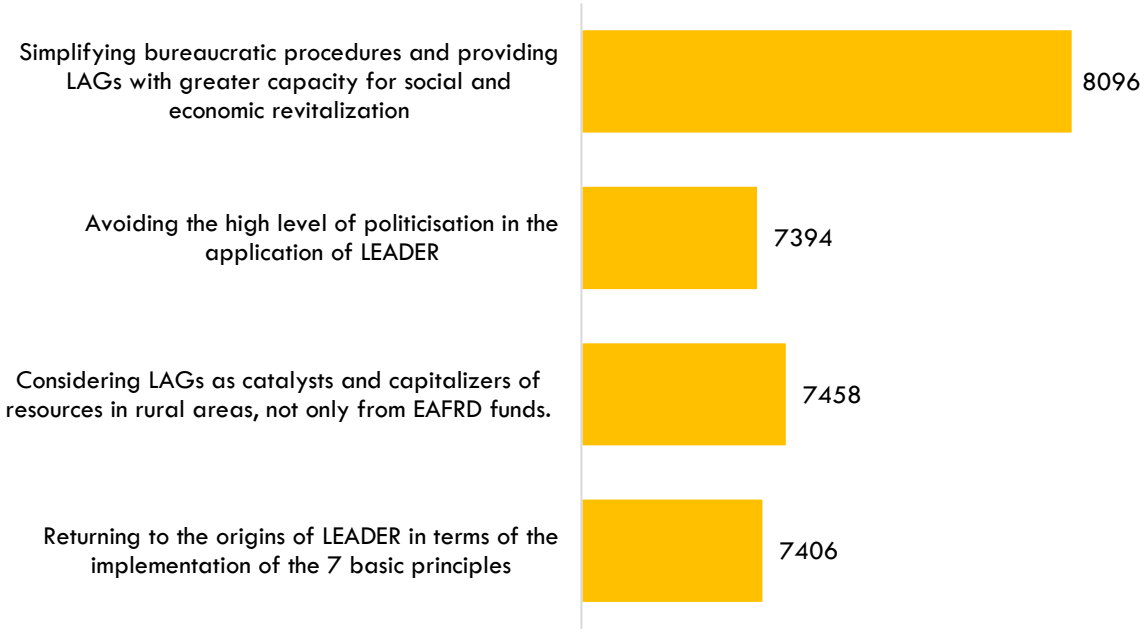


How to improve the LEADER Approach

How would you improve the LEADER approach?

Rate the following options from 1 to 5 (5 is the maximum value).

In this question, all options had to be rated from 1 to 5 from the participants. As is visible, most participants agree that simplifying bureaucratic procedures is the most important way to improve the LEADER-result. This is important, not only for the administration and for the beneficiaries, but even more for the credibility of the European Union and the Managing Authorities. All LEADER-areas are trying to market the EU and LEADER as a possibility, but in the field, the story being told from the beneficiaries, is the story about the incredible burden of bureaucracy. This needs to be changed.



Free text answers

What do you advise the top leaders about the continuity of LEADER to address and reverse the current situation in rural areas?

Here participants were able to answer in a free text window, that could be answered in the participants own language. Since the free text was answered in the participants own language, an overview have not been able to be made from one person. Instead, on the members meeting on 10th of September 2020 some conclusions were proposed and in a discussion amended to the following.

Main Conclusions to the free text answers are the following:

- Many participants have an urge to make their voices heard about the **vital importance of rural areas** in society as a whole. The gap between rural areas and cities / urban areas must be reduced. **The vital importance of rural territories must be recognized,** its image and perception among urban populations and decision-makers must be improved, with a

deconstruction of stereotypes and a disclosure of the functions it has, and LEADER must contribute to this.
This shows and manifests an important problem, that rural areas are mainly seen as peripheral, deviant and less valuable from outside. Is changing the narrative possible? Obviously, the majority of people in rural areas believe in a better future, it might be time to listen to them and find out about the existing strengths and possibilities that are there at a glance for the people living in rural areas;

- The fact that **LEADER makes a difference** in rural areas is repeatedly mentioned, the original LEADER principles, especially the bottom-up principle, and the flexibility for LAGs to design the strategies, territory and to adapt them to concrete local specificities is mentioned, and that this needs to be respected. Participants are also mentioning the results, what differences LEADER is making and how this method creates change and hope in rural areas. The public-private partnerships seen in LAGs are positively perceived;

  Here we would like especially to highlight the fact that LEADER is good in the management of a crisis and transformation, because LEADER was and is the tool to find **solutions** together with effected persons/regions, LEADER **educates the ability for self-organisation** and strengthen engagement, LEADER uses **regional resources and Know-how** and combines it with top-down aspects, and finally LEADER has a 25 years long **approved** method, organisation and structure

  LEADER has unique service propositions which are needed in times like this, which includes: **Participation** through **collaboration and co-financing** based on local needs, a public-private partnership **network center** with the LAG organisation, development based on **voluntarines**, and it works within a **continuous system** from local to EU-level.

- Because of this, participants state that, **LEADER must be provided with adequate financial resources**, considering the importance of territorial animation, training of local agents and empowering local communities in order to make LAGs regional development agencies or even the innovation broker in the region – not just funding agencies; and

- **Extend the LEADER approach** to other support instruments - LEADER needs substantial and secured financial resources – beyond EAFRD funding-frameworks, e.g. separate „regional fund“ (with money from recovery fund) to face economic Covid-19 problems within the next 2 years;

- **Make greater use of the LEADER approach in the fight and adaptation to climate change**, the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, the promotion of circular economy and the use of alternative and renewable energies was mentioned from participants.

And finally, many participants mentioned the problematic **bureaucracy**, the need to make the LEADER delivery-model easier and faster – control is necessary, but it should not be the leading principle To make this a reality, politicians need to give trust and responsibility to the local level.

For more information and details from some of the participating countries, please see Annex 1.

General Conclusions

1. Rural citizens ask for **basic services and job-opportunities**

80,2% of the people answering the survey rate jobs and decent employment as one of the top 3 necessities of rural areas. However, this is not true for all countries, for example in Sweden, "Accessibility to services comparable to those of cities" rates the highest. On European level, accessibility to services rate 61,5% of the people answering are choosing this option as one of the top three.

The services that rural people are asking for are still very basic. The services that rural people need and value the most, according to this survey, are the following:

• Health and Care

• Education

• Care services for the elderly and dependents

• Connectivity

• Affordable Housing

Please note, that these are services that are not necessarily completely replaceable with digital services. Rural people are - still -urging the same basic services as urban take for granted. The absence of these services are very important push factors for all possible migrants (inland, regional, international) that could imagine a life in rural areas.

2. **The vital importance of rural territories to society as a whole must be recognized**, its image and perception among urban populations and decision-makers must be improved, with a deconstruction of stereotypes – the urban norm needs to be broken

The second conclusion is especially drawn from the free text answers, like mentioned above. This means that public investments in development of rural areas (except farming) should be equal to the investments in the development of urban per capita, and it is time to change the narratives of rural – employ and invest in rural people to support this change. People living and working in rural areas have a different perspective.

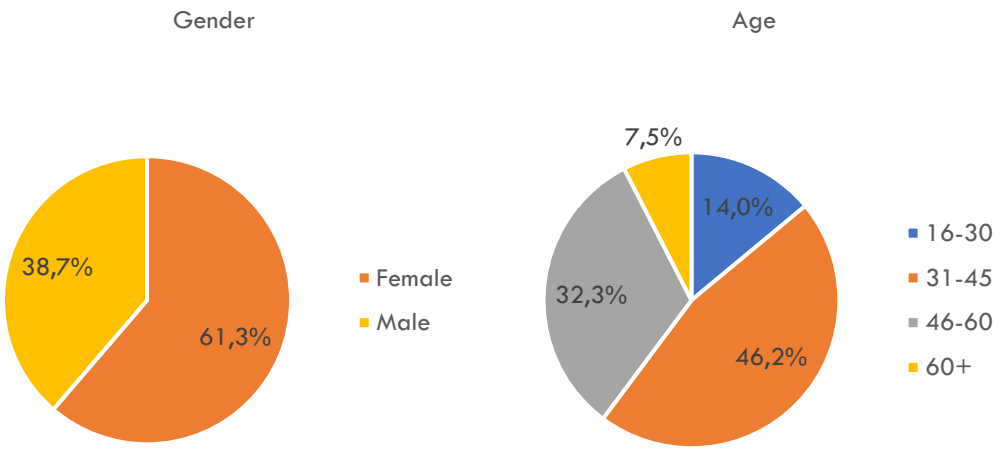
3. Expand and extend the **LEADER-method** as the multi-level governance tool it is. This was drawn from statistical answers as well as the free text answers. There is a lot of information around LEADER in the conclusion of the free text answers, and the main point is that LEADER and CLLD has a huge support in rural areas, and should be expanded and extended. LEADER has proven to react flexible, quickly and target-oriented to the current crisis and it is a method with 25 years' experience. LEADER/CLLD can and should be trusted, also to lead rural areas in to the future.

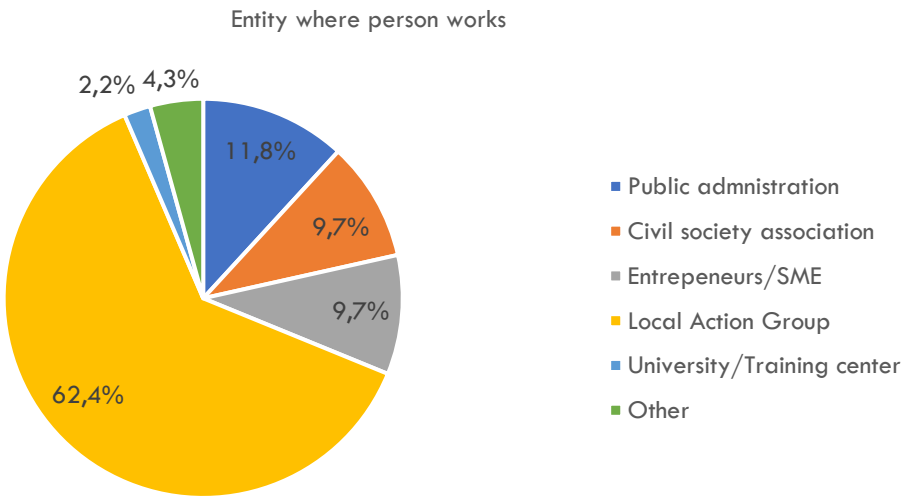


Annex 1. Country results

Austria

Sample composition:





Results highlighted by the National Network:

82% believe, that we will live better or at least the same in 2035 in rural areas, only

18% think it will be worse

81% said, raising awareness for rural areas (IDENTIFICATION) was the main contribution from LEADER

97% said, region would be worse without LEADER, 3 % said it would be the same or don´t know, no one said it would be better

96% want to have LEADER also in the future

3 main services:

- **Education**
- **Leisure offer/culture**
- **Care services**

Less rated: Access to financial services

Wishes for future of the LEADER system:

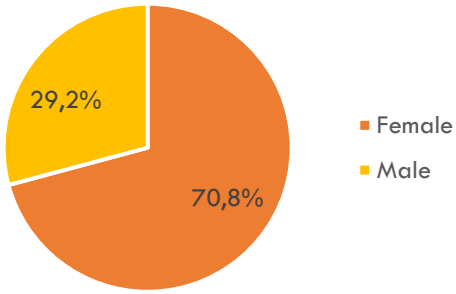
1. **Simplification**
2. **Back to the LEADER principles**
3. **LAGs as catalysts with CLLD model**

Bulgaria

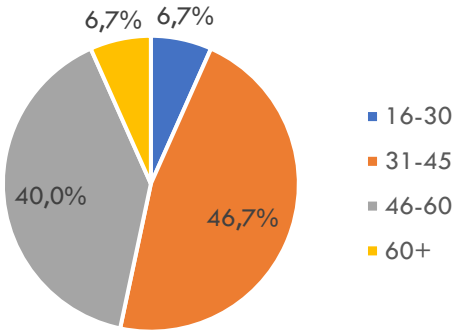


Sample composition:

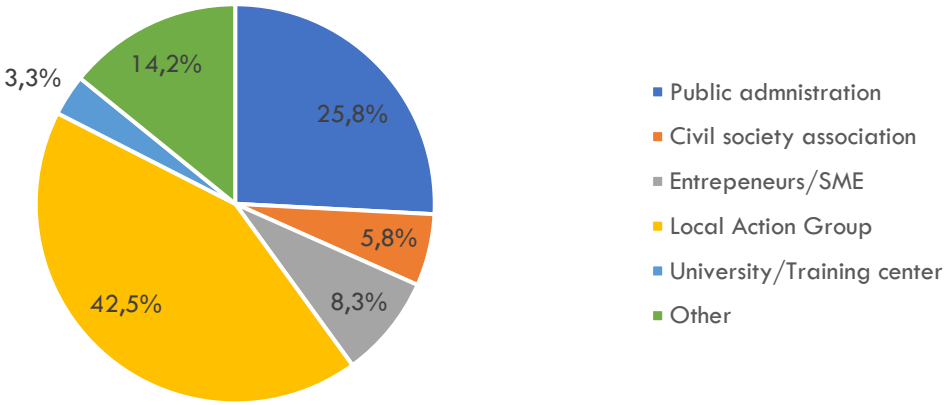
Gender



Age



Entity where person works

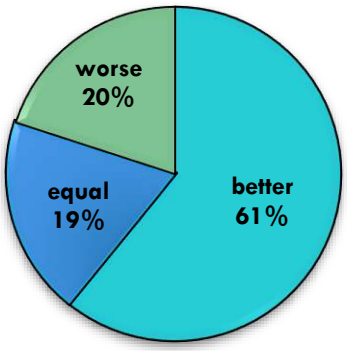


Results highlighted by the National Network:

Situation in rural areas in the Future

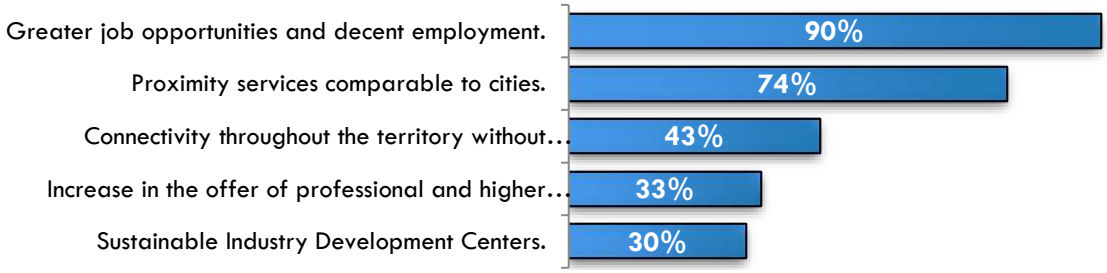
In general, do you think that in 2035 the people in rural areas will live better, worse or the same as today?

The responses show that the majority of respondents from Bulgaria believe in a better future (61%). However, 20 % of respondents believe it will become worse, and 19 % believes it will stay the same.



Looking 15 years ahead... what three things would you like to see happen?

In Bulgaria, according to the answers, "Greater Job opportunities and decent employment" in the rural areas is by far the highest demand with 90 %, followed by need of "Proximity services comparable to cities" (74%). The connectivity throughout the territory in rural areas is also recognized as important- by 43% of.

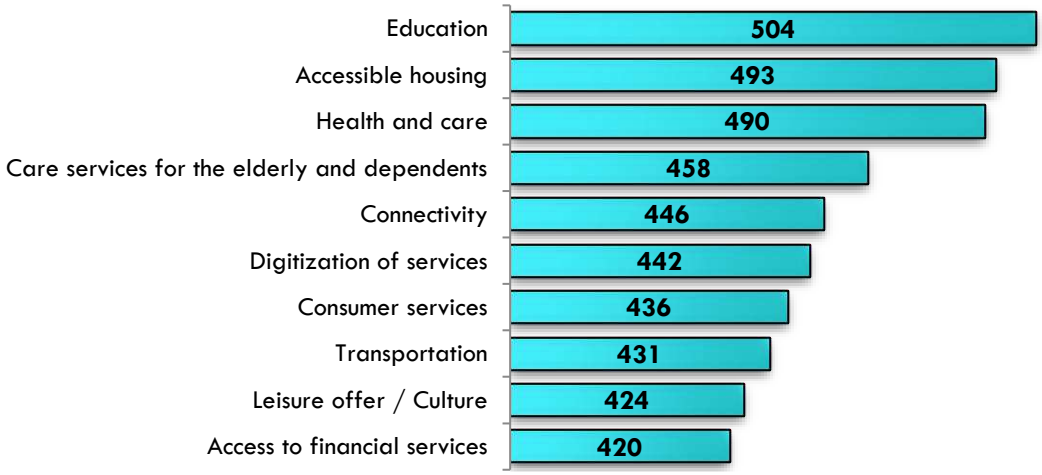


Most valuable local services

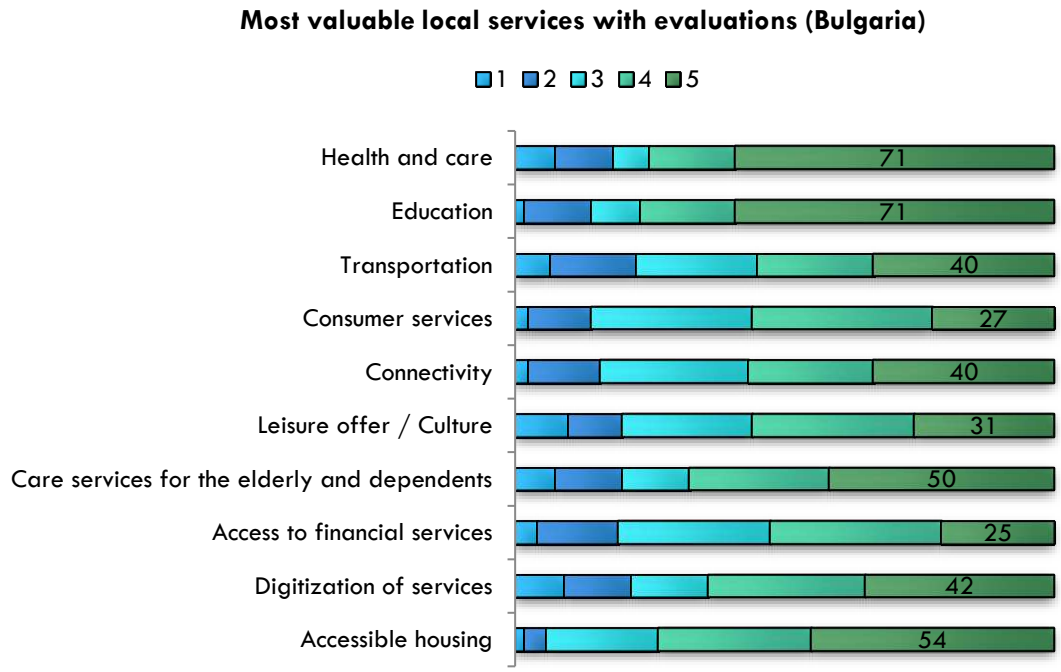
Which of these local services do you value the most?

All services are important for Bulgarian participants and the emphasis is put on education, health and care and accessible housing. Leisure offer/culture and and access to financial services is not as important.

Most valuable local services - general evaluation (Bulgaria)



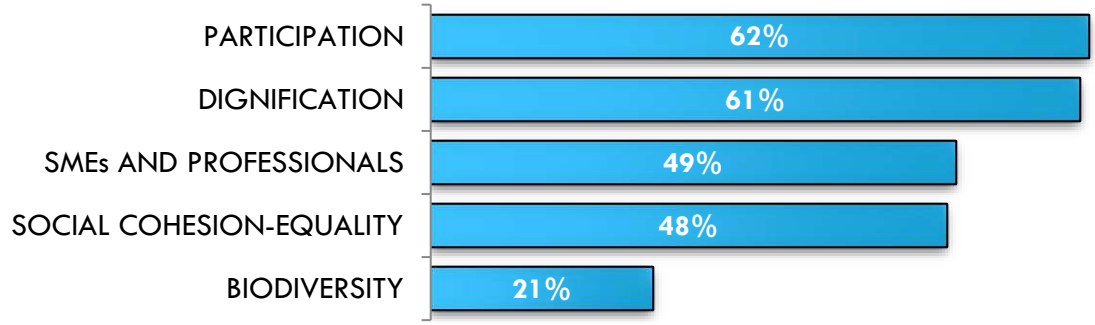
Highest evaluation – 5, receive health and care and education in rural areas, followed by accessible housing and care services for elderly and dependents.



How LEADER contributed for development of rural areas in Bulgaria

In what way has LEADER contributed to your territory?

In this question, participants could select 5 of 9 options. The Bulgarian participants in the survey selected 5 of these option:



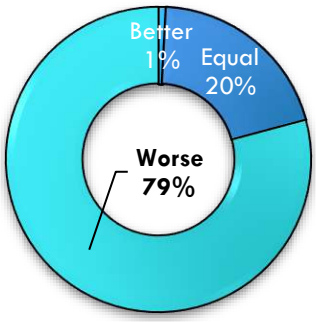
The highest contribution of LEADER according to the Bulgarian participants is:

- With 62% of answers respondents consider that LEADER is the only instrument for the participation and leading role of the population in the future of their territory, with greater weight for civil society representatives in decision-making. PARTICIPATION
- 61 % - LEADER has helped to increase the prestige and appreciation of the rural. DIGNIFICATION
- About ½ of participants consider that LEADER establishes direct collaboration through financial support and support, especially for SMEs and professionals in the territory. SMEs AND PROFESSIONALS (49 %)
- Also about ½ pointed out that the LAGs are the greatest social exponent of the territories and promoter of gender equality. SOCIAL COHESION-EQUALITY (48%).
- Through LEADER, the landscape and biodiversity in the territories are improved through sustainability plans. BIODIVERSITY 21%).

The LEADER/CLLD approach implementation in Bulgaria in the period 2014-2020 is multi-funded and LAGs are active also in the field of social cohesion and biodiversity.

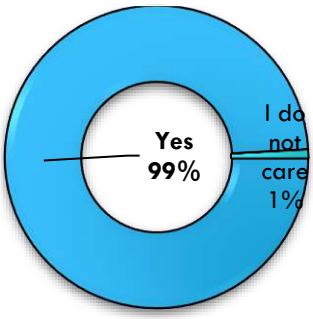
What would your territory be like without LEADER aid?

The respondents from Bulgaria highly value the implementation of LEADER approach and LEADER-method very positively.
79 % of the Bulgarian participants consider rural areas will be worse without LEADER.



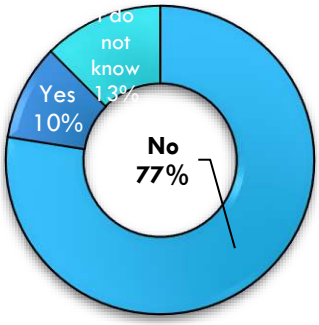
Would you like your territory to continue receiving resources to promote economic, social and environmental diversity through LEADER and LAGs?

The LEADER approach receives strong support from 99% of the surveyed Bulgarians.
Bulgarian rural areas need to continue receiving resources to promote economic, social and environmental diversity through LEADER and LAGs.



Do you think that, without these resources, your territory would have undergone a similar development at all levels (economic, social, political)?

77 % of Bulgarian respondents believe that, without the support of LEADER /CLLD the rural areas would not have similar development in all areas – economic, social, political.

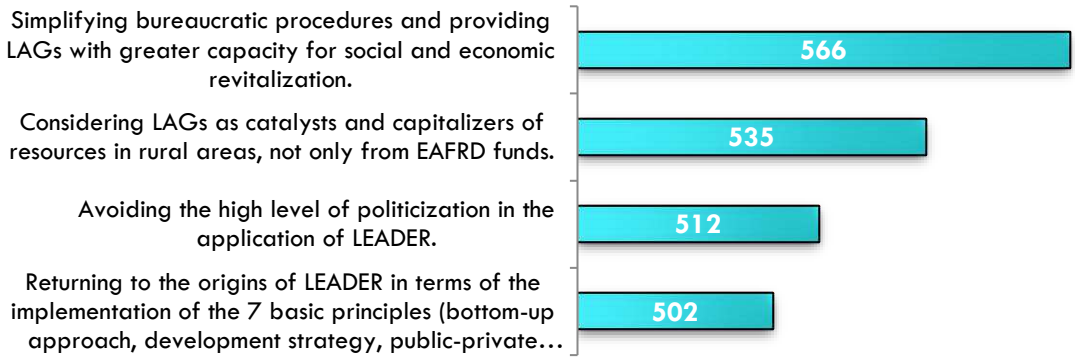


How to improve the LEADER Approach

How would you improve the LEADER approach? Rate the following options from 1 to 5 (5 is the maximum value).

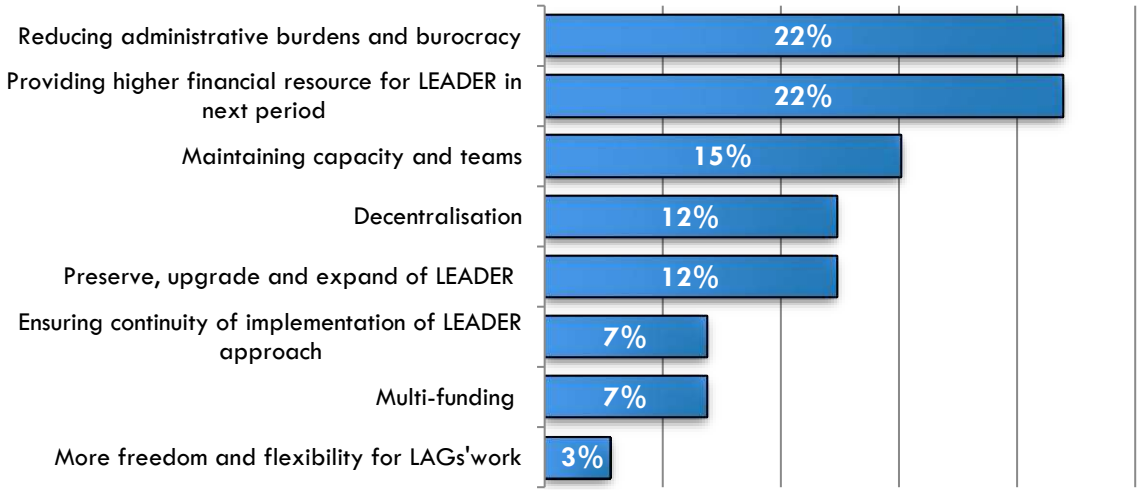
Most participants from Bulgaria agree that simplifying bureaucratic procedures and providing LAGs with greater capacity for social and economic revitalization is the most important way to improve the results of LEADER implementation together with considering LAGs as catalysts and capitalizers of resources in rural areas, not only from EAFRD funds – multi-funding of LEADER approach is successful in Bulgaria.

The statistics of answers on this question fully corresponds to the advices to decision makers – the next question.



What do you advise the top leaders about the continuity of LEADER to address and reverse the current situation in rural areas?

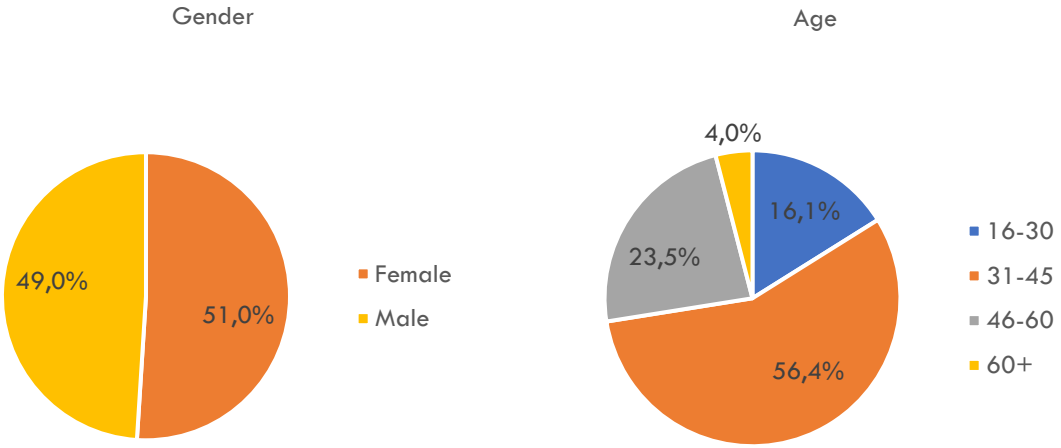
Here participants were able to answer in a free text window and to give advises to the decision makers regarding the future of rural areas.
The 61 out 120 respondents from Bulgaria added free text advises which can be summarized in several directions:

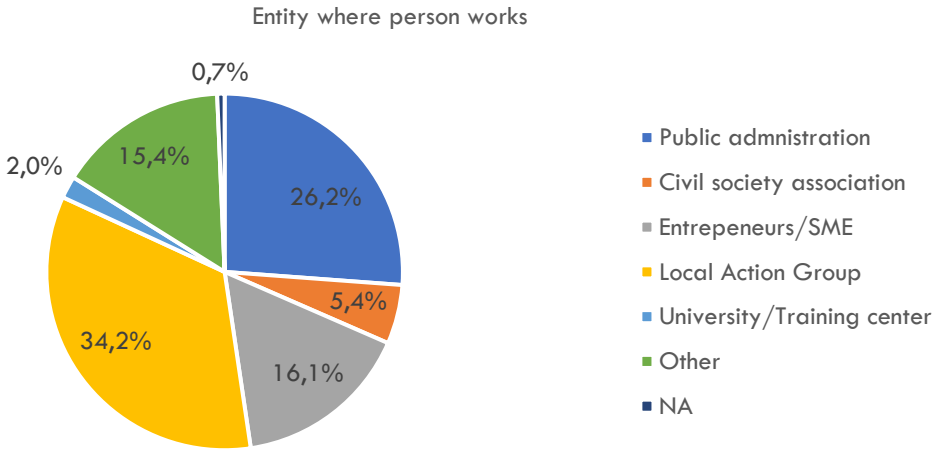


- Simplification and reduction of administrative burdens through appropriate measures in national legislation.
- Providing higher financial resource for LEADER in next period
- Ensure a smooth transition of the structures for the implementation of the preparatory phase (of the new CLLD Strategies) between the EU programming periods in order to eliminate the risk of loss of knowledge, human resources and partnerships.
- Continue multi-fund financing of Leader / CLLD, allocating more financial resources from all ESIFs' (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF and EMFF) to make full use of the potential of the instruments and synergies of different funds for integrated local development.
- Ensuring greater freedom, independence and opportunity for flexibility of the LAG in developing goals, priorities and activities with funding from the various programs and funds included in future CLLD Strategies based on the specific needs of the respective territory of the LAG.

Croatia

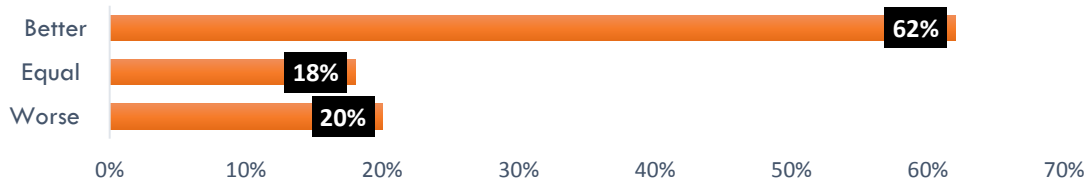
Sample composition:





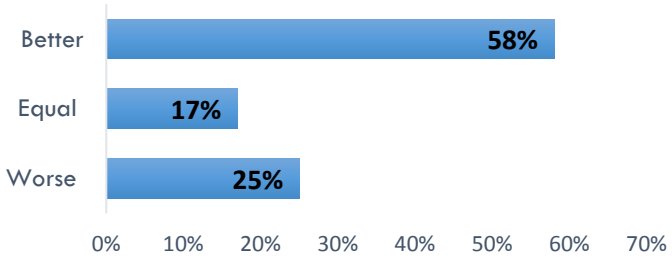
Results highlighted by the National Network:

In general, do you think that in 2035 the people in rural areas will live better, worse or the same as today?

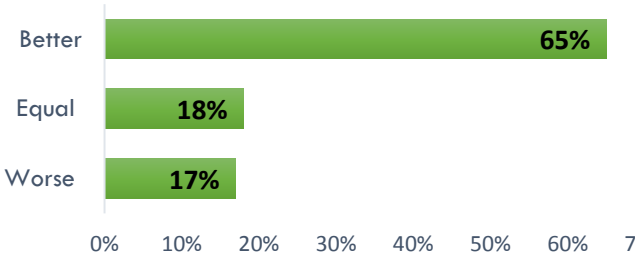


It is important to emphasise that most of young and middle age participants (in age range of 16-45) are optmistic in improvements of living in rural areas – 68% of them.

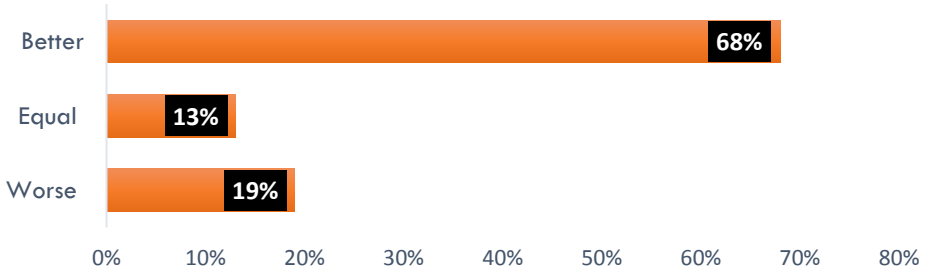
In Age range of 16-30



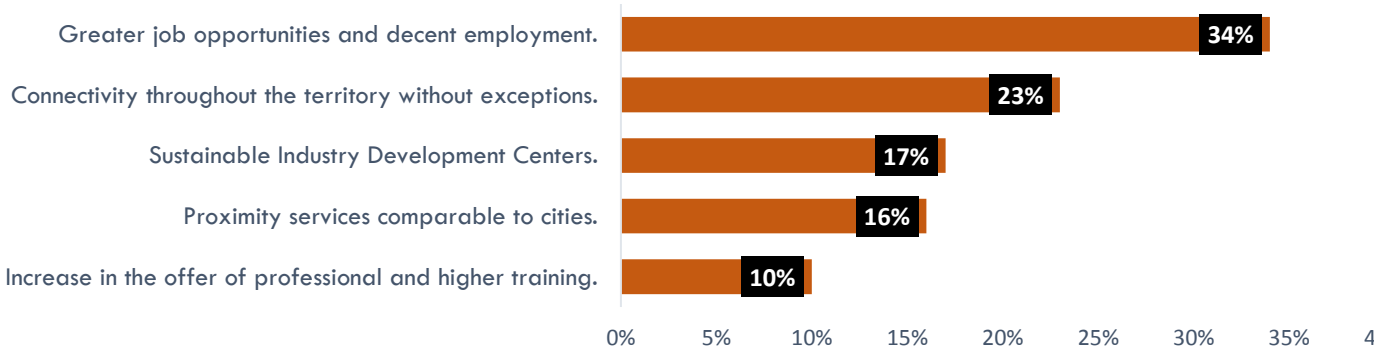
In Age range of 31-45



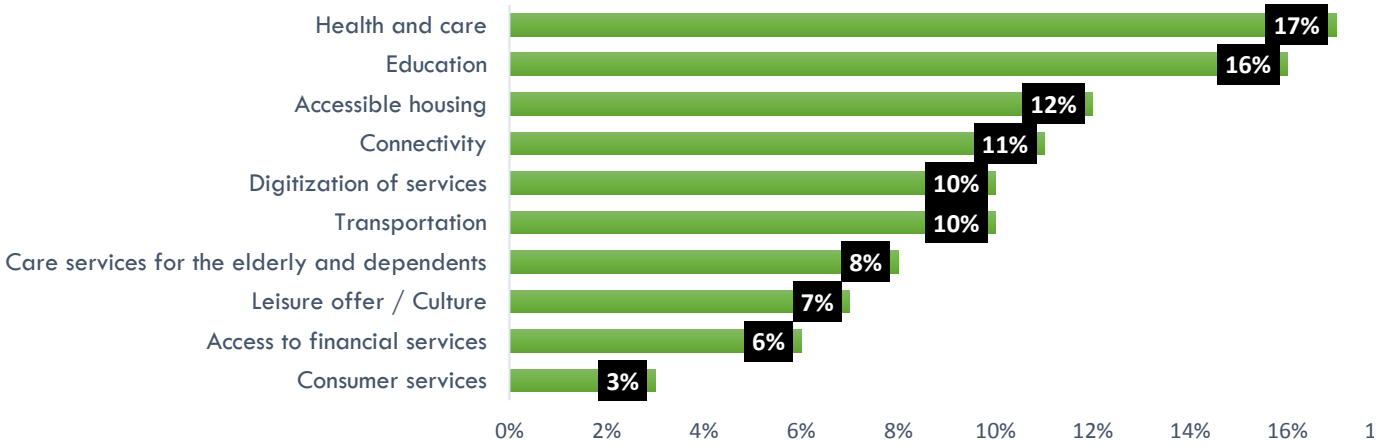
In Age range of 16-45



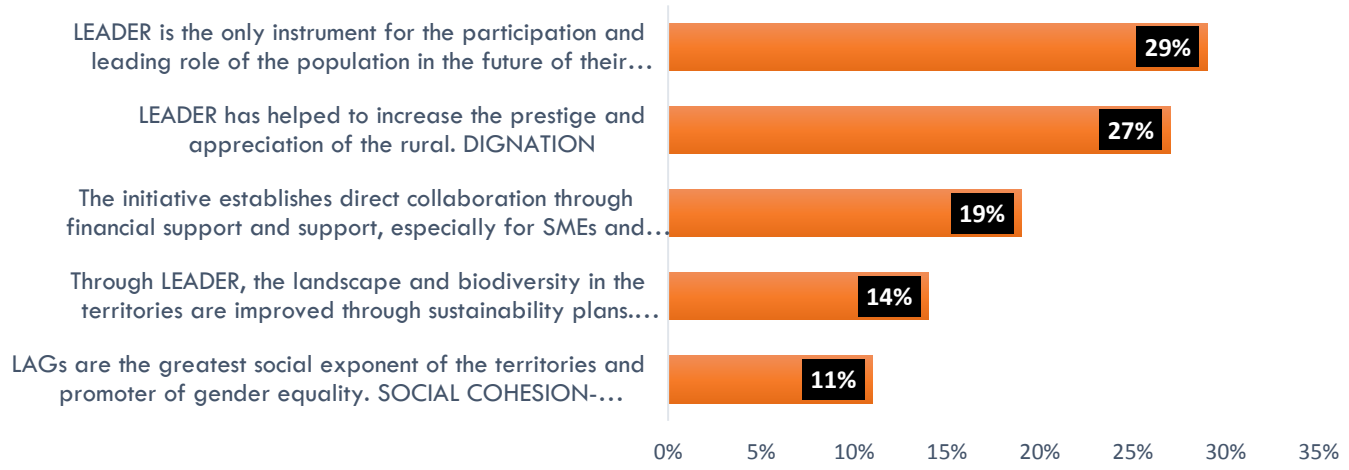
Most important aspects to improve in rural areas in the next 15 years are



Most valued proximity services in rural areas are



Ways LEADER contributes to the territory



78% of respondents believe that their territory would be worse if LEADER did not exist, 65% of participants consider that without LEADER resources, their territories would not have undergone a development such as that seen, and
100% participants consider that their territory must continue to receive financing for development through LEADER and the LAG

Most important / frequent points mentioned in the proposals for the decision-makers on the continuity of LEADER:

- It is necessary to provide **more finanancial resources** for implementation of LEADER program and to LAGs, alonog with giving greater authonomy to LAGs over budgetarty control, considering the strong interest for the grants and inadequate funds.
- To **reinforce the role of LAGs**, increasing their authonomy in allocating the funds and independence from the local politics, promoting „bottom up“ approach in delivering development meassures according to specific needs of every LAG's area.
- **Reduce and simplify the bureaucratic procedures**, the competent agencies inefficiency and delays in disbursement of funds. The efficacy and reputation of LAGs in the local community is dependent on the competent agencies.
- Support the **decentralization process** of the key decision making process for rural areas by relocating it to lower instances, and to the operational level.
- Through **communication improvement** with the local community it is necessary to get acquainted with the „situation on the ground“ and the needs of rural areas. The LEADER program and activities need more comprehensive promotion.
- **Greater networking** is the key for succesful advocating and influencing the decision makers. A stronger influence is needed in designing the Common Agricultural Policy, and in pointing out to inadequate legal solutions or call for proposals.
- Persist with **investing in rural areas**. Namely income diverzification and digitalization process, food production, infrastructure and public transport. It is of strategic importance to **promote the local production** while regulating the importation and shifting the tax burden away from the rural and undeveloped areas.

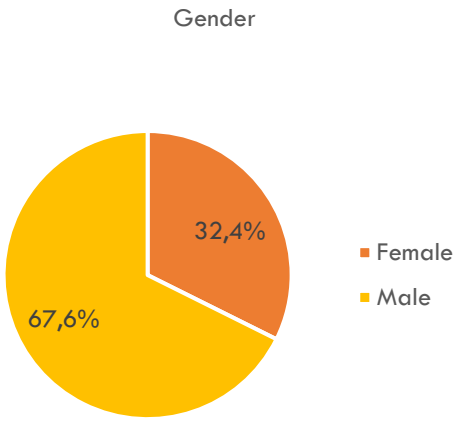
- Continue to **provide support for project proposals** preparation and implementation. Besides educational activities there is a need for more proactive approach in promoting the opportunities. Many family farms and micro enterprises in rural areas need consultancy assistance, and it is advisable to „collect the ideas“ directly „at the field“.

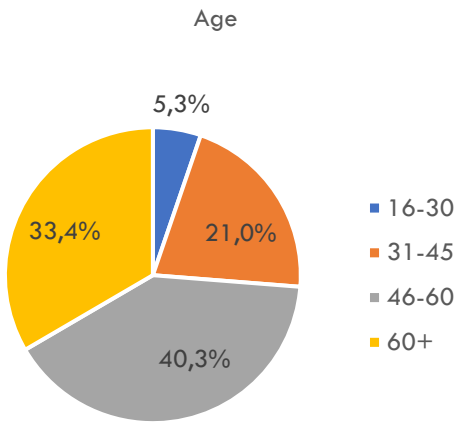
- The problem of rural areas is the demographic structure and **depopulation**. A large number of young people is moving to urban areas or aborad, while the rest of the population getting older. It is necessary to prioritize the demography problem and seek for solutions based on good practices of other countries.

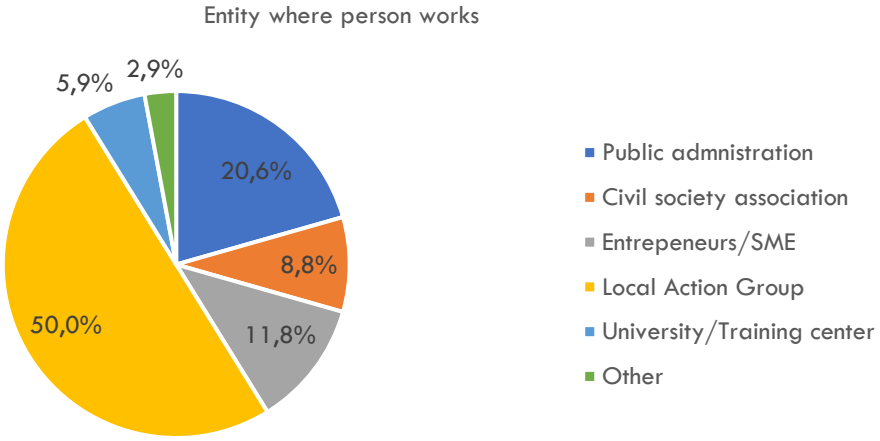
Denmark



Sample composition:





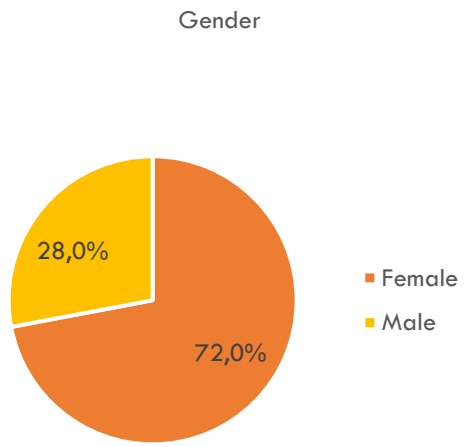


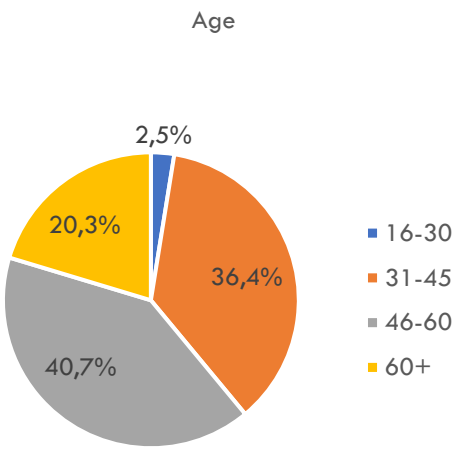
Results highlighted by the National Network:

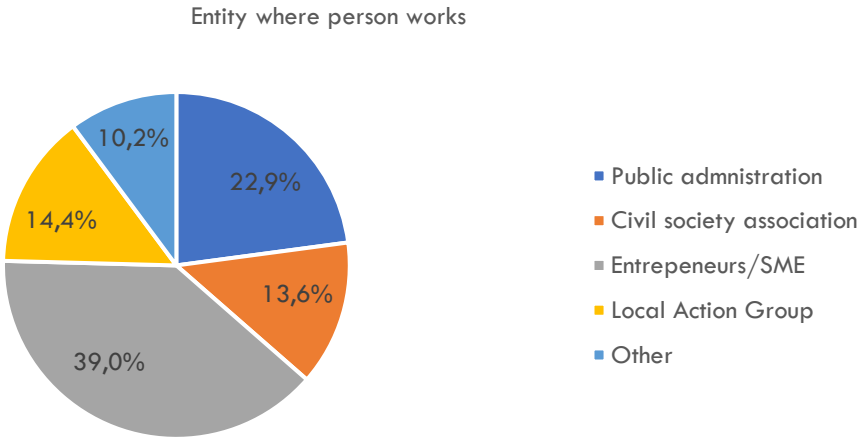
- Focus on revitalising the rural areas and especially supporting the establishment of small businesses.
- A clear support for the LEADER approach and that more funding needs to be provided to the LAGs and the efforts they contribute with in rural areas, including financing additional staff.
- In order to make the most of the LAG's continued work simplification of rules and processes is needed
- Improved cooperation and recognition of the great volunteer work taking place.

Estonia

Sample composition:







Results highlighted by the National Network:

86% believe, that we will live better or at least the same in 2035 in rural areas

79% LEADER has helped to improve the image and value of rural areas and has enhanced dignity. LEADER is the only way to shape and guide the future of our region so that civil society has a greater say in decision-making.

89% said, region would be worse without LEADER

98% said, want to have LEADER also in the future

3 main services:

- Local services comparable to the city
- Connectivity throughout the region without exceptions
- Better job opportunities and decent employment

Wishes for future of the LEADER system:

- Territorial cohesion and rural-urban linkages
- Diverse funding mechanism – multi-funding, increasing the budget for LEADER
- More attention to social issues

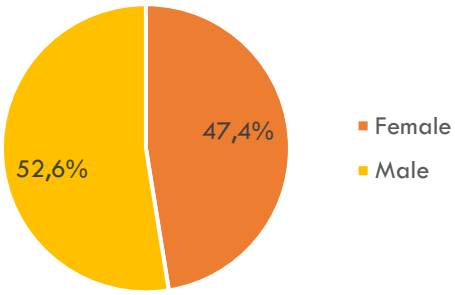
Greece



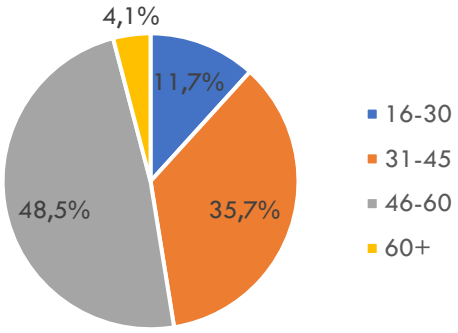
Greek Network of LAGs and FLAGs

Sample composition:

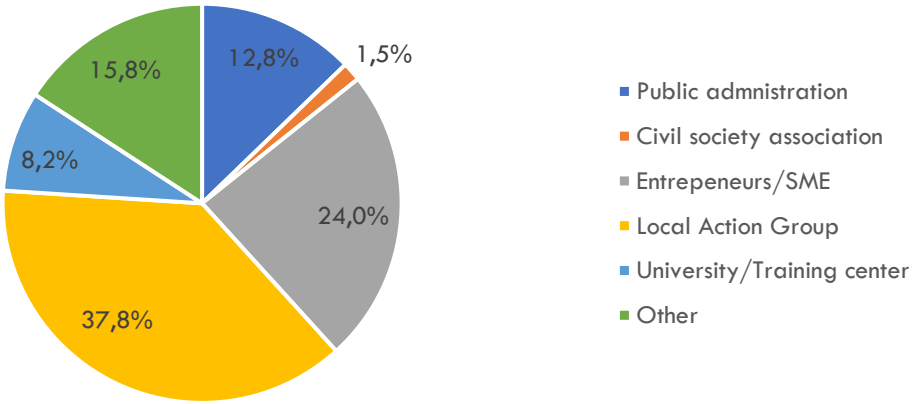
Gender



Age



Entity where person works



Results highlighted by the National Network:

"... Simplified answers to the question "What advice would you give senior leaders regarding LEADER's on-going focus in order to address and reverse the current situation in rural areas?"..."

1. LEADER should be implemented as before, as a European Community Initiative. The use of horizontal measures by Member States hinders the promotion of innovative ideas and projects. This will strengthen the LEADER philosophy and its local perspectives.

2. Simplify procedures and give LAGs more freedom in designing their local strategies, with a view to continuing LEADER at local level, with real local governance, listening to citizens, their needs, their real problems, beyond the political and economic interests, with the aim of keeping the inhabitants in the countryside by offering them opportunities for better living conditions and the promotion of the economic, social and environmental diversity of each territory...

3. To have less bureaucracy in design and implementation, with a more flexible implementation framework.

4. More freedom but with accountability. Show more transparency, social dialogue and better control to tackle corruption.

5. LEADER should continue to support the sustainable rural development of the areas, with emphasis on the protection of the environment, the cultural heritage, the promotion of education and employment.

6. Increase the resources of local programs because they are the only essential tools that really contribute to the local development strategy in the countryside, in public-private partnership as a multidisciplinary approach, based on innovation, cooperation and networking.

7. Propose a Pan-European Strategy for Decentralization on rural issues, propose solutions to key rural problems, such as population containment, marginalization and economic decline.
We need a set of measures that will attract young people back to rural areas.

8. Evaluate the results of the implementation of LEADER and other policies in the countryside and continue to ensure the lasting added value of them on the areas.

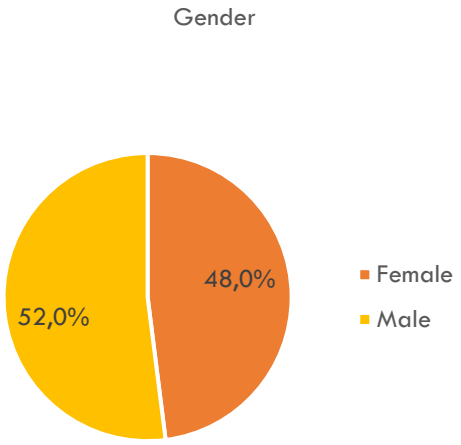
9. Promote good practices and encourage citizens with a view to a better quality of life in the countryside.

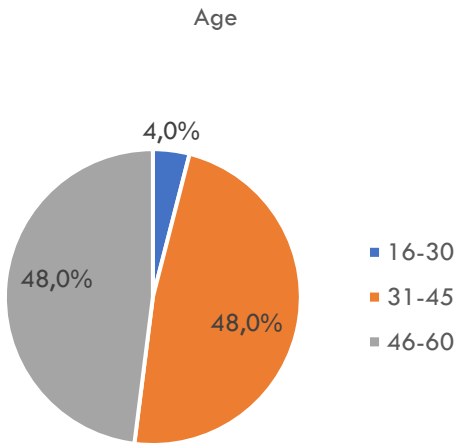
10. Give LAGs more freedom; give them ownership of the program so that they become agents of social & digital innovation, choosing social innovation as a driver of change, for the countryside and rural areas.

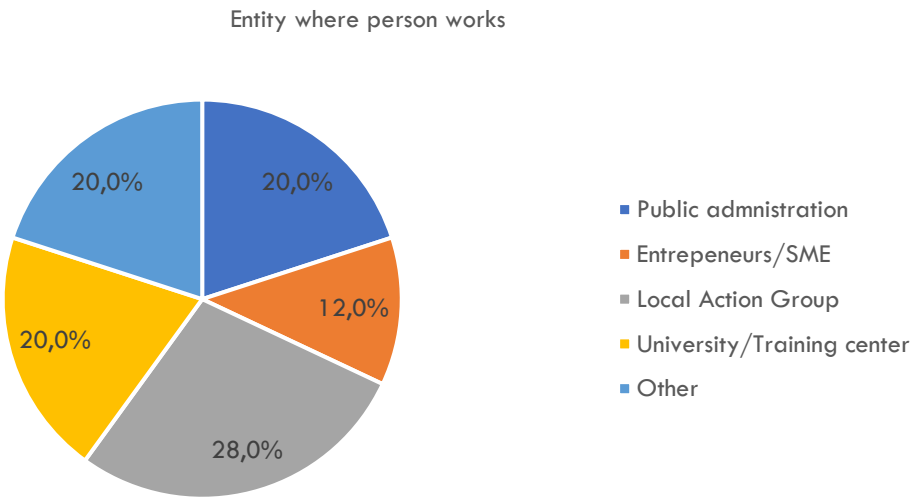
Italy



Sample composition:







Results highlighted by the National Network:

In general, do you think that in 2035 the people in rural areas will live better, worse or the same as today?

- Better 60%
- Equal 16%
- Worse 24%

The feedback received show a considerable optimism about the future of rural areas. However, in the case of Italy, it is necessary to take into account that the rural areas of the southern regions present a more difficult situation compared to the northern ones (which are already particularly developed and with excellent prospects for further economic and social development).

Looking 15 years ahead... what three things would you like to see happen?

Most important answers:

28% Excellent Communications and Transport Services throughout the whole of the territory

24% Greater job opportunities and decent employment

12% Sustainable centres for Industry Development

Work, services, connections and economic development are the main expectations of rural communities. This information confirms what is already known and should lead the LAGs to keep focusing on these priorities

Which of these local services do you value the most?

Average results:

- ✓ Education **4.64/5**
- ✓ Health and care **4.6/5**
- ✓ Care services for elderly **4.56/5**
- ✓ Transport **4.32/5**
- ✓ Connectivity **4.24/5**
- ✓ Digitization of services **4.04/5**
- ✓ Accessible accommodations **3.92/5**
- ✓ Free time/culture offer **3.84/5**
- ✓ Consumer Services **3.52/5**
- ✓ Access to financial services **3.32/5**

Basically, all the options have been taken into account.
However, it is clear that education is the key, together with health and social services.

In what way has LEADER contributed to your territory?

Most important answers:

20% Dignity

16% Biodiversity

12% SMEs and professionals:

The answers confirm that the Italian LAGs have been working a lot on the social and environmental issue. We think that it is also positive the strong attention paid to SMEs and professional, especially in the running programming period 2014/2020.

What would your territory be like without LEADER aid?

Worse: **72%**

Same: **28%**

Also, in this case the involved communities seem to recognize the merits and work of the LAGs through the LEADER approach and this bodes well for the next programming period 2021/2027.

Do you think that, without these resources, your territory would have undergone a similar development at all levels (economic, social, political)?

No **56%**

Don't know **36%**

Yes **8%**

The collected answer confirm what has already emerged through the previous questions. LEADER plays a key role for local development. But it is also important to highlight that about the 36% of the participants don't have a clear understanding of the LEADER environment.

And finally, how would you improve the LEADER approach? Rate the following options from 1 to 5 (5 is the maximum value).

Average results:

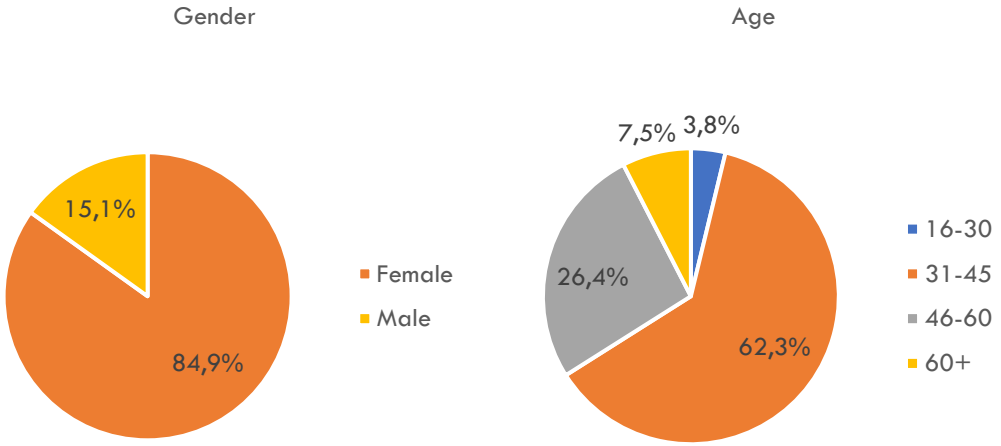
- ✓ Returning to the origins of LEADER in terms of the implementation of the 7 Basic principles: **4,24/5**
- ✓ Considering LAGs as catalysts and capitalizers of resources in rural areas, not only from EAFRD funds: **4,08/5**
- ✓ Avoiding the high level of politicisation in the application of LEADER: **4,16/5**
- ✓ Simplifying bureaucratic procedures and providing LAGs with greater capacity for social and economic revitalization: **4,48/5**

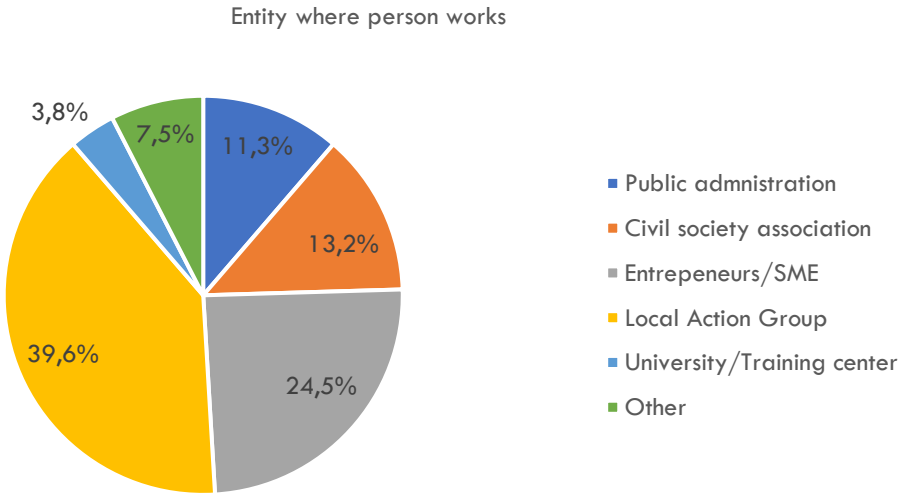
Basically, all the options provided have obtained the same score, with a slight prevalence of burocratic and administrative simplification. All these issues, therefore, need to be taken into account by the LAGs and decision makers.

Latvia



Sample composition:



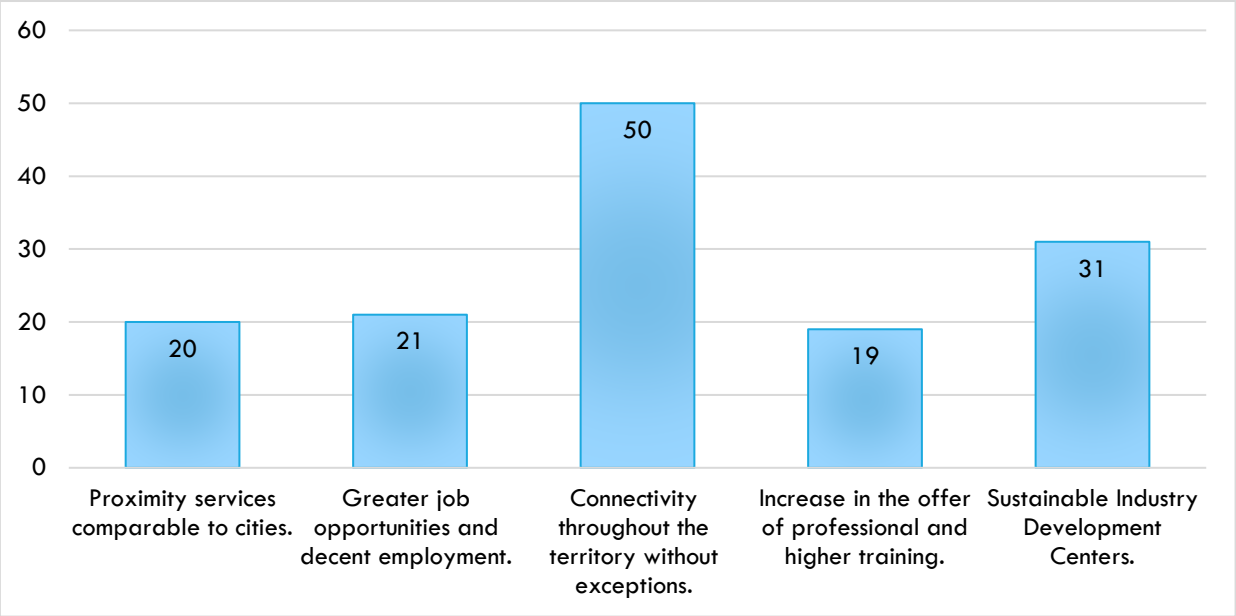


Results highlighted by the National Network:

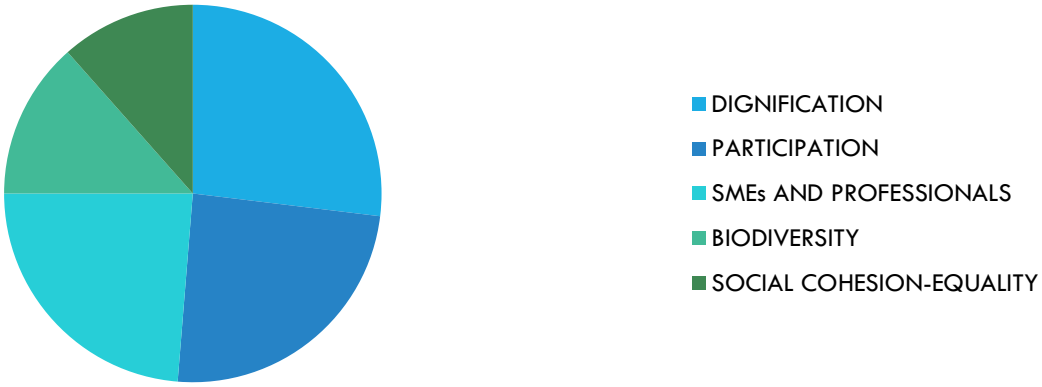
62 % of respondents say that their life without LEADER would be worse, 36 % thinks it would be similar, 2 % that it would be better.

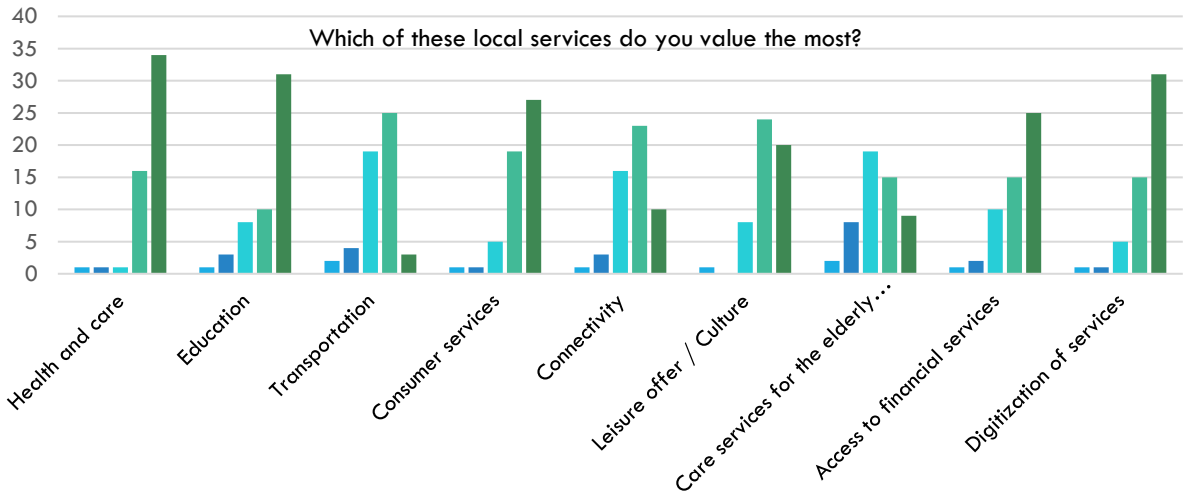
72% responded that without LEADER, their territory would have not gone a similar development at all levels (economic, social, political), 22% didn't know, 6% thought it would be similarly.

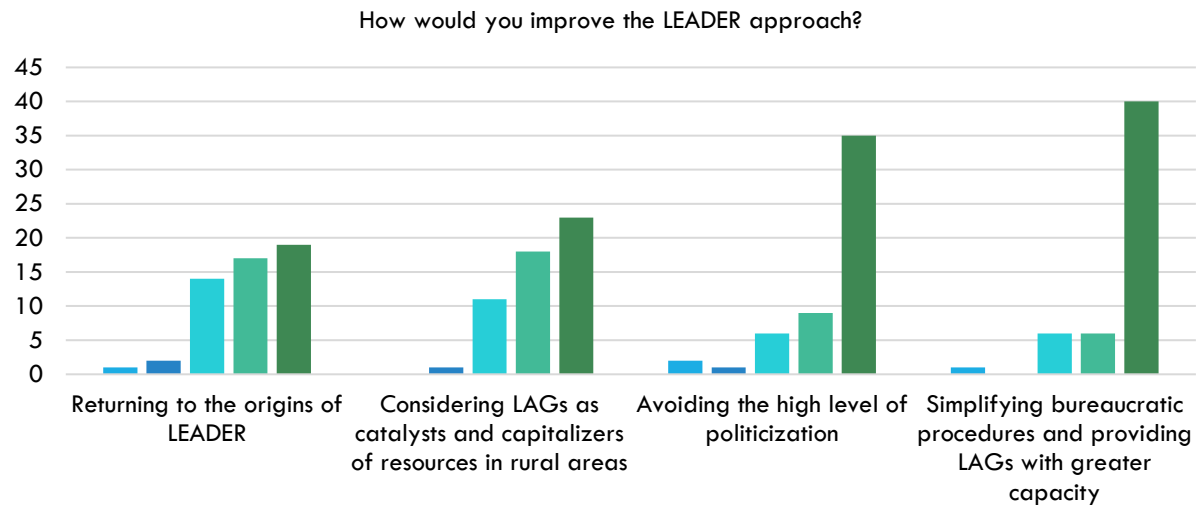
Imagine in 15 years... what three things would you like to see happen?



In what way has LEADER contributed to your territory?







In the question about Returning to the origins of LEADER 57% of respondents answered „5" are LAGs.

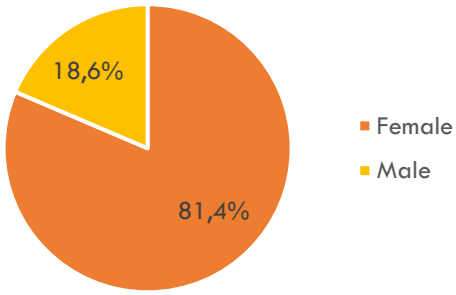
Lithuania



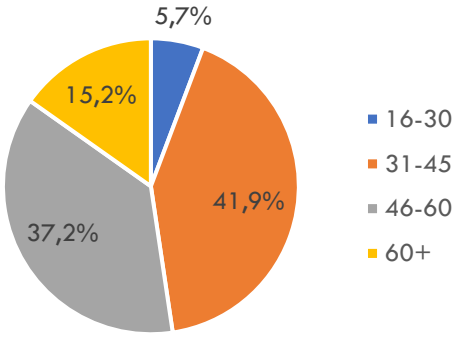
LITHUANIAN RURAL COMMUNITIES UNION

Sample composition:

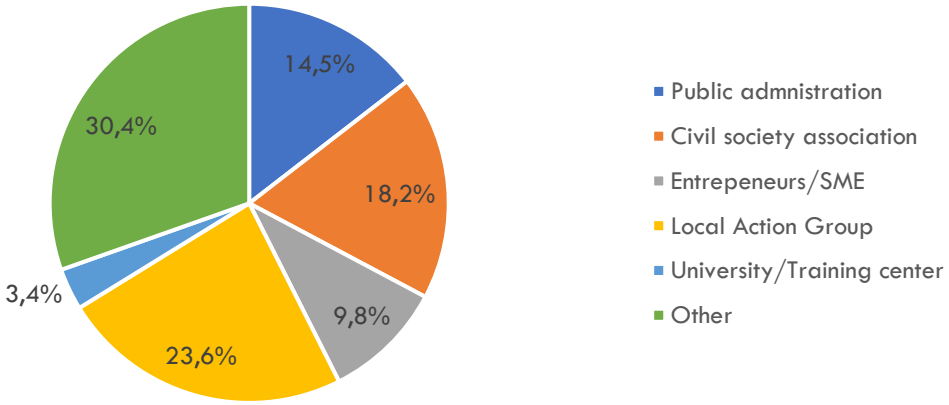
Gender



Age



Entity where person works



Results highlighted by the National Network:

63% believes that in **2035** we will live better in rural areas, but **21%** thinks life will be worse.

76% after **15** years in rural areas would like to have same proximity services comparable to cities.

80% thinks that without LEADER aid their territory be worse and only **8%** thinks that without LEADER resources, their territory would have undergone a similar development at all levels.

98% would like their territory to continue receiving resources to promote economic, social and environmental diversity through LEADER and LAGs!!!

More than **74%** agrees that LEADER has helped to increase the prestige and appreciation of the rural.

For better **LEADER** in future:

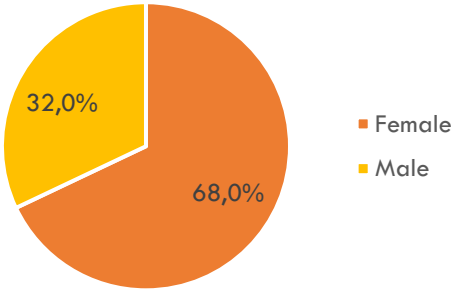
- Less bureaucracy and greater capacity for LAGs
- Less politicization
- Returning to the origins of LEADER

Poland

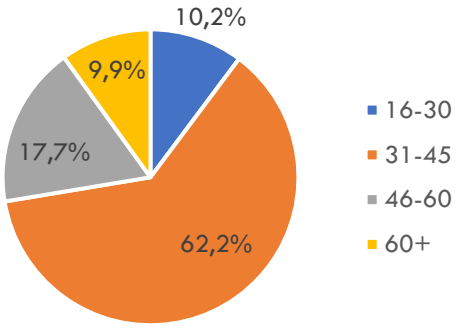


Sample composition:

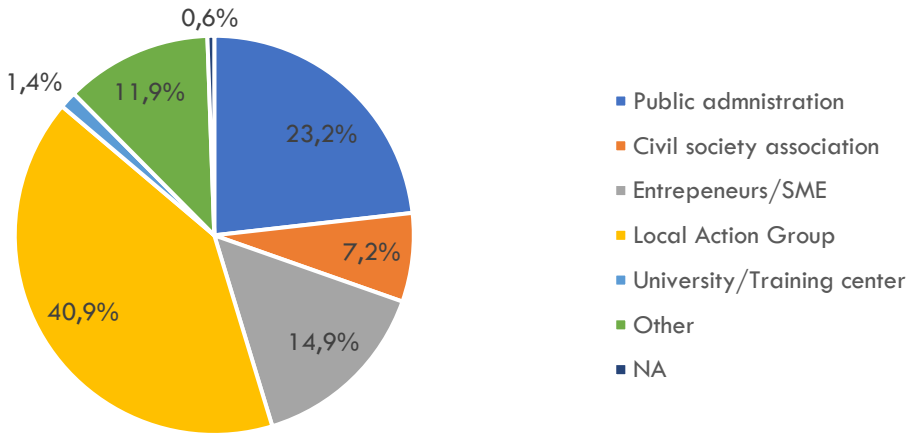
Gender



Age



Entity where person works



Results highlighted by the National Network:

Without LEADER, our territory would be

2,5% better off

85,6% worse off

12% the same

Percentage that want to keep LEADER in order to develop their territories:

98%	Yes
1,4 %	I do not care
0,6%	No

Do you think that, without these resources, your territory would have undergone a similar development at all levels (economic, social, political)?

7%	Yes
77%	No
16%	I do not know

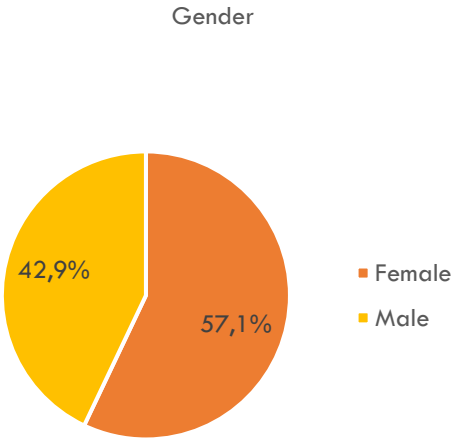
Most important free text from Poland:

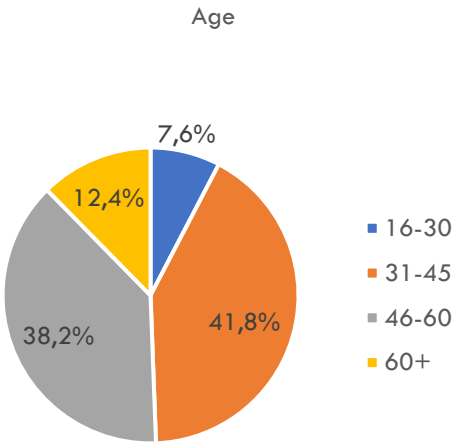
66	The first of all - Cutting red tape, simplifying procedures and legislation
38	The second - More resources for LEADER
22	Support for entrepreneurship (22)
17	Multifunded LDS (17)
12	Environmental protection, renewable energy (12)

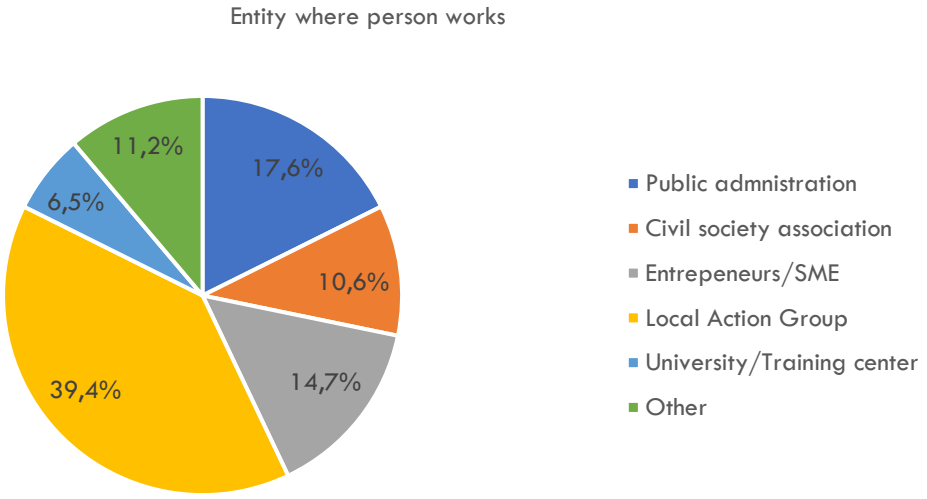
Portugal



Sample composition:







Results highlighted by the National Network:

Regarding the general prospects for 2035, **54% of respondents believe that rural populations will live better,** while 32% consider that they will live worse. 14% consider that there should probably be no major changes.

The most important aspects that need to be improved in rural areas in the next 15 years are: (Possibility to select multiple options)

- **Greater job opportunities and decent jobs** (76%);

- **Proximity services similar to those seen in cities** (63%);
- **Sustainable centres for industry development**. (60%).

The most rated proximity services are: (Score 5 – Maximum)

- **Health and care** (92%)
- **Education** (81%);
- **Care for the elderly and dependents** (66%);
- **Connectivity** (54%)
- **Affordable housing** (51%).

Regarding the ways LEADER contributes to the territory, the participants highlight the role of the approach in: (Possibility to select multiple options)

- **Increasing prestige and valuing the countryside** – Dignification (76%)
- **Establishing direct relationship through monitoring and financial support, especially with SMEs and entrepreneurs in the territory** - SMEs and Businesses (63%)
- **Being the only instrument for the participation and protagonism of the population in the future of their territory, with greater weight of representatives of civil society in decision-making** – Participation (45%)

88% of respondents believe that their territory would be worse if LEADER did not exist. 10% think it would be the same and only 2% think it would be better.

The vast majority (95%) consider that their territory must continue to receive financing for development through LEADER and the LAGs. Less than 1% disagreed and the rest indicated they were indifferent.

75% consider that without LEADER resources, their territories would not have undergone a development such as that seen. 8% have the opposite opinion and 17% indicated they do not know.

Most important / frequent points mentioned in the proposals for the decision-makers on the continuity of LEADER:

1. Return to the original LEADER principles, especially the bottom-up principle, with greater flexibility for LAGs to design the strategies, the measures to be applied in the territory and to adapt them to concrete local specificities (or unexpected situations)
2. Reduction of the bureaucratic burden, the multiplication of procedures, the dispersion of LEADER/CLLD by different programs, managing authorities and paying agencies, which cause unnecessary complexity and delays, which often result in project promoters giving up.;
3. The gap between rural areas and cities / urban areas must be reduced. The vital importance of rural territories must be recognized, its image and perception among urban

populations must be improved, with a deconstruction of stereotypes and a disclosure of the functions it has, and LEADER must contribute to this;

4. LEADER must be provided with adequate financial resources, considering the importance of territorial animation, training of local agents and empowering local communities;
5. Continue the commitment to support the diversification of activities and functions of rural areas, harnessing local strengths, knowledge and opportunities and providing greater support for small and micro scale projects, especially promoted by young people and unemployed, avoiding their leaving for the cities.;
6. Extend the LEADER approach to other support instruments;
7. Greater use of the LEADER approach in the fight and adaptation to climate change, the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, the promotion of circular economy and the use of alternative and renewable energies;
8. Greater support for cooperation, networking and exchange of experiences;

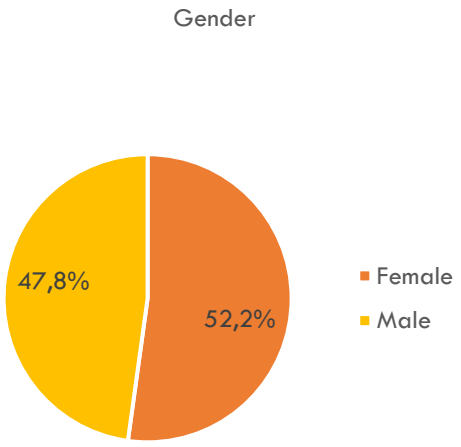
On how to improve the LEADER approach the most valued options were (Score 5 – Maximum):

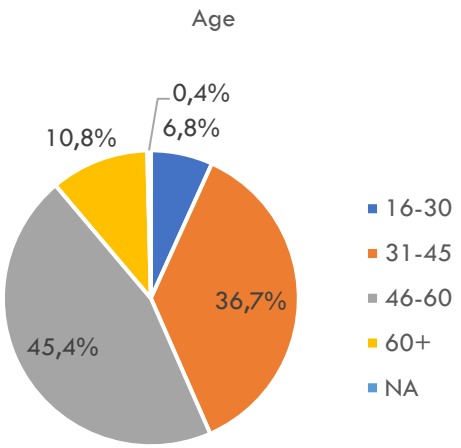
- **Simplifying bureaucratic procedures and providing LAGs with greater capacity for social and economic revitalization** (75%);
- **Avoiding the high level of politicisation in the application of LEADER** (56%);
- **Returning to the origins of LEADER in terms of the implementation of the 7 basic principles (bottom-up approach, development strategy, public-private collaboration, multi-sectorality, innovation, cooperation and networking** (54%)
- **Considering LAGs as catalysts and capitalizers of resources in rural areas, not only from EAFRD funds** (49%).

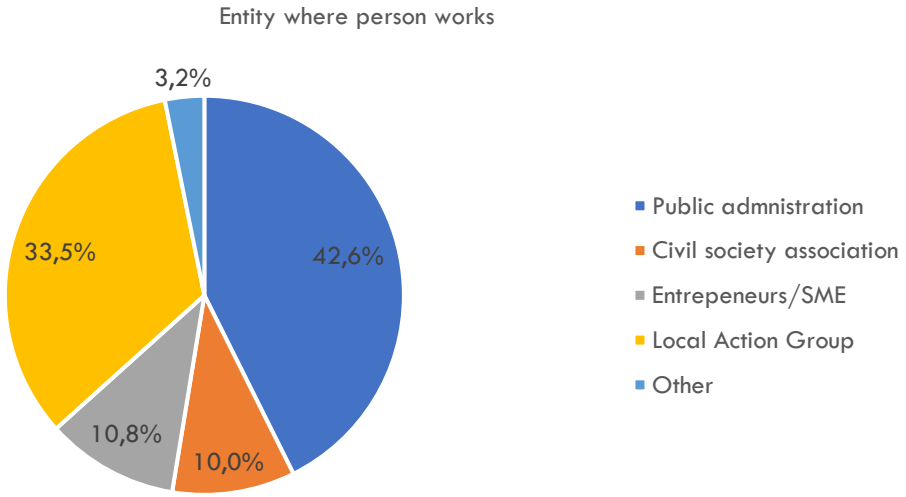
Slovakia



Sample composition:







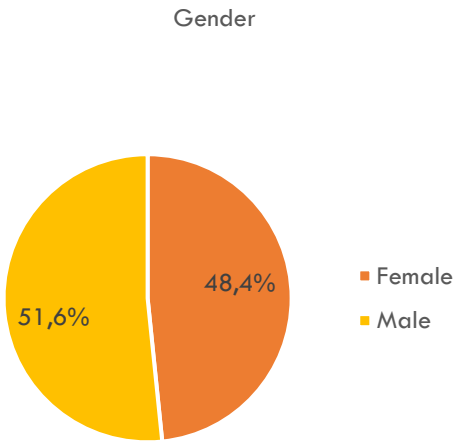
Results highlighted by the National Network:

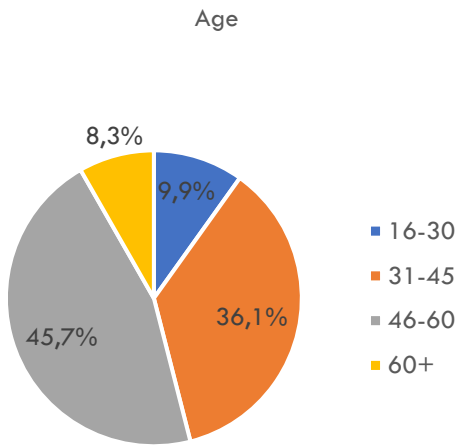
The majority of Slovak answers is about simplification of all processes - so less bureaucracy and more work directly in the region - people have the feeling that the region has to use national priorities and that sometimes the LEADER system bottom to top is missing...

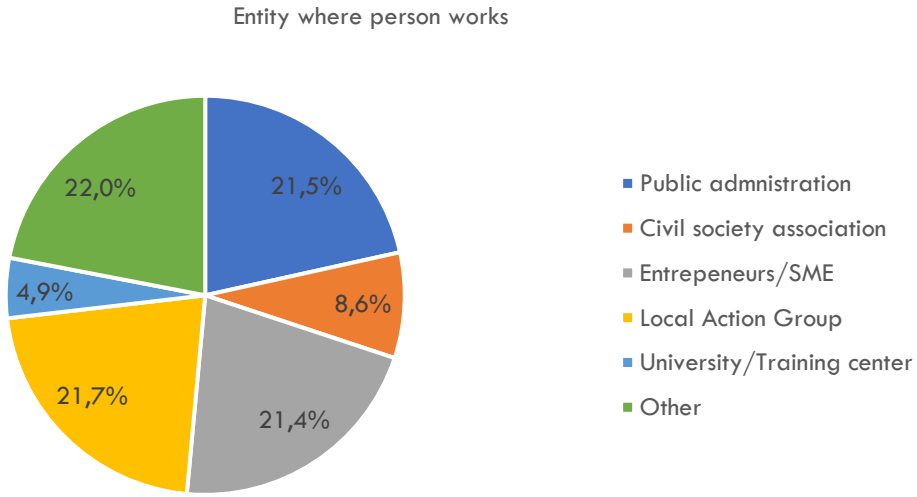
Spain



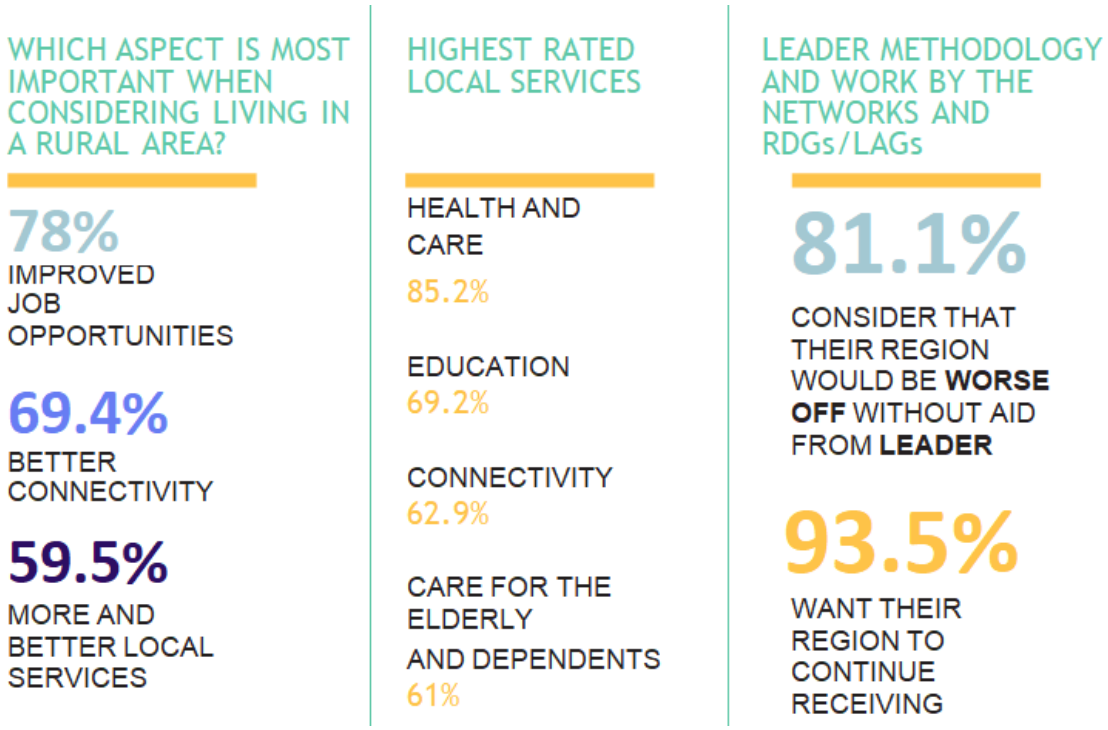
Sample composition:







Results highlighted by the National Network:



Simplified answers to the question "What advice would you give senior leaders regarding LEADER's on-going focus in order to address and reverse the current situation in rural areas?".

1. Return to **LEADER's origins**, placing LEADER as a measure within the RDP and giving a real role to local socio-economic agents. Excessive red tape should be avoided in the process as this prevents an efficient and rapid response to the needs of rural areas. A less bureaucratic framework is, therefore, required.

2. Turn the LAGs into **agents for social and digital innovation**, opting for social innovation to drive change, with the ability to structure rural areas with a common goal and a more collective approach.

3. **Greater social dialogue**, more **transparency** and more **involvement.** Provide a greater role and decision-making capacity to local actors in the area. Improve participation mainly by young people and children. Consider the social capital and associations as elements capable of invigorating and creating wealth in rural areas.

4. **Holistic vision**, promoting pilot and experimental actions and not being afraid to fail. A more comprehensive vision, more high profile and visible actions. Increase the number of collective projects, those considered non-productive: support for SMEs, social, cultural, educational projects, etc.

5. Increase **budgets,** drawing on more resources from other European, national and regional funds, not only from the EAFRD. LEADER should set itself more ambitious goals, explore other avenues, tackle more measures, reinvent strategies, etc., in short, focus more on purpose and less on form. Take advantage of the reach of local action groups and their infrastructure to manage new

measures and services for the general population. The LAGs should be given greater autonomy over budgetary control, and be more agile and proactive in the economic revitalisation of the region, with logical control measures established.

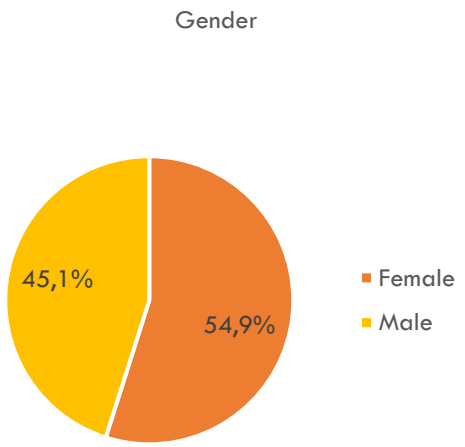
6. The LAGs have extensive experience in rural areas and are essential due to their proximity and involvement. Local Action Groups are excellent **tools for connecting and energising rural areas**. Greater flexibility and adaptation to changes in the teams is necessary.

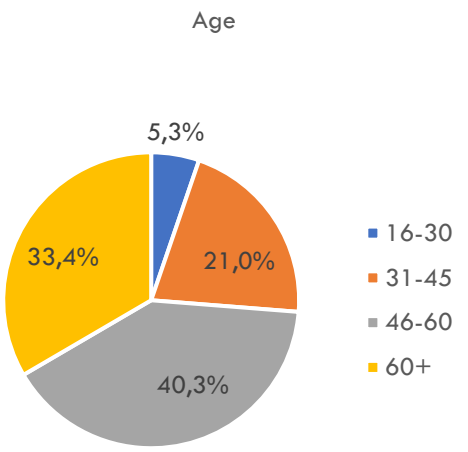
7. **Improve the visibility** of the actions undertaken by LEADER to demonstrate their added value with respect to other initiatives.

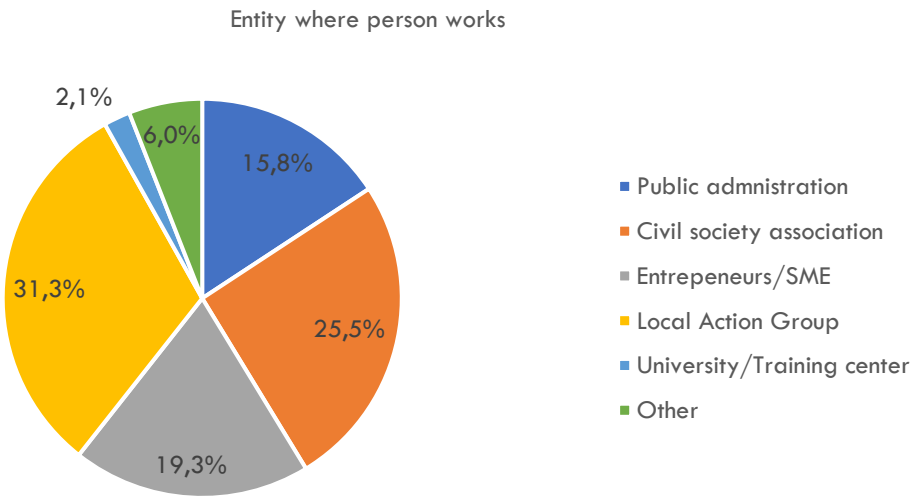
8. Take advantage of the current situation to position the rural world as a **source of opportunities**.

Sweden

Sample composition:



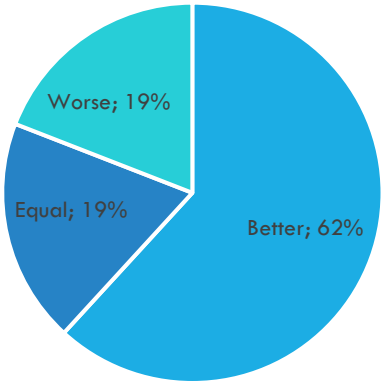




Results highlighted by the National Network:

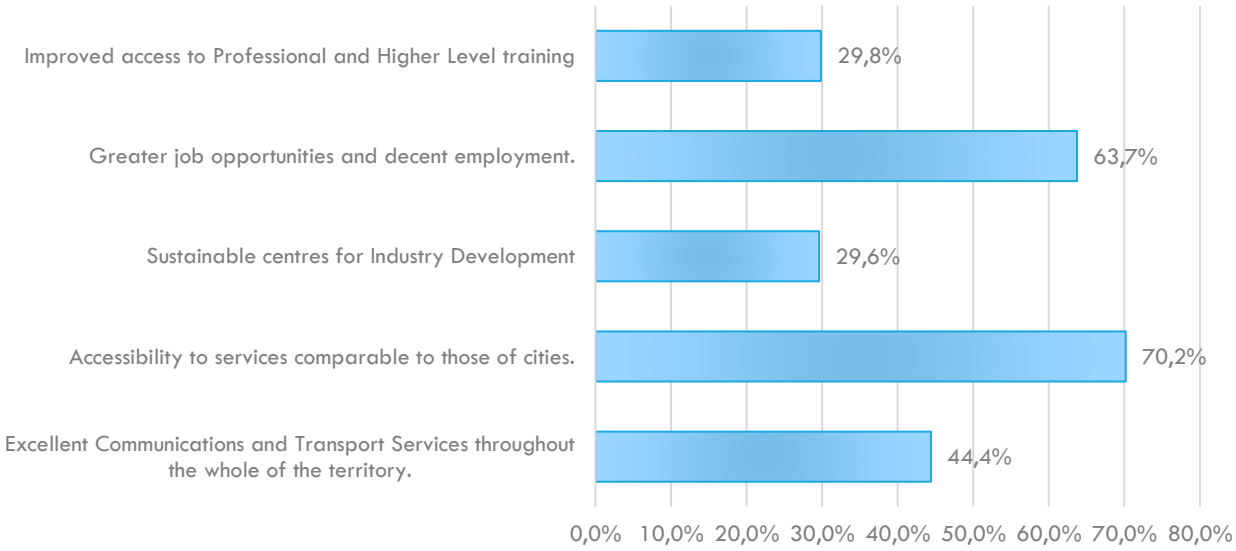
The Future

In general, do you think that in 2035 the people in rural areas will live better, worse or the same as today?



A larger part of Swedes is looking more positively on the future than the average European in this survey.

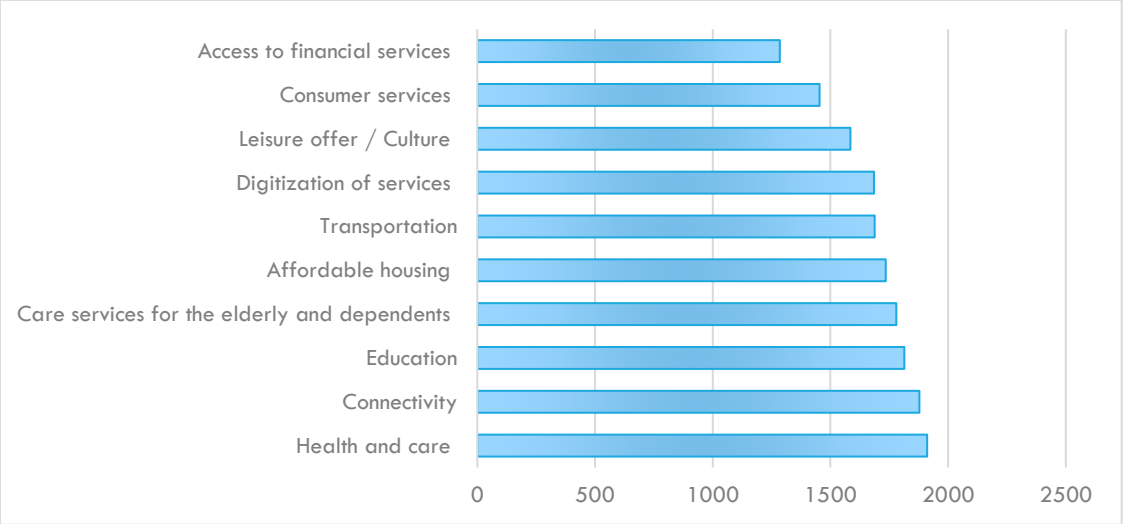
Looking 15 years ahead... what three things would you like to see happen?



Compared to European answers, it is to be noticed, that for Swedes in this survey, the highest demand is on accesibility to services, whereas Europe as a whole values jobs and employment more.

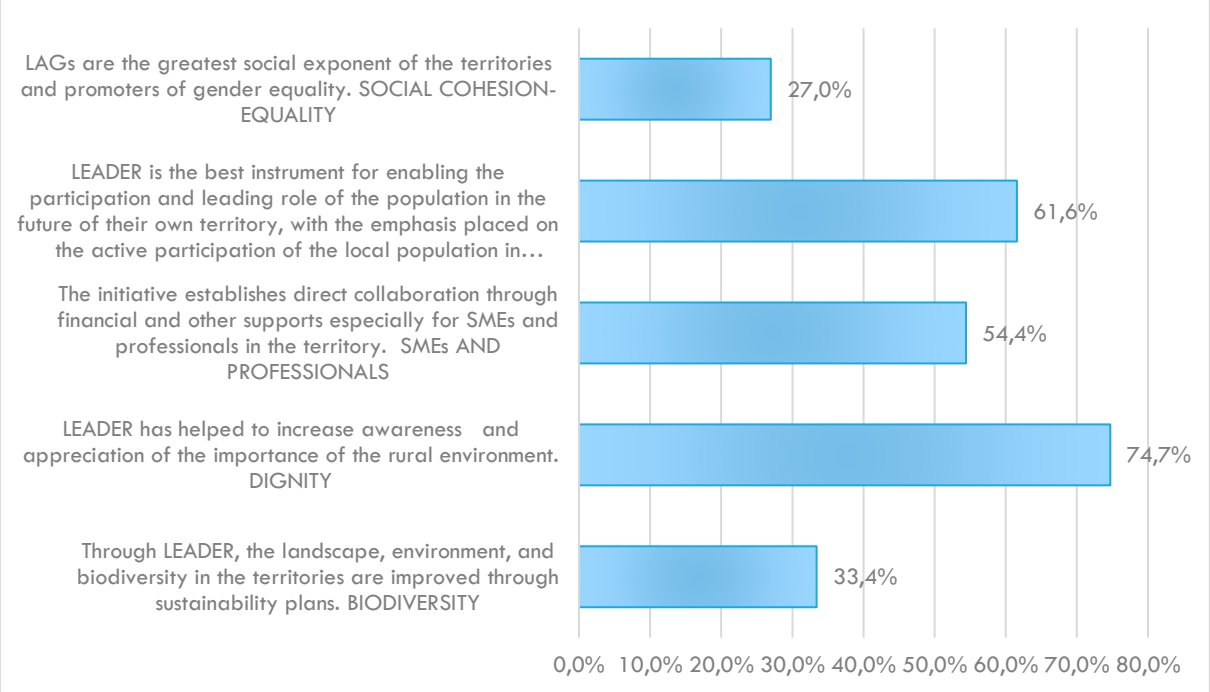
Most important local services

Which of these local services do you value the most?



Similar to Europewide survey – financial services, consumer services and leisure is not valued as much as Health and Care, Education, Care for elderly and dependants and connectivity.

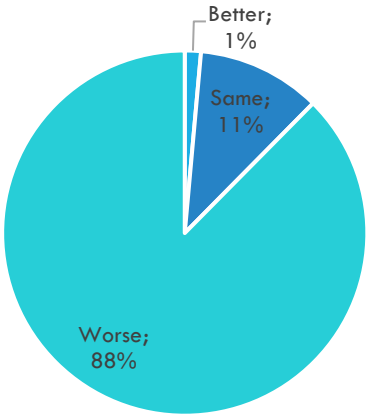
In what way has LEADER contributed to your territory?



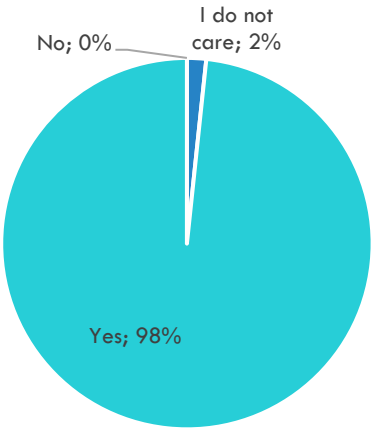
Sweden is noteably lower in BIODIVERSITY and SOCIAL COHESION/EQUALITY than European peers in this survey, but higher in DIGNITY.

Rating the value of LEADER

What would your territory be like without LEADER aid?

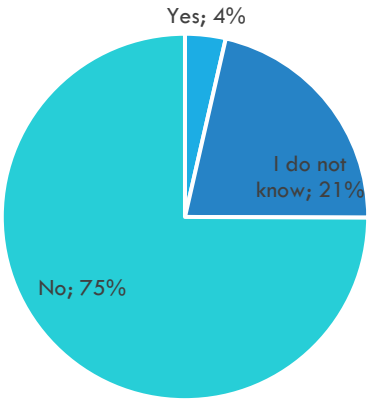


Would you like your territory to continue receiving resources to promote economic, social and environmental diversity through LEADER and LAGs?



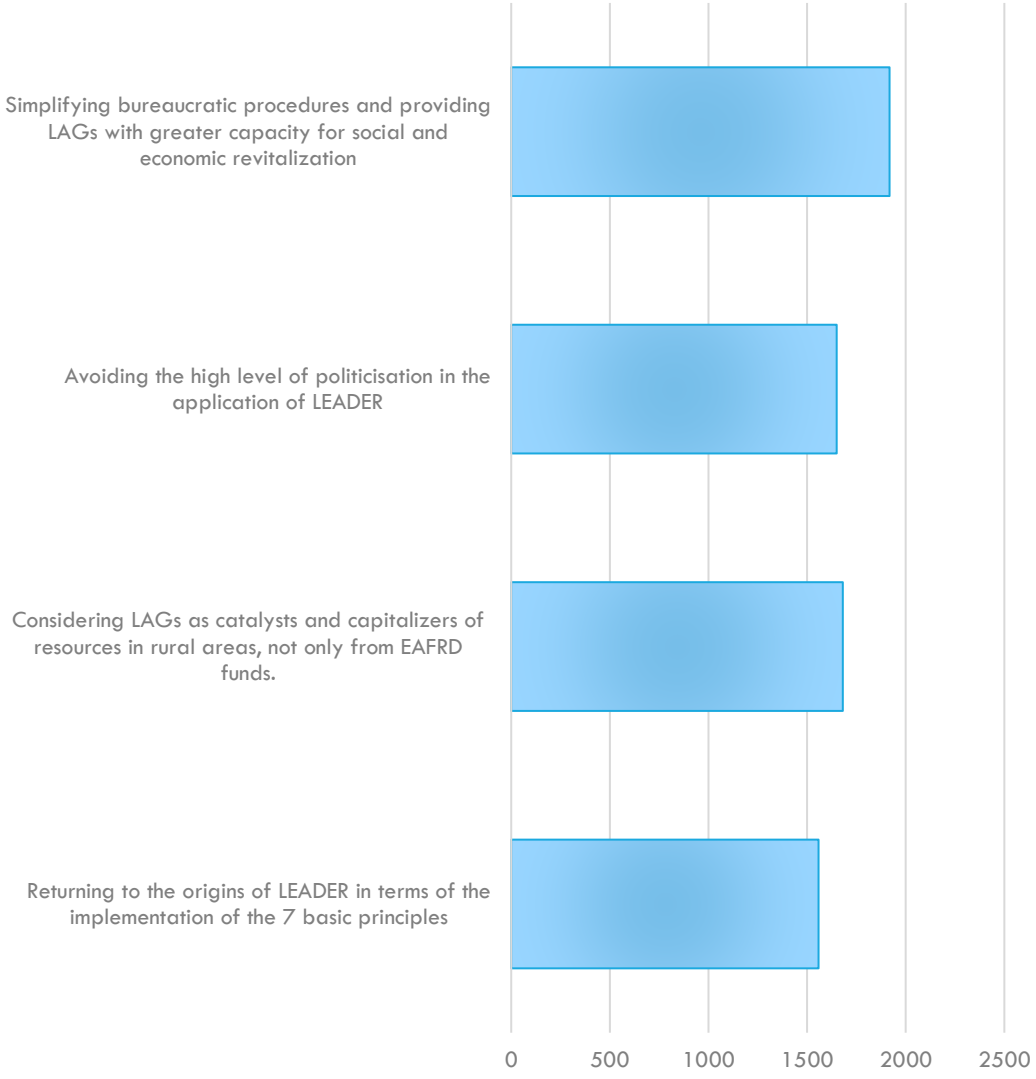
The answers from Sweden are slightly more positive than the average on European level

Do you think that, without these resources, your territory would have undergone a similar development at all levels (economic, social, political)?



Improving LEADER

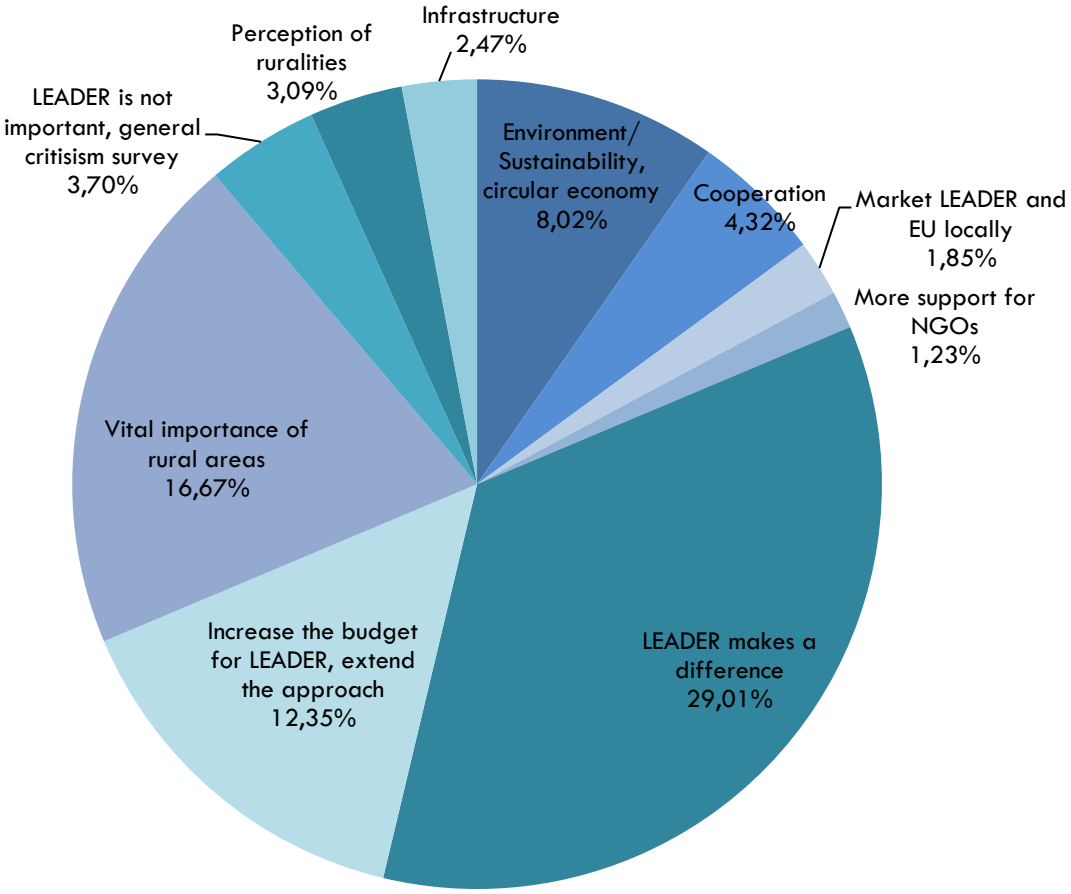
How would you improve the LEADER approach? Rate the following options from 1 to 5 (5 is the maximum value).



All seem almost equally important, however the comments in free text show differently

Comments from Swedish participants

From the 419 Swedish participants 219 free text answers were collected and distributed between following themes:



Annex 2. Survey questions

ReDR Red Española de Desarrollo Rural

ENGLISH

Which future do you want in rural areas?

Take part in shaping the future of rural areas

The world in which we live is experiencing and undergoing profound transformations. The glasses with which we looked at rural areas have changed and has made us a source of inspiration for our ability to solve problems, assume responsibilities and face new challenges. Let's take advantage of this opportunity!

The LEADER methodology and our way of acting -based on participation, innovation and public-private collaboration- can play an essential role in facing a new social, economic, cultural and environmental paradigm in rural areas

Through this survey, REDR intends to reflect, take sides and define among all how LEADER can continue to improve the quality of life of rural areas and their inhabitants in the near future.

Why should you participate? Your voice will be heard: as REDR we will ensure that your opinions and ideas are transferred to regional, national and European political leaders and officials of regional and local administrations. All the responses collected in this macro survey will be exposed in turn in our different information channels and through our associates.

Share Tweet

Personal information

Gender

ReDR Red Española de Desarrollo Rural

ENGLISH

Age range

- Under 15 ✓
- 16-30 ✓
- 31-45 ✓
- 46-60 ✓
- Over 60 ✓

Country

Austria

Autonomous community

Entity where you work

- Local Action Group ✓
- Public administration ✓
- Civil society association ✓
- Entrepreneurs / SMEs ✓
- University / training center ✓
- 0thers ✓

In general, do you think that in 2035 the people in rural areas will live better, worse or the same as today?

- Better
- Equal
- Worse

ReDR Red Española de Desarrollo Rural

ENGLISH

Select a maximum of THREE

- Accessibility to services comparable to those of cities. ✓
- Greater job opportunities and decent employment. ✓
- Excellent Communications and Transport Services throughout the whole of the territory. ✓
- Improved access to Professional and Higher Level training. ✓
- Sustainable centres for Industry Development. ✓

Which of these local services do you value the most? *Rate the following options from 1 to 5 (5 is the maximum value).*

1. Health and care

1 2 3 4 5

2. Education

1 2 3 4 5

3. Transportation

1 2 3 4 5

4. Consumer services

1 2 3 4 5

5. Connectivity

1 2 3 4 5

6. Leisure offer / Culture

1 2 3 4 5

7. Care services for the elderly and dependents

ReDR Red Española de Desarrollo Rural

ENGLISH

8. Access to financial services

1 2 3 4 5

9. Digitization of services

1 2 3 4 5

10. Affordable housing

1 2 3 4 5

In what way has LEADER contributed to your territory? *Select 5 options*

- LEADER has helped to increase awareness and appreciation of the importance of the rural environment. **DIGNITY** ✓
- LEADER is the best instrument for enabling the participation and leading role of the population in the future of their own territory, with the emphasis placed on the active participation of the local population in decision-making. **PARTICIPATION** ✓
- The LEADER Initiative promotes the establishment of synergies between actors and territories, improving socialization and collective work amongst the population- **ACTORS-TERRITORY** ✓
- The application of LEADER encourages renewed interest in rural dwelling through the development of sustainable job opportunities. **POPULATION GROWTH** ✓
- Through LEADER, improved access to vital services, together with the launch of sustainable, inclusive and innovative projects, have resulted in positive outcomes that would not be achievable without this initiative. **PROJECTS** ✓
- With the support of the LAGs, training-needs are detected and access to training is improved, especially for disadvantaged groups. **TRAINING** ✓
- The initiative establishes direct collaboration through financial and other supports especially for SMEs and professionals in the territory. **SMEs AND PROFESSIONALS** ✓
- LAGs are the greatest social exponent of the territories and promoters of gender equality. **SOCIAL COHESION-EQUALITY** ✓
- Through LEADER, the landscape, environment, and biodiversity in the territories are improved through sustainability plans. **BIODIVERSITY** ✓

ReDR Red Española de Desarrollo Rural

ENGLISH

Better | Equal | Worse

Would you like your territory to continue receiving resources to promote economic, social and environmental diversity through LEADER and LAGs?

Yes | No | I dot not care

Do you think that, without these resources, your territory would have undergone a similar development at all levels (economic, social, political)?

Yes | No | I don't know

What do you advise the top leaders about the continuity of LEADER to address and reverse the current situation in rural areas?

And finally, how would you improve the LEADER approach? Rate the following options from 1 to 5 (5 is the maximum value).

1. Returning to the origins of LEADER in terms of the implementation of the 7 basic principles (bottom-up approach, development strategy, public-private collaboration, multi-sectorality, innovation, cooperation and networking).

1 2 3 4 5

ENGLISH

1 2 3 4 5

3. Avoiding the high level of politicisation in the application of LEADER.

1 2 3 4 5

4. Simplifying bureaucratic procedures and providing LAGs with greater capacity for social and economic revitalization.

1 2 3 4 5

SEND

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European Leader Association for Rural Development

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SWEDISH PRESIDENCY 2020-2021

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