



European Commission



NEWSLETTER FOR THE ENRD May 2009



## Improving broadband coverage in rural areas

3 March 2009 witnessed the adoption of a [Communication](#) by the European Commission to improve access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in rural areas. With a significant part of the rural population in Europe (around 30% at December 2007)<sup>(1)</sup> remaining underserved – with no access to the Internet – this FOCUS article looks at the importance of broadband access and ICT to the rural economy.

An average 93% of Europeans can enjoy access to a high-speed Internet connection, compared with only 70% in rural areas. Indeed in some countries (such as Greece, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania) high-speed broadband Internet networks cover just 50% or less of the rural population. In 2008, about half of the people (41.7%) living in thinly populated rural areas of the EU-27 never used the Internet compared to 27.4% in densely populated areas.<sup>(2)</sup>

Given this situation, the Commission has said that connecting the EU's rural population with no high-speed Internet access is a priority for achieving 'broadband for all' by 2010 – a vital component of the [European Economic Recovery Plan](#).

(1) The only internationally recognised definition of rural areas was developed by the OECD, and it is based on the share of population living in rural communes (i.e. with less than 150 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>) in a given NUTS III region. [See Extended Impact Assessment — SEC \(2004\) 931](#).

(2) [European Commission, MEMO/09/92](#).

The Communication presents the benefits, which better access for rural areas to modern ICT like the Internet can bring, to businesses and individuals such as farms and food producers. In particular, ICT can play a significant role in promoting entrepreneurship and economic progress in rural areas, thus helping to boost the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, quality of life and diversification of the rural economy. In addition, usage of the Internet would help farmers' in their daily lives, for example, to plan, market and sell production, check weather forecasts, exchange of good practices, establish cooperation agreements with other market players, etc.

For example, with 80% of Swedish farms having access to the Internet, a third use the Internet daily, including to submit applications for EU support. In contrast, however, only a quarter of farmers in other regions like Tuscany (Italy) and Hungary use the Internet. Farmers are not the only ones missing out: across Europe, only 22.5% of people in rural areas use e-government services like lodging tax returns, compared with 32.9% in urban areas.<sup>(3)</sup>

Equipping rural areas with modern Internet connections, the take-up and diffusion of ICT in the agrifood sector as a whole, and the development of rural tourism with the support of ICT are thus priorities of the Strategic guidelines for rural development in 2007–13.

According to the recent Communication, among the key priorities is the development of adequate and reliable broadband infrastructure in rural areas. Following the proposed recovery package by the Commission, investments in new and existing broadband infrastructure in rural areas

(3) [European Commission, IP/09/343](#).

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as well as in passive infrastructure (including enabling of access to broadband and ground equipment) have been promoted. An additional amount of €1.02 billion will be injected in 2009 and 2010 in rural development programmes for this type of investment and for new challenges as identified under the Health Check of the CAP (biodiversity, water management, restructuring of the dairy sector, renewable energies and agri-environment). On this basis, amendments to rural development programmes should be submitted to the Commission by 15 July 2009.

Another priority for Member States should be the development of services and relevant online content (applications). This is central to boosting demand for, and take-up of, online public services and broadband in rural areas. Demand stimulation measures will enhance Member States' rural economies and help drive efficiency gains. In this context, farm and food industry businesses, non-agricultural SMEs, elderly people and disadvantaged persons, as well as women and young people, should be the main target groups for intervention. ICT shall be used as a tool for bringing territories and people together to reach the overarching goals of growth and sustainability.

As a complement to the Communication, the Commission organised an [EU conference](#) on broadband in Turin (Italy) on 2–3 April 2009. The event brought together the Commission, national and regional authorities and other interested parties to discuss the increased EU investment in broadband under the EU recovery plan and the policies that will help achieve 100% broadband coverage in rural areas.

Read more about better access to ICT for rural areas [here](#).

## 240 agricultural acts withdrawn from EU legislation

On 5 February 2009, the European Commission adopted a Communication removing 240 obsolete agricultural legislative acts adopted before 2007 from the legislation in force. This action forms part of the Commission's drive to reduce the regulatory burden and 'red tape' and in the framework of the [Communication on simplification and better regulation of the Common Agricultural Policy](#) (CAP). Reducing red tape in the farm sector by making rules more transparent, easier to understand and less burdensome will reduce costs for businesses and ensure that European citizens receive value for money.

In the early stages of EU law, from the 1950s, the number of legislative acts continually increased, many of which were adopted without an expiry date. These pieces of legislation therefore remain formally in force even though their legal effects have ceased, in many cases for a long time.

These 240 pieces of legislation which will now be withdrawn relate mostly to temporary measures, exceptional market support measures, granting of financial contributions and transitional measures linked to the accession of New Member States. The acts relate to the following sectors of the CAP: cereals, fruit and vegetables, bananas, wine, milk, beef and veal, rice, oils and fats, sugar and tobacco. The Commission will continue this exercise of cleaning up EU legislation.

The list of acts removed can be found [here](#).

## New agricultural research projects begin

As part of the 2009 European Year of Creativity and Innovation, each issue of Rur@l News will highlight ongoing EU-funded research projects that look at agricultural and rural development issues. This article focuses on the [DERREG](#) research project, which had its kick-off meeting in January 2009 in Brussels. Standing for 'Developing Europe's rural regions in the era of globalization', the project will last for three years, involves nine partners from eight Member States and 10 case-study areas, and takes place under the [Seventh Framework Programme for Research](#) (FP7) (the 'Cooperation' theme).

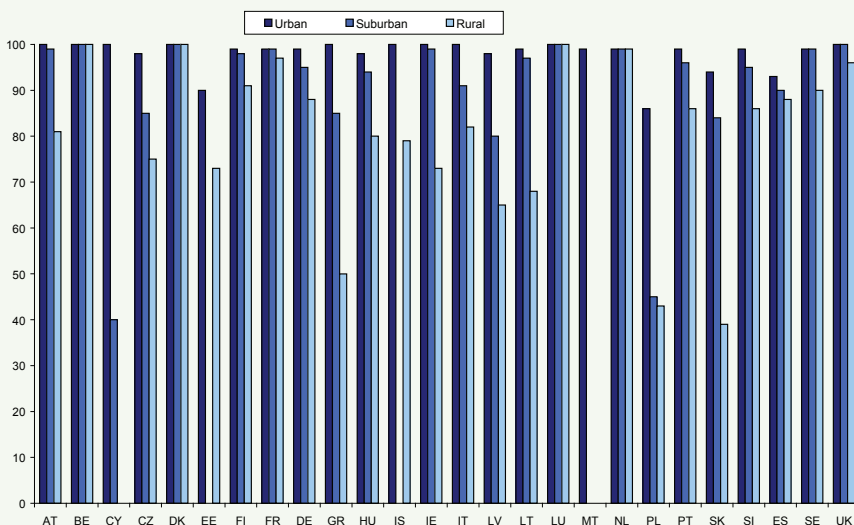
To a person living in a remote corner of Slovenia, Sweden or even West Wales, globalisation may appear to be a remote concept, involving large towns and cities, and indeed academic research in the field would seem to support this way of thinking, with most studies in recent years focusing on urban concerns. DERREG's aim is therefore to study how especially disadvantaged regions respond to key challenges arising from globalisation, focusing on rural business, migration, sustainable development and capacity building.

The nature of the areas studied will vary from very remote areas such as the west of Ireland to rural regions that are close to industrial centres such as Saarland in Germany. The project will look at a range of impacts: economic, focusing on how businesses in rural areas are becoming engaged in global processes; increased mobility and migration, such as migrant workers and second home owners; sustainable development – for example how rural areas can use their natural environment as capital, such as through ecotourism or the potential for renewable energy; and capacity building, looking at issues such as education and training.

At the end of the project, the intention is that there will be an online resource centre which will make the information gathered and conclusions reached publicly available as a tool to be used by people involved with rural and regional development. This can then inform the preparation of strategies to cope with globalisation, allowing people to look at the issues in the context of their own regions and highlighting best practice.

Find out more at: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/367\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/367_en.html)

Broadband coverage of population, December 2007 (%)



Note: No data for rural areas in Malta and Cyprus.

Source: Rural development statistical report 2008, European Commission.

## The NRNs meet for the second time

Organised by the EN RD Contact Point and hosted by the Czech National Rural Network (NRN), the meeting took place on 13 February in Prague. At the November 2008 meeting, the network representatives indicated that one of the most pressing needs was to understand how to engage the wider rural community – in particular, those rural stakeholders within Axes 1 and 2. Consequently the agenda gave the opportunity for presentations from selected experts and rural networks with different approaches and experiences of working with stakeholders in the different axes. This provided the wider context of rural networking, and subsequently fed the discussion which took place in the group workshops (the outcomes of which are presented below).

Three workshop groups considered two specific points:

1. What are the expectations from the active integration of Axes 1 & 2 stakeholders in the NRNs?
2. How can the interlinks between the different stakeholders be ensured?

The afternoon session looked at capacity building and issues for the first EN RD seminar. The discussion found that NRNs strive or at least aspire to build up networking between stakeholders and interlinking between axes. A step-by-step approach was generally accepted as appropriate. A few NRNs – such as Finland and Austria – have already taken practical steps to address this challenge, focusing on creating opportunities for face-to-face contact between stakeholders on well-

defined thematic areas of common interest. Small steps should, however, not mean ad hoc actions. A networking strategy is essential, while several NRNs acknowledged that they lack such a strategy.

Suggestions made at the meeting pointed to a potential framework for the specific activities presented earlier. It has been suggested that a 'change management' attitude should be adopted by the strategy and that practical tools should form a coherent 'communication platform'. Moreover, a number of contextual activities were mentioned as contributing to a sound strategy and facilitating networking across axes, including explaining rural development policy, conducting market research, and carrying out systematic needs analyses across the different axes.



### The first EN RD seminar

*[Capacity building for national rural networks: the challenges of national rural networks to efficiently support the implementation of EU rural development policy](#)*

Taking place on 30–31 March, this kick-off event of the EN RD aimed to examine how the links between all rural development actors – both practitioners and policy-makers – could be built as inclusively and efficiently as possible. The agenda was designed to inform and motivate those involved: representatives of the National Rural Networks, regional networks, Local Action Groups, EU organisations active in the field of rural development and national administrations. The seminar included plenary sessions examining, for example, the keys of success of networking, two workshops, and a roundtable discussion with expert panellists. The seminar presentations, workshop reports and conclusions will shortly be made available from the EN RD web-site.

### Building on the habit of quality

Organised under the auspices of the Czech Minister of Agriculture Petr Gandalovic and the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Mariann Fischer Boel, the Conference on Quality Policy took place in Prague on 12 March 2009. The topic of the main panel and the three parallel workshops (EU farming requirements and marketing standards, EU quality and certification schemes and organic agriculture) were based on the European Commission's [Green Paper](#) launched in October 2008. The conference was attended by agriculture ministers of EU Member States and representatives of their departments, representatives of the EU (the European Commission and Parliament) and European farming and food industry representatives, NGOs and specialists in the field of quality of agricultural produce. In her opening speech, Ms Fischer Boel praised the creativity of the European agricultural industry and highlighted the significant response to the recent Green Paper. The EU quality schemes – notably the Geographical Indications scheme and Organic farming – have her backing. She noted that new EU schemes are on their way – for example, the planned animal welfare label and extending the 'ecolabel' to foodstuffs. She said that such schemes should be compatible with existing schemes and be both farmer- and consumer-friendly.

The Green Paper will be followed by a Communication due to be adopted on 27 May 2009 which will set out the strategic orientations for agricultural product quality policy in future. More information on the EU's agricultural quality policy can be found [here](#).

## Tour of Member States: Belgium

Issue 3 of Rur@l News marks the start of our tour of the EU-27, which will examine Member States' agricultural and rural strategies and priorities. The first stop is the first country in alphabetical protocol order – Belgium (BE). In the rural development context, Belgium consists of two 'regions' - Flanders and Wallonia – as there are two rural development programmes. 41% of the 6 million people in Flanders live in what are considered rural areas, with the remaining 59% mostly located in the triangle formed by the cities of Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels. Although Wallonia has fewer inhabitants (3.4 million), a higher proportion – half – live in rural areas. In 2005, some 34 000 agricultural holdings managed 0.6 million hectares of cultivated land or 47% of the total Flemish surface, while 17 000 managed 45% of the total Walloon surface.

Both plans share the same overall goals:

- stimulating a dynamic and innovative agriculture sector;
- encouraging sustainable production methods with a view to improving the environment;
- improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy;
- local capacity building for more employment and diversification.

They differ to some extent, however, in their chosen strategy: both Flanders and Wallonia aim to improve the competitiveness of their agricultural sectors and the quality of life in rural areas. In addition, Wallonia is working to reinforce the complementarity between agriculture/forestry and environment, encourage the multi-functionality of agriculture activities and boost capacity building for developing the endogenous development of rural areas. Flanders' overall objectives focus on promoting the sustainability of the countryside and natural resources.

More information about these plans will be soon available on the EN RD web site.

Facts and figures		
	Flanders	Wallonia
<b>Surface area covered by forests</b>	11%	32%
<b>The cultivated land can be roughly split into:</b>	53% (fodder crops), 38% (arable crops), 8% (horticulture crops)	57% (fodder crops), 38% (arable crops)
<b>Area used for crop production classified as a less-favoured area (utilised agricultural area)</b>	0.8%	37%
<b>Share of farms managed on a part-time basis</b>	49%	8%
<b>Main components of food sector</b>	Meat, drinks, dairy products, chocolates & sugar, fruit & vegetables	Bakery products, meat, drinks, dairy products & sugar
<b>Share of organic farming of agricultural output</b>	Less than 1%	c. 1%

**Balmoral Show 2009**EN <http://www.balmoralshow.co.uk>

13–15 May 2009

Belfast, Northern Ireland (UK)

The Balmoral Show is Ireland's largest agricultural show. Attractions include international show jumping competitions, falconry displays, sheep shearing demonstrations and a craft village. There will also be exhibiting companies selling goods ranging from industrial farming equipment to the latest 4x4 vehicles. Over 70 000 visitors attend this popular three-day show.

**Sustainable development and planning**EN <http://www2.wessex.ac.uk/09-conferences/sustainable-development-2009.html>

13–15 May 2009

Limassol, Cyprus

The conference will address the subjects of regional development in an integrated way as well as in accordance with the principles of sustainability. The conference will be of interest to planners, environmentalists, engineers, architects, ecologists, economists, policy makers and other governmental officials, researchers and academics involved in the field of sustainability.

**Research for rural development 2009**EN [http://www2.ltu.lv/research\\_conf\\_2009/](http://www2.ltu.lv/research_conf_2009/)

20–22 May 2009

Jelgava, Latvia

The conference will provide the opportunity to exchange information and discuss future trends with experienced and new researchers from all over the world. The conference will be of interest to agricultural scientists; agricultural, rural and environmental engineers; and researchers and academics involved in the field of water management, veterinary medicine, food science, forest science, agrarian economics, regional development, land use planning, information and communication technologies and education.

**Joensuu forestry networking week: connecting young European experts**EN <http://www.metla.fi/tapahtumat/2009/JFNW2009/index.htm>

25–29 May 2009

Joensuu, Finland

This event is organised in cooperation with the *COST Action: Expected Climate Change and Options for European Silviculture (ECHOES)* jointly by the *Finnish Forest Research Institute*, the *European Forest Institute (EFI)* and the *University of Joensuu*. Young and experienced scientists, professionals and stakeholders in forestry from different parts of Europe are invited to participate. The event brings together: key stakeholders involved in research, education, consultancy and business; forest owners and forest managers; representatives of forest-based industries; and policy and other decision-makers. The seminar will include discussions, lectures, group work and excursions.

**European Neighbours' Day: let's bring together our citizens!**EN <http://www.european-neighbours-day.com/en>FR <http://www.european-neighbours-day.com/fr>

26 May 2009

Various European locations (see official website)

This event is launched by the *European Federation of Local Solidarity (E.F.L.S.)* with the aim of fostering community cohesion in Europe, by creating networks for exchanges on neighborly and community practices. Any city or town or social housing organisation is welcome to participate by promoting the event among its inhabitants using all the communication means at their disposal.

**Sustainable development: a challenge for European research**EN [http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index_en.cfm)

26–28 May 2009

Brussels, Belgium

This three-day conference is organised by the Directorate-General for Research in cooperation with the Czech Presidency of the EU. It focuses on the multiple ways through which European research contributes to global sustainable development. The event will be of interest to scientists, industry, civil society and R&D policy-makers to confront their views and stakes regarding what R&D can and cannot do for sustainability.

**ICTs, the environment and climate change**EN <http://en.itst.dk/the-governments-it-and-telecommunications-policy/green-it/conference-on-icts-the-environment-and-climate-change>

27–28 May 2009

Helsingør, Denmark

The Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation will host a high-level OECD conference on the potential of information and communication technologies to combat climate change and improve environmental performance. This event will bring together policy-makers, representatives from business and civil society, and academic experts.

**Combating poverty and social exclusion in rural areas**EN <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=158&furtherEvents=yes>FR <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=fr&eventsId=158&furtherEvents=yes>DE <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=de&eventsId=158&furtherEvents=yes>

11–12 June 2009

Budapest, Hungary

This conference, which enjoys the support of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour of Hungary, is organised by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and in cooperation with the Directorates-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Regional Policy and Eurostat.

It examines rural poverty which is a significant aspect of European poverty, and which in some Member States is twice the risk than in urban areas. In addition there appears to be a lack of public awareness and commitment in addressing the issue of rural poverty. This event will therefore highlight the need for enhanced cooperation to fight poverty and social exclusion, and involves the different actors in the fields of social policies, agricultural development, regional policy and statistics.

FIND OUT MORE

**WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE**

EU Rural Development policy 2007–13:

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm)

Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development:

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_en.htm)

The European Evaluation Network:

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/network/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/network/index_en.htm)**RURAL NEWS Contributions/Events**

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