



European Network for  
Rural Development

# LEADER LAG Survey 2017

## Findings at European Level

Version 2

9 November 2018

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## Introduction

The ENRD Contact Point (ENRD CP) launched a survey of LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) in November 2017 to explore on the ground experiences of implementing LEADER from the LAG perspective. Drawing on the ENRD LAG database over 2,200 LAGs were contacted and 710 confidential responses received from 27 EU Member States making this the largest and most comprehensive LEADER survey conducted. LAGs from 19 national and 70 regional Rural Development Programme (RDP) 'territories' responded. Germany, France, Spain, Czech Republic and Austria provided over 50% of the total responses.

The online survey included 38 questions in four sections and the questionnaire was provided in six languages. Each section addressed several key themes. The main chapters of this report follow the structure of the questionnaire and are as follows:

- Basic LAG data.
- LEADER principles.
- LEADER operation.
- LEADER improvements.

## Selected Key findings

### *Basic LAG respondent data*

- ✓ 72% of responses came from LAG Managers.
- ✓ 78% of respondent LAGs began operating before the 2014-2020 Programming period.
- ✓ 67% of LAGs had launched project calls in their local areas by the end of 2016.
- ✓ 33% of LAGs used more than one European Structural and Investment (ESI) fund.
- ✓ 89% of LAGs allocate >14% of total budget to running costs and animation; 31% allocate >21%.

### *LEADER principles*

- ✓ The highest ranked principle is 'the bottom up approach ensuring decision making power for LAGs to design and implement their Local Development Strategies (LDS)'.
- ✓ Most LAGs can use qualitative criteria and local knowledge in selecting projects.
- ✓ Implementing cooperation projects and innovative approaches are somewhat challenging for LAGs.
- ✓ 84% of LAGs think bureaucracy and administration requirements constrain their ability to implement the LEADER approach.
- ✓ LAGs with budgets over €5m responded more frequently that they were able to 'fully' or 'mostly' implement the LEADER approach than LAGs with smaller budgets.

***"Programmes must remember the basic elements of LEADER (unfortunately many people see just the projects and funding, and not the PROCESS). Animation should be strengthened."<sup>1</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes are taken directly from respondents' anonymous replies.

### *LEADER operation*

- ✓ National/regional delivery frameworks were seen to limit LAG freedom to pursue their operational priorities.
- ✓ Negative effects on LEADER implementation reported mostly relate to Managing Authority/Paying Agency requirements, implementation procedures and RDP level limitations.
- ✓ LAG staff spend most time on 'Supporting project development'; given the choice they would like to spend more time on project development, animation and innovation.
- ✓ All high-ranking LAG operational priorities link to local development, solutions and capacities – achieving LDS objectives ranks highest.
- ✓ 63% of LAGs report increased levels of Managing Authority/Paying Agency requirements since 2014.
- ✓ 48% of LAGs are responsible for project selection only; whilst 19% conduct selection, approval and payment of local projects.

### *LEADER improvements*

- ✓ 54% of LAGs think that increased independence and responsibility would significantly or very significantly increase their level of achievement.
- ✓ Simpler application processes/forms and more proportionate systems of controls are important improvements needed.
- ✓ LAGs' priority support needs from RDP authorities and/or NRNs are understanding audit expectations better and improved coordination and cooperation in the LEADER delivery system.
- ✓ Most LAGs want to work with the ENRD on implementation, management and tools, strengthening innovation in LEADER and networking and cooperation.

***"Quality management work should be done in all (F)LAGs to ensure the improvement of LAGs' operations."***

### ***Key conclusions***

Survey results significantly deepen understanding of LEADER's implementation informing ENRD support for LEADER and validate the objective set for the Contact Point of 'Simpler and more effective LEADER/CLLD'. They also confirmed many points raised by LEADER stakeholders during ENRD events.

LEADER LAGs focus on the local development aspects of their work. This is evidenced by survey findings regarding operational priorities ("achieving LDS objectives"), most important LEADER principle ("bottom-up approach with decision-making power") and most important activity, ("supporting project development"). Animation, cooperation and local innovation also feature strongly in responses.

LAGs perceive themselves to be constrained by the level of administrative and reporting requirements and current national/regional delivery systems. Many consider that higher levels of autonomy and responsibility would positively influence their level of achievement. Key support needs relate to simplification and better coordination and cooperation between LEADER stakeholders throughout LEADER delivery systems.

### Explanatory points

The questionnaire used a multiple choice format allowing respondents to choose the answers most appropriate to their LAG's circumstances. The text of some questions has been simplified in the charts that follow. The full text of each question and all possible answers are listed in the sections below.

The total number of responses for each question is recorded individually as response levels varied between questions throughout the survey. **Please note that in this document the references to LAGs relate specifically to those LAGs who responded to the survey.**

Where appropriate and relevant cross tabulation has been carried out to highlight differences between LAG types, this is mainly done by 'age of LAG / LEADER period' (see categories at question 7) and 'LAG budget range' (see categories at question 11) and 'percentage of LAG budget used for running costs and animation' (in question 17).

Questions three, five and six of the original questionnaire are not relevant for this report being primarily for survey management and have been omitted. Where necessary limited data cleaning has been undertaken to ensure consistency and correct obvious errors.

Country level technical annexes, covering 24 Member States will accompany this report in due course and will be made available along with this report on the ENRD website at this [link](#). In three Member States (Croatia, Malta and Slovenia) there were insufficient responses to guarantee the anonymity of respondents. At the time of the survey Slovakian LAGs had not yet been contracted and so did not complete the survey. For these four Member States technical annexes will not be prepared.

Please note that there is a significant degree of variation in number of responses by RDP, Member State and question. This should be taken into account when considering or interpreting the wider implications of the findings for some questions. Such issues are highlighted where particularly relevant.

Cross-tabulations by LAG age and budget should not be interpreted as necessarily implying any causal link as other contributing factors may have more bearing or govern responses. For example the date of RDP approval will influence the timing of LAG selection and approval and subsequent LAG actions.

*The ENRD CP wishes to thank the 710 Local Action Groups that responded to the survey and Managing Authorities and National Rural Networks that encouraged their participation.*

## Basic Implementation Data

### Question 1

Please select your country

- LAGs from 27 Member States (MS) responded to the survey
- There were 710 individual responses
- The top 3 MS responses were DE (143), FR (86) and ES (83)
- The highest percentage responses came from CY (100% of LAGs), LU (100%), LV (69%) and AT (57%)
- The lowest percentage of response came from HR (7%) and RO (8%)
- SK was the one MS without responses as LAGs had not been contracted at the time of the survey launch

Total Number of Responses 710

### Number of responses by MS

MS	Responses <sup>2</sup> % of total	Responses Actual	% response <sup>3</sup> / MS	MS	Responses % of total	Responses Actual	% response / MS
AT	6.2%	44	57%	IE	1.4%	10	34%
BE	1.1%	8	25%	IT	3.9%	28	28%
BG	1.3%	9	23%	LT	1%	7	14%
CY	0.6%	4	100%	LU	0.7%	5	100%
CZ	7.6%	54	30%	LV	3.4%	24	69%
DE	20.3%	144	45%	MT	0.1%	1	33%
DK	1.3%	9	43%	NL	1.1%	8	40%
EE	1.1%	8	31%	PL	3.9%	28	10%
EL	1.3%	9	19%	PT	4.1%	29	48%
ES	11.7%	83	25%	RO	2.7%	19	8%
FI	2.1%	15	27%	SE	1.3%	9	20%
FR	12.1%	86	27%	SI	0.6%	4	14%
HR	0.6%	4	7%	SK	0%	0	0%
HU	1.6%	11	11%	UK	7%	50	39%

<sup>2</sup> Percentage of the total number of responses

<sup>3</sup> Share of LAGs per MS which replied

## Question 2

Please select your Rural Development Programme (RDP)

- There were responses from 19 National RDPs (268 responses).
- There were responses from 70 Regional RDPs (442 responses).
- The top 3 responses from National RDPs were CZ (53), AT (43) and PL (29).
- The top 3 responses from Regional RDPs were UK England (29 regions), DE\_Neidersachsen/Bremen (27 regions) and ES\_Andalucia (27 regions).
- One National and 20 Regional RDPs had no responses, these were National – SK, Regional ES (3 regions), FR (7 regions), IT (10 regions).

Total Number of Responses 710

## Question 4

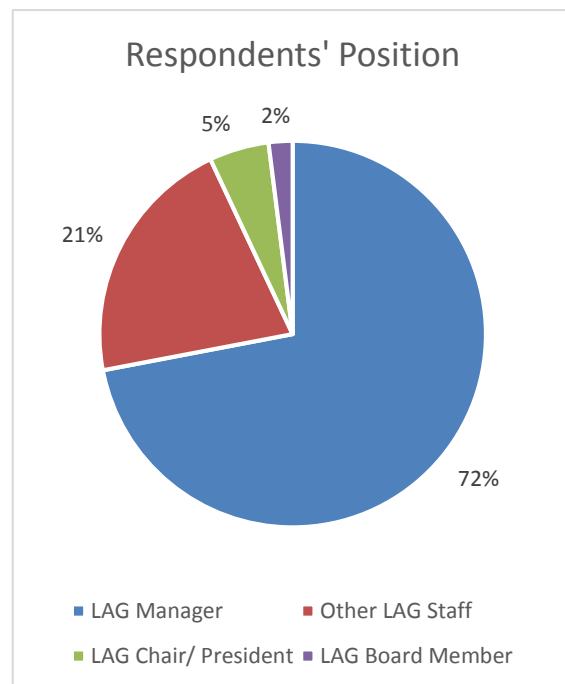
Respondents were asked to identify which position they held within the LAG.

- LAG Manager
- Other LAG staff
- LAG Chair/President
- LAG Board Member

Total Number of Responses 710

## Findings overall

- Although the majority of responses were from LAG managers anecdotal feedback confirmed that many managers consulted other staff and board members in completing these responses. This was encouraged in the survey completion instructions.
- The responses from LAG Chair/President and LAG Board members were quite small in number (52), however their responses sometimes differed from LAG Managers and other LAG staff. Where this was the case this has been highlighted in the most relevant questions.





### Question 7

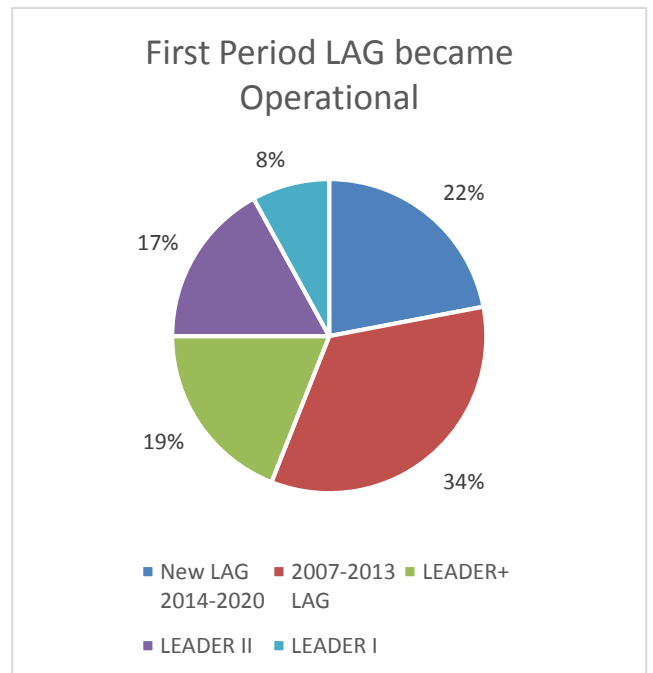
*In which period did your LAG first begin its operation? Please select the option that applies to you. (i.e. the point from where there is a significant degree of continuity in membership or territory)*

- Newly established LAG in 2014-2020 Programming Period<sup>4</sup>
- 2007-2013 Programming Period
- LEADER+ (2000–2006)
- LEADER II (1994-1999)
- LEADER I (1991-1993)

Total Number of Responses 710

### Findings overall

- The survey included responses from LAGs from all 'generations' of LEADER.
- 78% of LAGs responding had previous experience of implementing at least one round of LEADER.
- This includes 44% of LAGs which had operated in two or more previous rounds of LEADER.
- The largest grouping, 34% of LAGs responding to the survey began operation during the 2007-2013 Programme.
- 8% of LAGs that responded have been in existence since LEADER I.



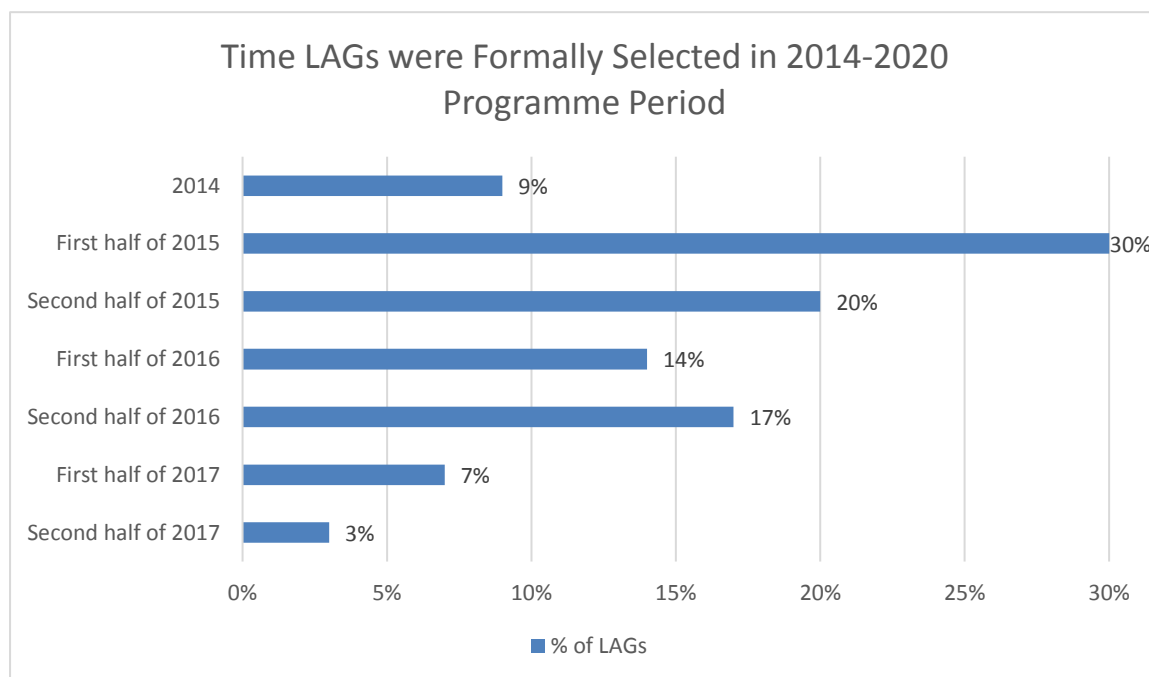
<sup>4</sup>Newly established LAG in 2014-2020 programming period' are referred to as 'New LAGs' throughout

## Question 8

When was your LAG formally selected in this (2014-2020) Programming Period?

- 2014
- First half of 2015 (Jan - June)
- Second half of 2015 (July – December)
- First half of 2016
- Second half of 2016
- First half of 2017
- Second half of 2017

Total Number of Responses 710



### Findings overall

- Overall 59% of responding LAGs had been selected by the end of 2015.
- 31% were selected in 2016 and 10% of LAGs in 2017.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- 69% of New 2014-2020 LAGs were selected by the end of 2015.

### Findings by 'budget range'<sup>5</sup> of LAG

- 76% of LAGs with large budgets over €10m were selected by the end of 2015.

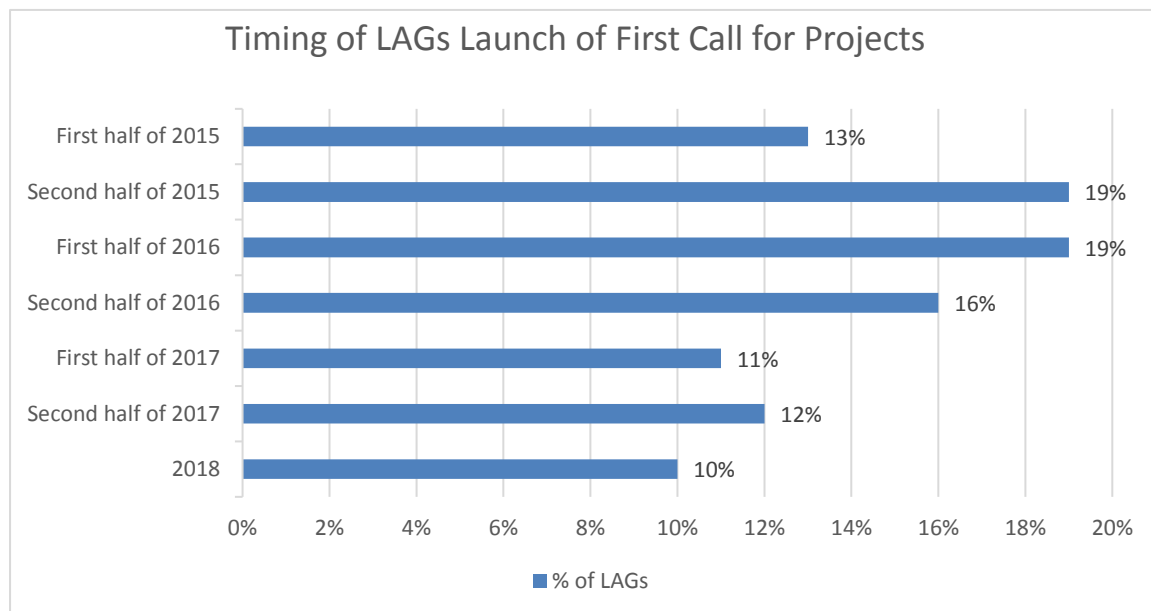
<sup>5</sup> See Question 11 for budget ranges

## Question 9

When did / will your LAG first launch a call for projects?

- First half of 2015
- Second half of 2015
- First half of 2016
- Second half of 2016
- First half of 2017
- Second half of 2017
- 2018

Total Number of Responses 710



### Findings overall

- Overall 51% of LAGs had launched project calls by the mid-point of 2016, while 10% were anticipating a 2018 launch. This appears to broadly reflect the profile of LAG approvals.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- The LAG age grouping where the highest percentage had launched calls by the end of 2015 were 'LEADER+' LAGs with 37%.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- 65% of LAGs with over €10m budget had launched calls by end of 2015 in comparison to 22% of LAGs with budgets <€500 000, this may reflect the early approval of the large budget LAGs and the imperative for them to commit funding early. Small budget LAGs have less animation and administration capacity which may have affected their ability to support project development and launch calls early.
- 28% of LAGs with budgets <€500 000 expected to launch their first calls in 2018.

## LAG Funding

### Question 10

Please select all the European Structural and Investment Funds that your LAG uses to finance your Local Development Strategy (in addition to EAFRD).

- European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)
- European Social Fund (ESF)
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- None of the above (only EAFRD)

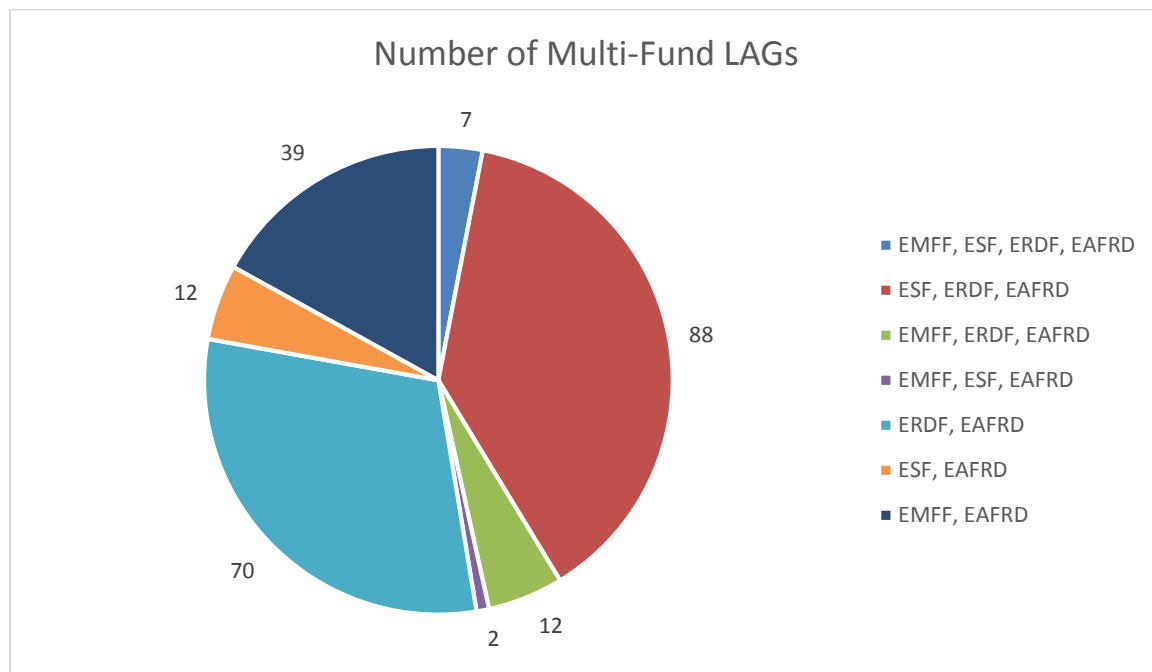
Total Number of Responses 696

### Findings overall

- 466 LAGs (67%) who responded use EAFRD only.
- 230 LAGs (33%) use more than one fund.
- Of the LAGs that use more than one fund 60 (9%) use EMFF, 109 (16%) use ESF and 177 (25%) use ERDF.
- Of the LAGs that use more than one fund 121 (17%) LAGs use two funds, 102 (15%) LAGs use three funds and seven (1%) LAGs use four funds.

These data relate only to EAFRD funded LAGs, multi-funded LAGs who do not use EAFRD were not surveyed.

The chart shows the different combination of funds used by LAGs in addition to EAFRD.



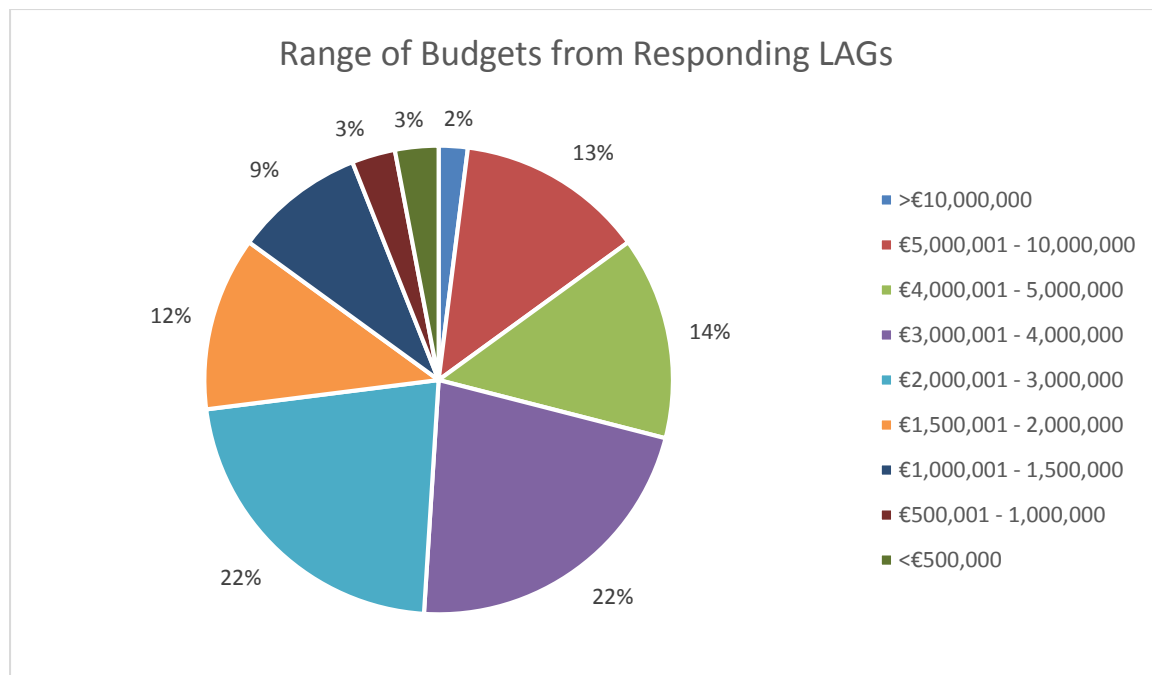
### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- All 'ages' of LAGs that responded to the survey include some multi-fund LAGs.
- LEADER II LAGs have largest percentage of LAGs who only use EAFRD (74%).
- LEADER + LAGs have largest percentage of LAGs that both use ERDF (30%) and ESF (20%).
- LEADER I LAGs have largest percentage of LAGs that use EMFF (24%).

### Question 11

What is your LAG budget (total public expenditure Euro, i.e. EAFRD plus all other EU and domestic public funds) for the 2014-2020 Programming Period? Please provide your best estimate if data are not available.

Total Number of Responses 696



### Findings overall

- There is a very significant range in LAG budget but with very small numbers of LAGs at the extremes.
- 58% of LAGs have budgets between €2m and €5m.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- New LAGs, 2007-13 LAGs and LEADER + LAGs have the highest percentage of LAGs with budgets in the range of €2-4m.
- LEADER II LAGs have the highest percentage of LAGs with budgets over €10m (but there are only 17 LAGs in 8 MS in total, who responded, that have this level of budget).
- For LEADER I LAGs the most prevalent budget ranges are the €3-4m and €5-10m ranges.
- New LAGs have the highest percentage of LAGs with budgets under €500k.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- LAGs with budgets of €1-1.5m had the largest proportion of LAGs using EAFRD only (83%).
- LAGs with budgets of €5-10m range were the LAGs that used multi-funding the most. They had the lowest EAFRD only (44%), the highest use of ERDF (46%) and ESF (32%) and second highest use of EMFF (17%).
- None of the LAGs in the <€500k- 1m range or over €10m that responded to the survey used ESF.

## Question 12

What % of this total LAG budget is allocated to running costs and animation?

- < 10%
- 10 – 13%
- 14 – 16%
- 17 – 20%
- 21 -25%

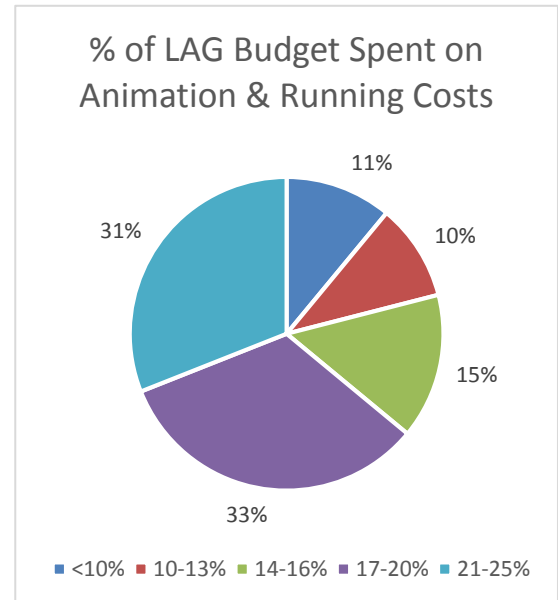
Total Number of Responses 696

### Findings overall

- 64% of LAGs allocate over 17% of budget to running costs and animation, 31% over 21%.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

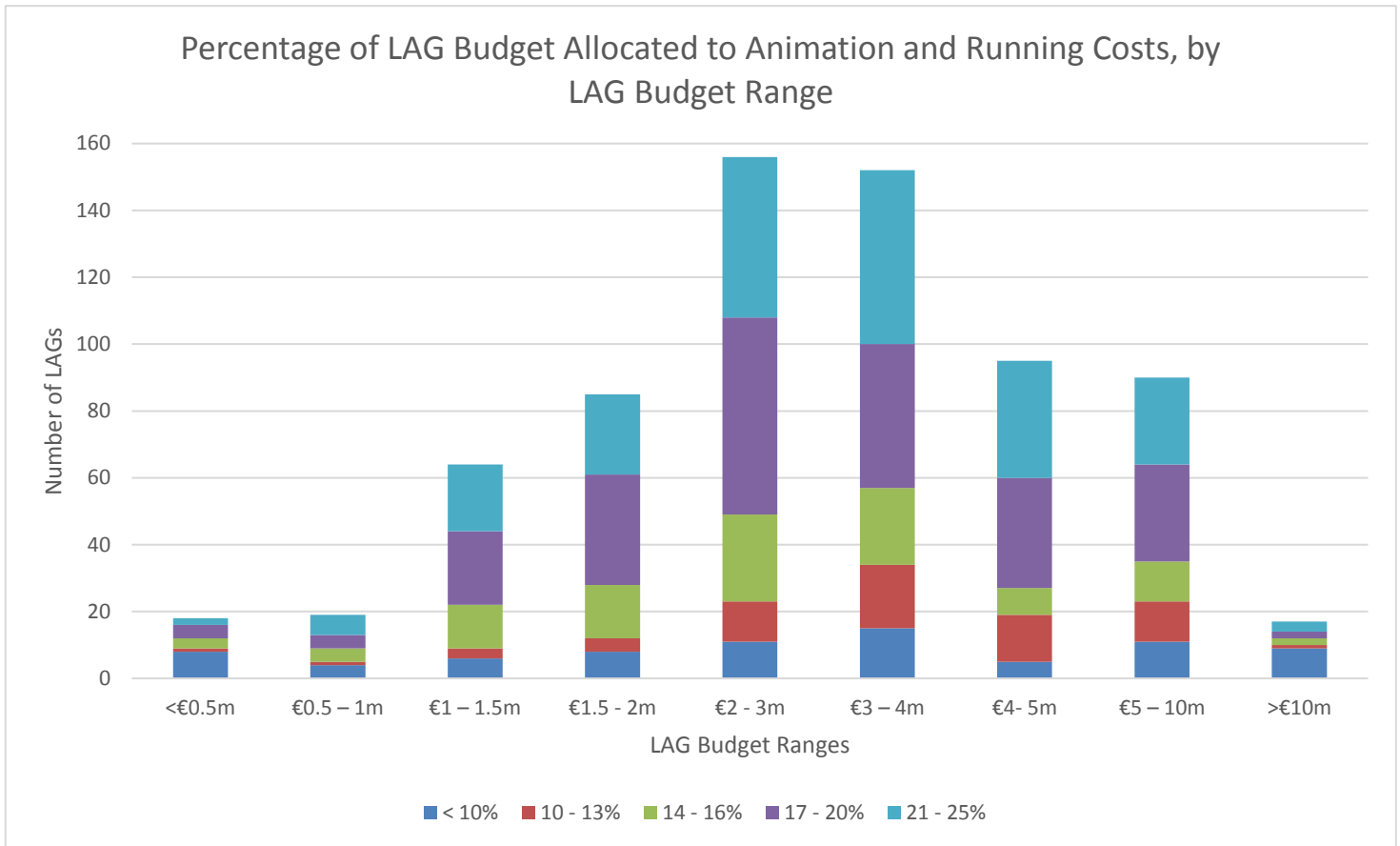
- Over 60% of LAGs in all age ranges allocated over 17% of budget to running costs and animation.
- In percentage terms, LEADER I LAGs (68%) were most likely to allocated over 17% of budget to running costs and animation and 2007-2013 LAGs (61%) least likely.
- New LAGs (13%) and LEADER+ LAGs (12%) had the highest percentage of LAGs allocating less than 10% of budget to animation and running costs.



### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- The largest number of LAGs respondents were those with the budgets in the range of €2-3m (see graph on page 16). Within this group the LAGs most frequently allocated 17-20% of their budget to animation and running costs.
- 44% of LAGs that had budgets of less than €500k allocated less than 10% to animation and running costs.
- 11% of LAGs that had budgets of less than €500k allocated 21-25%.
- 53% of LAGs with budgets over €10m allocated less than 10% to animation and running costs.
- 18% of LAGs with budgets over €10m allocated between 21-25%.

The chart below shows the distribution and number of LAGs in each 'budget range', and the percentage of their LAG budget they allocated to animation and running costs.





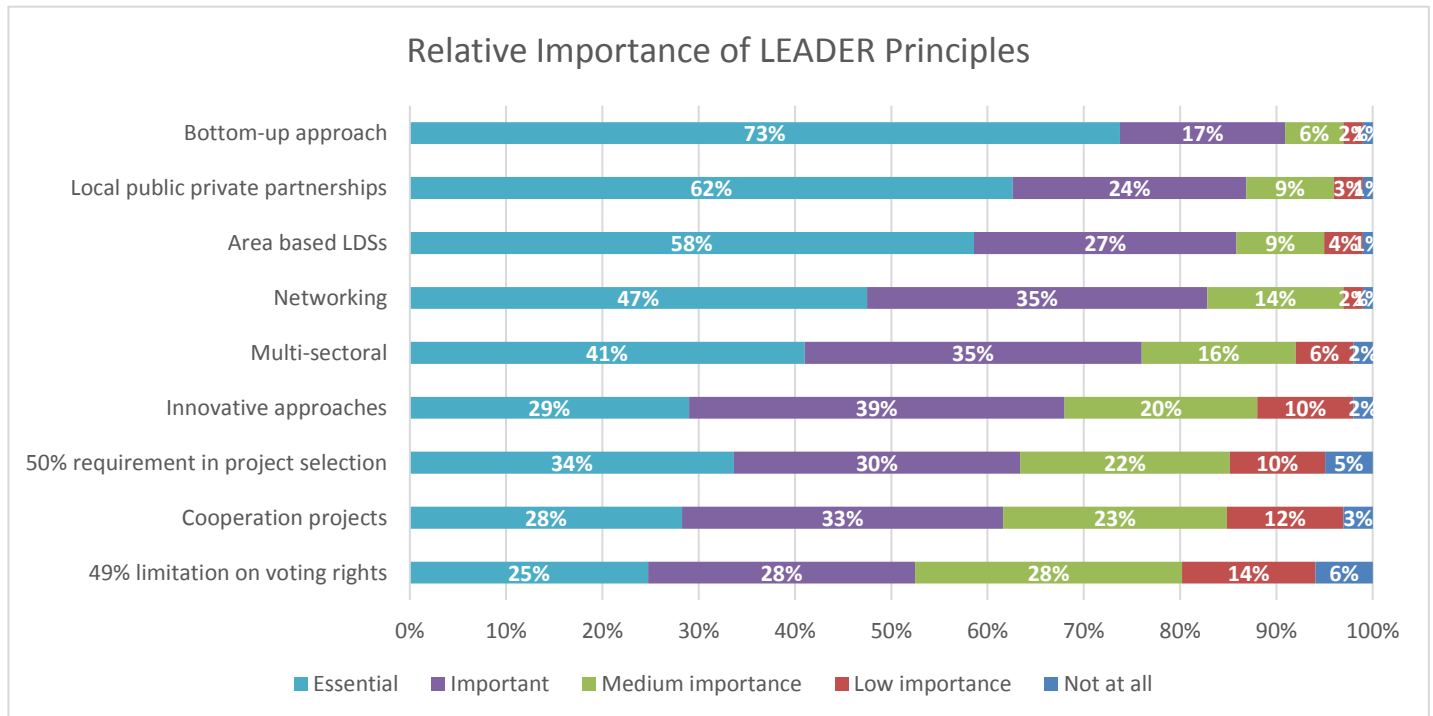
## LEADER Principles

### Question 13

How important are each of the following LEADER principles for your LAG in delivering real benefits on the ground? (Please rate each option from 1= not at all to 5 = essential).

- Area-based local development strategies intended for well-identified sub-regional rural territories.
- Local public-private partnerships (local action groups).
- Bottom-up approach with decision-making power for local action groups concerning the elaboration and implementation of local development strategies.
- The 49% limitation on voting rights of any single interest group.
- The 50% requirement for non-public sector votes in project selection.
- Multi-sectoral design and implementation of the strategy based on interaction between actors and projects of different sectors of the local economy.
- Implementation of innovative approaches.
- Implementation of cooperation projects.
- Networking of local partnerships.

Total Number of Responses 631



### Findings overall

- The three LEADER principles most frequently selected as ‘essential’ are the:
  - Bottom-up approach.
  - Local public-private partnership.
  - Area-based local development strategies.
- When ‘essential’ and ‘important’ categories are considered together the same ranking applies.
- The three LEADER principles most frequently selected as being of ‘low importance’ are the:
  - 49% limitation on voting rights.
  - Cooperation projects.
  - 50% requirement in project selection.
- When ‘low importance’ and ‘not at all’ are considered together the same ranking applies.

### Findings by ‘age’ of LAG

- These top and bottom choices were repeated by all ages of LAGs. The highest overall levels of ‘important’ and ‘essential’ ratings were given by LEADER II LAGs.

### Findings by ‘budget range’ of LAG

- LAGs with budgets in the lowest two categories (under €500k and €500k - €1m) ranked essential priorities differently.
- For LAGs with budgets under €500k ‘Networking of local partnerships’ was most frequently selected as ‘essential’ whilst ‘Innovation approaches’ was ranked ‘essential’ the least.
- LAGs with budgets of under €500k included ‘Area based development’ in their three principles most frequently rated ‘not at all important’.
- LAGs with budgets ranging from €500k - €1m included ‘Bottom up’ in their three principles most frequently rated ‘not at all important’.

### Findings by ‘respondent’ type

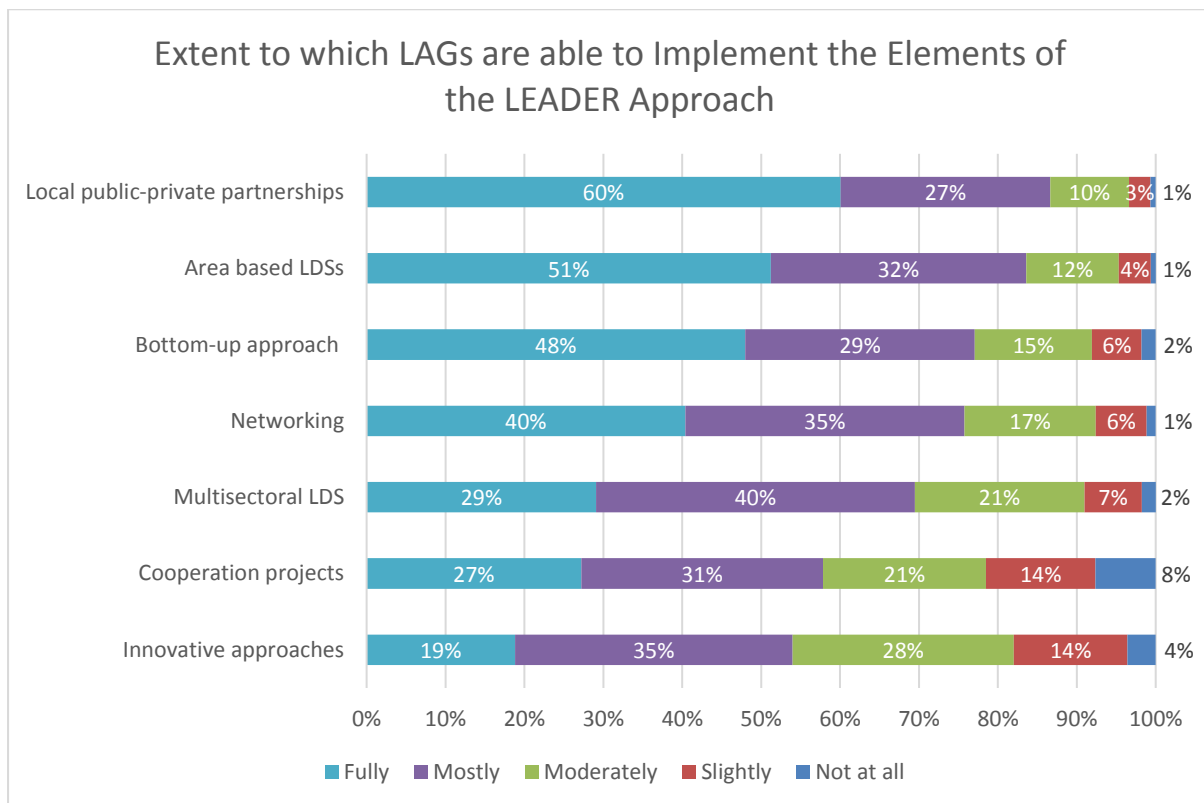
- There were slight differences in responses depending on whether respondents were LAG Managers, other LAG Staff, LAG Chair/President or LAG Board members.
- LAG Board Members represented only 2% of the respondents, they selected ‘Area Based LDSs’ as their top choice, all other respondents ranked ‘Bottom up approach’ as first choice.
- Other LAG Staff and LAG Board Members also included ‘Multi-sectoral’ in their top three.
- LAG Board Members rated each of the LEADER principles as ‘important’ or ‘essential’ less often than all other respondent types. In general LAG managers and other LAG staff gave higher ratings.
- The exception to this pattern is the ‘area-based LDS’ which 93% of LAG Board Members considered ‘important’ or ‘essential’ (86% overall for all respondents).
- LAG Chairs / Presidents’ rankings of these principles notably differed from others. There were four principles which LAG Chair/Presidents gave higher ratings than other respondents, this appears to reflect the priority they place on LAG governance:
  - 49% limitation on voting rights
  - Cooperation projects
  - 50% requirement in project selection
  - Innovative approaches.

### Question 14

To what extent is your LAG able to implement the following elements of the LEADER approach? (please rate each option from 1-5, where 1= not at all, 5 = fully)

- Area-based local development strategies intended for well-identified sub-regional rural territories.
- Local public-private partnerships (local action groups).
- Bottom-up approach with decision-making power for local action groups concerning the elaboration and implementation of local development strategies.
- Multi-sectoral design and implementation of the strategy based on interaction between actors and projects of different sectors of the local economy.
- Implementation of innovative approaches.
- Implementation of cooperation projects.
- Networking of local partnerships.

Total Number of Responses 622



### Findings overall

- The three elements of the LEADER approach selected that LAGs most think they can 'fully' implement are:
  - Local private-public partnerships.
  - Area-based local development strategies.
  - Bottom up approach.

- When 'fully' and 'mostly' categories of response are considered together the same ranking applies.
- The three LEADER approach elements that LAGs most frequently reported that they were able to implement either 'Slightly' or 'Not at all' are the:
  - Innovative approaches.
  - Cooperation projects.
  - Multi-sectoral.
- When 'slightly' and 'not at all' categories are considered together the same ranking again applies.

#### Findings by 'age of LAG

- These top and bottom choices were repeated by all ages of LAGs, except for LEADER+ LAGs who reported a lower level of ability to implement 'innovative approaches'.
- New 2014-2020 LAGs and LEADER I LAGs reported slightly higher instances of 'not at all' for implementing 'Cooperation projects'.

#### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- LAGs with budgets over €5m responded more frequently that they were able to 'fully' or 'mostly' implement the different elements of the LEADER approach than LAGs with smaller budgets.
- LAGs in the €4-5m budget reported more difficulty in implementing 'innovative approaches' and 'cooperation projects' than LAGs in other budget ranges.
- Interestingly, LAGs in the lowest budget range below €500k reported positively on their ability to implement 'cooperation projects' and 'innovation' by comparison to LAGs with much larger budgets. LAG budget did not appear to affect implementation of cooperation.

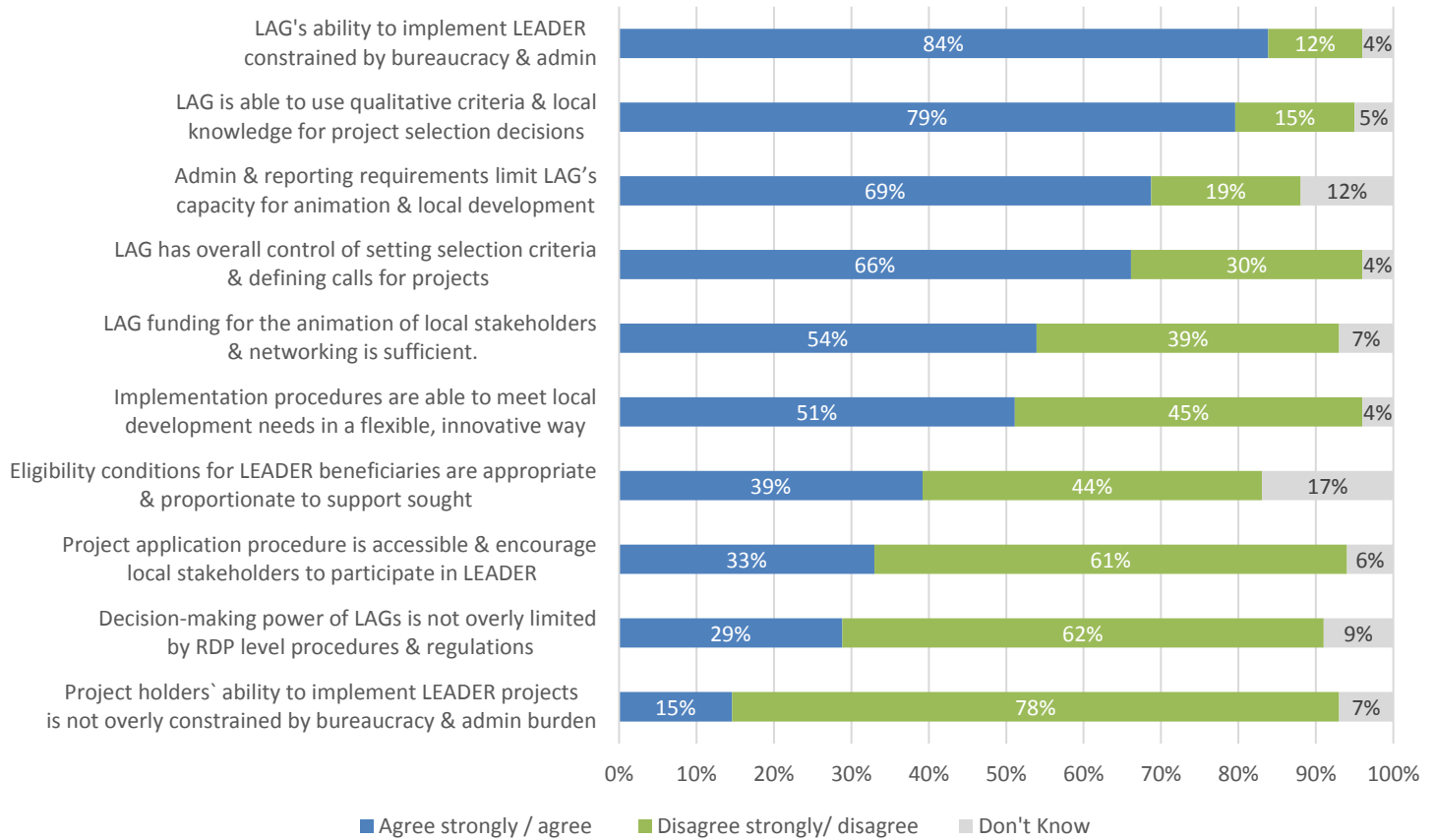
### Question 15

Please consider the statements below and for each statement select the option that best reflects your practical experience from this scale: 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = don't know, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly. The chart below has been structured to collate categories 1 with 2 and 4 with 5.

- LEADER implementation procedures are able to meet local development needs in a flexible, innovative way.
- The project application procedure is designed to be accessible and encourage local stakeholders to participate in LEADER.
- The LAG has overall control of setting selection criteria and defining calls for projects.
- The LAG is able to use qualitative criteria and local knowledge to inform project selection decisions.
- The decision-making power of LAGs is not overly limited by Rural Development Programme (RDP) level procedures and regulations.
- Your LAG's ability to implement the LEADER approach is constrained by bureaucracy and administrative burden.
- Project holders' ability to implement LEADER projects is not overly constrained by the level of bureaucracy and administrative burden.
- Eligibility conditions for LEADER beneficiaries are appropriate and proportionate to the amount of support sought.
- LAG funding for the animation of local stakeholders and networking is sufficient.
- Administrative and reporting requirements limit your LAG's capacity for animation and other development oriented activities.

*Total Number of Responses 628*

## Aspects of LEADER Implementation as seen by Local Action Groups



### Findings overall

- The four statements that LAGs most 'agree strongly/agree' with are that:
  - LAGs ability to implement the LEADER approach is constrained by bureaucracy and administrative burden (84%).
  - LAGs are able to use qualitative criteria and local knowledge for project selection decisions (79%).
  - Administrative and reporting requirements limit LAGs' capacity for animation and other development activities (69%).
  - The LAG has overall control of setting selection criteria and defining calls for projects (66%).
- LAG views were overall more split in relation to the appropriateness of eligibility conditions, adequacy of animation funding and the flexibility of implementation procedures.

- The three statements that LAGs most 'disagree strongly / disagree' with are that:
  - Project holders' ability to implement LEADER projects is not overly constrained by the level of bureaucracy and administrative burden.
  - The decision-making power of LAGs is not overly limited by RDP level procedures and regulations (62%).
  - The project application procedure is designed to be accessible and encourage local stakeholders to participate in LEADER.
- For seven of the statements there was rather a clear predominant opinion (over 60%). Overall these findings suggest that a clear majority of LAGs feel constrained in their ability to apply these methodological principles in implementing LEADER.

#### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- These levels of agreement were repeated by all ages of LAGs, except for LEADER I LAGs. who have much lower levels of agreement with the following two statements:
  - LAG funding for the animation of local stakeholders and networking is sufficient.
  - The LAG has overall control of setting selection criteria and defining calls for projects.

#### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- The size of LAG budget has more effect on some of the statements than others (mainly those relating to resource issues). In many cases there is no correlation between the responses and budget size.
- Only 30% of LAGs with less than €500k strongly agree or agree that 'LAG funding for the animation of local stakeholders and networking is sufficient' as opposed to 54% overall. Given that funding for LAG running costs- including animation - is fixed as a maximum pro rata share of the overall LAG budget this was to be expected.
- 47% of LAGs with budgets over €10m strongly agree or agree that 'Administrative and reporting requirements limit your LAG's capacity for animation and other development oriented activities', this was the only significant variation by any budgetary group from the overall average level of 69%. The prorating of LAG administrative and animation costs by budget means that these high budget LAGs are likely to be better resourced.

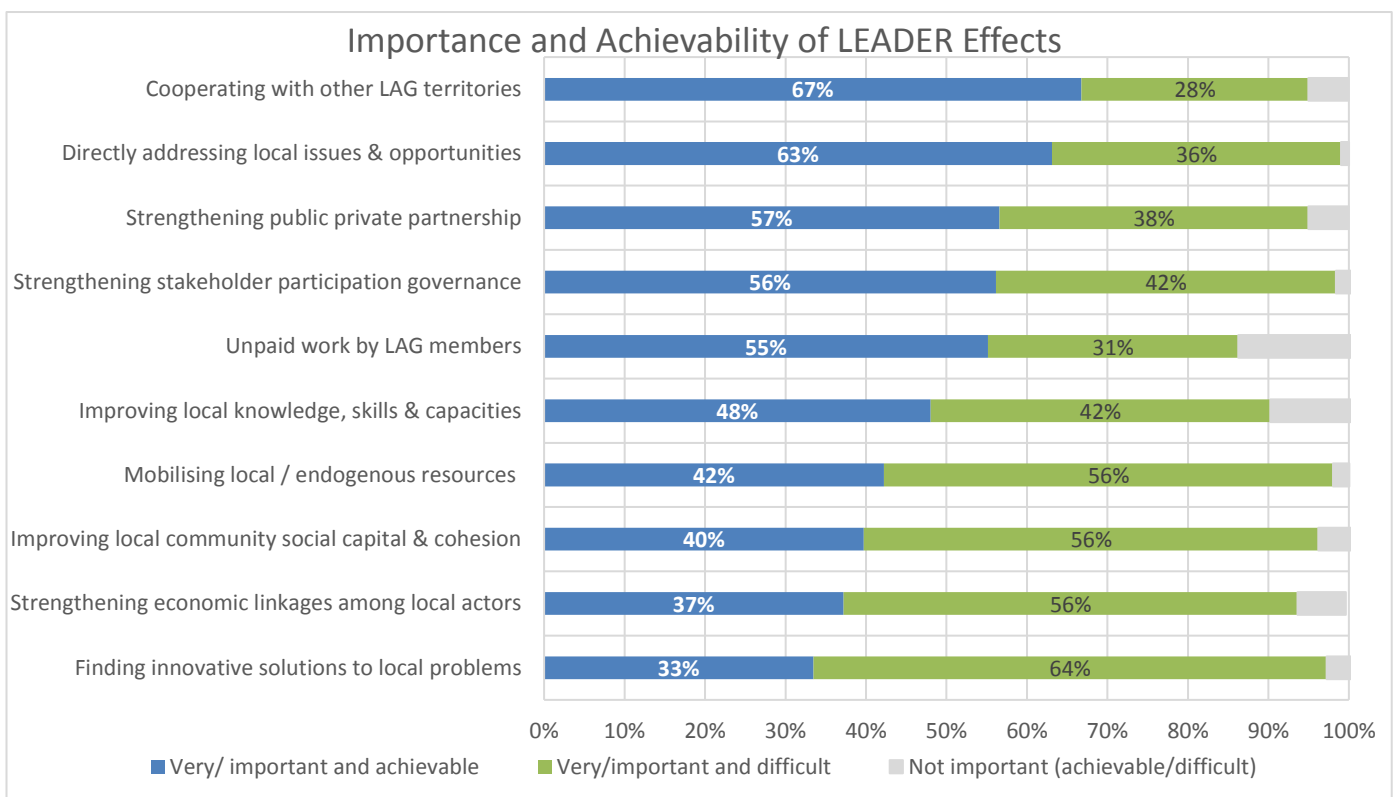
### Question 16

The LEADER approach can deliver qualitative local effects which are distinctive from those of other rural development activities. The importance of these effects and how easy they are to achieve may vary by LAG.

Please rank how important and how achievable each of the possible effects is for your LAG according to the following scale. 1= Very important and achievable, 2 = Very important and difficult, 3 = Important and achievable, 4 = Important and difficult, 5 = Not important but achievable, 6= Not important and difficult.

- Directly addressing local issues and opportunities.
- Strengthening stakeholder participation in local partnership and its governance.
- Strengthening economic linkages among local actors.
- Strengthening public private partnership.
- Unpaid work carried out by LAG members.
- Mobilising local / endogenous resources (human, physical, financial).
- Improving local community social capital and cohesion.
- Improving local individual's knowledge, skills and capacities.
- Finding / implementing innovative solutions to local problems.
- Cooperating with other LAG territories.

Total Number of Responses 621





### Findings overall

Here the chart and analysis concentrates only on the very important and important categories (taken together) and whether they are achievable or difficult to achieve.

- The three LEADER effects that most LAGs thought to be ‘Very important’ or ‘Important’ and ‘achievable’ are:
  - Cooperating with other LAG territories.
  - Directly addressing local issues and opportunities.
  - Strengthening public private partnership.
- There are four types of LEADER effect which a noticeably greater proportion of LAGs thought to be ‘Very important’ or ‘Important’ and ‘difficult’ to achieve are:
  - Finding / implementing innovative solutions to local problems.
  - Strengthening economic linkages among local actors.
  - Improving local community social capital and cohesion.
  - Mobilising local / endogenous resources (human, physical, financial).
- This appears to suggest some differentiation between working at the community level and in the LAG i.e. that those things thought most important and achievable occur at the LAG level predominantly whilst those which are important but difficult to achieve involve a higher degree of community engagement or participation.

### Findings by ‘age’ of LAG

- These top and bottom choices were similar for all ages of LAGs, however:
  - LEADER II LAGs do appear to find “Finding/implementing innovative solutions to local problems” the most difficult important / very important effect to achieve.
  - LEADER I LAGs reported most strongly that “Mobilising local/endogenous resources” was the least difficult important / very important effect to achieve.

### Findings by ‘budget range’ of LAG

- The size of LAG budget does seem to influence a LAG’s perception of what is ‘very/important and achievable’.
  - LAGs with larger budgets were more likely to respond across the board that the effects were ‘very/important and achievable’, than LAGs with smaller budgets.
  - 89% of smaller LAGs regard ‘mobilising local/endogenous resources’ as ‘very/important and difficult’ by comparison with only 33% of larger LAGs.
- The scale of budgetary allocation does therefore appear to matter when it comes to mitigating the difficulties and enabling LAG working at the local level with a view to delivering these LEADER effects.

## LEADER Operation

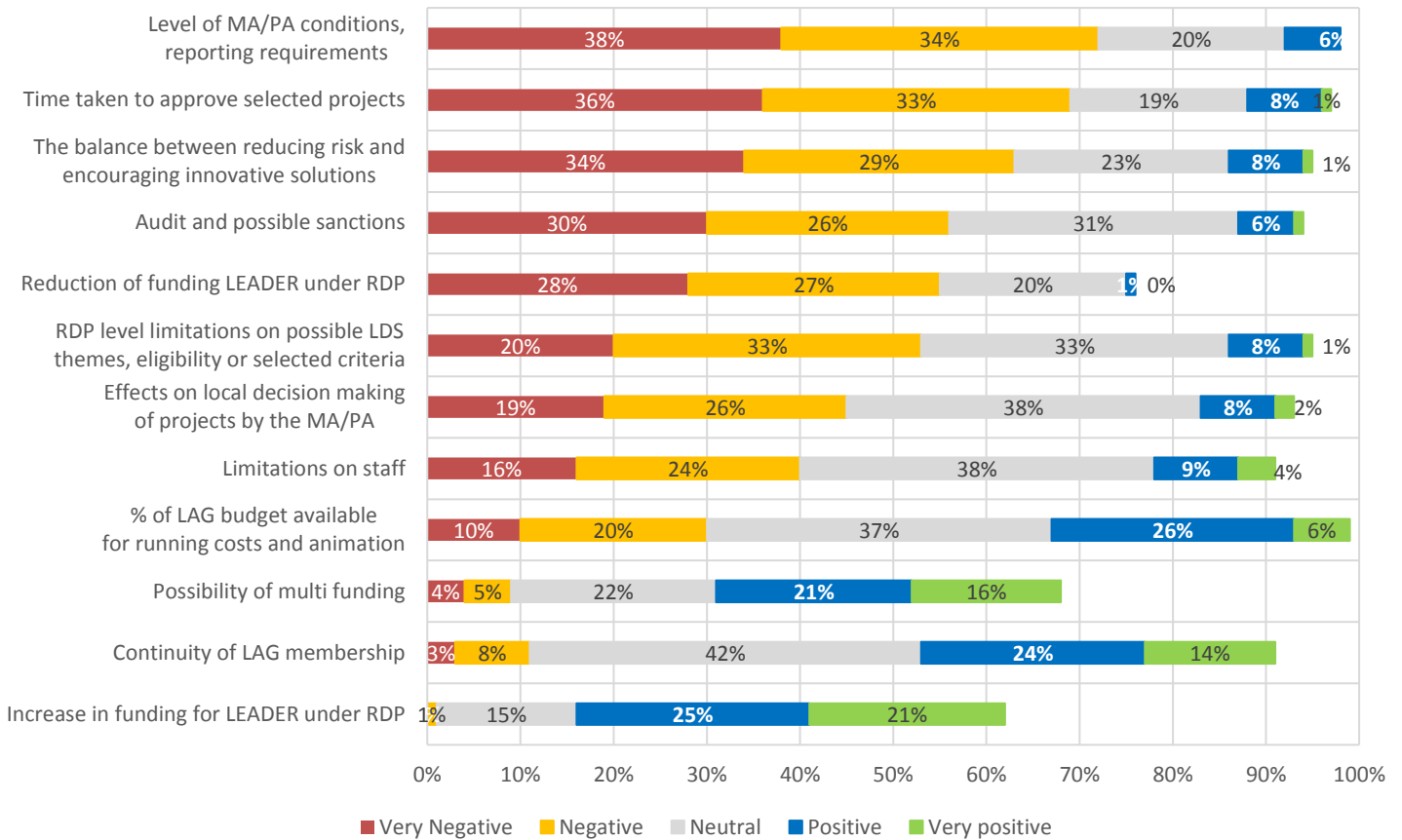
### Question 17

*What level of effect have the following factors had on the implementation of LEADER in your LAG territory? (for each option enter either 0 = not applicable, 1 = very negative, 2 = negative, 3 = neutral, 4 = positive, 5 = very positive)*

- Reduction of funding for LEADER under the RDP.
- Increase in funding for LEADER under the RDP.
- RDP level limitations on possible Local Development Strategy themes, eligibility or selection criteria.
- Level of Managing Authority/Paying Agency conditions, reporting requirements.
- Time taken to approve selected projects.
- Audit and possible sanctions.
- The balance in implementation procedures effects between reducing risk and encouraging innovative solutions.
- Effects on local decision-making of final approval of projects by the managing authority or paying agency.
- Percentage of LAG budget available for running costs and animation.
- Limitations on staff (continuity, skills, number).
- Continuity of LAG membership.
- Possibility of multi funding

*Total Number of Responses 578*

## Level of Effects on LEADER Implementation



For the purposes of improving the clarity of the analysis the 'not applicable' responses have been removed from the chart.

### Findings overall

- Overall the number of negative ratings for these factors outweigh the positive ratings with a substantial proportion of 'neutral' factors. Only four factors achieved higher positive than negative ratings and only five higher positive and neutral than negative.
- The three factors that LAGs thought to be most 'Very negative/negative' in their effects on LEADER implementation are:
  - Level of MA/PA conditions, reporting requirements (72%).
  - Time taken to approve selected projects (69%).
  - Balance between implementation procedures that aim to reduce risk rather than encouraging innovative solutions (63%).
- Audit concerns are often cited by LAGs as an inhibiting factor to LEADER implementation e.g. in workshops, this receives less priority than might have been expected here with 56% rating this as a negative / very negative factor.
- The negatively perceived factors and effects appear to relate to factors outwith the LAG, mainly deriving from MA/PA procedures and controls.

- The three factors that LAGs thought to be most 'Very positive/ positive' in their effects on LEADER implementation are:
  - Increase in funding for LEADER under the RDP (46%).
  - Continuity of LAG membership (38%).
  - Possibility of multi-funding (37%).
- Opinion on the proportion of LAG budget available for running costs and animation was relatively evenly split between positive and negative, as the largest category of replies is 'neutral' it seems that overall the limits applicable do not have a negative effect.

#### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- Analysis by 'age of LAG' saw 2007-2013 LAGs and LEADER + LAGs viewing 'increase in funding for LEADER under the RDP' much more positively than older LAGs. LEADER I LAGs rank 'continuity of LAG membership' more highly than others.
- Overall LEADER I and LEADER II LAGs tended to respond with 'very negative/negative' more frequently than other age groups of LAG (this occurred in relation to 10 out of the 12 options).

#### Findings by 'percentage of LAG budget available for running costs and animation'

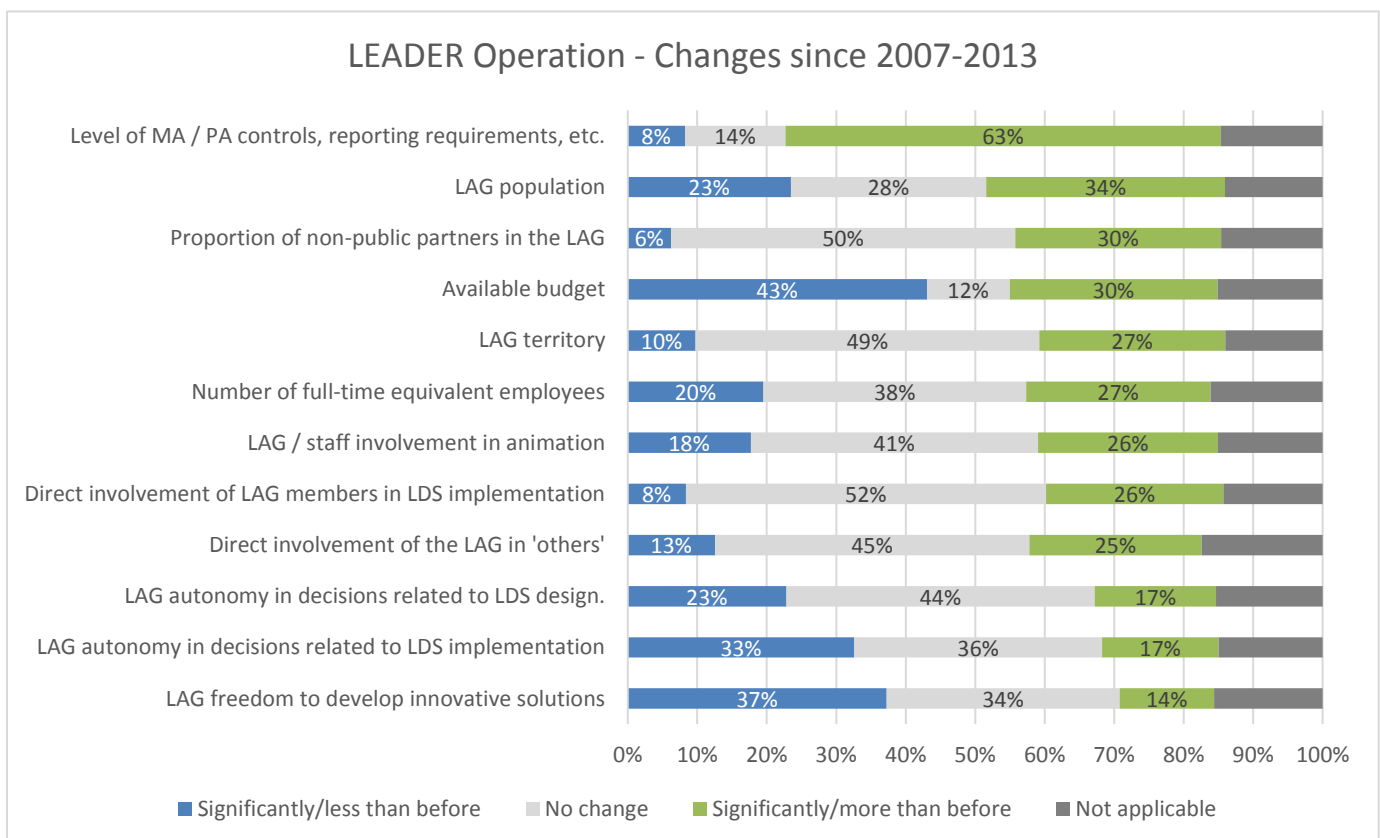
- The 'percentage of LAG budget available for running costs and animation' does not seem to influence the LAGs rating for the majority of factors significantly. Some notable examples of exception to this include:
  - A noticeably lower proportion of LAGs with lower levels of running cost (<13%) considered 'Implementation procedures that aim to reduce risk...' to be 'very/negative' as opposed to those with higher budgets.
  - Rather surprisingly only 26% of LAGs with less than 10% running cost and animation budget considered 'Limitations on staff' as 'very/negative', markedly less than the 40% of overall LAG respondents.

### Question 18

How have the following aspects changed for your LAG between the 2007 – 2013 and 2014-2020 Programming periods? (1 = significantly less than before, 2 = less than before, 3 = no change, 4 = more than before, 5 = significantly more than before) Applicable only for LAGs operational in 2007 – 2013 period.

- Available budget.
- LAG territory.
- LAG population.
- Number of full-time equivalent employees.
- LAG / staff involvement in animation.
- LAG autonomy in decisions related to local development strategy design.
- LAG autonomy in decisions related to local development strategy implementation.
- Level of MA controls, reporting requirements etc.
- LAG freedom to develop innovative solutions.
- Proportion of non-public partners in the LAG.
- Direct involvement of LAG members in LDS implementation.
- Direct involvement of the LAG in other regional and territorial development actions or structures.

Total Number of Responses 565



### Findings overall

- For all aspects, both some increases and decreases were perceived to have occurred. Overall responses were a mix of positives and negatives. However, for eight of the twelve aspects, the largest number of responses was that there had been no change of level between funding periods.
- The most striking perceived change in level reported related to the increased ‘Level of MA controls, reporting requirements etc,’ signalled by 63% of responses.
- The three changes where the largest proportion of LAGs perceive levels now (2014 – 2020) to be significantly more/more than in the 2007-2013 programming period are:
  - Level of MA/PA conditions, reporting requirements etc.
  - LAG population.
  - Proportion of non-public partners in the LAG.
- In each of these cases more LAGs reported increases than decreases for these changes.
- The three aspects where the largest proportion of LAGs perceive levels now (2014 – 2020) to be significantly less/less than in the 2007-2013 programming period are:
  - Available budget.
  - LAG freedom to develop innovative solutions.
  - LAG autonomy in decisions related to LDS design.
- For a number of positive aspects of LAG operation and governance more LAGs reported levels to have increased more than decreased:
  - Number of full-time equivalent employees.
  - LAG / staff involvement in animation.
  - Direct involvement of the LAG in other regional and territorial development actions or structures.
  - Number of non-public partners in the LAG.
  - Direct involvement of LAG members in LDS implementation.

### Findings by ‘age’ of LAG

- Earlier generations of LAGs (LEADER I, LEADER II and LEADER+) reported greater increases in the ‘level of MA/PA conditions, reporting requirements, etc’ than the general population.
- LEADER + and 2007-2013 LAGs reported higher increases in ‘LAG/staff involvement in animation’ than the general population.

### Findings by ‘budget range’ of LAG

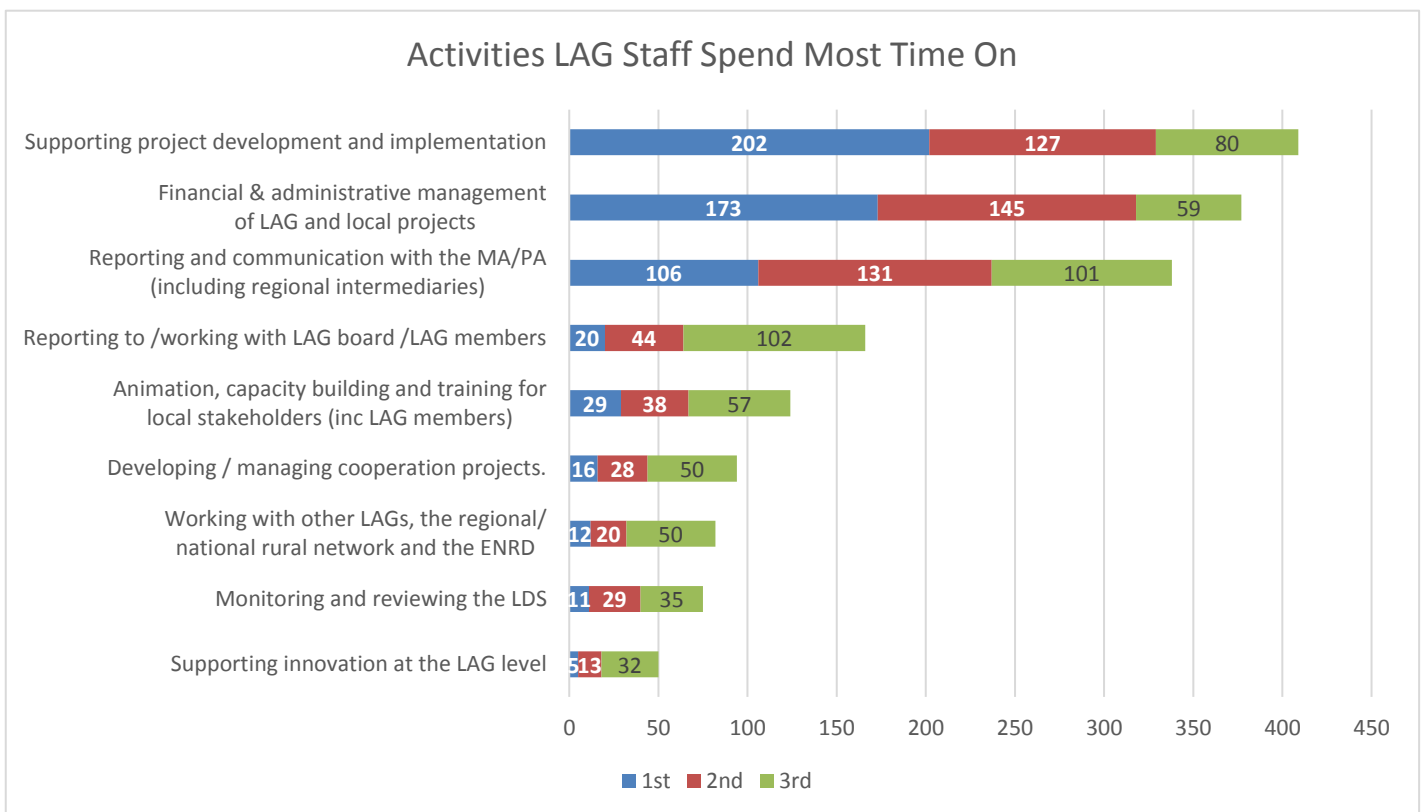
- All LAG budget ranges reported that ‘The level of MA/PA conditions and requirements’ have increased, with LAGs under €1.5m reporting the lowest increases.
- LAGs reporting that the ‘Available budget’ decreased (43% of replies) occurred across all LAG budget ranges, most significantly in LAGs with budgets greater than €10m.
- LAGs reporting that ‘Available budget’ increased (30% of replies) also occurred in all LAG budget ranges.
- LAGs with the lowest budget range (under €500K) reported that available budget increased the least (13%) and LAGs in the budget range €5-10m reported available budget increased the most (42%).

### Question 19

Please think about your day-to-day work in the LAG and rank the three types of activity which your LAG staff spend most time on overall on a scale of 1 – 3 where 1 = most time spent.

- Reporting to /working with LAG board and members.
- Supporting project development and implementation.
- Financial and administrative management of LAG and local projects.
- Reporting and communication with the Managing Authority and Paying Agency (including regional intermediaries).
- Animation, capacity building and training of local stakeholders (inc. LAG members).
- Supporting innovation at the local level.
- Monitoring and reviewing the local development strategy.
- Developing /managing cooperation projects.
- Working with other LAGs, the regional/national rural network and the ENRD.

Total Number of Responses 580



### Findings overall

- The three activities that LAG staff spend the most time on are:
  - Supporting project development and implementation.
  - Financial and administrative management of LAG and local projects.
  - Reporting and communication with the MA/PA (including regional intermediaries).

- The priority of these rankings is identical whether looked at by those which LAGs ranked as first choice or where all top three rankings are aggregated together.
- The activities which received the lowest rankings are in ascending order from lowest:
  - Supporting innovation at the local level.
  - Monitoring and reviewing the LDS.
  - Working with other LAGs, the regional/national rural network and the ENRD.
- The relative priority of these rankings is again identical, in both absolute and aggregate scores.
- The differences between the highest ranked and lowest ranked activities are very substantial, only 50 LAGs rate 'Supporting innovation at the LAG level' in their top three as opposed to 407 for 'Supporting project development and implementation'. There are also very marked differences between the top three and all the other activities.
- These lower ranked activities tend to be associated with LAG governance and development capacity building, the higher ranked activities are more delivery oriented. This suggests that in their daily work LAG staff prioritise activities contributing to delivery objectives over those contributing to more process related capacity building objectives.
- The low levels of time spent on 'supporting innovation at local level' are in marked contrast to the importance placed on this by LAG Chair/Presidents in Question 13.

#### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- Each age group of LAGs reported the same top three activities as the overall population, but first choices differed depending on the 'age' of LAG.
- LEADER II and New 2014-2020 LAGs spent most time on 'Financial and administrative management of LAG and local projects' with LEADER + LAGs selecting 'Reporting and communication with the MA/PA' as the activity they spent most time on.

#### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- LAGs with larger budget ranges, over €5m, reported 'Financial and administrative management of LAG and local projects' as their top response, with LAGs with smaller budgets, reporting they spent most time on 'supporting project development and implementation'.
- LAGs with budgets ranging from €4m-5m spent most time on 'Reporting and communication with the MA/PA'.
- Only in the budget ranges of less than €1.5m and €5m-10m did no LAG select 'supporting innovation at the LAG level' as one of the activities they spend most time on.

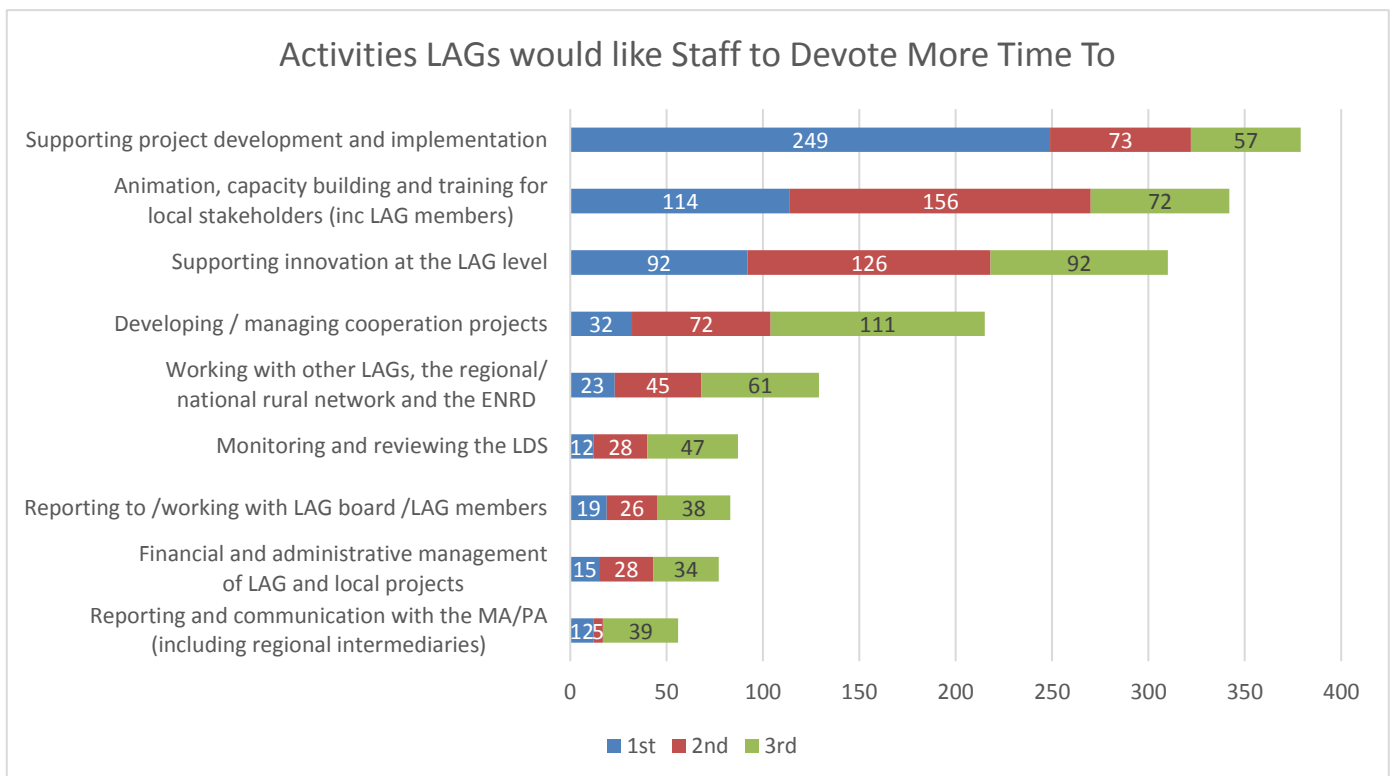


## Question 20

Where would you like to be able to devote more of your LAG team's time or resources in order to maximise the benefit of LEADER to your LAG territory? Please rank the three most important options below on a scale of 1 – 3 where 1 = most important.

- Reporting to /working with LAG board /LAG members.
- Supporting project development and implementation.
- Financial and administrative management of LAG and local projects.
- Reporting and communication with the Managing Authority and Paying Agency (including regional intermediaries).
- Animation, capacity building and training of local stakeholders (inc LAG members).
- Supporting innovation at the local level.
- Monitoring and reviewing the local development strategy.
- Developing /managing cooperation projects.
- Working with other LAGs, the regional/national rural network and the ENRD.

Total Number of Responses 572



## Findings overall

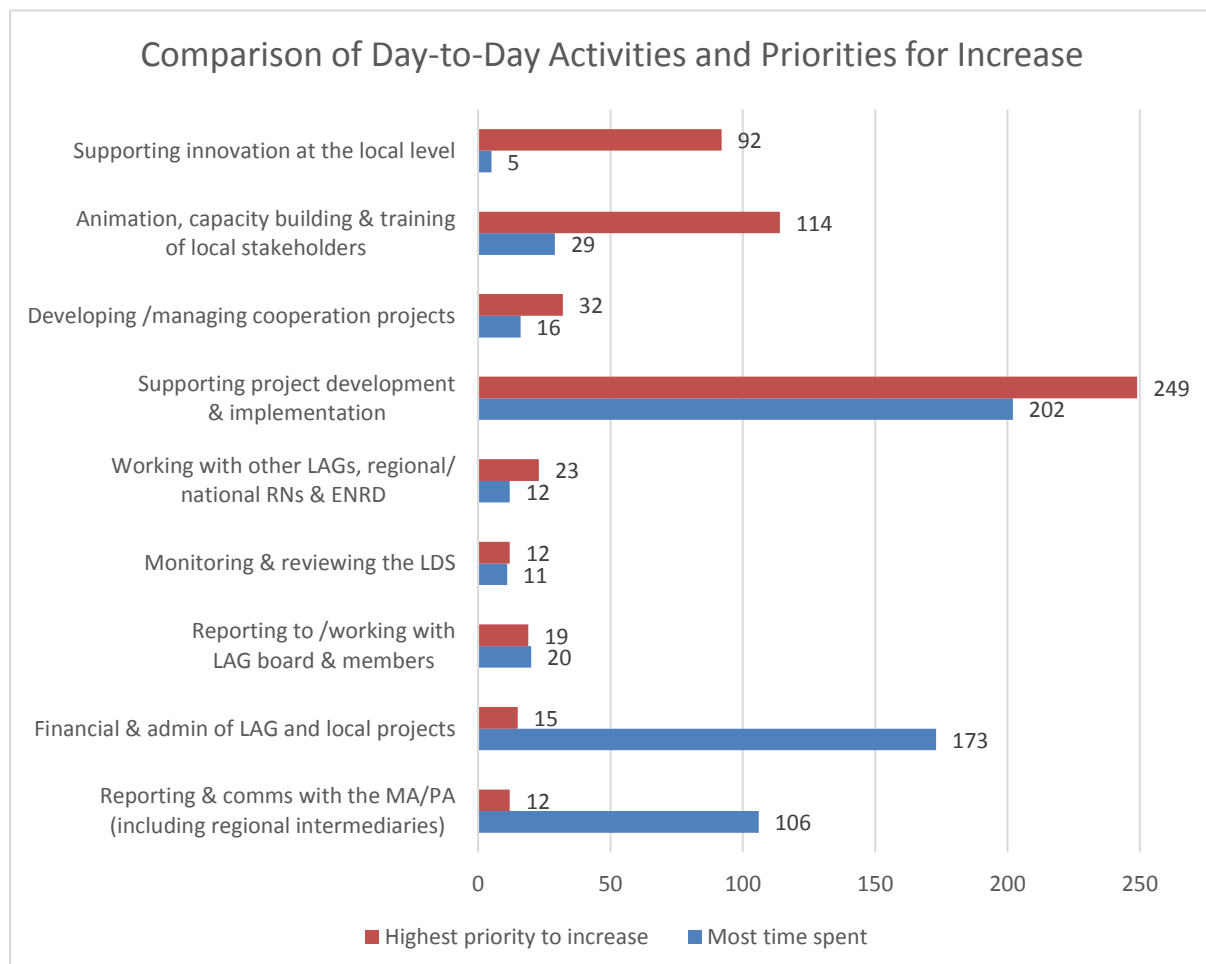
- The top three activities that LAG staff would like to spend more time on are the same when looked at in total and those ranked first, they all relate to local development work and increasing capacities of the LAG territory:
  - Supporting project development and implementation.

- Animation, capacity building and training for local stakeholders.
- Supporting innovation at LAG level.
- The areas where the fewest numbers of LAGs would like to spend more time are the same when looked at in total and those ranked first; they are focused on the management and administrative aspects of delivering LEADER:
  - Reporting and communication with MA/PA.
  - Financial management of LAG and local projects.
  - Reporting to/ working with LAG board / LAG members.

#### Findings by 'age' and 'budget range' of LAG

- The same order of priority applies when the responses are looked at by LAG age and LAG budget ranges.

The Figure below shows LAGs' day-to-day activities (Most time spent - Question 19) in comparison with what LAGs would like to devote more time to (Highest priority to increase - Question 20).



- 'Supporting project development and Implementation' is where LAG staff currently spend most of their time and would like to increase this most in the future.

- When looking at activities other than ‘supporting project development and implementation’ what LAG staff ‘spend most time on’ and what they would ‘like to devote more time to’ are in many cases almost direct opposites. For example, LAGs overall spend a lot of time on administrative tasks such as ‘Financial and administration of LAG and local projects’ and ‘Reporting and communicating with the MA/PA’, but would much prefer to devote more time to developmental tasks such as ‘animation and capacity building’ and ‘supporting innovation in the LAG area’. There appears to be an element of the things that ‘have to be done’, for example administration and management, taking too much time from longer term development activity and objectives, such as building community capacity and fostering innovation. This raises questions on the appropriate balance between time needed for these forms of necessary support activity and that available for achieving the wider LEADER objectives and added value sought.

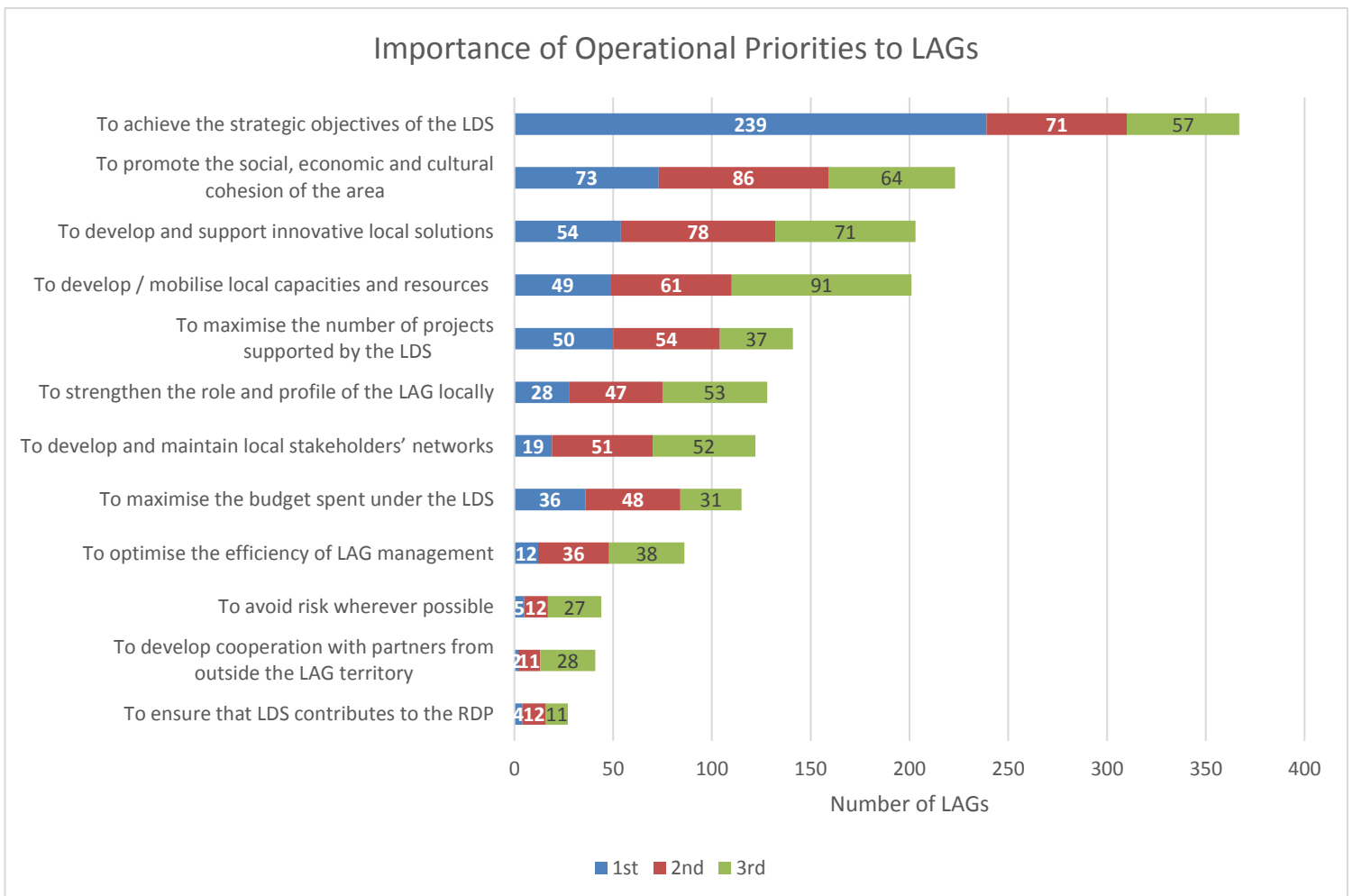
### Question 21

How important are the following operational priorities to your LAG? Please select your top 3 most important options below in order of importance on a scale of 1 – 3 where 1 = most important.

- To achieve the strategic objectives of the local development strategy (LDS).
- To maximise the number of projects supported by the LDS.
- To maximise the budget spent under the LDS.
- To ensure that LDS contributes to the RDP.
- To optimise the efficiency of LAG management.
- To strengthen the role and profile of the LAG locally.
- To promote the social, economic and cultural cohesion of the area.
- To develop and support innovative local solutions.
- To avoid risk wherever possible.
- To develop and maintain local stakeholders' networks.
- To develop cooperation with partners from outside the LAG territory.
- To develop / mobilise local capacities and resources (human, funding, knowledge, etc.)

Total Number of Responses 575

### Importance of Operational Priorities to LAGs



### Findings overall

- The four highest ranked operational priorities for LAGs are to:
  - Achieve the strategic objectives of the local development strategy.
  - Promote the social, economic and cultural cohesion of the area.
  - Develop and support innovative local solutions.
  - Develop / mobilise local capacities and resources.
- The first three of these are the same when looked at in total and those ranked first.
- The bottom three operational priorities when looked at in total for LAGs are to:
  - Ensure that the LDS contributes to the RDP.
  - Develop cooperation partners from outside the LAG territory.
  - Avoid risk wherever possible.
- The balance of responses to this question once again highlights LAGs' clear and very strongly preferred focus on development oriented activity at the local level and the pursuit of locally determined priorities.

### Findings by 'age of LAG

- LAGs' priorities across all 'ages' matched the overall population rankings with the exception of New 2014-2020 LAGs who included 'develop and support innovative local solutions' in their top 3 priorities.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- The ranking of priorities is the same when looking at response in relation to LAGs budget range.
- Only LAGs in the budget ranges of €1.5m to €4m selected 'cooperation', 'LDS contribution to the RDP' or 'avoiding risk' as their top operational priority.

## Question 22

To what extent does your national or regional LEADER delivery framework enable your LAG to pursue these operational priorities? Please select the option most appropriate to your LAG.

- The LAG has sufficient freedom to allow it to pursue its preferred priorities.
- The LAG has a moderate degree of freedom which allows it to partially address its priorities.
- The LAG has a limited degree of freedom which substantially compromises its freedom to address its priorities.
- The LAGs' freedom to address its operational priorities is seriously constrained.

Total Number of Responses 572

### Findings overall

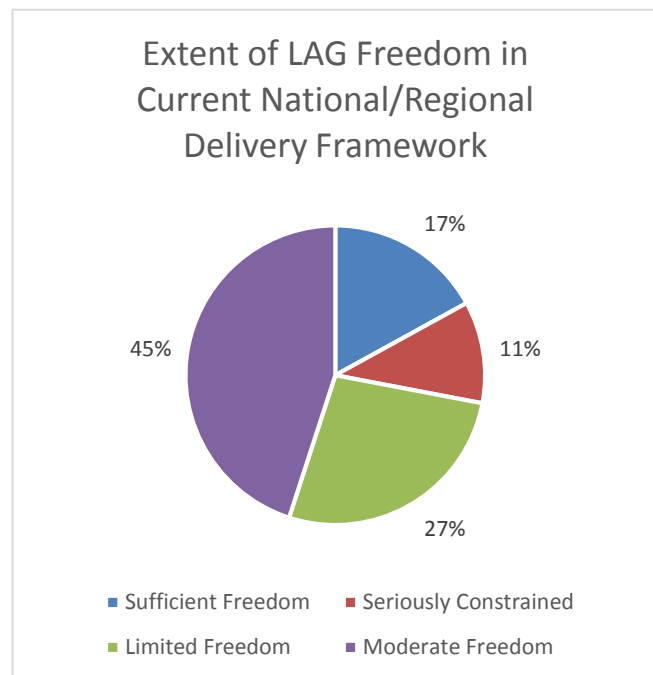
- Only 17% of LAGs reported that they have 'sufficient' freedom to deliver their operational priorities whilst 45% report having a moderate degree of freedom.
- 38% of respondent LAGs reported that they are 'seriously constrained' or have 'limited freedom' in their current national/regional delivery framework.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- The responses show that LEADER I LAGs consider themselves twice as 'seriously constrained' as the overall group of respondents, and even more so when compared to New 2014-2020 LAGs and 2007-2013 LAGs.
- There is a similar difference with LAGs who responded that they have 'sufficient freedom', with New 2014-2020 LAGs being almost twice as likely to choose this response than other ages of LAGs.
- Such a differentiated response is not unexpected and appears to reflect the different experience and expectations of the older LAGs vs the 'New' LAGs who have no such reference point. This is also consistent with the analysis of questions 19 to 21.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- LAG responses across the budget ranges more or less follow the same pattern as the overall responses. The exception to this is the proportion of LAGs who responded 'seriously constrained' in the €4-5m budget range which is almost double that of the overall response rate and three times as much as the LAGs in the €5-10m budget range.

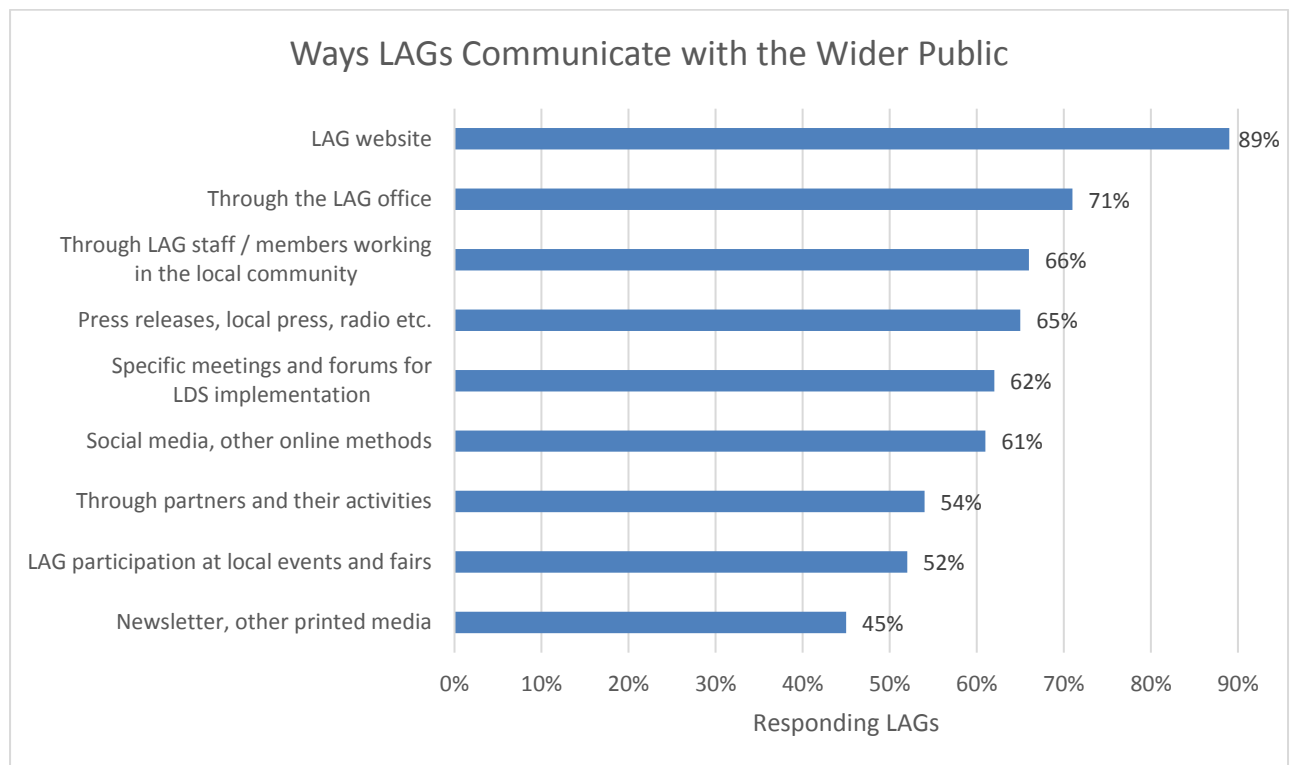


### Question 23

What is the main way your LAG communicates with the wider public in your LAG Territory (including potential beneficiaries)? Please select those methods which your LAG uses.

- LAG website.
- Specific meetings and forums for LDS implementation.
- Through the LAG office.
- Through LAG staff / members working in the local community.
- LAG participation at local events and fairs.
- Press releases, local press, radio etc.
- Newsletter, other printed media.
- Social media, other online methods.
- Through partners and their activities.

Total Number of Responses 580



### Findings overall

- The most popular ways to communicate with the wider public in the LAG territory include;
  - The LAG website.
  - Through the LAG office.
  - Through LAG staff /members working in the local community.
- Other important tools include ‘press releases’, ‘specific meetings and forums’, and ‘online and social media’.
- Newsletters and printed media are the least popular methods of communication.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- From the rankings it is clear that LAGs use mixed approaches to communicate with their wider public, different forms of active interpersonal engagement and working in the local community are clearly important. However, New 2014-2020 LAGs clearly make considerably less use of 'local events and fairs', 'partners and their activities', 'social media and other online methods', the 'LAG website', the 'LAG office' and 'LAG staff/members working in the local community' than other LAGs.
- LEADER I and LEADER+ LAGs are the highest users of some forms of communication, for instance 88% of LEADER I LAGs use the 'LAG office' for communication, while only 61% of 2014-2020 LAGs do so.
- For 'LAG participation at local events and fairs' again 60% of LEADER I LAGs use this method by comparison with 41% of 2014-2020 LAGs.
- The LAG website is the top overall communication tool used by all ages of LAG.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- LAGs with budget ranges of <€500k displayed the highest percentage use of communicating through the 'LAG office', 'LAG staff/members working in the community' and 'Partners and their activities'.
- LAGs with budgets over €10m displayed the highest percentage use of 'LAG participation in local events', 'LAG website' (100%), 'Press releases' and use of 'Newsletters'. They also showed the lowest use of 'social media'.

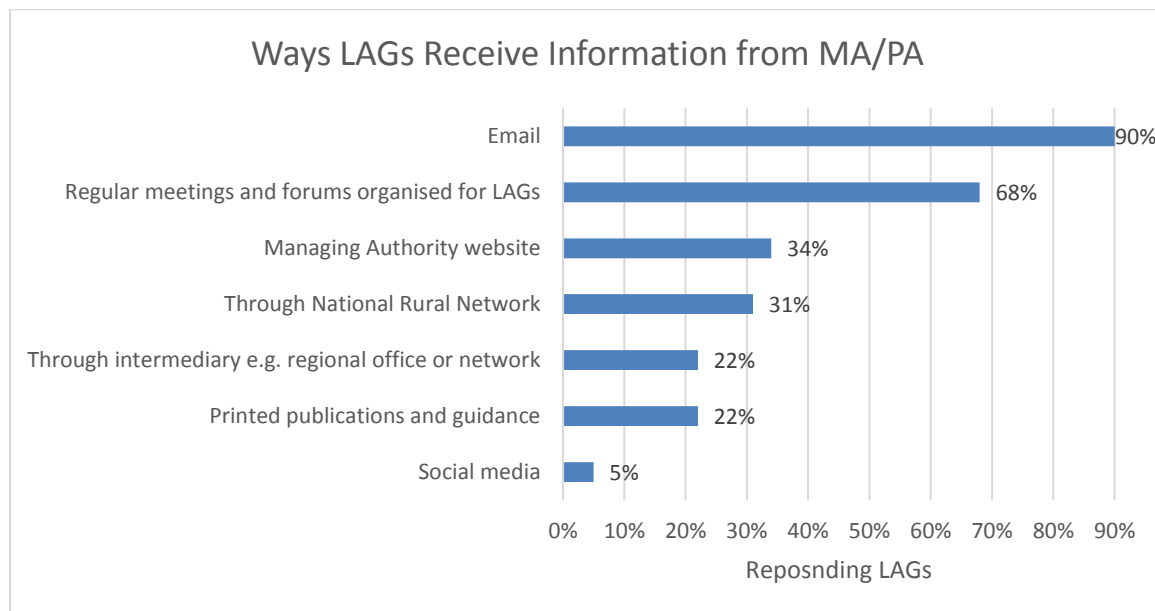


## Question 24

What are the main ways in which you receive information from the Managing Authority? Please select those methods which are most used

- Managing Authority website.
- Regular meetings and forums organised for LAGs.
- Through National Rural Network.
- Social media.
- Printed publications and guidance.
- Email.
- Through intermediary e.g. regional office or network.

Total Number of Responses 582



## Findings overall

- The most frequently used ways that MA/PA communicate with LAGs are:
  - Email.
  - Regular meetings and forums.
  - Managing Authority website.
- The least frequent ways for the MA/PA to communicate with LAGs are:
  - Social media.
  - Printed publications and guidance.
  - Through intermediaries.
- There does not seem to be any pattern for those LAGs who did not report receiving email communication from MAs, these respondents are from a mixture of Member States.

## Findings by 'age' of LAG

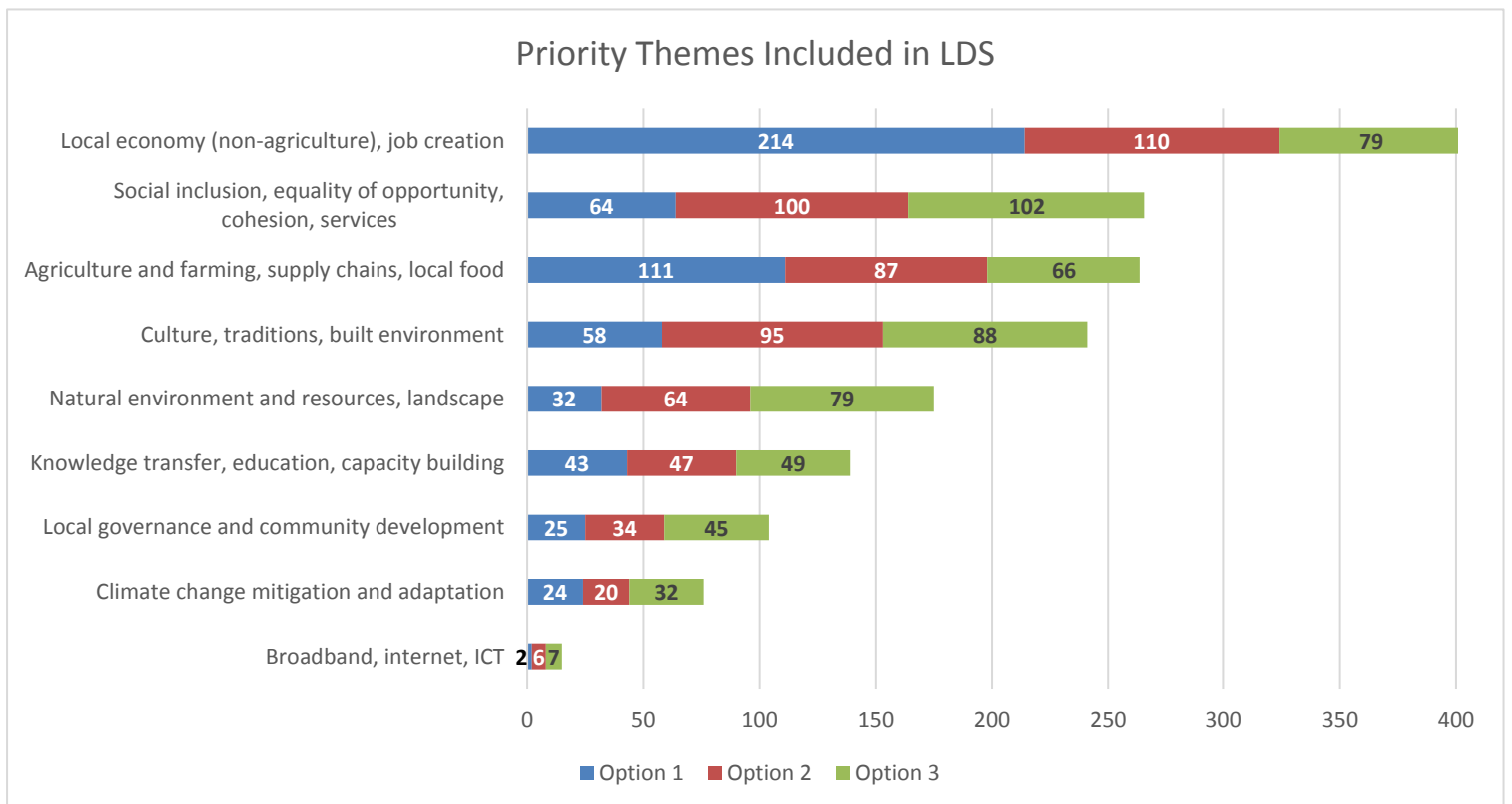
- This pattern of how the MA/PA communicates with the LAGs is similar across all ages of LAG.

### Question 25

Which of the following priority themes relate most closely to your Local Development Strategy objectives? Please select (up to) the three most relevant ones from the options provided.

- Knowledge transfer, education, capacity building.
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Agriculture and farming, supply chains, local food.
- Local economy (non-agriculture), job creation.
- Culture, traditions, built environment.
- Natural environment and resources, landscape.
- Social inclusion, equality of opportunity, cohesion, services.
- Local governance and community development.
- Broadband, internet, ICT.

Total Number of Responses 575



### Findings overall

- The overall top priority themes that relate most closely to LAGs LDSs are:
  - Local economy (non-agriculture), job creation.
  - Social inclusion, equality of opportunity, cohesion, services.
  - Agriculture and farming, supply chains, local food.

- The least frequently selected themes in ascending order are:
  - Broadband, internet, ICT.
  - Climate change mitigation and adaptation.
  - Local governance and community development.
- The relatively low rankings for ‘Local governance and community development’ and ‘Knowledge transfer, education and capacity building’ appears to be somewhat at odds with responses to questions 21 and 22, this may indicate that this is not included as a specific LDS theme, rather it is part of the day to day work.
- Only 15 LAGs identify Broadband, internet and ICT as one of their three top priorities. Climate change mitigation and adaptation also scores rather low priority; selected by only 76 LAGs.

#### Findings by ‘age’ of LAG

- The top three priority themes are the same for New 2014-2020, LEADER II and LEADER I LAGs as the overall priorities.
- For 2007-2013 and LEADER+ LAGs ‘Culture, traditions, built environment’ replaces ‘Social inclusion, equality of opportunity, cohesion, services’.

#### Finding by ‘budget range’ of LAG

- The top priority theme is ‘Local economy’ across all LAG budget ranges.
- The other two priorities themes differ within the budget ranges as follows:
  - up to €2m – Agriculture and Culture
  - Between €2m and €5m – Agriculture and Social Inclusion
  - Over €5m – Culture and Social Inclusion

### Question 26

What tasks does your LAG perform in relation to LEADER projects as part of your LDS implementation?  
Please select one of the options.

- Project selection only.
- Project selection and formal approval.
- Project selection and payment of claims.
- Project selection, formal approval and payment of claims.

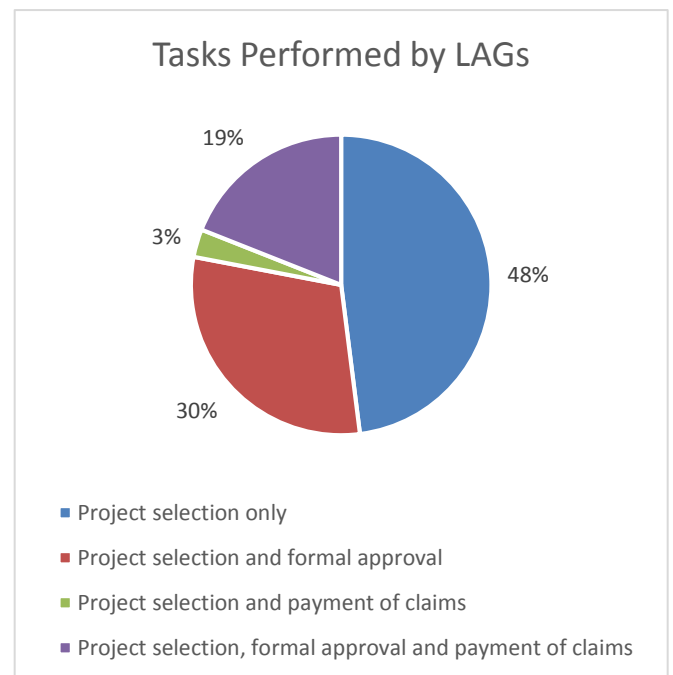
Total Number of Responses 578

#### Findings overall

- Overall just under half of the LAGs that responded to the survey performed 'Project selection only'.
- In total 49% of the LAGs in the survey have responsibility for 'project selection and formal approval', within this 19% of the total are also responsible for the full range of responsibilities including paying claims.

#### Findings by 'LAG freedom to pursue priorities' and 'LAG autonomy'.

- 51% of LAGs who consider they have sufficient freedom to pursue their priorities undertake project selection only. While 39% of those LAGs who perform 'project selection, formal approval and payment of claims' nevertheless consider that they are substantially or seriously constrained.



## LEADER Improvements

### Question 27

*What is most important to address in helping LAGs to be effective in implementing LEADER now? Please select and rank your top five priorities from the following items in order of their importance in (where 1= highest importance and 5 = 5th most important).*

- Better common knowledge and support through networking of LAGs, Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies and National Rural Networks and exchanges on transferable experience and practices
- The eligibility of measures to support the emergence of new ideas, e.g. the use of feasibility studies, LAG led projects, pilot projects, preparatory work etc. should be ensured from the EU level down.
- Setting aside a significant and specific budget for LAG animation activities.
- Allocating resources for cooperation to the LAG level.
- Ensuring better common knowledge of and support for LAGs to take advantage of using simplified cost options.
- LAGs setting selection criteria and defining calls
- LAGs using qualitative criteria and local knowledge to inform project selection decisions.
- Ensuring better common knowledge of and support for LAGs to take advantage of using different delivery tools e.g. 'Umbrella projects'.
- Improving MA or intermediary body turnaround time on approving selected projects.
- Improving timeliness of payments of beneficiaries` claims.
- Simpler and more proportionate systems of controls (for smaller projects?).
- Simplification, harmonisation and flexibility to support LAGs in the practical use of multi-funding.
- Greater clarity on LAG level monitoring and evaluation requirements in LEADER.
- Strengthening communication, coordination and cooperation between LAGs, Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies in delivering LEADER.
- A dedicated EU/national platform for information sharing among LEADER actors.
- Simpler application forms/application process.
- Allowing LAGs to act as a 'platform', signposting and brokering support from multiple (third party) sources to further LDS objectives.

*Total Number of Responses 554*

### Findings overall

To analyse this question each LAG's responses (1 to 5) were added together to give a total combined score which then represents the five elements each LAG thought were the most important from the 17 they could choose from. On this basis overall responses to the survey showed that from the listed options the three most important ways to help LAGs implement LEADER now all related to simplified and improved administrative processes (in descending order):

- Simpler application forms/application process.
- Simpler and more proportionate systems of controls (for smaller projects?).

- Improving MA or intermediary body turnaround time on approving selected projects.
- Simpler applications forms/application process was the top ranked highest importance response overall.
- It is worth noting that both ‘Better common knowledge and networking between LAGs, MA / PA and NRNs’ (60 LAGs) and ‘Eligibility of measures to support the emergence of new ideas’ (56 LAGs) scored strongly as first priority improvements outscoring ‘Simpler and more proportionate systems of controls’ (53 LAGs) and ‘Improving MA or intermediary body turnaround time on approving selected projects’ (52 LAGs).
- Overall the three least important ways to improve LEADER now were (in ascending order):
  - A dedicated EU/national platform for information sharing among LEADER actors.
  - Ensuring better common knowledge of and support for LAGs to take advantage of using different delivery tools e.g. ‘Umbrella projects’.
  - Greater clarity on LAG level monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements in LEADER.
- Here it is interesting to note that these are three knowledge based suggestions which tend to be supported by networking, this may reflect the fact that these are already being addressed to some degree.

#### Findings by ‘age’ of LAG

When broken down by ‘age’ of LAG, the following priorities emerged.

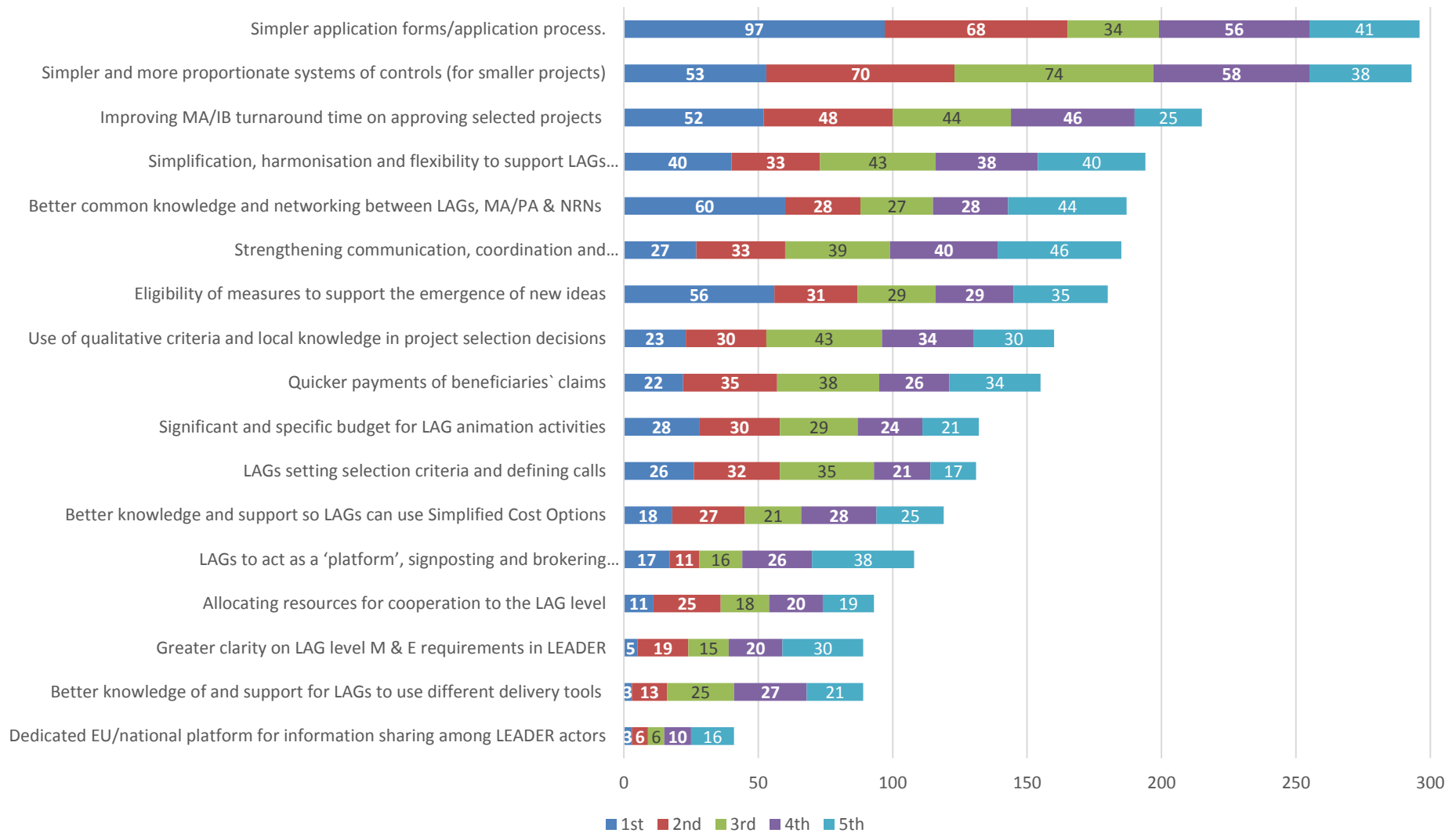
- ‘Simpler application forms/process’ were the top priority for New LAGs and 2007-2013 LAGs.
- For LEADER+, LEADER II and LEADER I LAGs the top priority was ‘Simpler and more proportionate systems of controls’.
- The bottom three answers overall also applied to LAGs of all ages.

#### Findings by ‘budget range’ of LAG

When broken down by ‘budget range’ of LAG, using the combined scores (from 1 to 5), the following priorities emerged.

- ‘Simpler application forms/process’ and ‘Simpler and more proportionate systems of control’ were the first or second top priority for all budget ranges of LAGs.
- ‘Improving IB/MA turnaround time on approval of selected projects’ was the third top priority for LAGs up to €5m, while for LAGs over €5 it was ‘Better common knowledge and support through networking of LAGs, MAs and PAs and NRNs and exchanges on transferable experience and practices’
- For LAGs with budgets over €2m ‘Simplifying and harmonising rules on multi-funding’ is important.
- LAGs with budgets of under €2m and over €5m included ‘Allocating resources for cooperation to the LAG level’ in their bottom three priorities.

## Most Important Changes to Improve Implementation Now



### Question 28:

*Some LAGs desire greater independence in their operations with more power and responsibility e.g. in project selection and approvals, project management, use of funds, managing risk etc. Which one of these statements best reflects your LAG's position?*

- We are happy with the existing levels of responsibility, independence and accountability
- We prefer less independence with a lower level of direct LAG responsibility and financial accountability
- We prefer the existing level of independence with a lower level of direct LAG responsibility and financial accountability
- We prefer a much higher degree of independence and would be happy with a significantly higher degree of direct responsibility and financial accountability
- We prefer a moderate increase in independence with a moderate increase in direct responsibility and financial accountability
- Any increase in independence should not be linked to increased LAG responsibilities and accountability

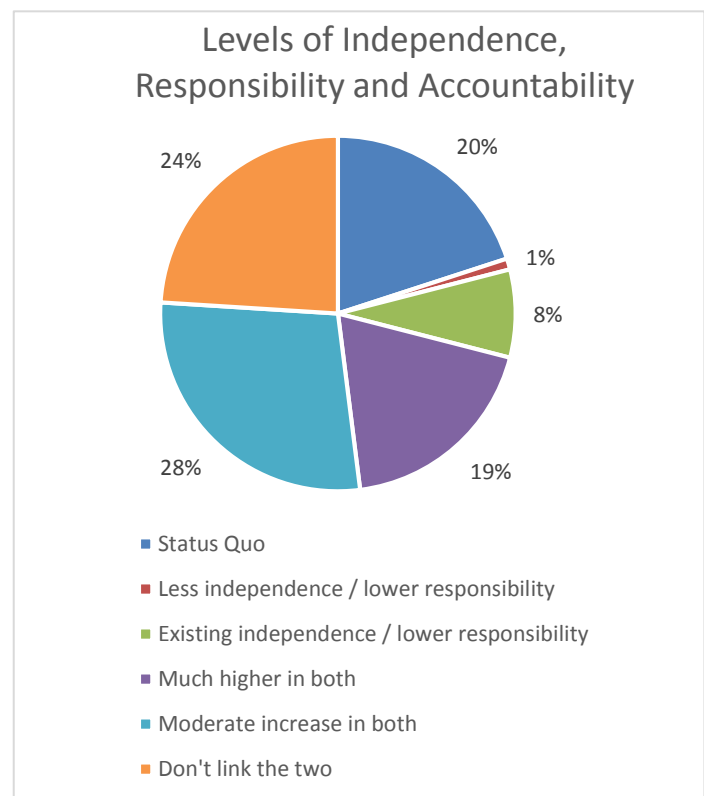
Total number of responses – 551

#### Findings overall

- 20% of LAGs are happy with the same levels of independence, responsibility and accountability as they have at present (the status quo).
- The greatest appetite for change is for increased levels of independence, responsibility and accountability, with 47% of LAGs choosing these ('moderate' and 'much higher') options.
- 24% of respondents did not think that greater independence should be linked with greater responsibility and accountability.

#### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- New 2014-2020 LAGs had the highest levels of LAGs who 'are happy with the same levels of independence, responsibility and accountability as they have at present (the status quo).
- Former LEADER I and LEADER II LAGs showed the greatest appetite for increased levels of independence, responsibility and accountability with over 50% of these in favour of these options.
- LEADER I LAGs were the least likely to think that greater independence should be linked with greater responsibility and accountability.





### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- Over 35% of the LAGs in the budget ranges of €1-1.5m and €5-10m favoured a moderate increase in independence, responsibility and accountability, this was the highest level recorded.
- Almost 30% of LAGs with budgets in the €4-5m range, 25% in the up to €500k and 25% of the over €10m range wanted much higher independence, responsibility and accountability.
- Across the budget ranges (except for €3-4m LAGs) at least 25% of LAGs did not want to link an increase in independence with an increase in responsibility.

### Findings by 'respondent' type

- When looking at who responded to this question LAG managers made up 76% of responses. The top response from LAG managers and Other LAG staff was that they would like a 'moderate increase in independence and responsibility', whilst the top response for LAG Chair/Presidents was for 'much higher independence and responsibility'. LAG Board members' top response was that they were happy with existing levels of independence and responsibility.

## Question 29

To what extent would greater independence, power and responsibility for your LAGs improve what you are able to achieve? Please select one option.

- Not at all
- A little
- Significantly
- Very significantly

Total Number of Responses 548

### Findings overall

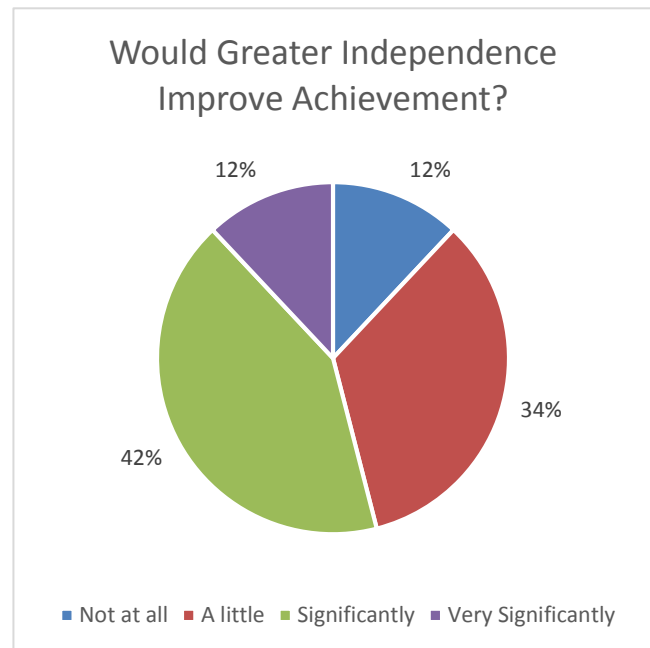
- Overall 54% of LAGs that responded to the question thought that greater independence, power and responsibility would improve what they are able to achieve either significantly or very significantly.
- On the other hand 46% though it would improve achievement a little or not at all.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- There was variation between age categories of LAG, whilst at least 38% of all ages of LAGs thought greater independence would improve achievement 'significantly' for 2007 - 2013 LAGs this figure was higher at 45%.
- 62% of LEADER II LAGs and 50% of LEADER+ LAGs thought greater independence would have a significant or very significant effect.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

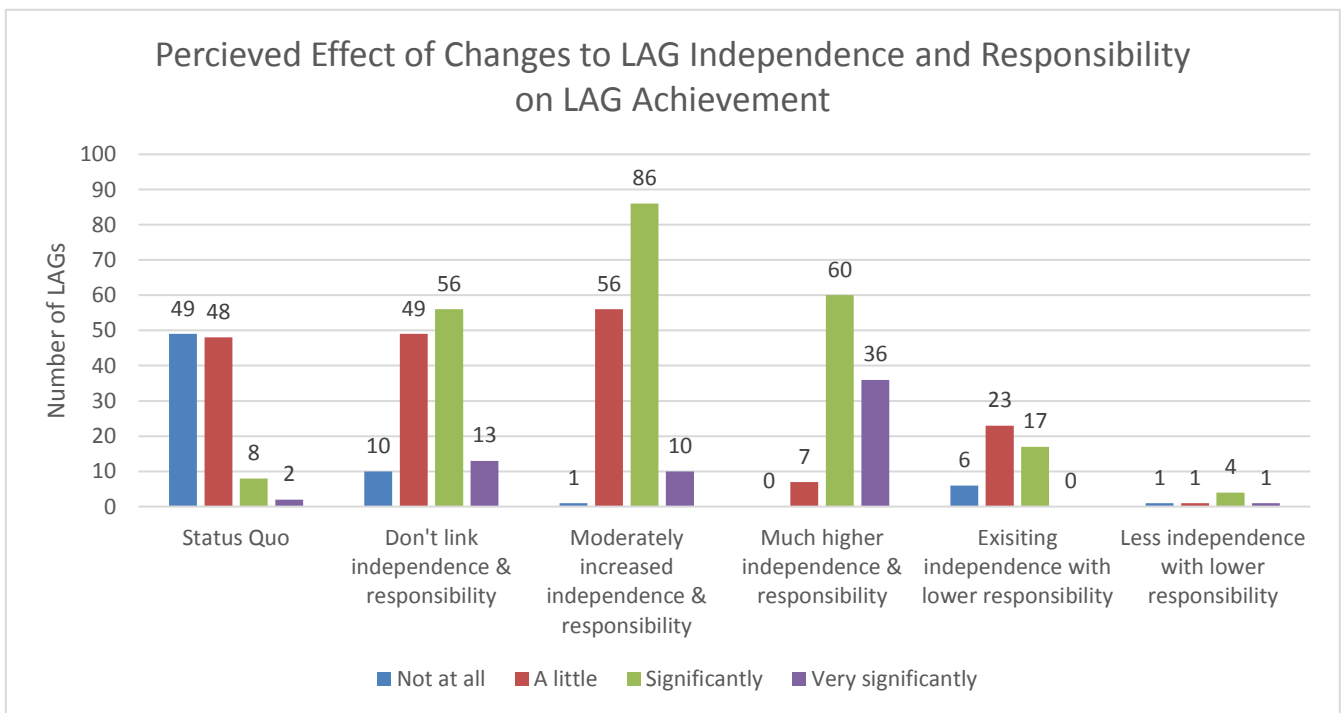
- Overall the smaller budget LAGs (up to €1.5m) saw greater independence having the least effect, with 62% of LAGs with budgets of up to €500k thinking it would have no or little effect.
- LAGs with budgets in the range of €4-5m and €5-10m thought greater independence would have the most effect with 68% and 62% respectively, thinking that it would have a significant or very significant effect on achievement.
- 54% of LAGs with budgets over €10m thought increased independence would have little or no effect on achievement.



### Assessing the Percieved Effect of Independence on Achievement

The table below links answers to question 28, the extent to which 'LAGs desire greater independence with more power and responsibility' with question 29 answers regarding the 'extent that greater independence, power and responsibility would improve what LAGs are able to achieve'.

- 97 of 107 (91%) LAGs who said they wanted the 'status quo' in independence and responsibility also replied that greater independence would 'not at all' or be 'a little' help in improving achievements.
- 96 out of 153 (63%) LAGs who wanted 'moderately increased in independence and responsibility' said it would 'significantly' or 'very significantly' improve achievement.
- 96 out of 103 (93%) of LAGs that wanted much higher levels of independence and responsibility thought that it would 'significantly' or 'very significantly' improve achievement.



### Question 30

*If it was possible to reduce LAG administration through the provision of a centralised support service (e.g. shared and managed by multiple LAGs) to what extent would that improve your LAGs level of achievement?*

- Not at all
- A little
- Significantly
- Very significantly

Total Number of Responses 552

#### Findings overall

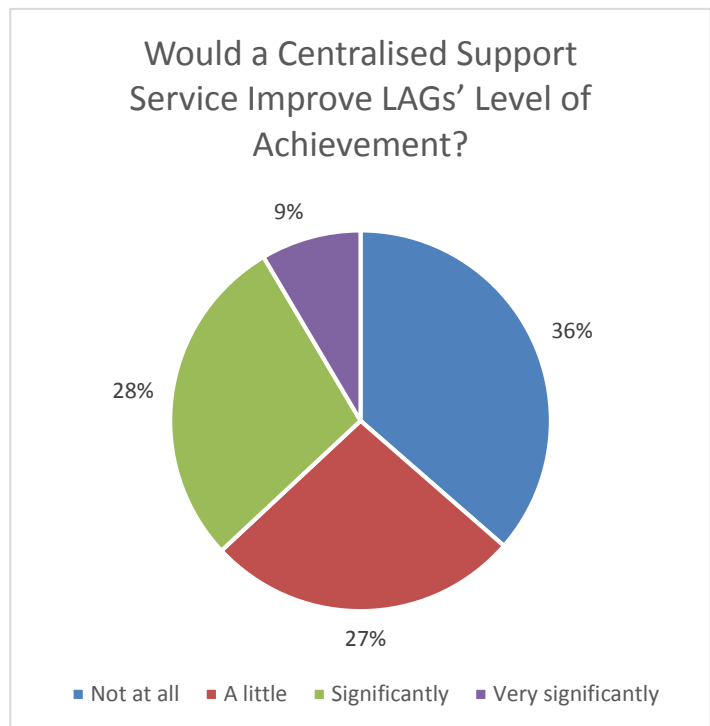
- Overall 63% of respondents to the survey thought that a centralised support service would not at all / little improve LAG achievements.
- 9% thought it would improve achievement very significantly.

#### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- LEADER II LAGs were the most positive about a centralised support service with 46% suggesting it would significantly or very significantly improve achievement.
- LEADER+ LAGs were the least interested in a centralised support service with 46% thinking it would not improve achievement at all.

#### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- LAG budget had a clear effect on preferences and perceived benefit here.
- A centralised support service was most popular with LAGs with budgets of less than €1.5m.
- The only budget range where over 50% of LAGs thought that this would significantly or very significantly improve achievement were those with budgets ranging from €500-€1m (53%).
- Only 15% of LAGs with budgets of over €10m thought that centralised administration would significantly or very significantly improve achievement.



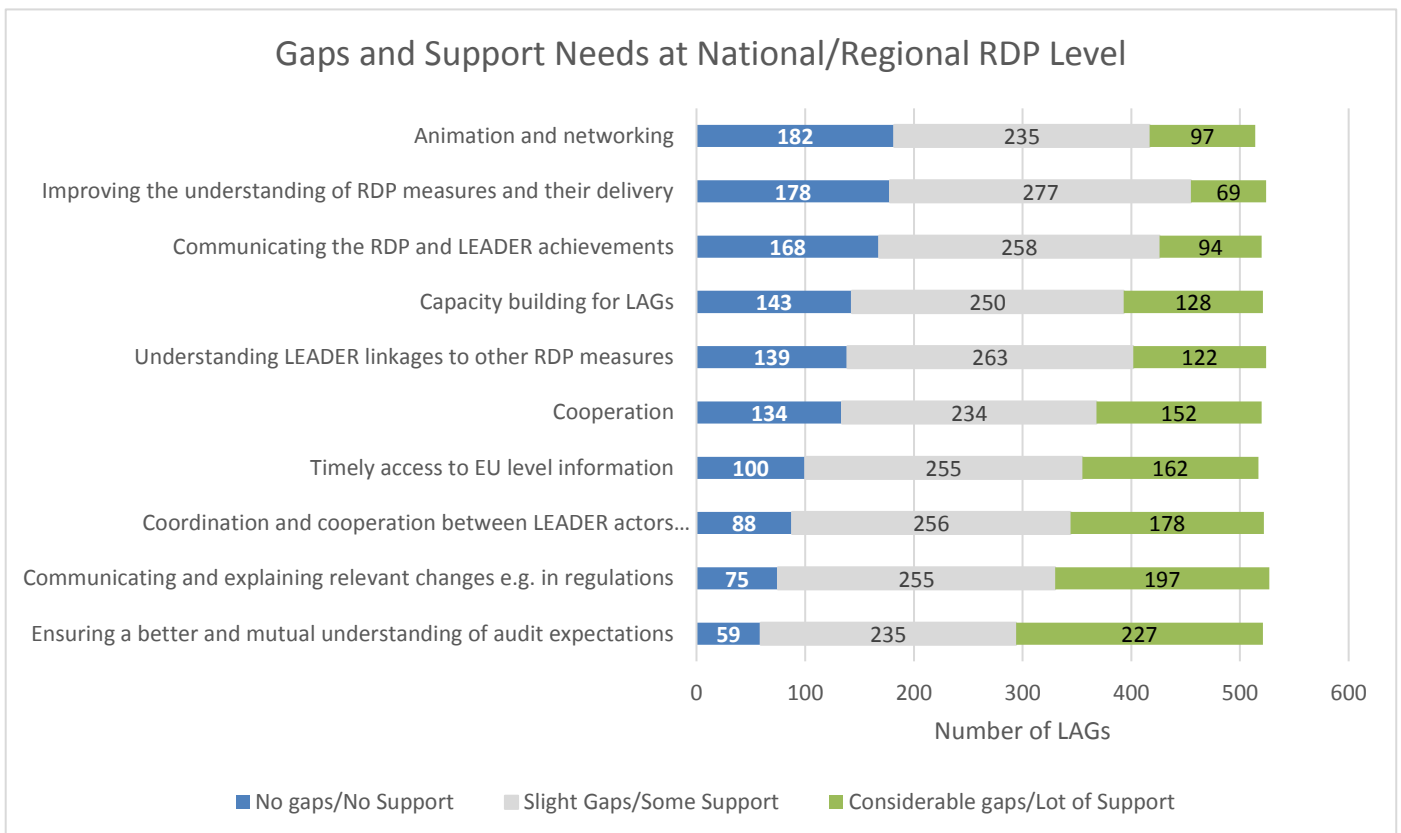
### Question 31

To what extent does support from national and regional Rural Development Programme authorities (e.g. Managing Authority, Paying Agency) meet LAG needs and enhance LEADER implementation? Please, use the following scale to rank the provision against the specified needs (for further support):

- 1= no gaps in support – no support needed,
- 2 = slight gaps – some support needed,
- 3 = considerable gaps – lot of support needed.

- Improving the understanding of RDP measures and their delivery.
- Communicating the RDP and LEADER achievements.
- Understanding LEADER linkages to other RDP measures.
- Capacity building for LAGs.
- Animation and networking.
- Cooperation.
- Timely access to EU level information.
- Coordination and cooperation between LEADER actors at national and EU level.
- Communicating and explaining relevant changes e.g. in regulations.
- Ensuring a better and mutual understanding of audit expectations.

Total Number of Responses 543



### Findings overall

- The largest response to each of the questions was Slight Gaps - Some Support needed, in all cases only a minority of LAGs thought there were considerable gaps and support needs.
- Responding LAGs reported that the areas with the lowest support gaps and needs for further support were in the following areas:
  - Animation and networking.
  - Improving the understanding of RDP measures and their delivery.
  - Communicating the RDP and LEADER achievement.
- LAGs highlighted the following as those areas where considerable gaps/lot of support was most needed from the National/Regional RDP authorities:
  - Ensuring better and mutual understanding of audit expectations.
  - Communicating and explaining relevant changes e.g. in regulations.
  - Coordination and cooperation between LEADER actors at EU and national level.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- The top 3 areas where considerable gaps/lot of support needed were broadly similar to the overall findings across the ages of LAGs with the exception of LEADER II LAGs who included Cooperation, and New 2014-2020 LAGs & LEADER I LAGs who included Timely access to EU level information in their top 3.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- Again, responses were similar to the overall findings across all the budget ranges of LAGs, with the only exception that LAGs with budgets ranging between €2m- €5m placed support for Timely access to EU level information in their top three support needs.

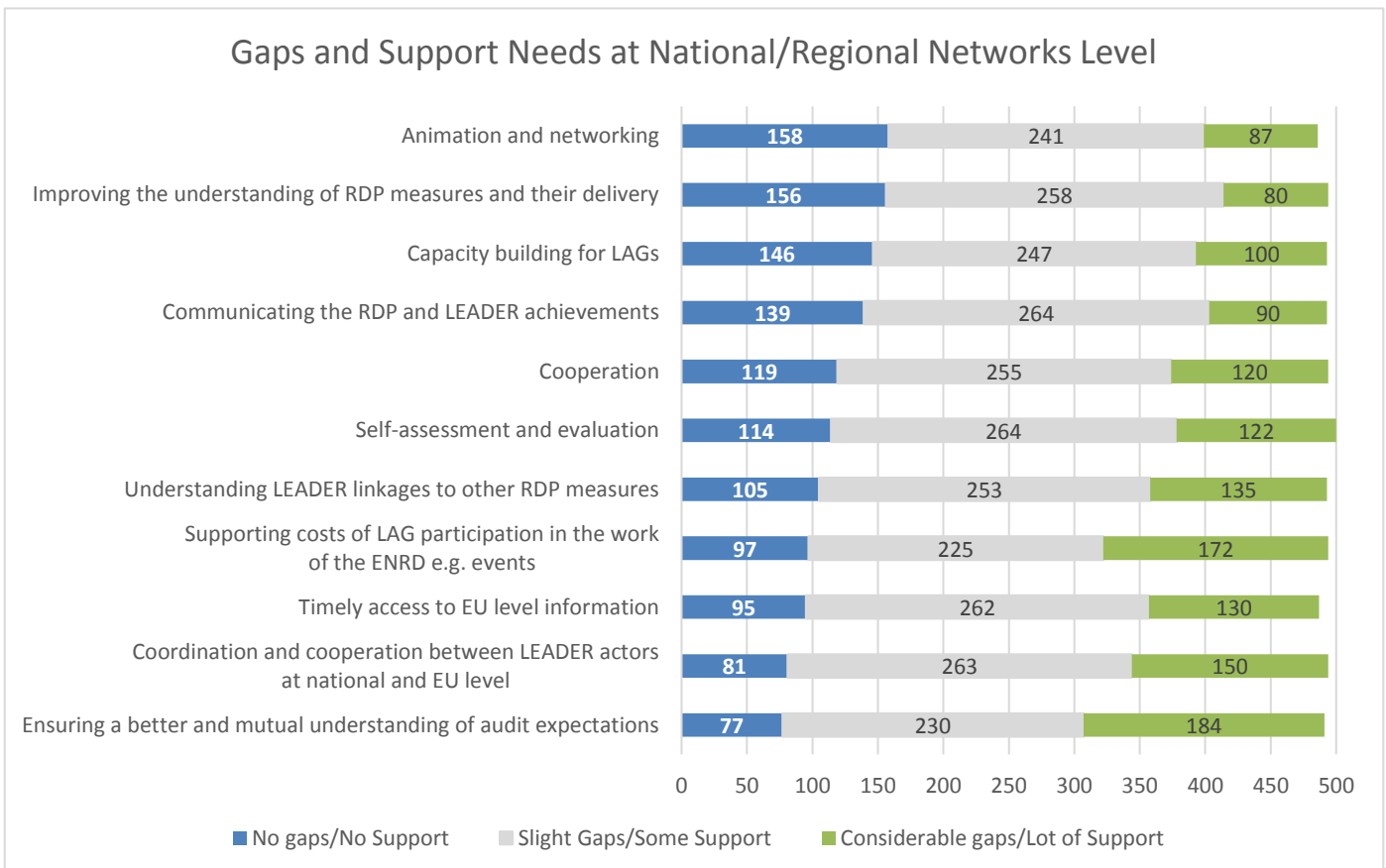
### Question 32

To what extent does support from national and regional Rural Networks meet LAG needs and enhance LEADER implementation? Please, use the following scale to rank the provision against the specified needs (for further support):

- 1= no gaps in support – no support needed,
- 2 = slight gaps – some support needed,
- 3 = considerable gaps – lot of support needed.

- Improving the understanding of RDP measures and their delivery.
- Self-assessment and evaluation.
- Communicating the RDP and LEADER achievements.
- Understanding LEADER linkages to other RDP measures, e.g. EIP Operational Groups.
- Capacity building for LAGs.
- Animation and networking.
- Cooperation.
- Timely access to EU level information.
- Supporting costs of LAG participation in the work of the ENRD e.g. events
- Coordination and cooperation between LEADER actors at national and EU level.
- Ensuring a better and mutual understanding of audit expectations.

Total Number of Responses 516



### Findings overall

- The largest response to each of the questions was Slight Gaps - Some Support needed, in all categories only a minority of LAGs thought there were considerable gaps and associated support needs.
- Responding LAGs reported that the areas where gaps were smallest and least support was needed from the national and regional Rural Networks were the following:
  - Animation and networking.
  - Improving the understanding of RDP measures and their delivery.
  - Capacity building for LAGs.
- LAGs highlighted the following as areas where the need for further support from the national and regional Rural Networks was greatest:
  - Ensuring a better and mutual understanding of audit expectations.
  - Supporting costs of LAG participation in the work of the ENRD e.g. events.
  - Coordination and cooperation between LEADER actors at national and EU level.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- Again, the three areas where considerable gaps/lot of support needed were broadly similar to the overall findings across all 'ages' of LAGs, with the exception of New 2014-2020 LAGs who included 'Self-assessment and evaluation' in their top three.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- Across all the budget ranges of LAGs the areas of greatest need were similar to the overall findings. The one marked exception was that LAGs with budgets over €10m placed support for Self-assessment and evaluation as one of their top three support needs.



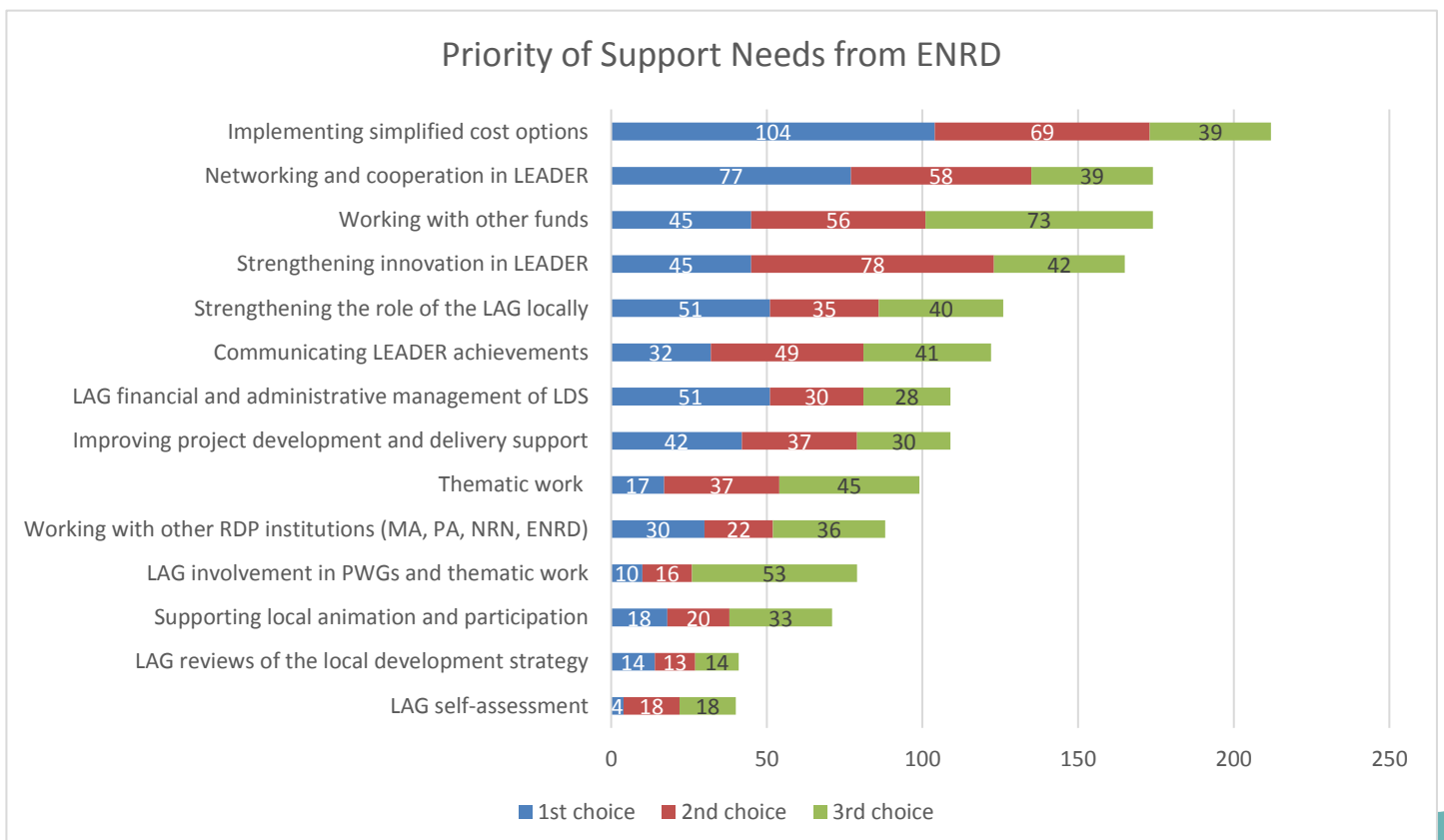
### Question 33

Which of the following areas of your LAG's activity are the priorities which the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) should work on to help your LAG most?

Please rank the three most important options below on a scale of 1 – 3 where 1 = most important.

- LAG reviews of the local development strategy.
- LAG financial and administrative management of local development strategy implementation.
- Improving project development and delivery support.
- Implementing simplified cost options.
- Networking and cooperation in LEADER.
- Communicating LEADER achievements.
- Strengthening innovation in LEADER.
- Strengthening the role of the LAG locally.
- Supporting local animation and participation.
- Thematic work (e.g. Greening the local economy, social innovation, ICT & broadband, smart villages, etc.).
- Working with other RDP institutions (MA, PA, NRN, ENRD).
- LAG self-assessment.
- Working with other funds.
- LAG involvement in practitioner-working groups and thematic work.

Total Number of Responses 544



### Findings overall

- There is a very mixed picture here regarding ENRD support needs, it appears that the overarching priority is simplification related. Overall the top three priorities for the ENRD to work on which would help LAGs most were:
  - Implementing simplified cost options.
  - Networking and cooperation in LEADER.
  - Working with other funds.
- Strengthening innovation in LEADER ranks a strong fourth and was the most popular second choice.
- There are differences when the priorities are looked at by first choice only. While 'Implementing simplified cost options' and 'Networking and Cooperation' remain first and second, 'Strengthening the role of the LAG locally' and 'LAG financial administration and management' score equally and come into the top three priorities as third choice in place of 'Working with other funds'.
- The three areas which are seen to be lowest priorities for the ENRD to work on to help LAGs were:
  - LAG self-assessment.
  - LAG reviews of the local development strategy.
  - Supporting local animation and participation.
- Looking at the priorities by first choice only 'LAG involvement in practitioner-working groups and thematic work' and 'Thematic work' were two of the lowest scoring. 'Self-assessment' and 'LAG strategy review' also scored extremely low rankings and markedly less than communicating LEADER achievements.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- When looking at priorities by 'age of LAG', there were a few differences, in addition to the overall top three choices, with 2007-2013 LAGs looking for ENRD to work on 'Strengthening innovation in LEADER', and LEADER I and LEADER II LAGs wanting ENRD to work on 'Communicating LEADER achievements'.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

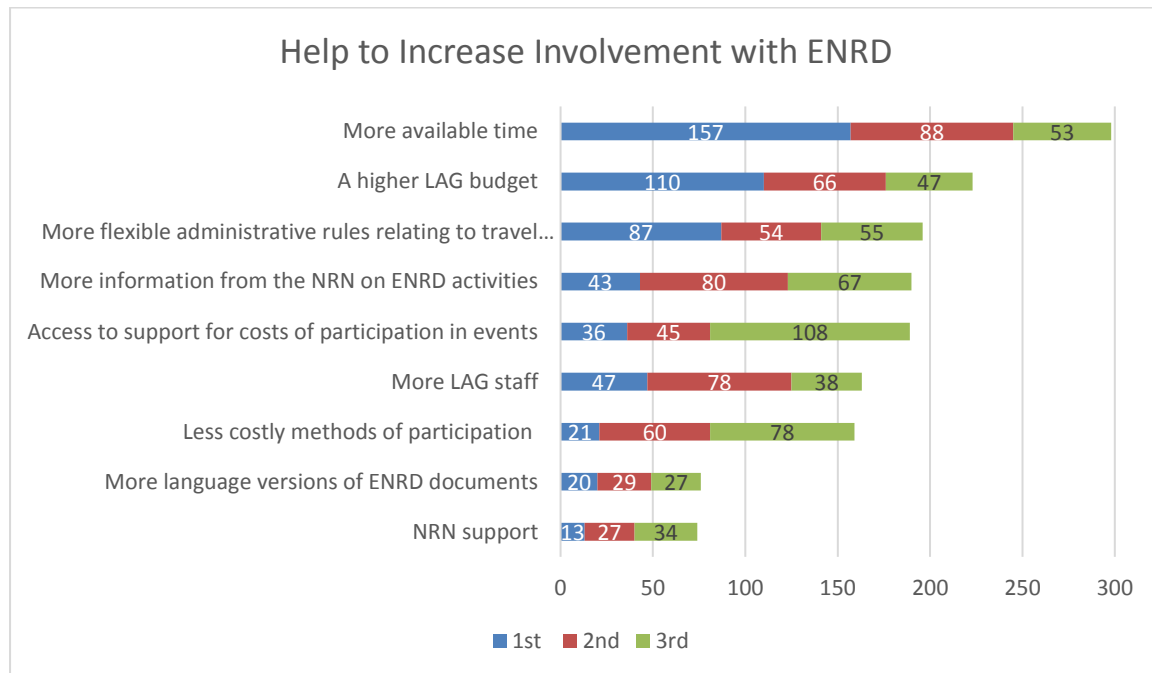
- The top three overall priorities were reflected across all the LAG budget ranges. The only variation was that LAGs with budgets under €2m replaced 'Working with other funds' with 'Strengthening innovation in LEADER'.

### Question 34

What could help you get more involved in the work of the ENRD? You may select up to three of the options below. Please rank the three most important options below on a scale of 1 – 3 where 1 = most important.

- More flexible administrative rules relating to travel, participations in conferences etc.
- A higher LAG budget
- More available time
- More LAG staff
- More language versions of ENRD documents
- More information from the NRN on ENRD activities
- NRN support
- Less costly methods of participation (e.g. Online meetings)
- Access to support for costs of participation in events
- Other, please describe

Total Number of Responses 540



### Findings overall

- Overall, both in total and as first choices, LAGs responded that the biggest help to increase involvement with ENRD would be:
  - More available time.
  - A higher LAG budget.
  - More flexible administration rules for travel, participation in conferences etc.

- Clearly the major limitations here are therefore related to the available resources for participation.
- The three areas which were seen to be of least priority in increasing involvement with ENRD were:
  - NRN support.
  - More language versions of ENRD documents.
  - Less costly methods of participation.

#### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- More available time was the priority for all 'ages of LAGs' except LEADER I LAGs who prioritised 'A higher LAG budget'. New 2014-2020 and 2007-2013 LAGs included 'More information from NRN on ENRD activities' in their top three choices. LEADER II LAGs included 'Access to support for costs of participation in events' in their top three choices.

#### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

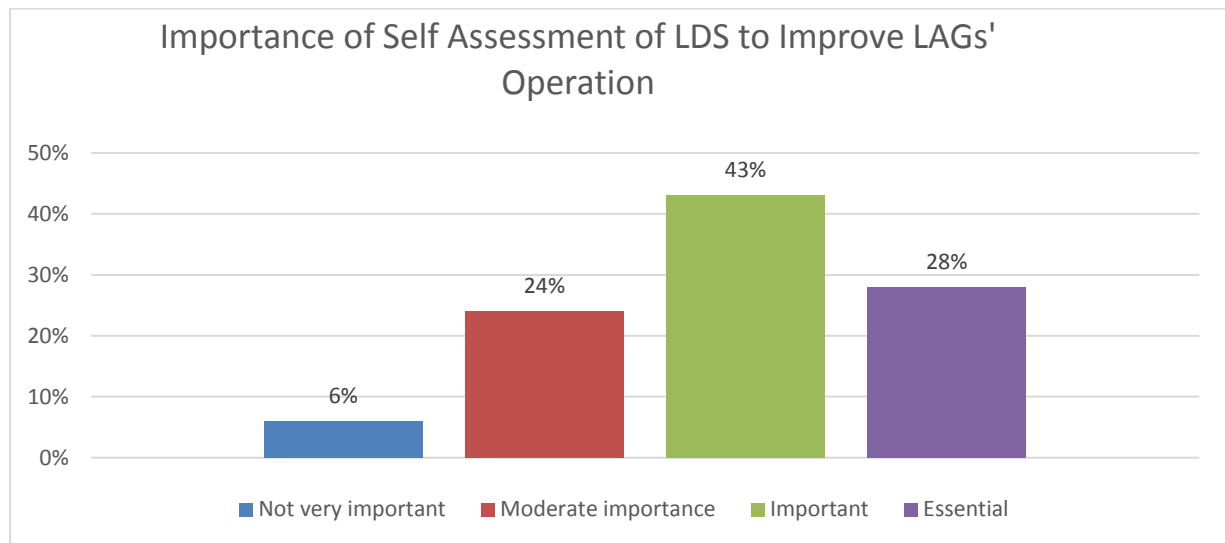
- The top priority in all budget ranges was 'More available time'. Top three selections showed some variation, LAGs with budgets ranging from €2-5m included 'More information from NRN on ENRD activities' and LAGs with budgets over €10m included 'Access to support for cost of participation in events' in their top three choices.

### Question 35

*How important do you think self-assessment (internal review) of your own Local Development Strategy is to improving your LAG's operation?*

- Not very important.
- Moderate importance.
- Important.
- Essential.

Total Number of Responses 553



### Findings overall

- Overall 71% of LAGs who responded to the survey thought that 'self-assessment to improve LAGs' operation' was important or essential, only 6% though that it was 'not very important'.
- 78% of LAGs who prefer a much greater degree of independence, responsibility and accountability (see Q 28) view this as important or essential.

### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- LAGs' view of self-assessment being 'essential' increased with the 'age of LAG' i.e. 22% of New 2014-2020 LAGs responded that it was essential, whilst 36% of LEADER I LAGs responded that it was essential. The highest percentage of LAGs (10%) who responded that it was 'Not very important', were LEADER+ LAGs.

### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

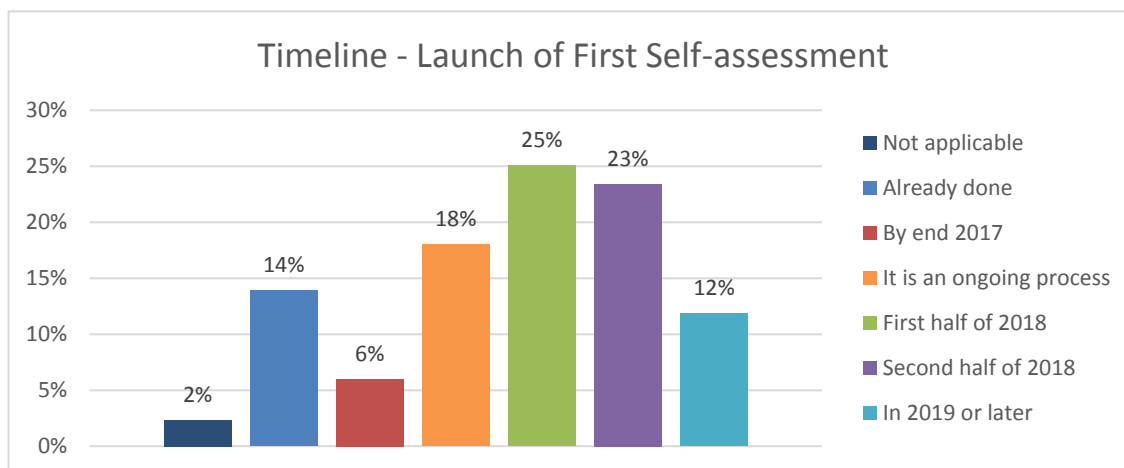
- The largest proportion of LAGs in all budget ranges rated self-assessment as 'important', except LAGs with budgets over €10m of whom the largest group rated it highest as 'Moderate importance'.
- LAGs in the €5-10m budget range were the LAGs that responded the highest percentage (37%) of 'essential'. LAGs in the €2-3m range responded with the highest percentage (12.5%) of 'Not very important' ratings.

### Question 36

When are you planning to launch your first self-assessment?

- Already done.
- By end 2017.
- First half of 2018.
- Second half of 2018.
- In 2019 or later.
- It is an ongoing process.
- Not applicable.

Total Number of Responses 555



#### Findings overall

- Overall, 20% of LAGs had carried out self-assessment by the end of 2017, for 18% it is an ongoing process. 60% of LAGs are planning to start in 2018/19.

#### Findings by 'age' of LAG

- Although there were only a small number of New 2014-2020 LAGs that responded to this question, 37.5% of them had completed their self-assessments by the end of 2017. Conversely, this group has the highest percentage (25%) of LAGs intending to complete in 2019 or later.

#### Findings by 'budget range' of LAG

- LAGs with budgets under €1.5m report the highest percentage (23-24%) of ongoing self-assessment.

#### Findings by 'levels of independence, responsibility and accountability'

- A higher proportion (56%) of LAGs who responded that they were 'happy with their existing levels of responsibility'<sup>1</sup> had completed their self-assessment by the end of 2017 compared to 35% of those who wanted 'much higher independence and responsibility'.

<sup>1</sup> See Question 28

- Those LAGs who wanted ‘much higher independence and responsibility’ and those ‘who didn’t want to link increased independence to increased responsibility’ were the two groups (30%) most likely to be carrying out self-assessment in 2019 or later.
- 38% of LAGs who thought self-assessment was ‘not applicable’ wanted ‘much higher independence and responsibility’.
- 76% of LAGs who had completed self-assessment by the end of 2017 thought it was important or essential.

### Question 37

Are you willing to participate in further LEADER work with the ENRD (e.g. a focus group, practitioner-working group, other forms)?

- Yes – 440 - 81%
- No – 104 – 19%

*Total Number of Responses 544*

- The overwhelming majority of LAGs are willing to participate in further LEADER work with ENRD.