

Terms of Reference

Baltic Sea Network - European Agricultural Fund for Rural development (BSN - EAFRD)

Background:

The Baltic Sea Network - for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (BSN-EAFRD or the Network) was initiated as a result of the Baltic Leadership Programme Bioeconomy, funded by the Swedish Institute and implemented in 2016 in the cooperation between the Swedish Institute and the Ministry of Agriculture in Lithuania and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland in their capacity as coordinators of Policy Area Bioeconomy of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

The core members of the Network are officials involved in the implementation of the rural development programmes (Managing Authorities, Implementing and Intermediate Bodies) from the EU Member States in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR): Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden.

The BSN - EAFRD is open to other relevant stakeholders engaged in activities related to rural development in the BSR, the implementation of the EUSBSR as well as to bioeconomy in general, who can join in as full members or affiliated partners. The Network can also invite experts to specific meetings if need be.

The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, acting also as a coordinator responsible for rural development within EUSBSR Policy Area Bioeconomy (PAC), has undertaken the role of a facilitator and promoter of the BSN - EAFRD. Their role will be to coordinate the Network's activities and promote the results at the local, national and EU levels.

Aim:

The aim of this Network is to facilitate and strengthen transnational cooperation (TNC) in the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in order to invigorate the link between the EAFRD and the EUSBSR.

The Network understands transnationality as a concept that “seeks to find new solutions to existing problems through exchange of knowledge and experience,

but which also goes further to institutionalise the practices by laying the foundation for future cooperation and strengthen cohesion of a transnational area". TNC is needed to mitigate the effects of border effects (in spite of the European integration and e.g. existence of the European Single Market) and bridge the gaps in levels of social and economic development between European regions. TNC has also "often helped to overcome institutional inertia, mobilising financial resources, stimulating economic, social and cultural exchanges and new relationships. Second, they have facilitated policy transfer and institutional adaptation through networks".

The transnational area in which the Network operates is defined by the EUSBSR - the first European macro-regional strategy reinforcing cooperation within the BSR. The Strategy was approved by the European Council in 2009 following a communication from the European Commission. It provides an integrated framework for improving the environmental condition of the sea, transport bottlenecks and energy interconnections as well as facilitating the development of competitive markets across borders and common networks for research and innovation. The Strategy is divided into three objectives which represent the three key challenges of the Strategy: saving the sea, connecting the region and increasing prosperity. The objectives guide an array of Policy Areas which are specific areas for macro-regional cooperation that address the key challenges and opportunities in the BSR.

One of these Policy Areas is Bioeconomy. The EUSBSR Action Plan gives the following definition: "The bioeconomy offers an integrated approach to incorporate economic/prosperity, social and environmental (on land and in the sea) aspects of sustainability in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture – and more than that: it also offers an approach for enhancing sustainability, entrepreneurship, competitiveness and growth – in cities and rural regions alike – by building on circular thinking; and an approach that aims to enable a transition from a fossil-based to a sustainable bio-based society. In other words a sustainable bioeconomy is linked to all parts of the green and blue economy."

Policy Area Bioeconomy includes also challenges related to agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Agriculture, and specifically rural development programmes implemented within the EAFRD have been the topic of the work for the BSN - EAFRD, well in line with Action 5 of the EUSBSR Action Plan: *Enhance the combined effects of the rural development programmes*. This action calls for an improved cooperation between all the relevant actors, leading to streamlining of the rural development measures in the national rural development programmes, including joint initiatives. The work within the Network has also followed the approach actively promoted by the European Commission whereby mainstream

programmes are recommended to assist the implementation of the EUSBSR. Given the importance of the EUSBSR for sustainable growth and development of Baltic Sea region, its contribution to the objectives of Europe 2020 Strategy, and the fact that the EUSBSR is based on the effective use of existing funding sources, the European Commission asked that national, regional and EU policies and financial resources be aligned with the objectives of the EUSBSR, and required Member States to describe their approach to the macro-regional strategies and their priorities and objectives and how these will be taken into account when drafting the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes.

Objectives:

In the short-term perspective the Network intends to contribute to:

- enhanced cooperation between the interested Member States (MS) in the Baltic Sea Region, in relation to the EAFRD,
- a development of the existing network between the Managing Authorities (MA) of the EAFRD programmes, including relevant stakeholders,
- an enhanced role of the EAFRD in the implementation of the relevant areas in the EUSBSR, (*both with reference to its current Action Plan, and to any future new priorities/measures*),
- an established common understanding of the role of the EAFRD and the bioeconomic approach in relation to the EUSBSR and in the MS,
- a strengthened transnational cooperation between projects in the EAFRD in the BSR,
- established connections and cooperation modalities with the existing rural networks, both at the European and national levels, (*such as National rural networks, European Rural Development Networks, etc.*)
- developed cooperation modalities with relevant Policy Area Coordinators,
- cooperation with the relevant networks within the other macro-regional strategies in the EU.

In the long-term perspective the Network intends to contribute to:

- the identification of policy gaps, exchange good practices and cooperation praxis within the framework of the EAFRD and possible links to the EUSBSR,
- the development of a knowledge base for EAFRD interventions linked to the EUSBSR in the new programming period (post 2020) (*with the aim of strengthening TNC in the EAFRD as well as promoting the bioeconomic approach in the EUSBSR*),

- the formulation of recommendations to the EUSBSR Action Plan in relevant policy areas. The Network is the sender and recipients are PAC's, National Coordinators for EUSBSR, relevant national authorities, etc.
- an agreement on joint actions and recommendations to policy/decision makers concerning the use of mainstream funds for TNC in macro-regions.

Activities:

- A more formal contact point will be established within the Network in order to safeguard the information and communication flows, based on a Letter of Intent signed by Ministers/Directors in charge of the rural development programmes.
- A coordinated pilot call for proposals will be launched within the Network's members' national rural development programmes promoting the objectives of the EUSBSR. A specific Action Plan will be elaborated specifying the contents and terms of the call.
- The Network will act as a reference group to the EUSBSR Policy Area Coordinator responsible for rural development and review proposals for flagship projects.
- The Network will agree upon selected indicators in order to measure the impact of national rural development programmes on the EUSBSR
- The Network will map and analyse EAFRD projects (incl. LEADER/CLLD) where links to the EUSBSR can be found. The coordinator of the Network will develop a common mapping method for projects relevant to the EUSBSR.
- The Network will develop and agree on special actions in order to assure better follow-up and evaluation processes for projects where the Baltic Sea Region perspective is present. Examples of best practice will be identified and disseminated.
- The Network will formulate common statements and recommendations and deliver them to relevant policy makers and decision making bodies at EU, national and regional levels.
- The Network will consider additional funding possibilities (e.g. through the Swedish Institute) in order to finance selected activities, for example formulation of policy recommendations to the programmes after 2020 or organisation of partner search fora targeting rural development actors.

How we work:

- The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania will coordinate activities within the BSN - EAFRD.
- The Network will meet face-to-face twice a year, once in connection to the EUSBSR Annual Forum. Other relevant events organised by the

members of the BSN - EAFRD can also be linked to the Network meetings.

- The coordinating MS will convene and chair the Network's meetings, when appropriate in cooperation with the hosting MS. Before each meeting all members are allowed to submit written suggestions to its agenda. The agenda is then compiled and distributed by the coordinator.
- All costs related to the participation in the Network will, when needed, be covered by the Technical Assistance budget in the MSs concerned.
- The MSs participating in the network and other potential stakeholders may be, when possible and appropriate, asked to make a contribution in order to develop and strengthen TNC in the EAFRD in the BSR. A rationale for such requests will consider common challenges faced by the rural areas in the BSR, the implementation premises of the EAFRD programmes, the objectives of the EUSBSR as well as the principles of the bioeconomic approach.
- MSs participating in the BSN - EAFRD are encouraged to include Network members in other relevant meetings or events arranged with respect to the EUSBSR.
- The communication with relevant European actors (EC, European Parliament, PACs, Interract, European Rural Development Network) will be the responsibility of the BSN - EAFRD while contact with national actors (relevant ministries and agencies, national parliaments and rural development networks) will lie within the authority of each MS.
- The membership in the Network implies a commitment and a positive attitude among members who contribute and share the work burden in order to maintain the vital spirit of the Network.
- The Network members use digital technology such as Google docs, e-mails, video conferences and interactive websites whenever relevant and conducive to the work.

Work and time plan, evaluation:

- An evaluation of activities within the Network will be carried out. Its structure and funding will be agreed by the Network.
- A more detailed work and time plan will be agreed upon and presented following more discussions among the participating MAs.