

## Survey report

### CLLD and LEADER in times of Corona Survey period: 26/3-21/4.2020

#### Background

ELARD with members from 26 countries and around 2200 LAGs have conducted a survey in order to see how the Corona-crisis is affecting our rural communities and the daily life of Local Action Groups around Europe.

#### Methodology:

The Survey was divided in two parts: Network survey and (F)LAG-survey and was carried out with the online tool google forms. The network survey was intended for the representative in ELARD to answer, whereas the (F)LAG survey was aimed at the (F)LAGs. However, it was up to the representative to spread the (F)LAG-survey and animate their members to answer.

#### Conclusions:

**Involvement of public in programming:** The current situation is making it difficult for member states to involve the (F)LAG-networks in planning for the 2021-27 period, which obviously needs attention. Maybe there is also a need for education on a national level in how to use new technological tools and instruments. There would not alone appear to be a difference between countries, but also between departments in countries, this problem it is assumed, is contingent on individual competences and mind-sets. It would therefore be important to put requirements from a European level towards member states regarding the involvement of public in the preparatory phase

**Need of infrastructure, flexibility from authorities and know-how for home-office:** Another conclusion is that many (F)LAGs are struggling with home-office, making use of new technology and the working environment in general.

Nevertheless, **(F)LAGs are taking on a role as local information-hubs and serviceproviders:** (F)LAGs are working on solutions, helping other local groups as facilitators, making the new virtual world as accessible as possible to all local actors. National networks, NGOs, and other actors are assisting the (F)LAGs in getting information out there, but there is undoubtedly a clear need for more education and training in these matters. Not to mention the need for real infrastructure – broadband. Also, regional and national authorities flexibility is a requirement to make home-office work (f.e. accepting digital signatures and so on)



**(F)LAGs are flexible and quickly acting:** There is no shortage of good ideas on how to cope with the new situation the world and Europe is in, and (F)LAGs are showing themselves as being flexible and ready to take on board new ideas. (F)LAGs are involved in a multiplicity of projects, volunteering in many different areas where it is necessary (schools, hospitals, shops, farming), to education in virtual tools, service provider, information-hub, marketing of local products, hands on support to SMEs, and so on. It is important to keep spreading the good examples between the (F)LAG to keep up the inspiration for all.

**Failing financial means and high burden of administration:** Strangely, not one responder has mentioned targeted calls as a solution to the crisis. It could therefore be reasonably assumed two possible reasons for this are: in some countries the administration is too slow and not flexible enough, and in other countries there is already a real shortage of funding, or both.

A clear majority of (F)LAGs state that beneficiaries are having problems in finishing on time, reaching the result indicators and keeping event-based projects running.

Around 364 out of around 3000 (F)LAGs around Europe have answered the survey. The responders state the need for their Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies to step up in speed and flexibility, which is not new, but rather made clear, once again.

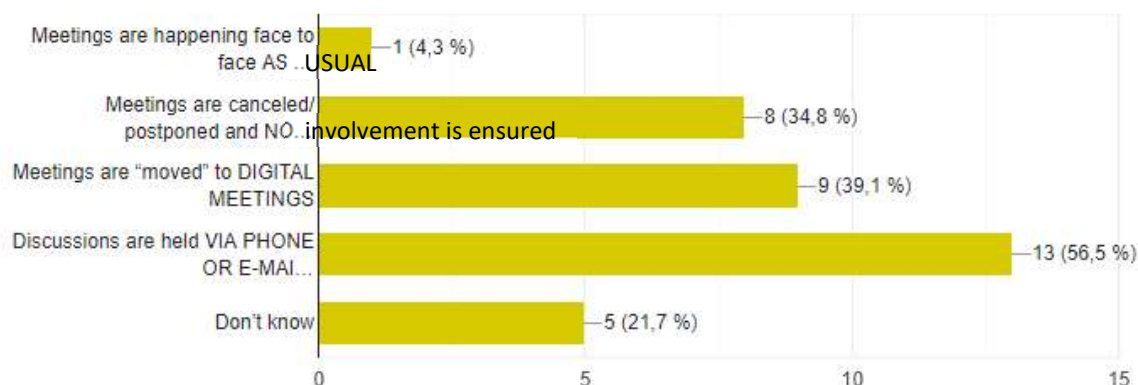
(F)LAGs around Europe are ready to act, are acting and coping with the situation, and there is a real positive force in this. It would be such a shame to miss this great opportunity to assist recovery, because of failing means and cumbersome administration.

## Network survey

23 out of 26 members answered the questionnaire.

How are your Managing Authorities communicating and how is the active involvement of stakeholders ensured when preparing programme of 2021-2027?

23 svar



Members that answered moved completely or partly to digital meetings in preparing 2021-27: Austria, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Slovenia. However, the amount of meetings and quality of these seem to differ greatly. The comments show a very different picture, depending on the Member state, but also within the member state, depending on department and individuals. Public engagement in preparing 2021-27 is endangered in many countries, and it is necessary to raise the focus on this at all levels.

### Civic engagement in general

Comments on civic engagement (in general) from the networks state that:

- There are many new initiatives around like virtual festivals, conferences, concerts, events, and meetings of different kinds with the (F)LAGs, and there is huge amount of voluntary work for the relief of people in need.
- Networks are working on ideas about engaging people on Facebook through surveys, video conferencing, etc.
- We should adapt to the new future now – how can we engage and adapt to the new reality after this crisis, when we in fact do not know what that reality will be like?

Best practice case shared from Austria:

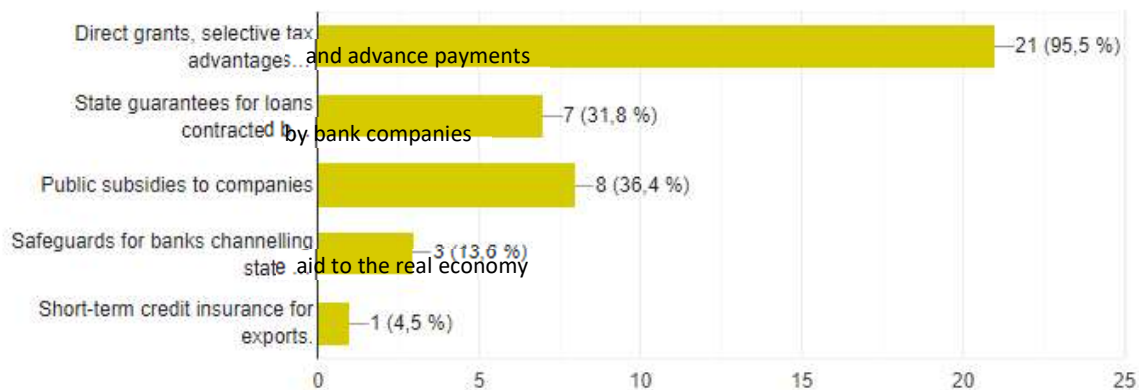
Austria established a volunteer's network in the LAG. There is a 20 h/week employee at the LAG and a partner in every municipality. With this network they try to build up local supply chains, care systems for elderly people etc. The interest and willingness to help is quite big. Also, some other trans-regional platforms were created on provincial or Austrian level. A call for helpers in agriculture resulted in 5 days, more than 7.000 volunteers declared their willingness to help.

### Temporary Framework



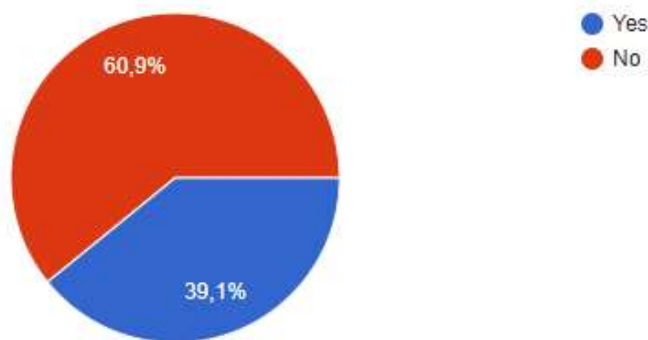
The European Commission has adopted a temporary framework so that Member States can use the full flexibility provided for in state aid rules to support the economy in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. To remedy this situation, the temporary frame for Member States establishes five types of aid. Select the aid that you consider is most necessary for the correct execution of the LEADER Aid Scheme

22 svar



Has paying agency, managing authority or other stakeholders acted on possible support activities?

23 svar



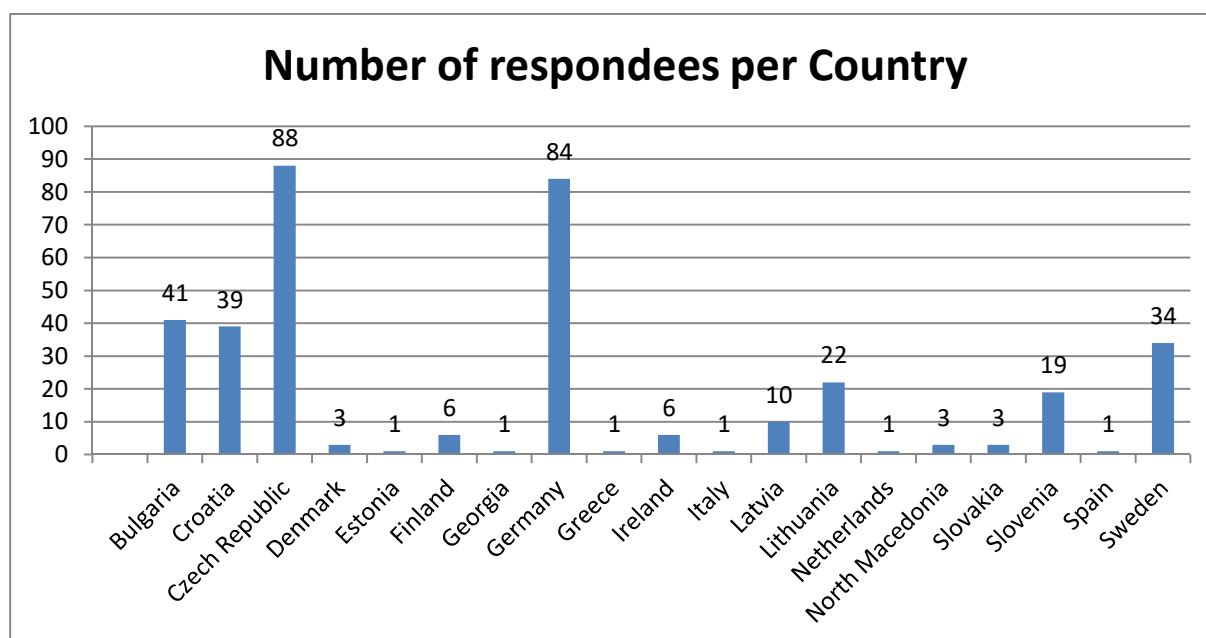
Some conclusion: In the first part of crisis, LEADER/CLLD has not been a priority, understandable. Nevertheless, in the comments, it seems that the stronger national networks get more information and can give more input to the member state on what is needed and possibilities to act.



## (F)LAG survey

In total there was answers from 364 (F)LAGs from 19 countries answering the survey, which is 16% of our members (F)LAGs, and around 12% of all (F)LAGs (assuming 3 000 in total).

However, Czech Republic answering rate is almost 80%, Croatia and Bulgaria are also very high. Sweden has 64% of all LAGs in Sweden and Germany around 49% of their members answered, which is roughly 25%. Notably high numbers also comes from Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia.

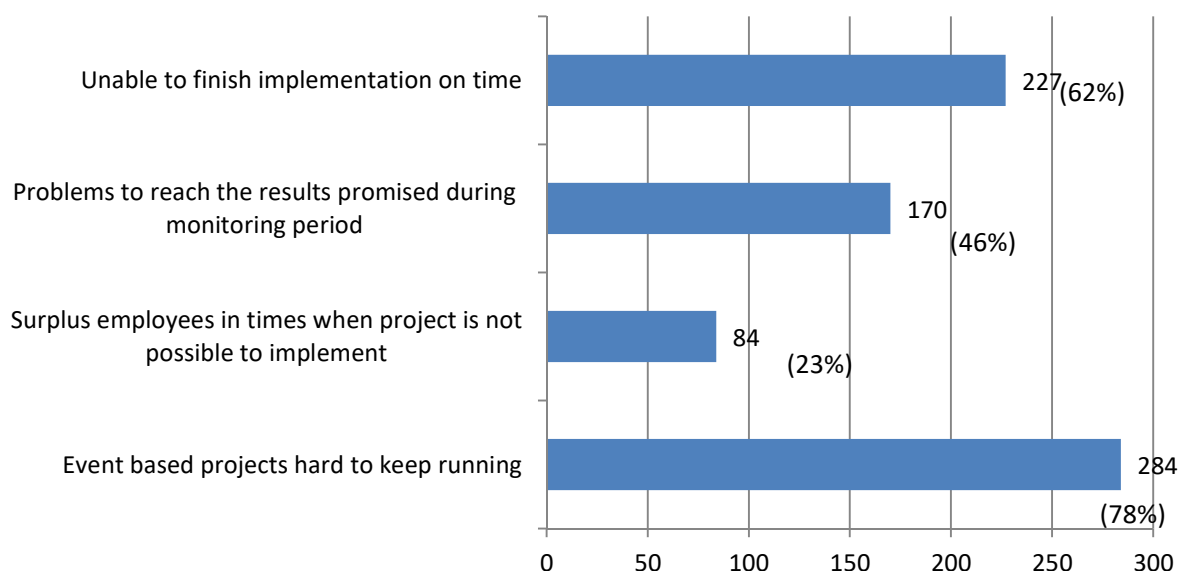


## Project Beneficiaries Challenges

### Multiple choice-question:



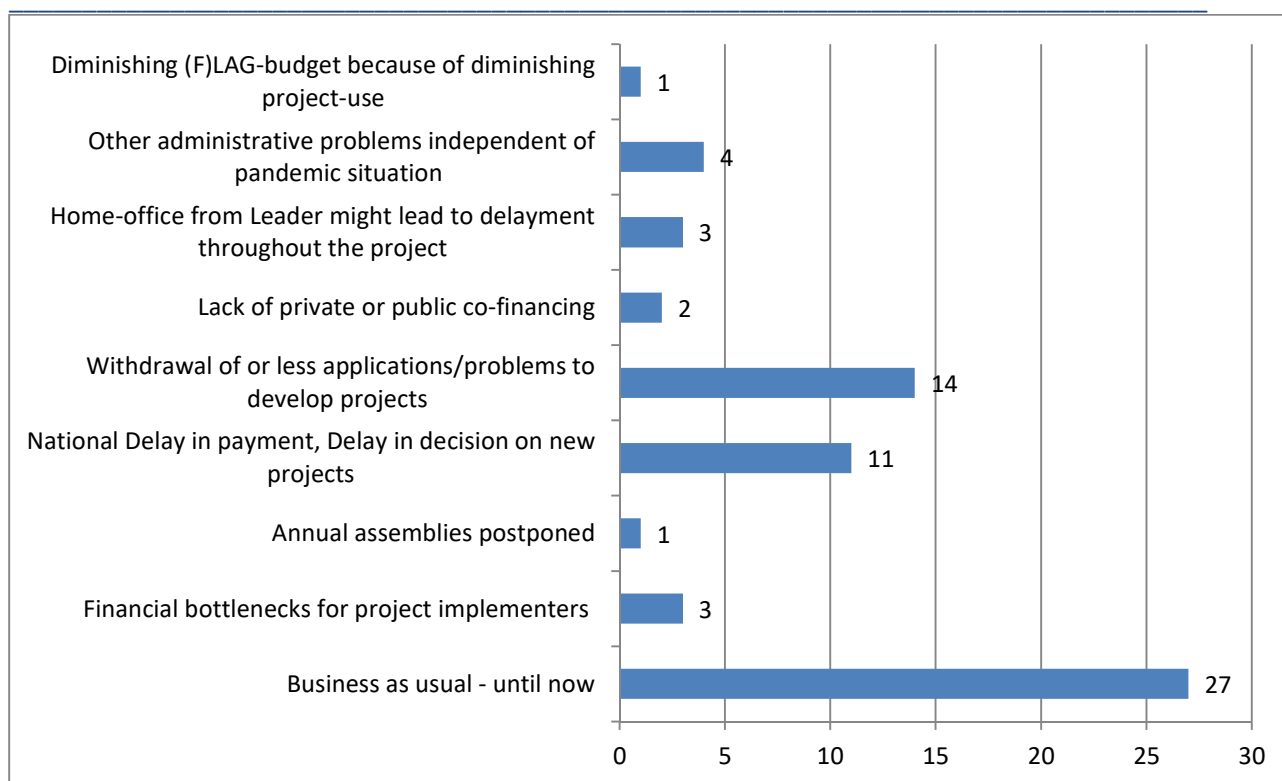
## What are the challenges project beneficiaries are facing because of the situation?



Only 23% of (F)LAGs state that project beneficiaries have problems with surplus workers. There are enough tasks. As expected, many state that beneficiaries are having problems in finishing on time, reaching the result indicators and keeping especially, event based projects running.

### Other, free text on challenges project beneficiaries are facing:





As in all “Other, free text” responders have answered freely. Since this is much more difficult, than to click in on multiple answers, it is recommended to give these answers extra focus, even if the numbers seem to be lower than in the multiple choice diagram. (A click from 2 persons is much easier to achieve, than two persons actually writing in a free text field about the same thing.)

27 (F)LAGs have answered that the reality for project beneficiaries is something like “business as usual”, of course with teleworking and other ways of operating from home-office, but still keeping the projects going until now, while mentioning that this situation might not last.

However, 31 answers are already describing a difficult situation for project beneficiaries, with different types of answers ranging from “lack of co-financing, delays, annual assemblies postponed, and financial bottlenecks for beneficiaries, to mention some.

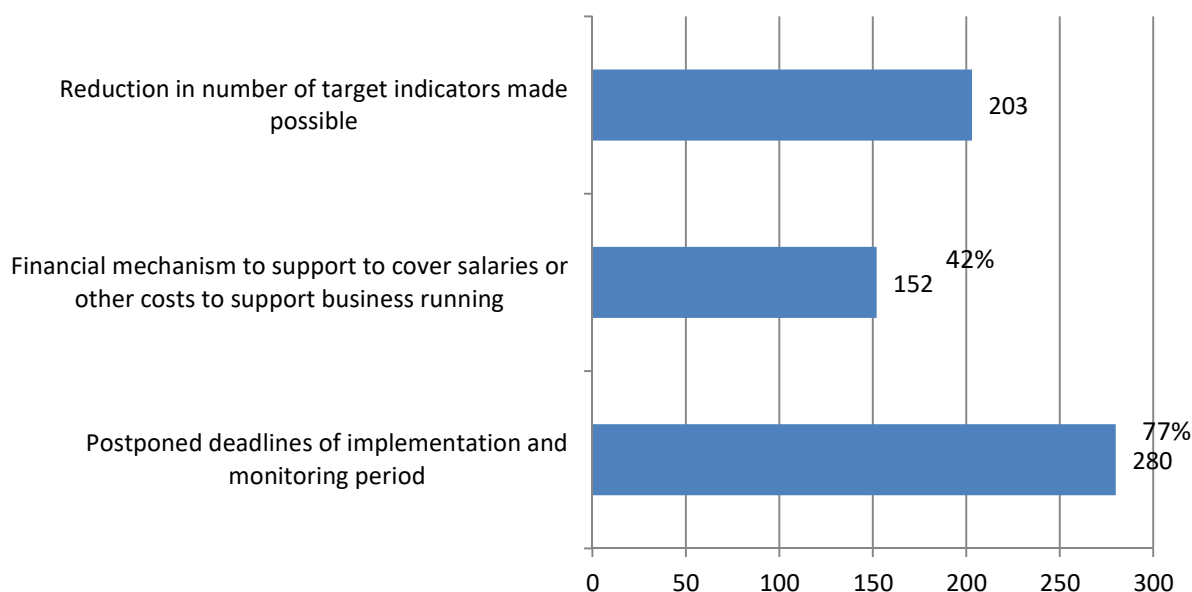
## Suggestions to support beneficiaries

### Multiple choice-question:

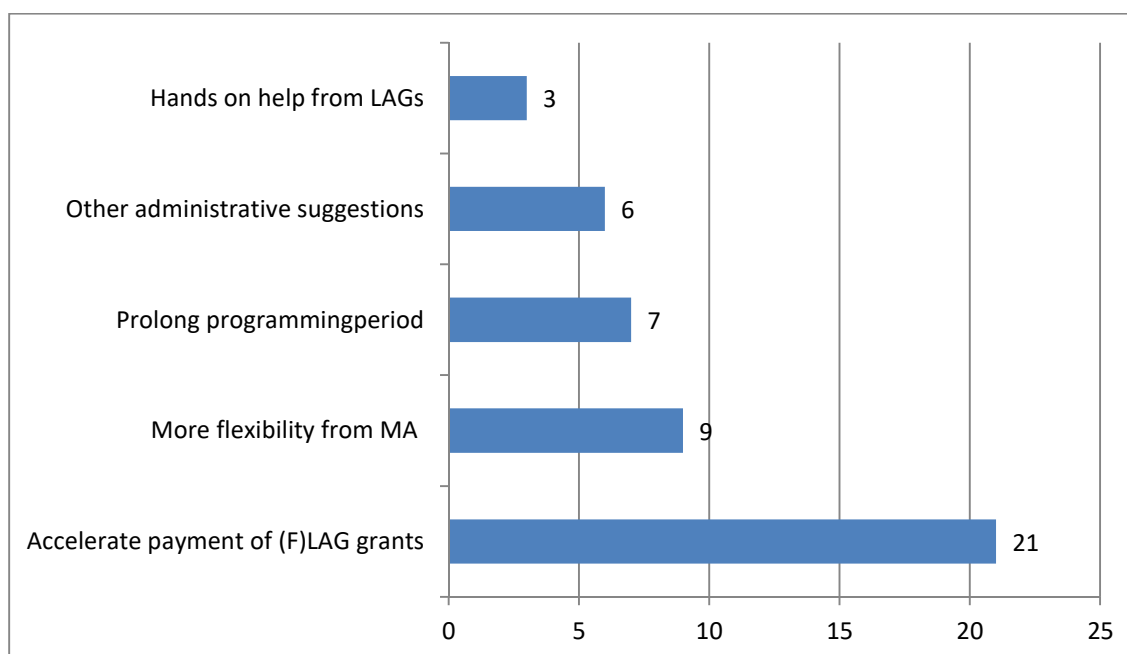




## Suggestions to help project implementers going forward



### Other, free text on suggestions to help project beneficiaries going forward:



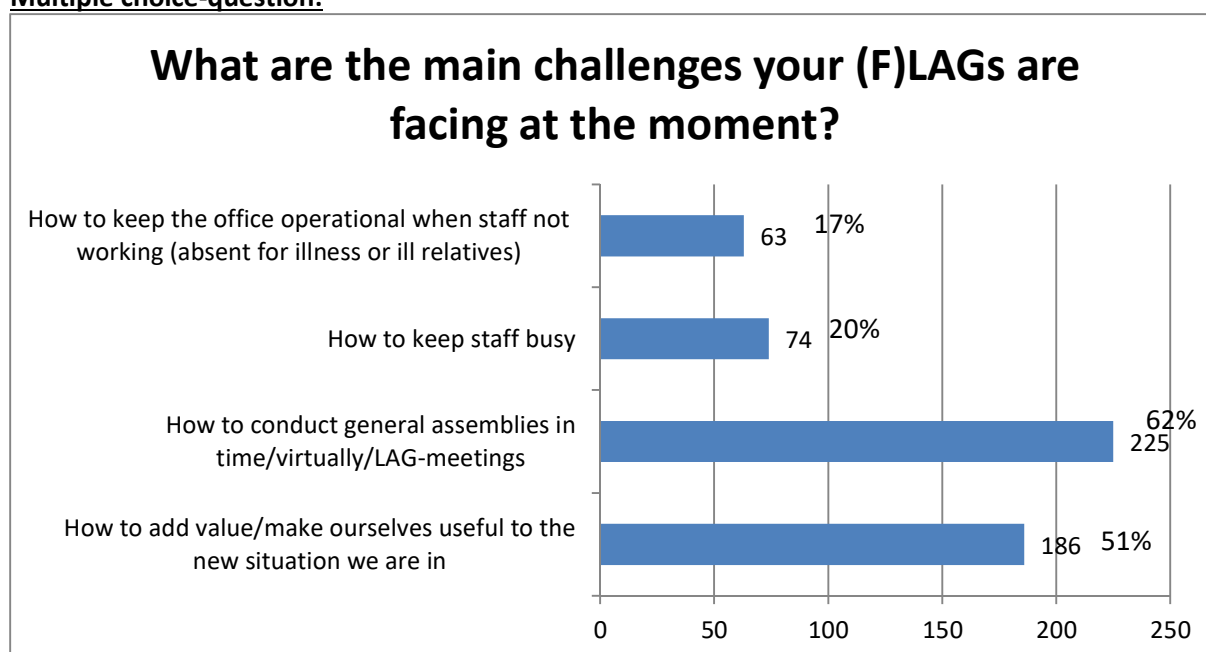
Other administrative suggestions are: Financial mechanism during Corona-Time should not be credited to de-minimis. / Acceptance of digital signatures and soft copy documentation/ support of technology for project management / general relief in bureaucratic burden





## Current challenges for (F)LAGs

### Multiple choice-question:

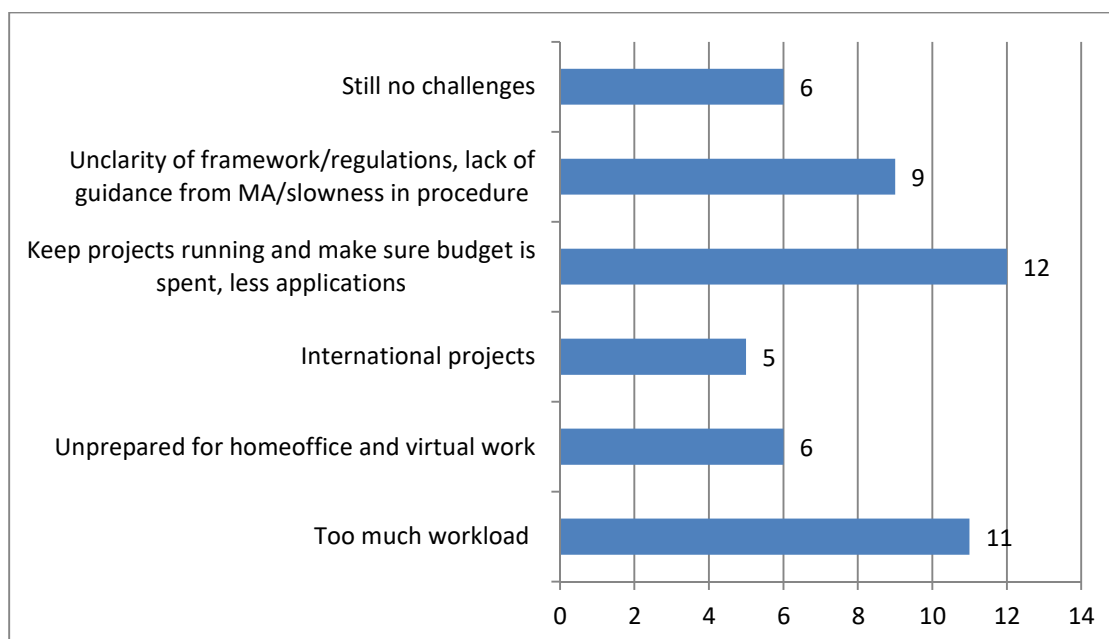


(F)LAGs, like many other office-workers, are struggling to make a working home-office. The answers show clearly that some countries have better experience and infrastructure than others, for example many (F)LAGs from Latvia, Finland, Sweden are coping better with the home-office situation, as can be seen in the comments. Currently, at the same time, the majority of our (F)LAGs around Europe are working on solutions on how to make themselves most useful!

It does not seem to be a big problem keeping staff busy, on the contrary, as shown in next diagram. 17% are struggling to keep the office running, which, given the crisis we are in, does not seem to be such a big number.



**Other, free text on what challenges (F)LAG are facing at the moment:**

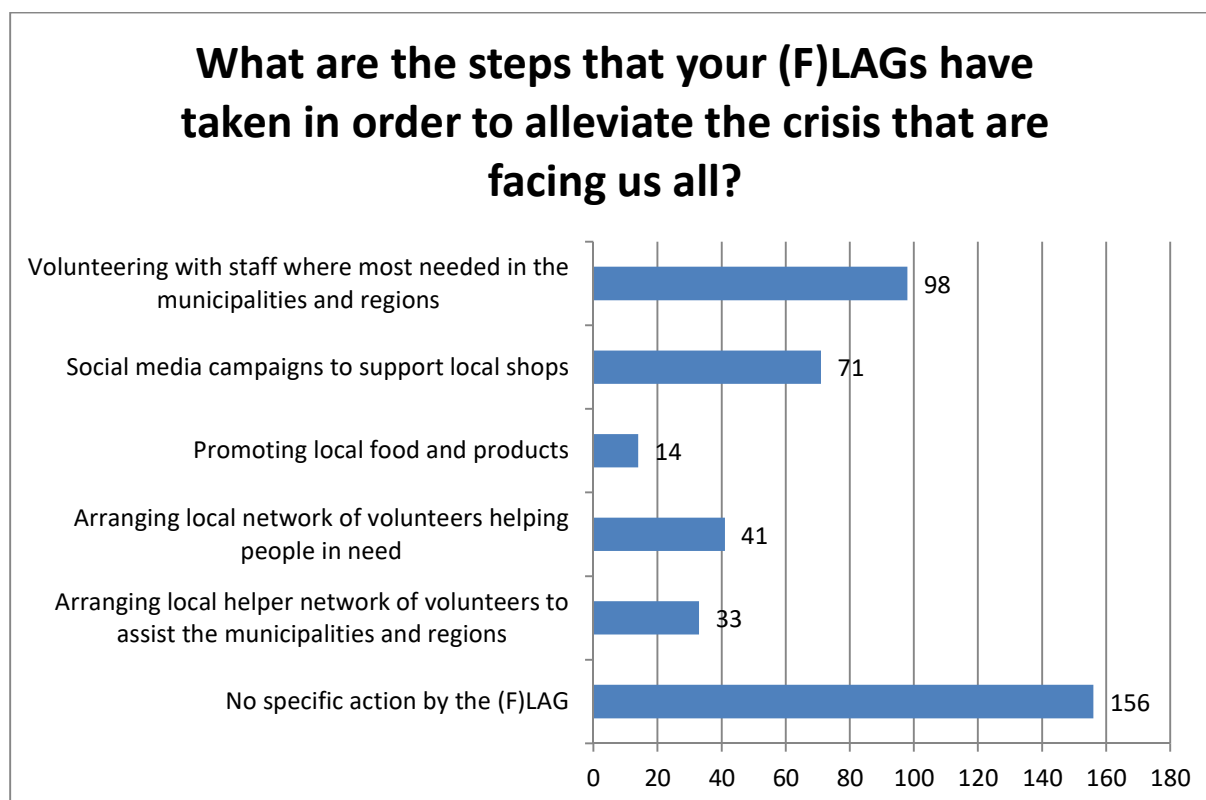


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Unfortunately, it seems obvious that a remarkable amount of (F)LAGs are struggling with unhealthy working environment.

## (F)LAGs situation – steps taken

### Multiple choice-question:

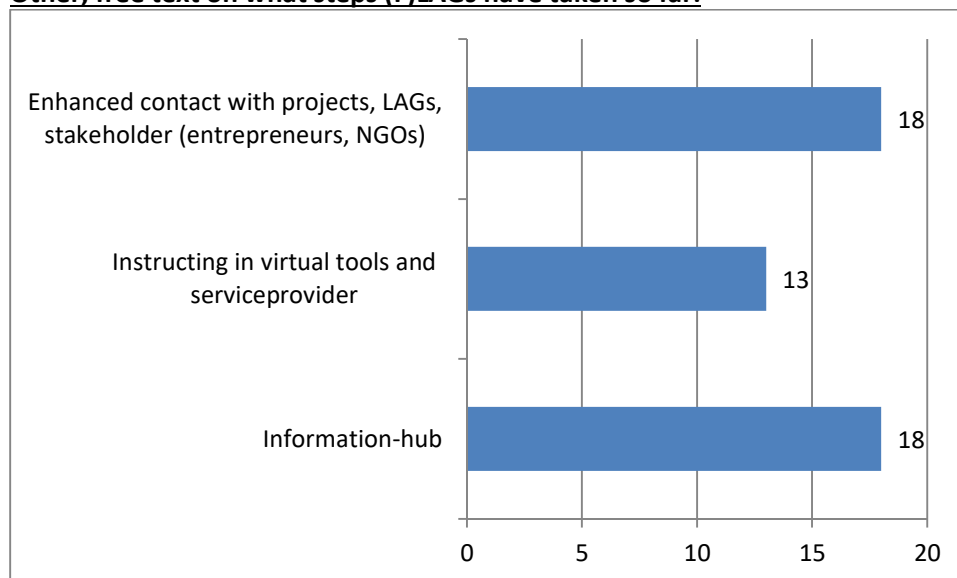


257 of 413 answers are on activities, which is 62% of the answers.

In promoting local food and products is enclosed: pay now get it later campaign, gift cards, online campaigns, list of local food, local food database



**Other, free text on what steps (F)LAGs have taken so far:**



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Behind the three staples are examples like:

- Information hub: on actors relevant for local businesses for relief, hotline, spreading good examples, for disabled people, contact-broker
- Instructing in virtual tools and service provider: free of charge usage for online services – libraries, assisting in the schools, meeting facilitator etc.
- Enhanced contacts with projects, LAGs, stakeholders: Keeping up work and contact, staying flexible, helping entrepreneurs applying for financial support, survey with stakeholders on impact of Covid 19

Many (F)LAGs have found ways to make themselves useful even where funding is sparse and system unflexible. There is no shortage of good ideas on how to cope with the new situation the world and Europe is in, and (F)LAGs are showing themselves as being flexible and ready to take on board new ideas. (F)LAGs are involved in a multiplicity of projects, volunteering in many different areas where it is necessary (schools, hospitals, shops, farming), to education in virtual tools, service provider, information-hub, marketing of local products, hands on support to SMEs, and so on. It is important to keep spreading the good examples between the (F)LAG to keep up the inspiration for all.

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