E - Bulletin
No. 7

July **2021**

WE EFFECT

brdn
Balkan Rural Development Network

www.brdnetwork.org

MEMBERS OF THE BALKAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

MRRBiH
Mreža za ruralni razvoj u Bosni i Hercegovini

NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF MONTENEGRO

HMRR
HRVATSKA MREŽA ZA RURALNI RAZVOJ

NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF KOSOVO

RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK OF NORTH MACEDONIA

ANRD

brdn
Balkan Rural Development Network

Content

3 LEADER/CLLD Youth Camp

4 Regional Rural Development Policy Forum

6 2nd Balkan Rural Parliament
"Reviving of rural Western Balkans – moving towards EU integration"

9 Balkan Green Businesses Stories

10 Albanian Rural Parliament 2 ||
The European Perspective of Rural Albania

11 Farm to Fork Academy

12 Rural You. Rural Albanian Youth

13 The First Food Hub in North Macedonia

LEADER/CLLD Youth Camp

32 participants from the Western Balkan countries participated at the three-day training on LEADER/CLLD organized in Mojkovac, Montenegro, from 24 to 28 May, 2021. Youth representatives of the rural areas in the region, gained knowledge on the basic principles of the EU LEADER approach; the process of creation and managing of Local Action Groups – LAGs and development of bottom-up strategies designed by the LAGs. Practical examples of animation and mobilization of rural stakeholders and implementation of LEADER in the EU countries, were also shared with the participants, which stimulated group discussions and share of knowledge.

By increasing the knowledge of rural youth about LEADER/CLLD approach and connecting the rural youth with institutions, organizations and other rural and urban stakeholders, an active youth participation in the rural development processes in the Western Balkan is ensured. The involvement of youth in the LEADER/CLLD processes will bring forward fresh and innovative ideas on crucial issues such as "agricultural productivity, commercialization and diversification of production patterns and livelihoods, which will significantly contribute to sustainable development of the Western Balkan rural areas.

This training was organized by the Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN) and the Network for Rural Development of Montenegro, with financial support of GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

https://fb.watch/6qROXjrNzp/

Regional Rural Development Policy Forum

Over 40 representatives of the civil sector from the Western Balkans participated at the 3rd Regional Rural Development Policy Forum, organized on June 14, 2021, in Ohrid, N. Macedonia, by the Balkan Rural Development Network, with aim to discuss the challenges and activities that will contribute to improving the living conditions and well-being of rural communities.

This Regional Rural Development Policy Forum covered topics important for rural communities in the region such as:

- gender equality and the integration of gender perspective in national and regional rural development policies;
- Social entrepreneurship; and
- participation of rural youth in the rural development processes.

In his address, the President of BRDN, Petar Gjorgievski, stressed that *"Experiences are needed to bring people from rural areas together to work on common needs. On the other hand, the government should bring its institutions closer to the rural population and use policy making as a tool for development, without unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles. I would like to emphasize once again the importance of CSOs as a mediator in this process, without whose participation it would not be possible."*. In this regard, the Balkan Rural Development Network stives to be as present as possible and to be in constant contact with the rural communities through its membership and the implementing project activities. The gained knowledge and practical experience, the BRDN member networks are transferring to their members - local NGOs and are continuously supporting them to become more efficient in the daily work and more active in the local development processes.

"Gender equality must be taken into consideration when decisions are made, resources are allocated, and policies and legal frameworks are created and implemented. At We Effect we try to be a driver in moving gender equality to the top of the regional rural development agenda. With our partner organizations in the region, we are committed to cooperate for action and positive changes". - emphasized Anneli Leina, the regional director of We Effect Europe Region.

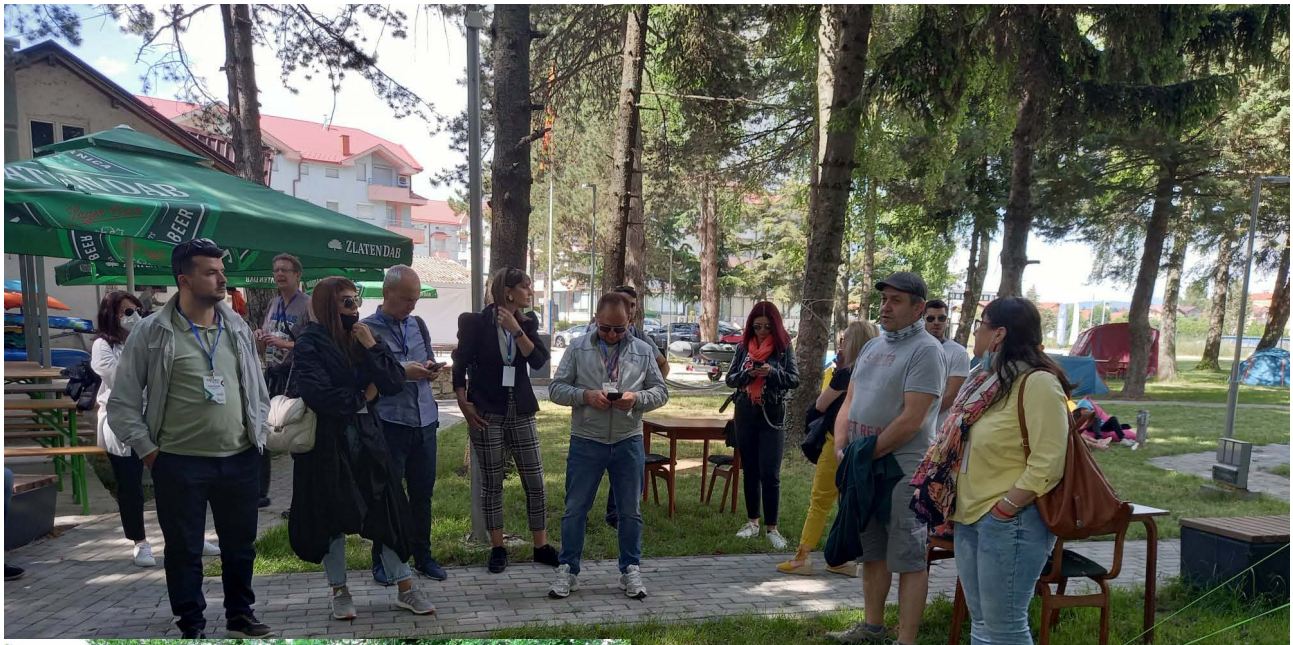
This third Regional Rural Development Policy Forum was financially supported by the Swedish development organization We Effect, within the project "Support to BRDN in institutional development to Revive Rural Communities in the Western Balkan". BRDN organizes the Forum to improve the dialogue between civil society and decision makers, in the process of creating policies for rural development in the Western Balkan countries. Having the 3rd Regional Rural Development Policy Forum prior to the 2nd Balkan Rural Parliament (BRP), supported the advocacy goals of the event, by including the conclusions from the discussed topics in the Declaration of the 2nd BRP. This Declaration, as a set of clear ideas about the concerns and aspirations of rural people, is addressed to all national governments of the Western Balkan countries and relevant EU institutions.

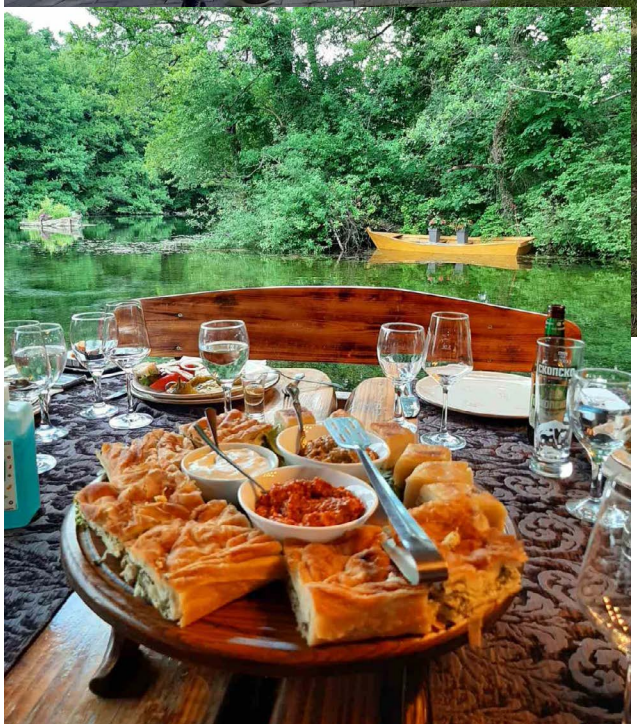
2nd Balkan Rural Parliament

"Reviving of rural Western Balkans – moving towards EU integration"

Inspired by the national rural parliaments, which have been implemented in Europe for more than a decade, the Balkan Rural Parliament is already taking its place in the policy-making process for rural development of the Western Balkans as one of the basic tools for representing rural communities, through national networks and the Balkan Rural Development Network.

On June 15 and 16, 2021, the Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN), with financial support of SWG – Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South-Eastern Europe, organized the 2nd Balkan Rural Parliament, gathering more than 60 various stakeholders from rural areas of the Western Balkan countries, including representatives of the civil society, Managing Authorities from the WB countries, national governments, and relevant donors, in Ohrid, N. Macedonia. The two-day event was also, virtually attended by many important actors in the rural development sector among which representatives of the European Commission and relevant EU organizations, who joined the discussions on the challenges and actions which can be taken for improvement of the well-being of the WB rural communities.





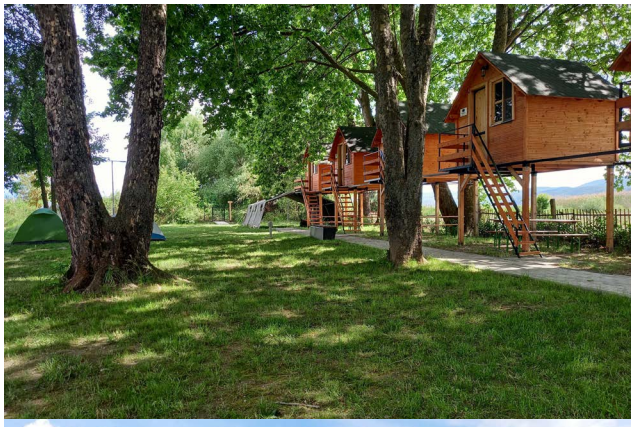
BRDN and the national member networks, presented a clear image of the rural areas in the Western Balkan countries and their role in the rural development in the region, as driving forces that can accelerate the process of EU integration. There is a large cultural and socio-economic gap between urban and rural areas in Western Balkans, therefore existing need for significant investment in infrastructure, education, health, business development, environment, research and innovation, digitalization.

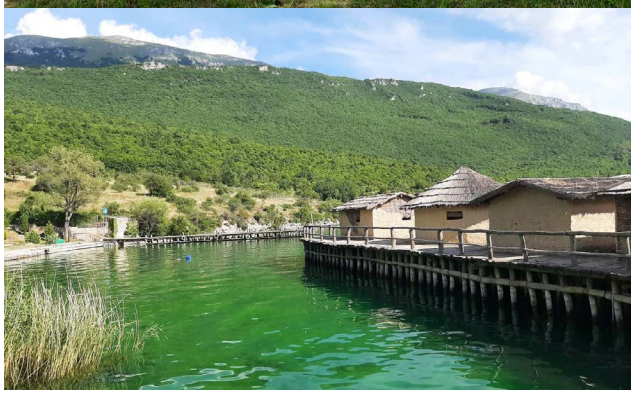
"However, the need for investment is not always about money and is not limited only to these sectors, but also investing in the capacities and skills development of local communities, civil society organizations particularly youth and women as potential assets of the rural human capital." emphasized Petar Gjorgievski, the President of BRDN.

Speaking about the EU integration process of the WB countries, Petar Gjorgievski expressed the awareness of the Western Balkans about their negative image from the past, concluding that such a perception of constant mistrust creates a deadlock in the EU integration process and negatively affects the development of the rural areas. *"We want to change this perception into a perception that the Western Balkans has values that bring us closer than divide us. These values will only enrich the values of the EU. We need to invest in strengthening of the mutual trust on every level among people, institutions at national level, but also impowering the trust between the Western Balkans and European Union to build equal partnerships."* – he added.

Finally, he urged the European Union to give active support to governments in making the reforms and to provide an effective support in strengthening the capacities of the civil society organizations and networks at national and regional level in the rural development processes.

The two-days program included field trips for the participants in the surrounding areas of Ohrid and Struga, where some picturesque sights and potentials for rural tourism were visited, as well as inspiring stories presented from local entrepreneurs.





As final output of the 2nd Balkan Rural Parliament was the developed set of stand points regarding the concerns and aspirations of the rural people and what these imply for action by the rural communities, for the policies of the governments, in the form of DECLARATION.

https://youtu.be/DmdQ5RExFvM

Balkan Green Businesses Stories

Promotional video of the Western Balkan green businesses was prepared within the EU funded project NAGE-Networking and Advocacy for Green Economy, implemented by BRDN members.

In order to introduce the concept of green economy and green entrepreneurship as unique cross-cutting entrepreneurial model for rural diversification and sustainability, some of the best green economy practices in the Western Balkan countries and Croatia, as EU member, were identified and packaged into the following video:

https://youtu.be/OVa8qg0wuKs

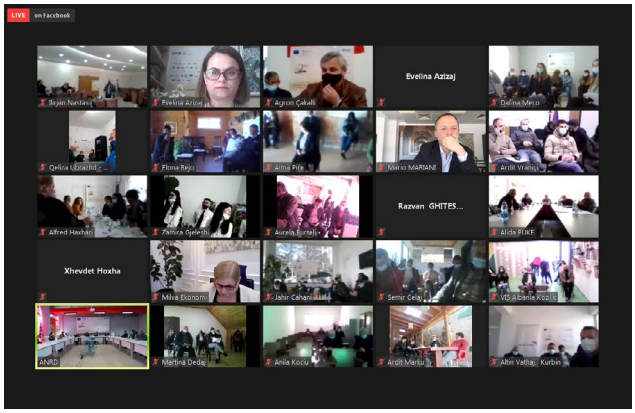
Albanian Rural Parliament 2 ||
The European Perspective of Rural Albania

On March 4-5, 2021, the Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD) organized the 2nd Albanian Rural Parliament (ARP), which marked a unique landmark of genuine rural movement in Albania, inclusiveness under pandemic conditions and partnership with all involved actors, aiming to influence and accelerate the reform processes in the rural sector for the revitalization of rural communities. The 2nd Albanian Rural Parliament was a joint effort by the ANRD and twenty-eight constituent CSOs in partnership with the Agriculture University of Tirana and Epoka University.(For more read https://anrd.al/second-rural-parliament)

The second ARP brought together more than 600 participants from all over Albania, convened both virtually and physically. The main objective of ARP was to discuss the challenges and actions which can be taken and call for the government and other relevant stakeholders to get an active role in the process of improvement of the well-being of rural people. The Joint Declaration of the 2nd Albanian Rural Parliament is one of the main outputs of ARP and it represents a set of recommendations addressing the development priorities of rural communities in Albania. (Read the Declaration here https://anrd.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Deklarata-Parlamenti-Rural-2-EN.pdf)

Farm to Fork Academy

Regardless of the difficulties created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the second Albanian Rural Parliament, through the digital platform and thanks to the organizational and coordinating efforts of the Albanian Network for Rural Development, made possible this important public meeting for dialogue, cooperation, exchange of key issues of rural development as well as draw recommendations on development and revitalization of the life and economy of rural communities. (The proceeding of the second ARP presenting all the input gathered during the two day event can be found here https://anrd.al/publications/proceedings-report-2nd-albanian-rural-parliament-2021-european-perspective-of-rural-albania/)



The implementation of the project: Academy "Farm to Fork" - V4 for Sustainable Agriculture in Albania funded by the International Visegrad Fund in partnership with the governments of the Visegrad countries started on February 2021. The Academy's participants consist of 12 farmers/ small agro-Entrepreneurs from different geographical areas of the country. The project aims to promote the use of new technologies on farms that result in biodiversity protection, sustainable rural development and tackling the challenges of climate change.

Through this project, farmers gain knowledge and also witness in-practice, measures pertaining to the enhancement of sustainability of Albanian agriculture on small farms, environment preservation, and prevention of further losses in biodiversity, by implementing accurate pilots and its practical development through the Farm to Fork Academy trainings, tutor-led solution project development and the execution of three pilot investment awards**.** Further, the project trickles down the knowledge via demonstration workshops for a wider group of project beneficiaries.(Read more on https://anrd.al/ongoing/farm-to-fork-academy-v4-for-sustainable-agriculture-in-albania/)

Rural You. Rural Albanian Youth

Rural-You - Rural Albanian Youth is one of the latest projects where ANRD participates advancing further its thematic work regarding rural youth. The project has started implementation in February 2021, under the leadership of Volontari Nel Mondo RTM. Rural You aims to promote the interest, representation, and contribution of rural youth in implementing the Albanian EU integration agenda in terms of the agricultural and rural development sector in the long run. The project is an invitation to look at the rural world from the perspective of young people enabling rural youth to be aware of the opportunities available at the sector level, actively participating in the sustainable growth of their territories, exercising their voice in the public arena. (Read more on https://anrd.al/ongoing/rural-you-rural-albanian-youth-2/)

Rural-You - Rural Albanian Youth' project aims to cultivate and boost the internal capacities of local CSOs and young activists to monitor, analyze, and undertake concrete actions through an integral approach, providing them not only with capacity development but also with advocating experience to contribute in sector development through involvement in rural policies.

The First Food Hub in North Macedonia

The constant increase of the need and demand for fresh and local food worldwide, was the motivation to develop the idea of establishment of the first Food Hub in the country, as a support to local producers on different levels: processing, packaging, e-sales platforms, marketing, networking etc. The potential of this idea was primarily recognized by the local farmers and food processors from Pehcevo surrounding, therefore RDN of N. Macedonia, with financial support of the Swedish development organization We Effect, established the first Food Hub in this area. The primary school in Pehcevo gave on disposal its kitchen facilities, while the LAG Malesh-Pijanec took the managing role of the Hub.

As a concept, the Food hubs are created and projected for improvement of the food production. They include a business model that usually involves a shared kitchen that can be rented per hour and are intended for use in the commercial production of food products. Their availability and common approach make these workshops financially affordable for small and family local food operators, while at the same time enabling them to take advantage of professional, licensed, and certified kitchen facilities and equipment, without the need for large capital investments for own kitchen.

Food hubs are a crucial, but often invisible, part of the local food system. They help small farmers grow by offering a combination of production, distribution, and marketing services. They provide link between producers and consumers of food in local and regional food systems. Furthermore, the Food Hubs are creating new jobs, promoting entrepreneurship and fight food insecurity.

In Republic of North Macedonia, given the importance of agricultural production and the large percentage of the population directly involved in it, Food Hubs have a great opportunity to support and help small-scale farmers and food processors offering them a combination of manufacturing, distribution, and marketing services.

After identifying the stakeholders and venue for establishing the Food Hub in Pehcevo, a complete renovation of the kitchen and purchase of equipment followed, to meet all HACCP criteria and the needs of the stakeholders.

On June 2nd, 2021, the Vermont Secretary of Commerce and Community Development, Ms. Lindsay Kurrle, together with representatives from the U.S. Embassy Economic section, Mr. Andrew Moffat (Economic officer), and Ms. Rozita Mrenoski (Economic staff), visited the Food Hub in Pehcevo. Considering that such Food Hubs are well developed in the state of Vermont, this visit was interesting for both sides to discuss ideas on further development of the Food hub in Pehcevo and next steps for partnership.

This material is completely or partly financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and We Effect.
Sida and We Effect does not necessarily agree with the opinions expressed.