

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY 2014–2020

The objective of the international strategy for the region covered by Leader Action Group SILMU is to enhance the effectiveness of the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland 2014–2020.

PURPOSE AND STAKEHOLDERS OF INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The purpose of the international activities of Leader Action Group SILMU is networking and co-operation internationally. Through networking and co-operation, the operators in the region accumulate experience of international operations, which adds to issues such as social capital in the region. Mutual learning in the development of villages provides the village communities in the region with many good experiences and implementation models for the development of villages.

The development of businesses in the region with regard to the international aspect will require improved operating conditions for entrepreneurs, exchange of good practices and learning from others, and attracting customers to the region especially in the fields of tourism, the care industry and culture. In the service industry, small businesses need, due to their small resources, an operator whose expertise and network help them to obtain new knowledge and growth capital for their business through international co-operation. It is possible to increase the number of international customers by means of correctly implemented commercialisation of services. Companies are also looking for partners, suppliers, retailers and distributors.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

In the programme period of 2014–2020, the area of operation of Leader Action Group SILMU consists of nine municipalities: Askola, Lapinjärvi, Loviisa, Myrskylä, Mäntsälä, Pornainen, Porvoo, Pukkila and Sipoo. The international co-operation of the municipalities has recently focused on twin town activities, which is implemented by almost every municipality. Due to the proximity of the capital region of Finland, the area is easy to reach, and the distances are short.

The region is home to approx. 120,000 inhabitants, about a third of whom are Swedish-speaking. For this reason, greater use should be made in the Eastern Uusimaa region of the expertise in the Swedish language by conducting closer co-operation with parties in the Nordic countries. The Eastern Uusimaa region is becoming increasingly international as representatives of different cultures and countries visit the region or move to the region.

The eastern part of the region of SILMU currently hosts a small number of internationalised companies engaged in the manufacturing industry, mainly in the packaging and technology sector. However, the majority of the companies in the region are micro-businesses that do not currently have the resources to develop their international operations. The tourism industry is not yet a very international sector, and there would be a need for measures to attract for example tourists travelling between St. Petersburg and Helsinki so that the number of Russian tourists could be brought to a growth track. The traffic routes in Eastern Uusimaa are good and the distances short, so the accessibility of services is at a good level. The proximity of the capital region is an opportunity for the region, for instance as a destination for day trips by travellers.

TABLE 1. SWOT analysis of the international aspect of Leader Action Group SILMU

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - location in the vicinity of the capital region - beautiful, diverse and clean natural environment - rich cultural environment - accessibility, short distances - wide population base and clientele - good production conditions - strong and versatile small businesses - high level of expertise and education - active associations - interaction between rural and urban areas 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social exclusion of young people - inadequacy of workforce - burden of entrepreneurship - environmental damage and climate change - deteriorating services which are farther and farther away - deteriorating profitability of agriculture - language problems, lack of service in one's mother tongue - negative attitudes prevent the introduction of renewable energy sources - ageing of population - security in rural areas
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - metropolitan focus - concentration of jobs in cities - ageing of population - one-sided economic structure - poor condition of bodies of water - special challenges related to the archipelago - deteriorating road infrastructure - poor telecommunications infrastructure - lack of community spirit 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - local energy, energy self-sufficiency - bio-economy - increasing the versatile uses of forests and use of wood - increase in the prestige of local production - growth in the demand for services - development of environmental technologies - active and affluent population - networking of operators - increased significance of the Baltic Sea - facilitation of teleworking - tourism in nearby areas - entrepreneurship by young people - utilisation of the special features of the archipelago - care and welfare services

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the international strategy of Leader Action Group SILMU have been drawn up on the basis of interviews of international operators in the region and of persons responsible for international activities in local administrations.

The objective of the international strategy is to build international activities by networking, which will support and consolidate the activities. The six main objectives of the international strategy are to:

- 1) add to projects that promote continued settlement in rural areas
- 2) add to projects that promote rural businesses
- 3) add to joint research and study projects as well as exchange of experts
- 4) add to interaction and learning together between different parties
- 5) add to international peer groups
- 6) add to the expertise of local operators and the acquisition of know-how.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE STRATEGY

The goal is to use new methods of implementation enabled by issues such as online working and social media in the implementation of the strategy.

1. The international strategy will be implemented in practice by networking locally, regionally and internationally with various parties (e.g. business development companies, advisory organisations and Leader groups). New partners are actively sought for networking; especially educational institutions are a potential alternative for partners. Co-operation with the Leader groups in the Uusimaa region will be intensified.
2. The strategy named "SILMUSTA KASVUA" will be used for funding international projects, where, among others, best practices are learned and experiences are exchanged with/between different nationalities.
3. The international strategy takes especially into account young people, who are interested in international co-operation. Funding for this will be sought from the Erasmus+ programme of CIMO, the expert organisation in international mobility and co-operation.
4. Funding will be sought from several funding sources (ESF, ERDF, State subsidies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for development co-operation by NGOs). Operators in the region will be informed of the funding.
5. Excursions, trips and meetings will be arranged between Finnish and non-Finnish people, taking into account the different groups: entrepreneurs, village operators, young people, culture etc. Language studies and exchange of experts will be arranged for the employees and Board members of the Leader group by means of the ELARD LAG Staff Exchange program.
6. Businesses and other parties in the region will be assisted to acquire resources that enable participation in the international activities of Leader Action Group SILMU and the obtaining of support.