

Summary Report

ENRD Workshop

Social Hubs in Rural Europe

*Responding to demographic change &
promoting social inclusion*

9 February 2017

L42, Rue de la Loi 42, Brussels 1040



Context of the event

Rural areas are constant spaces of change, driven by social and technological modernisation, agricultural restructuring and globalisation. In the face of such change, Europe's rural regions are constantly challenged to retain services, facilities and most importantly population structures.

Rural areas are facing both **new and long-standing social and demographic challenges** including the increased number of migrants and refugees and the need to better integrate them within rural (and urban) societies; ageing population and young people increasingly leaving rural areas; the need for integrating and involving Roma population many of whom live in rural areas but often do not participate in the decisions taken for their area; challenges for women in rural areas to gain appropriate rural employment, become drivers of rural development, innovators or entrepreneurs in rural society or equal partners in agriculture.

Rural 'social hubs' can be defined as individual organisations or a set of organisations that are actively working to respond to demographic change and promote social inclusion issues in rural areas¹. However, a social hub concerns much more than a simple definition can possibly capture: it involves a lot of **experienced, committed and enthusiastic individuals** who have worked on helping the inclusion of disadvantaged people in rural areas or the integration of a rural community as a whole. They experiment with new approaches, learn from past mistakes and positive experiences, and have the patience to wait until their work bears its fruit, which often takes many years.

Several committed organisations work on similar issues to improve rural societies but may not know about each other's work. **The main objective** of the 'Social Hubs in Rural Europe' event was to bring some of these committed organisations and individuals together, present their work, share their experience and **stimulate exchange in order to provide inspiration for future work and cooperation**.²

The workshop also aimed at exploring how **Rural Development Programmes and projects** (supported by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development - EAFRD) could build on existing experience and how they could be used to reinforce social inclusion and demographic change in rural areas.

¹'Responding to demographic change and promoting social inclusion' is one of the working themes of the ENRD Contact Point during 2016-2017 (see http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/social-inclusion_en for more information).

² This workshop is a second in a series of social inclusion workshops (the first ENRD Social Inclusion workshop was organised in March 2016): http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-leaderclld-and-networking-support-social-inclusion_en

The workshop included the following main sessions:

- Social Hub sessions on the (1) integration of migrants & refugees; (2) integration of Roma; (3) the role of arts & culture in promoting social inclusion; (4) young people in rural areas; (5) the role of women entrepreneurs in rural areas (see specific reports on the outcomes of the hub sessions).
- Presentation on the new Commission initiative, the European Solidarity Corps, which provides support for engaging young people in solidarity activities across Europe.³
- A wide range of further initiatives and projects presented during the 'social route' session (see summary table of initiatives presented).

For more information about the event (including programme booklet, presentations & keynote speech, social hub reports, summary of initiatives presented during the social route session), please visit: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-social-inclusion_en.

³ See for more information: https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en;
http://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-solidarity_en

Key conclusions and recommendations

Social inclusion is a **long-term process** that often exceeds the timeframe of formal programmes

The social and economic inclusion of various groups facing difficulties in society (often referred to as 'disadvantaged groups' in this report) is a long-term process; **successful social inclusion initiatives often take decades** (e.g. the SECAD Youth initiatives, the integration of Roma communities and the work of artists in rural communities). On the one hand, building trust and motivating disadvantaged groups takes a lot of effort and time. On the other hand, local communities also need time to open up towards these groups, and overcome negative feelings (e.g. certain target groups, such as migrants and refugees, may have been given access to services that locals have to pay for).

Inclusion is not about specific target groups, it's about the **whole community**

Inclusion is not only about the specific target group but **the whole community**. There are a number of successful methods that can help to bring inclusion issues closer to local communities: these include 'story-telling' (telling the personal stories can help to understand specific issues and the situation of people facing difficulties); awareness-raising about the potential benefits for local communities (e.g. addressing depopulation of rural areas); involvement of disadvantaged groups (e.g. of young people and migrants), directly in planning and implementing activities (i.e. not just for them, but by them); and promotion of regular exchange between key stakeholders. **Voluntary work** is one of the main tools of rural communities to contribute to social inclusion.

Enable **on-going exchange and communication** among key stakeholders

Exchange and communication and the **partnership approach** are important at all levels: both at the local level between the different stakeholders concerned (representatives of disadvantaged groups, local mayors, LAGs, NGOs, schools, farmers and volunteers, etc.); and across the different layers of policy-making (EU institutions, national ministries/ Managing Authorities, LAGs, etc.). **Thematic Groups** organised by National Rural Networks that bring together a wide set of stakeholders **are particularly useful platforms of exchange**.

It is crucial to disseminate and communicate successful examples and inclusion models. Rural networks and partnerships at local (e.g. LAG) national (NRN) and European levels (ENRD, European stakeholder organisations) can play a key role in this dissemination.

Don't start with building the roof

One needs to **understand and respect the 'hierarchy of human needs'**. In order to achieve social inclusion, first the basic human needs have to be fulfilled (including food, safety, housing, employment, etc.).

There are local initiatives that aim to address this situation such as the Ratatouille Programme (on sustainable organic farming/ vegetable growing, employment and environment) in Hungary for Roma communities. In a similar vein, people need to understand fundamental rights (for instance the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – FRA - is carrying out a range of awareness raising activities). Therefore, assessing the situation and key problems in a community and planning tailor-made initiatives and programmes; as well as understanding the wide range of initiatives (e.g. those addressing poverty and fundamental rights) is a starting point for successful social inclusion. Overall, more attention needs to be given to understand the diverse profiles, needs and motivations of disadvantaged groups.

Large variety of social challenges

Social policies **need to be adapted to the specific needs and social challenges of Member States and regions**. Understanding this diversity is important. Certain types of social issues impact certain countries or regions more than others, e.g. the integration of Roma people or migrants is more prominent in some of the Member States; and economic opportunities for women differ from region to region. While transferring good practices, it is important to recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. **Exchange among Member States and regions facing the same challenges** need to be encouraged and enhanced (e.g. through the NRN cluster on migrants; or ERGO network work in Member States with large Roma population).

Matching funding with needs

Integration of specific groups (e.g. migrants and refugees) requires access to a number of basic rights and services – jobs, housing, food, education, health, social services, etc. Furthermore, the integration process takes time that often goes beyond the programming cycle of formal public programmes. This requires **imaginatively matching needs with available public, private and civil society resources**.

This matching and linking of roles goes way **beyond the competences of any one fund or programme** and necessarily involves the networking of many different actors. Successful integration in rural areas requires the use of a combination of funds and programmes, and the 'rural (and social) proofing' of various policies. There is a need for long-term thinking and planning, for the 'creative' use of funds (finding matching funding resources to keep initiatives going), finding ways to use multiple policies in synergy (in line with the multi-sectoral approach recommended through Cork 2.0 Declaration).

Improve the contribution of Rural Development Programmes

LEADER/CLLD is a key RDP measure that addresses social inclusion issues in rural communities. LEADER/CLLD strategies and projects can help to 'break the ice'; the integration process often starts with small-scale, local initiatives. It is really important to carry out a series of **soft actions at an early stage** to understand the needs and gain the trust of the disadvantaged groups as well as the broader rural community. LEADER/CLLD can be a tool for this and LAGs can take a lead in coordinating different actors at local level. Through (transnational) cooperation projects the experience of successful LAGs can be extended. Some NRNs at national level and some LEADER groups at local level have shown that they can take a lead role in the coordination – from a rural point of view.

However, to keep things moving and to revitalise rural communities through social inclusion, **there is a need for more targeted support and funding with a focus on social inclusion within the RDPs**. Small-scale LEADER projects and NRN initiatives can get things moving, but are insufficient to achieve a complete break-through.