



This ENRD workshop focused on job opportunities in rural areas. The event provided an overview of the prevailing issues and trends in rural employment.

Different topics were explored, including social inclusion, pathways to creating and sustaining rural jobs, emerging trends and support mechanisms. A selection of inspiring initiatives and projects was showcased. Participants engaged in group discussions and shared their experience and ideas on the opportunities for rural employment now and into the future.

Event Information

Date: 27 November 2019

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Participants: Managing Authorities, regional and local public authorities, NRNs, NGOs, LAGs, EU institutions, researchers and other stakeholders

Outcomes: Establishing a stronger understanding of rural job opportunities and related support mechanisms, exchanging ideas on enabling factors, challenges and concrete solutions

Webpage: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-vibrant-rural-areas-rural-jobs_en

Setting the scene

Opening speech – Mario Milouchev, Director of DG AGRI, outlined that rural areas need to be attractive places for people to live and work in, throughout every stage in their lives. This means providing job opportunities, basic services, and a good quality of life for rural citizens, whether they are farmers or not, young or old, women or men. To this end, strong and tailored policies are needed to unleash the potential of rural areas. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has a special place in this, however alone it cannot solve all the issues - synergies with other funds and rural proofing should be ensured.

Employment opportunities in rural areas – [Janet Dwyer](#) from the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) provided an insight into rural employment. Policies and related measures must address key issues such as low population density, remoteness, poor infrastructure or dependence on the primary sector. These challenges can be turned into opportunities to enable rural employment, by building on local assets, supporting local skills and knowledge, taking advantage of new trends and emerging economies, and attracting newcomers. Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals has been presented as an opportunity to boost rural economies and jobs; successful economies will be the ones that reduce disparities.

National approaches – [Juuso Kalliokoski](#) from the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry underlined the importance of streamlining relevant policies in order to contribute to job creation (e.g. ensuring the integration of the CAP objectives and the State Aid objectives). In addition, using adequate indicators would be needed to monitor indirect jobs created as a consequence of EAFRD-funded projects. One of the biggest challenges for rural businesses in Finland is the shortage of skilled workers. The presented smart shrinking concept could inspire other MSs facing similar challenges.

[Anna Rosa](#) from the Polish Academy of Sciences pointed out that specific approaches need to be tailored to local areas in order to reflect spatially differentiated conditions. Support should be addressed particularly to young people who are neither in education, nor in employment or training (NEET). Enhancing employment initiatives outside agriculture and providing access to knowledge and capital were also stressed.

Using public support to boost rural jobs

A moderated panel discussed the role of public funding in supporting rural employment. The panellists focused on how different policies and the different funding instruments work together in practice, at the EU and national level. There was a lively discussion on how to better contribute to rural areas' development, how to better involve rural populations to the policy making and programming process, what role to play by the EC, national

regional, local authorities, the NRNs and the civil society. While each fund has its own key focus (i.e. rural development for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, territorial cohesion for the European Regional Development Fund, improving employment and social inclusion for the European Social Fund), there is a considerable need for cooperation and joint approaches. Integrated interventions should be promoted to multiply the effect of public funding. Coordinated implementation of EU funds could help to improve synergy at national, regional and local level.

At the national level it is important to involve rural actors in the planning stages in order to understand local needs. Rural networks can help to facilitate this exchange. Carrying out a robust SWOT analysis as well as a solid assessment of needs in order to design better targeted interventions, are key steps to ensure that the EU funds will provide support where they are most needed.

Parallel group discussions: Opportunities for rural employment

Pathways to creating and sustaining rural jobs

There are many opportunities to create new sources of income and jobs in rural areas. One of them is **multi-functional farming** that is capitalising on various on-farm activities i.e. agritourism, social and educational farms, culinary business or on-farm nurseries. [Francesca Gironi](#) from the Coldiretti farmers' organisation (IT) presented the state of play in Italy where multi-functional farming was supported through necessary changes in national legislation.

Supporting **young rural entrepreneurs** has a huge potential for boosting rural employment. [Mara Saldabola](#) presented the support scheme introduced by the municipality of Alūksne (LV) to encourage young people to start their own business. Despite it being a small-scale initiative, the scheme has helped to create many successful businesses and has helped to motivate young people to return to their villages.

Emerging trends in rural employment

Remote working and the **digital economy** are providing new means for rural communities to access job opportunities and create new economic activities. 'Grow Remote', founded in 2016 in Ireland, is an example of how initiatives can enable remote workers in rural areas. [June Bolneo](#), leader of the local chapter of 'Grow Remote' in Portugal, presented the results of this initiative that is supported by more than 170 volunteers and has already expanded to 16 countries.

Another innovative area with high potential for rural employment is the **circular economy**. [Marcello Piccini](#) from the company Fiusis (IT) started in 2010 to produce clean heat and electricity from agricultural residue (olive tree pruning). Since then he has created more than 30 jobs in the Apulia region, which has a high unemployment rate. Introducing further support mechanisms in the legislative framework (e.g. a law allowing and regulating the marketing of wood ashes as fertilizers) could unlock further opportunities for the business to grow and create even more jobs.

Social dimension of rural jobs

[Helena Isakson](#) from the Federation of Swedish Farmers (SE) described a **business training programme targeted at rural women** which aims to increase their involvement in agriculture and forestry. Through this RDP funded project, 70 women have improved their business skills, confidence and have expanded their professional networks. Now, 70% of the course participants have full time jobs in agriculture and 50% have set-up new businesses.

The presentation by [Petra Martinu](#) from the Local Action Group (LAG) Policsko (CZ) provided an insight into the reality of **employing people that are disadvantaged in the labour rural market** (i.e. young people in institutional care and people over the age of 50 who are unemployed). Thanks to the dedication and close cooperation of the LAG with the local social service provider, the LEADER-funded project successfully integrated project participants into the labour market. As a result, the beneficiary decided to undertake the second edition of the project.

Concluding remarks

- **More integrated policies:** Rural development policy cannot solve all the challenges of rural areas on its own. Various EU funds and the national, regional and local level need to work hand in hand to develop rural areas.
- **Better targeting of interventions:** All relevant actors need to be involved in the planning phase to reflect local needs in the SWOT analysis and to address them by the interventions in the CAP Strategic Plan.
- **Changing the narrative about rural areas is crucial:** Shifting the discourse from seeing rural areas as victims to becoming actors with many opportunities to contribute to economic, social and environmental goals.