Discussion Brief
WORKING DRAFT
Welcoming new arrivals to rural areas

Context

People move to rural areas for economic or social reasons. Migration to rural areas may happen within Member States and/or within the EU; or people may arrive from outside of the EU (e.g. recent migrants' crisis). For instance, there are those who start a new business and new life (with or without their families); others are 'placed' in an area (out of their will) only for a temporary period (e.g. asylum seekers waiting for final asylum decision). People who have just moved to a rural area need welcoming services, or specific support for improving their (temporary) living conditions, and eventually encourage them to stay in the longer term.

Welcoming new arrivals is often a strong 'interest' of the local area and community. In particular, new arrivals:

- ✓ can help to overcome demographic change issues, i.e. the aging of population,
- ✓ can boost economic activity and can help to overcome labour and skills shortages in some specific areas,
- ✓ can contribute to sustaining public institutions and services (e.g. health-care and education).

However, sometimes it takes time for local communities to realise the opportunities offered by the arrival of new people, and in the short run it rather seems a challenge than an opportunity. Naturally, local communities often receive new arrivals with suspicion, and can even get jealous of the specific benefits that these people receive. One of the challenges regarding asylum seekers is that they often only stay in the area for a short period and once the asylum status is granted they move on.

Methods & examples

Local inhabitants play a key role in welcoming new arrivals. However, the welcoming services needed may much differ depending on the background and reasons for new people arriving to the local area. Below are examples from two specific contexts to demonstrate such differences.

Welcoming asylum seekers

The arrival of asylum seekers impacted upon different Member States and regions to different extents.[1] While some Member States were not impacted at all, others had a serious inflow of refugees and asylum seekers, that often had an impact on rural areas.

For instance, in Sweden small villages received many refugees that sometimes outnumbered the local population. Therefore, specific activities were carried out to overcome (potential) tensions between the local population and the new arrivals, as well as to improve the basic living conditions and well-being of the people who just arrived in the rural areas. Refugees and asylum seekers had different needs, starting from a need for

---

[1] See ENRD Factsheet on 'How to support the social inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers?'.

shelter, food and clothes (at the very early phases) to cultural and language introductions, welcoming to the village and school for children soon after arrival.[2] There are successful examples from all over Europe for actions to support new arrivals at the very early stages, e.g. in Sweden they used traditional bread-baking as an activity to bring locals and immigrants together; the municipality of Bad Berleburg in Germany supported actions including youth cafes and an integration bus, as well as closer cooperation between the local LAG and municipality to strengthen the welcoming culture[3]; in the Czech Republic an art initiative (visits and performances) tried to bring refugees and local villagers together[4].

Welcoming new entrepreneurs and their families

A key priority of some rural areas is to attract new entrepreneurs into the area to create new economic activity. The ENRD Thematic Group on Rural Businesses stressed the importance of the provision of services (including welcoming services) in rural areas for attracting new entrepreneurs.

One of the most successful approaches identified was 'rural digital hubs' that can help to attract new businesses, create new employment, improve digitisation opportunities and the demographic situation. Cocotte Numerique[5], a rural digital hub in France, has offered broadband infrastructure, co-working spaces and training for local inhabitants, and attracted new entrepreneurs to the area. Some of the services offered by the hub include **welcoming services to local entrepreneurs and their families**, assisting them with finding accommodation, schooling for children and employment for their spouses.

Getting involved in the discussion

The ENRD Contact Point aims to generate discussion and exchange about useful approaches among interested stakeholders and improve the RDP implementation. **The initial welcoming of new arrivals can be relevant in many different rural contexts. In what way is it relevant in the context of your Member State and/or your work?**

> **Get involved in the discussion - Tell your ideas through Viima**
>
> - What are the specific issues that arise in your Member State/ region? What are the specific examples that you have?
> - Are there any practical challenges that you are facing?

Read the other Social inclusion discussion briefs on 'Supporting basic needs' (food, health, housing)'; 'Supporting jobs & employment'; 'Supporting social cohesion & strengthening local community', 'Social proofing rural programmes and policies'.

---

[2] See presentation of Hans-Olof Stalgren (Swedish NSU): Integration of migrants into fisheries communities
[3] See ENRD Factsheet on 'How to support the social inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers?'.
[4] See: https://netwerkplatteland.nl/workshop-social-inclusion-refugees-at-the-country-side & https://netwerkplatteland.nl/sites/default/files/field/file-attachment/From%20the%20centre%20and%20back%20again.pdf
[5] A detailed case study is currently being developed and will be published soon.