

# ENRD Social Inclusion Workshop

## Attractive and inclusive rural areas

### 16 November 2017, Cyprus (Nicosia)

#### What was the workshop about?

The ENRD Social Inclusion Workshop was organised back-to-back with the [9<sup>th</sup> NRN meeting](#) (that took place on the 15/11/17<sup>1</sup>). During the workshop participants discussed key social inclusion challenges in rural areas and ways of overcoming these by identifying innovative practices (including RDP-funded examples from participants).



At the start of the meeting, four experts were invited to provide ‘eye-opener’ interventions (food-for-thought)<sup>2</sup> for the discussions of the day related to addressing basic needs, creating jobs and employment for social inclusion; strengthening local communities, and assessing the impact of social inclusion (with a focus on the Social Return on Investment – SROI method).

Participants – including representatives of Network Support Units, Managing Authorities, Local Action Groups and other stakeholder organisations – were part of an interactive group work organised in three stages:

1. Identifying main **social inclusion needs** in rural areas & selecting a specific need among these for the exercise ([Session 1](#)).
2. Thinking about **wild ideas** – in a situation where no institutional, financial, legal barriers exist - to address the specific social inclusion challenge chosen ([Session 2](#)).
3. Developing **realistic actions** to address the specific challenge through the participation of the NRN and other relevant stakeholders ([Session 3](#)).

#### The most important social challenges identified

Session 1 of the workshop started with interventions from two local level stakeholders on the specific challenges that they are facing in their area<sup>3</sup>. The session discussed the question on ‘*What are the main social inclusion needs in rural areas?*’. A set of common challenges were identified by participants across the five discussion groups. The most prominent among these were:

##### **a. The need for attracting young people into rural areas**

Attracting young people into rural areas stood out as the **most important social inclusion need** across all discussions. It was stressed during the discussions that the main challenge is not that young people are leaving rural areas (as this is a natural process, e.g. to learn and gain education), but rather how to attract them (back) to rural areas. Specific challenges include, the lack of **suitable and attractive employment** opportunities, lack of job prospects and **quality of life** (including transport, health, education and other services), and lack of **education and training** (including entrepreneurship support) were highlighted.

<sup>1</sup> On the 17 November a field visit was organised to ‘Riverland Dairy Bio’ Organic Sheep Farm, that also serves as a recreational area for both young and old (see also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmswxPbPMgw>); Golden Donkeys Farm that offers sightseeing, olive oil and donkey milk testing, donkey rides and various other activities; and the picturesque Lefkara Village.

<sup>2</sup> See boxes on thoughts from experts further down.

<sup>3</sup> See presentations of [Chris Ranford \(Cornwall FLAG, UK\)](#) and of [Geza Gelencser \(Koppany Valley LAG, Hungary\)](#)



### *Thoughts from Maura Farrell (NUI Galway/ Irish NRN) on jobs and employment*

Issues of employment are particularly complex for marginalised members of society with rural youth opting to migrate to urban centres and limited or unsuitable employment for women and migrants. Key issues of concern for social inclusion relate for example to low paid employment, poor services provision especially for youth, unsuitable employment for women and migrants etc. As a result specific groups at risk of social exclusion often opt to migrate to urban centres. Improvements in rural services are of the upmost importance (including broadband, transport, education, childcare, etc.) for employment, job creation and social inclusion.

See also presentation of Maura Farrell on [‘Supporting jobs and employment for social inclusion’](#)

### **b. General lack of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities**

Certain groups (e.g. young people and **women** in rural areas) are particularly impacted by the lack of employment and job opportunities. The **agricultural and farming sector** faces specific challenges in this regard (low income, lack of knowledge/ entrepreneurial skills, lack of continuity in family farming, etc.). The need for **suitable entrepreneurship support**, education and training (including seed funding and project support that allows more risk-taking) were mentioned as key factors that could contribute to better employment in rural areas. The role of **social entrepreneurship** was highlighted as a tool for creating new jobs, boost local economies and strengthening rural communities.



### *Thoughts by Franz Wolfmayr (European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities - EASPD) on people with disabilities & older people*

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities proposed a shift in paradigm: Disability is not seen as a characteristic of a person any more, it is seen as the lack of ability of society to include persons with certain needs. Generally, persons with disabilities and older people are not presented in the work of National Rural Networks. Older people should also be seen as an enormous resource with knowhow, networks and money. **We need to find ways to interconnect older people with youth for the best interest of both groups.**

See also presentation of Franz Wolfmayr on [‘Addressing basic needs in rural areas’](#).

### **c. Weaknesses in local engagement**

Rural areas often face a series of deficiencies in terms of the involvement of local people and communities in identifying key needs, developing strategies and getting involved in the development process. Among the key aspects, the lack of (i) **trust** within local communities and institutions, (ii) a common **vision**, (iii) participation of specific community groups in the **decision-making**, and (iv) community **engagement and spirit** were mentioned by participants.



### *Thoughts from Ali Khan (Open Society Foundation) on community engagement & trust*

Trust is the basis of any strong communities, but it is also one of the major challenges that communities are dealing with. According to a recent survey (2017), trust is in decline in key institutions of government, media, business and NGOs. If this situation is to be overcome, it is important not to dismiss the genuine reluctance and fears of local people (e.g. of migrants and new arrivals) and acknowledge that the standard pro-migration (and similar) arguments do not work and need to be changed. A key issue is therefore framing and communication.

See also presentation of Ali Khan on [‘Strengthening local communities – integrating newcomers’](#).

#### d. Changing the 'image' of rural areas

**Rural areas** are often associated with a negative image of being 'outdated' or 'moving backwards'. If young people and other groups are to be attracted to rural areas, this **image needs to be changed**. For this purpose more innovative, dynamic and interactive communication tools (e.g. story-telling, videos, podcasts) are needed.



#### *Thoughts from Chris Ranford (Cornwall FLAG) on communication & measuring social impact*

Using **social return on investment (SROI)**, we can monitor, evaluate and provide a sound evidence base to present to government, policy-makers, funders and the public the impact of social projects on communities. Having a tool that can ascribe a financial value to a non-financial benefit is a way of getting people to listen. Creative ways of communicating social issues is vital. The more visual the better, such as sharing success and good practice projects with use of video/ film which has much more power for inspiring and spreading positive change.

See also presentation of Chris Ranford on ['Social Return on Investment \(SROI\)'](#)

### Actions and solutions

Based on the wild ideas discussed during Session 2 a set of innovative solutions and actions have been developed by the various groups to address the specific challenges chosen.

#### *Rural Youth Business Accelerator and YouTube Channel*

Through this action, young people would gain access to business accelerator programmes specifically designed for their needs. NRNs and (F)LAGs would raise awareness and include youth entrepreneurship in their strategies. Regional authorities would couple this with appropriate funding. Local enterprises would be channelled in the programme.



#### *You can be a rural superhero*

This idea concerns the identification of local ('common') people in rural areas that can serve as role models for young people. A video (YouTube) series would be prepared to present the journey of these local 'superheroes' with specific focus on how they develop their businesses, what specific challenges they face. Superheroes would be supported on their journey at different stages.

#### *Horse riding as part of smart specialisation*

Through this action, local inhabitants would have preferential access to local leisure activities (such as horse riding). Support would be provided to set up the necessary infrastructure, and develop the activity in an environmentally sustainable manner. The initiative would also contribute to developing the area as a tourist destination (building the brand, tourist routes, etc.). Local residents would be closely involved throughout the process.



#### *Action plan for remote and disadvantaged rural communities in Cyprus*

According to this action a specific (and detailed) action plan would be developed focussing on remote and disadvantaged rural communities in Cyprus. The action plan would be developed step-wise, including needs analysis, identification of key target groups, bringing stakeholders and authorities together, horizontal policy planning and legal adaptation, rural proofing of policies, and prioritisation of actions.

## A positive narrative for rural areas



This action would focus on creating a positive narrative and stories about rural areas. Students, rural entrepreneurs and animators would work with dynamic local communities to develop a community action plan including new entrants, and older people. These relationships would be filmed during the planning and project realisation stages and create 'good news' stories on the positivity of rural areas.

## Next steps in the ENRD Social Inclusion and Demographic Change Work

The event concluded with presenting the action plans (as above) suggestions and perspectives from the four external experts with a view to the future.

Orsolya Frizon-Somogyi (DG AGRI) provided some ideas about the future social inclusion priorities of the European Commission in rural areas. It has been stressed that social inclusion is one of the EU's main objectives and got particular attention with the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights. There is a need for clear targets at the EU level and a performance-based policy. The European Solidarity Corps is a tool that could also contribute to making rural areas attractive for young people and establishing intergenerational links between elderly and young.

Following on these suggestions and the outcomes of the workshop, the next steps in the ENRD's work are:

- **Disseminating outcomes** of the workshop in Cyprus. Among others, NSUs can encourage the take-up of some of the examples of actions through the RDPs.
- **Drawing on the themes and key issues** highlighted during the event, with specific focus on attracting youth to rural areas, improving entrepreneurship culture, the image of rural areas and the use of innovative communication tools, and considering 'forgotten' groups (such as disabled and older people).
- **Exchanging about these subjects** through the online **VIIMA** platform and other forms and tools of communication (e.g. exchanges among members of the **NRN** cluster of migrants).
- Preparing an outlining of a **future ENRD Social Inclusion Workshop (foreseen for Spring 2018)** building on the lessons learnt of this workshop and on-going exchanges among key stakeholders.

## Highlights & Recommendations

Some of the key highlights and recommendations that emerged through the event are:

- **Making rural areas more attractive for young people** and especially entrepreneurs is one of the most important challenges to reverse demographic ageing.
- **Communication** is a crucial aspect; the rhetoric about rural areas needs to be changed, and modern rural policies need modern communication tools (including story-telling, videos, etc).
- **Intergenerational exchange** needs to be improved as a tool for overcoming the generational divide.
- There are important **useful practices out there** (such as the youth umbrella projects in Sweden) that need to be shared, up-scaled and used more widely.
- Addressing social inclusion and demographic change is complex issue that needs to be addressed in an **integrated way** (through a combination of funds, policies and tools). Long-term thinking is needed (as these changes need time).
- **Innovative approaches** need to be supported; social enterprises and social innovation are important tools and mechanisms. Innovation requires flexible support structures and allowing risk-taking.
- It is necessary to work more on **'forgotten' issues**, such as the situation of people with disabilities, older people, migrants (that recently seems to receive less political attention) and areas lagging behind.