

Young people face a number of disadvantages (such as lack of education and training, unemployment, lack of basic services), especially when living in rural areas. Rural Development Programmes and especially LEADER/CLLD can help to overcome these. Some of the most successful initiatives in this regard have been those that were not just carried out for young people but also by young people.

INTRODUCTION

On average one in four young people in Europe is unemployed and this rises to one in two in certain Southern European countries. The risks and consequences of a “lost generation” means that young people are often the key target groups for social inclusion policies.

Although **rural areas are “ageing”** (increasing numbers of older people living in rural areas), statistics show that in comparison to the total population, predominantly rural areas tend to have both more older people and also more young people aged 10-19¹.

Young people in rural areas suffer from significantly higher unemployment rates, with some countries being particularly hit due to the economic crisis. The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) has risen dramatically in rural areas reaching 18.3% in 2014.

Exclusion from labour market participation can be a direct consequence of the **difficulties of young people to access certain services**, in particular education and training as well as infrastructures for mobility. The limited and inappropriate education facilities lead to young people in rural areas having less qualifications than those in urban areas and a greater tendency to abandon studies at an early stage.

Reduced economic and social opportunities for young people in rural areas often lead to the out-migration of the most active and skilled. This depletes the human capital of rural areas still further and makes the position of those left behind even worse. Population losses eventually lead to reduced services (education, health) and consequently limit employment opportunities even further. The situation is often worse for women in rural areas, especially educated young women who cannot easily find employment opportunities. Many have no alternative but to migrate.

Multiple disadvantage of young people is also possible due to gender, ethnicity, social class or disability.



Support through the Rural Development Programmes

One of the six priorities of rural development policy in the current period is to “promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas”. This priority will be implemented through a series of measures which can specifically help young people. They include: the provision of training, support for business creation, measures to help young farmers basic services and village renewal, cooperation and above all LEADER.

Early school leaving was 12.4% in rural areas as opposed to 10% in cities in 2014

In 2014, youth unemployment (15-24 years) was **25%** in Predominantly Rural areas (PR) opposed to 21% in predominantly urban areas.

Youth unemployment in PR areas exceeded **50%** in Greece and Spain.

43% of 15-24 year old in rural areas had secondary or upper secondary qualifications in 2014 as opposed to 46% in urban areas.

6.6% had tertiary qualifications as opposed to 9.3% in urban areas.



¹ Eurostat, “Rural development statistics by rural urban typology”, Eurostat Yearbook 2013

The contribution of LEADER to social inclusion challenges faced by young people

At the most basic level, many of the projects for diversification, job creation and improving the quality of life supported by LEADER also benefit young people. Some LEADER groups have tried to increase the proportion of young people who benefit from these projects by **explicitly prioritising youth in their selection criteria** and procedures.

However, experience shows that, in order to be successful the engagement with young people must start at a very early stage and become an integral part of the partnership and the local development strategy. Innovative examples targeting explicitly the young include **giving voice to young people** as a means to raise awareness of their particular needs and to participate actively in rural life.

Youth activities in Eksdale in Scotland, UK

A Youth Information Centre was created in Eksdale (Scotland), where young people come together and discuss their problems and ideas. The centre was equipped with a volunteer database a platform which allows young people to have a voice in the community. A Youth Development manager to oversee the delivery of the project was also appointed.

Giving voice to young people also means **providing them with the tools for their personal and social development**, such as information technologies. A LEADER project from Denmark offers electronic technology opportunities for the development of music skills. It has also served as a social integration project for young refugees.

Rural young people and music (from secret 'geeks' to visible artists) Denmark

The project established a state-of-the-art multi-media workshop for local young artists and musicians in Toender municipality in Denmark. It was addressed to young people who are interested in being able to use the latest electronic technology. The programme of the workshop activities was advertised to young people on the municipality website and the music school own website and the distribution of information packs. Music has been the means to bring young people together, from music students to refugees from Kenya.

One of the biggest problems in rural areas is often that the **education system** follows standard syllabuses which do not recognise or value the specific skills required for living and working in rural areas. This can lead to high levels of school drop outs. A LEADER Group in Extremadura (Valle del Jerte) is trying to tackle this through an integrated plan of complementary educational and training activities negotiated with parents, teachers and students.

LEADER Groups have also worked with young people to design and **invest in innovative centres and spaces** for young people to carry out their own initiatives. The direct support provided by LEADER in these cases can complement investments made by municipalities using the basic services and village renewal measure. These activities can lead to more complex approaches involving **pathways to employment**.

Another LEADER project from Scotland offers a good example in this respect. It provided personalised support to young people to acquire skills and confidence that may eventually lead to integration in the labour market. Such integrated approaches bring the benefit of reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion by improving skills and labour market prospects.

Connecting with young disadvantaged people in the Okney islands in Scotland, UK

Voluntary Action Okney implemented the 'CONNECT' LEADER project that focused on providing one-to-one, tailored personal and skills development. The project aimed to ensure that young unemployed people gain the confidence, skills and commitment to enable them to successfully move on to the more formal programmes/opportunities offered by partner agencies. CONNECT worked with referrals from several job centres, skills development and social service local organisations. As a consequence, young people gained skills and some managed to obtain employment after a work placement.

LEADER can add value in this respect by **encompassing the whole path of personal development** (from the acquisition of skills to employment) and the context in which young people live (provision of training and education services, advisory support, creating attractive social and cultural environments through meeting places for youth, cultural, recreation, sports and leisure activities).

What can be done at the local level?

- ✓ It is important to **reach out to young people**, to create spaces and activities where they can develop confidence and skills in their own terms.
- ✓ LAGs and other local organisations can help to bridge the generational gap by listening more attentively to young people and ensuring their voices are heard in local partnership strategies.
- ✓ **Local youth coaches combined with umbrella projects** (e.g. in Sweden) have been a highly successful practice. Youth coaches often better understand the needs and 'language' of rural youth, which leads to better engagement.
- ✓ **Young people need to be more involved** in the development of projects (these should be not just for them, but also by them).
- ✓ The legal competences and funds of LAGs are limited and cannot hope to cover all the needs of young people. However, they can support **small scale actions and play an important coordinating role** between the different funds, departments and organisations required for integration.
 - ✓ In this context multi-funded strategies, especially coordination between ESF and EAFRD is important.
- ✓ Change of experience with regard to relevant LEADER practices is crucial; **transnational and inter-territorial cooperation projects** in this area need to be encouraged.

What can be done at the national level?

- ✓ Managing Authorities also have a key role in **unlocking the potential of different measures** (e.g. business creation, young farmers, village renewal and basic services) and policies.
- ✓ Rural networks can facilitate the **exchange of views between key stakeholders**, including policy-makers, LAGs, immigrant organisations and business associations (the Swedish Thematic Group on migrants is a good example).

What can be done at the European level?

- ✓ European-level networks (including the ENRD) can contribute to exchanging about various LAG practices and through this can help to identify good practices that are transferable to other regions.
- ✓ At the same time, European-level exchange can be facilitated between key stakeholders to share views and best practices. For instance, several NRNs have an interest in working on the youth and young farmer themes.