



European Network for  
Rural Development

EN

## PROJECTS BROCHURE

The European Agricultural  
Fund for Rural Development

# VIBRANT RURAL AREAS



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## European Network for Rural Development

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union (EU). The ENRD contributes to the effective implementation of Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) by generating and sharing knowledge, as well as through facilitating information exchange and cooperation across rural Europe.

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Past editions of the EAFRD Projects Brochure can be downloaded from the publications section of the ENRD website <sup>(1)</sup>. The ENRD collection of good projects and practices <sup>(2)</sup> contains many additional examples of EAFRD assistance to rural development initiatives.

<sup>(1)</sup> <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/search>

<sup>(2)</sup> [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice_en)

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# Introduction

**The European countryside offers unique potential in terms of quality of life, typically with cheaper land and housing, more space, cleaner air, and easier access to high quality natural landscapes compared to many parts of urban Europe. Rural areas that combine these natural strengths with adequate services, business development opportunities and inclusive communities are places where individuals and professionals can thrive.**

**Rural areas are constantly facing change, driven by technological, environmental, demographic and political trends affecting society in Europe and globally. While Europe's rural areas are sometimes challenged to retain services, facilities and population, these trends can also create new opportunities for innovative solutions. Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) help rural areas build on their specific circumstances and characteristics to turn challenges into opportunities and become, or remain, attractive places to live and work – even in extreme situations, as the recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown. RDPs can also help make significant contributions to the EU's new Green Deal growth strategy by ensuring that rural areas do not get 'left behind' and by using incentives to promote vibrant sustainable rural areas.**

'Strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas' is one of the three general objectives of the European Commission's proposal for the CAP post-2020. This EAFRD Projects Brochure looks at how RDPs are already contributing to the three main ingredients needed for vibrant rural areas: well-functioning services, dynamic business development opportunities and inclusive communities.

Rural communities cannot exist without the appropriate services and infrastructure to meet residents' needs. Accessibility of services is critical to the well-being of rural residents and the social and economic resilience of communities. The quality of services in key areas like health, education, mobility, energy and digitalisation have a major impact on the quality of life in rural territories.

RDP support can help contribute to the delivery of services in rural Europe. This is particularly important when, in the context of public budget cuts and depopulation, essential services like shops, public transport, banks, health care, schools, youth facilities and post offices close down. In such cases, RDPs can support the development of private businesses or community initiatives which provide rural areas with an alternative form of service provision, or help with the provision or upgrading of basic infrastructure upon which service delivery depends (for example broadband connection).

RDPs can also play a useful role in supporting bottom-up planning, animation, training, technical assistance, piloting and financing of innovative projects for rural service provision – LEADER<sup>(1)</sup> and Smart Villages are well-known examples of this<sup>(2)</sup>. In the recent

(1) For more on LEADER, see the EU Rural Review 29 'LEADER Achievements', [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-29-leader-achievements\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-29-leader-achievements_en) and the LEADER Resources on the ENRD website, [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources_en)

(2) For more about Smart Villages see the ENRD Smart Villages Portal, [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal_en)



COVID-19 crisis, several LEADER Local Actions Groups (LAGs) have taken initiatives to help their rural communities face the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

Community and social vitality rely in particular on the availability of local economic activity and local jobs. Supporting rural employment – whether within the primary sector (farming/forestry) or in the wider rural economy – is a key priority of EU Rural Development policy and can also make a valuable contribution to the overall jobs and growth objectives of the EU by tapping into the growth potential in many rural areas.

Thanks to their proximity to nature and primary production, rural economies are well placed to seize the opportunities offered by emerging economies like the bioeconomy, the green and circular economies as well as the experience economy<sup>(3)</sup>, based on their rich natural heritage and cultural traditions. They can make a major contribution to key EU priorities like the European Green Deal<sup>(4)</sup> and the new 'Farm to Fork'<sup>(5)</sup> strategy for a sustainable food system. The predominance of elderly residents in many rural areas – typically seen as a challenge – can turn into an opportunity for developing the social economy, residential economy and 'silver' economy. Digital services can help overcome traditional challenges for rural businesses and create new forms of proximity to knowledge, markets and relationships.

Social inclusion is key to enable communities to proactively define their needs and identify possible solutions based on local specificities. Inclusive rural

communities ensure that as many people as possible have a voice in the decisions affecting their area and are able to take part in collective actions. Bottom-up approaches like LEADER are one way in which RDPs can help build relationships and trust, responsibility and capacity within the community, involving people of all ages and background, and can help deliver successful investments in facilities, services or businesses.

The three elements underlined above – services, jobs and social inclusion – are deeply intertwined. Improvements in rural services like broadband, transport, health, culture, education and childcare are of upmost importance for employment, job creation and social inclusion.

This edition of the EAFRD Projects Brochure presents EAFRD-supported project from the 2014-2020 RDPs that have successfully improved services, jobs or social inclusion in rural areas – sometimes achieving more than was initially planned. It shows how social objectives can go hand in hand with economic and environmental sustainability and that vibrant rural areas are essential for all, including for farmers and urban citizens. The publication illustrates how RDPs provide both 'hard' and 'soft' support – investing in physical assets and people, as well as offering a framework to involve communities in developing their own strategies for vibrant rural areas.

### The ENRD Contact Point Team

(3) The term 'experience economy' refers to consumers looking to not only buy material products, but to have particular life 'experiences'. For more on this and the opportunities for rural areas, see EU Rural Review 24 'Re-imagining rural business opportunities', [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-24-re-imagining-rural-business-opportunities\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-24-re-imagining-rural-business-opportunities_en)

(4) [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

(5) [https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en)



# 1. Rural Services

**Better quality infrastructure and basic services enhance the daily lives of rural residents and may stimulate new solutions to the underlying challenges faced by rural communities.**

The population in rural areas is normally more dispersed than in urban settlements, which can mean the cost of providing services to individual customers is higher. This often affects the economics for service providers, making them less interested in potential customers in less densely populated areas.

When rural communities decide to join forces to fill gaps in service provision they can achieve critical mass that facilitates investments, and RDPs can help them achieve their objectives. Successful projects can trigger new investments and multiply impacts.

*In rural Germany, five neighbouring communities got together to secure investment, using EAFRD support to bridge the digital divide (page 5).*

*On page 6 you can read how a Croatian village used EAFRD funding to expand its water supply network, ensuring adequate access to water for rural businesses and all inhabitants and in turn triggering further public investments including in neighbouring areas.*

Through investments in basic services, local infrastructure upgrades and support to private service providers, RDPs create more opportunities to offer an accessible and attractive environment for businesses that cater for specific local needs.

*In response to client needs and supported by the RDP, a Romanian laboratory upgraded its business to provide integrated veterinary services 'at the farm gate' (page 8).*

New digital technologies enable social innovation to provide better rural services. They can also improve relationships with urban areas while actively moving towards a greener, healthier and more caring society. Improved access to the Internet enables rural populations to benefit from such technologies and this is a focus of RDP support.

Involving local people in decision-making processes often helps in better defining needs and possible solutions. Services are often best designed by including the rural communities themselves through a bottom-up approach.

*In rural Ireland, support from the RDP via LEADER led to the purchase of a neurological rehabilitation suit thanks to which patients can receive help to walk again in their rural communities (page 10).*

These examples highlight how RDP support can help offset the higher 'cost per head' that hinders investment or stimulate new approaches to delivery of services in rural areas. Such investments improve the economic and social resilience of rural areas.



# Rural Germany on the path to the Gigabit Society

Five rural districts in Germany used EAFRD funding to set up a digital infrastructure company to bridge the digital divide.

Kassel, Schwalm-Eder, Waldeck-Frankenberg, Werra-Meißner and Hersfeld-Rotenburg are five rural districts in the region of north Hessen, central Germany. The area is sparsely populated compared to the German average, with 145 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (the average population density in the country is 235 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>).<sup>(1)</sup>

Despite the municipalities' efforts, in 2014 the districts were below the German average for availability and quality of high-speed broadband connections. This meant a majority of citizens and companies could not take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the information society.

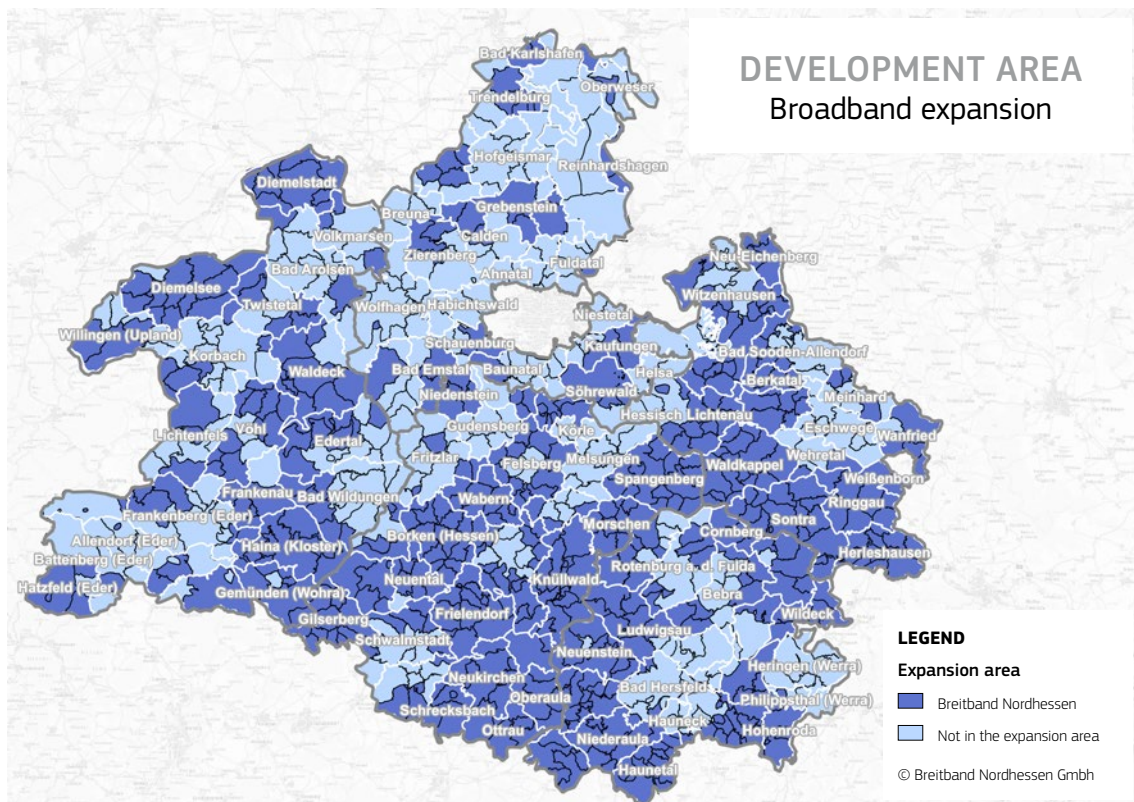
The five districts joined forces to set up the infrastructure company Breitband Nordhessen GmbH (BNG), which then launched two public tenders to appoint the contractor for the construction of the fibre

optic network, Weigand Bau GmbH, and an operator, Netcom Kassel. It then applied for funding under Measure 7 – Basic services and village renewal of the Hessen region's Rural Development Programme (RDP) to co-finance 50% of the costs for the passive infrastructure, including cable conduits, fiberglass and multi-functional boxes. Co-funding from WIBank – the Development Bank in Hessen and the European Investment Bank enabled it to develop a cost- and resource-efficient model which earned it the 2015 European Broadband Award as the best project in the Award category 'cost reduction and co-investment'.

*"Breitband Nordhessen represents a best practice in both the organisational set-up and the efficient financing of a passive fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) network that provides high quality service to rural households and SMEs."*

European Broadband Awards 2015

(1) Source: Eurostat, data on population density (2018), <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00003/default/table?lang=en>



570 villages in 90 municipalities in the North Hesse region have already been connected to the high-speed internet thanks to this project. In addition, Breitband Nordhessen plans expansion to additional areas (dark blue in the map).

© Breitband Nordhessen GmbH



Within three years, the project granted access to high-speed Internet to more than 570 villages in the North Hessen region.

Within three years (October 2016 to November 2019), the project installed a fibre line of 2 200 km with 1 400 multi-functional boxes (MFG). Towns in all five districts gained access to high-speed Internet in April 2017 and today more than 570 villages in 90 municipalities in the North Hessen region are connected to the network.

Further broadband expansion in the region is in the pipeline. BNG is planning to connect 90 regional schools to the new network, which is expected to be funded by a new programme of the Federal Department of Transport and Digital Infrastructure.

This RDP-funded project triggered more digital infrastructure investments in the Hessen region, which is advancing towards the ‘Gigabit Society’ envisaged by the European Commission in its Digital Single Market strategy<sup>(2)</sup>. The company has developed its ‘Gigabit strategy’ to help local municipalities and cities in the region deliver local high-speed Internet networks. The strategy will guide all new network developments in the area, including for housing or industrial areas.

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Breitbandausbau Nordhessen</b>
Type of beneficiary	Public company
Period	2017 – 2020
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 40.9 million</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 20 million</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 20.9 million</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M07 – Basic services and village renewal
Further info	<a href="http://www.breitband-nordhessen.de">www.breitband-nordhessen.de</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:laurier@breitband-nordhessen.de">laurier@breitband-nordhessen.de</a>

(2) <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/content/european-digital-strategy>

## Improving the water supply in a Croatian village

**EAFRD funding improved the public water supply in rural Croatia, triggering further investments which led to better services and a higher quality of life for the inhabitants of the area.**

Reka is a small rural settlement of around 1 500 inhabitants in the county of Koprivnica-Križevci in northern Croatia. It is a dynamic place with an active community, organised around various associations and a football club. Agriculture is the main economic activity, mainly centred on small-scale family farming and often combined with jobs in the nearby city of Koprivnica. Koprivnica is a thriving tourist destination with high living standards and is regarded as a national champion in effective waste management.

As part of a wider plan to improve living conditions in the area around Koprivnica, the municipality decided to complete the public water supply and sewage network in Reka. The network had been built in 1997, but 50 of the 500 households in Reka were not connected to it.

The public water supply company, Koprivničke vode Ltd., applied for funding under Measure 7 – Basic services and village renewal of the Croatian Rural Development Programme (RDP). Thanks to this money, the company built a new 2.3 km pipeline which ensured the last 50 households in Reka had access to the public water supply and sewage network.

The major works involved in a project of this size often create inconvenience for the citizens affected. In this case however, thanks to the local citizens’ council mediation efforts, the inhabitants of Reka collaborated closely with the company (Koprivničke vode Ltd.) during both the construction phase and when directly negotiating the connection points.





© Koprivničke vode d.o.o.

The project improved the public water supply and sewage network in Reka. It also paved the way for another EAFRD-funded project to improve the road connecting two villages, along which the water pipelines run.

*"I am really satisfied with the collaboration between the project promoter and the inhabitants of Reka. All the inhabitants were informed in good time about the works and welcomed their accomplishment with a lot of enthusiasm."*

**Kristinka Mikulić,**  
President of the local citizens' council

The project then triggered more public investments in local infrastructure aimed at improving access to services and living conditions in this rural area.

The City of Koprivnica backed another project to rebuild the NC 017 road connecting Reka to Starigrad, along which the water pipelines run. This

project was also co-funded under Measure 7 – Basic services and village renewal of the Croatian RDP. The road was renovated and a foot path, a bicycle lane and a public lighting system were all added. Residents now enjoy safer and easier access to basic services including a kindergarten, a playground and a post office, as well as schools, churches, community centres and stores.

The works also improved the connections between the NC 017 and the national roads of Koprivnica-Zagreb and Žlebice, a neighbourhood of Reka inhabited by Roma families. A new children's playground will be built in the area

in the near future so as to facilitate contacts between the inhabitants of Žlebice and the rest of the population.

Further extensions of the water supply and sewage network are also planned in other nearby settlements.



© Koprivničke vode d.o.o.

The local inhabitants collaborated closely with the company during the construction works.

*"The construction of the water supply in Reka gave us a true incentive to continue efforts to modernise the water supply system and make it safer. These projects have had positive effects on the quality of life of our users and fellow citizens."*

**Koprivničke vode Ltd. Spokesperson**

Project Name	Construction of the water supply network of the settlement of Reka and Starigrad
Type of beneficiary	Public company
Period	2017
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 88 907</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 71 832</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 12 676</li> <li>• Private: € 4 399</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M07 – Basic services and village renewal
Further info	<a href="http://www.kcvode.hr">www.kcvode.hr</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:sonja.lovrencic@kcvode.hr">sonja.lovrencic@kcvode.hr</a>

## Providing veterinary services 'at the farm gate' in Romania

**A veterinary company used EAFRD funding to purchase a mobile laboratory to offer veterinary services at their clients' premises.**

Veterinary health services are very important for individuals and businesses raising animals and processing, storing and marketing products of animal origin. This is particularly true in rural areas, where these types of activities are often located.

The private company Laborvet started operating in 2009 providing veterinary services in the county of Bacau. It acquired the authorisation for conducting sanitary activities in 2011 and further extended its services to deal with food safety in 2015.

Laborvet's clients are mostly located close to the laboratory and include poultry, pig and pigeon breeders, food production units, animal and non-animal food traders, as well as catering companies, confectioners and shops selling natural health, nutrition and beauty products. Many of these clients were increasingly requesting advice and a quicker diagnosis at their own premises. This service called for a mobile laboratory, yet very few certified veterinary mobile laboratories currently operate in

Romania, as they require specific equipment and trained staff. Mobile laboratories are mainly used



© Laborvet Serv

This private veterinary company used RDP funding to better respond to its clients' needs, expanding its activities.



© Laborvet Serv



This RDP-funded project created new job opportunities for local people.

now qualified to work in the mobile lab. The company now employs nine people.

Laborvet was the first private laboratory in the north-eastern part of Romania to provide veterinary sanitary services. Strategic thinking and good management helped the business adapt to its clients' needs and EAFRD funding was crucial in helping the company diversify its services.

*“Highly recommended! The analyses were performed with great quality and they proposed targeted treatment for the detected bacteria. Thanks, and wishing you much success from now on!”*

**Sorin Iftime,**  
Laborvet client

by the public sector for emergency interventions, epidemics, controls in the field of public nutrition, or for the detection of a possible outbreak of infectious diseases.

To better respond to their clients' needs, in 2016 the Laborvet managers decided to apply for funding from the Romanian Rural Development Programme (RDP), under Sub-Measure 6.4 – Support for investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities.

Thanks to this funding, the company purchased a mobile veterinary laboratory with the necessary equipment for sampling, testing, diagnosing and treating farm animals and pets.

The lab meets European quality standards and allows for the collection and transport in optimum conditions of samples from farms or veterinary offices. Samples are extracted on the spot using appropriate instruments and immediately tested for early diagnosis at the customer's premises. If needed, samples can be delivered to the laboratory for further research and registration in the lab's database. This door to door service allows farmers to save time and money. Laborvet serves farms but also collaborates with veterinary offices across Bacau County.

*“Our services cost three times less than public services, we offer a ‘package’ solution and issue an invoice that farmers do not have to pay on the spot. Analysis results are provided faster than state laboratories. For the detection of pathogenic germs in food and feed we use an automatic method with internationally recognised technology that reduces the time required for analysis from 5 days to 24 hours!”*

**Laborvet spokesperson.**

The RDP funding also led to the creation of jobs for three local people with experience in the field, but who lacked the required certificates. Laborvet trained them in laboratory activities and techniques so that they are

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Integrated veterinary services using a mobile laboratory</b>
Type of beneficiary	Private company
Period	2016 – 2017
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 127 440</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 97 492</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 17 204</li> <li>• Private: € 12 744</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M06 – Supporting farm and business development
Further info	<a href="http://www.laborvet.ro">www.laborvet.ro</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:laborvetserv@yahoo.com">laborvetserv@yahoo.com</a>



## Innovative and accessible rehabilitation services in rural Ireland

**EAFRD funding offered new hope to patients suffering from strokes or spinal cord injuries in rural Ireland, making neurological rehabilitation more inclusive and easily available to local communities.**

Technology is offering new solutions, and new hope, for patients recovering from spinal cord injuries, stroke or brain injuries. Specific equipment, however, is expensive and requires dedicated rehabilitation services, traditionally more accessible in urban centres.

A robotic exoskeleton, for example, is a special type of equipment enabling patients to improve their ability to stand and walk by taking an increasing

number of steps with the appropriate weight shift. It is extremely expensive. The not-for-profit organisation No Barriers Foundation, in Letterkenny Co. Donegal offers patients from their local rural areas a chance to follow rehabilitation protocols in their own community. When it decided to purchase a robotic exoskeleton, the Foundation looked at LEADER for potential support via Donegal Local Development.



© No Barriers Foundation

Thanks to RDP funding, the No Barriers Foundation is able to provide this service at €30-60 per session. This below market price makes the service more inclusive, with the added value that rural patients can follow rehabilitation close to home.

© No Barriers Foundation



As of February 2020, over 40 wheelchair-using patients had access to the exoskeleton through the project's pilot scheme.

The Foundation formed a number of subcommittees, including a fundraising committee. In December 2016, it launched a fundraising campaign called 'Positive Steps', which mobilised the local community and raised 25 % of the total costs of an Ekso Bionics Robotic Exoskeleton. This amount complemented funding from Measure 19 of the Irish Rural Development Programme (RDP).

The Foundation also formed a service provision committee, which included physiotherapists, occupational therapists and a local General Practitioner (GP), to oversee the service roll out. Some of the RDP funding was used to pay Ekso Bionics – the company producing the exoskeleton – to train the four chartered physiotherapists to provide the service in Donegal starting in 2018.

GPs, hospital consultants, community nurses and other relevant stakeholders were asked to refer patients needing the machine to the Foundation. Within three months of the launch of the referral scheme in January 2019, the machine was being used at full capacity (30 sessions per week).

The exoskeleton is one of only three accessible to the public in Ireland and one of only 300 worldwide. Neither private healthcare providers nor the public Health Service Executive (HSE) would be able provide such a service. Thanks to RDP funding, the No Barriers Foundation is able to provide this service at € 30-60 per session, depending on the duration of the session. This below market price makes the service more inclusive, with the added value that rural patients can follow rehabilitation close to home.

*“The Ekso Bionics Exoskeleton project is very innovative because it is the first time such high-tech equipment is available in our LEADER area.”*

**Frank Kelly,**  
Donegal Local Development

The service is now financially self-sustaining and employs two full-time staff and four part-time contractors, who work for the project as required.

Since the start of the project, the Foundation has worked to raise awareness about the project and the availability of the machine for those who need it via a media campaign, educational seminars and participation in conferences. A wheelchair accessible vehicle helps transport the exoskeleton equipment throughout the north-west of Ireland.

As of February 2020, over 40 wheelchair-using patients had access to the exoskeleton through the project's pilot scheme. With its help, patients within the rural community of Donegal have taken a total of 950 000 steps.

This is the first project of its kind in Ireland and could be used as a template for further projects. The No Barriers Foundation staff believes it can be replicated with the right team in place, the support of communities and sufficient funding. Plans for the future include further trialling the outreach of the service, hiring additional full-time staff, offering psychological services to patients and additional group exercise classes.

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Purchase of exoskeleton bionic rehabilitation suit</b>
Type of beneficiary	NGO
Period	2018
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 161 380</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 121 035</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 40 345</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M19 – LEADER/CLLD
Further info	<a href="http://www.nobarriers.ie">www.nobarriers.ie</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:johnnyloughrey2000@yahoo.co.uk">johnnyloughrey2000@yahoo.co.uk</a>

# 2. Rural Employment

Rural areas often provide a healthier business environment alongside lower costs, such as for land and office space. However, rural businesses may be limited by geography, demography and access to skilled labour, infrastructure and other resources. Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) can help turn such challenges into opportunities and, by helping to make the local business environment more attractive and sustainable, can in turn promote rural jobs.

The Internet and other digital technologies are creating new opportunities for rural businesses and entrepreneurs, as are new emerging sectors like the green, bio, experience and residential economies<sup>(1)</sup>. In addition to new opportunities for providing goods and services, digital technologies also enable new sources of finance, such as crowdfunding.

Combining these opportunities and alternative sources of finance can lead to business development. This means there is significant potential for increasing the viability of current jobs, creating new ones and attracting people – including young people – to live and work in rural areas.

*In France, a group of 11 agronomists set up a collective farm using a creative combination of funding sources, including the EAFRD (page 13).*

Businesses in rural areas are not all linked to agriculture. Rural communities both produce and use a wide range of goods and services. Sometimes even traditional businesses may need RDP support when looking to expand.

*On page 14 you can read how a Slovak bakery successfully used EAFRD funding to expand and strengthen its business.*

Regional business potential and local entrepreneurship can also benefit from a network where businesses get together to support each other.

*An example from rural Austria is presented on page 16, showing how a network of businesses is boosting local employment.*

RDPs, and particularly the LEADER method, enable local communities to design solutions to local challenges. These solutions can often have multiple positive effects, for example setting up services which create new employment opportunities but also help make communities more inclusive.

*A rural community in Lithuania used LEADER multi-funding to convert an abandoned building into a home for the elderly, creating new jobs and a service that benefits the whole community (page 18).*

These examples highlight some of the diverse ways RDP support can help maintain existing jobs and create new employment opportunities in rural areas. This adds to the attraction of living and working outside major urban areas, helping sustain rural communities and even helping them grow, which in turn makes such areas a more attractive market for large and small private service providers.

(1) The residential economy looks at strategies that make a place attractive for new residents, in turn creating advantages for the local economy. For definitions of different types of economies in rural areas, see EU Rural Review 24 'Re-imagining Rural Business Opportunities', [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-24-re-imagining-rural-business-opportunities\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-24-re-imagining-rural-business-opportunities_en)





# Setting up a collective organic farm in France

A group of young agronomists used EAFRD funding to set up a collective organic farm where they live and work. Hard work, passion and creativity make this project a successful rural business story.



© La Tournerie

Working together has many advantages but it can also sometimes prove difficult. The collective at La Tournerie uses creative thinking to solve practical challenges.

In 2012, a group of ten young agronomists who had studied together at Lille's Higher Institute of Agriculture decided to farm and live together. Some were interested in market gardening or livestock breeding, while others wanted to make bread, cheese and beer. Most members of the group grew up in towns and few of them had parents who were farmers. One leitmotif they all agreed on was: working together should lead to a better quality of life than working alone.

Looking for inspiration, in 2013 the group visited a collective farm in Mayenne, north-west France. The farm's collective organisation was based on shared skills and on-call staffing at week-ends, ensuring that everyone can be replaced at a moment's notice. This model demonstrated that a good work-life balance can be achieved, even on a farm, and this convinced the group to start their own project.

*"We were all used to a family life with holidays, week-ends off and parents who had time for us. We wanted to make agriculture our business without sacrificing everything for our job. With this collective, the idea was to have a professional activity while also having some leisure time – which is generally impossible in conventional farming."*

**Pierre David, Baker,**  
co-founder of La Tournerie

Two members of the group set up a 'base camp' in a small farmhouse and were soon joined by the rest of the group. The idea of a collective farm started to take shape.

The group received training from the Chamber of Agriculture and successfully applied for funding from Measure 6 – Farm and business development of the French National Framework Rural Development Programme (RDP). Each member of the group also received €22 400 from the national 'Dotation Jeunes Agriculteurs' ('Young farmers' set-up'), which is provided to young people (under 40 y.o.) who set up as farm managers for the first time.

The group creatively bypassed the main obstacle to farm business start-ups, namely access to land. They received help from Terres de Liens, an NGO which buys land in danger of losing its agricultural use and leases it to farmers committed to local, organic and human-scale farming. Combining different sources of funding with a crowdfunding exercise, the group bought La Tournerie and its 83 hectares of land from the owners who were about to retire.

The collective farm began its activities in 2015. Four hectares of land are allocated to organic market gardening and include 4 500m<sup>2</sup> of greenhouses. In addition to pigs, there are dairy cows and goats, a craft cheese dairy and 20 hectares dedicated to organic cereals to provide the raw material for producing bread, beer and feedstuff for the pigs.

The farm produces seasonal fruits and vegetables, various dairy products including cheese, sourdough bread, craft beer and pork meat. While the production volumes were modest at the beginning, the collective model of the diversified farm meant it was able to reach its full production capacity within two years.

In June 2015, the farm collective was officially approved as a *Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation*



© La Tournerie

With its organic products, shop and community café, La Tournerie brings a breath of fresh air to the surrounding villages.

*en Commun* (GAEC). This is a type of agricultural civil society group originally designed to allow the joint exercise of agriculture under conditions comparable to those existing on family farms. The principle of this partnership is that members work together, sell the common production and are paid at least equal to the national minimum wage.

Working together has many advantages but it can also sometimes prove difficult. The collective at La Tournerie used creative thinking to solve challenges such as assigning tasks, sharing spaces and pooling revenues, continuously trying out different approaches and creating new ones.

At the farm, weekly group meetings begin with a ‘mood tour’ to measure the pulse of the collective, and philosophical meetings are held to discuss serious issues without the pressure to take a decision. Without aiming for consensus, these opportunities for formal exchanges bring out new questions and nourish individual thinking about the direction of the project.

La Tournerie is now a thriving rural business success story. It opened a shop on its premises, as well as a community café (*café associatif*) where the members

sell their own beer and organise regular concerts. In a rapidly depopulating region, La Tournerie brings a breath of fresh air to the surrounding villages. Its business model, developed with RDP support, can be held up as an example for other budding farmers keen on working in agriculture across Europe’s depopulating regions.

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>La Tournerie</b>
Type of beneficiary	Collective farming grouping (in French: <i>Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun – GAEC</i> )
Period	2015 – 2017
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: €563 000</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: €224 000</li> <li>• National/regional funding: €339 000</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M06 – Farm and business development
Further info	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Vendredisfestifs/">https://www.facebook.com/Vendredisfestifs/</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:thomas.gibert@hotmail.fr">thomas.gibert@hotmail.fr</a>

## Making Slovak locally-produced bread more competitive

**Thanks to EAFRD funding, a bakery located in a Slovak village expanded its production of high-quality bread and pastries, creating new jobs and improving its energy efficiency in the process.**

Ján Bobro founded his bakery in Hriňová, central Slovakia, in 1998. The bakery employed six people who produced several types of home-made bread and traditional pastries.

The quality of the production earned the bakery many customers including shops from nearby villages, as well as guesthouses and hotels in the surrounding Podpolanie mountain region.

The business was so successful that it gradually increased and diversified its production, employing up to 46 people full-time in the busiest periods of the year. Nevertheless, like many local businesses, Bakery Hriňová had to compete with big retailers and supermarket chains who sell cheap frozen bakery products.

In 2016, Ján Bobro decided to invest in modernising and innovating his equipment to increase the production capacity and competitiveness of his business while maintaining its high quality standards. Measure 4 – Investments in physical assets of the

Slovak Rural Development Programme (RDP) offered a valuable opportunity for the development of this local business.

Ján Bobro used the funding to renovate and extend the bakery’s premises, and to purchase new machines and equipment. The project was prepared carefully with the help of an architect and a local construction company was selected via a public procurement procedure.

The construction works lasted around 12 months and extended the production area from 593 to 1 541 m<sup>2</sup>. The building now also has a larger dispatching and storage area.

Eleven new machines were purchased, including new ovens, a rolling machine and a semi-automatic machine to make doughnuts. The new equipment has modernised the production process, making the employees work easier, improving the quality of the products and increasing production volumes.



© Bakery Hriňová

This RDP-funded project created 13 new full-time jobs over three years. The annual turnover of this rural business went from € 1.8m in 2017 to € 2.3m in 2019.

The bakery also installed a new heat recovery device helping to reduce energy costs by about 20%.

Thanks to the project, the four new jobs initially created increased to 13 new full-time jobs over three years. Bakery Hriňová now employs 59 people working full-time, with six additional part-time people in the busiest periods.

The bakery produces 2 tonnes of products per day and offers between 60 and 70 different products. The bakery is open from Monday to Saturday and employees work according to a three-shift system.

Sales increased rapidly and the annual turnover went from € 1.8m in 2017 to € 2.3m in 2019.

*“Without the EAFRD support, this investment would have taken us 10-15 years and we would have not been able to extend our production on such a scale. EAFRD funding enabled us to expand in a couple of years. It was a precious help!”*

**Ján Bobro,**  
owner of Bakery Hriňová

Bakery Hriňová has opened seven new shops and serves many grocery stores and restaurants in the region as well as cooperatives and big retailers like the supermarket chain BILLA. They plan to continue to serve clients in their region so as to guarantee the freshness of their products and control the distribution costs.

Project Name	<b>Bakery Hriňová – Investments to increase the competitiveness of a bakery business</b>
Type of beneficiary	Private company
Period	2016 – 2017
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 1 992 842</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 822 047</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 274 016</li> <li>• Private: € 896 779</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M04 – Investments in physical assets
Further info	<a href="http://www.pekarenhrinova.sk">www.pekarenhrinova.sk</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:pekaren@pekarenhrinova.sk">pekaren@pekarenhrinova.sk</a>



## Networking boosts local businesses and jobs in rural Austria

**A LEADER project in Austria demonstrates how structured collaborations and networking among businesses can promote innovation, creativity and (youth) entrepreneurship, boosting the economic vitality of rural areas.**

Murtal is a district of the state of Styria in south-east Austria which hosts many local businesses in different sectors. In 2009 the private company Industrie und Wirtschaftsentwicklung Murtal Murau GmbH, based in Graz, used LEADER funding to set up a network of ten local businesses called Kraft. Das Murtal ('Strong districts of Murau and Murtal'). The network fostered the exchange of experience in the fields of human resources development as well as economic cooperation and partnerships between businesses and with local stakeholders.

When the time came to take Kraft. Das Murtal a step further, LEADER proved to be, once again, the ideal method. The two LAGs Holzwelt Murau and innovationsRegion Murtal, both based in Upper Styria, joined forces and helped the network to expand using funding from Measure 19 - LEADER of the Austrian Rural Development Programme (RDP).

Between 2016 and 2018, Kraft. Das Murtal expanded its structure with the aim of accelerating and intensifying regional cooperation within the local business community, strengthening the regional and social responsibility of local companies and promoting employment in the region.

The project formalised a network of local businesses, including individual entrepreneurs, SMEs and bigger companies. To date, over 80 companies are active in the network, with a total of almost 7 000 employees.

The project facilitates networking among businesses across different economic sectors, ranging from craftsmanship to services, research and development. Through formal and informal exchanges, companies share good practices, discuss environmental, economic and social sustainability and support new business ideas. 'Tutors' selected from the participating companies take responsibility for specific projects



© Kraft. Das Murtal

One of the objectives of the project is to motivate young people to stay in the region.



© Kraft, Das Murtal

Young employees working for the companies involved in the network were asked to contribute ideas for activities. This has encouraged creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly among younger workers.

to be developed by the network. This mentoring has proven to be a success factor.

The businesses are investing in social responsibility and in their employees' well-being by, for example, setting up an online platform promoting health and well-being at work.

The project organises training activities and supports local youth employment. For instance, 20 companies organise biannual job days to recruit potential new employees.

The project helps businesses connect with citizens, particularly through activities organised in schools and universities. Every year, Kraft. Das Murtal reaches out to 1 500 students and 200 teachers, as well as the general public. It also interacts with the public administration and policy-makers and promotes regional development by helping mediate the diverse interests of local stakeholders.

Kraft. Das Murtal collaborated with the LAGs to design a regional development strategy which is part of the LAG's Local Development Strategy and identifies local needs and ways for local businesses to address them. The project engages and coordinates regional stakeholders in developing activities in the fields of education, infrastructure, economic activities and the environment.

One of the objectives of the project is to motivate young people into staying in the region. It does this by helping young people find a job, creating awareness

of the local strengths and job opportunities in the region and improving the image of regional companies as attractive employers. Young employees working for the companies involved in the network were asked to contribute ideas for activities including a business ideas contest. This has encouraged creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly among younger workers, in helping create new businesses and develop existing ones. By increasing regional business cooperation the network has created an added value for the region.

*"Without our many activities, the exodus of young people to urban areas would be much higher."*

**Florian Hamper,**  
Kraft. Das Murtal Deputy Spokeperson.

Project Name	<b>Kraft. Das Murtal – A network among businesses in the West Upper Styria</b>
Type of beneficiary	Private company
Period	2016 – 2018
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 465 340</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 148 909</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 37 227</li> <li>• Private: € 279 204</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M19 – LEADER
Further info	<a href="https://kraft.dasmurtal.at/de/index.asp">https://kraft.dasmurtal.at/de/index.asp</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:kraft@dasmurtal.at">kraft@dasmurtal.at</a>

## Social employment in the Lithuanian countryside

**A Lithuanian rural community used LEADER to address the problem of declining social services while also creating a social employment success story.**

A wide range of new job opportunities can be created in rural Europe's social economy.

Like many rural areas in Europe, the area surrounding Kaunas, central Lithuania, is confronted with the outmigration of young people. The ensuing problems include the need to care for the elderly and the closing of schools and other public services.

The community clearly felt the need for a home for the elderly and had the idea of converting an old school, which had been closed for several years, into a care home. They then went to Kaunas region's LAG to ask for support.

*"Due to the high level of outmigration, there are not enough young people living here who can care for their elders. So that is why we wanted to convert an old closed school into a home for the elderly. Carrying out the project will increase the quality of life of the locals."*

**Virginija Petrauskienė,**  
Project Manager

Kaunas region's Local Action Group (LAG) worked with the community to design a LEADER project. They discussed with the municipality of Kaunas, which decided to set up a new nursing home for senior citizens. The LAG helped the community to work with the municipality to get funding and permissions.

The EAFRD funding was used to undertake renovation works to modernise the exterior of the building and to purchase and install some essential equipment, including a wheelchair-accessible lift connecting the ground and the first floor, a mobile bathtub and medical furniture.

The financial help provided by LEADER and the Kaunas municipality also allowed the project to install solar panels to heat the water, add insulation and replace windows. Alongside the LEADER project, separate ERDF funding covered the costs related to renovating most of the interior of the building.



Kaunas region's Local Action Group (LAG) worked with the community to design a LEADER project, and helped the community to work with the municipality to get funding and permissions.





© Edmundas Mališauskas - Kaunas District Municipality

The main beneficiaries will be the senior citizens hosted in the care home and their friends and family who will be able to go and spend time with them.

The new centre offers 30 dedicated accommodation places for the elderly and has created 18 full-time jobs for locals. These jobs are varied and one of the roles of the new staff will be to involve the elderly residents in rural community life. The project holders believe that 400 people will benefit either directly or indirectly from this project. The main beneficiaries will be the senior citizens hosted in the care home and their friends and family who will be able to go and spend time with them. Neighbours and other community members will be able to use the community services and participate in activities or festivals that will take place in the building.

As the project manager Virginija Petrauskienė explained, the plan was from the outset to not only look after the elderly, but also to, “allow the community to connect with our residents’ lives”. In this way the residents will continue to be part of the community and will not feel isolated.

*“LEADER is one of the key measures which offers the possibility of implementing social projects with all sectors of society contributing solutions to local problems.”*

**Ilona Javičienė,**  
national LEADER coordinator  
at the Ministry of Agriculture

This project, where LEADER helps coordinate support to help a community achieve its bottom-up proposals, demonstrates how innovations in the social economy can boost rural employment.

Project Name	Renovation of the building located at Knygnešio P. Varkalos street 26, Girininkai village
Type of beneficiary	Public body
Period	2019 – 2021
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 230 000</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 156 400</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 27 600</li> <li>• Private: € 46 000</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M19 – LEADER
Further info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Personal-Blog/Roku-Gerove-320695738396862/">https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Personal-Blog/Roku-Gerove-320695738396862/</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://kaunorvg.lt/en">http://kaunorvg.lt/en</a></li> </ul>
Contact	<a href="mailto:roku.gerove@gmail.com">roku.gerove@gmail.com</a>

# 3. Inclusive Rural Communities

**Social inclusion is a long-term process that aims to make all groups of people in a community feel valued and important. It requires responding to diverse needs in society and supporting and integrating vulnerable groups such as youth, women, migrants, the disabled and the elderly.**

**Many successful projects are the result of multiple stakeholders combining their abilities – and using support from Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) – to address common needs.**

Communities can encourage collective action to identify and seize opportunities that improve the living conditions in their areas. RDPs, and particularly LEADER, can help identify specific needs at local level, address these through well-targeted measures and link stakeholders to ensure more effective solutions.

RDPs can support activities like social farming which use agriculture as a means to counter the isolation of vulnerable groups. Such projects also offer farmers interesting opportunities for income diversification.

*Page 21 details how a care farm in Wallonia, Belgium, is successfully using RDP funding to foster the social rehabilitation of vulnerable people, while also exploring opportunities for farm diversification.*

An unfavourable demographic situation and a weaker labour market can be specific disadvantages for rural areas. One way of addressing these challenges is to encourage young people to live and work in these areas.

*An RDP-supported project in Spain (page 22) is working to bring youth back to Spain's rural areas.*

The partnership approach and ongoing communication and exchange among key stakeholders is essential. In addition to communicating when establishing a project, continuous dialogue between stakeholders can also be integral to its ongoing success, particularly in the case of projects that 'connect the dots' between social inclusion and other economic and environmental objectives.

*A social farm in the Netherlands is using the Dutch RDP to stimulate local food production and food waste reduction and is working to raise the awareness of its local stakeholders (page 24).*

The goal of inclusive rural communities requires responding to a variety of needs, including integrating diverse and vulnerable groups. Supporting the integration of migrants is a way to seize the opportunity that this generally vulnerable group can bring to combat rural depopulation.

*Page 26 shows an example of LEADER transnational cooperation supporting the exchange of good practices on integrating migrants in rural areas across the EU.*

There are substantial advantages to inclusive rural communities, especially when these provide opportunities and employment while addressing local challenges. Inclusive and attractive rural areas are vibrant places to live and work in, and RDPs are contributing to creating them.



# Including vulnerable people through social farming in Belgium

**An EAFRD-funded project in rural Wallonia, Belgium, has achieved remarkable social inclusion results and is paving the way for a wider recognition of the benefits of social farming.**

The Centre Hospitalier L'Accueil in Lierneux, near Liège, has been helping to reintegrate patients with mental health issues into the community for over 130 years. In February 2017 it decided to take advantage of its rural setting to launch the project 'Positive Agritude' with funding from Sub-Measure 16.9 of the Walloon Rural Development Programme (RDP), which supports the diversification of agricultural and forestry activities into the health sector.

Through the project, the hospital offers patients suffering from addictions, psychosis, depression or learning difficulties an opportunity to volunteer for five hours per week on one of the 26 nearby partner farms.

The main goal of the programme is social reinsertion: giving a role to vulnerable people makes them feel better about themselves and encourages social interaction. Through feeding animals, maintaining the vegetable garden, repairing a fence or trimming a hedge, participants come in to contact with nature, create friendships, feel useful and (re)gain confidence.

The partnership always starts on a voluntary basis for both parties. An adaptation phase is necessary to assess whether the pair work well together. If necessary, it can be stopped at any time at the request of either party.

Thanks to RDP funding, the hospital was able to recruit two full-time supervisors: an occupational therapist and a project manager. They are in charge of liaising between the farmers and the patients, monitoring the support to the patients and developing the network.

There are currently 23 patients (21 men and two women) participating in the programme.

The initiative is rewarding for both patients and farmers. Living according to the rhythm of the land and the animals with a stable schedule of activities and a structure to the week can be a source of well-being for everyone. For vulnerable people it is especially beneficial.

*"The positive effect of getting back to basics and to nature is instantly apparent. The patients come out of their shell and speak more. They are glad to get out of the hospital, far from the constant surveillance of doctors and to create bonds with the farmer and his family but also with the animals."*

**Manon Bernier,**  
Project Manager



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Positive Agritude is one of 15 pilot projects launched by Wallonia's Rural Development Network to support social farming.

As physical well-being sets in patients start to rely less on medication and suffer from fewer psychotic episodes and headaches. Some lose weight, others cut down on smoking. In some cases, the therapeutic benefits are such that patients leave the hospital for good and some can even find a job, although this is not the main objective of the programme.

The hospital also benefits from the weekly farm visits as patients spend quality time outside the institution, which frees up time for the social workers. Patients taking part in the programme need less medication, require less hospitalisation time and tend to make a better and faster recovery.

In addition to the benefits for the patients, there is a positive upshot for the farmers too. Taking on a temporary assistant not only alleviates the workload and some of the solitude of farm life, it also provides an opportunity for them to talk and explain their work to someone. They also rediscover their social role.



*"It is rewarding to pass on knowledge. A woman farmer once confided that it had become routine for her to feed the calves. It was by explaining how to do it that she realised how much she enjoyed doing it".*

**Manon Bernier,**  
Project Manager

Positive Agritude is one of 15 pilot projects launched by Wallonia's Rural Development Network under RDP Sub-Measure 16.9, concerning diversification and social farming. This measure supports farmers, foresters or local environmental associations with relevant experience willing to host vulnerable people and foster their integration in the community through practical experiences. The host benefits from guidance provided by the public social services.

Social farming is seen as an innovative and sustainable way of diversifying agricultural activities, while contributing to the overall objective of social inclusion of vulnerable groups. The idea is that any farmer wishing to develop a partnership of this kind would be legally recognised and given a specific status, so as to be able to gain income from their involvement.

Three years into the project and following some impressive results, the Positive Agritude team is now aiming to increase its number of participants by looking beyond the hospital's walls. A partnership has

been set up with a team 'on the road' which provides home-based care to people who have mental health or addiction issues but are not hospitalised. These patients might be more autonomous but they still suffer from social isolation and would benefit from being better integrated in the community.

*"We are working on bridges between hospitals, vulnerable people and real life. A better integration of vulnerable people in the community is a win-win situation for everyone."*

**Clementine Ransy,**  
Project Manager

Project Name	<b>Positive Agritude - a rural network for the social rehabilitation of vulnerable people</b>
Type of beneficiary	Public hospital
Period	2017 – 2019
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 491 500</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 258 037</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 233 463</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M16 – Cooperation
Further info	<a href="http://www.isosl.be/communication/press.aspx">www.isosl.be/communication/press.aspx</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:f.dehareng@isosl.be">f.dehareng@isosl.be</a>

## Bringing youth back to Spain's rural areas

**In its bid to support youth employment in Spain's rural areas, a LEADER project has created various tools and activities to encourage young talents to return to their local areas after completing their studies.**

Spain is among the European countries most affected by rural depopulation. The country is using its regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) to promote professional and personal development opportunities for young people – and society as a whole – in rural areas. In line with these efforts, under the current regional RDP of Catalonia, young people are a priority in all Catalan Local Action Groups' (LAGs') Local Development Strategies (LDS).

In 2017, the Consorci GAL Alt Urgell-Cerdanya, a consortium of 13 LAGs, municipalities and associations in Catalonia, used funding from Sub-Measure 19.3 – LEADER cooperation activities of the Catalan RDP to set up the 'Odysseu' project. Odysseus was a

legendary Greek king who, after fighting in the Trojan war, endured ten years of trials and adventures before finally going home to Ithaca. Odysseus' story echoes the (less dramatic) situation of young people from a rural setting who go to study in cities then find it hard to return home due to a lack of employment opportunities.

The objectives of the project included promoting the return of young people to rural areas and their professional integration by supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship.

In the space of one year, the project developed various sets of actions to target different population

groups: young people still living in rural areas, young people who have left to study or work in urban areas, local businesses, a broader audience interested in moving (back) to rural areas and local farmers. Most activities were set up with a view to them continuing also beyond the project period. Workshops in schools, support to youth entrepreneurship, networking sessions, info days and visits to local companies were among the activities aimed at reaching high-school students and youth in professional training in the area. Over 2 000 participants were involved and received information about the innovative businesses in their area as well as successful cases of people returning to rural areas.

Through questionnaires and interviews, the project gained an insight into what incentives would be needed for young people who have left to study or work in urban areas to return to rural areas. Interviews were often carried out at train stations during people's Sunday journeys back to the city and were also aimed at testing and increasing their knowledge of employment opportunities and advisory services available in the region. The results were used to develop further activities under 'Odisseu'.

The project developed tools to address the gap between companies, i.e. potential employers, and universities with their large pool of young local talents. Solutions included the internship programme 'Odisseu Practicum' and the online platform 'Retorna'.

The former is a paid internship programme for university students to work in local companies with the students' wage shared equally between the programme and the host companies. The number of businesses participating in the programme increased from 11 in 2017 (first edition) to 112 in 2019 and over 170 young people have already benefited from the paid internships. For each edition, between 12% and 25% of the participants got at least a

one-year contract with the host companies following the internship.

The online platform 'Retorna' ('Come back') helps companies in rural areas to employ local talents by connecting them with young professionals (under 40 years old). Over 360 people – mostly women – have registered with the platform since 2016 and at least 20 local companies have subscribed to a service whereby they receive alerts if a user's profile matches one of their job offers.

To respond to the needs of people willing to move (back) to rural areas, the project developed 'Viure Rural' ('Rural living'), an online mapping of over 1 000 local services and opportunities in the fields of employment, education, health, housing, sports, culture, leisure, environment and mobility.

*"The increasing interest in rural areas makes the territory more proactive and proud of all the resources it has to offer."*

**Odisseu spokesperson**

Finally, 'Odisseu' carried out a study on new entrants in the field of agriculture in Catalonia. It was used to define challenges and proposals to promote generational renewal in agriculture and to fine-tune other project activities.

The online tools developed by the project and the internship programme continue to deliver results, including fostering entrepreneurship and improving the employability of young people as well as their engagement with their rural territory of origin.



© Odisseu

This EAFRD-funded project targets young people from a rural setting who go to study in cities and can find it hard to return home due to a lack of employment opportunities.

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Odisseu</b>
Type of beneficiary	LAGs, municipalities and associations
Period	2017
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 100 214</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 43 092</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 57 122</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M19 – LEADER/CLLD
Further info	<a href="http://www.odisseujove.cat">www.odisseujove.cat</a>
Contact	<a href="mailto:info@odisseujove.cat">info@odisseujove.cat</a>

## Zero-waste social farming in the Netherlands

**In the Dutch countryside, an EAFRD-funded project connects social farming, support to local food production and food waste reduction.**

De Laarhoeve is a private social farm founded some 20 years ago by Judy Kerkhofs in Diessen, southern Netherlands. The farm's aim is to employ people with mental health issues and provide them with a familiar and safe environment so they can enter the labour market while working to the best of their abilities. Employees are trained and supported to develop their full potential and the farm is open to the public to encourage communication between its employees and clients coming to shop.

Like other social farms, De Laarhoeve abounds with success stories of people whose medical conditions improved thanks to their work on the farm. Positive results include less stress, fewer behavioural problems and, in some cases, less need for medication. The farm employs 11 people with special needs, but who are nonetheless capable of working and who come to the farm via healthcare institutions or the local municipality.

Over the last few years the farm has been processing agricultural products – mainly fruits and vegetables from its premises or from nearby farms – which are not suitable for the market because of their shape, colour, ripeness, or quality. This avoids wasting food and allows for the small-scale production of sauces and jams.

In 2016, De Laarhoeve's owners decided to increase the farm's capacity to handle lower-quality fruits and vegetables and transform these into processed products (jam, soup, chutney or ragout) for sale at the farm's premises.

The farm joined forces with three local agricultural producers: cherry producer Akkerbouwbedrijf Verschuure CV, organic tomato producer Aldo BV and egg producer Cooperatie Heibloem. A network of local farmers, ZLTO (formally an NGO) and an educational institution Helicon were also part of the project (Helicon later quit and was replaced by the HAS University of Applied Sciences in 's-Hertogenbosch).

Funding from Sub-Measure 16.1 – Establishing EIP-AGRI Operational Groups of the Dutch Rural Development Programme (RDP) allowed the project promoter and its partners to design and build a high-tech food processing line. This EIP Operational Group also set up a state-of-the-art kitchen, with the equipment chosen based on safety concerns for the staff.

There were some challenges in the implementation of the project, including some delays in the payments, which slowed down the whole process and required additional administrative work. However, production at De Laarhoeve has already increased and consists of three types of activities.



© De Laarhoeve

The farm employs 11 people with special needs, who are also involved in the processing of agricultural products.





© De Laarhoeve

Thanks for RDPs, this project connects social farming, support to local food production and food waste reduction.

The farm processes its own agricultural produce and sells this to local shops. Local producers also bring their products which are not suitable for the market (cherries for example) to be processed and packaged at De Laarhoeve. Once this is done, the producers take the products (cherry jam for example) back to sell under their own label. De Laarhoeve currently serves 16 local agricultural companies. The farm also produces on behalf of other clients (local hospitality suppliers for example) and always uses local or regional products.

The farm works mostly with farmers located in the southern part of the Netherlands (Noord Brabant, Limburg, Zeeland, Gelderland) and is looking at attracting more nearby farmers to collaborate with them. The goal is to use the farm's equipment and employ staff at their full capacity so as to make the project financially sustainable.

De Laarhoeve currently employs 13 persons but wants to grow to up to 35 employees. It also aims to involve more logistics providers, retailers and educational organisations to set up a robust network striving to reduce food waste – a goal very much in line with the EU's Bioeconomy Strategy and the objectives of the EU's Green Deal.

*"The biggest impact of working on the farm for people with mental health issues is that they have a goal, they can make themselves useful to society. They are quieter and more at peace at home and enjoy personal development. In some cases, even the use of medication has decreased."*

**Judy Kerkhofs,**  
founder of De Laarhoeve

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Social farming and product innovation</b>
Type of beneficiary	Private company
Period	2016 – 2019
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 529 378</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 117 412</li> <li>• National/regional funding: € 117 412</li> <li>• Private funding: € 294 554</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M16 – Cooperation
Further info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.delaarhoeve.nl">www.delaarhoeve.nl</a></li> <li>• <a href="https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/proeftuin-innovatie-streekproducten-brabant">https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/proeftuin-innovatie-streekproducten-brabant</a></li> </ul>
Contact	<a href="mailto:info@delaarhoeve.nl">info@delaarhoeve.nl</a>

## Using LEADER to foster migrants' integration in rural Europe

**A transnational cooperation project under LEADER allowed 16 LAGs in four different countries to share good practices on how to make rural areas more welcoming for migrants.**

Recent years have seen increasing numbers of migrants arrive in Europe fleeing from conflict zones. While their full integration cannot be expected to happen overnight, their inclusion can offer valuable opportunities for rural areas, including as a response to depopulation. Many good practices are happening at the local level and transnational cooperation, as enabled by LEADER, can take them a step further.

Aware of the good work going on in their respective rural areas and the importance of exchanging good practices, 16 LAGs from Austria, Finland, Germany and Sweden decided to set up a transnational cooperation (TNC) project to learn from each other's experiences of migrants' inclusion using the LEADER method.

After three transnational partner meetings, the LAGs signed a partnership agreement in November 2016 to commit to working together for three years, using funding from Sub-Measure 19.3 – LEADER cooperation activities of their respective Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

The resulting TNC project 'Identification and exchange of good practices', led by the Finnish LAG Aisapari, involved seven LAGs from Austria, seven from Finland, one from Germany and one from Sweden. Each LAG also connected with their own local stakeholders to ensure that the knowledge gained through the project was shared as widely as possible.

The objective of the project was to exchange good practices on integration and on identifying how migration can generate added value for rural territories. A basic principle was that migrants and refugees can become the main actors and drivers of community-led local development. Gender equality was mainstreamed in all the project activities.

The project established a transnational network of 'local integration actors' (from the public, private and third sector) between partner regions, offering them the opportunity to learn from each other and sustain the exchange in the long term. The aim was to enhance migrants' involvement in local development



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Many good practices on migrants' integration are happening at the local level and transnational cooperation, as enabled by LEADER, can take them a step further.



© LAG Aisapari



Participants in the project gained soft skills, including more confidence in public speaking, inspiration for new activities and stronger motivation.

activities, and to raise awareness among residents and authorities of migration issues and the added value of migrant integration for rural areas.

The project organised study trips and conferences on different aspects of migration and integration in each partner country. Germany, for example, focused on integration in the labour market while in Austria partners discussed the different integration models and political frameworks in each country. During the Swedish visit partners strengthened their knowledge of migration and integration issues and in Finland, where the last visit took place, discussions centred on practical methods of integration as well as the emotions encountered in facing new and unknown situations.

Each conference involved between 75 and 110 participants, including the project partners, NGOs, associations and other local stakeholders active in the field of migrants' integration in the country hosting the event. The conference programme included presentations, workshops involving locals and newcomers and field visits to integration projects which offered something unique or innovative and were transferable to other contexts.

The knowledge gathered during the project was disseminated widely through local events and networking between participations and their local contacts. About 50 inspiring projects from the participating countries were collected in the final report and more good practices and experiences continue to be shared online through social media and a blog, beyond the formal end of the project.

One of the main results of the project was the creation of new contacts among participants across the different countries, which led to new activities. In Austria, for example, following the project the

members of the seven participating LAGs set up 17 new networks working on migrant inclusion, creating four new coordination jobs in total. Soft skills gained by the participants, including more confidence in public speaking, inspiration for new activities and stronger motivation, were also an important achievement of the project.

The RDP funding helped the different partners create bonds over a complex and sometimes overwhelming issue. The coordination, combination of knowledge and knowhow-transfer within the regions and internationally was motivating, fruitful and had a considerable positive impact. The integration experts in each region no longer felt isolated and without peer support. The project opened up a vast web of partnerships, associations, organisations, volunteers, refugees and migrants, bringing significant added value to participants. It contributed to making the participants more motivated and active in their local areas, improving their everyday integration work. This should in turn benefit migrants settling in rural areas.

The good practices collected in each country were included in a final report.

*"I am happy this project has contributed to making the participants more motivated and active in their local work. This project showed the power of civil society and what can be accomplished when public organisations and volunteers join forces. We have seen how important it is to have a forum and platform for local, multi-sectoral cooperation. I hope these will continue to develop."*

**Eeva Arpala, LAG Aisapari**

Project Name	Exchanging good practices on integrating immigrants in rural areas across the EU
Type of beneficiary	LAG
Period	2016 – 2019
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total budget: € 600 000</li> <li>• EAFRD funding: € 252 000</li> <li>• National/Regional funding: € 348 000</li> </ul>
RDP Measure	M19 – LEADER/CLLD
Further info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://iirablog.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/final-report-2mm.pdf">https://iirablog.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/final-report-2mm.pdf</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://www.ruralintegration.eu">www.ruralintegration.eu</a></li> </ul>
Contact	<a href="mailto:eva.arpala@aisapari.net">eva.arpala@aisapari.net</a>



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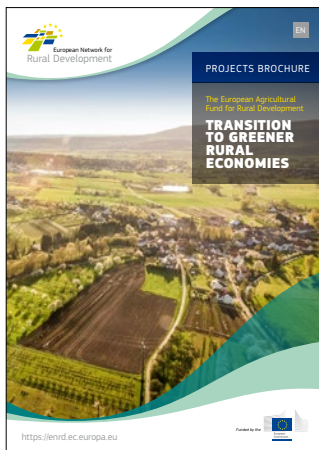
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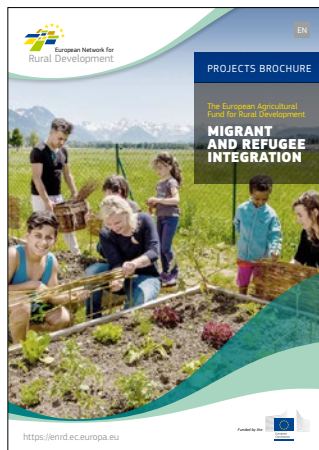
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