RURAL ISOLATION OF CITIZENS IN EUROPE

Policy Brief
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Volonteurope is an international network promoting the values and principles of volunteering, active citizenship and social justice for all. Through its members, associates and partners, the network works at a local, regional, national and European level. The Volonteurope Secretariat is hosted and supported by CSV, UK’s leading volunteering and social action charity.

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Preamble

Through its policy and advocacy work, Volonteurope ensures that the role of civil society organisations in bringing citizens closer to European political processes and preventing social exclusion remains high on the agenda of institutions and policy makers.

The network’s work programme reaffirms that volunteering is a crucial component of active citizenship and that it contributes to European values of solidarity, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms, inclusion and diversity.

Through policy research and debates, seminars and working groups, engaging in consultations and working in partnership with other stakeholders, Volonteurope responds to challenges that compromise the future of the European project. The network identifies the rural isolation of citizens in the European Union (EU) as one of those major issues which, if unchecked, will create even more pockets of deprivation, isolation and poverty in the EU.

This initial policy brief, launched at the ‘Rural Isolation of Citizens in the EU’ seminar in Rome on 29 September 2014, kicks off Volonteurope’s two-year campaign, which will assess the extent of the problem and provide different stakeholders with recommendations and solutions for tackling rural isolation.

This brief aims to introduce the problem of rural isolation, reflect on its realities and negative impact and assess its different dimensions. It also sets out current EU policies that address rural isolation and includes a series of successful and innovative case studies from civil society. These are projects that engage citizen-volunteers and effectively address the challenges of rural isolation. Examples from Volonteurope’s members and partners in the United Kingdom, France, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands and Italy show that civil society organisations, with appropriate support, can make a real, lasting and positive change to the lives of people of all ages in rural communities across Europe. The document also sets out a range of recommendations for addressing the problem of rural isolation.

Over the course of the next two years, Volonteurope will work with partners from different sectors to develop this policy brief. Volonteurope will endeavour to ensure the strong visibility of the campaign through innovative dissemination approaches, including the creative arts, exhibitions and Forum Theatre performances, as well as a concluding conference in Amsterdam.
Introduction

What are rural areas?

Since 2010, the European Commission has classified regions as either predominantly urban, intermediate or predominantly rural based on population density. Urban areas are those with a minimum population density of 300 inhabitants per square kilometre and a minimum population of 5000 inhabitants. Areas that do not meet these thresholds are classified as rural¹.

Rural regions across Europe do not represent a uniform group. There is considerable economic and social diversity among rural areas. Levels of educational attainment, income, employment and social exclusion, as well as rates of risk of poverty, can vary significantly from one Member State to another. It is possible to identify economic and social trends within macro-regions (Eastern Europe, North-Western Europe, and Mediterranean Europe), and to observe differences between older and newer EU Member States. The importance of the primary sector (agriculture, forestry and fishery) in the rural economy, the size of farms and the levels of investment in agriculture diverge enormously between the EU-15 and the EU-N12² countries. These factors have an impact on their levels of rural isolation.

The importance of rural Europe

Rural areas provide food, raw materials, environmental services and spaces for rest and recreation. They are also home to some of Europe’s natural, cultural and historical heritage. More than half of the EU’s land area (51.3% in 2012) is classified as predominantly rural. More than one fifth of the EU’s population (22.3% in 2012) lives in rural regions³.

With the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements, the total rural population of the EU increased from 75 million to 116 million⁴. Rural areas also account for a large proportion of economic activity and employment in the EU, especially among EU-N12 Member States.

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¹ The classification is based on NUTS level 3. See Rural Development in the EU: Statistical and Economic Information – Report 2013, D-G for Agriculture and Rural Development, December 2013, p. 49.
² The EU-N12 are the 12 countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Cyprus, Malta, Romania and Bulgaria. On the other hand, the EU-15 refers to the older 15 Member States.
In 2010, rural regions produced 29% of the total GVA (Gross Value Added, a measure of economic output) and accounted for 36% of total employment in the EU-N12 (in the EU-15 these values were 14% and 17%, respectively). Over 21% of the European population is employed in rural areas, which illustrates the importance of these regions for the European economy.

What do we mean by the rural isolation of citizens?

Despite their demographic and economic importance, rural regions lag behind urban and intermediate ones in a number of socio-economic indicators. People living and working in rural Europe usually experience higher rates of risk of poverty and lower levels of employment, income, educational attainment, health care, and access to infrastructure and public services.

Social immobility is reinforced by the disadvantages faced by rural regions, such as remoteness and sparsely populated areas. Therefore, the term rural isolation of citizens refers not only to social, labour and educational exclusion, but also to the mechanisms that perpetuate these trends over time.

This is not to say that all rural regions are poorer and more marginalised than urban areas. In Europe, the urban-rural divide is quite complex, with some macro-regions experiencing high levels of rural isolation (especially among the Mediterranean countries and the newer Member States), while others present high levels of wellbeing in rural areas when compared to urban ones (especially among countries in Central and North-Western Europe). In fact, urban areas also have their own self-reinforcing processes and patterns of social exclusion.

Nonetheless, it is possible to identify patterns of rural isolation across the EU, which can be addressed through public policy, citizen engagement and civil society involvement. These will be discussed later in the brief.

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6 Ibid.
Realities and extent of rural isolation in the European Union

*Lack of education, ageing populations, poor infrastructure: a worrying picture*

In general, rural areas present lower levels of educational attainment and higher rates of school dropouts\(^7\). The percentage of people who achieved at least upper-secondary education in rural areas in 2012 was 70.7%, compared to 77% in urban regions. Within the EU-N12, the rural-urban divide is particularly acute, with 77.2% educational attainment in rural areas and 92.7% in urban areas. Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Malta have extremely low levels of educational attainment in rural regions, ranging from 27% (Portugal) to 51% (Italy)\(^8\). Rural regions also present the lowest rates of life-long learning\(^9\). In 2012, only 3% of adults aged 25 to 64 living in rural areas in the EU-N12 were in education or training. Only around 1% of adults in rural regions in Bulgaria and Romania participated in education or training activities in 2012\(^10\).

Ageing populations are particularly prominent in rural regions in Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In EU-15 Member States, 20.4% of people in rural areas are older than 65 years. From 2007 to 2012, the proportion of young people in rural regions decreased in 19 Member States, while the proportion of elderly people increased in all Member States except Belgium and Spain\(^11\).

In terms of the young-to-old population ratio in rural regions, only Poland, Slovakia and Ireland have more young people than old people, while Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal have less than 65 young persons for every 100 elderly inhabitants. Moreover, the old-age dependency ratio is highest in the rural regions of the EU-15 (above 30% in Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom)\(^12\).

Rural areas also lag behind in availability and quality of infrastructure. Broadband internet, for example, is available to 76% of rural households and to 96% of non-rural households. In EU-N12 countries, only 47% of rural households can access broadband internet, compared to 80% in non-rural areas\(^13\). This urban-rural digital divide, especially acute in the newer Member States, is further reinforced by a lack of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) education in rural schools. Apart from limited internet connectivity, rural regions also have poorer transport infrastructure and lower availability of public services.

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\(^7\) School dropouts are defined as those people, aged 18-24 years, who have attained at most lower secondary education level and are not involved in further education or training. Educational attainment is defined as the percentage of the population between 25 and 64 years with at least an upper-secondary level of education.


\(^9\) Life-long learning is the participation of adults in courses and training.


\(^11\) Ibid, pp. 60-64.

\(^12\) Young/old population ratio refers to the number of young people compared to the number of elderly people, while the old-age dependency ratio refers to the number of working age people for every person aged 65 or over (a 30% ratio means that there are close to 3 people of working age for every elderly person). Ibid, p. 61.

\(^13\) Ibid, p. 268.
Economic development in rural areas

In 2010, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in rural areas only reached 70% of the EU average, while for urban regions GDP per capita was 123% of the average. This means that income levels in rural regions are considerably lower than in urban regions. This difference is particularly alarming in the rural areas of the EU-N12 States, where GDP per capita was only 44% of the EU average in 2010. Rural areas in Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania have some of the lowest GDP per capita in Europe.¹⁴

This income disparity is reflected in levels of poverty. The European Commission has estimated that over 20% of the rural population was at risk of poverty in 2009, compared to less than 15% in urban areas. This number is more pronounced for the EU-N12, where over 24% of rural populations were at risk of poverty in 2009. It is estimated that about 70% of all people at risk of poverty in the EU-N12 are living in rural areas. Rural poverty has been more strongly associated with Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy, while urban poverty has been associated with four countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands).¹⁵

In 2012, predominantly rural regions had a lower rate of employment than the country average in 15 Member States. For the EU as a whole, the employment rate in rural Europe stood at 62% in 2012, 2% below the EU average and 3.5% below intermediate regions. Rural regions were also hit by the 2008 crisis, causing unemployment rates in these areas to rise from 7% to 11% between 2008 and 2012.¹⁶

In 2010, across the EU, the primary sector accounted for 4.4% of the value added in rural areas, while the secondary sector (mining, manufacturing and construction) accounted for 30.9% and the tertiary sector (services) for 64.6%.¹⁷ The primary sector employed 14% of the rural work force, while the secondary and tertiary sectors employed 28% and 59%, respectively.¹⁸

The distribution of economic activity and employment per sector varies widely across Europe, reflecting Member States’ different socio-economic contexts. The primary sector in the rural regions of Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Greece and Portugal still accounts for a significant share of local employment and economic output.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 71-78.
The primary sector tends to present lower productivity and income levels than the other two sectors. Labour productivity in agriculture is especially low in EU-N12 countries, representing only 31% of the EU average. In terms of capital investment in agriculture, again EU-N12 Member States are at a clear disadvantage, receiving only 6% of total investment in the EU in 2010. Bulgaria and Romania have extremely low levels of Gross Fixed Capital Formation\(^\text{19}\) in agriculture, with Portugal and Greece performing only slightly better. This indicates a lack of investment in the primary sector for some EU countries. The seasonality of several types of farm work adds downward pressure on income and employment levels in rural areas. Regions with highly seasonal agricultural cycles (for example, southern Italy) tend to have higher levels of unemployment.

It is mainly due to lower income levels in the agricultural sector that over one-third of farmers in the EU are engaged in other gainful activities. For the majority of them (77%), these activities occupy more of their time than farm work.

Consequently, debates on rural development often emphasise the need for economic diversification and innovation in rural areas in order to generate more employment opportunities for local residents and increase their income levels. Economic diversification also means more investment in infrastructure and skills. Given that the economic performance of rural areas varies significantly among regions, countries and macro-regions, economic development policies need to be targeted and take into account the specificities of local contexts.

**The territorial dimension of rural isolation**

The “Territorial Dimension of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe” (TiPSE) report, a joint collaboration between the European Commission and Member States, has identified spatial patterns of social exclusion and poverty in Europe. Through data analysis and a series of case studies, the TiPSE report has found that “the role of space as a driver for social exclusion is clearer for the rural than the urban context”\(^\text{20}\). Factors such as remoteness, lack of access to labour

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\(^{19}\) Gross Fixed Capital Formation measures how much of the value added is invested rather than consumed. See Rural Development in the EU: Statistical and Economic Information – Report 2013, pp. 128-134.

\(^{20}\) The Territorial Dimension of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe: Draft Final Report, p. 42.
markets and educational opportunities, as well as a lack of public services and infrastructure, exacerbate social exclusion in rural locations throughout Europe.

The remoteness of some rural areas has a major role in determining spatial patterns of poverty and social exclusion. Remote islands, as well as mountain, coastal or border regions, tend to experience the highest levels of rural isolation. Remote islands, as well as mountain, coastal or border regions, tend to experience the highest levels of rural isolation. Rural regions that are easily accessible or close to urban centres tend to present relatively high socio-economic indicators in terms of income and quality of life. Thus, geographical distance has a strong impact on access to opportunities.

The TiPSE report has identified four broad patterns of differentiation in levels of social exclusion in Europe. Three of these are of particular relevance in understanding the rural dimension of socio-economic isolation:

- urban-rural differentiation
- peripherality (geographic marginality)
- place specific issues (e.g. demographic ageing, outmigration or population density)

Both ‘peripherality’ and ‘place specific issues’ are pertinent to the concept of rural isolation. Rural areas with low population density, for example, tend to have the lowest levels of access to health services.

Rural Europe experiences high levels of outmigration, especially of its younger people. EU-N12 Member States are losing rural population due to emigration to urban areas or other countries. In 2011, Lithuania, Latvia and Ireland lost significant shares of their rural population to emigration, while Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal and Romania also experienced negative net migration.

While younger and more qualified groups of people may look for opportunities elsewhere, those staying behind (e.g. elderly, disabled or ill persons and children) “become most vulnerable to structural change in the local environment” due to their geographical immobility.

Civil society groups have repeatedly pointed to the stigmatisation experienced by some rural populations, especially from the poorest areas, which deepens feelings of isolation and exclusion. Individuals and communities who have been trapped in processes of social exclusion often feel alienated from mainstream society and lack the tools to seek better opportunities and engage with social networks outside their more restricted social circles. Rural poverty has sometimes been associated with inter-generational processes, whereby the descendants of poor farmers and rural dwellers will find it difficult to leave poverty and isolation. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the self-reinforcing nature of rural isolation.

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, pp. 32-33.
23 Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2013, p. 60.
25 Ibid, p. 44.
The self-reinforcing nature of rural isolation

The TiPSE report has concluded that:

“In the long run, it is often the most vulnerable population groups who become trapped in a vicious cycle of immobility, exclusion and poverty. It is specifically critical when, within this cycle of immobility and poverty, disadvantage is transmitted from one generation to the next. [...] Prejudice and stigmatization increases the risk of poverty and contributes to a downward spiral.”

Some studies have attempted to identify self-reinforcing patterns that help explain the persistence of rural isolation in some regions. The European Commission, for example, has identified a series of barriers to employment growth in rural areas:

“...negative demographic trends and the loss of young people from rural areas; a high degree of concentration within relatively few economic activities; poor (or a lack of) infrastructure; low levels of accessibility to services, such as the quality of and access to broadband Internet; low levels of skills, knowledge, entrepreneurship and innovation; and undeveloped social and institutional capital.”

The European Commission has also remarked that “many of Europe's rural areas face a common challenge – their capacity to create high quality, sustainable jobs is falling behind urban areas”. It is usually the most remote areas that face the strongest challenges to growth, employment and social inclusion. Access to public services, such as education, health, crime and justice, social and welfare, transport and communications, can be a critical determinant of social wellbeing. However, in the case of some rural regions, the Commission has acknowledged that:

“the construction of infrastructure of all kinds and the provision of health care, education and other basic services is usually also more costly because of the nature of the terrain and the remoteness of the location, and more difficult to justify because of the small numbers of people being served.”

A 2010 study on employment, growth and innovation in rural areas found that, despite some growth in GDP per capita in rural areas between 2001 and 2008, this has been insufficient to “bring about substantial catching-up effects and close the gap” with the EU average. Furthermore, this growth in GDP per capita did not translate to growth in employment rates, “so that rural regions still need a significant effort” to catch-up with other European regions.

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26 The Territorial Dimension of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe: Draft Final Report, p. 44.
27 Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2013, p. 262.
28 Study on Employment, Growth and Innovation in Rural Areas (SEGIRA), D-G for Agriculture and Rural Development, December 2010, p. 60.
29 Ibid, p. 61.
31 Ibid.
What can be noted from the discussion above is that different structural and demographic factors interact and form barriers to the development and social inclusion of some rural areas. According to the European Network for Rural Development, the main determinants of rural poverty are demography, education, labour markets and remoteness. These interact to generate entrenched poverty and social exclusion\(^\text{32}\).

Since the 1980s, there has been some improvement in rural employment and income levels in several rural regions. Several initiatives have contributed to lifting farmers out of poverty. Nonetheless, rural areas continue to lag behind. This is especially true in Mediterranean and Eastern Member States.

Consequently, improvements in labour markets, infrastructure and education are key to tackling rural isolation. A comprehensive and coherent rural development policy is needed in order to break vicious cycles of exclusion and marginalisation. Investment and economic diversification may help generate employment and higher levels of income. The provision of public services also has an important role to play in bringing rural regions closer to European averages of social and economic wellbeing.

Most important, however, is the need to involve citizens and civil society in rural development efforts. Local initiatives can make an invaluable contribution to addressing rural isolation. These need to be supported by coherent funding and public engagement. Volunteering and active citizenship are essential tools for generating awareness and promoting positive, sustainable change. Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations have taken the lead in providing innovative solutions to rural problems, as can be seen from the case studies presented in the following pages.

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Case Studies

Successful civil society interventions combating rural isolation in Europe
Romania: It’s Up to YOUth! - How can young people from rural areas take action and change mentalities?

Imago Mundi Youth Association, which is based in the small rural community of Malureni in the district of Arges, Romania, works mostly with young people from rural areas. One of its most successful projects was Youth Unemployment: Lost and Found! Financed through Youth in Action, this youth exchange programme took place between 11 and 21 July 2013. Scoop Welzjin, from the Netherlands, coordinated the project with partners Imago Mundi and Youthfully Yours Greece! The aim of the project was to change amongst young people and the authorities, and encourage them to take an active role in fighting youth unemployment.

Local activities took place in the participating countries between 1 May and 30 November 2013, while the exchange itself occurred between 11 and 21 July 2013 in Almelo in the Netherlands.

As part of the project, a local campaign, It’s Up to YOUth!, was set up in Romania. The campaign was organised and implemented by young people from Romania in October and November 2013 in Arges, and was launched through a press conference on 15 October. Through informal debates, more than 200 young people from rural and urban areas were encouraged to take control of their own future and prepare themselves for the challenges they will face in the labour market. In Romania, young people are streamed into different schools at the age of 14 based on their exam results. This streaming process can have a powerful impact on whether they progress to college and hence on the rest of their lives. Young people from rural areas, with lower access to education, are disadvantaged from the start in this competition and have lower chances of success in the labour market.

The participants received information on sought after jobs as well as on scholarships and volunteering opportunities in their country. Online surveys, Facebook groups and blogs were also part of the campaign, and the participants were asked to take part in online debates. The campaign was entirely organised by the young participants, who received support from the volunteers at Imago Mundi and students from their own schools. The campaign took place throughout Arges, with debates in three major schools in the city of Pitesti (200 000 inhabitants) as well as in four rural schools. The campaign received extensive media coverage, which encouraged the young people and also increased the campaign’s impact.

Out of the 20 volunteers who carried out the campaign, 15 were from rural areas. The campaign was such a success that one of the coordinators, Constantin Dedu, received an award at a Mobility Gala organised by the Romanian Youth in Action National Agency in December 2013. This recognised the success of a project through which 15 young people, eight of them from the rural communities of Arges, took part in an international youth exchange and then used their experience in their own communities.

This is a positive experience that encouraged many young people in Arges to get involved in volunteering activities.
France: Intercultural exchanges providing enriching experiences to rural youth

The issue
According to the French National Statistics Institute (INSEE), 18% of the French population lives in rural areas, a bit less than the European average (22%). Rural populations have increased as quickly as urban populations in the last decade (around 1%). Inequalities between rural and urban populations are still significant when it comes to poverty rates and educational and cultural opportunities. Rural regions are often neglected by French political reforms, creating a sense of abandonment amongst rural populations. The ultra-centralised administration is one of the root causes of this phenomenon.

Even if transport has enabled people from rural areas to access urban centres, commuting has been an issue, with some key services moving to cities. Another problem is the lack of ICT education in rural areas, which leads to lower access to communication networks, and can have a negative impact on rural inhabitants’ employability. In terms of youth employment, young people from rural areas are more likely to be excluded from the labour market and have less access to educational, cultural and leisure opportunities. They often find themselves trapped in the local labour market.

Obstacles can be physical but also psychological: people from rural areas often do not like to go to urban centres because they do not know the urban norms of clothing or behaviour, which frustrates them and makes them feel uncomfortable.

Setting up the project
Erasmus Plus Youth Exchanges allow young people from different countries to meet and live together for a short period of time. During the Youth Exchange, participants jointly carry out a work programme (a mix of workshops, debates, role-plays, outdoor activities, etc.) designed and prepared before the exchange. Youth Exchanges also allow young people to develop skills; become aware of a thematic area; discover new cultures, habits and life-styles; and strengthen values of solidarity, democracy, citizenship, etc. The learning process is based on non-formal educational methods.

This project is a Youth Exchange between five organisations from Sweden, Romania, Poland, Portugal and France (Itinéraire International, Volonteurope Member). The project was submitted by the Portuguese organisation, Adamastor. The theme is “Health Behaviours using Sport for European Youth”. It involves four young adults between the ages of 18 and 25, and one youth leader. The exchange took place in August 2014.

In order to reach young adults from rural areas, Itinéraire International started by visiting local community centres to explain the project. It worked in partnership with local organisations that target young people but do not have access to international mobility opportunities. Itinéraire International invited the Cultural and Social Centre of Saint Julien de Concelles (a city with less than 7000 people) to be its partner in the project.

The project enabled Itinéraire International to reach a large number of young adults and give them information about opportunities to go abroad. It also helped strengthen the city’s youth policy.

Outcomes
A stronger culture of mobility among young people from rural areas enhances their capacity to understand the
modern, globalised world so that they can access communication networks and increase their employability. It is important to broaden the perspectives of these people who, when coming back to their home village, can enrich their community by bringing back new ideas, new ways of thinking and new possibilities. The project also aims to remove psychological obstacles to geographical mobility through a first international experience, so that when young people come back, they are mentally ready to move.

Encouraging young people from rural areas to travel can also be really beneficial in terms of independence and citizenship as they learn how to plan a stay abroad and how to carry it out. It also helps them to forge their identity and creates tomorrow’s European citizens.

It is interesting to notice that young people from rural areas feel more comfortable when going abroad than going to a French city centre, as they feel they are not expected to know how things work, and they are not seen as rural people.

Activities: preparation, exchange and return
First, our International Mobility Advisor receives the young person in individual appointments to define personal and professional objectives in order to fit the stay abroad to the young person’s aspirations. Then, we provide specific support for their future experience abroad (cultural and intercultural preparation, language and administrative preparation, explaining the itinerary, etc.).

We assist the young person during the entire mobility process: before departure with all the preparations, during the stay abroad with regular reports, and after they come back in order to get the best out of their experience.

The Cultural and Social Centre has lent us a room for the preparation stage and their members assist the workshop.

We try to get the participants involved as much as possible. It is their project: How do they want to experience it? How do they want to get the most out of it afterwards? Would they like to create videos, exhibitions or memory books? They choose what they want, and we provide all the necessary support. The Cultural and Social Centre helps us with the materials, the premises and the organisation of events after the trip. The idea is to showcase the experiences in both urban and rural areas in order to reach more young people who would be likely to take part in a future mobility project.
The Netherlands: Volunteers taking responsibility for the wellbeing of their villages

In the Netherlands there are some 2500 village organisations. These organisations consist of volunteers who take responsibility for the wellbeing of their village, promoting activities for children and health care in the village.

Most of these organisations are members of the regional organisation for small villages. There are 11 regional organisations, most of which with professionals who support the village inhabitants and their organisations.

The 11 regional organisations (also mostly supported by volunteers) form the national organisation LVKK (Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen – National Organisation for Small Villages).

Major activities
One of the most common activities of the village organisations is to draw plans about the future of the village and to carry them out. Plans may include housing for young people, availability of pre-school in the village, safe traffic and so on. The identity of the village is an important factor as plans are based on the distinct character of each village.

New reality: declining population
The population in the Netherlands is declining in several regions of the country while in others there is a substantial ageing of the population. In 20 years most regions of the Netherlands will be dealing with these realities. Plans that are made today will no longer be useful then. Several Village organisations’ work is still based on the old idea of growing populations and growing economic opportunities.

Project: responsible citizenship (BIK)
It is important that inhabitants of rural areas take responsibility over their own future. In our vision it is not ideal to look to the (local or national) government for solutions to everything. People in the villages have to formulate the problems and the particular ways of solving them. It is very important to let them formulate what is going on and what they want to do about it. It is their perception of the issues and the opportunities which is important.

There are lots of examples in the Netherlands of people who are pro-active and come to good solutions. The declining population is a given which you cannot change; the way this is handled is very important.

Principles
- People are responsible for their village infrastructure.
- People have to recognize that changing demographic trends have great influence on the wellbeing of the village / rural area.
- It is important to look beyond the village; regional cooperation is crucial for the good maintenance of village infrastructure.
Italy: Volunteering as a practical response to rural isolation in Liguria

In the Italian region of Liguria there are 235 municipalities, most of which are mountain villages. The number of citizens living in rural areas is still significant, although in recent years the population has tended to move to larger cities.

The reasons for this shift are many: lack of good quality transport, services, schools and work opportunities. In addition, the population in Liguria is the oldest in Europe and continues to age.

Volunteering, promoted by Cesavo (Volontеuropе member) is a practical response to encourage active citizenship in rural areas and support those in need. The local Parishes and the Pro Loco centre are places of exchange, support, socialisation and companionship for rural citizens. They are open all year round, providing access to the City and local services, and countering the impacts of the economic crisis and austerity policies.

Volunteers and associations in the area:

- Set up medical clinics in social spaces (for example the Mutual Aid Society);
- Manage summer camps for children;
- Organise cultural events: music, theatre, exhibitions etc.;
- Facilitate the opening of local museums;
- Maintain internet points in the City Hall;
- Maintain local trails and offer guided hiking experiences;
- Support schools with extra-curricular activities (for example with long-distance courses, after-school activities, sports and so on);
- Support people with disabilities as well as elderly people.
- Cooperate to deliver medicine to households in the most remote villages.
Bosnia and Herzegovina: Active Communities Programme – empowered community leaders

Community Organising Project and Active Community Fund

Tuzla Community Foundation (Volonteurope Member) focuses on strengthening the role of community centres as instruments of change, creating places where community members meet and learn about local needs, and where initiatives are born. The Community Organising Project started in the Tuzla suburb of Simin Han. In 2008, it expanded to four more communities in Tuzla.

A distinctive grassroots model was developed in Tuzla, and the process culminated in 2011 with the creation of an informal Network of Active Communities, comprised of 17 communities from the Tuzla area and represented by 60 leaders (including community councillors, young people, women and older people).

We implement projects that encourage people to take control of their lives and become more active in their development and that of their community. Through direct work with people in the neighbourhoods and communities in Tuzla, we have developed a trusting relationship with local civil society organisations and community groups, and developed a sound understanding of local needs and available resources, while building capacity within local groups.

We help foster cooperation with the government, donors and the general public, and develop mechanisms for supporting disadvantaged and marginalised groups and communities. Our programmes’ main target groups are active citizens groups and associations, active youth groups and associations, and vulnerable groups such as women, people living in poverty, older people and young people.

Empowered community leaders

Mramor is a small rural community, situated 17 km from the urban centre of Tuzla. A member of the Network of Active Communities, Mramor has 2000 inhabitants. One of the leaders in Mramor is Hasib Hirkić (30): “Being an active member of community brings a lot of responsibilities, duties and tasks. It is great feeling that you can see changes in the community with implementation of small projects, such as renovation of the community centre, building a sports field or children’s playground. But what is the greatest success is the change in people and feeling that we are making decisions together.”

First principles of community organising

Engagement and identification of common interests. It is important to recognise the personal interests of people in a community. Residents naturally seek to improve their living conditions, ensure better education for their children and build better infrastructure. These personal interests need to be recognised and validated as they are incentives for community engagement.

Regular communication and cooperation: Community organising is a dynamic process that requires ongoing focus on building social structures and networks in the community.
Negotiation and conflict resolution: Community members need to learn to discuss, accept confrontation and negotiate.

Prioritisation and joint action: local activists need to prioritise and coordinate when working on multiple projects. Prioritising needs to be done during the action planning phase based on the importance of each initiative, the availability of resources, funding opportunities and time frames.

Organising Phases – Cycle of change

1. Community Analysis
Community analysis of needs and resource mapping exercises need to include as many residents as possible. All community resources – human, financial and others – should be mapped.

2. Team building – Local Community Development Groups
The community organising process is usually started by a few activists. The group builds up as the work progresses. It is very important to use all opportunities for team building, increasing the numbers of activists and supporting the involvement of leaders from all sectors of the community.

3. Community Action Plan Development
Every year, after analysing needs and mapping resources, joint action planning should be done by the group of community leaders. Joint planning includes setting the objectives, defining indicators and expected results, and agreeing on priorities and distribution of responsibilities.

4. Mobilising for Action
This includes mobilising people and volunteers as well as raising funds and involving local businesses and media. In this phase all human and material resources defined in the first phase should be mobilised.

5. Implementing Actions
The goals are to achieve change in the community and to further strengthen local leaders, social networks and community cohesion.

6. Evaluation
Local Community development groups should always carry out internal evaluations and use their own experience to improve their future work. Evaluation is used as a learning tool.

Active Community Fund
The Fund for Active Communities was set up in 2011 in order to empower active citizens and restore trust among community groups, civil society organizations, and Community Councils in Tuzla neighbourhoods. The specific goal was to empower underprivileged groups of citizens (residents of remote neighbourhoods, young people, women, older people, etc.). The general goal of the programme is to encourage the active participation of citizens in community development through community organising and education.

The support for this fund is limited to the communities where the Tuzla Community Foundation mentors the organising process. All proposed projects are joint initiatives led by Local Community Development groups and are developed in line with the analyses of needs, resource mapping and action planning process in the community.

Each year there are two calls for proposals, one for smaller projects to enable each community to organise small scale action and one for bigger projects (up to EUR 1000). The Committee uses a mix of democratic discussion and a scoring system. The basic criteria for support are: community needs, wellbeing of the community, partnerships, improving living conditions and starting new community activities, civic participation, the budget distribution (it is not mandatory for applicants to provide co-financing, but if they do, they are given priority) and sustainability.
Scotland: Supporting people affected by cancer in rural UK

Macmillan Cancer Support is one of the largest British charities and provides specialist health care, information and financial support to people affected by cancer.

As well as helping with the medical needs of people affected by cancer, Macmillan also looks at the social, emotional and practical impact cancer can have, and campaigns for better cancer care and for inequalities in cancer care to be addressed. Macmillan Cancer Support’s goal is to reach and improve the lives of everyone living with cancer in the UK.

Context

The United Kingdom has a population of over 63 million people and the overall population density of the UK is one of the highest in the world at over 256 people per square kilometre. 8 million people live in the capital city of London. This contrasts starkly with other parts of the UK, especially Scotland, which is sparsely populated except for a few major cities. The entire population of Scotland is approximately 5 million people with one million of these living in rural communities.

Living in a rural and often remote community brings a different way of life and sometimes a variation in the quality of the services and amenities available to rural dwellers. Factors such as poor or intermittent public transport to access services and amenities, high costs associated with travelling to and from appointments, the time it takes to travel due to long distances as well as poor public transport connections and a general lower level of amenities in local areas due to small population numbers can all result in inequalities of service to people in rural communities.

Macmillan has a particular focus on cancer and on people affected by cancer. Evidence suggests that people living in rural communities often access health and social care services when their cancer is more advanced which leads to poorer health and a poorer prognosis. Social exclusion can also be a significant factor as local support networks may not be available such as cancer support groups, which are often more readily available in larger cities.

Macmillan Connected Project

Macmillan Connected is an innovative partnership between Macmillan Cancer Support and Skype. Skype is a software application which allows people to have a conversation via the internet often with a visual connection by a webcam.

The Macmillan Connected service offers emotional support to people affected by cancer, whether they have been diagnosed themselves or are caring for someone close to them. They are connected via Skype with a volunteer buddy who has been trained and is supported by Macmillan.

Our volunteer buddies are people who have either lived through cancer themselves, or support someone else on their cancer journey. They are Macmillan-trained volunteers able to offer short-term support to someone who is going through a tough time, or just to listen when someone may need a chat.

Macmillan Connected is completely free and someone can connect from their own computer at a time that suits them. This pilot service has been designed and is being developed in close collaboration with the people who use it and the volunteers (buddies).
Challenges and opportunities

The technology of Skype means that people can connect with each other across countries, across continents. It is not limited by the usual geographical boundaries. Linking people, no matter where they live, is one of the fundamental philosophies of the Macmillan Connected project and as part of this we can overcome some of the challenges and isolation that may face people affected by cancer in rural communities.

We wanted to be able to connect people from the most rural parts of the country with someone they felt they could connect with on a personal level (because they had been through a similar experience, same cancer type etc.) and it would not be dependent on being able to travel, to be in the same town or even country.

This brings obvious benefits as the person seeking a buddy can do this from their own home at a time that suits them. This immediately removes many of the difficulties of living remotely such as accessing public transport, the time taken to travel to access services as well as costs of fuel or public transport.

The service is free; you only need broadband connection, Skype (which has no cost) and the skills to use these.

A challenge remains around raising awareness of the service and gaining the confidence of individuals to use this newer way of accessing a service – this type of technology does not suit everyone. In some rural and remote areas, broadband connections are still poor so the Macmillan Connected service is harder to access which is something we hope in time will become less and less as rural social connectivity policies improve.

Macmillan faced lots of challenges around recruiting, training and supporting our volunteer buddies. For the organisation it was a new way to interface with volunteers via the web as opposed to a face to face situation. We had to examine our processes and work out solutions to ensure the service was safe for both users and volunteers as well as providing an excellent service for everyone concerned.

The future

This project is a pilot project so we are still at the learning and developing stage. We seek feedback from our service users and our volunteers on a regular basis and our first evaluation is underway. We hope that this service will be a prototype to be used by us and others more widely for a range of services and applications.
England: Norfolk Knitters and Stitchers

First launched in 1988, CSV's senior volunteers programme (RSVP) responds to local community needs by managing and delivering new services identified and led by community volunteers. We currently have 18,000 CSV Senior Volunteers, supported by 480 Volunteer Organisers, operating around the UK making their communities better places to live through a wide variety of activities.

CSV Norfolk Knitters is one such group - started 6 years ago with 40 keen knitters by a local retired school head-teacher who wanted to share her love of knitting. Now, an Action Group of retired volunteers, supported by CSV, establishes and coordinates knitting groups across Norfolk for senior and retired individuals, vulnerable adults, and other community groups. Groups have developed in community halls, churches, libraries, care homes, and individual's houses, and have brought together like minded people who want to meet others, use their skills to help the less fortunate, and raise money for good local causes at the same time.

A Wool Loft based in Norwich enables members to access patterns, wool, and store items they have made ready for collection by local and international charities or for sale to fundraise. Volunteer Organisers support local groups within specific areas of Norfolk, and provide advice, wool, patterns, and talks. Items are knitted/sewn to donate to charities and good causes or sell to raise funds, and a huge volume of items is produced each month - in March 2014, 80 sacks of knitting were collected by The International Aid Trust alone. There are also links to local schools who take knitted items out to developing countries on the Knitters'/Stitchers' behalf. Events are held to showcase skills, items made, and to hold demonstrations – at a recent Exhibition of Knitting and Sewing there were 708 visitors from a diverse range of individuals (8% were under 18).

From a handful of people in 2009, the reach of Norfolk Knitters has grown year on year - in the last 2 years it has doubled its reach to over 1,700 members.

It is becoming increasingly clear that knitting and stitching are much more than an activity or craft – they provide vulnerable individuals with a social network, somewhere to continue to use their skills to help others, and a sense of community and belonging. In the last 12 months, monitoring data gathered by the Action Group based on requests to establish groups, new members information, talks given, visitors to events, and reviews of existing members has shown that, far from being simply an opportunity to practice a craft, the activity of knitting is:

1) clearly of benefit in terms of mental health, reducing rural and social isolation, and integration into communities
2) seen as an attractive and accessible activity by diverse community groups seeking support with all of the above
3) instrumental to the self-esteem of vulnerable individuals who are empowered to give back to their communities in a way which utilises their skills and assets.

Rural isolation, deteriorating health, and an ageing population are challenges in Norfolk:
• over 50% of individuals live in rural areas with limited access to transport
• the highest percentage of over-65’s in the East of England reside here (21.7% in 2011)
• Norfolk’s older population increased by 21.6% between 2001 and 2012, and continues to grow as it is a popular retirement destination
• nearly 27% of the population over 65 have a social care need compared to a UK total of 30% (Norfolk Insight, 2012). This is expected to rise over the next 10 years.

There is a correlation between isolation and deterioration of both mental and physical health and it has been shown that volunteering helps people to maintain their skills, feel part of a community, and provide social stimulation - which in turn improves wellbeing and lengthens life expectancy (Wellbeing and Civil Society, 2013).

Although the majority of CSV’s Norfolk Knitters and Stitchers are older, social/rural isolation and deterioration of skills is not exclusive to them, and CSV’s work with diverse communities both in Norfolk (supporting disabled adults to volunteer) and nationally (for example supporting third country nationals to integrate into society in Ipswich) has shown us that being part of a group activity and using your skills to the benefit of others improves both community networks for these diverse groups and integration through enhanced understanding of diverse cultures and abilities.

This is particularly striking in Norfolk due to the rurality of the area combined with the traditional white demographic now challenged with the influx of migrant communities arriving for work opportunities.

Of 80 members reviewed:
74% are a member for social contact
86% had made new friends from joining
79% felt that they were using their skills to benefit others
55% reported feeling happier
14% were able to describe how being part of Norfolk Knitters had contributed to improvements in their health.

Margaret is an example of the organic way in which Norfolk Knitters & Stitchers creates new groups. She lost her husband to illness in 2013 and found herself alone and rurally and socially isolated. She became very depressed, but found Norfolk Knitters and decided to raise money for the Palliative Care Centre which had looked after her husband. To date she has raised £456, and a group has been established at the Centre for knitting and also crochet. Margaret no longer feels alone and is enjoying feeling needed and useful. In addition, she joined the crochet group, stating “you are never too old to learn something new!”

Jean Miller is 80 years old and has 3 sons and 4 grandchildren and was widowed 25 years ago. She worked in schools and then as a doctor’s receptionist before her retirement 18 years ago. At that time she lived in Kent but 8 years ago she decided to move to Norfolk.

She was completely alone and didn’t know a soul. She saw our advertisement in the local paper and thought, “I can knit and meet other people at the same time”. This changed her life. She gets out and about more, has met lots of new people and made new friends. She goes regularly to a knitting group in Cromer and has been able to help others with her knitting skills. She also comes to the Wool Loft and loves the buzz of it all as people find patterns, look at the knitting, bring in the things they’ve made and chat together.

She says: “My mental health has improved and I’ve got wonderful hands because I knit. It’s so nice to be able to knit things for a good cause. There’s a real ‘feel good’ factor. You can knit just what you fancy – dog coats, baby clothes and so on. I love the stories that are in the newsletter telling you what happens to everything.”
European Union policies on rural isolation

**Current Rural Development Policy (RDP)**

European Rural Development Policy (RDP) has undergone considerable change in recent years. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in place since the 1950s, has traditionally been a sectoral policy dealing mainly with agricultural development through subsidies and price guarantees for farms, with limited territorial aspects. The CAP has always been one of the biggest items in the EU's multi-annual budgets. In the late 1990s, the ‘Agenda 2000: For a Stronger and Wider Union’ established Rural Development Policy as the second pillar (Pillar II) of the CAP, while Pillar I continued to focus on direct payments to producers. This meant that, in addition to direct market support for farmers, the CAP now had an explicit element of social and environmental investment in rural areas based on their needs. The guiding principles of RDP under the CAP are decentralisation of responsibilities and flexibility of programming.

The 2000-2006 programme period saw funding for rural development brought under this single regulation for the first time. Further changes in 2003 (introduction of the Single Farm Payment) and 2005 guaranteed increased funds for Pillar II for the 2007-2013 period through a gradual reduction in payments under Pillar I. Since then, RDP (or Pillar II) has been implemented through one type of programming and one fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). In 2008, the CAP went through a ‘health check’ reform, which increased funding for programmes in the areas of climate change, renewable energy, water management and biodiversity for the 2007-2013 period through another compulsory modulated reduction in direct payments to bigger farms. Thus, the CAP has experienced a gradual shift from direct market support for farms (that had hitherto been linked to agricultural production) to a more holistic rural development approach.

Rural Development Policy for 2007-2013 focused on three main axes:

- **Axis 1**: improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors
- **Axis 2**: improving the environment and the countryside
- **Axis 3**: improving the quality of life and encouraging economic diversification in rural areas

Subsidiarity and partnerships with local actors were to be pursued through the cross-cutting axis of LEADER (**Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale**), which was intended as a supportive framework of collaborative action in order to help achieve...
the other axes (this is also known as Axis 4). LEADER focuses on delivering highly individual projects designed to address specific local problems, especially social and environmental issues. Projects under LEADER are implemented by the so-called LAGs (Local Action Groups).

In 2014, a new legal framework for RDP under the CAP entered into force. The current framework covers the 2014-2020 programmatic period and is aligned with the Europe 2020 Strategy. It is no longer divided into three axes but rather is based on six key priorities:

1. Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.
2. Enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions, and promoting innovative farm technologies and sustainable management of forests.
3. Promoting food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture.
4. Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry.
5. Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors.
6. Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

These priorities feed into the CAP's three general objectives (viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and balanced territorial development), which in turn feed into the three objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The priorities under Pillar II are to be met through a list of 17 measures plus LEADER. After establishing their priorities, Member States are free to compile the best mix of measures for their rural programmes to address their particular needs and challenges.

The LEADER approach should be strengthened through the concept of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). CLLD is meant to give flexibility to the implementation of RDP at the local level, enabling communities to determine relevant solutions to local needs. LAGs need to design Local Development Strategies, which are to be funded by the EAFRD. CLLD is mandatory for EAFRD programmes and is also an optional part of European structural and cohesion funds, as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
Member States must spend at least 30% of their EAFRD on certain measures related to land management and the fight against climate change, and at least 5% on the LEADER approach. This is meant to guarantee minimum levels of funding for the social and environmental needs of rural areas, and avoid disproportionate shares of the resources being used as payments to farms.

Nonetheless, as can be seen from the three axes in the 2007-2013 period and the six priorities in the 2014-2020 period, farm (agricultural) support continues to be an important part of RDP. This means that in addition to farm payments under Pillar I, subsidies to agricultural activity are also promoted under Pillar II and they represent important shares of RDP spending.

**A brief assessment of the 2007-2013 RDP**

The total Community funding for rural development measures (Pillar II) amounted to EUR 96 billion over the period 2007-2013. Levels of implementation of the EAFRD (the ratio between the cumulated declared expenditure and the planned expenditure) until August 2013 were extremely low in several countries, including Greece (47%), Bulgaria (49%), Romania (50%), Italy (55%) and Estonia (56%)\(^33\). Implementation in the EU as a whole averaged 65% of the 2007-2013 financial plans. This means that large amounts of funds set aside for rural development are not being spent.

In terms of the composition of expenditure per axis, Axis 2 had the highest share (53.2%), followed by Axis 1 (30.5%) and Axis 3 (10.8%). Axis 4 (LEADER) made up only 3.6% of the total amount declared at the EU level\(^34\). Levels of expenditure for LEADER do not seem to reflect the new CAP principles of subsidiarity and partnership at the local level. We have seen the importance of civil society and local communities’ involvement in rural development, and the need for sufficient resources to support such initiatives. LEADER is a cross-cutting Axis, which makes it even more relevant in terms of allocation of funds.

The allocation of funds to Axis 3 (the one most closely related to combat the rural isolation of citizens) was the highest in Bulgaria (36.6%) and Malta (33.2%). The rate is below 10% in France (9.9%), Portugal, Luxembourg (each 9%) and in Ireland (7.9%). Only 18% of EAFRD was allocated to Axis 3, while Axes 1 and 2 represented 33% and 46% of the total contribution\(^35\).

Comparisons between funds allocated to Pillar I and Pillar II can be complicated due to historical trends, differing rural policies and market interventions, varied importance of the primary sector and contributions made by Member States. Nonetheless, it is possible to see that rural development falls far behind market support for farms. For 2007-2013, allocations to Pillar I amounted to nearly EUR 337 billion, while Pillar II was allocated EUR 96 billion\(^36\).

\(^{34}\) Ibid, p. 311.
\(^{35}\) Ibid, p. 302.
Pillar I allocations among farms is also highly unequal. Traditionally, 20% of EU farms have received 80% of CAP payments, with the biggest subsidies usually going to big agri-businesses and landowners, including Royal Estates, airports and railway stations. Much of the payments end up with landowners, not with those who farm the land. As subsidies are linked to agricultural employment, land ownership, historical payments and political bargaining and not to income or wealth levels, Pillar I of the CAP can hardly be regarded as a policy dedicated to the inclusion of impoverished and excluded rural communities and farmers.

Pillar II also suffers from distorted and unclear allocations. Although the European Commission and the European Parliament have made efforts to establish objective criteria linked to policy objectives for distribution of funds among Member States, it is clear that the European Council has resorted to historical patterns of payments and political bargaining at the moment of allocating funds. One author has argued that the idea of objective criteria in allocation of rural development funds is a “mirage”, which can partly be explained by the inherent difficulties in establishing such criteria. The substantial increase in allocation to France for the 2014-2020 period, for example, at a time when most other Member States are experiencing a decline in funding, is “striking and puzzling”.

Allocation of CAP funds among Member States varies enormously. France is by far the largest recipient (with over 15% of total payments), followed by Germany, Spain and Italy. This primarily reflects the size of these countries’ agricultural sector (so payments under Pillar I). Therefore, the largest share of CAP funds has been aimed at supporting large agricultural activity, not rural development in all its social and territorial dimensions. In order to combat the rural isolation of some European citizens, more focused and holistic funding is necessary for the 2014-2020 period, as well as an emphasis on involving and supporting civil society and local community projects.

The road to Europe 2020

As seen above, the Europe 2020 Strategy, aimed at promoting smart, inclusive and sustainable growth in Europe during this decade, is reflected on the CAP’s second pillar’s priorities. For years, the CAP has been criticised for failing to deliver social inclusion and poverty reduction to some of Europe’s poorest rural areas. Criticisms have focused on the unequal distribution of funds, which has not been linked to income and wealth levels, thus neglecting poor farmers and small family farms. Critics have also argued that singling out farmers is ineffective for reducing poverty, since they

38 Ibid.
39 Q&A: Reform of EU Farm Policy, BBC News, July 2013, http://bbc.in/X0M4YK
have above-average income in several countries and are asset rich\textsuperscript{40}. Since enlargement, the CAP has continued to benefit farmers from the older 15 Member States far more than farmers from the newer members.

Furthermore, the CAP has been seen as unfair for poor farmers in the developing world, who are unable to compete with European subsidies. Another commonly held view is that the CAP absorbs too many resources, when agriculture accounts for less than 2\% of the European economy. Finally, food shortages are extremely unlikely in Europe, where the supply and stocks of food are regarded as safe and stable, and would continue to be so without the billions of euros dedicated to farm payments\textsuperscript{41}. CAP funds, it is said, should be freed for investment in technology, innovation, research and competitiveness in other areas\textsuperscript{42}.

The current challenge for Europe is to better address the rural isolation of citizens by targeting rural poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and lack of services and infrastructure. Smart investment in education, the labour market and public services needs to be strengthened. Rural Development Policy has to take into account evolving labour trends in Europe’s rural areas. The EU-15 countries, for example, have experienced a reduction in the numbers of farms and an increase in their size. In the EU-N12, workers have been leaving agricultural activity to seek employment in other sectors. In 2010, there were around 12 million farms in the EU, but only 10 million Annual Work Units, which is less than one per farm\textsuperscript{43}. Agricultural labour has been gradually replaced by physical capital. From 2005 to 2010, the agricultural labour force shrank by 5.2\% a year, while productivity grew by 6.8\%\textsuperscript{44}. The vast majority of European farms are still small family farms, dominated by family labour. Consequently, RDP policy can benefit from proportional funding allocations to promote the development of different economic sectors in rural areas, taking into account the need to strengthen employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors.

A considerable body of economic research has underpinned the need to move away from heavy farm subsidy and towards investing in rural areas’ social needs, innovation and environmental services\textsuperscript{45}. These priorities need significantly less budget and would be more effective in reducing rural isolation. The EU budget should follow a more welfare-oriented logic rather than being shaped by agricultural output, political compromise and historical patterns of payments. Rural policies have been dominated by large political and economic interests, rather than the social and environmental needs of the poorest rural regions in Europe. Even the CAP’s second pillar funding has been characterised by unclear trends, which may increase inequalities among rural areas rather than address them.

Rural Development Policy needs to be rationally underpinned by the policy’s objectives on a European scale and not be subject to national interests. At a time when millions of Europeans are experiencing social and economic hardship, rural spending needs to be scrutinised against the delivery of collective welfare goods.

\textsuperscript{40} Valentin Zalurnt (2009), The Budgetary Aspects of the New CAP Payments, D-G for Internal Policies, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, pp. 14-15.

\textsuperscript{42} Q&A: Reform of EU Farm Policy, BBC News.

\textsuperscript{43} An Annual Work Unit corresponds to the work performed by one person who is occupied on an agricultural holding on a full-time basis. See Rural Development in the EU: Statistical and Economic Information – Report 2013, pp. 20-33.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Valentin Zalurnt (2009).
A clear move from farm assistance to smart rural assistance is thus necessary. Europe has made progress in reforming the CAP but further efforts are needed to target the underdevelopment of the most deprived rural areas in the EU. Reductions in Pillar I funding in order to increase availability of resources for Pillar II have to continue despite political opposition. Some authors have suggested an increase in co-financing requirements for Pillar I⁴⁶, thus forcing Member States to withdraw opposition to further reform. Similarly, co-financing requirements for targeted rural development could be reduced (although co-financing is an important aspect of European funding in order to promote better quality project design and prioritisation by Member States).

The EAFRD needs to be well-funded and politically supported. For the 2014-2020 period, funding for Pillar II is again lower than funding for Pillar I (EUR 90 billion compared to EUR 283 billion), and is lower still than the 2007-2013 period⁴⁷. Such funding has to be well targeted to reach the poorest areas, always involving local communities and civil society in project implementation, taking into account the importance of volunteering for the delivery of programmes and as a tool for social inclusion.

Political resistance to increased funding for rural territorial development needs to be overcome. In 2003 and 2008 the European Commission tried to shift more money from farm payment to rural development than the finally agreed amount. Further shifts from Pillar I to Pillar II may bring more opposition from some Member States, especially those who would move from net recipients (due to the size of their agricultural output) to net contributors (due to their lower rates of rural isolation). However, targeted funding for the poorest rural regions must be protected and enhanced.

In order to conclude the reform of the CAP, further transition from the Single Farm Payment to rural development has to be achieved through gradual de-scaling of payments, taking into account farm size and income and assets levels. Beyond a certain threshold of income and asset levels no payments should be made.

**Does rural development need a new policy framework?**

It has also been suggested that rural development priorities should be removed from the CAP. Some think that the CAP is not a suitable instrument for addressing rural isolation because it has been associated with agricultural subsidies for too long and is heavily influenced by large-farm lobbying. A better option, it has been argued, would be to firmly place rural development within structural funds, which are more clearly oriented towards social needs and territorial imbalances due to their financial solidarity principle⁴⁸.

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⁴⁶ Co-financing refers to the percentage of total European funding that has to be delivered by Member States.
ESF and ERDF are the component parts of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Growth Programme for 2014-2020. The policy areas of the EAFRD which contribute to the Growth Programme complement and support those covered by ESF and ERDF. This means that only certain areas of the EARDF are delivered as part of the Growth Programme.

This could generate duplication and incoherent project implementation. In England, for example, the Growth Programme has a unified Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) that is responsible for programme design, oversight and societal engagement, from the local to the national level. The EAFRD has a separate PMC, which remains responsible for the fund, including that part delivered via the Growth Programme. This reflects the primary focus of EAFRD on land-based activities and the farming and forestry sectors. Although the Growth Programme PMC aims to provide advice to the EAFRD PMC, this could be an obstacle for rural development to become more integrated with other structural and cohesion types of policies. It could also result in lost opportunities for greater synergy and local input (especially considering that local sub-committees or Local Action Groups could fail to link ESF, ERDF and EAFRD). Managing Authorities for the Growth Programme and EAFRD at the national level may also be different, which can further hinder coherence.

If Pillar II is maintained as the instrument for addressing rural isolation, it needs to be well coordinated with the Growth Programme. The EAFRD has been more integrated and aligned with the ESF and the ERDF than ever before. This is a step in the right direction to guarantee better targeted programmes that address local needs and avoid duplication. Coordination between different developmental policies must continue and be strengthened, always in consultation with civil society, citizens and communities.

In the course of its campaign on rural isolation of citizens in the EU, Volonteurope will work with its partners and various stakeholders to explore whether it would be beneficial to completely separate rural development from agricultural policy and potentially propose that rural development forms a separate stream of funding within the Growth Programme.

**From isolation to inclusion**

It is crucial to develop the capital base of rural areas, especially the poorest and most isolated ones. Capital includes not only economic assets and investment (which are equally important), but also human capital (education, skills), social capital (connections among individuals and social networks), cultural capital (heritage, identity, local creativity and talent), and environmental capital (landscapes, natural resource endowment and hydric resources)\(^49\). These are all key ingredients to rural development and crucial for economic diversification in rural areas. Such diversification could increase income levels, reduce unemployment and promote social inclusion.

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\(^{49}\) Study on Employment, Growth and Innovation in Rural Areas (SEGIRA), pp. 57-64.
European and Member States’ social programmes and funding to support women, migrants, ethnic minorities, the disabled, the elderly, children and young people should strive to include a rural dimension to their objectives and narrative. Rural development can always be regarded as a cross-cutting dimension of programmes designed to support vulnerable groups in society.

Environmental stewardship in rural areas needs to be continuously supported under RDP in order to promote the sustainable management of landscapes, water resources, ecosystems and to combat climate change while also promoting economic diversification (for example, eco-tourism), social inclusion and better resilience in the poorest rural areas.

The implementation of RDP must be built on strong partnerships with local communities, civil society and volunteers. The promotion of active citizenship and volunteering should be an integral part of rural development in all Member States, allowing rural communities to take ownership of their wellbeing and prosperity. More funding for LEADER can help achieve this (with the right balance of co-financing by Member States).

The concept of CLLD proposed for the 2014-2020 period may be a positive tool but it depends on receiving enough funding and political support. Member States must support LAGs on the design of Local Development Strategies, without sequestering the process. This could be achieved through Technical Assistance to LAGs being clearly mentioned in EAFRD Operation Programmes. Moreover, EAFRD Operation Programmes must inform on LEADER alignments with the Growth Programme CLLD initiatives in order to promote coherence.

Cross-sector partnerships among NGOs, businesses, Governmental institutions, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the media are necessary to foster a climate of cooperation and a sense of the ‘common good’. Funding for civil society and LAGs must be protected and increased in order to overcome obstacles to rural development.
Recommendations

EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS

1) **Guarantee coherence** between the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), such as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), avoiding duplication and ineffective use of funds, especially if ESIF include a rural dimension.

2) **While reviewing and negotiating Member States’ Partnership Agreements** and their EAFRD and ESIF Operation Programmes (OPs), the European Commission has to promote coherence and complementarity between these policies in each Member State, while guaranteeing that the OPs contain a robust civil society and citizen engagement aspect.

3) **Agricultural funding needs to be better targeted to support the poorest farms** in Europe, including small family farms. In order to achieve this, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has to be linked to wealth and income levels and decoupled from land ownership and output. The EU has to base the CAP on its policy objectives at the European level and not on historical patterns of payments or the political interests of each Member State.

4) **Decouple Rural Development Policy** (especially Pillar II of the CAP) from commercial policy and firmly establish it within the same solidarity principles that underpin the ESIF. Further separation between rural development and the CAP may be necessary.

5) **Increase focus on local-level action by increasing percentage of rural funding to LEADER and CLLD.** Strengthen the role of Local Action Groups, community organisations and civil society with sustained funding, engagement and assistance.

6) **Support volunteering and grassroots action** in order to promote social inclusion and the development of social networks in rural areas. Recognise the role of volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in engaging citizens and promoting local ownership of projects.

7) **Focus on the wellbeing of and opportunities for vulnerable groups** (women, young people, old people, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants) in rural areas while designing and evaluating rural policy. In order to target these groups, coherence and complementarity between different funds needs to be prioritised.

8) **Target rural infrastructure as a rural policy priority.** The digital divide must be addressed through policies that increase broadband availability and take up in rural areas. This must be accompanied by the development of digital skills among rural populations with local training programmes involving volunteers and LAGs. Policies have to take into account the characteristics of the local population in terms of age, educational attainment and income levels.

9) **Policies need to support the empowerment of rural communities** and capacity-building at the local level. This can be achieved through involving vulnerable groups in the design, delivery and evaluation of projects. The democratic legitimacy of Rural Development Policy will be enhanced if rural populations are engaged and able to take ownership of local action.

10) **Strengthen the rural dimension of Europe 2020** by measuring its impact on rural areas, especially taking into account its five objectives. The European Semester must include the measurement of progress achieved in rural areas and the European Commission must make specific recommendations to Member States to address rural issues, especially regarding the most deprived regions. The 2015 review of Europe 2020 must include an analysis of progress achieved in rural areas and areas of improvement.

11) **The 2016 review of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework must consider the rural dimension.** The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has indicated that the review will focus on his agenda for jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change. These must also be looked at from a rural perspective.
MEMBER STATES

1) **Improve implementation of the EAFRD**, considering that several Member States fell well short of full implementation of the allocated funds for the 2007-2013 period. Guarantee implementation of LEADER funds and the promotion of CLLD.

2) **Carry out cross-sector consultations with stakeholders** at the moment of preparing the Operation Programmes for the EAFRD and ESIF in order to engage citizens and increase the democratic credentials of these policies. Consultations may also help increase coherence and complementarity among programmes, especially if actors at the local level are involved.

3) **Allow local groups and committees to participate in the governance structure** of European funds, taking their views on the design, implementation and evaluation of the programmes. Clarify local level participation with all stakeholders on the Operation Programmes before submitting them to the European Commission.

4) **Focus resources on the most vulnerable and deprived rural areas**, involving Local Action Groups and vulnerable groups of citizens in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects.

5) **Establish a clear coordinating structure between the EAFRD and the ESIF governance structures** to guarantee complementarity of programmes. Integrate the different funds’ strategic priorities in order to target areas most in need.

6) **Guarantee the flexibility of programmes** in order to address local needs and carry out projects of local relevance.

7) **Remove political resistance to further reductions to farm subsidies** in order to free up resources for more comprehensive and targeted rural development across Europe.

8) **Engage volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations** in rural development by guaranteeing enough funding and meaningful spaces of debate.

9) **Provide technical assistance to Local Action Groups** in developing their Local Development Strategies.

CIVIL SOCIETY

1) **Share examples of best practice and innovative approaches** to rural isolation.

2) **Take an active role in the governance structure of European funds** that have an impact on rural development (EAFRD, ESIF). Participate in the design of Operation Programmes and the oversight of monitoring committees at the national level. Engage local groups and vulnerable groups in the design and implementation of projects.

3) **Communicate bad practices by Member States to the European Commission** in order to guarantee Governments are complying with their obligations to consult and engage a variety of stakeholders (especially at the local level) in the design, implementation and evaluation of European programmes.

4) **Establish local advisory groups to assist grassroots and community organisations** to access European funds. Advise Governments on strategic priorities and volunteer involvement.

EDUCATION / MEDIA

1) **Raise public awareness** about the rural isolation of citizens in Europe.

2) **Promote the importance of rural development** for the achievement of the Europe 2020 objectives.

3) **Promote the notion of European solidarity in tackling rural isolation** in the most remote and deprived rural areas in Europe.

4) **Combat the stigmatisation of rural citizens**, especially those most vulnerable.

ALL STAKEHOLDERS

1) **Promote and engage in cross-sector debates** on whether to maintain Rural Development Policy within the CAP or to make it a separate funding stream within the Growth Programme (thus moving it closer to the ESF and the ERDF).