

Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural areas

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Main findings

- Invisibility of rural poverty
 - No data in EU or national surveys
 - No harmonised definition of rural areas in EU

First consideration:

- improve knowledge of the phenomenon under the light of the relevance of the rural dimension in the EU
 - Harmonisation of definition of rurality
 - common indicators able to capture and monitoring rural poverty

Main findings (from available statistical data NUTS 3 and 2 and from the National Reports of the FGB study):

- Poverty rate is very significant in rural areas compared to the urban ones even if there are remarkable differences among rural areas

Features of rural areas affecting the risk of poverty and social exclusion for the rural population.

Demography

Education

Labour market

Demography

- exodus and urbanisation (long established trend in western countries and now mainly relevant in Eastern countries)
 - impoverishment of human resources and economic activity
 - migration of young people to cities (Western countries) or abroad (Eastern countries)
 - aging and isolation of elderly
 - gender (aging single women in western countries; out-migration of rural women in Eastern and Southern countries; labour market barriers for women (Southern and Eastern countries))
 - counter-urbanisation, returning migrations (mainly in Western countries)
 - pressure on cost of living
- In perspective: impoverishment of rural areas in terms of demographic trends

Education

- educational attainment significantly lower in rural than in urban areas
 - General lack of pre-school facilities,
 - Difficulties to access to primary and secondary school (cost and time of every day commuting and decline in the number of rural schools, linked to a strategy of grouping schools)
 - quality of education: lower in rural areas (education infrastructure, qualification of staff, scarce ICT, obsolete or missing equipment for vocational training and apprenticeship)
- impoverishment of rural areas in terms of quality of human capital

Labour market

- **Worse than urban** (e.g.: male and female employment rate, long-term unemployment, etc.)
- Relevance of **agriculture** in labour market
 - Low income, seasonality, low pensions (farmers and agricultural workers). More severe in Eastern countries (transformation of agriculture from state to private farms→ fragmentation of farms, unemployment, etc.)
 - Seasonal workers, undeclared immigration and criminal organisations (southern countries)

Remoteness, infrastructures and access to basic services as particular problems of rural areas

- **Transport:** limited, low quality infrastructure (mainly in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania)
 - **digital gap:** lack of physical infrastructure (broadband), lack of education, adoption of ICT endogenous
 - **health care and services:** long travel times, lack or poor medical infrastructure and staff, lack of emergency services
- impoverishment of rural areas in terms of quality of life/attractiveness for people and capital

Vicious circles and poverty of rural areas

- Demography, education, labour market and remoteness interact and generate vicious circle which may reproduce and amplify the phenomenon of poverty
 - **Poverty of rural areas**: possible disadvantage of the rural context in comparison with the urban one
 - **Poverty in rural areas**: specific at-risk groups may stand out, either different from the urban ones or similar to them, but facing different specific problems connected to the characteristics of rural areas

Policies

Question:

are actual policies and measures able to break the vicious circles affecting rural poverty and risk of exclusion? How can they be improved to reach this goal?

How to improve synergies?

- Poverty of rural areas and poverty in rural areas are linked. However, policies tackle the two aspects of poverty separately.
 - Example:
 - policies explicitly designed to address the difficulties of poor people in most of Member States do not have the ***rural poor*** as a target
 - policies aimed at improving the conditions of rural areas or at reducing disparities between regions and influence the general context within which the condition of rural poor are defined do not have the ***poor*** as a target
- Improving synergies between policies against the two aspects of poverty (poverty of and in rural areas)

Policies against poverty of rural areas

- **Not directly** targeted against poverty and risk of exclusion
 - Cohesion (or structural/regional policy)
 - Common Agricultural Policy
 - Pillar 1 Guarantee-Common Market Organisation
 - Pillar 2 Rural Development policy

Positive outcomes

Very important policies supporting rural areas and fighting against poverty and risk of exclusion. Main actions in:

infrastructures

labour market

tourism and cultural attraction

quality of life

diffusion of SMEs in rural areas

(a number of success stories)

Limits

Some problems of method and coherence among goals of those policies

Improvement of CAP:

- Pillar 1:

- better target poor farmers and agricultural workers
- stress the emphasis on multi-functionality, environmental measures, improvement of quality and employment that could play a role in fighting poverty of farmers and rural areas

- Pillar 2:

- reinforce Pillar 2 (example modulation)
- Axis 3 (Quality of Life) very important but should better address the issue of poverty
- effectiveness of a bottom-up approach but improve governance and administrative capacity in the implementation of policies (heterogeneity in institutional capacity among local levels of government throughout the EU; countries with the greatest rural development needs remain under funded because of difficulties in co-financing national and regional new rural development measures (financial constraints, administrative difficulty, etc.)
- risk of failure in the poorest areas (vicious circle “low capacity building/difficulty in using funds/low capacity building”)

Which policies?

- Policies by all levels of government should focus on **human capital investment infrastructure labour market**
- Improve co-ordination between policies (mainstream the rural dimension into social inclusion policies and viceversa)
- Improve involvement and co-ordination of different actors (government and social economy)
- Implement monitoring and evaluation system of the policies (set of indicators of the performances and exchange of good practices)

- THANKS