

Rural Businesses

‘Rural Businesses’ is one of the sub-topics of the broader ENRD thematic work on ‘[Smart and Competitive Rural Areas](#) ^[1]’. Work on this sub-topic focused on identifying how rural entrepreneurship can be supported to better access new markets and develop new forms of successful rural business both on and off-farm.

The thematic work identified new trends and opportunities for businesses in rural Europe. These range from opportunities in biotechnology to the experience economy and from possibilities created by new information technologies to changing consumer demand.

Taking advantage of these opportunities requires new ways of thinking about rural businesses, ‘wild ideas’ and improved, modern forms of business support. These need both to provide **flexible support for individual rural businesses** and **help to overcome the digital divide** in order to improve the business environment in rural areas.

Providing flexible business support means:

- Smarter approaches that go beyond ‘one-off’ interventions towards supporting the entire process of rural business development, innovation and acceleration (e.g. rural business accelerator approach);
- Creating a ‘support ecosystem’ that incorporates multiple elements and practices such as peer learning, mentoring, training, advice etc. that can be accessed as required;
- Ensuring that entrepreneurs are able to quickly access small-scale, flexible forms of finance;
- Adapting support models to overcome the additional practical difficulties that can arise in a rural setting.

Overcoming the digital divide involves:

- Supporting the **roll-out of broadband internet access** across Europe’s rural areas, for example, through innovative community broadband approaches;
- Building **digital skills and capacities** of rural populations and businesses to enable them to take advantage of digital opportunities, for example, to access new markets; and
- Taking advantage of tools such as **rural digital hubs**, which can offer fast, reliable internet access, physical work spaces and a range of business and community support services tailored to local needs.

Strategically deploying Rural Development Programme (RDP) Measures

The RDPs provide a set of tools (Measures) that can be used to contribute to these types of rural business support models. Notably by:

- building skills and capacity through knowledge transfer (M1); advisory services (M2); Cooperation (M16); LEADER/CLLD (M19); and Technical Assistance (M20); and
- providing flexible forms of finance through farm and business development (M6); and LEADER/CLLD (M19).

Good approaches involve effective use of RDP Measures in complementary ways and more effective coordination between the RDPs and other policies, initiatives and tools which can influence rural development – such as [Regional Development](#) [2], [Broadband Europe](#) [3] and [Financial Instruments](#) [4].

Main reports

- [Summary factsheet of the Thematic Group on 'Smart and Competitive Rural Businesses'](#) [5]
- [Final Report of the Thematic Group on 'Smart and Competitive Rural Businesses'](#) [6]
- [2014-2020 RDP analysis report on support for Rural Businesses](#) [7]

Publications

EAFRD Projects Brochure on '[Supporting Rural Business](#) [8]'

EU Rural Review 24 on '[Re-imagining Rural Business Opportunities](#) [9]'

Comparative case studies

- [Mobilising the innovative potential of rural businesses](#) [10], developed on the basis of three rural business accelerator case examples:
 - [Academy on Tour](#) [11] (Belgium)
 - [Short Food Supply Chain Masterclass](#) [12] (the Netherlands)
 - [AgriEnt Business Accelerator](#) [13] (Greece)
- [Community Broadband: New digital opportunities for rural areas](#) [14], developed on the basis of two community broadband case examples:
 - [North-Western Kuhmo Village Optical Fibre Cooperative](#) [15] (Finland)
 - [Molenwaard Civil Society Broadband](#) [16] (the Netherlands)
- [Revitalising rural areas through digitisation](#) [17], developed on the basis of three rural digital hub case examples:
 - [Cocotte Numérique](#) [18] (France)
 - [#hellodigital](#) [19] (Scotland)
 - [Ludgate Hub](#) [20] (Ireland)'

Factsheets

- [Rural digital hubs](#) [21]

- [Business accelerators and other tools for supporting change in rural businesses](#) [22]
- [Social innovation and social entrepreneurship](#) [23]
- [Smart RDP support for smart rural businesses](#) [24]

Events

- [Revitalising Rural Areas through Business Innovation](#) [25] (30 March 2017 – Brussels, Belgium): see [seminar highlights](#) [26]
- [1st TG meeting](#) [27] (13 October 2016): see [meeting summary](#) [28]
- [2nd TG meeting](#) [29] (30 November 2016): see [meeting summary](#) [30]
- [3rd TG meeting](#) [31] (23-24 January 2017): see [meeting summary](#) [32]
- [4th TG meeting](#) [33] (18-19 May 2017): see [meeting summary](#) [34]

Browse through all events under the broader topic '[Smart and Competitive Rural Areas](#) [35]'.

Thematic Group documents

- [Leaflet](#) [36]
- [Background Paper](#) [37]
- [Final TG report](#) [6]
- [Digitisation, the use of ICT and access to broadband](#) [38] (briefing)
- [Smart networking for rural businesses](#) [39] (briefing)
- [Building on local community, environmental and cultural assets](#) [40] (briefing)
- [Urban-rural linkages for rural businesses](#) [41] (briefing)

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Links

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- [2] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/investment-policy/
- [3] <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/broadband-europe>
- [4] <https://www.fi-compass.eu/>
- [5] https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg_rural-businesses_summary-factsheet.pdf
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[26] https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/s4_rural-businesses_seminar-highlights.pdf

[27] https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/1st-meeting-thematic-group-smart-and-competitive-rural-businesses_en

[28] https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg1_rural-businesses_event-summary.pdf

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[30] https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg2_rural-businesses_event-summary.pdf

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[36] http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg1_rural-businesses_tg-leaflet.pdf

[37] http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg1_rural-businesses_tg-background-paper.pdf

[38] http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tg1_rural-businesses_brief_digitisation.pdf

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