

SPAIN

Local development

Location

Sierra Norte de Madrid

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local
development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding

Financed under LAG's
operating costs

Project duration

2020 – 2020

Project promoter

GALSINMA

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Website

<https://sierranorte.com/plataforma-voluntarios-sierra-norte-madrid-coronavirus>

A local action group set up the Acción Sierra Norte platform to protect the groups most at risk from the spread of COVID-19.

Summary

Madrid was the main COVID-19 hotspot in Spain. However, Sierra Norte de Madrid, an area comprising 42 municipalities and 29 500 residents, managed to curb the impact of the virus, registering the lowest rate of contagion in the entire Madrid region.



GALSINMA, the Local Action Group (LAG) that operates in this territory, was a key player in this crisis. Volunteers, but also the LAG coordination, were essential in facing the population's needs during these difficult weeks. Various actions were initiated by groups of volunteers: making face masks and gowns, cleaning and disinfecting, or checking up on seniors through phone calls and applications such as Zoom or Skype, to help people who may have suffered from loneliness during the confinement.

Results

Coordination between different groups and donations from different entities enabled this platform to distribute 85 635 face mask - 35% of them were homemade.

Distribution of 9 000 protective hospital gowns, boots, hats, protective jumpsuits, and gloves - 40% were homemade.

Production of 1 237 3D protection screens, 1 219 masks and donation of 251 valve adapters for respirators.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Difficult situations help people to learn. For LAG GALSINMA, the Acción Sierra Norte platform reinforced the role groups can play in a territory. Meetings are now being held with many sectors (tourism, education and the primary sector) to work on the medium and long term response to the needs of the population. This experience underlined the importance of LAGs as key agents in their territories. The LAGs made it possible to unite different organisations, both public and private, and support the collaboration and participation of all to create and reinforce a network based on the feelings of unity and territory.

Context

Madrid was the main COVID-19 hotspot in Spain. However, Sierra Norte de Madrid, an area comprising 42 municipalities and 29 500 residents, managed to curb the impact of the virus registering the lowest contagion rate in the entire Madrid region. On the one hand, the low population density and geographical spread of the municipalities contributed to slowing down the transmission of COVID-19. On the other hand, the ageing population and scarcity of basic resources made this a very vulnerable territory where it was necessary to take all precautions to avoid infections.

GALSINMA, the Local Action Group that operates in this territory, was a key player in this crisis. It acted as a point of reference in coordinating the actions of the 42 municipalities, non-profit organisations, private sector and regional government to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, successfully directing efforts to minimise the impacts in the territory.

LAG GALSINMA's actions and daily work made it possible to identify the needs in the short and medium term and designing new measures to reach each home in Sierra Norte. All sectors, even small businesses and food establishments, cooperated in the fight against COVID-19.

During this time, LAG GALSINMA played a key role by engaging all the actors in its territory, both in the private and public sectors. Thanks to the commitment of all the volunteers and the importance of their belief in a common project, the community managed to minimise the impact of the pandemic.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to:

- Minimise the impact of COVID19 and its effect on the high risk groups in the territory. *"Prevention against the unknown"*.
- Develop a horizontal and collaborative organisation that can identify basic needs and act quickly.
- Support the most vulnerable groups in health, education, and employment skills. *"Leave no one behind"*.
- Reinforce the feeling of unity, cooperation and collaboration. *"If we go alone, we will be faster; if we go together, we will go further."*

Activities

All the actions carried out are the result of the constant work of volunteers and LAG technicians. They were able to adapt to this new scenario by being resilient and looking for opportunities to work together, driving the efforts towards a common objective.

At the beginning, one of the biggest concerns was the lack of personal protection equipment, such as surgical masks for the civilian population and municipal staff. To complement confinement measures and social distancing obligations, the **manufacture of homemade face masks** was one of the first actions promoted. The masks, sterilised according to all security measures, were distributed all around the 42 municipalities to prevent infection. All this work was completed with the purchase of medical supplies as well as the search for donations from different entities to supply the approved surgical masks for the staff of nursing homes and other public institutions, such as the State Security Forces.

Another action was the coordination of equipment and means to **manufacture 3D protection visors and parts of respirators**. To do this, collaboration between the Sierra Norte Adult Education Centre and professionals in programming, robotics and the use of the robotic area was essential. A working group was organised where volunteers made their printing machines and time available to the Acción Sierra Norte platform to manufacture the 3D protection material.

Regarding **disinfection and cleaning tasks**, teams were organised in the different municipalities to disinfect public areas, such as small markets, banks, pharmacies and waste containers with hypochlorite.

In addition, rounds of calls were organised to the older people who spent the confinement in nursing homes, to provide support and companionship. Through digital platforms such as Zoom or Skype, the elderly were able to 'connect abroad', making their isolated situation more bearable.

Solidarity campaigns were organised to collect food for needy families and the most vulnerable groups. Private and non-profit organisations were involved, receiving orders and distributing the food to families.

Faced with the closure of schools, rural areas face two distinctive problems: how to **address the lack of material resources and weak internet connection**. Many families were not prepared for distance education and this new situation caught them by surprise. The Acción Sierra Norte platform has been working to help families establish a better work-life-balance and provide materials and technological resources for those families with fewer resources. Due to the lack of a quality internet connections in a considerable number of homes, many of the mayors have offered their town hall to be a 'central office' where teachers send homework and thus ensure that pupils can continue their school activities.

Rural tourism in Sierra Norte is a source of income for many of the families who, due to the health crisis, have had to close their businesses. Acción Sierra Norte platform members and LAG GALSINMA technicians in the tourism field, have launched different awareness campaigns to promote the region's natural, gastronomic and cultural heritage with the aim of **reactivating safe tourism**, in a responsible and sustainable form. Additionally, a programme promoting local products such as lamb was launched. This sector was seriously affected due to its close links to the restaurant sector.

Different meetings carried out between the LAG and the restaurant and hotel sectors have enabled identification of the main lines of work to continue **promoting rural tourism and local products**. This was done mainly through social networks and newsletters. The objective is to reactivate the economy once the confinement has passed and to return, little by little, to normality. Protocols were drawn up, regulations have been shared with the sector and quality tourism has been promoted, all in the interests of maintaining the safety of tourists and workers.

To sum up, all the actions carried out by LAG GALSINMA through the Acción Sierra Norte platform show the importance of local actors such as the LAG, with its experience and knowledge of the territory and its people and to connect all the different parties under a common objective: the safety of the population and the reactivation of the local economy in a sustainable way.

Key lessons

The Acción Sierra Norte platform was created with the purpose of protecting the groups most at risk from the spread of COVID-19. Currently, the project has been expanded and is encompassing other activities focused on solving urgent socio-economic needs derived from the COVID-19 crisis:

- Coordination between different groups and donations from different entities allowed this platform to distribute 85 635 masks - 35% of them were homemade.
- Distribution of 9 000 protective hospital gowns, boots, hats, protective jumpsuits, and gloves - 40% of which were homemade
- Production of 1 237 3D protection screens, 1 219 masks and donation of 251 valve adapters for respirators.
- This situation has allowed the consolidation of different projects, such as 'Destino Madrid Rural': an interterritorial cooperation project among the three LAGs in the Community of Madrid. This project involves entrepreneurs, rural development agents and tourism technicians in promoting local products and markets.

Key lessons

Difficult situations help people to learn. For LAG GALSINMA, the Acción Sierra Norte platform reinforced the role of the group in the territory. Meetings are now being held with all sectors (tourism, education and the primary sector) to work in the medium and long term, with the goal of responding to the needs of the population.

This experience underlined the importance of LAGs as key agents in their territories. The LAGs made it possible to unite different organisations, both public and private, and support the collaboration and participation of all to create and reinforce a network based on the feelings of unity and territory.

Additional sources of information

n/a