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ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR GREEN RURAL DESTINATIONS

WORK PACKAGE 2: STATE-OF-THE-ART REVIEW

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Understanding entrepreneurship in rural areas

This section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of rural entrepreneurship by covering three critical areas: the definition and characteristics of rural entrepreneurship, the importance of entrepreneurship for rural development, and the challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship in rural areas. Rural entrepreneurship is a distinct field that engages with place and space, leveraging local resources to reconnect rural areas to broader economic networks. Unlike traditional entrepreneurial models that emphasise high-tech or fast-growth ventures, rural entrepreneurship tends to focus on alternative opportunities. Rural entrepreneurs often face distinctive challenges, such as limited access to resources and infrastructure. However, these regions may also possess strong social capital, which can be leveraged to foster entrepreneurial activities. Understanding rural entrepreneurship requires tailored approaches that consider the specific characteristics and potential of rural environments.

1.1.1. Definition and characteristics of rural entrepreneurship

Rural entrepreneurship involves creating and running commercial enterprises in rural areas. It involves using local resources, interacting with the rural population, and tackling the specific obstacles and possibilities that come with the rural context. This type of entrepreneurship is characterized by its focus on establishing economically sustainable practices that contribute to the overall growth and regeneration of rural areas.

A key characteristic of rural entrepreneurship is the dependence on the abundant natural resources available in rural regions, such as agriculture, forestry, and tourism. Rural entrepreneurs leverage these resources to create value-added products and services, thereby contributing to the local economy and promoting sustainable development. For instance, Martinho (2020) highlighted that agricultural entrepreneurship in the European Union significantly contributes to sustainable development by efficiently utilizing these resources. Innovation and adaptability are also vital traits of rural entrepreneurs. They often develop creative solutions to overcome the constraints posed by rural settings, such as limited access to markets, infrastructure, and capital. This innovative spirit is essential for transforming rural challenges into opportunities for growth and development, further emphasized by Jørgensen and Mathisen (2023).



In conclusion, rural entrepreneurship is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon with significant potential for driving sustainable development in rural areas. By understanding and leveraging its unique characteristics – such as resource utilization, community engagement, innovation, sustainability, and local impact – stakeholders can foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurial success and rural prosperity.

This Erasmus+ co-funded project *Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations* aligns with these goals by developing comprehensive modules that address these characteristic traits of rural entrepreneurship. Through innovative curricula and courses tailored to the unique needs of rural communities, the project aims to enhance the skills and knowledge of individuals in rural areas, thereby fostering economic growth and sustainable development. This holistic approach ensures that rural entrepreneurs are well-equipped to harness their local resources, engage with their communities, innovate, and create lasting positive impacts.

1.1.2. The importance of entrepreneurship for rural development

Rural entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in fostering economic growth and development in rural areas. It is seen as a key solution to reduce poverty, unemployment, and migration while improving living standards. Rural entrepreneurs contribute to agricultural development and create employment opportunities. Furthermore, rural entrepreneurs stand out because they harness and develop local resources, stimulating the growth of their local economies." (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015). In fact, rural entrepreneurship has long been acknowledged as a significant source of income and job creation, while also serving as a catalyst for product innovation, market expansion, and technological progress in these regions.

Moreover, according to Adhikari *et al.* (2018), rural entrepreneurship is essential for enhancing the resilience and sustainability of rural communities, especially those reliant on agriculture. The authors argue that entrepreneurial activities help communities capitalize on unique local resources, such as natural, cultural, and social capital, and convert these into economic opportunities. Rural entrepreneurship, when supported by community development frameworks, can address challenges like resource scarcity, climate variability, and economic shifts. Rural entrepreneurship is vital for transforming rural regions by combining local assets and knowledge to create sustainable economic ecosystems, thus preserving and strengthening rural communities.



A key approach to promote rural entrepreneurship is to assess and capitalize on their unique resources, or "community capitals," like natural, social, and human assets. Emphasizing place-based branding, communities can market distinct regional products, fostering a stronger connection to larger markets. Policy support, including favourable regulations and investment in essential infrastructure, is crucial, as it enables market access and sustains local businesses. Additionally, it is essential to develop human resources through skill-building and knowledge transfer. Training programs and networking opportunities empower rural entrepreneurs with essential skills and resources. Entrepreneurship programs involving local actors can create supportive ecosystems in rural territories. Through tailored support that addresses each community's strengths, these strategies create an environment conducive to sustainable entrepreneurship and economic growth (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015)

1.1.3 Challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship in rural areas

Rural entrepreneurship faces distinct challenges, including limited access to financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of technical and business skills. Other obstacles include market access difficulties, shortage of raw materials, sociocultural barriers, skilled labour, and business networks.

Rural businesses may also have limited local demand, making it challenging to achieve economies of scale. Additionally, rural areas are often isolated from innovation hubs, impeding knowledge-sharing and reducing exposure to diverse ideas. However, rural areas offer unique opportunities that align well with certain types of entrepreneurships, such as agritourism, lifestyle entrepreneurship, and small-scale manufacturing. The accessibility to natural resources and the potential for low-cost land and labour present competitive advantages for endeavour tied to agriculture, eco-tourism, or artisan crafts. Furthermore, rural entrepreneurs are often motivated by lifestyle factors, community involvement, and social impact, creating a distinct culture that fosters sustainable and community-oriented business models. Embracing local advantages and developing robust support networks and targeted policies are essential for enhancing entrepreneurship's role in rural economic resilience and growth (Fortunato, 2014).

To promote entrepreneurship in rural areas, targeted strategies must address both the structural challenges and leverage unique local strengths. Governments need to implement comprehensive policies, improve infrastructure, and provide skill development programs.



Developing strong local support networks like mentorship programs and entrepreneurship hubs encourage collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and community-oriented growth.

Additionally, fostering a “buy-local” ethos within rural communities can strengthen local markets for small businesses, creating a cycle of support that benefits both entrepreneurs and residents. Successful rural entrepreneurship can contribute significantly to economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction in rural areas.

1.2 Overview of the project

Entrepreneurship in rural areas faces various challenges, including negative stereotypes and misconceptions that can hinder the success of rural entrepreneurs. These challenges include a perceived lack of education and skills, limited access to resources, isolation, low market demand, insufficient infrastructure, and negative attitudes toward entrepreneurship. The project *Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations* aims to address these challenges through innovative curricula and courses tailored to the unique needs of rural communities, thereby enhancing their capacity to develop and sustain green tourism destinations. The goal is to enhance the skills and competencies of individuals in rural areas, thereby fostering economic growth and sustainable development. By focusing on sustainable entrepreneurship, the project aims to provide rural areas with the tools and knowledge necessary to leverage their natural and cultural assets in an environmentally friendly manner.

Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations involves multiple partners across Europe: Norway, Ireland, Portugal, Turkey, Cyprus and Finland. Each partner is bringing unique expertise and resources to develop comprehensive educational materials and frameworks that can be shared and implemented beyond the project partnership.

1.3 Innovative aspects and project impact

The project significantly impacts the development of the entrepreneurial skills and aptitudes required in rural areas, reaching many learners through partner institutions and providing access to innovative approaches and methodologies. It aims to create more employment opportunities, raise awareness about the importance of mental health, and highlight the business potential of rural areas. By contributing to the European Framework of Entrepreneurial Competences and promoting EU policies in education, skills development, and entrepreneurship,



the project fosters a comprehensive approach to rural development. Innovative aspects include incorporating diverse perspectives such as marketing, sustainable development, food tourism, mental well-being, inclusiveness, diversity, IT skills, and entrepreneurship. The project addresses and aims to contribute towards dismantling negative stereotypes about rural inhabitants and entrepreneurs. In this manner, partners hope to encourage inter- and multi-disciplinary collaboration in developing six modules which will include practical experience and resources that bridge urban and rural skills and competencies.

1.4 Outcomes and Open Educational Resources (OERs)

1.4.1 State-of-the-art review

The primary objective of this review is to identify best practice strategies and methodologies for registering samples and case studies of current entrepreneurial pedagogies and methodologies applicable to rural destinations. Additionally, the review aims to uncover perceived gaps in knowledge, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by rural entrepreneurs. To achieve this, a webinar was conducted under this work package, with participation from all project partners. This event served as the public launch of the project, during which guidelines were presented, and a Q&A session facilitated to engage stakeholders and address any queries.

This state-of-the-art review enhances the understanding of current approaches to entrepreneurship for green rural destinations. The review informs the development of targeted strategies and resources by identifying gaps in knowledge and best practices. Furthermore, this outcome creates optimal conditions for collaboration and innovation among project partners, fostering a more integrated and effective approach to promoting sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas.

1.4.2 In-house framework design and outreach

The main objective of this work package is to develop comprehensive modules covering various aspects essential to rural entrepreneurship.

- Mental health and well-being (Norway)
- Inclusiveness and diversity (Cyprus)
- Food tourism (Turkey)



- Marketing (Ireland)
- Entrepreneurship (Finland)
- IT skills (Portugal)

The framework design involves developing a clear mission, operational processes, and systems tailored to the needs of rural enterprises. This structured approach ensures that the business models created are both sustainable and scalable. Alongside this, outreach activities are critical, aiming to connect with target audiences through strategic marketing, effective networking, and active community engagement. These activities are designed to increase the visibility and credibility of rural entrepreneurs, thereby enhancing their reach and impact.

The creation of sustainable and scalable business models for rural enterprises provides a solid foundation for long-term success. Additionally, the outreach efforts are expected to significantly increase rural entrepreneurs' visibility and credibility, helping them establish a strong presence in their respective markets. Overall, these initiatives will lead to enhanced skills and knowledge in various aspects of rural entrepreneurship, equipping individuals with the tools and confidence needed to thrive in a competitive environment.

1.4.3 Starter kit development

The primary objectives of this work package are to provide comprehensive guidance on developing and testing entrepreneurial applications specifically tailored for rural tourism. Additionally, it aims to encourage entrepreneurship and foster innovation within the rural tourism sector.

Starter kit development offers best practices that provide valuable insights into effective application design, usability, and performance optimization. These best practices are essential for ensuring that the applications developed are user-friendly and efficient. Another key outcome is facilitating collaboration and networking among entrepreneurs, developers, and stakeholders. This involves sharing ideas, resources, and best practices to create a supportive and innovative environment. Starter kit development aims to support the development of high-quality entrepreneurial applications for rural tourism. These applications offer innovative solutions to address the unique challenges faced by rural areas. Moreover, the enhanced collaboration and



networking efforts will contribute to an improved tourism experience and foster economic development within rural communities. Overall, these outcomes support sustainable growth and increase rural destinations' attractiveness for tourists and entrepreneurs.

2. PARTNER COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS

2.1 Fagskolen Rogaland, Norway

Fagskolen Rogaland¹ is a public educational entity with its own school board, situated in Stavanger, Norway. It has a long history of 150 years, starting as a maritime institution. Over the years, has adapted its offerings to meet the evolving needs of the community, providing educational opportunities at H-VET² level.

Students are aged 20+ who have completed secondary school and achieved a craft certificate. The college boasts about 1600 students with the average age being 35. Fagskolen Rogaland offers a broad range of studies in areas such as technical industrial production, mechanical, electrical, oil and gas, maritime, chemical processing, construction, health services, childhood education, business, entrepreneurship, marketing, tourism, and renewable energies.

Equipped with modern teaching/learning equipment such as smart boards, drilling simulators, 3D printers, robotic building equipment, drones, and healthcare virtual reality simulators, Fagskolen Rogaland also boasts a certified materials testing station that delivers services to the local industry and training to students. The staff regularly engage in further training initiatives in different areas of specialization, holding master's degrees and possessing considerable industry experience.

Given the cooperative system in Norway (education institutions, industry, and employment centres), Fagskolen Rogaland has built strong local networks across various educational fields. The entire campus community actively promotes sustainable environmental practices, often collaborating with other schools, local communities, and the municipality/county.

¹ Rogaland Polytechnic College in English

² Higher Vocational Education and Training



2.2 Polygonal North Oy, Finland

Polygonal North Oy is a Finnish start-up offering tailor-made solutions in smart urbanization, environmental engineering, reducing CO2 emissions, and seeking subsidies to turn structured ideas into environmental initiatives. Established in 2021, Polygonal North leverages its deep understanding of digitalization and a nature-based perspective to enable organizations and individuals to be more agile and environmentally friendly. Polygonal North's human resources have been working with EU funding since 2014. The company has 3 full-time staff in the research and social service sectors and 3 in the manufacturing sector. It provides front-end/back-end developer solutions, including Cross Platform Build (iOS & Android) development and WordPress integration. Polygonal North uses tech-driven, environment-oriented solutions to address global issues like circular economy and environmental sustainability. They have run projects like "School to Farm," using farms as ecological and pedagogical education environments with a gamified STEM-based learning approach.

2.3 Perifereiako Gymnasio Agias Varvaras, Cyprus

Perifereiako Gymnasio Agias Varvaras, or the Agia Varvara Regional Gymnasium, is a public high school in Nicosia, Cyprus, hosting 412 students aged 12-15. Founded in January 1993, the school employs 51 teachers and offers a variety of obligatory subjects like Greek, English, French, Maths, Physics, and more. The school emphasizes the development of Greek language skills, health safety, climate change awareness, and improving learning outcomes through responsibility and empathy. Despite the expanding economy, Cyprus faces a shortage of skilled workers, making the consolidation of urban and rural skills essential. Perifereiako Gymnasio Agias Varvaras values a strong public school system and a diverse community, striving to offer ongoing training to its teaching staff and promoting creativity, innovation, and environmental responsibility among students.

2.4 Cankaya Ilce Milli Egitim Mudurlugu, Turkey

The Çankaya District Directorate of National Education, established in 1983, is the central district of Ankara, Turkey, managing 221 schools and adult education centers. The institution focuses on planning, programming, managing, supervising, and evaluating education and training



at the district level. The Directorate offers lifelong learning opportunities, non-formal vocational training for adults, and socio-cultural activities. It organizes training courses and seminars for teachers, administrators, and educators, promotes national and international projects, and provides strategic planning training. Çankaya İlçe Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü supports the development of skills and knowledge for individuals who cannot receive formal education, addressing local and regional educational needs through various courses and programs.

2.5 Escola Secundária Cacilhas-Tejo, Portugal

Cacilhas-Tejo Secondary School, located in Almada, Portugal, serves about 1900 students aged 15 and older, along with 140 teachers and 48 school assistants. The school offers general education courses in Science and Technology, Economics, Humanities, and Arts, as well as professional courses in Marketing, Tourism, Graphic Design, Management, and Informatics. The school encourages extracurricular activities and participation in competitions. It also provides adult education in the evenings, offering primary and secondary education courses and Portuguese as a foreign language. The Professional Courses offered at Cacilhas-Tejo are closely linked to the professional world, preparing students for local and regional job markets. These courses include Travel and Transport Agencies Technician, Pharmacy Assistant, Environmental and Rural Tourism, Management Support Technician, and more.

2.6 Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, Ireland

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) is the state education and training authority in Ireland's Limerick and Clare region. It plays a leading role in providing high-quality education and training, contributing to the social and economic prosperity of the region. LCETB oversees 2 Community National Schools and 18 post-primary Community Colleges, co-patroning 4 Community Schools. It supports youth work initiatives and delivers courses to over 24,000 learners annually through 28 College of Further Education and Training campuses. The authority offers a range of programs, including Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Hospitality Education, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), Specific Skills Training, Local Training Initiatives, Specialist Training Provision, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), and more. LCETB attracts and retains high-caliber staff, providing a supportive working environment that encourages professional and personal development. The authority is committed to flexible



employment practices, attractive career prospects, and opportunities for professional advancement. These partners bring a wealth of expertise and resources to the ***Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations*** project, ensuring a comprehensive and collaborative approach to promoting sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas.

3. STATE OF THE ART ANALYSIS IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

3.1 Vocational education programmes addressing green rural areas

The following pages address the question of how vocational education benefits the target group in the project's partner countries. Some of the main questions that can be highlighted are:

- i. Which training offers can be found in Norway, Finland, Cyprus, Turkey, Portugal, and Ireland to support entrepreneurship in rural areas with challenges or negative stereotypes and misconceptions that can hinder success, a perceived lack of education and skills, limited access to resources, isolation, low market demand, insufficient infrastructure, and negative attitudes toward entrepreneurship and which national regulations are valid in this regard?
- ii. Are there specific training courses for entrepreneurs, rural communities and educators in food tourism, marketing for green rural destinations, entrepreneurship in green rural destinations and IT skills for green rural destinations and if so, how far do they differ?
- iii. How is access to these programs regulated, and how are these programs funded on a local, national, regional, and/or European level?
- iv. Are there specific/or mandatory programs tailored to the needs of rural communities, such as local governments, community organizations, and other stakeholders who are interested in supporting entrepreneurship & innovation in rural areas?
- v. And, equally importantly, to what extent are the six curricular areas³ already part of these programmes?

³ The six areas targeted are: mental health & well-being tourism, inclusiveness & diversity, food tourism, marketing, entrepreneurship, and IT skills all within the frame of green rural destinations.



Elaborating answers to these and other questions was important during the initial project phase. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis including the institutional conditions in the respective partner countries and the perspective of trainers working in the field. Trainers in all partner countries have contributed with their expertise regarding their professional fields. This helped the consortium to identify the gaps and challenges that will be addressed in *Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations*

3.2 Norway

Entrepreneurial skills in rural areas of Norway encompass a blend of traditional business insight, innovative thinking, and adaptability to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by rural environments. However, it is possible to identify seven key aspects that characterize current entrepreneurial skills in rural Norway. The first is that rural entrepreneurs in Norway often need to be adaptable to changing market conditions, seasonal fluctuations, and limited resources. They must demonstrate flexibility in adjusting their business strategies and operations to meet the needs of the local community and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

A second key aspect is resilience as building and sustaining a business in rural areas can require resilience in the face of various challenges, including geographic isolation, limited access to infrastructure, and market volatility. Successful rural entrepreneurs in Norway exhibit resilience in overcoming obstacles and persevering through setbacks.

Thirdly, strong ties to the local community are essential for rural entrepreneurs in Norway. They often rely on community support, collaboration, and networking to access resources, customers, and market insights. Effective communication and relationship-building skills are crucial for fostering positive relationships with community members and stakeholders.

Fourthly, diversification plays a key part. Given the often-limited market size in rural areas, entrepreneurial ventures in Norway's rural regions may need to diversify their products, services, or revenue streams to sustainably operate and thrive. This requires creativity, strategic planning, and the ability to identify and capitalize on niche markets or opportunities.

Fifthly, many rural entrepreneurs in Norway prioritize sustainability and environmental stewardship in their business practices. This may involve adopting eco-friendly technologies,

promoting local and organic products or implementing green business practices that align with Norway's commitment to environmental conservation and sustainability.

Sixthly, rural entrepreneurs in Norway must possess basic digital literacy skills to leverage technology for marketing, communication, and operations, including e-commerce, social media marketing, and digital tools for financial and customer management.

Finally, to differentiate themselves and stay competitive, rural entrepreneurs in Norway often need to be innovative and creative in developing unique products, services, or business models. This may involve leveraging local resources, cultural heritage, or traditional craftsmanship to create value-added offerings that resonate with both local and global markets.

3.2.1 Samples of training and OERs offered in Norway

RESOURCE 1	Ministry of Labour and Inclusion
DESCRIPTION	The Ministry of Labour and Inclusion provides free-of-charge resources related to Food, Fishing and Agriculture which includes land management, agriculture and forestry, animal husbandry, reindeer husbandry and the development of new industries based on agriculture.
LINK	https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/aid/id165/
RESOURCE	<i>The Nature of Entrepreneurs' Engagement with a Layered Rural Context</i>
DESCRIPTION	Article published in "The International journal of entrepreneurship and innovation"
LINK	https://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/29947/article.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y
RESOURCE 2	OECD Economic Surveys: Norway 2019
DESCRIPTION	The OECD iLibrary resource titled "Maintaining High Employment" is part of the <i>OECD Economic Surveys</i> , Norway, 2019. It examines Norway's labour market, highlighting its strengths such as high-quality employment, secure jobs, and low inequality. However, it also addresses challenges like declining employment rates among certain groups, high sick-leave absence, and issues related to disability support and education.
LINK	https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2e51bb02-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/2e51bb02-en
RESOURCE 3	Open for business? How to create opportunities in entrepreneurship for everyone.
DESCRIPTION	Insightful interviews with OECD and guest experts on such pressing challenges as inequality and inclusive growth, the digital transformation, social change, the environment, international co-operation, and more.
LINK	OECD (2021), "'Open for business?' How to create opportunities in entrepreneurship for everyone", <i>OECD Podcasts</i> , Duration: 19:27, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://soundcloud.com/oecd/missingentrepreneurs
RESOURCE 4	Agricultural census in Norway
DESCRIPTION	A podcast as a part of a series of country-specific essays on the results of the European Union (EU) Farm structure survey (FSS) 2010.
LINK	https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive



3.3 Finland

Rural entrepreneurship is a cornerstone of economic vitality in Finland, with over 40% of enterprises operating in rural areas. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry leads the charge in promoting rural businesses' profitable and sustainable growth through the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland. This program, funded by the State budget and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), focuses on creating new jobs, fostering diverse entrepreneurship, and supporting environmental sustainability.⁴

Agricultural entrepreneurs benefit from the program through funding that compensates for farming in Finland's challenging northern conditions and encourages environmentally friendly practices. This includes subsidies for investments aimed at enhancing competitiveness and sustainability. Small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas play a vital role in employment, receiving subsidies for purposes such as product development, marketing, and collaboration to stimulate growth. Residents in rural areas also reap the rewards of the Rural Development Programme, as it aims to create a vibrant countryside that attracts new residents and visitors. The program supports initiatives for cleaner environments, improved services, and enhanced living conditions. Additionally, it encourages the use of technology and methods to develop services, including expanding broadband connections to make rural areas more attractive for businesses and living.⁵

Overall, the program underscores the importance of rural development in alignment with major trends such as environmental sustainability, climate action, and competitiveness. As Finland embraces diverse rural livelihoods and focuses on the bioeconomy, the program ensures that rural areas thrive by leveraging their unique strengths and addressing challenges. The ongoing support for entrepreneurship in rural Finland contributes to economic growth, environmental well-being, and the overall enhancement of rural living environments.

To illustrate one such case study is Lauhanvuori-Hämeenkanas UNESCO Global Geopark, which is a region in Western Finland that achieved UNESCO Global Geopark status in 2020. The Geopark spans three regions and nine municipalities, initially a fragmented area that has now been transformed into an integrated nature tourism destination.

⁴ <https://mmm.fi/en/rural-areas/rural-entrepreneurship>

⁵ <https://mmm.fi/en/rural-areas/rural-development-programme>



Lauhanvuori-Hämeenkanigas UNESCO Global Geopark is in the southern part of Suomenselkä, on the borders of three provinces. The Global Geopark presents the unique Geological story of its region, valuable nature sites, and special culture.

Lauhanvuori-Hämeenkanigas UNESCO Global Geopark project exemplifies successful regional/rural entrepreneurship, cooperation, sustainable development, and the transformation of a fragmented area into a unified and thriving nature tourism destination.

Terttu Hermansson, Executive Director of Lauhanvuori-Hämeenkanigas Geopark ry, spearheaded the project. Her leadership was instrumental in guiding the project towards its goals. The project secured funding through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This funding was crucial for the successful implementation of various initiatives within the Geopark.

Lauhanvuori-Hämeenkanigas UNESCO Global Geopark is a diverse area that includes two national parks, wetland conservation areas, and numerous natural and cultural sites. These characteristics make the Geopark a unique and valuable region. The primary focus of the Geopark is on preserving and explaining the Earth's history, geological heritage, natural heritage, landscapes, and cultural heritage. This theme is central to the Geopark's mission and activities.

The Geopark enhances tourism and promotes sustainability. By developing the area into a unified destination for nature tourism, the project "Kestävää kehitystä Geoparkissa" ("Sustainable Development in the Geopark") has transformed previously fragmented areas into a cohesive and attractive location for visitors. The success of the project is largely due to the close cooperation between municipalities, governmental bodies, educational institutions, local and rural businesses, and rural residents. This collaboration has fostered a strong and cohesive identity for the Geopark.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) provided flexible and effective funding, which facilitated the development of the Geopark. This support was essential for the project's achievements. The project aimed to encourage more sustainable practices, particularly in nature tourism and health and well-being. Companies were guided to adopt responsible practices, and the Geopark joined the UNESCO Global Geopark GEOfood Network, promoting local food products. This initiative has helped to integrate sustainability into the region's tourism and economic activities.



3.3.1 Samples of training and OERs offered in Finland

RESOURCE 1	Maaseutu.fi
DESCRIPTION	"maaseutu.fi" is the website for the Rural Finland portal. "Maaseutu" is the Finnish word for rural areas, and "maaseutu.fi" translates to "rural.fi" in English. This portal is maintained by the Rural Network Unit of the Rural Development Unit at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Finland. The website serves as a platform for information and resources related to rural development, agriculture, and rural policies in Finland. Furthermore, the portal provides information on various topics such as rural entrepreneurship, sustainable development, agricultural practices, and rural policies. It aims to support the development and well-being of rural areas in Finland.
LINK	https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/aid/id165/https://maaseutu.fi/
RESOURCE	Eskolan Kyläpalvelu Oy
DESCRIPTION	One of the best-known examples of a community-based social enterprise in the countryside is Eskola village in Kannus, which established Eskolan Kyläpalvelu Oy to meet the service needs of its residents. Owned by over 130 villagers through the village association or personal shares, it is a registered social enterprise. This multi-service company provides various services including day-care, lunch services, library and postal services, and home cleaning and support services.
LINK	https://eskolankyla.fi/
RESOURCE 2	Expert Training in The Management of Social Enterprises
DESCRIPTION	The training provides tools for guiding and advising social enterprises from the perspectives of company establishment, growth and success.
LINK	https://yyo.fi/
RESOURCE	Sustainable Rural Social Entrepreneurship MOOC
DESCRIPTION	This MOOC consists of online lectures, readings, case studies, reflection, and essay assignments. After completing this course, you know what social enterprises and community-based social enterprises are and how they can be used in the development of rural communities in Europe and other parts of the world.
LINK	https://digicampus.fi/course/view.php?id=3754#section-0



Photo source: <https://lhgeopark.fi/geopark-info/mika-on-geopark/>

Link: <https://lhgeopark.fi/>



3.4 Cyprus

The Rural Development Programme which is co-financed with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) by 53% and the Cyprus Government by 47% has a total amount of €251 million. Through the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment focuses on supporting structures with the help of which the farmer will be closer to the consumer, thus strengthening the immediacy of the relationship through which mutual respect will occur and understanding the needs and it will become possible to recognize and reward the efforts of farmers. In addition, the Strategic Plan aims to create foundations that will help farmers respect the environment and produce products in a way that will ensure natural resources for future generations. At the same time, it also aims to support farmers and breeders who respect the health of the consumer and use farming practices that ensure food safety, strictly observing those practices that limit the risk of chemical residues and the use of antibiotics in animals.

Also, the Strategic Plan aims to utilize new technologies to make farmers competitive, so they can survive in the globalized market by offering the consumer food at reasonable prices. The Strategic Plan addresses various categories of beneficiaries, such as farmers, producer groups, businesses, individuals, local authorities, partnerships, government departments and other bodies.

An example of a case study in Aeroponics Mediterranean Ltd., Planty in Larnaca, Cyprus. 'Planty' has built a state-of-the-art greenhouse, that uses environmentally friendly techniques and covers the complete production cycle from seed to market. It's a EAFRD-funded project (European Network for Rural Development) Rural Development Programme (RDP) support facilitated the construction of a state-of-the-art greenhouse which includes a nursery and a hydroponic growing plant, using Nutrient Film Technique (NFT) as well as storage and packaging facilities. Seeking innovative agriculture projects that are environmentally friendly and adapted to the market reality of Cyprus, the beneficiaries decided to invest in a state-of-the-art agricultural production unit. The new unit will provide premium horticultural products to the Cypriot market and, more importantly, will be able to export these products to new markets, such as the Greece and the Gulf Countries.

The objective of this project in setting up a state-of-the-art agricultural production unit was two-fold: generate premium products to be sold at a high price and produce them in sufficiently significant volumes to allow their export. Such an investment would improve the competitiveness of the business and create new business opportunities.



It is an establishment of a 10 000 m² state-of-the-art facility and greenhouse made up of aa 5 000 m² nursery and a 5.000 m² area for hydroponic production using the Nutrient Film Technique (NFT). The facility also includes 850 m² for storage and packaging facilities, ready to supply the market with premium horticultural and hydroponic products including micro leaves/microgreens, herbs and leafy vegetables.

Project information:

Location: Psematismenos, Larnaca, Cyprus

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P5 - Resource efficiency & climate

Project promoter: Aeroponics Mediterranean Ltd.

Links: <https://plantv.eu/our-story/>

https://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/da/ead/ead.nsf/home_el/home_el?opendocument





3.4.1 Samples of training and OERs offered in Cyprus

RESOURCE 1	Rural Development and Environment
DESCRIPTION	<p>The website is the portal for Rural Development and Environment in Cyprus and is run under the Ministry of Agriculture. The Managing Authority is responsible for the sound management and the efficient implementation of the Programme.</p> <p>The Rural Development Programme is the main policy tool of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment for the development of the primary sector and Cyprus rural areas. Strengthening the competitiveness of the primary and secondary agricultural sector in Cyprus and reviving the Cypriot countryside, while protecting the environment are part of the national priorities for rural development.</p>
LINK	https://www.gov.cy/moa/
RESOURCE 2	Immerse Yourself in Nature
DESCRIPTION	<p>One of the best-known examples of Rural Development program is the Cyherbia's Story. The Cyherbia Botanical Park project has received support and co-funding from the Leader Programme of the European Union and the Republic of Cyprus. Between 2014 and 2020, Cyherbia received assistance for carrying out activities under the Strategic Local Development framework, driven by local communities. This support came from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Cyprus Agricultural Payments Agency, which oversees the rural development program. Specifically, the funding contributed to the modernization of the botanical park, including the construction of new buildings and the acquisition of machinery and equipment. The European Union and the Republic of Cyprus jointly co-financed the investment project undertaken by Cyherbia for the modernization and expansion of its facilities.</p>
LINK	https://www.cyherbia.com/
RESOURCE 3	Ministry of Agriculture
DESCRIPTION	Successful practices or agricultural units that have been financed by the Rural Development Program (RDP) 2014-2020.
LINK	https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/memo_14_2628
RESOURCE	Ministry of Agriculture
DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIC PLAN CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) of the European Union 2023-2027
LINK	https://www.gov.cy/moa/en/



3.5 Turkey

As in the rest of the world, tourism and agriculture constitute the backbone of economic activities in rural areas in Turkey. Although the per capita share of the agricultural sector has been declining in parallel with the development of Turkey, it is above the average of developed countries. In terms of employment, almost all agricultural employment, which constitutes about one-fifth of total employment in Turkey, is in rural areas. It is estimated that the share of agricultural employment in total rural employment is over 60 percent.

On the other hand, economic activities in rural areas are not limited to agriculture as reflected in employment data. Rural areas have significant mobility in other branches of economic activity, such as tourism, rural industry, rural services, energy, and mining. In this framework, rural economic activities are not only limited to agriculture, and rural areas should not be considered only as villages. Therefore, the rural economy is part of an economic chain starting from sub-village settlements and extending to towns, districts, small and medium-sized provincial centres, and metropolises. In this respect, approximately 25 percent of our country's population lives in rural areas.

The most important international platform that Turkey's rural development policies are influenced by, especially in policymaking, is the European Union. Changes in the EU can have a direct impact on Turkey. For this reason, the changes in the EU rural development policy are significantly parallel to the changes in the field of rural development in Turkey and are funded by the EU. The amount of investment made in this context is approximately 1.4 billion Euros.

The 11th Development Plan (2019-2023) was prepared with the aim of setting out the development vision of our country with a long-term perspective and includes policies and measures related to rural areas in Turkey. Among the policies set out under the heading "Rural Development"; are farmer and environment-oriented programming of rural development support; maintaining supports for rural agriculture, rural economic infrastructure investments and development of farm activities, rural tourism, handicrafts, and rural informatics applications within the scope of IPARD and other rural development supports; ensuring the development of institutional and local capacity for rural development in order to raise living standards in rural areas; applying positive discrimination to groups such as women, young farmers, etc.; ensuring that producer organizations are leading institutions in social solidarity, cooperation, training and



financing, positive discrimination for women, young farmers, etc., and ensuring that producer organizations are leading institutions in social solidarity, cooperation, training, and financing.

In line with the development objectives in rural areas in Turkey, Development Plan Strategy objectives are determined every 5 years, and a strategy document is prepared. In this context, in line with the National Rural Development Strategy (2021-2023), the following goals and objectives constitute the main elements of the activities for the development of rural economy in the regional development perspective of Turkey:

Under objective 1 are the following items:

- Increasing competitiveness in the agriculture and food sector
- Increasing the added value of agricultural production,
- Encouraging and increasing the effectiveness of organizations in agriculture,
- Modernization in agriculture and development of agriculture 4.0 applications,
- Improving food safety, security, and supply chain.

Under objective 2 are the following items:

- Diversification of rural economic activities
- Increasing employment and production in non-agricultural sectors,
- Development of rural industry,
- Increasing innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas,
- Ensuring digital transformation in rural areas,
- Promote green transformation and circular economy practices in rural areas.

The National Rural Development Strategy (2014-2020) outlines a strategic framework based on objectives, priorities, and measures.

- **Developing rural economy and increasing employment opportunities:** Focuses on agri-food processing and marketing, modernizing agricultural enterprises, rural tourism, adding value to local products, and aquaculture.
- **Improving the rural environment and ensuring sustainability of natural resources:** Includes promoting environmentally friendly agricultural practices and organic farming.
- **Improving social and physical infrastructure of rural settlements:** Aims to enhance transportation, waste management, drinking water access, and renewable energy use.
- **Developing institutional capacity for local development:** Involves building local management structures and innovative public service models.



Photo: Çameli Stone Mansions, Çameli “Ecotourism Area”

Link: <https://www.ogm.gov.tr/>

Çameli Ecotourism Infrastructure Development Project was supported by Çameli Municipality within the scope of the 2015 Alternative Tourism Infrastructure Financial Support Program funded by the South Aegean Development Agency. Since 2014, it is a real rural development model based on tourism thanks to eco-tourism and extreme sports activities developed in Çameli. In addition, Çameli Ecotourism area prepares a suitable ground for nature-loving people to carry out many alternative sports tourism activities such as mountain biking, mountain hiking, paragliding, orienteering, snowshoeing, angling and many similar alternative sports tourism activities on weekends or daily and thus discover natural beauties directly.



Photo: Green Destination Model Project

Link: <https://www.sentrum.com.tr/en/sentrum-project>



It is the first Green Destination Model project in Turkey with the aim of creating a destination where cultural and natural values are protected, energy efficiency is ensured, renewable energy applications are available, waste is separated, tourism is spread over 4 seasons, technology and art are brought together, and the welfare of the people of the region is increased, and 10 million TL has been invested.

Within the scope of the implementation, energy audits were carried out in 8 small-scale tourism enterprises and 2 public buildings in Küçükköy, and necessary improvements were made in order to save energy in the equipment used. Focus group meetings and trainings were organized for public institutions, private enterprises and local people to determine the current situation on sustainable tourism, energy efficiency and renewable energy practices. The study, which created significant employment opportunities for the people of the region, is already a good example of putting entrepreneurial skills into practice in green rural areas.

The project, which aims to expand tourism, which is concentrated in the coastal areas of our country, to rural areas, also significantly encourages the integration of regional culture and local products into tourism and the expansion of income-generating activities for local people.

A third case is Isparta/Kuyucak Village Lavender Plantations, which is one of the projects included within the scope of "The Future is in Tourism", which was launched in 2007 in cooperation with Anadolu Efes, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to establish tourism as an alternative sustainable development tool in Turkey and to create local models by encouraging entrepreneurship.

In Kuyucak Village, located in Isparta, lavender is cultivated over an area of 5,000 decares, accounting for 90% of Turkey's lavender production. After harvest, producers sell the flowers either fresh or dried. The lavender is then processed in factories into various products, including cream, soap, oil, and cologne, which are made available to consumers. Kuyucak Village serves as an excellent example of rural tourism and provides a model for similar initiatives.

In terms of the results of the project, it is one of the largest implementations in our country due to its contribution to employment through tourism in rural areas. The project, which initially focused only on agricultural development, soon became one of the most important destinations for rural tourism and paved the way for women's employment and youth entrepreneurship in the region.



Photo: Isparta/Kuyucak Village Lavender Plantations

Link: <https://isparta.ktb.gov.tr/>

3.5.1 Samples of training and OERs offered in Turkey

RESOURCE 1	Agriculture and Rural Development Support Institution (TKDK)
DESCRIPTION	The Agriculture and Rural Development Support Institution (TKDK) is an organization affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Turkey. The general purpose of the organization is to encourage the use of resources provided by the European Union and international organizations in activities for the implementation of rural development programs.
LINK	https://www.tdkk.gov.tr/?lang=en
RESOURCE 2	Ankara Development Agency
DESCRIPTION	Carries out pioneering activities for the sustainable development of Ankara. It prepares Ankara-focused regional plans and provides financial and technical support to projects developed in line with the main objectives and priorities identified in these plans. It is designed as an intervention area to support new income-generating activities in rural areas to address the vulnerability of intensive population loss in rural Ankara, to harmonize living standards in rural areas with urban areas and to support sustainable development in sub-regions.
LINK	https://ankaraka.org.tr/yeni-nesil-kirsal-kalkinma
RESOURCE 3	Development Agencies



DESCRIPTION	Development Agencies, which operate under the Ministry of Industry and Technology, carry out activities for the development of human and institutional capacity at the local level in our country, the creation of the necessary investment environment for the development of the competitiveness of our regions at the global level, and investment planning. Therefore, it assumes an interface function between central and local stakeholders. There are 26 development agencies operating in our country. Each Development Agency has to carry out various activities and provide regional grants to the development priorities of their regions.
LINK	https://www.ka.gov.tr
RESOURCE 4	South Aegean Development Agency
DESCRIPTION	The South Aegean Region of Turkey aims to increase tourism revenues by mobilizing the eco-tourism potential of the region and expanding tourism activities inland. For this purpose, the region is a center of attraction for eco-tourism in terms of its natural beauties, historical richness and potential for sports and cultural activities. Infrastructure works are being carried out for the development of health tourism in Pamukkale Karahayıt; the creation of the infrastructure of extreme sports and training areas in areas such as Fethiye, Çameli and Akyaka; the excavation and landscaping of many ancient cities such as Laodikeia, Tripolis, Stratonikeia, Aphrodisias; and the creation of eco-tourism centers.
LINK	https://www.ka.gov.tr/sayfalar/guney-ege-kalkinma-ajansi-turizm--1-5
RESOURCE 5	#11 Development Plan 2019-2023
DESCRIPTION	It is a strategic document focusing on an economic and social development process that generates more value for Turkey to gain competitiveness at the international level by increasing its productivity in all areas. It is prepared for a 5-year period.
LINK	https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/On_Birinci_Kalkinma_Plani-2019-2023.pdf
RESOURCE 6	Ministry of Culture and Tourism
DESCRIPTION	It is the ministry that fulfills its duties to ensure the sustainable preservation and promotion of Turkey's universal culture, art and tourism values, to facilitate access to information in the formation of social awareness and to increase the share of our country from world tourism.
LINK	https://www.ktb.gov.tr/
RESOURCE 7	Directorate General for Agricultural Reform
DESCRIPTION	"Young Farmers Entrepreneurship Trainings" are organized within the scope of the Rural Disadvantaged Areas Development Project (KDAKP), which is carried out with additional financing from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

LINK	https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/TRGM
RESOURCE 8	Ministry of Industry and Technology General Directorate of Development Agencies
DESCRIPTION	2022-2023 Free online trainings to increase the entrepreneurship and employment opportunities of young people in rural areas within the scope of the "Youth Employment Theme".
LINK	https://www.bakka.gov.tr/haber/genclere-yonelik-akilli-tarim-uygulamalari-girisim-firsati/1393

3.6 Portugal

Inclusive and sustainable rural development in Portugal is associated with the promotion of different types of agriculture and respective environmentally friendly production practices, as well as increasing the role of territorial agents as providers of ecosystem services. It aims to respond to the challenges of rural territories, particularly in terms of climate change, generational renewal, conservation of landscapes, and natural and cultural heritage.

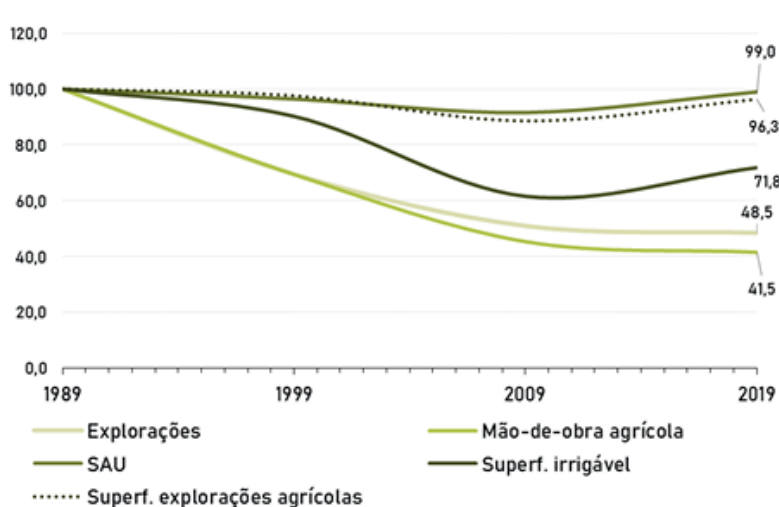
A long-term vision for rural areas involves improving living conditions and accessibility and developing initiatives that promote the diversification of activities, job creation, and equal

opportunities in rural territories, with a view to consolidating their productive fabric. Rural development also focuses on the qualification and training of rural agents, sharing information and knowledge, disseminating good practices, and cooperative work. Together, synergies are promoted between the different actors, enabling the renewal of knowledge, with a view to qualifying the intervention of rural development agents and promoting the image and full potential of rural territories.

The Ministry of Agriculture has specific programs to promote rural development like the PDR2020, the National Rural Network (RRN), the Family Farming Statute (EAF), a system of Professional Qualification, an Agricultural and Forestry Advisory Service (SAAF), and a Technical Support for Farmers – PEPAC. Agriculture continues to be an essential driver of the rural economy. However, the diversification of the socioeconomic structure of rural areas is essential for the development of non-agricultural activities, on and off farms, with a view to creating new sources of income and employment, directly contributing to improving household

income, settlement of the population, occupation of the territory and strengthening of the rural economy.

In this context, the DGADR is responsible for promoting the consolidation of the productive fabric of rural areas, monitoring initiatives that promote economic growth, diversification of activities, and creation of micro-enterprises and support services for the rural population.



Graph: Trends, in index 100=1989, of the number of holdings, agricultural labour, Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA), irrigable area, and area of agricultural holdings in the period 1989

Inspired by the essence of the Montado, Sociedade Agricola do Freixo do Meio promotes a space for cooperation, inclusion, personal development, work, and community building. It seeks to create a community that harmoniously integrates the ecosystem to which it belongs, that is autonomous, resilient, peaceful, and ecumenical.

Its mission is based on demand, transparency, sociocracy participation, knowledge, and innovation, enriched by the visions of science, agroecology, permaculture, and food sovereignty. The fundamental principles that guide their activity:

- Act as a social enterprise, seeking to improve the community in which we live above all else.
- Value and dignify the people who work with us.
- Promote stable employment for local residents.
- Treat profit as a condition and not as an objective to be maximized.



- Build healthy, living soil through the use of practices such as annual crop rotation, the use of compost, cover crops, green manure and minimal tillage.
- Practice organic farming certified according to European standards (Reg. (CE) 834.2007).
- For the health of soils, people and ecosystems, reject the use of chemically synthesized pesticides such as pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers.
- Reject the use of genetically modified organisms, GMOs, synthetic, toxic and radiation resources, in all stages of production and post-harvest operations.
- Manage the animals and all living beings on the estate, from the perspective of ecosystem elements, respecting their characteristics and functions.
- Feed ruminants (cows, sheep, goats, horses and donkeys) exclusively with natural fibres, such as natural pasture, sprouts, hay and straw.
- Feed omnivores (pigs) and granivores (turkeys, chickens, hens and geese) with adequate diets, essentially through cereals, natural pasture, sprouts, fruits, and vegetables.
- Do not use foods with GMOs, antibiotics, ivermectin or synthesized hormones, as well as all prohibited substances.
- Conserve and enhance natural resources, such as biodiversity, climate and atmosphere, reducing erosion and pollution of air, soil and water, through the application of correct techniques.
- Breed and preserve national autochthonous breeds and use local seeds and plant varieties whenever possible.
- Maximize the nutritional value of food, through harvesting and slaughtering carried out at the most appropriate times.
- Practice minimal food processing, sufficient to preserve its nutritional value as much as possible. Do not use radiation, ultra-pasteurization, excessive heating, synthetic additives or derivatives of GMOs.
- Include all ingredients on the product label.
- Manage and use water responsibly.
- Minimize the ecological impact of the estate, using maximum renewable energy.
- Promote and manage spaces that allow wildlife to exist on at least ten percent of the estate.



Photo: Montado, Sociedade Agricola do Freixo do Meio

Source: <https://freixodomeio.pt/>

3.6.1 Samples of training and OERs offered in Portugal

Resource	DGADR – Formação Profissional
Description	Agriculture Ministry service to promote the increase in the basic training of the active population, through educational and professional progression in double certification training processes in the areas of agriculture, agri-food and rural development.
Link	https://www.dgadr.gov.pt/formacao

3.7 Ireland

According to the Irish Central Statistics Office (www.cso.ie), in 2021, small enterprises - defined as those employing fewer than 10 people - made up 92.4% of all enterprises in the Irish economy and accounted for 23.7% of the total workforce. In terms of tourism-related businesses, Kerry had the highest concentration, with 12.8% of its enterprises operating in the tourism sector. Clare and Limerick followed with 9.48% and 9.52%, respectively. Additionally, Dublin and Cork together represented 43.4% of all enterprises in Ireland that year.

The Irish Government has outlined a comprehensive strategy to foster regional employment and stimulate economic growth in rural areas by creating an environment that



supports entrepreneurship and enterprise development. A central focus of this strategy is to help rural businesses diversify and expand, with targeted investments in skills enhancement and talent development. These efforts aim to retain and attract individuals who can contribute to the long-term economic vitality of rural communities.

A key component of this support system is the network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), which serve as accessible hubs for entrepreneurs and small businesses. LEOs provide tailored advice, information, and, where appropriate, financial assistance to help new ventures get off the ground and existing businesses grow. Recognising the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—which make up over 98% of the rural enterprise base—the Government is also exploring ways to expand LEO support to businesses with more than 10 employees, particularly those that struggle to access other forms of state aid.

Social enterprises are another vital part of the rural economic landscape. These organisations often operate in areas where traditional commercial ventures are less viable due to low population density or limited economies of scale. In recognition of their role, the Department of Rural and Community Development launched Ireland's first National Social Enterprise Policy in 2019, formally integrating social enterprises into the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The transition to a green economy presents significant opportunities for rural Ireland. As the country moves toward a low-carbon, climate-neutral future, sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable food production, the circular economy, and eco-tourism are poised for growth. These areas not only align with global sustainability goals but also offer new employment pathways in rural regions. The green economy encompasses a wide range of activities—from energy-efficient products and services to green financial services—all aimed at reducing environmental impact while supporting economic development.

Research and development will play a crucial role in advancing the green economy. Ireland has the potential to become a leader in renewable energy, particularly in wind power, both onshore and offshore. There is also growing interest in micro-generation, which can empower communities and businesses to participate directly in the renewable energy transition. These initiatives, supported by policy and investment, are designed to ensure that rural areas are not only included in but are central to Ireland's sustainable future.



The Government of Ireland's 2022 *Priority Actions Progress Report from the Small and Medium Enterprise & Entrepreneurship Taskforce* highlights significant strides in supporting SMEs through the green transition and climate action initiatives.

One of the key supports introduced is the Green for Micro programme, delivered through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). This initiative is specifically designed to assist smaller businesses in beginning their sustainability journey, offering tailored guidance and resources to help them adopt environmentally friendly practices.

In addition, the Green Transition Fund plays a central role in helping manufacturing businesses reduce their carbon footprint. It supports capacity building by enabling companies to develop customised decarbonisation plans. The fund also provides grant aid for investments in carbon-neutral technologies and energy monitoring systems, helping businesses make the shift to more sustainable operations.

Complementing this, the Enterprise Emissions Reduction Investment Fund offers financial support aimed at shortening the payback period for key carbon-reducing technologies in the manufacturing sector. This makes it more feasible for businesses to invest in impactful, long-term sustainability solutions. Another important measure is the Non-Domestic Microgeneration Grant (NDMG), which provides financial assistance to businesses and other non-residential sectors for the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels. This initiative encourages on-site renewable electricity generation, reducing reliance on external energy sources and lowering overall emissions.

Together, these programmes reflect a strong governmental commitment to equipping SMEs with the tools and incentives needed to thrive in a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy. The following are two examples of good practices:

Case study 1: Wilde Irish Chocolate

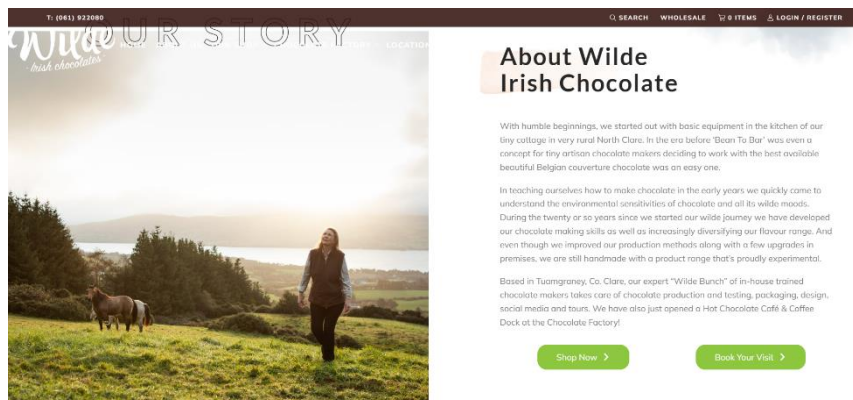
Wilde Irish Chocolates, nestled in the heart of rural County Clare, exemplifies the spirit of sustainable rural entrepreneurship championed by the “Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations” project. As a small, artisan chocolate producer operating from the scenic shores of



Lough Derg, Wilde Irish Chocolates has embraced a business model that blends local identity, environmental consciousness, and community engagement.

Their commitment to handcrafting high-quality products using traditional methods not only supports local employment but also enhances the region's appeal as a green tourism destination.

In line with the project's goals, Wilde Irish Chocolates demonstrates how rural enterprises can thrive by leveraging local resources, storytelling, and experiential tourism. Visitors are invited to tour the chocolate factory, meet the makers, and sample products—creating a direct connection between producer and consumer that fosters transparency and trust. This approach aligns with the project's emphasis on sustainable business practices, inclusive community development, and the promotion of rural areas as vibrant, innovative spaces for entrepreneurship. As such, Wilde Irish Chocolates stands as a compelling case study in how small enterprises can contribute meaningfully to the green transition and rural revitalization across Europe.



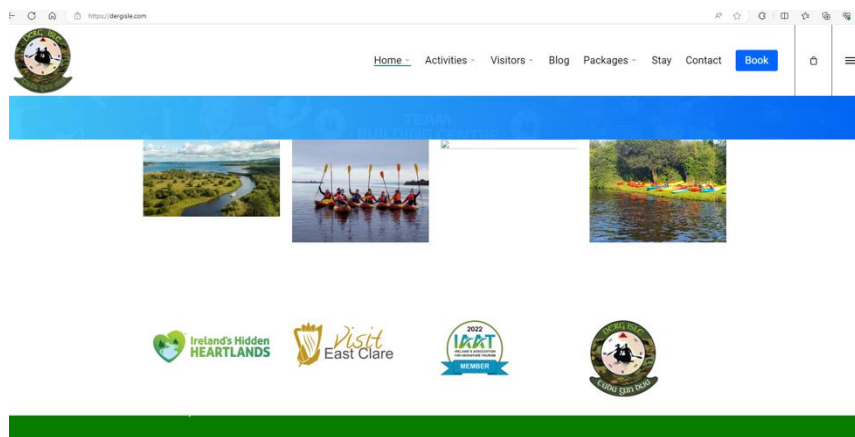
Link: <https://wildeirishchocolates.com/>

Case study 2: Derg Isle Adventure Centre

Derg Isle Adventure Centre, located on the western shores of Lough Derg in County Clare, is a vibrant example of sustainable rural entrepreneurship aligned with the goals of *Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations*. Nestled in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Derg Isle offers a unique blend of eco-conscious tourism, outdoor education, and community engagement. Its wide range of land and water-based activities—including kayaking, paddleboarding, archery, climbing, and a custom-built obstacle course—showcases how rural destinations can leverage natural landscapes to create immersive, low-impact tourism experiences.



The centre's commitment to environmental stewardship and inclusive access reflects the project's core themes of sustainability, innovation, and rural revitalization. By offering guided, safe, and educational experiences on the River Shannon and Lough Derg, Derg Isle not only promotes physical well-being and environmental awareness but also supports local employment and economic development. Its integration of nature-based learning, team-building, and adventure tourism makes it a model for how rural enterprises can thrive by aligning with green economy principles and fostering a deeper connection between people and place. As such, Derg Isle stands as a compelling case study in the development of green rural destinations across Europe.



Link: <https://dergisle.com/>

Case study 3: Cotter Organic Lamb

Cotter Organic Lamb, based in Dromtrasna North, County Limerick, is a standout example of sustainable rural entrepreneurship that aligns closely with the values of the “Entrepreneurship for Green Rural Destinations” project. Run by the Cotter family, this award-winning farm produces 100% grass-fed, certified organic lamb using environmentally conscious and ethically driven practices. Their approach combines traditional farming with modern innovation—most notably, the development of a “virtual vet” system to monitor animal health with minimal intervention, reducing the need for chemical treatments.

The Cotters are not only committed to sustainable food production but also to regional identity and community engagement. Their lamb is marketed as “of the region, for the region,” and they



have embraced direct-to-consumer sales, allowing them to maintain transparency and build trust with their customers. Their use of natural sheep wool for packaging—fully compostable and reusable—demonstrates a holistic commitment to reducing environmental impact across the supply chain.

By integrating digital tools, sustainable packaging, and a strong local narrative, Cotter Organic Lamb exemplifies how rural enterprises can thrive through innovation, environmental stewardship, and community-rooted values. It serves as a compelling case study for how green entrepreneurship can revitalize rural economies while preserving cultural and ecological heritage



Link: <https://www.cotterorganiclamb.ie/>



3.7.1 Samples of training and OERs offered in Ireland

RESOURCE	Clare Local Enterprise Office
DESCRIPTION	<p>Local Enterprise Office Clare provides direct services to the small and micro enterprise sector as well as helping to create an enterprise culture across the county.</p> <p>provide direct financial supports to businesses.</p> <p>advise on a range of alternative funding options available.</p> <p>offer business information, advisory services and enterprise support.</p> <p>deliver high-quality training to meet the needs of your business including; Start Your Own Business, Managing Your Business e.g. Marketing, Sales, Financial Management, Strategy and Business Planning.</p> <p>mentor you and your business with experienced experts.</p> <p>create progression pathways for high-potential start-ups and high growth companies to Enterprise Ireland.</p> <p>advise on and provide access to local property solutions for start-ups and business expansions.</p> <p>facilitate effective business networking.</p> <p>promote and develop entrepreneurship education in the local community.</p>
LINK	https://www.clarecoco.ie/your-council/departments/local-enterprise-office/
RESOURCE	West Limerick Resources
DESCRIPTION	<p>The community development organisation offers various programmes for Enterprise Start-Up and development support including advice, training and business mentoring support. The main enterprise supports programmes are Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme and Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme.</p>
LINK	http://www.wlr.ie/



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