

ERP Mid-Term Event 2021 - Breakout Group 5 Report

Breakout Group Name

Digitalisation – digital divide, just transition

Names of Leader, Reporter, Speaker/s

Leader: Hartmut Berndt - BAG LAG, Germany

Speaker: Philip Donner - Livantiira Village Society, Finland

Reporter: Aleksandra Todorovska - Rural Development Network of RM

Main issues and lessons identified in presentations and discussion

1. Existing differences among EU member countries and the non-EU countries (for ex. Western Balkan countries) in terms of the digitalisation gap between rural and urban areas. There are different challenges in narrowing the digital divide gap, such as developing internet infrastructure in the rural areas in some EU countries, or improving the digital literacy among Western Balkan rural population.
2. Raising the awareness of the need for adapting to the new technologies and enhancing the understanding of the rural population on how to use the connectivity and what opportunities are offering the new technologies. It is not enough for the rural people to have the connectivity, but it is important for them to be conscious of the potential of the connectivity and enable them to use it in marketing and selling their locally produced services.
3. Digitalisation offers opportunities for opening new jobs and greater mobility by offering an opportunity for people to work from anywhere in the world. However, this is also a big challenge for people in Europe, since the global market puts them in competition with working force from African and Asian countries, which have much lower standards.
4. Empowering rural communities to take the ownership of constructing and maintaining their own internet network, which shall lower the costs instead of giving the ownership to tele-company. This process requires cooperation, active participation of the rural community and involving experts to handle the technical aspects.
5. Digital safety is an important issue and the governments should take actions to make the digital use more safely.

Any ideas and case-study examples relating to the theme (including a name and email for the person proposing if possible)

Philip Donner presented an example of community collaboration in constructing and running a fiber network. 6 villages in Kuhmo (Finland) established a cooperative, which built a 160km of network, in 6 weeks, for 200 households in the area. Every household constructed their share of the network. The funds for construction of the network were partly from the Rural Development Program, which is EU funded, and partly from a fund managed by the Communication and Traffic Ministry. This is an example of collaborative approach of activating the local community and external experts in taking ownership of managing their network.

Messages for the 5th ERP 2022

The digitalisation is an enabling tool for developing sustainable rural areas and creating better life for rural communities. It offers new opportunities for economic growth, opening of new jobs and decreasing the migration of young people from rural areas. Important step in this process is empowering the local communities to use the advantages of the digitalization and to take the ownership of their digital transformation – from digital isolation to connection, and to becoming digital players in their own right.