



Provision of social care and support services in remote rural areas

Challenges and opportunities

European association of service providers for persons with disabilities |
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Provision of social care and support services in remote rural areas: Challenges and opportunities

European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities

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Introduction

Social care and support services are enablers of human rights. Not only do they cover physical care, but they also enable people to be independent and to be full members of society¹.

According to article 19 of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, persons with disabilities have the right to live in the community and have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live. To this end, they have a right to have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community.

The Convention embodies the right to habilitation and rehabilitation services in Article 26. This encompasses specifically the possibility to receive support at the earliest stage it is required. Moreover, support services should be aimed at promoting participation and inclusion in society, even included in rural areas.

Currently, all EU Member States have ratified the Convention and so did the EU, making it a common and joint responsibility to align policies and practices to meet the related requirements.

Service provision in the disability field has been undergoing substantial changes over the past years, and many services that were set up according to the medical-based approach to disability, are currently moving away from this model towards the human rights approach introduced by the UN CRPD. These fundamental changes in the design and delivery of services are clearly yet to be fully accomplished, both in the legal frameworks and in the practice, and they represent the challenge for the service provision of tomorrow as well as for policy makers at EU and national level.

While the importance of high quality social care and support services is hard to undermine, it is important to note that access to these services is not equal for all. In particular, **people in remote rural have relatively poor access to welfare services, education, employment, income and life chances**².

Obstacles to using and providing social care and support services in rural areas include³:

- increased costs in time and transport taken to provide and access services
- lack of alternative provision from the independent and voluntary sector
- lack of anonymity
- poverty and homelessness, which make the possibility of accessing or receiving information about such services more difficult

The lack of social care and support services may drive people living in remote rural areas to leave their homes to seek services elsewhere. Conversely, the availability of quality social care and support services has the potential to improve the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in remote rural areas.

This report aims to **provide a better understanding of the state of play on the availability of social care & support services in remote rural areas in Europe and to explore ways in which service provision can be improved.**

¹ Moss P. (2004) Understanding of care work in theory and practice Summary of Report on Stage Two Work package 11 Care Work in European Current understandings and future directions.

² Shucksmith, M. (2003) Social exclusion in rural areas: a review of recent research, Aberdeen: Arkleton Centre.

³ Pugh, R. et al. (2007) Obstacles to using and providing rural social care, Research Briefing. Social Care institute for Excellence.

EASPD carried out telephone interviews with service providers in six different countries to gain a better understanding of their perspectives on the link between the provision of support services and rural development. These interviews are presented in a form of case studies which provide valuable insights to the current state of play in different European countries, as well as recommendations and possible solutions for improving access to services in rural areas.

Definition of key concepts

- Remote areas - A region is considered remote if less than half of its residents can drive to the centre of a city of at least 50 000 inhabitants within 45 minutes.
- Rural areas - Local administrative units with a population density below 150 inhabitants/km².
 - In this study we only consider remote rural areas. Rural areas located close to urban areas (i.e. less than 45-minute drive) are not considered in this study because ability to access services for persons residing in these areas is not significantly affected.
 - Note: for simplicity, when we mention urban areas, we mean both urban areas and non-remote rural areas.
- Rural development – the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in remote rural areas.
- Social care & support services for persons with disabilities – services that help a person overcome barriers that come with having a disability. These services apply at all stages of the life span (e.g. childhood, youth, adult life and older age) and support persons' participation in different aspects of life (e.g. carrying out activities of daily living, or cultural, political and social activities and economic participation).

Case Studies

This report presents six case studies from different parts of Europe to provide information on the availability of social care and support services in remote rural areas. To capture the diversity of European states and to ensure a more representative sample, six countries were selected to represent different social welfare models in Europe:

- Continental model: Austria and France
- Nordic model: Finland
- Anglo-Saxon model: Ireland
- Post-Communist model: Romania
- Mediterranean model: Spain

The case studies were based on in-depth telephone interviews with service providers who have experience delivering support in remote rural areas. To capture different perspectives on the topic, respondents include representatives of different types of service providers:

- Organisations providing nationally (KVPS)
- Organisations working regionally (Chance B)
- Organisation working at local level (Adapei 23, Fundació Tutelar, Western Care)
- Umbrella organisation (FONSS)

Chance B: Styria, Austria

Michael Longhino

Head of Project Department at Chance B,
Gleisdorf

About Chance B:

Chance B offers social services to people of all ages and for areas of life in Eastern Styria. Most of the services delivered by Chance B are mobile.

Types of services: 27 types of services along the life span, ranging from early intervention, education, employment and elderly care.



Availability of social care and support services in remote rural areas

Chance B provides mobile services to ensure that persons with support needs can receive services where they live. Without the use of cars most services would not be possible in the area. In many rural areas of Eastern Styria, public transport is problematic, meaning that some of the clients of Chance B would not be able to access social care and support services otherwise.

Barriers to provision of services in rural areas

- **Mobility and transport:** mobility is often difficult due to the lack public transport. Depending on weather conditions, road conditions can render the accessibility of some areas impossible (e.g. snow in mountainous areas).
- **Lack of specialists in local areas:** Qualified specialists tend to move to bigger cities because they have a higher demand for their services in densely populated areas.
- **Additional costs:** there are significant financial costs associated with the provision of services in remote rural areas. Chance B maintains 80 cars that cover around 2 million kilometres per year. In addition to this, delivering services in remote areas means additional staff time. These generate costs that need to be funded.
- **Legal frameworks:** The laws regulating social services do not take into account the fact that services provided in cities differ significantly from those provided in rural areas. Under the current regulations, the costs of services in urban areas are calculated at the same level as in rural areas.
- **Availability of information and general awareness** about social services is generally higher in urban areas.
- **De-centralised system:** It is easier for social service providers to operate in urban areas where they can cover a bigger set of population of service users through centralised public bodies. For example, for the city of Graz, of population of about 350,000 people, there is 1 mayor and one body working on informing and granting access for persons with disabilities to services. Whereas in the rest of the Eastern Styria, of population of 300,000 people, Chance B needs to work with 70 different mayors to deliver its services and share information with service users.

Cost of service provision in remote rural areas

- Most of the services delivered by Chance B come free of charge for their customers. Thus, from the perspective of service users, there is no difference in price between rural or urban areas. However, due to additional travel time and shortages in specialists, the amount of services delivered in remote rural areas is much lower. As a consequence, there are longer **waiting lists**.
- Social service providers have to find ways to finance their services. The fact that the law does not provide additional/special support for services in rural areas can discourage service providers from operating in rural areas.
- Services are funded by federal and regional authorities. There is currently an EU-funded INTERREG project between Austria and Hungary on [Case and Care Management](#) for elderly people to live longer in their homes.

Recommendations for improvement

- There is a need for a centralised regional body to which social service providers can address with the services they provide.
- There is a lack of data about the users in remote rural areas and their needs for services. The use of ICT could support data collection in this domain and facilitate communication among social care and support staff and service users.
- More assistive technology in homes.
- Invest in local community-based social services and social enterprises in remote rural areas to boost social, economic and community life. Promoting innovative and small-scale businesses in villages can help create jobs for communities in general.

Kehitysvammaisten Palvelusäätiö: Finland

Kirsi Konola, Head of Development

Kehitysvammaisten Palvelusäätiö (KVPS, Service Foundation for People with an Intellectual Disability), Tampere

About KVPS:

KVPS develops and produces services to support people with intellectual disabilities (or special support needs) and their families all over Finland

Types of services: a range of respite care services to families and people with special support needs; residential care and support in independent living.



Availability of social care and support services in remote rural areas

KVPS provides services in remote areas through local units and mobile staff. In the North of Finland, vast territories remain scarcely populated and distances between villages can be considerable. In general, persons with disabilities in rural areas have same entitlements for services as in urban areas, but the **spectrum of available services** is more limited. So, for instance, there is less variety for person-centred planning. On the other hand, people in urban areas, such as Tampere (3rd largest city in Finland with population of over 230,000 people), face challenges accessing services due to longer waiting lists.

Barriers to provision of services in rural areas

- **Low number of service users** in certain localities still requires economic contribution for putting services together.
- **Lack of mainstream services and public infrastructure:** Underdeveloped basic services and infrastructure, such as banking, postal, cultural activities and other services, limit life-choices for rural people with disabilities.
- **Poor funding for services in small municipalities:** In Finland, social care and support services for persons with disabilities are currently funded by municipalities. The problem of disproportionality arises in poorer municipalities with a high share of people with support needs (elderly, socially vulnerable groups) and low number of working people, i.e. taxpayers. This creates an unsustainable situation in terms of funding services where they are most needed.

Cost of service provision in remote rural areas

- From the experience of KVPS, the costs of providing services in remote rural areas can be lower than in urban areas. For instance, the cost of renting buildings for groups homes or individual apartments are lower in Lapland than in Tampere. Moreover, it is easier to find staff in rural areas than, for example, in Helsinki, where there is a lot of competition to recruit qualified staff.

Recommendations for improvement

- Acknowledge and focus on the opportunities for inclusion connected to the provision of services in remote rural areas. In rural settings it is easier to become part of the community than in hectic urban settings. It can be also easier to reach out to mainstream actors, such as schools, authorities, businesses, etc, who are generally more enthusiastic about collaboration in rural areas.
- Make use of digital technology: there are currently small-scale initiatives to use technology to facilitate easier communication and independent living. These initiatives should be expanded and upscaled.
- Despite the fact that it is easier to spread general awareness and information about available and accessible services in urban areas, local communities can be more enabling in terms of participation of persons with disabilities.
- Continue developing services in remote rural areas to promote local development and person-centred service. Social care and support services have a big impact on the development of rural communities. These services are highly appreciated and visible in these communities. Rural setting has a potential to develop individualised services.

Adapei 23: Creuse, France

Annie Zapata

Director of Adapei 23, Creuse

About Adapei 23:

Adapei 23 is a parents' association committed to removing the obstacles to full citizenship for people with disabilities. The organisation provides services for persons with intellectual disabilities and elderly people in the department of Creuse, France.

Types of services: housing, residential care and support, employment and elderly care. Adults with intellectual disabilities (16 to end of life)



Availability of social care and support services in remote rural areas

Adapei 23 provides services for persons with intellectual disabilities and elderly people in the department of Creuse, France. In order to meet the demand for the variety of services required by local residents, Adapei has established (together with other organisations) a structure of social and solidarity economy⁴.

Adapei had experience using e-health solutions in their work. However, in a person-centred approach, personal contact and a thorough needs analysis is needed, at least during the first visit. To solve this issue, Adapei 23 created a partnership with paramedical services to have more capacities.

In recent years there has been an increasing demand for **elderly care** services. Adapei 23 had to adapt their services to cater to this demand. To this aim:

- Housing and residential facilities have been adapted
- Staff has been retrained

There are no waiting lists to access services in Creuse.

Barriers to provision of services in rural areas

- **Poor general infrastructure:** the lack of public transport has negative impact on mobility. People living in Creuse can access services through “on demand” transportation services. This is convenient for persons with disabilities if there are enough means of transportation. This however generates additional costs.
- **Poor broadband** connection in remote areas makes services less accessible.
- **The lack of data:** the lack of data on individual needs of users and the general situation concerning services in remote rural areas creates an obstacle for Adapei 23 in approaching local authorities to obtain funding for innovative projects.

⁴ According to ILO, Social and Solidarity Economy refers to enterprises and organizations (cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises) which produce goods, services and knowledge that meet the needs of the community they serve, through the pursuit of specific social and environmental objectives and the fostering of solidarity. Source: <https://goo.gl/F77sSe>

- **Weaker influence on policy makers:** Adapei 23 feels they are far from the decision-making power, meaning that budget and funding available do not always match their needs.
- **Development of quality workforce:** while shortage in frontline staff is not a problem, the availability of basic training for them is. The official available training for social care and support workers is considered very “old style.” In addition, low turnover rate of staff in these positions can also have a negative impact.
- **Shortage of managerial staff**

Cost of service provision in remote rural areas

- The funding needs of Adapei 23 are not sufficiently met. There is no official and well-established consultation mechanism to have a say on how funding is designed and provided from the public budget.
- Social economy enterprises are clearly part of the solution: e.g. the social and solidarity economy structure they are part of allows to offer a wider catalogue of services and reduce costs through economies of scale.
- Adapei 23 works in an agricultural area with no industry. They adapt the employment opportunities to the local employment market
- An advantage of operating in smaller villages or settlements is the cost-efficiency when implementing new approaches and testing innovative solutions. These settlements can serve as perfect pilot site.

Recommendations for improvement

- There is a need to acknowledge the fact that developing services in remote rural areas can lead to innovation.
- More data is needed. Evaluation and impact should be improved to support civil society organisations in implementing innovative projects.
- Establishing networks, such as the structures for social and solidarity economy, is key. More support should be provided to bring people together.
- Formal training for staff in rural areas needs to be modernised.

Western Care Association: Mayo, Ireland

Bernard O'Regan

Executive Director of Western Care Association, Co. Mayo

About organisation:

Western Care Association is a voluntary (non-statutory) organisation providing services to children and adults with learning disabilities in the Mayo county of Ireland. Western Care started as an initiative by parents who came to work together to ensure that their children live full and satisfied lives as equal citizens.

Types of services: therapy, residential services, respite care, self-advocacy, etc.



Availability of social care and support services in remote rural areas

Western Care Association provides social care and support services to about 900 people throughout the Mayo county. Not only have the services provided by the organisation encouraged people to stay in their local communities, they have also attracted some people from urban settings to move to rural areas.

The availability of services in rural areas is lower in general due to various factors. At the same time, the demand for social services in rural settings can be higher than in the cities. For instance, persons with support needs living in scattered and isolated rural areas have limited natural support, i.e. support from families, friends, neighbours who could, for instance, go with the person to a match or cinema. In urban areas with more vibrant and enthusiastic communities, there are more possibilities to get natural support and to participate in social life more actively.

Western Care Association tries to re-create such support through volunteering programmes (recruiting volunteers to engage in social activities together with the persons with disabilities).

Barriers to provision of services in rural areas

- **Poor general infrastructure:** the lack of public transport and poor condition of roads make remote rural areas less accessible. The use of digital technology could be a solution to overcome some barriers, but weak broadband infrastructure in rural areas does not allow it.
- **Staff shortage:** it is a challenge to find staff who is based in rural areas and could provide support locally. The available staff members therefore travel from one place to another, spending a lot of time on the road. For example, a speech and language therapist can come to 4-5 people a day in their homes in urban/non-remote areas. But in remote areas there would be less sessions for day.

Cost of service provision in remote rural areas

Provision of services in remote rural areas comes at an additional cost. When a support worker travels to a remote area to provide 1.5 hours of support per day, transportation can cost more than

the service itself. Delivering such services requires more resources while covering fewer service users.

The persons using services in remote rural areas, however, do not experience these additional costs of service provision. Regardless of their place of residence, persons with disabilities have the same rights and benefits. The drawback is rather in the fewer opportunities to use these services. For example, persons with disabilities both in urban and rural areas have access to free public transport, but in rural areas people have less opportunities to make use of this right because there is simply no public transport.

Services provided by Western Care are funded by the government. In the past, there have been EU-funded projects supporting services in rural areas, but currently there are none.

Recommendations for improvement

- **A strategy is needed for improving social care and support services in rural areas.** The one-size-fits-all approach that is currently used for funding and regulating these services fails to take into account the specificities and additional costs of service provision in remote rural areas.
- There is a need for reasonable acknowledgement of the additional costs required for providing services in rural areas at the same level as in urban areas.
- More investment in general infrastructure, facilities and local communities is needed.
- Social economy has the potential to improve and support local community development.

Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Social Services: Romania

Diana Chiriacescu

National Director of FONSS (Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Social Services)

About organisation:

FONSS' aim is to build the capacity of Non-Governmental organisations which provide social services in Romania in order to: strengthen their political implication at local, regional, national, European and trans boarder level; support the further development of sustainable community-based services; raise the awareness of citizens regarding the importance of community-based services as a medium for inclusion and reduction of poverty.



Types of services: FONSS is a federation gathering 32-member organisations (NGOs) that are social service providers in different regions of Romania. These organisations provide social or integrated services for children, families, persons with disabilities, youth in risk of exclusion, elderly etc.

Availability of social care and support services in remote rural areas

There are counties in Romania (such as Sibiu, Iasi, for example, but many others) in which rehabilitation services exist only in the capital city of the county or, in maximum two major cities. In these situations, people from rural areas need to travel up to 80-100 km to access these specialized services.

A series of SCSS are lacking massively in rural (and even urban) areas:

- early intervention and diagnostic;
- respite care services;
- support services for work integration;
- orthotics and prosthetics services;
- specialised rehabilitation services for persons with autistic spectrum disorders etc.

Barriers to provision of services in rural areas

- **Lack of political will to invest in social services** in general and in disability-related services in particular. Along with that, **the financial allocation for SCSS in local or central budgets is critically low**. At national level the overall expense with social services in Romania is 0,6% of GDP (the highest rate), compared with an average of 2,7% in EU28
- **The lack of professionals:** Specialised professionals do not go to work in rural areas and there is a major shortage in physio, speech therapists, medical doctors, nurses, psychologists, in

both rural and urban areas. The recent studies show that 80% of all students who finish the universities are working in different fields than the ones they have studied.

- **There is no needs assessment at local level**, despite a legislative obligation to perform regular assessments of this type, in the Law on Social Assistance 292/2011. As a consequence, *the demand* for SCSS is not centralised, formalised and transformed into budget allocation for providing a corresponding *offer* to these needs.
- **Poor infrastructure and accessibility issues in rural areas**: inaccessible roads and pathways, schools and public buildings without any form of accessibility adaptations, and no accessible information is available in these settings (Braille, or easy-to-read). The only exceptions are seen in those specialised services provided by NGOs, which are familiar with these accessibility requirements and respect them properly.

Cost of service provision in remote rural areas

The cost of services is not the same. Usually services in rural areas are cheaper, but this is also fluctuant from a region of Romania to another. No in-depth studies exist with regards to these variations of costs. Most of these services are provided for free by NGOs, or with very small co-payment rates from beneficiaries.

In terms of costs, the majority of social and the medical services benefit from official (national) standards of cost. Nevertheless, when these services are provided by for-profit companies, the cost is higher.

At the same time, the main problem is that NGOs are no longer able to guarantee a sustainability of their funding, and therefore there is a risk that these services that are delivered for free will become very costly for the beneficiaries.

Social economy is not sustainable solution to maintain the services as no financial or fiscal facilities exist in Romania for this sector.

Recommendations for improvement

- The spectrum of services available for people with disabilities at community level in rural areas is extremely scarce. As a first step, the needs assessment of social services at local level is crucial to appropriately plan the development of services and allocate budget to existing services as well as to services which should be developed to meet the needs of the population in both urban and rural areas.
- Sustainable financial allocations from authorities and further investment in social services should be prioritised to improve social care and maintain the provision of support services in both urban and rural areas.
- The accessibility of services (both mainstream and specialised services) in rural areas needs to be urgently addressed to meet the existing legislative norms.

Fundació Tutelar de les Comarques Gironines: Girona, Spain

Josep Maria Solé i Chavero

General Director and CEO of Fundació Tutelar de les Comarques Gironines (FTCG)

About FRCG:

FTCG is an independent, non-profit organisation established in 2003. It provides services to persons with mental health issues, intellectual disabilities or cognitive impairments related to old age in the province of Girona (total population of 750,000 inhabitants).

Types of services: Self-advocacy, guardianship, assistance, coordination of existing services (residential facilities, external support, specialised care, etc.)



Availability of Social Care and support services in remote rural areas

The persons in remote rural areas have the same benefits and rights for support services as people in urban areas. In general, social services are available in rural areas but this is not always the case in remote villages. The common approach is that persons with support needs are expected to physically travel to the premises of service providers. There are, however, services where public social workers travel to rural areas one or two days a week.

As a result, persons with support needs in remote rural areas are either highly dependent on public transport or face limitations in terms of flexibility. For instance, they cannot receive assistance when they most need it or when it is convenient to them. Instead, they have to adapt to a schedule determined by the visiting service provider.

Barriers to provision of services in rural areas

- **Stigmatisation:** in small communities, social interactions differ greatly from those in more populated areas. The social integration process is more complex and the lack of anonymity greatly affects users (especially in cases of mental health issues). Stigmatisation has been also identified as a key factor contributing to the failure of different pilot projects in the past.
- **Non-professional caretakers:** in Spain, the Disability law includes an economic allowance in case a relative of the user is willing to act as the main caretaker. This leads to situations where there is a shortage of professional guidance, which significantly reduces the general quality and impact of services.
- **Transportation infrastructure:** the fact that users need to travel to receive assistance can affect the quality, duration, continuity and frequency of support.
- **Digitalisation and remote assistance:** The use of digital technology could be a solution to overcome some barriers, but weak broadband infrastructure and signal in rural areas does not allow it. Also, affordability of internet connections (which digital technology is dependent on) is another barrier. In the case of tele-assistance (telephone) the service is accessible but the use of the telephone line requires financial resources.

- **Staff shortage:** in general, there is a significant shortage of specialised staff in Girona, both in terms of ratio per inhabitant and the degree of specialisation. It has been noted that the aging of the population will exacerbate this shortage.

Cost of service provision in remote rural areas

Provision of services in remote rural areas comes at additional cost, which is generally assumed by the users. To reduce these costs, service providers organise their visits to remote areas in a way that they can deliver support to multiple users from the same area in one day. The obvious setback is that individuals who need personalised support on daily or flexible basis have less opportunities accessing them.

The lack of resources can also lead to the fact that rural areas rely on urban areas to provide service. Support offered by the Health System Provider (Mental Health Primary Centres or Mental Health Day-Care Centres) can be one example for this.

Government funding for delivering services in remote rural areas, including costs of transportation, is insufficient and only covers basic support.

Recommendations for Improvement

- **Creation of a personal assistant job profile:** there is a need to move away from the one-size fits-all approach and create a personal assistant profile that would provide more specialised assistance, tailored for each specific case and with a professionalised approach.
- **Creation of a case manager role:** this would allow a more effective and cost-efficient provision of services. Each manager can take care of several cases and coordinate all different types of services accordingly to the specific needs and limitations of each user, improving the quality, flexibility, effectiveness and efficiency of the overall assistance provided. In addition, it can provide bureaucratic and legal advice, assistance or management and serve as a single contact point with the administration.
- **Promotion of social economy:** “[La Fageda](#)” case is a clear example of successful social economy and social inclusion in a rural area. La Fageda is a yoghurt producer which also aims to promote the social and labour integration of persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, placing the emphasis on each person's capabilities.

In this regard, some changes can be recommended to promote this kind of initiatives:

- Modification of public procurement contracts to include social clauses.
- Implementation of specific lines of credit subject to social and inclusive conditions.
- Awareness-raising campaigns to promote new consumer habits.
- Taxation advantages for social economy companies and third companies operating in cooperation with them.
- Inclusion of persons with disabilities (especially with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities) in the mainstream channels of professional education, shifting the classic clinical approach to employment-based integration strategies.

- **More integrated and coordinated support services** would lead to a more effective and cost-efficient support given the right conditions mentioned above: a better professional specialisation and the creation of a case coordinator role.

Conclusions

The state of play

There are pluses and minuses of living in urban or rural areas. When it comes to social care and support services for persons with disabilities, the answer is not one-sided. Some find smaller communities more open for collaboration (like in the case of KVPS in Finland) or more suited for testing innovative projects (like in the case of Adapei 23 in France). Others note that small communities can be less dynamic and offer less natural support (the case of Western Care in Ireland) or be more prone to stigmatisation (in the case of FTCS in Spain).

Persons with disabilities in remote rural areas of all presented countries have the same rights and entitlements for support services as persons in urban areas. However, the quality and the spectrum of available services is not at the same level. A wider choice of services, a higher concentration of specialists and easier public accessibility in urban areas could allow (if provided in an individualised way) for more flexible and person-centred services tailored to individual needs and circumstances.

Availability of well-functioning public transport and accessibility of public infrastructure are major factors determining the mobility of both service users and social care/support workers. Consequently, this influences the accessibility and frequency of support. Where such public infrastructure is not developed, provision of social care and support services becomes costlier and more time consuming.

In all of the presented cases there are differences in costs of service provision in rural and urban settings. In most cases, delivery of services in remote rural areas is reported as costlier, (mainly) due to transportation and staff costs. However, the costs can also be lower, as in the case of Finland and Romania, where costs are reduced due to lower prices for rent and lower level of prices in general.

There is no common agreement on whether service provision is more or less expensive in rural versus urban areas. However, all respondents agree on the fact that there are significant differences in the way services are organised in different settings. Therefore, these differences should also be acknowledged and reflected in the way these services are funded.

What can be improved

Legal frameworks and funding systems need to acknowledge the difference between the ways in which services are organised in urban and rural areas. Service providers and service users need support in ensuring the accessibility of services, especially in terms of funding.

Better **integration and coordination** can help to improve the regulation of social care services in remote and rural territories. As the example of Austria shows, working with 70 different mayors to deliver services to small towns and villages can be very burdensome. The case of Finland supports this view and shows that poorer municipalities are not able to fully meet the demands of their constituents on their own. In such cases, centralised regional governing bodies or networks, such as those created in France (Social and solidarity economy structures), could be part of the solution. In addition, integration and coordination of services can be achieved by implementing the Case management approach, as suggested by FTCS in Girona.

Creation of networks and centralised bodies could also help smaller municipalities to be more effective in reaching policy makers, and making their voices heard. There is a general need for **raising awareness** on the needs of service users in remote rural areas as well as on the particularities and

importance of providing person-centred support in remote rural areas. To this end, it is essential to **collect more data and evidence** on the needs of persons with disabilities and availability of services.

To ensure social inclusion of persons with disabilities in remote rural areas, the focus should be put on a holistic approach for local community development. This should include the development of:

- **People:** e.g. training and development of local workforce, including managerial level staff and specialists; engaging local people as volunteers who could engage in social activities with persons with support needs; provide support to informal caregivers and family members.
- **Infrastructure:** e.g. broadband and ICT infrastructure, accessibility of facilities, public transport, roads. Continuous ongoing investment in accessibility of built environment and housing facilities is a requirement for the needed transition from institutions to community based services.
- **Local enterprises:** e.g. social economy actors, small-scale businesses

European Union Multiannual Financial Framework

It is of utmost relevance that the next European Union Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020 takes into consideration the need of rural and remote areas services development in order to prevent gentrification and promote equal access to services regardless of the individuals place residence. This implies the need to make available a range of individualised support services that can meet the specific needs of the population and promote their general wellbeing.



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NB: This report has been elaborated by EASPD with a view to support the current discussions on how to make the post 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) a more efficient instrument in addressing people's needs and [developing the support services of tomorrow](#).