



Social Farming for the Elderly

Summary Report



This report is the result of the ERASMUS+ project

FarmElder: Social Farming for the Elderly

Project no. 2021-1-IE01-KA220-ADU-000033663,
involving the following partners:

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Technological
University of the
Shannon: Midlands,
Midwest (TUS)



**Eberswalde University
for Sustainable
Development**

Hochschule für
nachhaltige Ent-
wicklung Eberswalde
(HNEE)



SOUTH KERRY DEVELOPMENT
PARTNERSHIP CLG.

South Kerry
Development
Partnership Limited

ADRI MAG

ASSOCIAÇÃO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO
RURAL INTEGRADO DAS SERRAS DO
MONTEMURO, ARADA E GRALHEIRA



ADRI MAG - Associação
de Desenvolvimento
Rural e Integrado das
Serras de Montemuro,
Arada e Gralheira



društvo za socialno vključenost so.p.

Mosaic – Association
for social inclusion



European Landowners' Organization

European Landowners
Organization



Hof und Leben GmbH



Biotechnical Centre
Naklo

Editor(s):

Jerneja Rozman (BC Naklo), Dermot Carroll (TUS)

Disclaimer

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License. To view a copy of the license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Status of the elderly in partner countries and throughout the EU.....	1
1.1	Demographics	1
1.2	Challenges faced by the elderly	2
2	social farming	2
3	Social farming in the countries participating in the project and the EU	3
4	Elderly people as a target group of social farming	4
5	Conclusion	4

INTRODUCTION

FarmElder is a project funded by the Erasmus+programme of the European Union. The project examines the potential of social farming activities for elderly people. This report is a summary of the information gathered by the project partners in four national reports (Slovenia, Germany, Portugal and Ireland) and one European report. For a more in-depth look at the situation in the individual countries, we recommend the respective country reports, which are also available on the FarmElder project website.

This summary report presents

- An overview of demographic trends in ageing in the partner countries and the EU.
- The practice of social farming in each partner country and in the EU.
- The current activities and future potential of social farming for older people.

In this report, we understand the elderly as people who are 65 years and older and the working age as that between 16 and 64 years.

1 STATUS OF THE ELDERLY IN PARTNER COUNTRIES AND THROUGHOUT THE EU

1.1 Demographics

Most European countries are facing a situation in which the proportion of the population that is retired or elderly is increasing significantly compared to the younger and working-age population. According to Eurostat, projections show the proportion of older people (over 65) could reach almost 30% of the total population in the European Union by 2050, compared to 19% in 2018.

Nearly all EU countries are struggling with falling birth rates, rural depopulation and the impact of economic and social factors, which is why a larger proportion of older people in the population, especially in rural areas, is predicted for the future.

In Portugal, it is predicted that between 2018 and 2080, the proportion of elderly people will rise to 32% of the total population

According to the 2016 census, the proportion of elderly people in Ireland was 19%. There is currently a ratio of working age to older people of approximately 4 workers for every pensioner. By 2050, however, it is expected that the ratio will decrease to 2 workers.

In Slovenia, 21% of the population were elderly people in 2021. Of these, 43% were male and 57% were female. The ratio of working age to elderly people in Slovenia is 1.38 workers to 1 pensioner. 44% of the elderly work in the agricultural sector.

A look at the demographic change in Germany shows that the proportion of the elderly is growing. The elderly population is already about twice as big as the population of people under 30. Also, the population of people aged between 65 and 69 years old has already doubled in the last decade.

Europe is certainly aware of the problem of demographic decline. The European Union is currently working intensively on the challenges of health and long-term care, age discrimination, pensions, employment and retirement policies relating to active ageing, gender equality and solidarity between the generations.

The demographic challenge is particularly severe in the EU's farming population. These communities play an invaluable role in keeping rural areas alive and in providing sufficient food for all EU citizens. Nevertheless, in addition to the number of farmers steeply declining over recent decades, generational renewal is no longer assured, with only an average of one in ten farmers being under the age of 40.

1.2 Challenges faced by the elderly

According to Eurostat (2019), older people tend to live in rural areas. Families usually take care of the elderly, but the trend is now for younger people to migrate to urban areas, which means a greater need for rural care for the elderly. As Eurostat data shows, people aged 75 and over face difficulties in carrying out everyday tasks. In Germany, people aged between 80 and 85 are the most in need of care, with around one in five people needing help. In the age group between 75 and 79 years, every tenth person is dependent on help. Health promotion and disease prevention are of key importance and are advocated and promoted by all EU Member States.

Studies in Ireland, Slovenia and Portugal show that the main challenges faced by older people are physical and mental health, the availability of adequate health services, poverty, social isolation and the provision of adequate and appropriate care.

Issues such as isolation, loneliness and lack of meaningful activity are shown to have a wide range of negative effects on health.

Challenges for elderly people in rural areas are magnified by a lack of services and low levels of economic activity.

In both Ireland and Slovenia, it was found that a large proportion of farmers are elderly.

2 SOCIAL FARMING

Social farming is targeted at vulnerable people at risk of social exclusion. Social farms offer assisted work placement and therapeutic activities to specific target populations such as children and the elderly through recreational services and assistance. These activities are effective in meeting the needs of these target groups and addressing some of the above-mentioned challenges they face.

Social farming for the elderly is traditionally focused on providing care to elderly people with mild or severe signs of dementia.

Research has shown that social farming has a positive impact on quality of life, alleviating symptoms of dementia and reducing social isolation. There are also positive effects in the physical, mental, and social domains:

- Physical health: improved physical strength, better appetite, maintaining dexterity, better use of senses;
- Mental health effects: increased self-confidence, higher self-esteem, increased responsibility, increased self-awareness;
- Social effects: better social interaction, more social contacts, more social skills, more independence.

The Erasmus + funded Farcura project (Farcura.eu) presented opportunities and guidelines for the establishment of innovative social farming methods. It includes case studies of 14 social farms in different European countries.

3 SOCIAL FARMING IN THE COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT AND THE EU

Social farming is regulated at the EU level by the Rural Development Policy. There are several measures that Europe promotes to develop quality rural development (Regulation (EU) No. 1305/2013). The European policy is tasked with guiding overall local development, social inclusion, poverty reduction and rural economic development. In addition, it also emphasizes promoting diversification, the creation and development of small businesses, job creation and improving the accessibility of communication technologies in rural areas.

In Ireland, the social farming model was initially implemented by institutions and then by the third sector. There are now several groups running programmes on farms. Their target audience is mainly people with disabilities or people with mental health challenges. Three types of social farms have been developed in Ireland: private, third sector and institutional. These farms are linked to and funded by different service providers. They link up with the health service, or the facility finds the farmer and arranges accommodation or the use of premises, gardens, etc. Organisations such as Kerry Social Farming and Social Farming Ireland, funded through the department of agriculture, provide supports to family-run social farms.

Portugal does not yet have a form of social farming in place. However, there are various private organizations, including non-profit organizations, working for justice and solidarity between people. These organizations are not funded by the State or municipalities. They work mainly to support young people and families; care for the elderly and disabled; promote health and provide educational and professional training. Some of these organisations provide activities such as organic farming and horticultural therapy for their clients.

The Europe 2020 Strategy and European Rural Development Policy are important in the context of social farming because they both include provisions for vulnerable groups and their social inclusion in society. Social farming as a sustainable and innovative model for combining agriculture and social

protection answers many of the challenges faced by social services, rural societies and farmers. Social farming is also in line with the health and social objectives supported by EU funds and regulations. Agriculture is intertwined with many different policy areas including health, rural development, environment, education, and social services.

4 ELDERLY PEOPLE AS A TARGET GROUP OF SOCIAL FARMING

Social farming can improve the quality of life for older people and those living with age-related physical and mental disabilities. Some social farms, for example, run specialist dementia services, which are adapted to suit people living with the condition.

Issues with health and social marginalisation such as loneliness, social isolation, social exclusion, lack of engagement, and low levels of physical activity are recognised disease and mortality risk factors in older people. Social farming provides therapeutic activities that can address these risks and greatly improve quality of life, social relationships, activity participation, and physical activity.

In Germany a recent project "VivAge - Lebensabend in Dorf" profiled sites where farms are offering various levels of retirement options, including accommodation and day-service activities. In some cases – for healthier people – farm chores provide meaningful activity for the residents.

Slovenia also does not yet have a real form of social agriculture for the elderly. There are, however, several organizations that contribute to the development of social farming through projects. There are individual farms or organizations in Slovenia that offer the possibility of spending time on the farm through courses, day workshops and daycare for the elderly. One example is the Korenika farm.

Social farming for elderly people is not yet very well developed in Ireland or Portugal. But there are some projects, such as those profiled in the FarmElder case studies (farmelder.eu) that demonstrate its potential.

5 CONCLUSION

Social farming has an incredible potential to meet the needs and challenges faced by the elderly population in Europe. By bringing together farming activities and features with care services, social farming can directly address the risks elderly populations face and improve the mental, physical and social health of these populations.