



VOLONTEUROPE SEMINAR

RURAL ISOLATION OF CITIZENS IN EUROPE: EVIDENCE FROM BULGARIA, ALBANIA AND CROATIA

**Under the distinguished patronage of the President of the Republic
of Bulgaria, His Excellency Rosen Plevneliev**

**Central Military Club, Hall I
Sofia, Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd 7**

Thursday 7 May 2015, 15:30 - 19:00

#ruralisolation

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Rural areas provide food, raw materials, environmental services and spaces for rest and recreation. They are also home to some of Europe's natural, cultural and historical heritage. More than half of the EU's land area (51.3% in 2012) is classified as predominantly rural. More than one fifth of the EU's population (22.3% in 2012) lives in rural regions.

With the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements, the total rural population of the EU increased from 75 million to 116 million. Rural areas also account for a large proportion of economic activity and employment in the EU, especially among newer Member States. Over 21% of the European population is employed in rural areas, which illustrates the importance of these regions for the European economy.

Despite their demographic and economic importance, rural regions lag behind other regions in a number of socio-economic indicators. People living and working in rural Europe usually experience higher rates of risk of poverty and lower levels of employment, income, educational attainment, health care, and access to infrastructure and public services.

Social immobility in rural Europe is reinforced by the disadvantages faced by rural regions, such as remoteness and population scarcity. Therefore, the term rural isolation of citizens refers not only to social, labour and educational exclusion, but also to the mechanisms that perpetuate these trends over time.

Different structural and demographic factors interact and form barriers to the development and social inclusion of some rural areas. According to the European Network for Rural Development, the main determinants of rural poverty are demography, education, labour markets and remoteness. These interact to generate entrenched poverty and social exclusion.

Consequently, improvements in labour markets, infrastructure and education are key to tackling rural isolation. A comprehensive and coherent rural development policy is needed to break vicious cycles of exclusion and marginalisation. Investment and economic diversification may help generate employment and higher levels of income. The provision of public services also has an important role to play in bringing rural regions closer to European averages of social and economic wellbeing.

Most important, however, is the need to involve citizens and civil society in rural development efforts. Local initiatives can make an invaluable contribution to addressing rural isolation. These need to be supported by coherent funding and public engagement. Volunteering and active citizenship are essential tools for generating awareness and promoting positive, sustainable change. Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations have taken the lead in providing innovative solutions to rural problems.





Since the 1980s, there has been some improvement in rural employment and income levels in several rural regions. Several initiatives have contributed to lifting farmers out of poverty. Nonetheless, rural areas continue to lag behind. This is especially true in Mediterranean and Eastern Member States.

Rural isolation across the EU can be addressed through public policy, citizen engagement and civil society involvement.

Volonteur europe, an international network promoting volunteering, active citizenship and social justice, is engaged in a two-year campaign on the **Rural Isolation of Citizens in Europe**. This campaign aims to explore the challenges facing rural communities and identify possible solutions to these challenges.

The campaign started with a seminar in Rome in September 2014, where Volonteur europe members and partners shared innovative approaches to tackling rural isolation. We have also published a [policy brief](#) that discusses some of the most pressing issues in rural areas.

We believe that any rural development policy needs to actively promote the endogenous development potential of each rural area. Linking intervention to local needs and context is crucial. Each community has its strengths and capacities, which have to be nurtured and promoted. States and European Institutions have an important enabling role to play. With this in mind, we are going to hear from our Bulgarian, Albanian and Croatian partners about their concerns and approaches to rural development.

This seminar on the **Rural Isolation of Citizens in Europe: Evidence from Bulgaria, Albania and Croatia**, will draw on insights from civil society organisations in these countries, which will then inform our wider campaign and future report on the issue.

We aim to gather evidence and best practice from the voluntary sector across Europe to advocate for stronger political and financial support for the sector. We have recently held a seminar in Riga, Latvia, which gathered stories from the Baltic States and Poland.

We look forward to seeing you at the event. In the meantime, you can also follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), as well as sign up to our [newsletter](#) to receive updates about events, activities and all the work that we do.

Other useful links:

- Visit the Volonteur europe [website](#)
- Read the Volonteur europe [strategic brief for 2014-2018](#)
- [Volonteur europe recommendations on rural isolation to the EESC](#)
- [Rural Isolation of Citizens in Europe: Evidence from the Baltic States and Poland](#)





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PROGRAMME

The event will have Bulgarian/English simultaneous interpretation

15:30 – 16:00 REGISTRATION & COFFEE

16:00 – 16:20 OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION TO THE CAMPAIGN

- **Elitsa Nikolova**, Secretary for Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Infrastructure of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria
- **André Hudepohl**, Vice President, Volonteuropa and Policy Advisor, Humanitas; Netherlands

16:20 – 17:00 EVIDENCE FROM BULGARIA WITH Q&A

- **Mira Mileva**, Coordinator, National Rural Network; Bulgaria
- **Iva Taralezhkova**, Chair of the Board, Forum for Civic Participation and Devetashko Plato Association; Bulgaria

17:00 – 17:20 EVIDENCE FROM ALBANIA WITH Q&A

- **Ervis Martani**, Senior Researcher, Albanian Institute for Public Affairs; Albania

17:20 – 17:40 EVIDENCE FROM CROATIA WITH Q&A

- **Marina Koprivnjak**, Coordinator, Croatian Rural Development Network; Croatia

17:40 – 18:10 DISCUSSION

- Moderated by **André Hudepohl**, Vice President, Volonteuropa and Policy Advisor, Humanitas; Netherlands

18:10 – 18:20 CLOSING REMARKS

- **Constantin Dedu**, Board Member, Volonteuropa and Director, Imago Mundi; Romania

18:20 – 19:00 RECEPTION

For further information and to register for the event please visit volonteuropa.eu

