



Newsletter  
European coordination  
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Dear members and friends of the European FIMARC movements,

In this edition you are going to read about the situation of family farms and rural population in Poland as well as some information on the activities of PACRO (Polish Association of Christian Rural Organizations) - one of the member movements of the FIMARC under the PRORURE Project. The following article concerning small and family farming was based on the Publication prepared for the project „ Social and economic problems of small agricultural holdings in Poland” under the Action Plan for The Central Secretariat of the Polish National Rural Network.

### **Social and economic situation of rural population in Poland**

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland agricultural entities up to 300 ha are family farms. farms up to 5 ha shall be classified as small farms, more than 5 ha and up to 30 ha as small-scale farms. Larger area groups may be classified as medium commodity farms (e.g. 30-100 ha) and large family farms up to 300 ha, and over 300 ha large-scale agricultural entities. Both in Poland and in the European Union farms with the area up to 5 ha represent 69% of the total number of farms and the share of farms with the area up to 10 ha in the EU reaches an average of 80% . Despite such a large potential, from the global economy point of view fragmented agriculture is seen as a social and economic problem. On the other side, small farms have unique conditions, besides productive function, to provide health, recreation, education and care. In this way they play the role of "socially engaged agriculture" or "agriculture with social mission". Contact with the authentic rhythm of a farm, plants and farm animals, participation in a cycle of food production have scientifically proven beneficial influence on emotional and mental development of man. A precursor

to development of mentioned above ideas in Poland is the Polish Network of Educational Farms supported by the agricultural advisory system.

The current crisis is manifesting in increasing unemployment and weakening of economic position of a large number of rural households. A major problem of rural areas, not only economical but also social, is unemployment. After several years of its decline, since 2009 the unemployment rate in the countryside has been increasing. An important social problem of Polish countryside is the phenomenon of labor migration. Migration in rural areas is characterized by high dynamics. Often prolonged separation leads to alienation of family members and family break but at the same time economic migration improves the quality of life of family. Also the phenomenon of internal migration is observed. This means the inflow of urban population to the countryside. From a social point of view, having a few hectares of agricultural land and your own home meets the need for safety, allows to continue professional activity, also through seeking of additional sources of income.

At the same time mainly rural inhabitants are more exposed to poverty and exclusion than city residents. People at risk of social exclusion are mostly rural children and the youth from poverty environments. One of the reasons for this is the limited access to education. Especially dangerous for family is loss of income, when they come, in small towns and rural areas, from a single source, e.g. from work of one member of the family. Owning a small farm or even small land resources, from which production is consumed only for their own needs significantly reduces this risk. Small farms create, though usually not very effective, a workshop for a member (members) of the family who have not worked outside agriculture or lost their previous workplace. A strong argument for maintaining and supporting of small farms is a reduction of the need for social assistance when rising unemployment is combined with the lack of alternatives to obtain incomes. A small farm, used for agricultural purposes is not only a source of incomes and food, but also gives a chance for living in own environment, where there are own goods; house, farm, machinery, tractor, land. It is also an effective protection against exclusion from the labor market, even when one loses the other, non-agricultural workplace.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the average length of life of rural residents increases - in 2010 it was 71.4 years for men and 80.7 for women. Furthermore, rural women live longer than in the city, while for men the opposite is true, what is largely a consequence of a low level of health care of

rural inhabitants. The area of health care in rural areas is one of the most critical social issues - troubles with buying medicines and limited access to medical services are the main problems faced by rural inhabitants and they especially apply to households with multiple members, living on non-profit sources, retirees and pensioners, and the poorest categories of farms. Positive changes can be observed in the level of education of rural inhabitants, which continues to grow, but still a percentage of rural population with a university degree is almost three times lower than in cities. Improvement of education level of rural residents is mainly a result of increased educational activity of women.

Rural population in Poland in comparison with other European countries is relatively young and a very positive phenomenon is active attitude and entrepreneurship of a large part of the youth. However, the process of aging is becoming more and more visible. For members of rural community retirement does not always mean a major lifestyle change, most of them when retired continue to work on the farm or at adjacent parcels. In rural environment, old age is a time of life marked by respect from the rest of the community, but also impossibility of real influence for the course of events. Older people, however, feel the need to respond for their own needs and desires. This loss of independence is often perceived by them as a social degradation, which has a huge impact for their interaction with the environment. To hide their helplessness they begin to isolate themselves from society, and that, unfortunately, only makes the situation even worse.

A positive aspect of the situation is family tradition in rural Poland. This is an important issue in terms of maintaining the continuity of cultural heritage. Rural families convey the language, customs, norms, values and patterns of behavior which are vital for the whole Polish society.

Despite the shortcomings of rural life, village is becoming a popular place of residence - up to 50% of rural youth and 13% from the city declare their willingness to live in the country.

## **The ERASMUS + PRORURE project as a structuring project for FIMARC is on the run**

At the end of March in Assesse the second transnational meeting of European Erasmus Plus Project was held. It was run by ACRF from Belgium and devoted to preventing migration through employment and looking at the village as space to live and for culture. It was combined with the meeting of the European FIMARC Coordinators discussing current organizational issues.

### **PACRO activities within the PRORURE Project**

Under the topic concerning poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, PACRO concentrated on actions aimed at preventing social exclusion and poverty among rural children. Since the formerly carried out national project of creating youth centers in the poorest areas of Poland left the organization with 64 such premises, at present it is possible to use them. The project focuses on the implementation of the specially designed pro-health and socially oriented educational program which was created with the support of The Mother and Child Research Institute from Warsaw. The program is to be carried out through the network of youth centers in the framework of dedicated scenarios. So far the following steps have been taken:

- Signing agreements with associations which will take part in implementation of project activities (3-4 national organizations) and picking the districts in which the project will be implemented.
- Carrying out first meetings in selected districts and getting familiar with the diagnosis regarding the danger of social exclusion in local societies.
- Selecting local leaders who will participate in specially prepared training. Mobilization of the volunteers interested in the project of training.
- Meetings with trainers in order to discuss the substantive program of training sessions and setting their timetable.
- Creating and shaping first groups in local societies integrated around the goal of preventing social exclusion.

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