



Good practice

Proyecto EREA: Promoting entrepreneurship ecosystems and the social economy in rural areas of Aragon

Working Group: Territorial

Member State, Region: Spain, Region of Aragon

Thematic areas: Competitiveness and Innovation, Jobs and Skills



Basic project details

Lead organisation:

Aragon Emprende Foundation - Spain

Partner organisations:

National Administration, represented by the General Secretariat for the Demographic Challenge within the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, Network of Entrepreneurship Centres of Aragon (ARCE Network)

Initiative duration:

The programme launched its first edition in 2022 and has since been conducted annually.

Overview and objectives

This initiative is designed to promote the economic and social development of rural and intermediate areas (urban-rural regions). The programme has a dual objective: first, to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem and foster innovation in rural areas by encouraging actions beyond urban environments; and second, to create opportunities in regions facing demographic and socio-economic challenges.

By promoting entrepreneurship, the initiative aims to cultivate an environment conducive to innovation and business development. Additionally, it seeks to energise these territories by creating opportunities for a highly skilled workforce, particularly targeting young people. Furthermore, the initiative facilitates the identification of business opportunities that can help bridge the socio-economic and service-access gap between rural and urban areas.

Context

Demographic challenges such as population decline and aging populations reduce economic activity and vitality in rural areas. Aragon was lacking the infrastructure and support systems needed for innovation and entrepreneurship, limiting its development potential.

Target groups

The programme focuses on rural areas and local communities within rural-urban intermediate areas. Specifically, it targets two primary groups: entrepreneurs looking to launch new initiatives in their territories, and professionals or self-employed individuals who are already operating businesses in these areas and seek to enhance their projects.

Actions

The initiative comprises an integrated programme designed to promote entrepreneurship through three key pillars:

- **Support and advisory mechanisms:** This includes the establishment of business incubators, co-working centres, and financial guidance services to assist in the development of entrepreneurial initiatives;
- **Financial support:** The programme offers financial backing for innovative projects aimed at territorial transformation, particularly in rural municipalities with populations of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants;
- **Acceleration programme:** An acceleration programme for entrepreneurial initiatives is provided, featuring a digital platform and a range of training activities, including both face-to-face and hybrid online-offline formats.

Financial allocation

Total budget: EUR 2 800 000 (2022-2024)

EU co-funding: No

Sources of funding:

- National Funding (Cohesion and Territorial Transformation Fund, distributed by State Government to regions)
- Regional funding (ARCE Network)



Working Group Insights

“In agreement with the other members of the Territorial WG, I selected this good practice due to its significant potential, as evidenced by its initial results. The initiative has played a crucial role in fostering an innovative ecosystem that generates opportunities in rural areas. By promoting the development of entrepreneurial

skills and providing tailored support, it enables the better utilisation of local resources and facilitates the creation of new professional networks. Furthermore, this initiative exemplifies effective collaboration between different levels of government and various policy instruments.

By providing comprehensive and personalised support, this practice plays a vital role in both developing and retaining talent. On one hand, it aims to strengthen skills in rural and urban areas through targeted training programmes and mentorship opportunities. On the other hand, it offers a pathway to retain highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs by facilitating the effective implementation of their projects within the territory. This dual approach not only enhances individual capabilities but also contributes to the overall economic vitality of the region”.

GONZALO VALENCIA SAGRERA

Deputy Director for Inclusion Policies (Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations of Spain)

Results

From 2022 to 2024, the initiative achieved significant results, promoting a total of 190 entrepreneurial projects. Additionally, it has engaged 200 participants, contributing to the development of skills and strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem within the targeted areas.



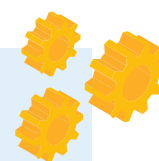
Success factors

The success factors of the initiative include the effective leveraging of local resources, strong support for diverse business sectors, tailored assistance for aspiring entrepreneurs, and a focus on innovation and business development. Additionally, the comprehensive nature of the programme, which combines various interventions, has led to better overall results. The combination of financial incentives, business incubation, and mentorship programmes also contributed to the creation of a self-sustaining entrepreneurial environment.

Implementation challenges

The key challenges faced by the initiative include:

- **Financial needs:** There is a pressing need for increased focus on securing adequate financing for rural development initiatives to ensure their sustainability and effectiveness;
- **Learning from past mistakes:** It is crucial to analyse and learn from previous failures to avoid repeating them and to enhance future efforts;
- **Building a regional ecosystem:** Creating a strong regional ecosystem that effectively connects rural and urban areas is essential. This requires careful analysis of business opportunities, available resources, and the unique advantages of each area;
- **Support infrastructure and expertise:** Establishing a support infrastructure and ensuring access to specialised staff with local knowledge are critical for the success of rural development programmes.



The conclusion of our expert Gonzalo Valencia Sagrera, Deputy Director for Inclusion Policies (Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations of Spain)

“This practice’s unique characteristic is the combination of all possible support mechanisms (advisory, financial, and acceleration featuring a digital platform and a range of training activities) adapted to rural and intermediate rural- urban areas, which ensures that entrepreneurs, professionals and self-employed individuals succeed in their goals”.

Useful sources

Official website: <https://erea.aragonemprende.com/>

<https://erea.aragonemprende.com/testimonios-inspiradores/>

<https://erea.aragonemprende.com/proyectos-con-impulso/>

<https://re-viviendo.es/>

<https://www.mateosierra.es/>

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