

Social empowerment in rural areas

→ *The project promotes empowerment in social service provisions in rural areas in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Many rural areas in the BSR find themselves in a downward spiral, where outward migration and the recent economic downturn lead to a deterioration of service infrastructure and quality of life. Competences that are needed to renew services and stimulate social innovation and entrepreneurship are missing while, regional disparities increase. Demographic changes and financial austerity further add to these challenges.*

Priority area	Innovation
Specific objective	Non technological innovation
Project acronym	SEMPRE
Lead Partner	Diaconie of Schleswig-Holstein, Germany
Project partners	3 LV, 3 SE, 2 DE, 2 EE, 2 FI, 1 DK, 1 LT, 1 PL
Project budget*	Total EUR 4,9 MM
*preliminary figures before contract signature	



Summary

Vulnerable groups at the risk of poverty and exclusion are affected strongly by this development because their life chances diminish and their potential is neglected. The project aims at improving the social service infrastructure by empowering end users to participate in service design and delivery. Social service providers, such as welfare and public sector organisations, NGOs and social enterprises are encouraged and enabled to involve end users, such as members of disadvantaged groups, such as single parents, the elderly or migrants – in the development and delivery of social services.

Institutional capacity building of social service providers (public, private and third sector) is essential for this process in order to adapt work methods and instruments and successfully manage organisational change. To this end, the project partners will test empowerment approaches in the local context by initiating and end user driven micro projects and developing their entrepreneurial competences. The lessons learned in this process are compiled in an “Empowerment Handbook” that will guide social service provider staff in the practical application of end user involvement. They will also develop training modules and methods to build the empowerment competence of social service provider staff and develop an “Organisational Roadmap for Empowerment” to inspire the leadership level of social service providers to rethink their role in the social economy.

Lastly recommendations for policymakers will be derived from the project activities with a view on creating more favourable socioeconomic conditions in rural areas that include a reliable, affordable and accessible service infrastructure. Innovation in the social sector can create growth and job opportunities in the rural areas of the Baltic Sea Region and make them more attractive places to live and work in.