



Resilient



Prosperous

Socio-economic integration of migrants in Spanish rural areas



SUMMARY

Nuevos Senderos ('New Trails') is an initiative by Fundación Cepaim (the Cepaim Foundation) that has been promoting labour and social integration in rural areas since 2002. It targets individuals and families with a migrant background, primarily from urban areas.

The project creates personalised itineraries for the socio-economic integration of participants, on the basis of consultations with rural municipalities, migrants and families seeking a fresh start in a rural environment. The itineraries include on-the-ground support and continuous monitoring before and after relocation to rural municipalities.

The initiative works to facilitate a smoother transition for participants by addressing the dual challenge of rural depopulation and migrants' social and employment struggles, thus mitigating the risk of social exclusion in urban settings.



CONTEXT

Since the mid-1950s, rural municipalities in Spain, particularly those in the interior of the country, have experienced severe depopulation. In 2002, the Cepaim Foundation established a rural development area, initiating projects to revitalise these municipalities.

Research on the social and demographic impact of foreign migration in rural areas has confirmed its substantial contribution to mitigating depopulation in smaller municipalities. Migrants play a vital role not only in seasonal agricultural work, but also in various sectors like agribusiness, commerce and local services.

The Nuevos Senderos project sees rural areas as fertile ground for employability and entrepreneurship. However, migrant individuals and families do not normally choose rural areas as the first option for migration, due to concerns about lack of employment opportunities and services there.



OBJECTIVES

- > Promote the socio-economic integration of socially vulnerable migrants and their families living in cities by facilitating a transition to rural areas;
- > Provide rural municipalities with the necessary resources to accommodate new arrivals and involve them in social and economic activities;
- > Give visibility to the positive aspects of migration for the development of municipalities, thus improving social perceptions;
- > Raise awareness among local actors – such as local and regional public administrations, businesses, educational centres and civil society – of those aspects of migration and rural development and about the project's activities.

Theme(s): Social inclusion, Migrants, Employment

Country: Spain

Organisation(s): Fundación Cepaim; Acción integral con migrantes

Start & end date: 01/2002 - ongoing

Budget: EUR 300 000 annually

Funding sources:

- Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, General Directorate of Inclusion and Humanitarian Attention
- European Social Fund, POISES (operational programme for social inclusion and social economy)

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The project was rolled out in four phases:

- > **Identification of municipalities willing to welcome newcomers and context analysis:** including raising awareness of the project and its activities across the regions where Cepaim operates and selection of participating rural municipalities.
- > **Design of personalised labour market and social inclusion itineraries:** based on interviews with individuals and migrant families interested in relocating and on assessments of the job offers identified in the relevant municipality. This includes the provision of training to enhance employability in the relevant sector and knowledge about the rural area.
 - o Individuals and families actively participate in the design of their involvement strategies. Training approaches are flexible and interculturally appropriate, including a comprehensive feedback mechanism for beneficiaries to share opinions on project design, quality and evaluation.
- > **On-the-ground activities:** bringing together municipalities and newcomers through field visits; identification of job opportunities through joint work with local companies; addressing information gaps; and facilitating migrants' engagement with the community. The aim is to remove potential obstacles hindering long-term integration and to foster cultural sensitivity towards both newcomers and new-born populations.
- > **Monitoring of the inclusion process:** through follow-up visits and meetings with residents, and revision of the personalised plans. The project has a structured monitoring and evaluation process, incorporating beneficiary feedback mechanisms. Risks are anticipated and mitigated, with continuous improvements to training courses as needed.

A regularly published magazine promotes the project and shares relevant outcomes.



RESULTS

Between 2019 and 2023, the project was rolled out in eight provinces across the country, achieving:

- > support for over 1 000 family units (1 500 people, plus dependent minors);
- > identification and management of 500 job offers in the participating rural municipalities;
- > identification of work placements for 400 participants; and
- > joint work with over 200 municipalities in eight Spanish regions, following the methodology of personalised intervention.

The support provided by the project included tutoring of newly arrived individuals and their families and set-up of channels for dialogue with the host community in contexts of social and cultural diversity. This was necessary for both the migrants and the municipalities seeking to rejuvenate their social fabric and demographics.

The Cepaim Foundation developed a **library** containing a methodological guide on the project's implementation since 2002, videos and other resources. Additionally, the project website features publications and video testimonials of newcomers to selected rural areas.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

This project actively engages with local authorities, communities and beneficiary families, ensuring their participation and ownership. The **entire local community was involved** in promoting social inclusion, particularly through sponsoring of the migrant families. This approach prevents misperceptions and encourages collaboration between local communities and beneficiaries to remove obstacles to long-term integration.

The project views **migrant family units as agents of rural community revitalisation** and ensures they are informed and prepared for integration into new rural communities, while building an understanding of integration as a two-way process in the receiving communities.

The project features a robust **strategic framework extended to multiple regions**, incorporating achievable and observable outcomes. It outlines clear and organised activities aligned with SMART indicators. The development of a communication strategy during the design phase, fostering clear communication with host communities and local authorities, proved essential for the success of the initiative. This strategic approach is crucial for engaging key stakeholders and ensuring the overall success of the rural itinerary.

The Cepaim Foundation applies annually to a national call for proposals within a broader social integration framework; the project is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and, as such, ensures compliance with the ESF integration guide. Cepaim, in collaboration with local authorities, advocates at regional and national levels for improved funding and integration policies.

