

PRESS RELEASE

Helsinki, 17 April

OECD: Finland is a pioneer in cross-sectoral rural policy

According to the OECD review published today, Finland has developed quite a unique way of making rural policy. The special strength is the long-term cross-sectoral working method that Finland has been implementing as one of the first countries in the world. The OECD report suggests that the cross sectoral collaboration could be furthered by giving more institutional strength to rural policy outside the sectoral structures of the government, in order to better address the rural policy actions of different administrative sectors and public bodies.

Finland is one of the most rural countries in the EU. Within Finland there are considerable differences between different types of rural areas, which must be taken into account in the policy. Over the past decades pioneering cross-sectoral work done in Finland has made an important contribution to taking the special characteristics of rural areas into account. Also the political decision-makers have become aware of the needs of different types of rural areas. The cross-sectoral approach has succeeded in reconciling the various policy sectors that touch upon the countryside.

The OECD highlights the central role of the Rural Policy Committee in the governance of rural policy. According to the OECD, the current position of rural policy in Finland is largely due to the work done by the Committee, which brings together the public, private and third sector stakeholders involved in rural affairs and maintains active discussion on these.

The OECD presents a number of recommendations aimed to develop the governance of Finnish rural policy. The role of the local action groups should be reinforced and their institutional interaction with municipalities and regional actors should be increased. In all Regional Management Committees there should be specific rural sections to ensure that the development prospects of each region can be discussed within the region itself.

The institutional role of the Rural Policy Committee within the Finnish government is quite weak. According to the OECD, the fact that the Committee is included in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry creates tension between the agricultural and rural policy. Detaching rural policy from the sectoral policies would show more clearly that the challenges faced by the rural areas go far beyond the agricultural sector. Rural policy should also have a budget of its own so that the resources of the networks could be allocated on a more long-term basis and regional actors could be more closely involved in rural policy work. This would also improve the assessment of the rural policy impacts of different policy sectors, i.e. rural proofing. Even if the Finnish rural policy has been highly successful, the need for it has by no means diminished as the challenges faced by rural areas continue to increase.

According to the OECD, the key issues in the future well-being of the Finnish rural areas are increasing the equitability and efficiency of public services, ensuring the competitiveness of rural enterprises that are not connected to farms, and improving the environment for business operations in the countryside.

The National Team which assisted the OECD in the review process supplied the necessary background material to the OECD researchers. Last year the OECD representatives visited Finland twice: in February they met national-level rural policy actors and in May they joined a field trip to North Karelia and Kainuu, where they met regional and local actors. The Rural Policy Committee commissioned the OECD to conduct the review on Finnish rural policy.

Rural Policy Committee

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