



D2.2 Rural-Urban Linkages and Opportunities post COVID-19



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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CRFS	City Region Food System
DECS	Dissemination, Exploitation, Communication and Scale up
DL	Deep Learning.
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
ENRD	Rural Network for Rural Development
ERA.	European Research Area
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
GA	PoliRuralPlus Grant Agreement
GenAI	Generative AI
GD	Google Drive
GIS	Geospatial Information System
GPT	Generative Pre-Trained Transformer AI technology
H2020	Horizon 2020 EU funding programme of this project
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LTVRA	EU Long Term Vision for Rural Areas



MAA	Multi Actor Approach
MCPs	Multi-Country Projects
MS	Member States
NBS	Nature Based Solutions
NEB	New European Bauhaus
NECPs	National Energy and Climate Plans
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRN	National Rural network
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PM	Person Month
R&I	Research and Innovation
RAP	Regional Action Plans
RDP	Rural Development Policy
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDM	System Dynamic Modelling.
SECAPs	Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SSH	Social Sciences and Humanities
WP	Work Package



Executive Summary

This deliverable focuses on assessing the impact of COVID-19 on rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. It involved collecting and analysing data to understand the effects of the pandemic on key sectors and activities driving these linkages, as well as identifying both direct and indirect consequences on rural and urban regions. The deliverable also aims to identify the challenges and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic. This comprehensive report aims to guide the PoliRuralPlus project in addressing the challenges and optimising rural-urban linkages post-COVID-19, ensuring sustainable and inclusive development across the EU.

The document is organised into the following sections that are the main body of the report for the project:

1. **Introduction:** The main goal of PoliRuralPlus is to foster sustainable, balanced, equitable, place-based, and inclusive development of rural and urban areas through improved connections, governance arrangements, and integrated territorial policies. This deliverable focuses on the pandemic's impact on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, identifying challenges and opportunities that have emerged.
 2. **EU Policy Landscape:** A analyses the EU policy landscape relevant to rural-urban linkages, including: Cohesion Policy, Rural Development Policy, Urban Development Policy, Long-Term Vision for EU Rural Areas and the EU Rural Pact, Nature-based solutions, New European Bauhaus and Climate Adaptation.
 3. **Literature Review:** Covers academic studies, EU policies documentation, European studies and reports, and national studies and reports. It highlights the need for integrated approaches to address common challenges and opportunities in both rural and urban areas.
 4. **Impact of COVID-19:** The pandemic has highlighted challenges such as digital connectivity and housing affordability but also presented opportunities for rural revival and local development policies. Key recommendations include enhancing digital infrastructure, promoting sustainable tourism, and supporting local development policies.
 5. **Innovation in Rural Areas:** Discusses the role of innovation in rural development, recommending the use of online toolkits for rural development, insights from Horizon 2020 and other EU projects, and specific strategies for the PoliRuralPlus pilots.
 6. **Pilot-Specific Regional Action Plans:** Suggestions for each pilot based on the document's findings, emphasising best practices, strategies to enhance rural-urban linkages, and post-COVID opportunities across the EU.
 7. **PoliRuralPlus Dashboard & Tools Recommendations:** Recommendations for developing a digital toolbox extending the results from PoliRural, incorporating AI/DL, MapWhiteboards, and collaborative analysis and visualisation features. It emphasises the importance of robust impact assessment frameworks and knowledge exchange. It also describes the PoliRuralPlus GPT service that has been developed to provide the pilots with an user-friendly service to use and benefit from the extensive results of WP2, and as a first step to the Dashboard.
 8. **Conclusions and Recommendations:** For achieving sustainable and inclusive development across rural and urban areas in Europe. It emphasises the importance of collaboration, innovation, and effective policy alignment.
- Annexes:** A comprehensive repository of the detailed results and analysis of the key reports and studies on which of the sections are based, documented in the relevant, but extensive, **Annexes A to O**, to allow pilots to drill down for any specific information using [PoliRuralPlus GPT](#). These will also be available on the [PoliRuralPlus Hub](#)

Key Takeaways:

- This main report, plus the detailed analysis of its extensive repository of Annexes.
- The assembled references database Knowledge Space - for future WP2 and WP4 work
- [PoliRuralPlus GPT](#) that makes all of the knowledge interactively usable - no need to read all this text.
 - Pilot stakeholders benefit by [PoliRuralPlus GPT](#) to address identified RAP issues such as:
 - Collaboration & knowledge sharing between policymakers, researchers, & communities.
 - Inclusivity and involvement of citizens, businesses, and NGOs.
 - Social innovation, funding sources and promotion of successful practices.
 - Strengthening the LEADER approach and enhancing territorial connections.
 - Leveraging digital tools and advocating for policy coherence.



1 Introduction

The objective of PoliRuralPlus is to foster a sustainable, balanced, equitable, place-based and inclusive development of rural and urban areas through improved connections, governance arrangements, and integrated territorial policies that prioritise experimentation and innovation in domains that favour bi-directional urban-rural synergies and the development of a well-being economy. Driven by foresight, planning and implementation of integrated urban-rural strategies.

This deliverable focuses on assessing the impact of COVID-19 on rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. It involved collecting and analysing the vast amount of reports, literature, policies and data to understand the effects of the pandemic on key sectors and activities driving these linkages, as well as identifying both direct and indirect consequences on rural and urban regions. This work identified the challenges and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic. In particular, this report aims to identify the PoliRuralPlus domain Knowledge Database space to help the PoliRuralPlus pilots to identify their most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies in the development of their Regional Action Plans (RAP), and underpin the Regional Analysis Dashboard that will be developed in WP4 and used in T2.3. That Knowledge Space will enable the AI-driven Dashboard to provide a very useful and powerful support for the pilots' stakeholders, empowering them to craft innovative, collaborative, and impactful strategies for integrated rural-urban development.

The impact of the PoliRuralPlus project will be (see Annex [B](#)) to improve:

- 1 The vision, consensus, skills, incentives, resources and regional action plan¹, as well as the connections, strategies and governance arrangements that foster synergistic development and just transition of rural and urban areas and more integrated territorial policies and strategies in a growing number of localities;
- 2 Business and innovation opportunities thanks to a more proximate, circular and green economy and renewed vitality of rural places through better connectivity, improved valorisation of cultural and natural heritage, and stronger innovation ecosystems.
- 3 Mutual access of rural and urban actors to services provided by either type of areas
- 4 The social connectivity, social capital, resilience, and capacity to face changes as well as of innovating, and increased understanding of the cultural connections between rural and urban communities and strengthened sense of territorial identity.

The regional disparities and lack of urban-rural cooperation that triggered the PoliRuralPlus project have become a significant problem in Europe. Without effective governance models for balanced development, rural areas are often left behind, exacerbating the divide between rural and urban communities. The project's goal is to strengthen local and regional authorities and promote innovation in rural areas is crucial for ensuring their inclusion in policy frameworks and creating sustainable and inclusive development across Europe.

Ultimately, PoliRuralPlus focuses on creating sustainable and inclusive development across rural and urban areas in Europe, and will:

- Develop RAP methodology and digital tools to support regional policy building.
- Develop a digital toolbox extending on the results from PoliRural, adding on AI/DL, MapWhiteboards and collaborative analysis and visualisation features.
- Identify NEB projects with potential synergies with PoliRuralPlus and establish communication channels for knowledge exchange.
- Present PoliRuralPlus's work and expertise, and participate in NEB events and workshops to learn from others.
- Validate RAP methodology and tools through 9 pilots.
- Showcase PoliRuralPlus's innovative solutions and achievements to NEB and other urban-focused initiatives for knowledge transfer.

¹ In the D5.1 change matrix



- Organise joint events and workshops, create online platforms, and foster partnerships between urban and rural stakeholders to facilitate knowledge exchange.

To achieve these outputs the project will communicate, disseminate, and transfer knowledge to promote urban-rural synergies and experimental culture. This will be achieved through the creation of a website, the use of social media, the organisation of conferences and workshops, and the publication of results in academic journals and other relevant publications. Stakeholders and individuals will be engaged through progress reports, surveys, workshops, meetings, webinars, focus groups, consultations, and interviews. Press releases, infographics, and videos will be developed to communicate project results to the media and public in an engaging and accessible way.

Integration and exploitation of the acquired data-driven knowledge and the results of PoliRuralPlus in the next practice of the partners (policy, research, education, business, civil society). Stimulate the replication and development of social, policy, digital and technology solutions of past and ongoing EU projects, initiatives and business models associated while improving capacities for managing demographic challenges, climate change, and the COVID-19 type of crises.

The PoliRuralPlus project results will be utilised by local and regional authorities, government agencies, civil society organisations, private sector actors, and researchers. These stakeholders will benefit from improved governance models, integrated rural-urban strategies, and collaborative decision-making. Businesses can capitalise on innovative rural-urban synergies, while researchers can contribute to the evidence base in this field. The findings will also inform EU policies, strategies, and funding programs. Overall, both rural and urban communities across Europe will benefit from the project's focus on synergistic development, social connectivity, and increased resilience.

1.1 Use of AI in WP2

This deliverable D2.2 reports the literature review on rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the project area. It identifies, reviews, summarises, and analyses relevant academic and policy literature on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, including related research into the influence of COVID 19 on regional development, Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative, to define the key concepts and themes, identify best practices and lessons learned in enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities. Each area was analysed using GenAI tools trained in PoliRuralPlus objectives and methodology (see Annex [L](#)), to draw out the key global findings and recommendations for the project. To support the pilots in the development of their Regional Action Plans (RAP), a custom PoliRuralPlus GPT has been developed as a user-friendly service to enable the pilots to readily use this extensive sources and analysis (See section 7.3).

The use of AI in the work of WP2 (see Annex B.1) is used responsibly, ethically, and in compliance with the European Union's AI Act² and other relevant regulations. This Code of Practice lists the principles and standards guiding AI development and use within the project based on the EU AI Act³ with best practices for ethical and responsible AI development in the context of rural-urban integration.

PoliRuralPlus' Code of Conduct for use of AI and specific practices for the PoliRuralPlus Databases, Dashboard, & Tools is presented in Annex B.3. In the research and analysis of the various sources for this report and the PoliRuralPlus References Database, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools (such as Gemini Advanced⁴, Elicit⁵ and

² [Artificial Intelligence Act: MEPs adopt landmark law | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ [TA \(europa.eu\)](#) and [Artificial Intelligence Act: MEPs adopt landmark law | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [Gemini \(google.com\)](#)

⁵ <https://elicit.com/>



ChatGPT⁶) has strictly followed the European Commission's "Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research"⁷ as it relates to WP2 and described in Annex B.4.

1.2 PoliRuralPlus custom GPT

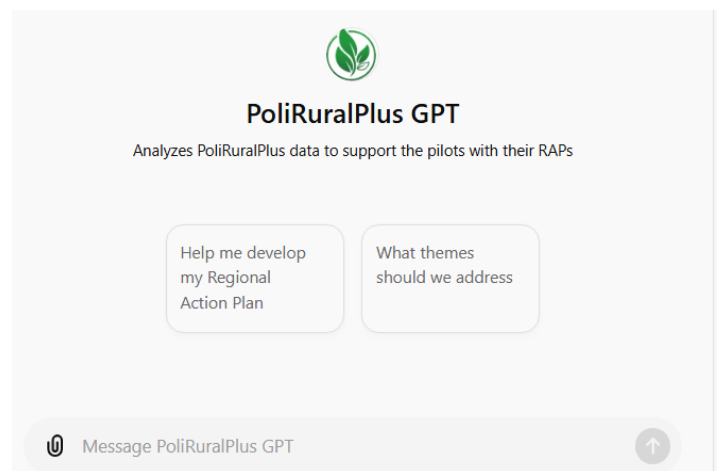


To provide an user friendly service for all pilot stakeholders rather than linearly reading all this text, the knowledge embodied in all of this deliverable and its annexes (as well as D2.1 and D5.1) are made available as the custom [PoliRuralPlus GPT](#). This public custom GPT uses the private Knowledge Space of D2.2, D2.1 & D5.1 and the intelligence of ChatGPT⁸. It can also be seen as an initial fast prototype⁹, and proof of concept (POC), of a Dashboard to provide the above services.

The [PoliRuralPlus GPT](#) is a user-friendly interactive service for the pilots, based on D2.2, D2.1 and draft D5.1 Knowledge Space. It enables pilots to easily query into the PoliRuralPlus description, extensive references analysis and the evolving pilot RAPs to address specific topics that interest them. In due course and in addition to the many references footnoted in this report, the task T2.3 PoliRuralPlus Dashboard will provide similar but more powerful and nuanced analysis and interactive support based on the complete domain knowledge space (see section 9).

While publicly available to any user with the link, to explore the contents of its Knowledge Space (i.e. D2.2, 2.1 and D5.1), the PoliRuralPlus GPT's contents are retained within the MAC Team workspace and are not used by ChatGPT to train its wider models. Though still we have been careful to avoid any private content in the deliverables used in the Knowledge Space¹⁰.

Annex O shows an example of a pilot stakeholder using the PoliRuralPlus GPT.



1.3 Definition of Urban and Rural Areas

In the context of urban-rural linkages, there is no universal definition of what is urban, and the global data is based on each country defining what it considers urban, and the population within it¹¹. The definition can vary from a cluster of five households or more to an administrative boundary defined by population density and built-up area. In addition, the definition of urban within a country can change over time.

The definition of rural and urban that PoliRuralPlus uses, is based on the concept of context-specific typologies and collaborating with different actors, as recommended by an EU Working Group (See Annex C.1). In this way, PoliRuralPlus can play a key role in shaping more effective and inclusive rural development policies across the EU.

⁶ [ChatGPT \(openai.com\)](#)

⁷ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2b6cf7e5-36ac-41cb-aab5-0d32050143dc_en?filename=ec_rtd_ai-guidelines.pdf

⁸ [Explore GPTs \(chatgpt.com\)](#)

⁹ [Prototype Model In Software Engineering: All You Need To Know \(theknowledgeacademy.com\)](#)

¹⁰ [Tutorial: How To Make and Share Custom GPTs - Unite.AI](#)

¹¹ "Better Food Systems For Better Rural-Urban Linkages", [Rural21 4 2018.Pdf](#)



So, as the fundamental approach of PoliRuralPlus is to be user-driven by the stakeholders in each region, it uses the local stakeholders' own definition of which of their local regions they consider to be rural or urban. (see Annex C.3)

1.4 Territorial Cohesion of Rural and Urban areas

Rural areas account for more than 341 m ha, which represent 83% of the total EU area in 2018. Agricultural land, forest and natural areas account for almost 80% of the EU's area. While in 2021, 8.9 % of the EU population was living in a city, with lower shares living in towns and suburbs (35.9 %) and in rural areas (25.2 %) ¹².

Administrative divisions were originally designed for top-down governance, control, and revenue collection. But they were created in a different time with limited individual freedom and mobility. Today, these divisions lead to fragmentation, inequality, poor coordination, and complexity in navigating public services. Citizens now identify more with functional living and working areas based on economic and social activities. Planning for these areas can promote efficient resource use, lower costs, and support sustainable growth, but it requires voluntary cooperation from all administrations with diverging interests, financial capacity, natural resources, and innovation. (See Annex C.3)

So PoliRuralPlus uses a functional approach to rural-urban territorial cohesion. To ensure balanced and effective development in functional living and working areas, several issues need to be addressed, including economic exchange, labour force, tourism and recreation, innovation, environmental impact and ecosystem services, infrastructure, social connections, and governance and public services (see Annex C.1). Rural areas provide food, raw materials, and workers to urban areas, while urban areas provide goods, services, and job opportunities to rural areas. Rural areas offer cultural and natural attractions for urban visitors and opportunities to test and implement new technologies. Urban areas generate pollution and waste that can impact rural areas, while rural areas provide ecosystem services that benefit urban areas. Urban areas often have better infrastructure that can facilitate rural economic development, and rural and urban areas can have different social networks, identities, governance structures, and priorities.

1.5 Rural-Urban Linkages

A basic definition of rural-urban linkages is that they consist of flows (of goods, people, information, finance, waste, information, social relations) across space, linking rural and urban areas. Perhaps a less descriptive definition is of the functional links between sectors (agriculture, industry and services). The latter is central to structural change taking place in both rural and urban areas ¹³. The multidimensional nature of rural-urban linkages are illustrated in the following from the RURBAN project ¹⁴.

¹² [Rural areas in numbers \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e3004c7c-326c-4961-b98e-000143f62001/en/document/other/rural_areas_in_numbers_en.pdf)

¹³ [session-1-insight-tacoli-ii-ed.pdf \(oecd.org\)](https://www.oecd.org/t2i/session-1-insight-tacoli-ii-ed.pdf)

¹⁴ Adapted from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/urban-rural-linkages/rurban_short.doc

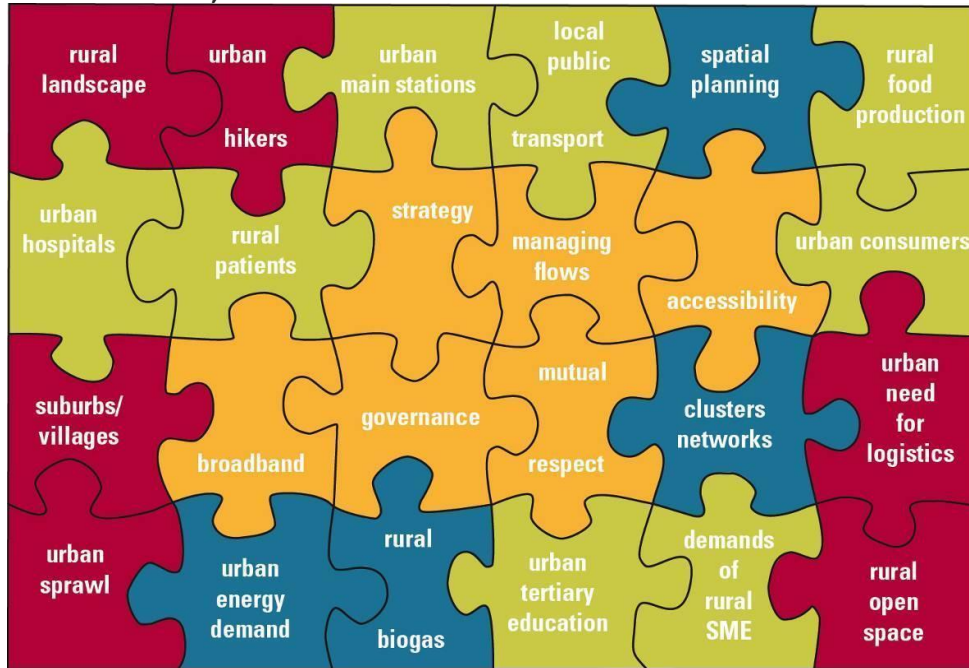


Figure 1 RURBAN Urban-Rural Linkages¹⁵

To address the multidimensional nature of connections between rural and urban areas, the EU cohesion policy promotes functional area approaches, in particular through its new policy objective ‘Europe closer to citizens’¹⁶. The concept of functional areas is at the heart of cohesion policy territorial development as well as territorial cooperation as it makes it clear that policies cannot be designed separately by each side of the border but jointly on the joint territory that people share in their daily lives.¹⁷ It is also the approach adopted by PoliRuralPlus. (see Annex D.1)

Rural-urban linkages are essential for fostering sustainable development and enhancing the overall quality of life in the European Union. Rural-urban linkages are essential for the economic, social, and environmental development of both rural and urban areas in Europe:

These linkages are essential in the EU because they support the balanced and sustainable development of both rural and urban regions. They foster economic growth, create employment opportunities, improve living standards, and enhance overall well-being for citizens. Additionally, they help bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, reducing disparities and ensuring that development is equitable and inclusive across the EU. By working together, rural and urban communities can create a more sustainable and prosperous future for all. This is the main aim of PoliRuralPlus (See Annex B.1).

1.6 Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide

Even though the Treaty of Lisbon established territorial cohesion as the third dimension of European cohesion. Despite the high priority given in policy to achieving geographically balanced economic development, gaps in living conditions still exist between rural and urban areas. In some cases, these gaps are growing in social, political, cultural and economic outcomes¹⁸. As a result, some key trends, and recommendations specifically relevant to the PoliRuralPlus pilots, are (see Annex D.3):

¹⁵ Adapted from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/urban-rural-linkages/rurban_short.doc

¹⁶ [inforegio - Urban-rural linkages \(europa.eu\)](http://inforegio.europa.eu/urban-rural-linkages)

¹⁷ <https://functionalareas.eu/>

¹⁸ “Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities”, [Massimiliano Mascherini](#), [Marie Hyland](#), [Garance Hingre](#), [Marta Anzillotti](#), [Daniel Molinuevo](#), [Eleonora Peruffo](#), [Viginta Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė](#), EuroFound



1. Bridging Gaps in Income and Living Conditions

- **Income Disparity:** Rural-urban gaps in income are a persistent challenge. Addressing this means supporting rural entrepreneurship, attracting new businesses, and improving income-generating opportunities outside traditional agriculture sectors.
- **Housing and Quality of Life:** Understand the differences in housing costs, pollution levels, and service access. Initiatives that improve infrastructure, public services, and quality of life, while addressing any shortcomings, can mitigate income-based disadvantages for rural populations.
- **PoliRuralPlus Action:** Pilots can explore how to boost rural incomes while ensuring the livability of communities. Diversifying economic sectors and focusing on green, sustainable development could be key.

2. Jobs, Opportunities, and the Digital Divide

- **Employment Trends:** While overall employment rates might be similar, specific challenges exist, especially with youth unemployment in rural areas. This calls for targeted training, skills development, and promoting the potential of remote work for particular roles.
- **Educational Gaps:** Investments in education, particularly tailored to the rural context and evolving labor markets, are essential.
- **Digital Infrastructure and Skills:** Closing the digital gap is vital for unlocking future opportunities across many sectors. This means improving broadband access and promoting digital literacy programs for rural residents of all ages.
- **PoliRuralPlus Action:** Pilots should identify local skills needs and work with educational institutions, develop workspaces with strong connectivity, and promote the viability of remote work.

3. Values, Identity, and the Recognition Gap

- **Cultural Differences Matter:** Acknowledge the diverse values and identities within both rural and urban settings. Avoid oversimplified narratives and seek to bridge communication and understanding between groups.
- **Feeling Ignored:** Rural populations often feel overlooked and disrespected. This can breed resentment and social division. Policies and projects must demonstrate genuine consideration of rural needs and concerns.
- **Community Engagement:** Actively involve rural communities throughout all project stages, from defining problems to proposing solutions. This fosters a sense of ownership.
- **PoliRuralPlus Action:** Pilots should embrace local perspectives. Ensure communication materials and outreach efforts are tailored to rural audiences in terms of language, style, and content.

Takeaways for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots:

- **Think Regionally:** Cooperation and knowledge sharing among rural areas can be key. Encourage clusters or networks within pilots to exchange lessons learned and strengthen their impacts.
- **Cross-Sectoral Partnerships:** Involve businesses, educational institutions, NGOs, and local governments in projects. This builds a broader base of support and leverages diverse expertise.
- **Promote Rural Success Stories:** Share inspiring projects that revitalise rural economies, showcase innovation, and improve community well-being. This can address the negative stereotypes and encourage a positive outlook for rural areas.



1.7 OECD Principles on Rural Policy¹⁹

The OECD Principles on Rural Policy aim to guide policymakers in crafting effective policies that enhance the well-being of rural communities and support sustainable rural futures. Drawing on two decades of work in rural development, they focus on three key pillars: Scale, Strategy, and Stakeholders.

The implications for PoliRuralPlus of these Key Principles are (See Annex F):

- The OECD Principles provide a comprehensive framework for crafting rural development policy, serving as a valuable resource for PoliRuralPlus initiatives.
- Rural areas are not homogenous. Tailor strategies to specific local needs and strengths, adopting a context-sensitive approach.
- Collaboration is crucial. Foster partnerships between rural and urban areas, and across different government levels for maximum impact.
- Embrace a forward-looking vision for rural areas that anticipates change, ensuring that initiatives are sustainable in the long term.
- Actively involve rural communities throughout the policy development process to ensure solutions align with local priorities and realities.

1.8 OECD Principles on Urban Policy²⁰

The OECD Principles on Urban Policy offer a comprehensive framework to help policymakers create thriving cities that contribute to overall national development. The focus is on smart, sustainable, and inclusive urban environments, emphasising three key pillars: Scale, Strategy, and Stakeholders.

The implications of these principles for PoliRuralPlus are (see [Annex F](#)):

- The OECD Principles provide a valuable blueprint for guiding policy decisions. Even though focused on urban policy, they offer insights applicable to rural development strategies.
- Pilots should embrace a systems thinking approach that recognises rural areas not simply as isolated entities but as interconnected parts of a broader regional and national ecosystem.
- Collaborations across sectors, regions, and levels of governance are essential for holistic development.
- PoliRuralPlus can play a key role in promoting a place-based and inclusive approach to rural development, prioritising engagement of rural communities throughout all project stages.

1.8.1 OECD Rural-Urban Partnerships - An Integrated Approach to Economic Development²¹

Urban and rural areas enjoy different and often complementary assets, and better integration between them is important)

- **Partnerships can take many forms.** Each pilot region needs to tailor its partnership to its specific needs and assets.
- **Shared vision and goals are vital.**
- **Partnerships evolve over time.** Start with achievable goals and build trust before tackling complex challenges.
- **Focusing on functional regions is essential.** Look beyond administrative boundaries to the true areas of interdependence in your region.

¹⁹ [OECD PRINCIPLES ON RURAL POLICY - OCDE](#)

²⁰ [OECD Urban Studies | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

²¹ [Rural-Urban Partnerships : An Integrated Approach to Economic Development | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)



1.8.2 Networks and rural-urban linkages for rural innovation: OECD working paper

An OECD working paper²² examines the role of networks and rural-urban linkages in absorbing and enhancing innovation in rural areas. The analysis focuses on the distinctive characteristics of rural areas that determine the different ways in which they adopt and diffuse innovation. The problem is that rural areas often lag behind urban centres in innovation.: (see F.2)

- Rural innovation exists and matters: Although rural areas face lower density and distance from markets, they still innovate. Adopting this innovation is vital to overcome challenges in access to key resources.
- Networks are crucial: Rural entrepreneurs need strong networks for suppliers, knowledge exchange, and market access.

Takeaway for PoliRuralPlus pilots:

- **Digital Infrastructure:** Ensure high-quality broadband access in rural areas, particularly for "last-mile" connections. This is crucial for innovation beyond just urban centres.
- **Promote Mobility:** Allow for remote working and support interregional mobility to bring talent and ideas into rural areas. Include this in regional planning policy.
- **Build Firm-Level Networks:**
 - Support university-industry collaboration in rural areas, focusing on training and real-world research projects.
 - Facilitate rural businesses' participation in trade networks and global value chains.
 - Use cluster development strategies and smart specialisation to create innovation ecosystems tailored to rural strengths.

1.9 Effective Use of Foresight

Foresight, which is a core element of the PoliRuralPlus methodology, and in particular the recommendations from the previous PoliRural project (See Annex G), can be most effectively used in the PoliRuralPlus Pilots to optimise rural-urban linkages and create more attractive and sustainable regions, as follows:

- Follow the established methodology.
- Dedicate adequate time and resources.
- Define your own vision of rural attractiveness.
- Align with the LTVRA's goals.
- Explore innovative funding avenues beyond LEADER.
- Integrate foresight results into regional development plans.
- Establish monitoring committees.
- Document lessons learned for future projects.
- Start small with data-driven tools like SDM and focus on qualitative approaches.

²² [Networks and rural-urban linkages for rural innovation | en | OECD](#)



2 EU Policy Landscape:

The European Union (EU) has developed a complex and multifaceted policy landscape to address the diverse needs of its rural and urban areas. These policies aim to foster balanced development, economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability across the Union.

The EU's policy landscape for rural and urban areas is comprehensive and ambitious. It seeks to address a wide range of challenges and seize opportunities to create a more balanced, sustainable, and inclusive Union. The success of these policies relies on effective coordination, collaboration, and adaptation to the evolving needs of both rural and urban communities. The EU's commitment to integrated development and the Green Deal policy framework, along with substantial financial resources and collaborative frameworks, provides a strong foundation for the future prosperity of all its regions.

The vast number of sources and 1,500 references that were identified and recorded in the PoliRuralPlus domain knowledge database indicate the extent and transparency of the key EU policies that shape the development of both rural and urban areas,

The analysis of those references, highlighting their objectives, mechanisms, and potential impacts, with very many detailed recommendations that can be drilled down into, is described in Annex H, while the results and major recommendations are summarised as follows:

Cohesion Policy:

At the heart of the EU's regional development strategy is the Cohesion Policy. It aims to reduce disparities between regions by investing in infrastructure, innovation, and social initiatives. The policy is guided by five key priorities:

- **Smarter Europe:** Driving innovation, digitalization, and economic transformation while supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.
- **Greener Europe:** Implementing the Paris Agreement, investing in renewable energy, and combating climate change.
- **More Connected Europe:** Developing strategic transport and digital networks.
- **More Social Europe:** Upholding the European Pillar of Social Rights, promoting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion, and equal access to healthcare.
- **Europe Closer to Citizens:** Supporting locally-led development and sustainable urban growth.

The Cohesion Policy operates with a budget of €377.5 billion for the 2021-2027 period, with a focus on less-developed regions. It aligns with broader EU economic policy coordination and is subject to compliance with economic rules.

Urban Development Policy:

EU urban development policy recognises the interconnectedness of economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of urban life. It promotes integrated approaches to address challenges such as urban poverty, housing, inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

The Urban Agenda for the EU, established in 2016, outlines 12 priority areas for partnerships between EU institutions, Member States, cities, and stakeholders. Cohesion Policy also plays a crucial role in urban development, with a minimum of 6% of the European Regional Development Fund dedicated to sustainable urban development strategies.

Rural Development Policy:



The EU is committed to revitalising rural areas through its Rural Development Policy. This policy aims to create stronger, connected, resilient, and prosperous rural communities by 2040. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) provides financial support for initiatives in knowledge transfer, innovation, agricultural competitiveness, environmental protection, and social inclusion.

The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-2027 further strengthens the focus on rural development. It emphasises climate action, environmental care, generational renewal, vibrant rural areas, and food quality. With a budget of €387 billion, the CAP plays a crucial role in supporting farmers and rural communities.

Long-Term Vision for EU Rural Areas:

The EU has a long-term vision for its rural areas, recognizing the challenges of demographic change, limited connectivity, and access to services. The vision emphasises the opportunities presented by the green and digital transitions, aiming to enhance rural quality of life and stimulate economic growth.

The Rural Action Plan, supported by flagship initiatives, focuses on empowering rural communities, improving connectivity, ensuring resilience, and fostering economic prosperity. It will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure its continued relevance.

EU Rural Pact:

The EU Rural Pact is a collaborative framework that engages actors at all levels to support the shared goals of the rural vision. It encourages the exchange of ideas and best practices, fostering cooperation between public authorities and stakeholders to unlock the full potential of rural areas.

2.1 EU Policies most relevant to PoliRuralPlus and its pilots

EU policies aimed at fostering sustainable development, innovation, and social inclusion in both rural and urban areas are particularly relevant to PoliRuralPlus. These policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Digital Agenda²³ for Europe, and the EU Single Market Programme, acknowledge the interdependence of rural and urban communities and the need for integrated approaches to address common challenges.

Rural-Urban Linkages:

The EU recognizes the importance of strong rural-urban linkages for achieving balanced territorial development. The Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and the EU Rural Action Plan aim to make rural areas stronger, connected, resilient, and prosperous by 2040. They emphasise the need for integrated strategies that address the diverse needs of rural communities, including access to services, digital connectivity, climate resilience, and economic opportunities.

Digitalization:

The EU Digitalization Policy emphasises the importance of digital transformation for rural and urban areas alike. The CAP includes investments in digital infrastructure, services, and skills to empower farmers and rural communities to take advantage of the digital transition. Digital tools and services can increase productivity, income, and access to essential services in rural areas.

Social Economy and Community Resilience:

²³ [Digital agenda for Europe | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)



The EU Single Market Programme supports social enterprises in rural areas, recognizing their contribution to social inclusion, local development, and social innovation. Social enterprises can provide essential goods and services, boost sustainable development, and foster inclusive social and governance relations. The Social Economy Missions aim to accelerate the development of social enterprises through inter-regional learning and collaboration.

The European Green Deal:

The European Green Deal is a comprehensive strategy to make the EU climate neutral by 2050. It emphasises the role of rural areas in achieving this goal and supports the transition to a green economy through investments in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and resource efficiency. The Green Deal also promotes social inclusion and aims to leave no one behind in the transition.

European Recovery Plans:

The EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is a €672.5 billion fund designed to support Member States in recovering from the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The RRF focuses on reforms and investments that promote the green and digital transitions, while also addressing social and economic disparities.

Gender Equality:

The EU Gender Action Plan III aims to accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in all EU external policies and actions. It focuses on empowering women and girls in all their diversity to participate and lead equally in social, economic, and political life. The plan also emphasises the importance of gender mainstreaming, gender-targeted actions, and data collection for targeted policies and monitoring.

Demographic Changes:

Eurostat data indicates a natural population decrease in most EU regions, with rural areas particularly affected by ageing populations and out-migration. This demographic shift highlights the importance of initiatives like PoliRuralPlus in supporting rural communities and creating attractive living and working conditions to retain and attract residents.

Rural-Urban Linkages:

The EU emphasises the importance of strong rural-urban linkages for balanced development. Initiatives like the Rural Pact and the Territorial Agenda 2030 promote integrated strategies that address the diverse needs of rural communities while leveraging their interdependence with urban areas. The concept of functional areas/regions is also highlighted, emphasising the interconnectedness of rural and urban areas based on commuting patterns and resource flows.

StartUp Village Forum:

This initiative focuses on fostering innovation in rural areas through start-up driven initiatives. It aligns with the EU's long-term vision for rural areas and emphasises research and innovation for rural communities. The forum promotes knowledge exchange and cooperation among various stakeholders to support the growth of rural start-ups.

Rural-Events Industry:

The rural events industry in Europe plays a crucial role in generating income and creating opportunities for rural areas. It fosters rural-urban connections by attracting urban visitors and encouraging partnerships between rural



and urban stakeholders. These events can also catalyse infrastructure improvements in rural areas, benefiting both residents and visitors.

System Dynamics Working Group:

The European Commission's System Dynamics Working Group explores the use of system dynamics modelling to understand complex systems and evaluate policy interventions. This approach can be particularly useful in rural development to analyse the long-term, systemic impacts of decisions and design more effective policies.

2.1.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots

PoliRuralPlus can effectively contribute to the sustainable and equitable development of both rural and urban areas across the European Union by strategically aligning with EU policies and actively engaging with stakeholders in the regions addressing the following in the pilots' RAPs.

Rural Themes:

- **Next CAP Reform:** The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-2027 presents opportunities for PoliRuralPlus to align its pilots with the policy's objectives, particularly in the areas of environmental care, climate action, and vibrant rural areas. The focus on generational renewal and knowledge/innovation aligns with PoliRuralPlus's mission.
- **Evolving Green Deal and Decarbonisation of Agriculture:** The Green Deal emphasises sustainability and environmental protection, which are central to PoliRuralPlus's work. The project's pilots can contribute to the Green Deal's goals by promoting local energy systems, sustainable transport, and circular bio-economy in rural areas.
- **Rural Energy Communities:** PoliRuralPlus can leverage the growing support for rural energy communities within the EU's energy policy framework. The project's pilots can demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of local energy production and consumption in rural areas.
- **New European Bauhaus in Rural Areas:** The focus on aesthetics and sustainability in rural infrastructure development aligns with PoliRuralPlus's work on local food and energy systems. The project can contribute to the New European Bauhaus by integrating these elements into its pilot projects.
- **Scaling of Successful Pilots:** The EU's emphasis on innovation and knowledge transfer provides a favourable environment for scaling up successful PoliRuralPlus pilots. The project can leverage EU funding and networks to replicate and expand its impact across different regions.
- **Innovative Finance (Multi-funding for CLLD):** The EU's recognition of the need for diverse funding sources for rural development aligns with PoliRuralPlus's focus on innovative finance mechanisms. The project can explore opportunities for multi-funding approaches to ensure the sustainability of its initiatives.

Urban-Rural Themes:

- **Local Food Systems:** The EU's farm-to-fork strategy and the emphasis on sustainable food production in the CAP present opportunities for PoliRuralPlus to strengthen local food systems. The project's pilots can contribute to shorter supply chains, local economic development, and improved food quality.
- **Local Energy Systems:** The EU's push for renewable energy and energy communities creates a favourable context for PoliRuralPlus's work on local energy systems. The project can facilitate the development of community-based energy solutions in both rural and urban areas.
- **Waste Management and Circular Bio-economy:** The EU's circular economy package and the focus on waste reduction and resource efficiency are directly relevant to PoliRuralPlus's work on waste management and circular bio-economy. The project's pilots can contribute to closing resource loops and reducing environmental impacts.
- **Sustainable Transport and Local Logistics:** The EU's sustainable transport policy and its emphasis on reducing emissions and promoting efficient logistics align with PoliRuralPlus's focus on sustainable transport and local logistics. The project can contribute to the development of more sustainable transport solutions in rural areas.



Implications for the PoliRuralPlus project:

- **Policy Alignment:** PoliRuralPlus should align its pilot projects with the objectives and priorities of relevant EU policies to maximise its impact and leverage funding opportunities.
- **Collaboration:** The project should actively engage with relevant stakeholders at the EU, national, and regional levels to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- **Innovation:** PoliRuralPlus should continue to develop innovative solutions that address the challenges faced by rural and urban communities, ensuring they are scalable and replicable.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The project should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress and impact of its pilot projects, contributing to evidence-based policymaking.
- **Advocacy:** PoliRuralPlus should advocate for policies that support integrated urban-rural development and promote the project's innovative solutions.

Takeaways for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots:

The PoliRuralPlus pilots can contribute to creating stronger, more connected, resilient, and prosperous rural communities that are well-integrated with urban areas, in line with the EU's long-term vision for rural areas by addressing the following implications:

- **Integrated Approach:** PoliRuralPlus should encourage the pilots to adopt an integrated approach that considers the interdependencies between rural and urban areas, focusing on functional regions rather than administrative boundaries.
- **Innovation:** PoliRuralPlus should continue to develop innovative solutions that address the specific challenges faced by rural areas, such as energy poverty, limited access to services, and demographic change. The project should leverage initiatives like the StartUp Village Forum to foster innovation and entrepreneurship in rural communities, promoting economic growth and job creation.
- **Sustainable Event Planning:** Certain PoliRuralPlus pilots can support the rural events industry by promoting sustainable practices and encouraging collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders to maximise the benefits for both areas.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** The project should utilise system dynamics modelling to analyse complex systems and evaluate the long-term impacts of its pilot projects, ensuring evidence-based decision-making.
- **Policy Advocacy and Alignment:** PoliRuralPlus should advocate for policies that support integrated rural-urban development, strengthen rural communities, and promote innovation and sustainability in all regions. PoliRuralPlus pilots should align with the EU's rural development policies, focusing on digitalization, social innovation, climate resilience, and sustainable economic development.
- **Collaboration:** The pilots should actively engage with stakeholders at all levels, including local communities, social enterprises, policymakers, and research institutions, to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- **Inclusivity:** The project should encourage all pilots to prioritise social inclusion and gender equality, ensuring that the benefits of rural development are accessible to all members of the community.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** PoliRuralPlus should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress and impact of its pilot projects, contributing to evidence-based policymaking at the EU and national levels.
- **Communication and Dissemination:** The project and all pilots should effectively communicate its findings and achievements to a wider audience, raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities in rural areas and showcasing the potential of integrated approaches to rural development.

2.2 European Studies and Reports

Further to the policy documentation there is a vast amount of EU funded studies and reports that address the complex challenges and opportunities facing rural areas. These are referenced and analysed in Annex I with the following being particularly relevant to PoliRuralPlus and its pilots:



1. Shrinking Rural Areas:

The ESPON ESCAPE study²⁴ reveals widespread population decline in rural Europe, attributed to factors like ageing, out-migration, economic restructuring, and lack of opportunities. This highlights the need for tailored policy responses and strengthened governance to address these challenges. For PoliRuralPlus, this means focusing on initiatives that boost local economic opportunities, enhance social infrastructure, and improve the quality of life in shrinking rural areas.

2. Opportunities and Challenges for Remote Rural Areas:

The EU Rural Observatory policy brief²⁵ identifies depopulation, ageing, limited service access, economic disparity, and poor connectivity as key challenges for remote rural areas. However, these areas also possess valuable natural assets and potential for tourism and sustainable industries. PoliRuralPlus pilots should leverage these opportunities, focusing on improving digital connectivity, promoting sustainable tourism, and supporting local businesses and initiatives.

3. Climate Change Adaptation and Flood Risk Management:

The EU is committed to building climate-resilient communities through strategies, tools, and initiatives like the Adaptation Support Tool (AST)²⁶ and flood risk area viewer. PoliRuralPlus should incorporate climate resilience into its pilot projects, considering the specific vulnerabilities of rural areas to floods and other climate-related risks. The AST can be a valuable resource for developing effective adaptation strategies.

4. Rural-Urban Linkages:

The EU recognizes the importance of strong rural-urban linkages for sustainable development. The Rural Pact and the Territorial Agenda 2030²⁷ promote integrated approaches to address common challenges and leverage the strengths of both areas. PoliRuralPlus should focus on strengthening these linkages by promoting local food systems, supporting sustainable transport, and fostering collaboration between urban and rural stakeholders.

5. Digitalization and Social Economy:

The EU's Digital Agenda²⁸ for Europe and the Single Market Programme supports digital transformation and social enterprises in rural areas. PoliRuralPlus should leverage digital technologies to enhance access to services, support local businesses, and promote social innovation. The project should also explore the potential of social enterprises in driving rural development and community resilience.

6. European Recovery Plans:

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)²⁹ provides significant funding opportunities for projects that promote the green and digital transitions. PoliRuralPlus pilots should align with the RRF's priorities to access funding and contribute to the EU's recovery efforts.

7. Gender Equality and Demographic Changes:

The EU Gender Action Plan III³⁰ and Eurofound's Living and Working in the EU e-surveys³¹ highlight the need for addressing gender disparities and demographic challenges in rural areas. PoliRuralPlus should ensure gender equality and social inclusion in its pilot projects, considering the specific needs of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups.

8. Rural-Urban Food Systems and Social Innovation:

Research on rural-urban food systems and social innovation emphasises the importance of community-led initiatives and collaboration between urban and rural areas. PoliRuralPlus can play a crucial role in facilitating these

²⁴ [European Shrinking Rural Areas Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance \(ESCAPE\) | ESPON](#)

²⁵ [Opportunities and challenges for remote rural areas in the European Union | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](#), see also <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC135398>

²⁶ [AST Step 0 — English \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁷ territorialagenda.eu/ta2030/

²⁸ [Digital agenda for Europe | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁹ [Présentation PowerPoint \(robert-schuman.eu\)](#)

³⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_23_5858/IP_23_5858_EN.pdf

³¹ [Living and working in the EU e-survey | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)



partnerships and promoting innovative solutions that address food security, nutrition, and sustainable development.

9. Nexogenous Development:

The concept of nexogenous development³² highlights the importance of socio-political reconnection and collaboration between rural and urban areas for achieving balanced rural development. PoliRuralPlus should adopt this approach, focusing on building strong partnerships and networks that connect rural communities with resources, knowledge, and opportunities.

2.2.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

To effectively contribute to the EU's efforts to create stronger, more connected, resilient, and prosperous rural communities that are well-integrated with urban areas, PoliRuralPlus needs to address the following:

- The project should prioritise initiatives that address the specific challenges faced by shrinking and remote rural areas, such as depopulation, ageing, and limited access to services.
- PoliRuralPlus should leverage the EU's focus on climate change adaptation and energy transition to develop pilot projects that promote resilience, sustainability, and renewable energy solutions in rural areas.
- The project should actively engage with stakeholders at all levels to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange between rural and urban communities.
- PoliRuralPlus should utilise the EU's policy frameworks, funding opportunities, and research findings to inform its pilot projects and maximise their impact.
- The project should prioritise social inclusion and gender equality in all its initiatives, ensuring that the benefits of rural development are accessible to all members of the community.

2.3 Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)

The European Union (EU) is committed to positioning itself as a global leader in implementing Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) to achieve sustainability and resilience. NBS are defined as cost-effective solutions inspired and supported by nature, providing environmental, social, and economic benefits while building resilience. These solutions integrate natural features and processes into cities, landscapes, and seascapes through locally adapted interventions.

NBS aligns with major EU policy priorities, notably the European Green Deal, biodiversity strategy, and climate adaptation strategy. The EU actively promotes policy dialogues and outreach initiatives to foster engagement, develop knowledge, and stimulate market demand for NBS.

Key policy goals for NBS include:

- Providing evidence for their effectiveness
- Improving framework conditions at the EU policy level
- Developing a European research and innovation community
- Advancing the development, uptake, and scaling of innovative NBS
- Mainstreaming NBS in international research and innovation

The European Commission (EC) has published several reports on NBS, including summaries of EU-funded projects, handbooks for practitioners, and evaluations of their impact. These reports highlight the potential of NBS to address societal challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and water management. The EU has also funded very many NBS projects.

³² [\(4\) Rural Marginalisation and the Role of Social Innovation; A Turn Towards Nexogenous Development and Rural Reconnection | Request PDF \(researchgate.net\)](#)



2.3.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots' RAPs towards EC NBS policies and priorities

PoliRuralPlus can contribute significantly to the EU's ambition of becoming a leader in innovating with nature and achieving a more sustainable and resilient future, by leveraging the EU's strong support for NBS to enhance its impact and relevance. The following implications are based on the EU's policy landscape and reports:

1. **Align Pilot Projects with EU Priorities:** PoliRuralPlus should ensure its pilot projects align with the EU's NBS policy goals and priorities, focusing on areas such as climate resilience, biodiversity, water management, and sustainable communities. This alignment will enhance the project's visibility and potential for funding and collaboration.
2. **Utilise EU Resources and Networks:** PoliRuralPlus should leverage the wealth of resources and networks available through the EU's NBS initiatives. This includes accessing funding opportunities, collaborating with research and innovation communities, and participating in policy dialogues.
3. **Develop Robust Impact Assessment Frameworks:** PoliRuralPlus should utilise the impact assessment framework and indicators provided in the EU's handbook for practitioners. This will ensure that the project's pilots are rigorously evaluated and their impacts are effectively communicated to stakeholders and policymakers.
4. **Promote Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building:** PoliRuralPlus should actively engage in knowledge exchange and capacity-building activities related to NBS. This can include organising workshops, training sessions, and webinars to share best practices and lessons learned with other stakeholders.
5. **Advocate for Supportive Policies:** PoliRuralPlus should advocate for policies that create favourable conditions for the uptake and scaling of NBS. This includes advocating for clear regulatory frameworks, financial incentives, and public procurement guidelines that prioritise nature-based solutions.

2.4 Climate Change Adaptation and Energy Transition in Rural and Urban Areas

Climate change poses significant challenges to both rural and urban areas across the EU, leading to economic losses, health impacts, and environmental degradation. The EU has recognized the urgency of addressing these challenges and has implemented strategies and tools to support adaptation and resilience.

The EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change aims to prepare the EU for the unavoidable impacts of climate change by improving knowledge of climate risks, stepping up adaptation planning, accelerating action, and strengthening global climate resilience. The strategy emphasises the importance of data-driven decision-making and systemic adaptation across all sectors of the economy and society.

The EU Adaptation Support Tool (AST)³³ provides practical guidance to policymakers at the national and sub-national levels in developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating climate change adaptation strategies. It aims to assist in creating comprehensive and effective adaptation plans tailored to specific needs.

Energy poverty is a significant concern in both rural and urban areas, exacerbated by rising energy prices and the cost-of-living crisis. The European Commission has published recommendations to tackle energy poverty, emphasising structural improvements, investment in energy efficiency and renewables, clear information on energy bills and saving practices, and the promotion of energy communities.

The link between urban and rural areas is crucial in addressing climate change and ecosystem restoration. Integrated policies that address resource flows, dependencies, and promote sustainable practices are essential for both areas. The focus areas include ecosystem restoration, food systems, sustainable infrastructure, and inclusive governance.

³³ [AST Step 0 — English \(europa.eu\)](#)



2.4.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

PoliRuralPlus can contribute significantly to the EU's goals of climate resilience, energy transition, and sustainable development in both rural and urban communities. The project's focus on data-driven decision-making, collaboration, and social innovation aligns well with the EU's policy priorities, ensuring its relevance and potential for long-term impact.

The EU's focus on climate change adaptation and energy transition offers several opportunities for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots:

1. **Aligning with EU Strategies:**
 - PoliRuralPlus should ensure its pilot projects align with the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change and the recommendations for tackling energy poverty. This alignment can enhance the project's relevance and access to funding opportunities.
2. **Utilising the Adaptation Support Tool (AST):**
 - The AST can be a valuable resource for PoliRuralPlus in developing and implementing its pilot projects. It offers guidance on climate risk assessments, adaptation planning, and monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that the projects are well-informed and effective.
3. **Promoting Energy Communities:**
 - PoliRuralPlus can play a vital role in raising awareness of energy communities and their benefits in rural areas. The project can facilitate the creation of these communities by providing information, technical support, and access to funding.
4. **Addressing Energy Poverty:**
 - The project can contribute to addressing energy poverty in rural communities by raising awareness, conducting energy audits, and advocating for supportive policies and financial mechanisms.
5. **Fostering Social Innovation:**
 - PoliRuralPlus can support social innovation in the energy transition by showcasing successful pilot projects, facilitating knowledge exchange, and promoting replication of good practices.
6. **Integrating Urban-Rural Linkages:**
 - The project should consider the interconnectedness of urban and rural areas in its pilot projects. This includes promoting sustainable food systems, waste management, and transportation solutions that benefit both areas.

2.5 New European Bauhaus (NEB)

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is an ambitious EU initiative that aims to merge sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusivity to transform our living spaces and experiences. It seeks to make the goals of the European Green Deal tangible and desirable by focusing on the quality of our built environment.

The NEB is guided by three core values:

- **Sustainability:** Solutions should prioritise circular economies, reduced pollution, and enhanced biodiversity.
- **Aesthetics:** Emphasises the importance of beauty, quality of experience, and style beyond mere functionality.
- **Inclusion:** Prioritises diversity, accessibility, and affordability for all.

The NEB operates through a community-driven, experimental approach, supporting pilot projects and offering access to funding for initiatives aligned with its values. It also plays a significant role in influencing EU policy, particularly the NextGenerationEU recovery plan and the European Green Deal.

The EIT Community NEB plays a crucial role in supporting start-ups, scale-ups, students, and communities focused on NEB goals. It identifies and supports projects embodying NEB values through a coordinated approach with various EIT entities.



One of the proposed EU missions under the NEB is to transform neighbourhoods across Europe, making them more beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive. The NEB Compass provides a guiding framework for decision and project makers, outlining three levels of ambition for each of its core values and working principles.

2.5.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

The NEB presents a significant opportunity for PoliRuralPlus to enhance the impact and visibility of its pilot projects. By embracing the NEB's vision and principles, PoliRuralPlus can contribute significantly to the transformation of rural areas into more beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive spaces. This will not only benefit the local communities but also contribute to the EU's broader goals of achieving a greener and more equitable future. So the project could:

1. **Integrate NEB Values into Pilot Projects:** Ensure that all pilot projects align with the NEB's core values of sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusivity. This can be achieved by incorporating circular economy principles, prioritising local materials, promoting community participation, and ensuring accessibility for all.
2. **Leverage NEB Compass:** Utilise the NEB Compass as a guiding tool for project development and assessment. This will ensure that the pilot projects meet the initiative's standards and criteria, increasing their chances of success and recognition.
3. **Collaborate with EIT Community NEB:** Engage with the EIT Community NEB to access mentorship, guidance, and potential funding opportunities. This collaboration can provide valuable support for project implementation and scaling.
4. **Participate in NEB Events and Networks:** Actively participate in NEB-related events, workshops, and conferences to exchange knowledge, build partnerships, and showcase the project's achievements.
5. **Advocate for NEB Principles:** Promote the NEB principles and values within local and regional contexts, raising awareness and encouraging broader adoption of sustainable and inclusive practices in rural areas.
6. **Focus on Cultural Heritage:** Explore ways to integrate the NEB's emphasis on cultural heritage into pilot projects. This can involve revitalising traditional buildings, promoting local crafts, and preserving cultural landscapes.

As result PoliRuralPlus will:

1. **Develop and implement a comprehensive New European Bauhaus strategy for the PoliRuralPlus project area.** This strategy should identify the specific challenges and opportunities facing rural communities in the area and develop tailored solutions.
2. **Foster participatory processes that involve rural communities in the development process from the outset.** This will ensure that the solutions developed are relevant and appropriate to the needs of the communities.
3. **Invest in research and innovation to identify and implement new technologies and solutions for rural development.** This includes supporting pilot projects and scaling up successful initiatives.
4. **Strengthen the capacity of rural communities to develop and implement their own development plans.** This includes providing training, funding, and access to networks.
5. **Promote cross-sectoral collaboration and knowledge exchange among stakeholders.** This will help to ensure that the most effective solutions are identified and implemented.

From the analysis in Annex H, the overall major conclusions on the NEB and implications for PoliRuralPlus are summarised in the following table:

Area	Conclusion	implications for PoliRuralPlus
1. Strategic Integration of NEB Principles:	The New European Bauhaus (NEB) Initiative, with its focus on sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics , presents a transformative vision for Europe's future, connecting cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● emphasise the strategic integration of NEB principles into urban and rural development policies. ● Leverage the NEB as a cultural, human-centred, and tangible experience to foster social acceptance and engagement with EU Green Deal policies.



	heritage with the EU Green Deal objectives.	
2. Research and Innovation Mission:	The proposed Horizon Mission on the New European Bauhaus underscores the commitment to research and innovation, aiming to beautify, sustain, and inclusively transform neighbourhoods across Europe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actively engage in the development and support of the proposed mission. ● Encourage collaboration between Member States, communities, and the Commission to define and implement innovative solutions. ● Foster a research-driven approach to address societal challenges and promote behavioural changes aligned with EU Green Deal targets.
3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange:	The NEB serves as a creative and transdisciplinary movement, promoting the exchange of knowledge between diverse backgrounds and breaking silos in the wake of interconnected challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhance interdisciplinary collaboration by facilitating knowledge exchange platforms. ● Support the NEB as a think-do tank, design lab, accelerator, and network to empower sustainable practices, inspire creativity, and drive innovative solutions. ● Encourage the co-creation of experimental spaces to reimagine post-pandemic living.
4. Phased Implementation Approach:	The NEB's three-phase approach—Design, Delivery, and Dissemination—provides a structured framework for materialising ideas, implementing pilots, and diffusing successful concepts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support the phased implementation of the NEB initiative. ● Encourage active participation during the Design phase, provide resources for pilot projects in the Delivery phase, and promote broad dissemination of successful ideas and concepts in the final phase. ● Ensure alignment with the Multiannual Financial Framework for sustained impact.
5. Global Impact and Replication:	The NEB aims to transcend European borders, fostering a global impact by diffusing innovative ideas and concepts, inspiring new generations, and supporting lead markets for sustainable living.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actively promote the global dissemination of NEB success stories. ● Facilitate networking and knowledge sharing beyond Europe to encourage the replication of best practices in building harmonious, sustainable living spaces. ● Support initiatives that align with NEB principles on a global scale, contributing to a broader transformation of societal norms and practices.

2.6 Takeaways for the PoliRuralPlus pilots

While Annex H has extensive detailed implications that pilots can be drilled into for specific purposes, the overall analysis of the EU policy landscape indicates that the implications for PoliRuralPlus to address the challenges and contribute to effective strategies for optimising rural-urban linkages in the post-COVID-19 era are summarised as follows:

- **Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitate exchange between policymakers, researchers, and communities across rural and urban areas.
- **Inclusivity:** Involve citizens, businesses, and NGOs in rural-urban development.
- **Social Innovation:** Identify, replicate, and promote successful practices. Address issues like transport poverty.
- **Strengthen the LEADER Approach:** Advocate for its importance, streamline procedures, and ensure recognition of local action groups.
- **Enhance Territorial Connections:** Encourage multi-sectoral collaboration and joint urban-rural projects.
- **Leverage Digital Tools:** Promote their use for collaboration, marketing, and bridging the digital divide.
- **Advocate for Policy Coherence:** Ensure alignment between urban and rural policies.
- **utilise R&I Foresight:** Adapt approaches to rural-urban contexts and anticipate future challenges.
- **Support SECAP Implementation:** Facilitate regional support, cooperation, and local involvement.



- **Raise Awareness and Encourage Energy Community Participation:** Disseminate information, advocate for political support, and create dedicated financing mechanisms.

Suggestions that the PoliRuralPlus pilots might consider to translate these implications into practice in their RAPs are as follows:

1. **Best Practice Analysis:**
 - Form a task force: Create a team within PoliRuralPlus to research and analyse existing successful models of rural-urban linkages. This could involve case studies, literature reviews, and connecting with relevant networks.
 - Pilot region matching: Identify best practices that closely align with the specific challenges and opportunities faced by each pilot region.
 - Adaptation, not duplication: Understand how those models can be adapted for local circumstances, considering factors like demographics, economic sectors, and existing infrastructure.
2. **Region-Specific Needs:**
 - Detailed baseline analysis: Each pilot region should conduct an in-depth assessment of its rural-urban linkages, including strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. This may involve data collection and stakeholder consultations.
 - Tailored strategies: Pilot strategies should be designed based on this analysis, ensuring they target the most pressing local needs for strengthening rural-urban connections.
3. **Integrated Strategies:**
 - Cross-sectoral dialogue: Facilitate workshops and meetings that bring together stakeholders from rural and urban areas, across different sectors (e.g., agriculture, tourism, social services, transport).
 - Joint project development: Encourage the development of projects with explicit benefits for both rural and urban areas within the pilot regions.
4. **Facilitate Collaboration:**
 - Knowledge sharing platforms: Establish online forums, regular newsletters, or shared databases where actors from different areas within pilot regions can exchange information.
 - Matchmaking Events: Organise events that connect rural entrepreneurs with urban investors, or rural service providers with urban expertise, fostering partnerships.
 - Celebrate Collaboration: Highlight successful collaborations within pilot regions to inspire replication.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
 - Identify key indicators: Work with pilot regions to select metrics that track the impact on rural-urban linkages (e.g., business partnerships, job creation, service accessibility).
 - Data collection mechanisms: Establish ways to collect this data consistently over time to measure progress.
 - Regular evaluation: Schedule periodic reviews of the data to identify successes and areas needing adjustment.
6. **Disseminate Results:**
 - Success stories: Create compelling narratives about positive outcomes achieved by pilot projects, emphasising their impact on rural-urban collaboration.
 - Wide dissemination: Utilise various channels like websites, conferences, publications, and social media to reach policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public.
7. **Strengthen LEADER:**
 - Capacity building for LAGs: Provide training and resources to local action groups within pilot regions, enhancing their ability to implement projects and foster collaboration.
 - Showcase LEADER impact: Document how projects initiated by LAGs contribute to strengthening rural-urban connections within pilot areas.



- National-level advocacy: Use evidence from the pilots to advocate for the LEADER approach in national policy discussions.

8. Digital Tools:

- Assess the digital divide: Analyse gaps in connectivity and digital skills in each pilot region.
- Targeted solutions: Explore options like co-working spaces in rural areas, digital skills training, and facilitating e-commerce for rural products/services.

9. Advocate for Policy Coherence:

- Analyse policy landscape: Map out existing policies impacting pilot regions at different levels (local, regional, national). Identify potential conflicts or synergies
- Form a Policy Working Group: Assemble stakeholders from pilot regions to discuss alignment and advocate for changes that support integrated rural-urban development.

10. Incorporate Foresight:

- Pilot foresight tools: Select one or two pilot regions to trial foresight methodologies, tailored to analysing long-term trends impacting their specific rural-urban linkages.
- Capacity building: Offer training and support to those pilots in applying foresight tools.
- Share insights: Document the process and lessons learned, creating a model for other pilots to use in their strategic planning.

3 Literature Review

The vast number of sources and approximately 1,000 literature references on rural-urban linkages and the development of both rural and urban areas indicate the extent of studies that have been undertaken. These were identified and recorded in the PoliRuralPlus domain knowledge database. The analysis of those references, highlighting their objectives, mechanisms, and potential impacts, with very many detailed implications that can be drilled down into, is described in [Annex I](#), while the results and major implications are discussed here.

3.1 Academic Studies

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the challenges and opportunities in urban-rural linkages in Europe. The lack of internet access in rural areas has been identified as a significant barrier to economic development³⁴. However, the pandemic has also led to a shift in residential choices, with an increasing number of people moving from urban to rural areas, presenting an opportunity for rural revival³⁵. Local development policies, particularly those that facilitate productive diversification and job creation, are crucial for post-COVID-19 recovery in both rural and urban regions³⁶. The pandemic has also accelerated pre-existing counter-urbanisation trends, leading to increased demand for short-term rentals and second homes in rural and coastal areas, which poses challenges for housing availability and affordability³⁷.

The urban-rural linkages in Europe are complex and dynamic, influenced by a range of socio-economic and institutional factors³⁸. Urban pressure, while often seen as negative, can also drive the development of sustainable rural-urban relationships³⁹. This is particularly important in the context of land use changes, where the interdependencies between urban and rural areas are increasingly evident⁴⁰. The role of rural-urban relationships in enhancing the rural landscape is crucial, and a territorial approach that integrates the supply of rural goods and services is proposed⁴¹. A range of studies have explored the complex dynamics of rural-urban linkages in Europe.

³⁴ Internet Access in Rural Areas: Brake or Stimulus as Post-Covid-19 Opportunity?

Iruñe Ruiz-Martinez +1, Sustainability, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229619>

³⁵ Rejuvenation in rural Ireland in response to the COVID-19 induced urban-to-rural migration phenomenon, Shreyashi Sen, International Journal of Environmental Science & Sustainable Development, 2021, [Rejuvenation in Rural Ireland in response to the COVID-19 induced Urban-to-Rural Migration Phenomenon | Environmental Science & Sustainable Development \(ierek.com\)](https://www.ierek.com)

³⁶ Local Development Policies: Challenges for Post-COVID-19 Recovering in Spain, Rodriguez-Cohard, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4468/2020.2.05rodriguez.juste.vazquez>

³⁷ Post-COVID-19 mobilities and the housing crisis in European urban and rural destinations. Policy challenges and research agenda, C. Colomb +1, Planning Practice & Research, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2022.2119512>

³⁸ <https://doi.org/10.1080/15239080902774929> The Context of Rural–Urban Relationships in Finland, France, Hungary, The Netherlands and Spain, Almudena Buciega +2, 2009, Urban pressure is not perceived as a negative process by many in different European contexts.

³⁹ [Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships | Semantic Scholar](https://www.semanticscholar.org) Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships, I. Terluin, 2006, There is increasing interest in enhancing sustainable territorial rural-urban relationships and integrating the supply of public and private rural goods and services in Europe.

⁴⁰ <https://doi.org/10.1068/b3902ge> Urban – Rural Linkages—Analysing, Modelling, and Understanding Drivers, Pressures, and Impacts of Land Use Changes along the Rural-to-Urban Gradient, D. Haase +1, 2012, urbanisation is usually detrimental to the environment in different regards.

⁴¹ <https://doi.org/10.1080/15239080902775058> Opportunities for Rural–Urban Relationships to Enhance the Rural Landscape, G. Overbeek, 2009, Rural areas could overcome urban ambivalence by establishing better relationships between urban and rural areas.



This reference and⁴² both emphasise the need for better relationships between urban and rural areas, particularly in the context of urban pressure. They highlight the potential of rural goods and services to enhance the rural landscape and call for a more integrated supply of these. The context of a growing metropolis like Madrid. Nilsson⁴³ adds a policy perspective, identifying strategies for sustainable urban development and urban-rural linkages, including better coordination of transport, land use, and open space planning, urban containment and densification, and preservation of agricultural land.

Nilsson identifies an important driving force behind urban expansion is the growth of the urban population. But for Europe, this is not a sufficient explanation. The major trend is that European cities have become much less compact. Since the mid-1950s European cities have expanded on average by 78%, whereas the population has grown by only 33%. In the PLUREL project⁴⁴ - an integrated project within the EU's 6th Research Framework Programme - more than 100 researchers from 15 countries analysed the impacts of urban land consumption at a pan-European level and, through six European and one Chinese case studies, identified how land use conflicts and the pressure towards peri-urban areas can be strategically managed in different development and regulatory contexts. To summarise, the following strategies were identified as important steps towards more sustainable urban-rural futures: (i) better coordination of transport, land use and open space planning; (ii) urban containment and densification - development of a green compact city; (iii) preservation of blue and green infrastructure; and (iv) preservation of agricultural land and the promotion of local production. The need also remains to strengthen governance at the regional level while at the pan-European level there is clearly a need for more policy attention to be given to urban-rural linkages. The vast number of sources and approximately 1,000 references that were identified and recorded in the PoliRuralPlus domain knowledge database indicate the vast literature extent and transparency of the key EU policies that shape the development of both rural and urban areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the complex interplay between urban and rural areas in Europe, revealing both challenges and opportunities. PoliRuralPlus and its pilots can leverage these insights to foster sustainable and equitable development in both regions. By addressing the opportunities presented by the pandemic, PoliRuralPlus can play a crucial role in shaping a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future for both rural and urban communities in Europe. From the analysis shown in [Annex I](#), this involves:

- **Digital Connectivity:** The pandemic highlighted the digital divide between urban and rural areas. PoliRuralPlus pilots should prioritise initiatives that enhance digital infrastructure and access in rural areas, facilitating economic development, education, and access to essential services.
- **Rural Revival:** The shift in residential preferences towards rural areas presents an opportunity for PoliRuralPlus to focus on pilot projects that enhance rural attractiveness, such as developing local food systems, promoting sustainable tourism, and creating diverse job opportunities.
- **Local Development Policies:** PoliRuralPlus should advocate for and support local development policies that encourage productive diversification and job creation in both rural and urban regions. This will help to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic and promote long-term resilience.
- **Housing Affordability:** The increased demand for short-term rentals and second homes in rural areas poses challenges for housing affordability. PoliRuralPlus pilots can explore innovative solutions to address this issue, such as promoting affordable housing initiatives and supporting sustainable tourism models that benefit local communities.

⁴² [Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships | Semantic Scholar](#) Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships, I. Terluin, 2006, There is increasing interest in enhancing sustainable territorial rural-urban relationships and integrating the supply of public and private rural goods and services in Europe.

⁴³ [Strategies for sustainable urban development and urban-rural linkages | Semantic Scholar](#) Strategies for sustainable urban development and urban-rural linkages, K. Nilsson +18, 2014, Various strategies were identified as important steps towards more sustainable urban-rural futures.

⁴⁴ [Peri-urban Land Use Relationships - Strategies and Sustainability Assessment Tools for urban-rural linkages | PLUREL | Project | Fact sheet | FP6 | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)



- **Integrated Territorial Approach:** PoliRuralPlus should adopt an integrated territorial approach that considers the interdependencies between urban and rural areas. This can involve collaborating with urban stakeholders to develop joint initiatives that promote sustainable land use, transportation, and resource management.
- **Sustainable Urban-Rural Relationships:** The project should focus on fostering sustainable relationships between urban and rural areas. This can involve promoting the supply of rural goods and services to urban areas, supporting rural entrepreneurship, and encouraging collaboration between urban and rural businesses.
- **Policy Advocacy:** PoliRuralPlus should advocate for policies that support integrated urban-rural development, promote sustainable land use, and address the challenges of housing affordability and digital connectivity in rural areas.

3.1.1 Managing Complex Change

As discussed in PoliRuralPlus D5.1 “Prepared pilot by Stakeholder Multi-Actor Approach” the RAPs require complex changes to achieve real and lasting impact. The Lippitt-Knostr Model⁴⁵ is a framework designed to guide the process of implementing and managing complex change within organisations or communities.

Based on this model, the PoliRuralPlus pilots can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of their RAPs, fostering positive change and creating a lasting impact on rural-urban linkages and development in their regions, as discussed in Annex K.5. From that analysis, the following are tailored recommendations for each PoliRuralPlus pilot's RAP to optimise rural-urban linkages and opportunities, based on their unique contexts and themes so far:

- **Building Consensus and Momentum:** The initial phases of the model emphasise the importance of creating a shared sense of urgency and building a strong coalition of supporters. This is crucial for the PoliRuralPlus pilots to gain buy-in from diverse stakeholders and generate momentum for their RAPs.
- **Strategic Planning and Communication:** The model's emphasis on developing a clear vision and strategy, along with effective communication, aligns with the PoliRuralPlus approach of using data-driven insights and collaborative planning to create impactful RAPs.
- **Empowerment and Participation:** By empowering local communities and stakeholders to take ownership of the change process, the PoliRuralPlus pilots can foster a sense of ownership and ensure that the RAPs are implemented effectively and sustainably.
- **Celebrating Success:** Recognizing and celebrating short-term wins is essential for maintaining motivation and building momentum for long-term change. The PoliRuralPlus pilots can use this principle to showcase the positive impacts of their RAPs and encourage continued support from stakeholders.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** The final phase of the model focuses on consolidating and institutionalising the changes made. This is crucial for the PoliRuralPlus pilots to ensure that the positive impacts of their RAPs are sustained over time and become embedded in the region's development trajectory.

3.2 National Studies and Reports

PoliRuralPlus with its focus on fostering innovation and sustainable development in rural areas, can draw valuable insights from the many national studies and community engagement guides. From those analysed in detail in Annex I.4, it is clear that these documents offer a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by rural regions and provide strategies for promoting inclusivity, collaboration, and economic growth. For instance:

Spain's Law 2/2021⁴⁶: This law, implemented in the Castilla-La Mancha region (a PoliRuralPlus pilot), provides a blueprint for addressing depopulation and promoting rural development. Its key aspects include area classification, prioritised public aid and subsidies, integrated governance, and a multi-faceted approach to economic, social, and

⁴⁵ [Lippitt-Knostr Model article](#)

⁴⁶ [tg1-rr-law-combat-depopulation_es_martinez_v3_en_2.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



territorial cohesion. The PoliRuralPlus pilots can learn from this law's focus on targeted support, collaborative governance, and comprehensive strategies that address the diverse needs of rural areas.

Ireland's Recovery and Resilience Plan⁴⁷: This plan emphasises green and digital transitions as pathways to sustainable growth and resilience. Its focus on climate action, renewable energy, and social and economic resilience aligns with the core objectives of PoliRuralPlus. The plan's investments in labour market access, reskilling/upskilling, higher education, and affordable housing are relevant to PoliRuralPlus's goal of creating thriving rural communities.

Community Engagement Guides (Ireland)⁴⁸: These guides offer valuable insights into inclusive community engagement. They emphasise the importance of involving marginalised communities, building trust, and ensuring meaningful participation in local decision-making processes. The PoliRuralPlus pilots can leverage these guides to develop effective community engagement strategies that foster collaboration, empower local stakeholders, and ensure that rural development initiatives are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

3.2.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

PoliRuralPlus and its pilots can contribute to the revitalisation of rural areas, promote sustainable development, and enhance the well-being of rural and urban communities, by addressing

- **Targeted Support:** The PoliRuralPlus pilots can adopt a targeted approach, prioritising areas most at risk of depopulation or economic decline. This can involve allocating resources, providing specialised training, and tailoring interventions to the specific needs of each region.
- **Collaborative Governance:** The pilots can establish governance structures that foster collaboration between different levels of government, local communities, and other stakeholders. This can ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to local needs.
- **Comprehensive Strategies:** The pilots can develop comprehensive strategies that address the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of rural development. This can involve promoting sustainable agriculture, supporting local businesses, investing in renewable energy, improving access to services, and enhancing cultural and social infrastructure.
- **Inclusive Community Engagement:** The pilots can prioritise inclusive community engagement throughout the project lifecycle. This can involve conducting needs assessments, facilitating dialogue, and ensuring that local communities have a meaningful voice in shaping the direction of rural development initiatives.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The pilots can utilise open data platforms and data-driven approaches to inform decision-making and monitor progress. This can enhance transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Capacity Building:** The pilots can invest in capacity building initiatives that empower local communities and stakeholders. This can involve providing training on project management, community engagement, sustainable practices, and digital skills.
- **Partnerships:** The pilots can foster partnerships with diverse stakeholders, including local businesses, educational institutions, NGOs, and community groups. This can leverage resources, expertise, and networks to achieve shared goals.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The pilots can establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, identify challenges, and ensure accountability. This can inform adaptive management and continuous improvement.

⁴⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/country-pages/irelands-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en

⁴⁸ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1J2tTa1KDvsIYRScn2D-nHZ1hmZV5pX0Z/edit#heading=h.1csj400>



- **Sharing of Best Practices:** The PoliRuralPlus initiative can create platforms for sharing best practices and lessons learned across different pilots. This can facilitate cross-learning, innovation, and the scaling up of successful interventions.

4 Impact of COVID-19:

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the relationship between rural and urban areas across Europe. While initially a health crisis, it rapidly transformed into a multifaceted economic and social one, revealing both vulnerabilities and opportunities in the rural-urban nexus.

The sources and 223 references that were identified and recorded in the PoliRuralPlus domain knowledge database underscore the need for policies and initiatives that address both the challenges and opportunities exposed by the pandemic. Investing in digital infrastructure, supporting rural economic diversification, and fostering collaboration between urban and rural areas are key to building a more resilient and interconnected future.

The analysis of those references with many detailed implications that can be drilled down into, is described in Annex J, while the results and major implications are summarised as follows:

Key Sectors and Activities Affected

- **Residential Choices:** A significant shift towards urban-to-rural migration occurred, driven by remote work possibilities and desires for more space and nature.
- **Essential Services:** Rural areas faced challenges in accessing healthcare and education, highlighting the need for telemedicine and online learning solutions.
- **Economic Activities:** The tourism industry was severely impacted, but there was also a growing emphasis on local food systems and sustainable agriculture.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** The reliance on digital connectivity for remote work and e-commerce exposed inequalities in rural internet access.
- **Public Administration:** Governments at all levels rapidly adapted to digital service delivery, with varying degrees of success depending on existing infrastructure and skill sets.

Consequences on Rural and Urban Regions

Rural Areas:

- **Positive:**
 - Population growth due to in-migration.
 - Increased awareness of the value of rural living and local production.
 - Potential for economic revitalisation through remote work and sustainable tourism.
- **Negative:**
 - Increased strain on services like healthcare and education.
 - Existing inequalities in income and employment opportunities worsened.
 - Housing affordability challenges due to increased demand.

Urban Areas:

- **Positive:**
 - Reduced congestion and pollution during lockdowns.
 - Increased focus on creating sustainable and resilient urban spaces.
 - Opportunities to repurpose unused commercial properties.
- **Negative:**
 - Economic disruption due to lockdowns, particularly in sectors like tourism and hospitality.
 - Outflow of residents leading to potential loss of skilled workforce.
 - Increased reliance on rural areas for essential goods and services.

Key Takeaways



- **Digital Divide:** The pandemic exposed a stark digital divide between urban and rural areas, hindering rural development and remote work opportunities.
- **Rural Resilience:** While some rural areas experienced economic hardship, others saw new possibilities for growth in sectors like local food production and sustainable tourism.
- **Urban Sustainability:** The pandemic accelerated the need for greener, more resilient cities with improved public services and infrastructure.
- **Collaboration:** COVID-19 highlighted the interdependence of rural and urban areas, emphasising the need for increased collaboration and knowledge exchange to tackle shared challenges and create a more equitable and sustainable future.

4.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted urban-rural linkages and regional development opportunities across Europe, with both positive and negative consequences. Understanding these impacts is crucial for the PoliRuralPlus pilots to effectively address the challenges and opportunities that have emerged.

Based on an analysis of the collected data, we identify the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural-urban linkages, the key sectors and activities driving these linkages, both direct and indirect consequences on rural and urban regions, and the challenges and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic, for the PoliRuralPlus project and its pilot regions, are summarised as follows:

4.1.1. Impact of COVID-19 on rural-urban linkages and opportunities

- **COVID-19's Complex Impacts:** The pandemic exacerbated existing rural-urban inequalities (health, finances) while also prompting temporary relocation to rural areas. This highlights a need for nuanced, adaptive policy responses.
- **Employment Disparities:** Rural areas faced greater financial hardship. The shift towards remote work highlighted the potential of digital solutions, but also potential divides as cities rebounded faster.
- **Territorial Solutions:** Successful responses will consider the interdependence of regions & cities, as problems don't always align neatly with administrative borders. Collaboration is key.
- **Digital Continuity:** The public sector's rapid adoption of digital solutions during the pandemic underscores the importance of digital infrastructure, skills, and innovation for future resilience.
- **Work-Life Balance and Well-Being:** COVID-19 and response measures had a varied impact on different populations. Future policy must consider these nuances, address work stress, and ensure support is available where needed.
- **Essential Worker Challenges:** Numerous sectors were critical during the pandemic, often under difficult conditions. Their well-being and job quality are vital for future societal preparedness.
- **Psychosocial Risks Abound:** Work intensity, insecurity, and other risks have negative health impacts. Policy must focus on root causes while also providing organisational resources for worker well-being.
- **Trust Matters:** Trust in institutions played a vital role in effective crisis response and policy acceptance. Economic security, transparent communication, and fighting misinformation strengthen trust.

4.1.2. Key Sectors and Activities Driving Urban-Rural Linkages:

- **Commuting and Migration:** The pandemic saw an increase in urban-to-rural migration as remote work became more prevalent. This migration highlighted the need for improved infrastructure in rural areas to support this trend.
- **Essential Services (Healthcare, Education):** Rural areas often faced challenges in accessing essential services during lockdowns, revealing the need for telemedicine and online education initiatives.



- **Agriculture and Food Supply:** The pandemic disrupted supply chains and emphasised the importance of local food production and sustainable agriculture practices.
- **Tourism:** Rural tourism experienced both setbacks (travel restrictions) and opportunities (domestic tourism, nature-based activities).
- **Digital Technology:** The pandemic accelerated the need for digital transformation in rural areas to support remote work, e-commerce, and access to information.

4.1.3. Direct and Indirect Consequences on Rural and Urban Regions:

Rural Regions:

- **Direct Consequences:**
 - **Increased Population:** Influx of urban residents seeking space and lower cost of living.
 - **Economic Strain:** Some sectors like tourism suffered due to travel restrictions.
 - **Increased Demand for Services:** Pressure on healthcare, education, and digital infrastructure.
- **Indirect Consequences:**
 - **New Opportunities:** Potential for economic revitalisation through remote work and sustainable tourism.
 - **Increased Awareness:** Recognition of the importance of local food systems and sustainable practices.
 - **Social Changes:** Integration challenges with new residents and potential gentrification.

Urban Regions:

- **Direct Consequences:**
 - **Population Decline:** Outflow of residents seeking a different lifestyle.
 - **Economic Disruptions:** Lockdowns impacted businesses and employment in city centres.
 - **Increased Focus on Sustainability:** Call for greener, more resilient urban spaces.
- **Indirect Consequences:**
 - **Potential for Rethinking Urban Spaces:** Opportunities to repurpose empty commercial properties and create more green spaces.
 - **Collaboration with Rural Areas:** Increased focus on sourcing food and energy from rural regions.
 - **Social Changes:** Reduced congestion, but potential loss of skilled workforce.

4.1.4. Implications for the PoliRuralPlus project

The pandemic highlights the need for PoliRuralPlus to focus on:

- **Digital Infrastructure Development:** Prioritise expanding broadband access and digital skills training in rural areas.
- **Diversification of Rural Economies:** Support the development of new business models, particularly in sustainable sectors like agritourism and renewable energy.
- **Strengthening Rural Services:** Improve healthcare, education, and transportation infrastructure in rural areas, leveraging technology where possible.
- **Promoting Collaboration:** Encourage knowledge exchange and partnerships between urban and rural stakeholders to create mutually beneficial solutions.
- **Monitoring and Adaptation:** utilise data and insights from the PoliRuralPlus dashboard to track changes, adapt strategies, and ensure that policies and initiatives are responsive to the evolving needs of both urban and rural communities.



4.1.5. implications for the PoliRuralPlus pilots

By understanding the multifaceted impacts of COVID-19 and focusing on these key areas, PoliRuralPlus pilots can leverage the pandemic as a catalyst for positive change, creating more resilient, sustainable, and interconnected rural-urban regions.

1. Bridge the Digital Divide:

- The pandemic highlighted the crucial role of digital connectivity for remote work, education, and access to services. Pilots should prioritise:
 - Expanding broadband access in underserved rural areas.
 - Offering digital literacy training programs for all ages and skill levels.
 - Supporting the development of e-commerce platforms for rural businesses.
- **Impact:** This will increase rural residents' ability to participate in the digital economy, access essential services, and attract remote workers, promoting economic growth and social inclusion.

2. Foster Resilient and Diversified Rural Economies:

- COVID-19 disrupted many traditional rural sectors, highlighting the need for diversification. Pilots should:
 - Support the development of new business models in areas like agritourism, renewable energy, and local food systems.
 - Invest in skills training and entrepreneurship programs to equip residents with the tools for the changing economy.
 - Facilitate collaboration between rural and urban businesses to create new value chains.
- **Impact:** This will create a more resilient rural economy, less vulnerable to future shocks, and provide new opportunities for income generation and employment.

3. Enhance Essential Services and Infrastructure:

- The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in rural healthcare and education systems. Pilots should:
 - Explore innovative solutions for service delivery, such as telemedicine, mobile clinics, and online education platforms.
 - Improve transportation links between rural and urban areas to enhance access to healthcare and other services.
 - Invest in affordable housing options for rural residents, including targeted solutions for vulnerable groups like the elderly and new migrants.
- **Impact:** Improved access to essential services will enhance the well-being of rural residents and make rural areas more attractive for both existing and new populations.

4. Promote Community-Led Development:

- Community engagement is crucial for sustainable rural development. Pilots should:
 - Establish platforms for dialogue and collaboration between diverse stakeholders.
 - Support community-led initiatives that address local needs and build social capital.
 - Provide training and resources to empower local leaders and organisations.
- **Impact:** Community-led development fosters a sense of ownership and pride, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions that address the unique challenges of each region.

5. Leverage Data and Technology for Decision-Making:

- Data-driven insights can inform policy decisions and project implementation. Pilots should:
 - utilise the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools to analyse local data and trends.
 - Monitor the impact of pilot initiatives and adapt strategies based on results.
 - Engage stakeholders in data collection and analysis processes to build trust and transparency.



- **Impact:** Data-driven decision-making leads to more effective policies and programs that are tailored to the specific needs of each region, ultimately leading to better outcomes for both rural and urban communities.

By incorporating these recommendations, the PoliRuralPlus pilots can effectively address the challenges and opportunities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, fostering stronger, more resilient, and more integrated rural-urban linkages.

5 Innovation in Rural Areas

In rural regions, innovation comes from a variety of sources, which are different to that found in urban areas. Formal science based innovation systems are typically found in larger cities with universities and large enough firms to have a formal R&D function. These science-based activities can be highly successful and have application in rural areas – for example, forest based bio-energy research and the Czech Bavarian Border pilot strategy⁴⁹. However, innovation is largely different in rural regions to cities and can take a number of different forms⁵⁰.

The sources and 203 references that were identified and recorded in the PoliRuralPlus domain knowledge database indicate that by fostering a holistic understanding of rural innovation and tailoring initiatives to the local context, PoliRuralPlus can empower rural communities to thrive in the 21st century.

The analysis of those references with many detailed implications that can be drilled down into, is described in Annex K, while the results and major implications are summarised here.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underscores the pivotal role of innovation in unlocking rural regions' potential. However, rural innovation differs significantly from urban innovation, requiring a tailored approach to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by rural areas.

Rural Innovation Challenges and Opportunities

- **Innovation beyond technology:** Rural innovation encompasses social innovation, new business models, and rethinking governance approaches.
- **Rural advantages:** Leveraging unique strengths like social ties and natural resources is key to addressing rural challenges.
- **Place-based strategies:** Generic approaches are ineffective; understanding local context and specific needs is crucial.
- **Skills and talent:** Investment in skills development and policies to attract and retain talent are essential for rural growth.

Rural Innovation vs. Urban Innovation

- **Not just formal R&D:** While valuable, most rural innovation emerges through necessity and resourcefulness, taking different forms.
- **Absorbing and adapting:** Rural areas benefit from external innovations but need the capacity to access and adapt them.
- **SME-driven economy:** The focus is on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as the backbone of rural economies.
- **Niche markets and value-adding:** Rural SMEs must specialise and focus on value addition to compete globally.

OECD Regional Development Work

- **Understanding disparities:** The OECD analyses data to identify inequalities between and within regions.
- **Place-based policies:** Tailored strategies are advocated to leverage regional strengths and address specific challenges.
- **Supporting transitions:** The OECD assists regions in navigating transformations caused by globalisation, demographic shifts, and climate change.
- **Innovation as a driver:** Innovation is seen as crucial for revitalising regions and ensuring competitiveness.

⁴⁹ As described in D5.1 and Annex L

⁵⁰ [Rural-innovation-background.pdf \(oecd.org\)](#)



- **Well-being focus:** Policies must promote inclusive development and improve quality of life for all residents.

Key OECD Reports and Their Implications for PoliRuralPlus

The OECD has produced various reports emphasising that rural areas are not obsolete but possess unique assets that can be leveraged through innovation. The reports highlight the importance of going beyond technical R&D and embracing social, organisational, and resource-based innovation. Unlocking the "hidden" potential of rural areas requires overcoming barriers such as limited resources, digital gaps, skills imbalances, and unfavourable policy frameworks. National-level strategies and investment are crucial for creating an enabling environment for rural innovation to thrive.

5.1 implications for PoliRuralPlus

Based on OECD insights, the following recommendations are crucial for PoliRuralPlus to foster rural innovation:

1. **Champion a holistic view of innovation:** Move beyond a narrow focus on technology and embrace social, organisational, and resource-based innovation.
2. **Strengthen the rural innovation ecosystem:** This includes enhancing access to skills, capital, knowledge networks, and infrastructure, particularly digital infrastructure.
3. **Governance & participation matter:** Enabling policies, multi-level coordination, and bottom-up, participatory approaches are essential for rural innovation to thrive.
4. **Advocate for supportive policies:** National-level strategies and investment are crucial for creating an enabling environment for rural innovation.
5. **A holistic understanding of rural success:** Look beyond GDP and consider a range of factors contributing to rural well-being.
6. **Addressing rural inequalities:** Identify and address disparities both between rural and urban areas and within the diverse rural landscape.
7. **Identifying opportunity levers:** Analyse local data to pinpoint specific assets and challenges in each pilot region.
8. **Data-driven understanding of rural-urban linkages:** Utilise tools like the OECD's Regional Well-being Webtool to gain insights.
9. **Data for advocacy:** Leverage data to advocate for tailored policies that address the specific needs of rural areas.
10. **Emphasise the value of place-based strategies:** Tailor initiatives to the unique context of each pilot region.
11. **Support diverse rural transitions:** Help rural areas adapt to demographic shifts, economic changes, and climate change impacts.
12. **Highlight diverse forms of innovation:** Showcase the wide range of innovative practices already occurring in rural areas.
13. **Well-being as an outcome:** Focus on policies that improve quality of life for all rural residents.

To implement these recommendations effectively, pilot regions should consider:

- Prioritising the most urgent recommendations based on local needs.
- Identifying quick wins, particularly in shifting the narrative around rural innovation.
- Exploring opportunities for collaboration with existing resources and partners.
- Experimenting with OECD-aligned metrics to measure progress and impact.



5.2 Online Toolkits for Rural Development

The analysis found several online toolkits offer valuable resources for rural development projects like PoliRuralPlus, as detailed in Annex K.1. The most relevant are:

1. Rural Pact Community Platform: Facilitates collaboration and knowledge sharing among rural stakeholders, aligning with PoliRuralPlus's goal of fostering dialogue and participation.
2. Tools4CAP Inventory: Provides a database of methods and tools for designing, implementing, and monitoring rural policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans. This can support PoliRuralPlus in policy assessment and implementation.
3. Rural Toolkit on EU Funding: Offers a comprehensive guide to EU funding opportunities for rural areas, including grants, loans, and technical assistance. This can help PoliRuralPlus pilots identify and secure funding for their projects.
4. InvestEU Portal: An EU-wide platform connecting project promoters with investors, increasing visibility and funding opportunities for PoliRuralPlus initiatives.
5. EU Convergence Monitoring Hub: Tracks economic and social progress in EU regions, helping PoliRuralPlus assess regional disparities and monitor the impact of its interventions.
6. Demographic Change Toolbox: Provides policy tools for managing demographic change, relevant for PoliRuralPlus's work in addressing rural population challenges.

Additional tools like the Digital Twin on Food Flows, OECD's urban policy toolkit, and various reports on rural-urban linkages offer further insights and resources for PoliRuralPlus.

5.2.1 implications for PoliRuralPlus

By integrating with and complementing existing tools, the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard can serve as a powerful resource for rural stakeholders, empowering them to make informed decisions and drive sustainable development in their communities.

To do this, the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and online services should:

- Leverage the strengths of existing tools, such as the Rural Pact's community focus and the Tools4CAP inventory's policy resources.
- Address gaps in existing tools, potentially by incorporating features like:
 - A "what-if" analysis tool for exploring the impact of different policy scenarios.
 - Customised dashboards for each pilot region, highlighting relevant data and resources.
 - Integration with funding databases like the Rural Toolkit to streamline the funding application process.

5.3 Horizon 2020 and Other EU Projects: Insights for PoliRuralPlus

Horizon 2020, the EU's research and innovation funding program, significantly contributed to COVID-19 research, supporting around 3,000 papers. This highlights the program's crucial role in addressing global challenges. Notably, 80% of identified COVID-19 papers were supported by the Health Programme, the European Research Council (ERC), and the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions. The EU's funding was instrumental in developing diagnostic tools, informing WHO guidelines, and supporting vaccine research, underscoring the importance of continued investment in research and innovation.

These projects are explored and analysed in Annex K.2, summarised as follows:

PoliRural

The PoliRural project focused on future-oriented policy development for rural areas. It developed an action-oriented foresight process and ICT toolbox, validated through 12 regional action plans. The project emphasised integrated, multi-disciplinary approaches and called for collaborative action at various levels to promote



sustainable and inclusive rural development. Key implications included new governance models, capacity building for local authorities, improved stakeholder collaboration, fostering innovation, and integrating rural areas into national and European policies.

Other Relevant Projects

- RURBAN: Examined rural-urban partnerships, highlighting their potential for combining growth and balance. The study recommended policy support, funding mechanisms, and a dedicated EU initiative for experimentation and capacity building.
- RURBANIVE: Focused on rural-urban synergies through "Rural-Urban Immersiveness," emphasising integrated strategies, new economic opportunities, improved services, and environmental sustainability.
- SHERPA: Created a science-society-policy interface to generate recommendations for rural policies. Key recommendations for PoliRuralPlus included establishing multi-actor platforms, empowering rural citizens, creating exchange programs, promoting citizen-led climate action, and encouraging local food provision.
- PROSPECTPLUS: Aimed to support EU cities and regions in implementing sustainable energy projects through a capacity-building program focused on innovative financing.
- SMARTA: Focused on improving accessibility and mobility in rural areas through shared mobility and public transport solutions, proposing a three-phase pathway for development.

5.3.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

These projects offer valuable insights and implications for PoliRuralPlus:

1. Integrated Approach: Adopt an integrated approach to rural development, considering economic, social, and environmental factors.
2. Multi-level Collaboration: Foster collaboration between local, regional, national, and European levels to address complex challenges.
3. Capacity Building: Empower local authorities and communities through training and resources.
4. Innovation Focus: Prioritise innovation in areas like digital technologies, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy.
5. Policy Integration: Ensure rural areas are included in national and European policy frameworks, with tailored policies to meet specific needs.
6. Evidence-Based Decision-Making: Strengthen the evidence base for rural development through research and evaluation.
7. Rural-Urban Partnerships: Explore innovative models for collaboration between rural and urban areas.
8. Shared Mobility: Consider implementing shared mobility solutions to address accessibility and mobility challenges in rural areas.

By building on the lessons learned from these projects, PoliRuralPlus can develop and implement effective strategies to promote sustainable and inclusive rural development.

6 Pilot-Specific Regional Action Plans:

This section analyses the previous sections to identify best practices and lessons learned in enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities, to increase the resilience and interconnectedness of urban and rural areas.

Building on the discussions and learnings of the previous sections and Annexes, the GenAI was trained on the aims, objectives and methodology of PoliRuralPlus, and its 9 pilot regions (based on their DoA summaries in Annex A₂ and updates in WP5 and WP7). The GenAI was then used to analyse and provide recommendations for each pilot's Regional Action Plan (RAP) to optimise their rural-urban linkages and opportunities, based on the data of best practices and lessons learned in the references of the PoliRuralPlus domain database knowledge space. The process is described in Annex L.

The RAP implications for each pilot was as follows:

Pilot	Implications for the RAP	
1. Ireland / Monaghan County	<p>Themes: Green Economy, Digital Inclusion, Social & Economic Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Economy Initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop renewable energy projects such as solar, wind, & biomass suited for Monaghan's landscape. ○ Partner with existing retrofit programs to enhance energy efficiency in residential & public buildings. ○ Engage in peatland restoration projects, leveraging national initiatives & funding. • Digital Inclusion & Entrepreneurship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implement digital skills training programs for various age groups to improve practical ICT applications. ○ Support local businesses in adopting e-commerce & online tourism platforms. ○ Develop telework & co-working spaces to attract remote workers & new residents. • Social & Economic Integration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create a welcoming environment for new residents, focusing on integrating immigrant communities. ○ Engage youth in regional development through targeted programs & employment opportunities. ○ Collaborate with housing initiatives to increase affordable housing options . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Green Economy Opportunities: Prioritise the development of green businesses, startups, & social enterprises in renewable energy, waste management, & sustainable tourism. Actively promote these opportunities to attract talent & investment. • Skill Up for the Green Economy: Invest in training & education programs that equip both rural & urban residents with the skills needed for emerging green jobs. This will create a qualified workforce & bridge the urban-rural divide. • Leverage Broadband: Monaghan has invested in broadband infrastructure; now it's time to fully utilise it. Develop digital platforms connecting rural producers with urban markets, facilitate remote work opportunities, & promote e-commerce to revitalise rural areas.
2. Slovakia	<p>Themes: Stakeholder Cooperation, Capacity Building, Inclusive Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Stakeholder Cooperation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish a cross-sectoral governmental platform to facilitate cooperation among stakeholders. ○ Promote inclusive, multi-level consultations at all decision-making stages. • Capacity Building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop local capacities through targeted training & resources. ○ Encourage strong political leadership to support rural revitalisation efforts. • Inclusive Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implement policies that ensure active citizen participation in regional development. ○ Foster a stable & supportive legal & financial environment for civil society growth . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen Stakeholder Networks: Formalise the cross-sectoral governmental platform & actively engage a wide range of stakeholders – from farmers & local businesses to environmental groups & urban planners – in the decision-making process for rural development. • Build Capacity for Consultation: Invest in training & resources to equip local communities with the skills & knowledge to participate effectively in consultations. This will ensure that rural voices are heard & their needs are considered. • Align with EU Rural Pact: Use the EU Rural Pact as a framework to guide policy development & secure funding for rural revitalisation projects. Actively seek opportunities to collaborate with other European regions on shared rural challenges.



3. Greece	<p>Themes: Sustainable Agritech, Agritourism Promotion, Digital Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Sustainable Agritech Training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide comprehensive training on sustainable agricultural technologies. ○ Develop promotional services to highlight agritourism opportunities. · Promotion & Diversification: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote local agricultural products & natural resources through targeted marketing campaigns. ○ Encourage agritourism to diversify income streams & increase awareness of local products. · Digital Skills Enhancement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve digital literacy among AKIS actors to utilise ICT services more efficiently. ○ Facilitate the adoption of digital tools in agricultural & tourism sectors . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Integrate Agritech Training: Offer training programs on sustainable agritech technologies to both farmers & tourism operators. This will enhance agricultural productivity while improving the quality of agritourism experiences. · Create Agritourism Networks: Develop a platform or network that connects agritourism businesses with urban markets. This could involve joint marketing efforts, package deals, & direct sales channels to increase visibility & revenue. · Promote Local Products: Establish farmers' markets or online platforms where local producers can directly sell their products to urban consumers. This strengthens rural-urban linkages & helps preserve local agricultural heritage.
4. Italy	<p>Themes: Short Supply Chains, Healthy Diets, Rural-Urban Synergies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Short Supply Chains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote short food supply chain models to link rural producers directly with urban consumers. ○ Enhance awareness of healthy diets through education & marketing campaigns. · Healthy Living Connections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foster better connections between urban dwellers & rural areas through health & wellness initiatives. ○ Develop programs to attract urban residents to rural lifestyles & cultural experiences. · Cultural & Economic Synergies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leverage the agrifood sector to create synergies between rural & urban areas. ○ Promote rural lifestyles & culture to attract urban visitors & residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Expand Short Food Supply Chains: Support the development of more short food supply chains, farmers' markets, & community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives. These create direct connections between rural producers & urban consumers, fostering a sense of community & supporting local economies. · Promote Rural Lifestyles: Develop marketing campaigns that showcase the appeal of rural life in Apulia, highlighting its cultural heritage, traditions, & natural beauty. Attract urban dwellers to experience rural living through events, festivals, & educational programs. · Invest in Digital Skills: Provide training & resources to help rural producers adopt digital technologies for marketing, sales, & logistics. This will enable them to reach wider markets & compete effectively in the digital age.
5. Finland	<p>Themes: Rural Event Industry, Community Cooperation, Tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rural Event Industry Ecosystem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Build a robust rural event industry to support local missions & foster community cooperation. ○ Develop events that attract urban visitors & involve creative sector artists from cities. · Community Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage cooperation among local & external communities through inspiring community work & events. ○ Value inhabitants' stories & experiences to enhance self-esteem & community identity. · Tourism Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote rural tourism by highlighting untouched nature, beautiful landscapes, & unique places. ○ Create opportunities for employment & career development through rural tourism initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Expand the Rural Event Ecosystem: Continue building on the success of the Rural Event Industry strategy. Develop a calendar of diverse events throughout the year, targeting different interests & demographics. · Promote Rural Tourism: Market Mallusjoki as a unique & attractive destination for urban visitors. Develop tourism packages that showcase the village's natural beauty, cultural events, & local crafts. · Foster Creative Collaborations: Create opportunities for urban artists & creatives to collaborate with rural communities on event development & content creation. This will enrich both urban & rural cultures.



6.Czech Bavarian Border	<p>Themes: Innovation Networks, Cultural & Economic Integration, Business Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rural Innovation Network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish the Bavaria-Czechia Rural Innovation Network to foster synergistic development. ○ Adapt urban incubator models to rural settings to support startups & innovation. · Cultural & Economic Integration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enhance mutual access to services & improve social connectivity between rural & urban areas. ○ Promote the valorisation of cultural & natural heritage to boost regional identity. · Business & Innovation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve business opportunities through better connectivity & stronger innovation ecosystems. ○ Create flexible working spaces & hubs to support local startups & entrepreneurs . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Establish Rural Incubators: Develop specialised incubator hubs that cater to the needs of rural startups, offering flexible workspaces, networking opportunities, & access to business support services. · Address Cultural Barriers: Facilitate cross-border collaboration by organising cultural exchange programs & language courses to bridge understanding between Czech & Bavarian communities. · Transfer the "Technology Campus" Model: Adapt & implement the successful "Technology Campus" model to the rural border region, creating a localised innovation ecosystem that connects startups, academics, & businesses.
7.Spain	<p>Themes: Cultural Heritage, Community Cooperation, Digital Transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Cultural Heritage Promotion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use Segobriga Archaeological Park as a focal point for cultural heritage & rural-urban synergies. ○ Develop diverse business models leveraging cultural assets & policy support. · Community Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foster cooperation among local stakeholders through capacity-building activities & common action plans. ○ Promote community work & events to enhance local economy & cooperation. · Digital Transformation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Integrate digital skills within the agricultural workforce to attract young farmers. ○ Adapt urban incubator models to rural settings to support local innovation ecosystems . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Integrate Segobriga: Make the Segobriga Archaeological Park a central hub for rural-urban synergies. Develop programs & events that link the park's cultural heritage with local businesses, tourism, & educational initiatives. · Foster Digital Transformation: Provide training & resources to help local businesses, particularly those in the agricultural & tourism sectors, adopt digital technologies for marketing, sales, & customer engagement. · Support Entrepreneurship: Establish programs that encourage & support entrepreneurial activities in the region, such as business incubators, mentorship programs, & access to funding.
8. Latvia - Vidzeme Planning Region	<p>Themes: Inclusive Governance, Sustainable Economy, Stakeholder Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Inclusive Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure active citizen involvement in regional development & decision-making processes. ○ Develop systematic mechanisms to monitor progress at the territorial level. · Sustainable Economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diversify the rural economy towards sustainable, environmentally friendly, & socially responsible practices. ○ Foster resilience through innovative & inclusive economic development strategies. · Stakeholder Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote multi-level consultations among rural & urban stakeholders at all decision-making stages. ○ Implement policies that respond directly to the needs of inhabitants . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop a Comprehensive Monitoring System: Implement a robust monitoring framework that tracks progress on VPR Development Programme goals, collects feedback from residents, & communicates results transparently to the public. · Empower Citizen Participation: Create mechanisms for meaningful citizen involvement in the planning & decision-making processes. This could involve online consultations, public forums, & participatory budgeting initiatives. · Focus on Sustainability: Prioritise projects that promote sustainable development in Vidzeme, such as renewable energy initiatives, eco-tourism, & the preservation of cultural heritage.



9.Malta	<p>Themes: Digital Transformation, Entrepreneurial Skills, Rural-Urban Connectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Transformation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enhance digital skills & knowledge in the agricultural & rural sectors. ○ Support the digitalization of local businesses & public services to improve connectivity. • Entrepreneurial Capacity Building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop entrepreneurial skills among the youth to reduce brain drain. ○ Promote circular economy practices & better connectivity with other areas. • Rural-Urban Connectivity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthen links between rural & urban areas to foster economic & social cohesion. ○ Engage local governmental entities to support transitions towards more sustainable practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailor Digital Training: Offer customised digital training programs for farmers & rural entrepreneurs that address their specific needs & challenges. This could include courses on e-commerce, digital marketing, & agricultural technology. • Foster Youth Entrepreneurship: Develop mentorship programs & business support services specifically targeted at young people in rural areas. Encourage them to start innovative businesses that address local needs & opportunities. • Promote Rural-Urban Exchange: Organise networking events, workshops, & cultural exchanges that bring together rural & urban communities. This will help break down stereotypes & foster greater understanding between the two groups.
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The GenAI provided the following overall explanation:

This refined set of recommendations for each PoliRural Plus pilot, integrates insights from the provided resources and descriptions. The focus was on aligning them with the identified themes and addressing challenges within each pilot: These recommendations are a starting point. Further discussion with stakeholders in each pilot is crucial for tailoring them specifically to its regions and maximising impact.

The GenAI's analysis stressed that for the implementation of each of the pilots' RAPs:

- **Prioritisation is Key:** Each pilot cannot do everything. Prioritise which recommendations are most relevant to their resources and capacities.
- **Data & Measurement:** Build in tools for tracking impact of refined recommendations. This justifies ongoing funding and helps refine further iterations.

While its recommendations are that they following need to be addressed in each RAP

1. Digital Infrastructure: Beyond Connectivity

- **Emphasise affordability and skills:** It's not just about connections, but also affordability. Recommend subsidies or innovative pricing models to ensure wider access.
- **Training for Value Creation:** Digital literacy shouldn't be just about using tools; it should focus on how to create value with digital solutions—selling products online, streamlining operations, precision agriculture, etc.

2. Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems: Targeted Approach

- **Mapping local strengths:** Analyse each pilot's unique agricultural potential. Tailor recommendations to those with organic farming advantages, those near city centres, etc.
- **Consumer awareness campaigns:** Parallel to short supply chains, invest in urban campaigns explaining benefits of local, sustainable produce to drive demand.

3. Innovative Financial Mechanisms: Unlocking Private Capital

- **Matchmaking investors with projects:** Set up platforms matching impact investors (interested in social/environmental returns) with suitable regional projects.
- **Capacity building for local stakeholders:** Train rural organisations, municipalities, and businesses on how to present their projects to attract such investors.

4. Strengthening Rural-Urban Partnerships: Structures, Not Just Intent

- **"Shadow" positions:** Facilitate temporary job placements of urban professionals in rural contexts and vice-versa. This builds long-term trust and understanding.



- **Cross-sectoral innovation hubs:** Co-locate spaces for rural entrepreneurs, urban creatives, and researchers to work jointly on specific challenges.

5. Nature-Based Solutions: Actionable Projects

- **Incentivise citizen participation:** Create paid or volunteer opportunities, integrating NBS into rural landscaping, urban green spaces, flood mitigation, etc.
- **Measurable outcomes:** Recommend that NBS targets be specific (e.g., increasing green area, reducing heat island effect, measurable biodiversity increase).

6. Social Innovation: Bridging Divides & Upskilling

- **Rural/Urban mentorship program:** Pair experienced rural social innovators with urban counterparts and vice versa for cross-pollination of ideas and approaches.
- **"Soft Skills" for Success:** Complement social innovation support with training in communication, networking, and project management that are often underdeveloped in rural contexts.

6.1 Key Concepts and Themes

The key concepts that provide a foundation for the PoliRuralPlus project's objectives and strategies in fostering sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development in rural and urban areas across the EU are as follows:

1. **Sustainable Development:** The project aims to foster sustainable development in both rural and urban areas by promoting balanced, equitable, and inclusive growth.
2. **Rural-Urban Linkages:** The project focuses on improving connections and interactions between rural and urban areas to create synergies and opportunities for mutual benefit.
3. **Integrated Territorial Policies:** The project emphasises the importance of integrating policies and planning across different territorial levels to ensure coordinated and holistic development.
4. **Bi-Directional Urban-Rural Synergies:** The project seeks to facilitate collaboration and cooperation between urban and rural areas, promoting mutual support and shared benefits.
5. **Well-Being Economy:** The project aims to create an economy that prioritises well-being, emphasising social welfare, community development, and environmental sustainability.
6. **Foresight, Planning, and Implementation:** The project places an emphasis on forward-looking approaches, strategic planning, and effective implementation of integrated rural-urban strategies.
7. **Experimentation and Innovation:** The project encourages the exploration of innovative solutions and experimentation to address challenges and seize opportunities in rural-urban contexts.
8. **Place-Based Development:** The project recognizes the importance of tailoring development interventions to the specific characteristics and needs of each region.
9. **Inclusive Development:** The project seeks to ensure that development initiatives benefit all members of the community, including vulnerable and marginalised groups.
10. **Coordinated and Collaborative Development:** The project aims to facilitate collaboration and partnership among various stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and government agencies, to drive coordinated development efforts.

6.1.1 Examples of each in the 9 pilots is as follows:

The PoliRuralPlus project addresses each of these as follows:

1. **Sustainable Development:**
 - The project focuses on achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability in both rural and urban areas.
 - It aims to promote practices that preserve natural resources, support renewable energy, and reduce carbon emissions.
 - Sustainable development in the project area considers the long-term well-being of communities, aiming for a balanced and resilient economy.
2. **Rural-Urban Linkages:**



- The project seeks to enhance the connections and interactions between rural and urban areas, fostering collaboration and resource-sharing.
 - It aims to identify opportunities for rural-urban partnerships, such as joint economic activities, knowledge transfer, and sharing of services.
 - Through improved linkages, the project aims to address urbanisation challenges while also leveraging urban resources to support rural development.
3. Integrated Territorial Policies:
- The project emphasises the importance of aligning policies at different territorial levels to ensure coherent and synergistic development.
 - Integrated territorial policies take into account the specific needs and potential of each region, promoting tailored and place-based approaches.
 - By harmonising policies, the project seeks to overcome administrative barriers and create an enabling environment for rural-urban collaboration.
4. Bi-Directional Urban-Rural Synergies:
- The project acknowledges that rural areas can contribute to and benefit from urban centres, creating a two-way flow of resources, knowledge, and innovation.
 - It seeks to identify and promote mutual dependencies and complementarities between rural and urban areas to achieve mutual benefits.
 - Bi-directional synergies may include opportunities in areas such as agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, and cultural exchange.
5. Well-Being Economy:
- The project prioritises the well-being and quality of life of residents in both rural and urban settings.
 - It seeks to create an economy that goes beyond GDP growth, focusing on social cohesion, health, education, and cultural enrichment.
 - The well-being economy concept aims to address social inequalities and improve the overall happiness and satisfaction of the population.
6. Foresight, Planning, and Implementation:
- The project adopts a forward-looking approach to anticipate future challenges and opportunities in rural and urban areas.
 - It involves strategic planning to set clear objectives, identify priority areas, and allocate resources effectively.
 - Effective implementation of integrated strategies ensures that actions are taken to realise the envisioned development goals.
7. Experimentation and Innovation:
- The project encourages trying new ideas, innovative solutions, and pilot projects to address complex development challenges.
 - Experimentation allows for learning from successes and failures, enabling adaptive management and continuous improvement.
 - By fostering innovation, the project aims to create an ecosystem that supports entrepreneurship and creativity in rural and urban areas.
8. Place-Based Development:
- The project recognizes the uniqueness of each region and the importance of tailoring development interventions to local characteristics and needs.
 - Place-based development seeks to empower local communities and stakeholders to actively participate in shaping their development trajectory.
 - The approach values local knowledge, culture, and heritage, aiming to preserve and enhance the identity of each area.
9. Inclusive Development:
- The project is committed to ensuring that development benefits are accessible to all members of society, including marginalised groups.
 - Inclusive development efforts focus on reducing social and economic disparities, promoting social cohesion, and providing equal opportunities for all.



- It seeks to engage with vulnerable communities, women, youth, and minority groups to ensure their active participation in decision-making processes.
10. Coordinated and Collaborative Development:
- The project emphasises the need for joint efforts and collaboration among various stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, governments, and NGOs.
 - Coordinated development involves aligning the actions of multiple actors to avoid duplication of efforts and maximise impact.
 - Collaborative development fosters partnerships to mobilise resources, share expertise, and jointly address common challenges.

These specific details provide a deeper understanding of the key concepts that underpin the PoliRuralPlus project's objectives and strategies. By focusing on sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development and leveraging rural-urban linkages, the project aims to create a positive and transformative impact in the project area and contribute to the well-being of communities across the EU.

6.2 Results – Best Practices and Lessons learned for the project

Based on the project's objectives and focus on fostering sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development of rural and urban areas through improved connections and governance arrangements, the following list outlines best practices that emerged:

1. Collaborative Regional Planning: Engaging multiple stakeholders, including local governments, communities, businesses, and NGOs, in the regional planning process to ensure a coordinated and inclusive approach.
2. Participatory Decision-making: Involving local residents in decision-making processes to ensure their needs, aspirations, and knowledge are taken into account when formulating policies and projects.
3. Integrated Territorial Development: Adopting integrated territorial policies that align different sectors and initiatives to promote synergies and address cross-cutting challenges.
4. Innovation Hubs and Knowledge Exchange: Establishing innovation hubs and knowledge-sharing platforms that facilitate the exchange of best practices, technological innovations, and lessons learned between rural and urban areas.
5. Sustainable Tourism Initiatives: Developing sustainable and responsible tourism initiatives that showcase the natural and cultural assets of rural areas to urban tourists, promoting local economic growth and cross-regional interaction.
6. Digital Connectivity and Skills Training: Improving digital connectivity in rural areas and providing training and support to residents in using digital technologies for economic and social development.
7. Nature-Based Solutions (NBS): Leveraging NBS to address environmental challenges, such as climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem restoration, while fostering rural-urban collaboration.
8. Social Entrepreneurship and Local Enterprises: Supporting social entrepreneurship and local enterprises in rural areas to create economic opportunities and innovative solutions that benefit both rural and urban markets.
9. Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Fostering partnerships between public, private, and civil society sectors to leverage their respective resources and expertise in achieving common objectives.
10. Sustainable Financing Mechanisms: Exploring and implementing sustainable financing models, including public-private partnerships, crowdfunding, and innovative funding mechanisms, to support the long-term development of rural-urban partnerships.
11. Capacity-building and Skill Development: Investing in capacity-building programs and skill development initiatives to empower local communities and enable them to actively participate in rural-urban development projects.
12. Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency: Encouraging the adoption of circular economy principles and resource-efficient practices to minimise waste and maximise resource use efficiency, benefiting both rural and urban areas.

However, it is clear that the emergence of these best practices in the PoliRuralPlus project area all depend on local contexts, specific challenges, and the engagement of stakeholders throughout the project's implementation.



Regular monitoring and evaluation will be crucial to assessing the effectiveness of these practices in achieving the project's objectives.

6.3 Results – Best strategies for each of the pilots

The major themes and strategies recommended for each of the pilots from the analysis in Annex L are as follows:

Pilot	Theme	Strategies
1.Ireland/ Monaghan	Green Economy, Skills, Collaboration	- Skill-focused green job initiative (skills audit, training, apprenticeships) - Green tech incubator and support (startups, mentoring, funding) - Regional green branding and marketing
2.Slovakia	Revitalisation, Collaboration, Policy Influence	- Disseminate "Vision for more attractive rural areas" and gather stakeholder input - Advocate for a cross-sectoral governmental platform for rural development - Shape the EU Rural Pact at the national level
3.Greece	Agritech, Tourism, Value Chain	- Targeted agritech training (sustainable technologies, smart farming) - Integrated agritourism packages (collaboration with tour operators, accommodation, cultural organisations) - Farmer's market and e-commerce platform
4.Italy	Short Supply Chains, Digitalization, Innovation	- Short supply chain educational initiatives (workshops, partnerships, marketing) - Agribusiness digitization program (training, mentoring, funding) - Smart village innovation hub (co-working space, knowledge centre)
5.Finland	Event-Driven Development, Community, Tourism	- Rural event toolkit and training (guide, training on planning, promotion, collaboration) - Creative sector partnerships (incentivise collaboration between urban artists and rural communities) - Tourism-focused event network (promote events blending rural experiences with high-quality offerings)
6.Czech/ Bavaria	Rural Incubation, Knowledge Transfer, Innovation	- Flexible rural coworking and networking spaces - Cross-border skills exchange (student exchanges, internships, joint projects) - Rural entrepreneurship grants (targeted funding, mentoring)
7.Spain	Segobriga Park as Hub, Quality of Life	- Segobriga-centred business development (tourism, cultural activities, services) - Quality of life marketing (promote rural living, work-life balance, remote work) - 'Living labs' for rural relocation (spaces for urban residents to experience rural life)
8.Latvia	Monitoring, Participation, Sustainability	- Participatory monitoring tools (digital tools for residents to track progress) - Stakeholder engagement campaigns (inform and engage residents in shaping development) - Resilient economy business support (training, funding for circular models, eco-innovations)
9.Malta	Skills, Bridging Disconnect, Circularity	- Next-gen farmer training (digital skills, agritech, entrepreneurial mindsets) - Mentality shift workshops (understand perspectives, break stereotypes) - Circular business models and networking (support adoption of circular economy principles)

The common themes and concepts in the text are:

1. **Skills Development and Training:**
 - Focus on upskilling and reskilling to meet the demands of green industries and agritech.
 - Development of tailored training programs for both rural and urban residents.
 - Emphasis on digital skills, sustainable practices, and entrepreneurial mindsets.
2. **Collaboration and Partnership:**
 - Collaboration between rural and urban areas, across sectors, and across borders.
 - Partnerships with educational institutions, businesses, and community organisations.
 - Emphasis on knowledge sharing, mentoring, and joint projects.
3. **Innovation and Technology:**
 - Support for green technology startups and rural entrepreneurship.



- Promotion of digital tools and smart farming techniques.
- Establishment of innovation hubs and coworking spaces.
- 4. Sustainable Development:**
 - Focus on green economy, renewable energy, and eco-tourism.
 - Promotion of short supply chains and local products.
 - Support for circular business models and resource efficiency.
- 5. Community Engagement and Empowerment:**
 - Participatory consultations and open forums.
 - Promotion of rural events and cultural heritage.
 - Empowerment of local communities to shape development.
- 6. Policy Influence and Governance:**
 - Advocacy for integrated rural development policies.
 - Contribution to the EU Rural Pact.
 - Shaping regional and national agendas.
- 7. Rural-Urban Connectivity:**
 - Bridging the rural-urban divide through various initiatives.
 - Promotion of rural living and working.
 - Facilitation of cross-border collaboration and exchange.

These themes collectively highlight a comprehensive approach to rural development that integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects. By focusing on skills development, collaboration, innovation, sustainability, community engagement, and policy influence, the PoliRuralPlus' aim is to create thriving and resilient rural communities.

6.4 Results for the pilots

From the analysis so far the best strategies for each of the 9 PoliRuralPlus pilot regions (described in Annex A), to enhance rural-urban linkages & opportunities in the post-COVID-19 era in each region, are as tabulated above.

All of these strategies have the potential to enhance rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the post-COVID-19 era. By investing in rural areas and supporting rural businesses and residents, we can create a more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

These are just a few examples of strategies that can be implemented to enhance rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the post-COVID-19 era. The specific strategies that are best suited for each region will vary depending on the unique circumstances and stakeholders of that region.

It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges of rural development. The best approach is to develop and implement a tailored set of strategies that are specific to the needs of each region. This approach should involve the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including local governments, businesses, residents, and community groups



7 PoliRuralPlus Dashboard & Tools Recommendations:

The PoliRuralPlus Regional Dashboard will be a comprehensive tool for regional stakeholders to analyse and optimise rural-urban linkages and strategies in the post-COVID-19 era. It will enable "What if" analyses based on the PoliRuralPlus references database of relevant information, facilitating informed decision-making and consultation. The PoliRuralPlus WP4 Tools component focuses on integrating existing PoliRural technologies (Hub, Attractiveness, Policy Explorer) with advanced AI/DL technologies to further enhance decision support and foresight in rural-urban interactions. Task T4.1 specifically aims to identify and implement AI/DL technologies to improve attractiveness indicators in various areas, such as citizen science, area development, and extreme weather prediction, while leveraging existing data and components from relevant platforms.

7.1 User Services required to support RAPs Implementation

To empower pilots to effectively implement their regional action plans, foster innovation, and strengthen rural-urban linkages in the post-COVID era, based on the analysis described in the last section, the services that the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and WP4 Tools should offer to optimally support the pilots in implementing their regional action plans are as follows:

Core Services for All Pilots:

1. Data & Analytics:
 - Regional Data Repository: A comprehensive, up-to-date database with regional-specific indicators on demographics, economy, infrastructure, environment, and policy.
 - Customizable Dashboards: User-friendly interfaces for pilots to visualise data relevant to their specific themes and goals.
 - Comparative Analytics: Tools to benchmark their region against others in similar contexts or against national/EU averages.
 - Trend Analysis & Forecasting: To understand historical data patterns and predict future scenarios based on different policy choices.
2. Scenario Modeling & "What If" Analysis:
 - Interactive Simulation Tools: Allowing users to test the impact of various interventions (e.g., investment in broadband, new policy implementation) on rural-urban linkages.
 - Visualised Outcomes: Show the potential impact on key metrics like employment, business growth, environmental sustainability, or community well-being.
 - Sensitivity Analysis: To explore how different factors influence outcomes and identify the most impactful policy levers.
3. Knowledge & Best Practices Sharing:
 - Curated Case Studies: Searchable database of successful initiatives relevant to each pilot's themes, with detailed descriptions and lessons learned.
 - Policy Library: Repository of relevant national and EU-level policies, with summaries and analysis to aid local adaptation.
 - Expert Forum: Online community or virtual meetings for knowledge exchange between pilots, experts, and stakeholders.
4. Collaboration & Networking Tools:
 - Stakeholder Directory: Database of relevant actors in each region, allowing pilots to connect with potential partners, mentors, or investors.
 - Project Management Features: Tools to facilitate collaborative planning, task tracking, and resource sharing within each pilot.
 - Grant Opportunity Matching: Algorithm-driven suggestions of relevant funding programs based on the pilot's profile and project ideas.



Additional Services Tailored to Pilot Themes:

5. Green Economy & Skills:
 - Skills Gap Analysis Tools: To identify specific skills needed for the green transition in each region.
 - Green Business Directory: A database of existing green businesses for networking and collaboration opportunities.
6. Agritech & Tourism:
 - Agritourism Marketing Toolkit: Templates and resources to help pilots develop compelling promotional materials.
 - E-Commerce Integration: Support for setting up online marketplaces for local producers to sell their goods.
7. Rural Innovation & Incubation:
 - Business Plan Templates: To aid rural entrepreneurs in developing viable business models.
 - Mentorship Matching: A platform for connecting startups with experienced mentors and advisors.
 - Virtual Incubation Program: Online resources and support for rural entrepreneurs.
8. Monitoring & Evaluation:
 - Customizable Indicators: Allow pilots to track the specific outcomes most relevant to their goals.
 - Impact Assessment Templates: To guide the evaluation of project effectiveness.
9. Circular Economy & Digital Transformation:
 - Circular Economy Resource Hub: Information on best practices and case studies in the circular economy.
 - Digital Adoption Guides: Step-by-step resources to help farmers and businesses transition to digital tools.

7.1.1 Functional Specification of the Dashboard and Tools PoliRuralPlus Services

1. Dashboard

- Key Components:
 - Interactive map-based visualisation of core rural indicators (population density, employment rates, income levels, access to services, etc.)
 - Customizable charts and graphs for data comparisons (over time, between regions)
 - "Spotlight" section featuring policy case studies with filters by region and policy focus area.
 - News/Updates feed pulling in relevant rural policy news and research.
- Data Sources:
 - Official government statistics databases (census, economic indicators, etc.)
 - Curated database of rural policy research and evaluations
- News aggregator with a focus on rural development
- Opportunity Explorer:
 - Interactive map highlighting regional assets (land use patterns, broadband coverage, existing businesses) in relation to EU/National funding priorities.
 - Filterable "opportunity feed" surfacing relevant projects from PoliRuralPlus's database based on region, sector, and funding source.
- Rural-Urban Connectivity Index:
 - Visualisation of collaboration potential between rural and urban centres within the region (e.g., supply chains, skills flows, shared infrastructure).
 - Case studies focusing on successful rural-urban partnerships in similar contexts.

2. Tools

- "What-if" Policy Scenario Tool:
 - Simple input interface for Mary to select potential policies or areas of focus (e.g., agri-tech business incubation, rural broadband hubs).
 - Output delivers *qualitative* narratives around potential benefits, challenges, and types of stakeholders to engage.



- Links to relevant policy examples from PoliRuralPlus's database.
- Micro-Data analyser:
 - Ability to overlay locally sourced data (Mary or her community might be collecting) onto broader regional dashboard trends.
 - Simplified tool for generating charts tailored for presentations and consultations (population projections, skills availability, etc.).
- Action Plan Builder:
 - Template-driven structure to guide Mary from opportunity identification to project outlining.
 - Automatic integration of relevant data points and visualisations from within the dashboard.
 - Impact KPI suggestion engine based on selected project type and policy goals.
- Indicator Explorer:
 - In-depth data analysis on specific indicators.
 - Ability to generate custom reports with downloadable visualisations.
 - Option to overlay different data layers on maps (e.g., income levels + broadband access).
- Policy Comparator:
 - Side-by-side comparison of different policy interventions, their implementation context, and outcomes.
 - Success metrics filter (e.g., targeting economic growth, service improvement)
- Stakeholder Communication Builder
 - Semi-automated generation of customizable slide decks or briefings.
 - Ability to pull in data visualisations and key takeaways directly from the dashboard.

3. Additional Considerations

- Community Input Module: A simplified way for Mary to collect feedback/ideas from stakeholders and incorporate it alongside the tool outputs.
- Success Story Tracker: A section where Mary can highlight her region's achievements as projects are implemented, fostering peer-learning within the platform.

Design Considerations:

- User-friendliness: Prioritise intuitive navigation and clear data labelling for non-technical users.
- Data Storytelling: Guide the user's analysis with integrated narratives and examples.
- Flexibility: Allow for both focused exploration and open-ended data analysis.
- Key Design Principle: Guided Exploration
 - The PoliRuralPlus tool shouldn't just give Mary data, but guide her process:
 - Onboarding: Brief tutorial tailored to Mary's role.
 - Progressive Exploration: Break down complex analysis into simple steps with clear explanations.
 - Narrative Context: Always complement data with real-world examples and implications relevant to her region.
- Additional Features (Potential)
 - Scenario Modelling: Simple "what-if" tool to project potential impact of policy choices based on basic parameters.
 - Community Forum: Secure forum for moderated discussion among analysts and rural stakeholders, facilitating knowledge exchange.
 - In the longer term the Dashboard and Tools to be developed into a more powerful service for Government users such as Sarah, to address broader issues such as:
 - Understand trends in rural areas (e.g., demographics, economic shifts, infrastructure challenges).
 - Identify policy interventions that have proven successful in similar rural regions.
 - Compare each specific region's performance to other rural areas on key indicators.
 - Access and communicate relevant data and insights to stakeholders.



Important Notes

- **Data Quality:** The success of this tool depends heavily on the reliability and comprehensiveness of the underlying data sources.
- **Iterative Development:** Engage policy analysts like Sarah throughout the design process to ensure it aligns with their real-world needs.

7.2 User Services required to meet Users' needs

An alternative analysis based on the needs of PoliRuralPlus' targeted users' personas' stories and usage scenarios is presented in Annex M.

This leads to the following functional specification for the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and online tools, builds upon the insights of the user stories and use cases. Its Organised for clarity and to highlight the connections between user needs, dataset requirements, and dashboard features.

7.2.1 Functional Specification of the PoliRuralPlus Services

Core Principles

- **User-Centric Design:** Tailor functionalities directly to the needs of Mary, Sarah, and Sandra using simple language, intuitive workflows, and role-focused views.
- **Data-Driven Empowerment:** Enable users to make informed decisions, build persuasive arguments, and explore alternative strategies.
- **Rural-Urban Interconnection:** emphasise linkages and co-dependencies between rural and urban areas throughout the platform.
- **Evolving Platform:** Allow for the integration of new data sources, tools, visualisation methods, and user feedback over time to ensure the platform stays relevant.

Additional Considerations

- **Governance:** Establish clear data ownership, sharing, and privacy protocols.
- **Accessibility:** Design with users of various technical skill levels in mind.
- **Tutorial & Support:** Provide guidance materials and technical assistance.
- **Funding Finder:** Integrate database of relevant funding programs.

7.2.1.1 Dataset Requirements

The following categories of data are essential for a robust and impactful platform:

- **Demographic and Socioeconomic Data:** Population trends, age breakdowns, income levels, education attainment, employment sectors, migration patterns, etc. – at regional and sub-regional levels.
- **Infrastructure:** Broadband coverage and quality, transportation networks, healthcare facilities, education facilities, energy infrastructure, etc.
- **Environmental:** Land use patterns, agricultural data, resource availability, climate risk projections, etc.
- **Policy:** Regional, national, and EU-level policies affecting rural areas, funding programs, case studies, and impact evaluations.
- **Best Practices:** Examples of successful projects in green business, digitalization, social innovation, rural-urban collaboration, etc.
- **Technology Uptake:** Data on the adoption of various technologies in rural settings, digital skills levels, and existing infrastructure.
- **User-Generated Data:** Mechanisms for stakeholders (Mary, Sarah) to upload relevant local datasets or project results for integration and sharing (subject to governance structures).



7.2.1.2 PoliRuralPlus Tools (WP4)

- **Foresight Tools:** Support workshops and activities that help users explore future trends and uncertainties shaping rural-urban interactions.
- **AI/DL Integration:** Develop and integrate machine learning models using existing PoliRural solutions and external data, focusing on:
 - **Attractiveness Indicators:** Enhance predictions and analysis of factors influencing rural attractiveness.
 - **Data Gap Filling:** Employ techniques for filling in missing data or estimating values in underserved regions.
 - **Risk Identification:** Apply models to highlight potential risks related to climate change, resource availability, etc.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

This deliverable D2.2 reports the literature review on rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the project area. It identifies, reviews, summarises, and analyses relevant academic and policy literature on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, including related research into the influence of COVID 19 on regional development, Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative, to define the key concepts and themes, identify best practices and lessons learned in enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities. Each area was analysed, and the key findings and implications for the PoliRuralPlus project are listed.

To support the pilots in the development of their RAPs, these again analysed using GenAI tools trained in PoliRuralPlus objectives and methodology (see Annex L), to draw out the key global findings and implications for the project.

The text is split into readable main report (sections 1 to 9), while the repository of the detailed results and analysis of the key reports and studies on which of the sections are based, are documented separately in the relevant, but extensive, Annexes (A to N). This allows pilots to drill down into the extensive analysis in the various Annexes (e.g. using keyword searches) for specific topics that interest them. In due course and in addition to the many references footnoted in this report, the task T2.3 PoliRuralPlus Dashboard will provide similar but more powerful and nuanced analysis and interactive support based on the complete domain knowledge space (see section 9).

While the drill-down analysis of this report can be done by simple keyword searches, a more useful approach is to interactively query the content using GenAI. Annex N is an example of such a dialogue between a pilot user and Gemini Advanced.

A custom PoliRuralPlus GPT has been developed using ChatGPT as a user friendly service to simplify this process for the pilots to use. This PoliRuralPlus GPT service is also the first step to providing the full Dashboard service, so it will be further developed and refined in task T2.3.



8.1 Learnings

Given the PoliRuralPlus project's objectives and focus on fostering sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development of rural and urban areas through improved connections and governance arrangements, the following outlines the key learnings, implications and strategies that emerged.

Key learnings:

1. **Interconnectedness for Resilience:** Strengthening rural-urban linkages enhances the interconnectedness between regions, promoting resilience to economic, environmental, and social shocks.
2. **Place-Based Solutions:** Tailoring development initiatives to the specific characteristics and needs of each region is vital for ensuring inclusive and sustainable growth.
3. **Collaborative Governance:** Effective governance arrangements that involve multiple stakeholders and encourage collaboration are essential for successful rural-urban development.
4. **Importance of Digital Technologies:** Leveraging digital technologies fosters innovative solutions and improves access to services and markets in rural and urban areas.
5. **Nature-Based Solutions (NBS):** Integrating NBS in development strategies can yield positive environmental, economic, and social outcomes, benefiting both rural and urban communities.
6. **Sustainable Financing Models:** Exploring diverse financing mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships and crowdfunding, is crucial for the long-term success of rural-urban partnerships.
7. **Inclusive Participation:** Active engagement of local communities and marginalised groups is necessary for ensuring development projects meet their needs and aspirations. Engaging rural youth and women is crucial for revitalising rural communities.



8. **Role of Social Entrepreneurship:** Supporting social entrepreneurship initiatives empowers local communities to drive economic growth and job creation.

Particularly useful insights include:

1. **Diverse Linkages Based on Region Type:**
 - a. Rural-urban linkages vary based on region type, necessitating flexible and adaptive strategies.
 - b. COVID-19 accelerates the potential for diverse linkages, highlighting the need for adaptable solutions.
2. **Urban-Rural Partnership for Food Security:**
 - a. Urban-rural partnerships are crucial for food, energy, and water security, gaining significance post-COVID-19.
3. **Initiating Urban-Rural Linkage Development:**
 - a. Initiating urban-rural linkages can enhance sustainable agroecology post-COVID-19.
 - b. Sustainable agroecology requires a focus on environmentally friendly and resilient practices.
4. **Assessment of Rural-Urban Linkages:**
 - a. There is a need to assess rural-urban linkages and their potential role in territorial development.
5. **Politicised Mobilities and Rural-Urban Relations:**
 - a. Understanding politicised mobilities during disruptions like COVID-19 is crucial for sustainable rural change.
6. **Digital Divides and Learning Opportunities:**
 - a. Bridging digital divides is essential for equitable access to education and opportunities in rural areas.
 - b. Engaging rural youth and women is crucial for revitalising rural communities.
7. **Conceptual Framework for Nexogenous Development⁵¹:**
 - a. Rural service hubs are potential contributors to nexogenous development, emphasising localised strategies.
8. **Importance of Public Transport and Sustainable Employment:**
 - a. High-quality public transport and sustainable employment are vital for rural economies.
9. **Nuanced Impact of COVID-19 on Rural-Urban Inequalities:**
 - a. COVID-19 exacerbates existing inequalities, impacting health, healthcare, and financial resources in rural areas.
10. **Financial Hardships and Employment Disparities:**
 - a. Rural-urban differences in income, employment, and mental well-being are influenced by employment conditions and remote work capacity.

8.2 implications

Based on these learnings, the following recommended actions aim to guide the PoliRuralPlus project in optimising rural-urban linkages and addressing challenges in the post-COVID-19 context, fostering sustainable, resilient, balanced and inclusive development in rural and urban areas, are as follows:

1. **Strengthen Rural-Urban Collaborations:** Facilitate partnerships and collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders through joint projects, knowledge exchange, and resource-sharing.
2. **Develop Integrated Territorial Policies:** Align policies at different territorial levels to foster a coherent and synergistic approach to development.
3. **Invest in Digital Infrastructure:** Improve digital connectivity in rural areas and provide training to enhance digital literacy and access to online opportunities.
4. **Promote Sustainable Tourism:** Develop sustainable tourism initiatives that showcase rural assets to urban tourists, supporting local economies and cultural exchange.

⁵¹ [\(4\) Rural Marginalisation and the Role of Social Innovation; A Turn Towards Nexogenous Development and Rural Reconnection | Request PDF \(researchgate.net\)](#)



5. **Support Nature-Based Solutions:** Encourage the implementation of NBS projects to address environmental challenges and enhance the well-being of communities.
6. **Establish Innovation Hubs:** Create innovation hubs to facilitate knowledge exchange, pilot projects, and technology adoption for rural-urban development.
7. **Empower Local Communities:** Invest in capacity-building programs to empower local communities to actively participate in decision-making processes.
8. **Monitor and Evaluate:** Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of interventions and adjust strategies based on feedback.
9. **Foster Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between public, private, and civil society sectors to leverage resources and expertise.
10. **Embrace Innovation:** Foster an environment that encourages experimentation and innovation to address challenges and seize opportunities in rural-urban contexts.

However, these learnings and recommendations are influenced by the specific contexts and developments within the PoliRuralPlus project area. Therefore, ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and engagement with stakeholders are critical to ensure the project's success and to refine strategies as the project progresses.

The following more specific implications are aligned with the objectives of the PoliRuralPlus project and contribute to the sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development of rural and urban areas within the project area:

1. **Develop Cross-Sectoral Pilot Projects:** Create pilot projects that involve collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders in specific sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy, or eco-tourism. These projects should prioritise experimentation and innovation, testing different approaches to enhance rural-urban linkages and opportunities.
2. **Establish Regional Innovation Hubs:** Set up regional innovation hubs to foster knowledge exchange, facilitate co-creation of solutions, and promote the adoption of digital technologies. These hubs should serve as centres for training, mentoring, and support for local entrepreneurs and businesses.
3. **Implement Nature-Based Solutions Demonstrations:** Integrate Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) into development plans, focusing on projects that showcase the benefits of NBS in enhancing environmental sustainability and promoting rural-urban collaboration. Monitor and evaluate the impacts of these solutions to inform future strategies.
4. **Foster Sustainable Tourism Partnerships:** Encourage partnerships between rural and urban stakeholders in the tourism industry to develop sustainable tourism initiatives that highlight the unique natural and cultural heritage of the project area. Promote responsible tourism practices that benefit local communities and preserve the region's identity.
5. **Enhance Digital Infrastructure in Rural Areas:** Invest in improving digital connectivity and access to high-speed internet in rural areas. Provide training and resources to enhance digital literacy among local residents, enabling them to participate in the digital economy and access online services.
6. **Support Social Entrepreneurship and Local Enterprises:** Provide financial and technical support to social entrepreneurs and local enterprises in the project area. Facilitate access to funding, mentoring, and market linkages to stimulate economic growth and create jobs.
7. **Promote Inclusive Decision-making:** Engage local communities, including youth, women, and marginalised groups, in the planning and decision-making processes of the project. Ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs are adequately addressed in the development initiatives.
8. **Establish Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Facilitate partnerships between public and private entities to jointly fund and implement sustainable development projects. PPPs can bring together resources and expertise from different sectors to achieve common goals.
9. **Monitor Progress and Share Best Practices:** Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the progress and impact of the project's interventions. Share best practices and lessons learned among project partners and stakeholders to facilitate learning and continuous improvement.
10. **Promote Cross-Border Collaboration:** Explore opportunities for cross-border collaboration with neighbouring regions and countries to expand the impact of the project and promote bi-directional rural-urban synergies on a broader scale.



8.3 Strategies

The strategies that PoliRuralPlus should adopt for improving connections, governance arrangements, and integrated territorial policies, while prioritising experimentation and innovation in domains that promote bi-directional urban-rural synergies and well-being economy, are as follows:

1. **Empower local communities:** Invest in capacity-building programs and skill development initiatives to empower local communities and enable them to actively participate in rural-urban development projects.
2. **Strengthen rural-urban collaborations:** Facilitate partnerships and collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders through joint projects, knowledge exchange, and resource-sharing.
3. **Invest in digital infrastructure:** Improve digital connectivity in rural areas and provide training to enhance digital literacy and access to online opportunities.
4. **Promote sustainable tourism:** Develop sustainable tourism initiatives that showcase rural assets to urban tourists, supporting local economies and cultural exchange.
5. **Support nature-based solutions:** Encourage the implementation of NBS projects to address environmental challenges and enhance the well-being of communities.
6. **Establish innovation hubs:** Create innovation hubs to facilitate knowledge exchange, pilot projects, and technology adoption for rural-urban development.
7. **Embrace innovation:** Foster an environment that encourages experimentation and innovation to address challenges and seize opportunities in rural-urban contexts.
8. **Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between public, private, and civil society sectors to leverage resources and expertise.
9. **Monitor and evaluate:** Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of interventions and adjust strategies based on feedback.
10. **Adopt a territorial approach:** Consider the specific context and needs of each region to tailor strategies accordingly.

These actions are aligned with the EU's New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative, which aims to create more sustainable and inclusive living spaces. By following these principles, the PoliRuralPlus project can help to foster more equitable and prosperous rural-urban linkages in Europe.

Analysis of the conclusions and implications of each of the sections found that the key areas for action in the PoliRuralPlus project to optimise rural-urban linkages and address challenges in the post-COVID-19 context, are as follows:

1. **Flexible and Adaptive Strategies:**
 - Develop adaptable strategies responsive to changing circumstances accelerated by COVID-19.
 - Develop flexible and adaptive strategies that can respond to changing circumstances.
 - a. Develop strategies adaptable to different regions and responsive to changing circumstances accelerated by COVID-19.
2. **Strengthen Urban-Rural Partnerships:**
 - Promote and strengthen partnerships between urban and rural areas, focusing on food security and sustainability.
 - Strengthen partnerships between urban and rural areas, particularly in the area of food security and sustainability.
3. **Promote Sustainable Agroecology:**
 - Support initiatives prioritising sustainable agroecology post-COVID-19.
 - Promote sustainable agroecology as a key strategy for post-COVID-19 recovery.
4. **Comprehensive Assessment of Linkages:**
 - Develop methods for assessing rural-urban linkages comprehensively for effective territorial development.
 - Understand rural-urban relations and the impact of events like pandemics on these relationships.
 - Develop a comprehensive strategy for rural-urban linkages: This strategy should identify the key challenges and opportunities facing rural communities and outline a plan for addressing them.



5. Understand Rural-Urban Relations:
 - Conduct research to understand politicised mobilities and relations during disruptive events like pandemics.
 - Comprehensively assess rural-urban linkages to identify opportunities for improvement.
6. Address Digital Divides:
 - Implement measures to bridge digital divides, especially for online learning and equitable education access.
 - Address digital divides in rural areas by ensuring equitable access to education through online learning.
7. Focus on Rural Service Hubs:
 - Explore the potential of rural service hubs as place-based solutions in nexogenous development.
 - Develop rural service hubs as place-based solutions for economic development.
 - Create innovation hubs and knowledge-sharing platforms for the exchange of best practices, technological innovations, and lessons learned between rural and urban areas.
8. Investing in Public Transport and Employment Opportunities:
 - Invest in high-quality public transport links to support rural economies.
 - prioritise creating sustainable regional employment opportunities.
 - Invest in public transport and employment opportunities in rural areas to promote sustainable economic growth.
9. Strengthen Rural-Urban cross-sectoral Collaborations:
 - Facilitate partnerships and collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders through joint projects and resource-sharing.
 - Strengthen rural-urban collaborations through joint projects and resource sharing.
 - Foster collaboration: Bring together stakeholders from different sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, and technology, to develop innovative solutions for rural development.
10. Develop Integrated Territorial Policies:
 - Align policies at different territorial levels to foster a coherent and synergistic approach to rural-urban development.
 - Develop integrated territorial policies that align with the EU's New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative.

To implement these actions, the project should focus on:

1. Developing a comprehensive strategy for rural-urban linkages.
 - emphasise and implement integrated urban-rural strategies to enhance linkages and address challenges identified in the study.
2. Fostering cross-sectoral collaboration among stakeholders from different sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and technology.
3. Supporting youth and women in rural areas by providing education and training opportunities.
 - Support youth and women: Invest in programs that empower young people and women in rural areas to participate in the economy and society.
 - Promote education and training: Provide access to education and training opportunities that prepare rural residents for the jobs of the future.
4. Investing in infrastructure, including transportation, broadband internet access, and other essential infrastructure in rural areas.
5. Protecting the environment by ensuring that rural development projects are environmentally sustainable.

In addition to these implications, the analysis also calls for the development of best practices for rural-urban linkages, the identification of region-specific needs, the implementation of integrated urban-rural strategies, and the promotion of collaboration among stakeholders in the nine pilot regions. The project should address monitoring and evaluation, the dissemination of findings, the development of integrated development policies, investments in infrastructure, support for social economy initiatives, and innovation and experimentation. More broadly, PoliRuralPlus must promote the empowerment of local communities, the strengthening of rural-urban



collaborations, the investment in digital infrastructure, the promotion of sustainable tourism, the support for nature-based solutions, the establishment of innovation hubs, the embrace of innovation, the fostering of multi-stakeholder partnerships, the monitoring and evaluation of interventions, and the adoption of a territorial approach.

The PoliRuralPlus pilots could undertake the following specific actions to address the diverse aspects of rural-urban development, ensuring inclusivity, adaptability, and sustainability across the pilot regions.

1. Empower Local Communities:
 - a. Establish community-based capacity-building programs focusing on skill development tailored to local needs.
 - b. Create mentorship programs connecting experienced individuals with aspiring community leaders for knowledge transfer.
2. Flexible and Adaptive Strategies:
 - a. Establish a dynamic strategy development team capable of responding to evolving circumstances.
 - b. Implement regular strategy review sessions to assess effectiveness and adapt plans accordingly.
3. Support Youth and Women:
 - a. Launch entrepreneurship programs specifically targeting youth and women in rural areas.
 - b. Establish mentorship networks connecting successful individuals with aspiring entrepreneurs.
4. Strengthen Urban-Rural Partnerships:
 - a. Organise joint workshops and forums bringing urban and rural stakeholders together to identify partnership opportunities.
 - b. Develop incentive programs for businesses engaged in partnerships that enhance food security and sustainability.
5. Promote Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems:
 - a. Provide grants and resources to farmers adopting sustainable and local agriculture practices.
 - b. Facilitate direct connections between local farmers and urban markets through an online platform.
 - c. Promote NBS and NIB principles and opportunities.
6. Embrace Innovation:
 - a. Create innovation funds to support experimental projects in areas like proximity services, circular economy, and green technologies.
 - b. Establish an innovation hub where local communities can collaborate on innovative solutions.
7. Promote Collaboration:
 - a. Facilitate knowledge-sharing platforms where stakeholders from different sectors can exchange ideas.
 - b. Organise collaborative projects that involve stakeholders from agriculture, tourism, event industry and technology sectors.
8. Identify Best Practices:
 - a. Establish a dedicated team to analyse and document best practices in rural-urban linkages.
 - b. Create a centralised database accessible to all pilot regions for sharing successful strategies.
9. Understand Region-Specific Needs:
 - a. Conduct region-specific surveys and consultations to identify unique challenges and opportunities.
 - b. Develop a toolkit for each pilot region containing strategies tailored to their specific context.
10. Invest in Infrastructure:
 - a. Collaborate with private and public sectors to prioritise infrastructure projects enhancing connectivity.
 - b. Establish a fund to support the development of digital infrastructure, focusing on areas with the greatest need.

These will now be addressed in WP3-6 with rural-urban partnerships driven by the stakeholders identified in D2.1 to increase the resilience and interconnectedness of urban and rural areas. By focusing on context-specific strategies and fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, the project will maximise its potential to enhance rural-urban linkages and opportunities.



By implementing these recommendations, the PoliRuralPlus project can make a significant contribution to the EU's goal of creating more balanced and inclusive development across its territories and contribute to fostering sustainable, inclusive, and resilient rural-urban linkages across Europe. Through implementation of these best practices, the EU can help to create a more prosperous and equitable society where rural and urban areas work together to achieve shared goals.

9 References

Task T2.1 “Literature Review”, which ended in June 2024, undertook the following: (a) Identified relevant academic and policy literature on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, (b) Reviewed and summarised the literature to identify key concepts and themes, (c) Reviewed related research in NBS and New Bauhaus Initiative, (d) Analysed the literature to identify best practices and lessons learned in enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities, (e) Synthesised the findings of the literature review in this D2.2 report outlining key findings and implications for the project and (f) Reviewed papers related to the influence of COVID 19 on regional development. In addition, to the many references footnoted in this report, the complete domain knowledge space database data for use by the PoliRuralPlus AI-driven Regional Analysis Dashboard service in task T2.3 is stored on the PoliRuralPlus secure shared space, as described in D2.1 for the stakeholders database.

The references database Knowledge Space was assembled by first analysing core sources such as the Call that funded the PoliRuralPlus project, i.e. HORIZON-CL6-2023-COMMUNITIES-01-2⁵² and its background documents, and key studies such as the OECD report “Networks and rural-urban linkages for rural innovation”⁵³. Then following the relevant references and themes cited in each report, each of their reports was in turn analysed and their relevant references and themes identified, and so on, resulting in the current 2,500 domain references. Further relevant references are being continuously added as they are identified.

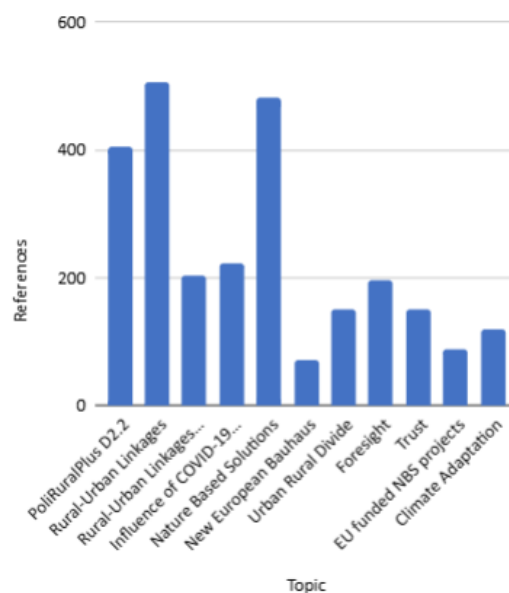
Similar to the discussion in D2.1, the risks associated with working and sharing the database amongst all Partners, provides transparency and smoothness in the project work. The consequences of the risk of people unintentionally erasing or distorting the database are mitigated by keeping backups.

The references are structured into the indicated themes as per the specification of W2 and refined by the data sources, with the current status being as follows:

Sheet No	Subject	Refs.	Dist
1	PoliRuralPlus D2.2	405	16%
2	Rural-Urban Linkages	506	19%
3	Rural-Urban Linkages & innovation	203	8%
4	Influence of COVID-19 on Region	223	9%
5	Nature Based Solutions	482	19%
6	New European Bauhaus	71	3%
7	Urban Rural Divide	151	6%
8	Foresight	197	8%
9	Trust	150	6%
10	EU funded NBS projects	89	3%
11	Climate Adaptation	119	5%
	TOTAL	2,596	100%

PoliRuralPlus database of references

PoliRuralPlus References Database



⁵² [EU Funding & Tenders Portal \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-room/pages/press-room.aspx?CIDPR=13222)

⁵³ [Networks and rural-urban linkages for rural innovation](https://www.oecd.org/rural-urban-linkages-for-rural-innovation/)



Annex A: PoliRuralPlus Pilot Regions

The 9 PoliRuralPlus pilot regions, as described in the GA, are as follows:

Pilot 1 Ireland / Monaghan County (MID, MAC)

The “Rural and Urban Monaghan County Action Plan” is an elaboration of the “Monaghan Regional Action Plan” developed in PoliRural. By 2030, County Monaghan will have a vibrant, integrated and inclusive Rural-Urban community where all will enjoy the same quality of life, with a vibrant innovation ecosystem of active smart towns, smart villages and rural actors. By 2030, make County Monaghan a strong, connected, resilient and prosperous integrated rural-urban region, with the highest proportion of non-traditional new entrants in Ireland.

Pilot 2 Slovakia (SUA, WPMS)

“Vision for more attractive rural areas”. It represents a new push for making a meaningful difference and hope for revitalisation of the Slovak rural areas and as a project output serves as an input document into broader public consultations for consensus building in anticipation of new sources of funding with the aim to improve its impact on the ground. It will provide a fertile ground for the establishment of an active network of stakeholders for the various consultation processes related to rural areas, strong political leadership, building local capacities and finding resources to sustain is essential. Inclusive stakeholders from rural and urban areas multi-level and integrated overarching consultations at all stages should become a new normal for any decision-making processes at a policy level.

Pilot 3 Greece (AUA, GenAIA, NP)

Pilot will provide training for sustainable agritech technologies and Promotional Services for agritourism. The availability of training options will lead to an increased level of digital skills, which means AKIS actors will be able to use crucial ICT services faster and more efficiently. Through promotional actions and tailor-made plans, opportunities will be created for diversification of agritourism and discovery of financial opportunities to promote both the local agricultural products, and the region’s rich natural resources. Promotional activities will raise awareness about local products, while at the same time will provide inspiration for potential stakeholders

Pilot 4 Italy (TIN)

The short supply chain as a link between rural and urban. Enhancing awareness of healthy diets would also mean creating better connections with the territory and in particular with the rural areas and nature. People are becoming increasingly attentive to eating and living healthily. After the pandemic, citizens and especially urban dwellers are looking for options that could improve their daily life and lifestyle, in particular in terms of jobs and spare time. The agrifood sector has a natural potential of fostering synergies between rural and urban areas. The establishment and promotion of Short Food Supply Chain models create direct linkages between rural and urban citizens. It also bears a strong significance to attract people from urban areas by promoting rural lifestyles and culture.

Pilot 5 Finland (MYA, SML)⁵⁴

This Pilot will build the Rural Event Industry Ecosystem. It will support a meaningful mission for the community, the possibility to impact their own future and that of the village, cooperation among inhabitants, cooperation beyond their own community, inspiring and empowering community work and events, inhabitants' stories and experiences are valued, better self-esteem via events that are noted in Southern Finland. New opportunities for employment and career. Rural Events attract urban visitors from Southern Finland, and the creative sector artists, who may live in cities, will come to create content for the Rural Events, and because urban citizens look for places with untouched and original nature, beautiful landscape and unique special places. This is tourism from Cities to Rural.

⁵⁴ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/european-startup-village-forum_en



Pilot 6 Czech Bavarian Border (P4A, THD)

Pilot will build the Bavaria-Czechia Rural Innovation Network and transfer experience from Bavaria to the West and South Bohemia region. The goals are: to improve connections, strategies and governance arrangements that foster synergistic development and just transition of rural and urban areas and more integrated territorial policies and strategies in a growing number of localities; to improve business and innovation opportunities thanks to a renewed vitality of rural places through a better connectivity, improved valorisation of cultural and natural heritage, and stronger innovation ecosystems; to improve mutual access of rural and urban actors to services provided by either type of areas; to improve Improved social connectivity, social capital, resilience, and capacity to face changes as well as of innovating, and increased understanding of the cultural connections between rural and urban communities and strengthened sense of territorial identity. It will build Incubators as hubs for startups in rural regions⁵⁵. It will adapt the concept of an incubator from an agglomeration, where flexible working space is relevant, to the rural area, where a flexible working, networking and meeting space is necessary. Most startups have a private home base available, because we have no deficit in our region, but we need a hub and network node and something small but representative to meet partners, fellows and customers

Pilot 7 Spain (SINNO, P4A)

Pilot focused on Rural-Urban Synergies & Cultural Heritage. It will support strong individual activity of local stakeholders. If we are able to engage most of them in the common action plans, addressing different business models with Segobriga Archaeological Park as the centre of gravity. All will benefit from the cultural content, tools, collaboration among them and policy support of regional/local governments. Measurable to impact on the local economy, cooperation among inhabitants, cooperation beyond one's own community, inspiring and empowering community work and events. As there is an increasing interest not only in visiting Segobriga and surrounding areas for, truisms, culture, training, capacity building, etc., but also and especially after the COVID situation, there is an increasing interest in living more time per year in the rural areas, even moving definitely for a better quality of life. The primary sector and local economy are growing thanks to the possibilities offered in rural sites. Nevertheless, Rural-Urban Bridges are becoming more important.

Pilot 8 Latvia - Vidzeme Planning Region (VPR)

Vidzeme expects rural areas to be strong, well-connected, resilient and prosperous. Strong governance is conditional upon active involvement of citizens in development of rural territories and in decision-making and is in the centre of one of our identified challenges. Diversification of the rural economy towards more sustainable, environmentally friendly and socially responsible business practices to the resilience of the region and the prosperity of its people. Inclusive stakeholders from rural and urban areas multi-level and integrated overarching consultations at all stages should become a new normal for any decision-making processes at policy level.

Pilot 9 Malta (AcrossLimits)

Digital transformation and Entrepreneurial capacity building in the rural areas of Malta and Gozo targeting the Agricultural sector. The main concept is to help "level up" the agricultural and rural sectors in Malta and Gozo by providing knowledge and opportunities to improve their digitisation aspects and also to push more entrepreneurial skills towards the youth sector. Together with linking between rural-urban aspects, this should help lessen the "brain drain" that rural villages see towards Malta or even towards other EU countries. It will support strong individual activity of local stakeholders, especially from business, NGO and citizen sectors. The local governmental entities will also be involved to help in the transition towards more circularity and better connectivity with other areas. Malta and Gozo being so physically small, things are already super connected, however, the mentality of people from rural and those from urban areas are still far apart.

⁵⁵ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/start-villages-commitment-long-term-vision-rural-areas-2022-04-12_en and https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/european-startup-village-forum_en



Annex B PoliRuralPlus WP2 work

The objective of PoliRuralPlus is to foster a sustainable, balanced, equitable, place-based and inclusive development of rural and urban areas through improved connections, governance arrangements, and integrated territorial policies that prioritise experimentation and innovation in domains that favour bi-directional urban-rural synergies and the development of a well-being economy. Driven by foresight, planning and implementation of integrated urban-rural strategies.

This deliverable focuses on assessing the impact of COVID-19 on rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. It involved collecting and analysing the vast amount of reports, literature, policies and data to understand the effects of the pandemic on key sectors and activities driving these linkages, as well as identifying both direct and indirect consequences on rural and urban regions. This work identified the challenges and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic. In particular, this report aims to identify the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Data data space to help the PoliRuralPlus pilots to identify their most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies in the development of their Regional Action Plans (RAP), and underpin the Regional Analysis Dashboard that will be developed in task T2.3.

PoliRuralPlus is looking especially at:

- Urban-rural interaction: Policies that encourage and facilitate the interaction between urban and rural areas, such as the development of integrated transport systems and the promotion of mixed-use development.
- Governance: Innovative governance structures and mechanisms that facilitate cooperation and collaboration between different levels of government, stakeholders and citizens, such as the use of participatory approaches and multi-level governance.
- Transparency: Policies that promote transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, including the use of open data and participatory budgeting.
- Citizen participation: Policies that encourage and support citizen participation in decision-making processes, such as participatory planning, citizen juries, and community-led development initiatives.
- Promoting inclusive action for change: Policies that promote equity and social justice in urban-rural development, such as the inclusion of marginalised and underrepresented groups in decision-making processes and the promotion of social entrepreneurship.
- Financial mechanism innovation: Policies that promote innovative financial mechanisms to support integrated urban-rural development, such as the use of public-private partnerships, green bonds, and crowdfunding.

The project is leveraging data and services available through European Research Infrastructures and implementing a multi-actor approach to address ecological and digital transitions. By prioritising experimentation and innovation in domains that favour bi-directional urban-rural synergies, such as proximity, greener economy/society, circularity, services, culture, landscape and heritage, and mobility, the project aims to improve rural-urban cooperation, connections, and planning for sustainable growth. It is also addressing challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and aims to improve social inclusiveness, environmental knowledge, and access to good quality services and opportunities for rural communities.

PoliRuralPlus is building directly on the successful PoliRural H2020 project, which developed an Action-orientated Foresight Process and ICT Tool Box that was validated by 12 Regional Action Plans (RAP) focused on rural areas and people.

The PoliRural project emphasised the importance of taking an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to rural-urban development, and called for more concerted action at the local, regional, national, and European levels to promote sustainable and inclusive development across rural and urban areas. Key recommendations for further work included:



- Developing and implementing new governance models that are better suited for addressing the complex and interconnected challenges facing rural and urban areas.
- Enhancing the capacity of local and regional authorities to develop and implement effective integrated rural-urban strategies.
- Improving communication and collaboration between different stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, civil society organisations, and private sector actors.
- Fostering innovation in areas such as digital technologies, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy to promote economic development and environmental sustainability in rural areas.
- Ensuring that rural areas are included in national and European policy frameworks, and that policies are tailored to meet the specific needs and characteristics of rural areas.
- Strengthening the evidence base on integrated rural-urban development through rigorous research and evaluation of policies and interventions.

To address these, PoliRuralPlus is following 2 parallel tracks:

1. Foresight, planning and implementation of integrated urban-rural strategies
 - The PoliRuralPlus project aims to improve the quality of life for people living in urban and rural areas across the EU by promoting coordinated and collaborative development within the regions. The project is supporting 9 pilot projects (including 8 from the previous PoliRural project and 1 new project) that focus on developing rural-urban partnerships. The aim is to increase the resilience and interconnectedness of urban and rural areas.
 - In terms of financing, the project demonstrates the successful application of funding mechanisms to support these partnerships, including public-private partnerships, crowdfunding, and other innovative financing models. The goal is to find sustainable financing solutions that can support the long-term development of these partnerships.
2. Digital tools and data aided decision and policy making
 - The PoliRuralPlus project, is improving the previous project's Digital Innovations Tool Box by adding new market leading AI/ML, GIS, visualisation, IoT and analysis tools. These tools allow us to combine different types of data (including ERC EOSC and data from relevant Data Spaces) that previously could not be linked due to limited computing power and the immaturity of data processing and AI/ML algorithms. The new tools help decision-makers and planners form better decisions and policies using the combined data.
 - This powerful PoliRuralPlus Tool Box is focused on experimentation and innovation in domains that favour bi-directional urban-rural synergies and development of a well-being economy: proximity, greener economy/society, circularity, services, culture, landscape, heritage, and mobility. The main impacts of PoliRuralPlus will be to improve connections, strategies, and governance arrangements that foster synergistic development a just transition of rural and urban areas, business and innovation opportunities, mutual access of all actors to services provided by either type of areas, social connectivity, social capital, resilience, capacity to face changes, and increased understanding of the cultural connections between rural and urban communities.

The EU has established several policies and instruments that require better integrated urban and rural development if their objectives are to be met, including the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Rural Development Policy, Urban Agenda for the EU, European Innovation Partnership (EIP), Digital Agenda for Europe, Cohesion Policy, and European Green Deal. These policies recognize the need for integrated approaches and the importance of coordinated action across sectors to urban and rural development and highlight the interdependencies between rural and urban areas to achieve sustainable and equitable development. Building on these policies, PoliRuralPlus aims to add durable value through providing the following results:



- **Socio-economic benefit:** The PoliRuralPlus will provide a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic benefits of integrated rural-urban development, which can be used to inform policy and investment decisions. This analysis will include an assessment of the potential economic benefits of increased connectivity between rural and urban areas, as well as an evaluation of the social benefits of improved access to services and opportunities.
- **Ecosystem services evaluation:** PoliRuralPlus will evaluate the ecosystem services provided by rural and natural areas, and explore ways to promote the sustainable use of these resources. This will help to ensure that ecosystem services are fully taken into account in decision-making processes, and will support the development of policies and strategies to enhance the resilience of rural and natural areas.
- **Nature-Based Solutions** - The PoliRuralPlus will be focused on the use of Nature-Based Solutions to promote sustainable development in rural areas. PoliRuralPlus will support building of natural spaces, such as parks and green corridors, that can link rural and urban areas. This can facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services between rural and urban areas, and promote the exchange of knowledge, culture, and innovation.
- **New European Bauhaus** - PoliRuralPlus will provide a platform for knowledge exchange between rural and urban areas on the topic of sustainable development, and innovation. This will promote collaboration and identify best practices that can be adopted in both areas. The pilot will be realised in rural and urban areas. This will help demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of these solutions, promote innovation, and provide a basis for scaling up successful practices. It will contribute to the development of policies that support rural-urban synergy and the adoption of nature-based solutions.
- **Socio-economic analysis:** PoliRuralPlus will undertake a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of integrated rural-urban development, which will provide insights into the challenges and opportunities facing rural and urban areas. This analysis will include an assessment of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of different development scenarios, and will help to identify the most effective policy interventions to promote sustainable development.
- **Regional action plans:** PoliRuralPlus will develop regional action plans to support integrated rural-urban development in different European regions. These plans will be tailored to the specific needs and opportunities of each region, and will be based on a thorough understanding of local conditions, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Tools and methodologies:** The PoliRuralPlus will develop a range of tools and methodologies to support integrated rural-urban development, including a foresight methodology adapted to integrated rural-urban development, an interoperable decision support system for rural-urban strategy and policy development, and a system dynamics user interface for non-experts.
- **Connectivity and harmonisation of data sources:** PoliRuralPlus will facilitate connectivity to and harmonisation of key global, EU, and national data sources, which will support the development of evidence-based policies and strategies for integrated rural-urban development.
- **Collaborative analysis and exploration:** PoliRuralPlus will enable collaborative analysis and exploration by means of Map Whiteboards, which will support stakeholder engagement and the co-creation of solutions.
- **Exploratory AI/ML-aided analysis:** PoliRuralPlus will use state-of-the-art machine learning techniques to identify important indicators in urban planning from various source data - weather, earth observation, local measurements. Indicators will help to inform decision-making and support the development of evidence-based policies and strategies.
- **Regional KPI measures and calculation methods:** PoliRuralPlus will develop regional KPI measures and calculation methods to monitor and track the development of integrated regions, which will support evidence-based decision-making and the evaluation of policy interventions.
- **Influence on various sectors:** PoliRuralPlus will have an impact on various sectors, including agriculture, food system, forestry, transport, energy, tourism, and cultural heritage. By promoting the integration of rural and urban areas, the project will support the development of sustainable and resilient rural economies, and will contribute to the achievement of key EU policy objectives.

The impact of the PoliRuralPlus project will be to improve:



1. The connections, strategies and governance arrangements that foster synergistic development and just transition of rural and urban areas and more integrated territorial policies and strategies in a growing number of localities;
2. Business and innovation opportunities thanks to a more proximate, circular and green economy and renewed vitality of rural places through better connectivity, improved valorisation of cultural and natural heritage, and stronger innovation ecosystems.
3. Mutual access of rural and urban actors to services provided by either type of areas
4. The social connectivity, social capital, resilience, and capacity to face changes as well as of innovating, and increased understanding of the cultural connections between rural and urban communities and strengthened sense of territorial identity.

The regional disparities and lack of urban-rural cooperation that triggered the PoliRuralPlus project have become a significant problem in Europe.

Without effective governance models for balanced development, rural areas are often left behind, exacerbating the divide between rural and urban communities. The project's goal is to strengthen local and regional authorities and promote innovation in rural areas is crucial for ensuring their inclusion in policy frameworks and creating sustainable and inclusive development across Europe.

Ultimately, PoliRuralPlus focuses on creating sustainable and inclusive development across rural and urban areas in Europe, and will:

- Develop RAP methodology and digital tools to support regional policy building.
- Develop a digital toolbox extending on the results from PoliRural, adding on AI/DL, MapWhiteboards and collaborative analysis and visualisation features.
- Identify NEB projects with potential synergies with PoliRuralPlus and establish communication channels for knowledge exchange.
- Present PoliRuralPlus's work and expertise, and participate in NEB events and workshops to learn from others.
- Validate RAP methodology and tools through 9 pilots.
- Showcase PoliRuralPlus's innovative solutions and achievements to NEB and other urban-focused initiatives for knowledge transfer.
- Organise joint events and workshops, create online platforms, and foster partnerships between urban and rural stakeholders to facilitate knowledge exchange.

To achieve these outputs the project will communicate, disseminate, and transfer knowledge to promote urban-rural synergies and experimental culture. This will be achieved through the creation of a website, the use of social media, the organisation of conferences and workshops, and the publication of results in academic journals and other relevant publications. Stakeholders and individuals will be engaged through progress reports, surveys, workshops, meetings, webinars, focus groups, consultations, and interviews. Press releases, infographics, and videos will be developed to communicate project results to the media and public in an engaging and accessible way.

Integration and exploitation of the acquired data-driven knowledge and the results of PoliRuralPlus in the next practice of the partners (policy, research, education, business, civil society). Stimulate the replication and development of social, policy, digital and technology solutions of past and ongoing EU projects, initiatives and business models associated while improving capacities for managing demographic challenges, climate change, and the COVID-19 type of crises

The PoliRuralPlus project results will be utilised by local and regional authorities, government agencies, civil society organisations, private sector actors, and researchers. These stakeholders will benefit from improved governance models, integrated rural-urban strategies, and collaborative decision-making. Businesses can capitalise on innovative rural-urban synergies, while researchers can contribute to the evidence base in this field. The findings



will also inform EU policies, strategies, and funding programs. Overall, both rural and urban communities across Europe will benefit from the project's focus on synergistic development, social connectivity, and increased resilience.

The improved cooperation and coordination will lead to smart rural-urban development strategies. More business and innovation opportunities in rural areas will promote a green, circular, and proximate economy. The project supports the EU's sustainability objectives, including the European Green Deal. Cross-disciplinary collaboration will be strengthened, promoting mission-oriented innovation for a well-being economy.

The wider impacts will include:

Scientific Effects: Enhanced cross-disciplinary collaboration will foster knowledge exchange and innovation across different science fields. The project will leverage European research infrastructures, such as EOSC, EU Data spaces, INSPIRE, Copernicus, DIAS, Eurostat, and FAO, to support data-driven decision-making and evidence-based policy recommendations.

Economic Effects: The project aims to create sustainable rural economies with new business opportunities through integrated strategies and action plans, improved connectivity, access to resources, and pilot initiatives as replicable models for other regions.

Societal Effects: The project aims to connect rural and urban areas, build resilience, and promote innovation by enhancing mutual access to services and social connectivity. It will foster people-place bonds to promote social inclusion, cooperation, and collaboration.

1. Analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities + Impact of COVID-19

This report is the second of the following 4 deliverables of WP2 "Analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities + Impact of COVID-19", which aims to identify the key rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the project area:

D2.1 "Stakeholders identification"	M3 (Mar24)
D2.2 "Rural-urban linkages and opportunities post COVID-19"	M6 (Jun24)
D2.3 "Rural Urban data analysis"	M24 (Dec25)
D2.4 "Stakeholder feedback and data analysis final"	M36 (Dec26)

WP2 is the foundational phase of the project. It establishes the groundwork by forming the multi-actor community and conducting thorough research on rural-urban linkages. This research identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges within these linkages, setting the stage for subsequent activities. The outcomes of WP2 help define the direction and objectives for the rest of the project (WPs 3,4 and 5).

The main objectives of WP2 are:

1. To identify the key rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the project area, by:
 - a. Conducting a thorough analysis of the existing economic, social, and environmental linkages between rural and urban areas in the project area
 - b. Analysis of links to the New Bauhaus Initiative⁵⁶
 - c. Identification of the key sectors and activities that drive these linkages and opportunities.

⁵⁶ [New European Bauhaus: beautiful, sustainable, together. \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-new-european-bauhaus-beautiful-sustainable-together-1000x1000.pdf). PoliRuralPlus will establish communication with existing the *European Bauhaus* (NEB) projects and will participate in NEB events. As direct connection will use open calls. To include NEB projects in PoliRuralPlus, third-party open calls clearly announce the collaboration intent in project documents, and define eligibility criteria that encourage NEB project participation.

Resources in the budget for these joint initiatives and collaborations with NEB projects will be allocated within WP6. The project will actively promote open calls to NEB communities through targeted marketing efforts and will provide support during the application process. All outputs will be presented on the good practices platform to be an inspiration for following after-project activities. By doing so, PoliRuralPlus can create strong synergies with NEB projects, contributing to mutual development and promoting sustainable growth across Europe.



- d. Identification of the challenges and bottlenecks that limit the potential for rural-urban linkages and opportunities.
2. To assess the impact of COVID-19 on these linkages and opportunities, by:
 - a. Collecting and analysing data on the impact of COVID-19 on the key sectors and activities that drive rural-urban linkages and opportunities.
 - b. Identifying the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic on the rural and urban areas of the project region.
 - c. Identification of the challenges and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic.
3. To propose strategies for enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the post-COVID-19 era by:
 - a. Developing a set of policy recommendations and practical interventions that can enhance rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the project area.
 - b. Considering the opportunities presented by digital technologies and e-commerce for enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities.
 - c. Developing strategies for addressing the challenges and bottlenecks that limit the potential for rural-urban linkages and opportunities, particularly in light of the impact of COVID-19

The work of WP2 is split into 3 tasks as follows:

- T2.1 Literature review –conducted and reported in this D2.2, a literature review on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, with a focus on the project area.
 - a. Identify relevant academic and policy literature on rural-urban linkages and opportunities
 - b. Review and summarise the literature to identify key concepts and themes
 - c. Review related research in NBS and New Bauhaus Initiative
 - d. Analyse the literature to identify best practices and lessons learned in enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities
 - e. Synthesise the findings of the literature review in this D2.2 report outlining key findings and recommendations for the project
 - f. Review papers related to the influence of COVID 19 on regional development
- T2.2 Stakeholders' Feedback – began, as reported in D2.1, by identifying relevant stakeholders, including farmers, urban consumers, local authorities, businesses, NGOs, and community groups, and establishing communication channels with them.

The task continues now to:

 - a. Develop a survey or interview guide to solicit feedback on rural-urban linkages and opportunities
 - b. Conduct surveys or interviews with stakeholders to gather feedback on the current state of rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the project area, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on these linkages and opportunities
 - c. Analyse the feedback and identify key themes and trends
 - d. Synthesise the findings of the stakeholder feedback in D2.4 outlining key findings and recommendations at the end of the project
- T2.3 Data Analysis, which:
 - a. Will identify relevant data sources on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, including economic, social, and environmental data with focus on INSPIRE, EOSC and Data Spaces
 - b. Analyse the data to identify key trends and patterns in the project area
 - c. Analyse existing standards and data models and analyse semantic of existing data
 - d. Assess the impact of COVID-19 on rural-urban linkages, as well as the main challenges and opportunities that it posed using the data analysis based on available data, and report in D2.3.



- e. Provide a dashboard for the stakeholders to be able to look at what-if analysis of changing particular opportunities, and use it as the basis for further discussion and consultation.
- f. Synthesise the findings of the data analysis into D2.4 describing the key findings and recommendations at the end of the project, including strategies for enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the post-COVID-19 era.

2. PoliRuralPlus Code for Use of AI

The PoliRuralPlus project is committed to using Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies responsibly, ethically, and in compliance with the European Union's AI Act⁵⁷ and other relevant regulations. This Code of Practice outlines the principles and standards guiding AI development and use within the project based on the EU AI Act with best practices for ethical and responsible AI development in the context of rural-urban integration.

The EU AI Act⁵⁸ defines an 'AI system' as:

a machine-based system designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy, that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments;

With this definition, PoliRuralPlus' Code of Conduct for use of AI is based on the following principles:

- **Human-Centric:** AI solutions will prioritise the well-being, safety, and fundamental rights of individuals and communities. AI will augment, not replace, human judgement in decision-making.
- **Transparency & Explainability:** Users will be clearly informed when interacting with AI systems, and the rationale behind AI-generated outputs should be understandable where possible.
- **Accountability:** PoliRuralPlus and its partners are responsible for the AI systems we develop and deploy. Appropriate oversight and accountability measures will be in place at all stages.
- **Non-discrimination & Fairness:** AI systems will avoid bias and promote equitable outcomes for both rural and urban communities.
- **Data Privacy & Security:** AI systems will adhere to robust data protection standards, ensuring secure and ethical data management practices.
- **Sustainability:** AI solutions will contribute to social and environmental sustainability and minimise environmental impact.
- **Innovation & Excellence** PoliRuralPlus encourages innovation in AI, balanced with responsible practices for safe and beneficial development.

General Practices

1. **Risk Classification & Assessment:**
 - All AI features within PoliRuralPlus will be classified according to the EU AI Act's risk categories (prohibited, high-risk, etc.), allowing implementation of relevant safeguards.
 - High-risk AI systems will undergo thorough risk assessments, impact assessments, and mitigation planning prior to development and deployment.
2. **Data Governance:**
 - Data used to train and operate AI systems must be high-quality, relevant, and representative.
 - Data management practices will comply with EU regulations like GDPR and any additional member state data privacy laws.
 - Data sources, use, and storage will prioritise transparency and security.
3. **Development & Deployment:**

⁵⁷ [Artificial Intelligence Act: MEPs adopt landmark law | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵⁸ [TA \(europa.eu\)](#) and [Artificial Intelligence Act: MEPs adopt landmark law | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)



- AI models will be designed and developed for accuracy, robustness, and fairness.
 - Version control, documentation, and monitoring will be implemented for deployed AI systems.
 - Human oversight mechanisms will be in place for high-risk or complex AI systems.
4. **Communication & User Interaction:**
 - Users will be informed when interacting with an AI system, particularly if it generates content or influences decision-making.
 - PoliRuralPlus will provide channels for receiving feedback and grievances related to AI use.
 5. **Monitoring & Evaluation:**
 - AI systems will be regularly monitored to assess performance, intended benefits, and unintended consequences.
 - The Code of Practice will be periodically reviewed and updated as needed.
 6. **Education & Awareness:**
 - PoliRuralPlus will promote AI literacy across the project, including training on AI ethics and responsible use.
 - Stakeholders who interact with AI-powered features will be provided with clear explanations and guidance.
 7. **Additional Considerations:**
 - Continuous Learning: PoliRuralPlus will maintain awareness of evolving AI regulations and best practices in responsible AI.
 - Partner Collaboration Partners providing AI solutions for PoliRuralPlus must uphold these principles and provide documentation on their AI systems' compliance.
 - Societal Impact: PoliRuralPlus acknowledges the potential for AI to reshape rural and urban areas. The project aims to maximise positive impacts while mitigating potential unintended consequences.

Specific Practices for the PoliRuralPlus Databases, Dashboard, & Tools

1. **Risk Classification & Assessment:**
 - All AI features within PoliRuralPlus will be classified according to the EU AI Act's risk categories (prohibited, high-risk, etc.), allowing implementation of relevant safeguards.
 - High-risk AI systems will undergo thorough risk assessments, impact assessments, and mitigation planning prior to development and deployment.
 - **Specific to Databases, Dashboard & Tools:** Database queries, dashboard visualisations, and recommendations from online tools will be assessed for their potential impact on individuals and communities to determine appropriate risk levels.
2. **Data Governance:**
 - Data used to train and operate AI systems must be high-quality, relevant, and representative.
 - Data management practices will comply with EU regulations like GDPR and any additional member state data privacy laws.
 - Data sources, use, and storage will prioritise transparency and security.
 - **Specific to Databases:** The PoliRuralPlus database will curate data from reliable sources and implement quality controls to minimise inaccuracies.
 - **Specific to Tools & Dashboard:** Data feeding into AI-powered analyses for these elements will undergo source verification and bias checks.
3. **Development & Deployment:**
 - AI models will be designed and developed for accuracy, robustness, and fairness.
 - Version control, documentation, and monitoring will be implemented for deployed AI systems.
 - Human oversight mechanisms will be in place for high-risk or complex AI systems.
 - **Specific to Dashboard & Tools:** The "what-if" scenario generation features of the Dashboard will be carefully designed to avoid suggesting actions with potentially significant real-world consequences. Human review of AI proposals is highly recommended.
4. **Communication & User Interaction:**



- Users will be informed when interacting with an AI system, particularly if it generates content or influences decision-making.
 - PoliRuralPlus will provide channels for receiving feedback and grievances related to AI use.
 - **Specific to Tools & Dashboard:** Explanations for AI-generated insights will be as clear and non-technical as possible. Users will be reminded that these tools provide supporting analysis and are not substitutes for human judgement in decision-making.
5. **Monitoring & Evaluation:**
- AI systems will be regularly monitored to assess performance, intended benefits, and unintended consequences.
 - The Code of Practice will be periodically reviewed and updated as needed.
 - **Specific to Databases, Dashboard & Tools:** Usage patterns will be analysed to identify any potential biases emerging in how users interact with the tools, highlighting the need for adjustments.
6. **Education & Awareness:**
- PoliRuralPlus will promote AI literacy across the project, including training on AI ethics and responsible use.
 - Stakeholders who interact with AI-powered features will be provided with clear explanations and guidance.
8. **Additional Considerations:**
- Any use of AI within the PoliRuralPlus database, dashboard visualisations, or online tools will be documented and aligned with this Code of Practice.

This Code of Practice is a living document and might be amended based on regulatory changes, technological development, or lessons learned within PoliRuralPlus.

3. PoliRuralPlus use of Generative AI

In the research and analysis of the various sources for this report and the PoliRuralPlus References Database, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools (such as Gemini Advanced⁵⁹, Elicit⁶⁰ and ChatGPT⁶¹) has strictly followed the European Commission's "Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research"⁶² as it relates to our PoliRuralPlus project as follows:

- **Transparency:** We openly disclose when generative AI models are used in the research process (e.g., data generation, analysis, writing), and specifically the AI's role and its limitations.
- **Accountability:** We maintain strong human oversight over AI outputs. We never use generative AI for critical decision-making or high-stakes tasks. We ensure through open collaborative content production and review by all partners that errors and biases generated by AI are identified and addressed.
- **Data Quality and Integrity:** We carefully curate the datasets (such as [PoliRuralPlus References Database.xlsx - Google Sheets](#)) used to train generative AI models to ensure they are representative and free of bias to the extent possible. We clearly document the source and limitations of any AI-generated data to maintain the integrity of our research findings.
- **Intellectual Property:** We have clear IPR management procedures (from the GA and CA), and proactively address potential copyright and ownership issues when using or creating outputs with GenAI tools.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** We carefully consider and address privacy risks when utilising GenAI if our work involves sensitive data or confidential research activities, such as a peer-review process. In those cases we do not use GenAI.

⁵⁹ [Gemini \(google.com\)](https://gemini.google.com/)

⁶⁰ <https://elicit.com/>

⁶¹ [ChatGPT \(openai.com\)](https://chatgpt.com/)

⁶² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2b6cf7e5-36ac-41cb-aab5-0d32050143dc_en?filename=ec_rtd_ai-guidelines.pdf



Given the focus of PoliRuralPlus on rural, urban and regional policy issues, we are actively aware and address:

- **Bias in Rural Data:** GenAI models can perpetuate biases that might be present in datasets related to rural, urban and regional communities, so we are extra vigilant in checking for this and mitigating it.
- **Representativeness:** We ensure our project's use of AI reflects the diversity of experiences and perspectives found in rural and urban areas.
- **Community Engagement:** In our engagement with community stakeholders we are open and transparent on our use of GenAI in the project, to build their trust and in turn increase the legitimacy of our findings.

As the EU GenAI guidelines are "living" and the GenAI tools are continuously being enhanced, these PoliRuralPlus GenAI guidelines and practices are regularly reviewed and updated.

Annex C Definition of Urban and Rural Areas

In the context of urban-rural linkages, there is no universal definition of what is urban, and the global data is based on each country defining what it considers urban, and the population within it⁶³. The definition can vary from a cluster of five households or more to an administrative boundary defined by population density and built-up area. In addition, the definition of urban within a country can change over time. Rapid urbanisation, particularly in developing countries, is reshaping food security and nutrition in both rural and urban areas. Over half the world's population now lives in cities, and by 2050, 66% of the world's population is projected to live in urban areas, with the increase concentrated in East and South Asia and Africa⁶⁴.

To address geographical or rural-urban inequalities to integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development more effectively with regard to populations and sectors in a given geographical area, territorial policy approaches are most appropriate⁶⁵. They can help coordinate and concentrate efforts to address the spatial concentration of poverty and food insecurity in some less developed areas, reflecting vast spatial inequalities. Given widely differing conditions across regions within countries, territorial approaches provide tools to recognize the spatial dimensions of development and to better understand the great diversity of people and resources across territories and use these to define development goals that address this diversity. Moreover, as they embrace both urban centres and rural areas in an area, territorial approaches provide valuable opportunities to bring the rural dimension into debates surrounding urbanisation and promoting a more sustainable urbanisation.

A territorial approach to development does not have one single definition, but it can be characterised by the development of a territory (including both areas that are “more rural” and those that are “more urban” in a defined region) by addressing the development of multiple sectors, implemented by a range of stakeholders and structured by multilevel governance – or governance that involves coordination and collaboration between local, regional and national level authorities and stakeholders. Implementing territorial approaches to development can enable governments to better address geographical and/or rural-urban inequalities regarding investments, access to services and infrastructure.

Territorial development strategies can be appropriate in contexts of widely differing conditions across regions within countries. They can provide tools to recognize the great diversity across territories and use these to define development goals. By bringing a more holistic lens to development than sectoral approaches, territorial approaches offer specific opportunities with respect to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The interdependence among the goals, as well as the need for more holistic, multidisciplinary, multi sector and multi stakeholder approaches anchored in more representative, multilevel forms of governance suggests that these approaches could have a growing role as the implementation of Agenda 2030 unfolds.

In the near term, key processes are already underway, such as Habitat III (United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development) that took place in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016, and the implementation of a Committee on World Food Security (CFS) workstream dedicated to urbanisation and Rural Transformation over 2016-17 provided entry points to advance thinking around territorial approaches to development and how they may work to build rural-urban linkages and connectivity to ensure the rural-urban nexus is leveraged for wider development, and that no one is left behind in the development process. Rapid urbanisation and the transformation of the rural space, with their new challenges as well as opportunities, are changing the traditional approaches to food security and nutrition.

⁶³ “Better Food Systems For Better Rural-Urban Linkages”, [Rural21_4_2018.Pdf](#)

⁶⁴ Leveraging Food Systems For Ending Hunger And Malnutrition, Ditto

⁶⁵ [Territorial approaches, rural-urban linkages and inclusive rural transformation \(ifad.org\)](#)

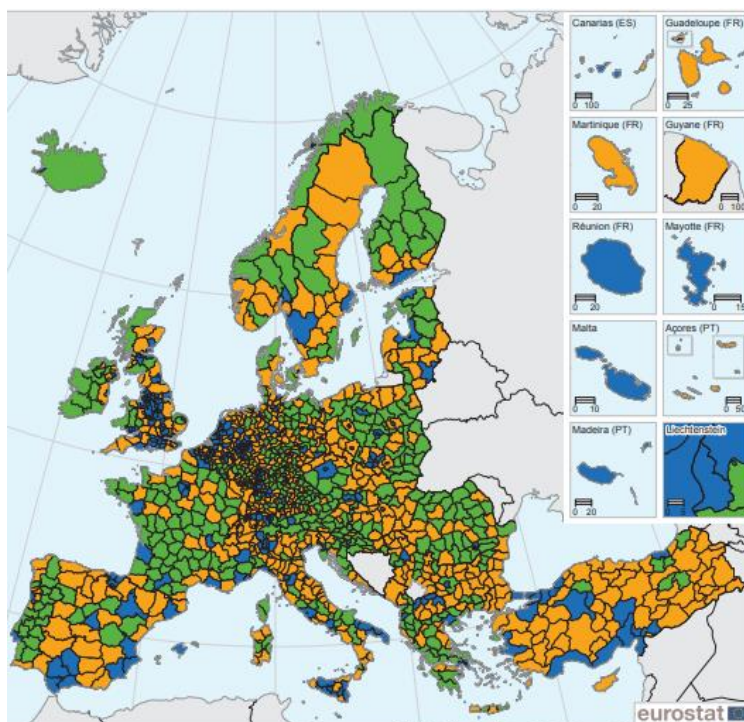


The Eurostat Methodology Manual on Territorial Typologies⁶⁶, in its urban-rural typology that is applied to NUTS level 3 regions: defines 3 types of region based on the share of the rural population, as shown in the figure:

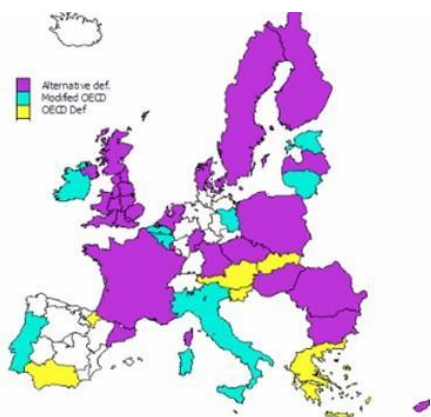
1. predominantly rural regions,
2. intermediate regions and
3. predominantly urban regions.

Eurostat defines a rural area as an zone where more than 50 % of its population lives in rural grid cells, as used in the degree of urbanisation⁶⁷. These are based are groups of 1 km² population grid cells that share similar characteristics, based on a combination of their population density and geographical contiguity. While the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines areas as:

- Predominantly rural if more than 50% of the population lives in rural communes and less than 25% live in an urban centre. Rural communes are the communes with population density below 150 inhabitants / Km².
- Predominantly Urban, if the share of population living in rural local units is below 15%, and
- Intermediate, if the share of population living in rural local units is between 15% and 50% and less than 25% live in an urban centre ⁶⁸.



Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat
Cartography: Eurostat - GISCO, 09/2018



However, Europe's rural areas are diverse in terms of many physical, socio-economic, environmental and institutional factors. This diversity is one of Europe's greatest resources but nevertheless it creates challenges for many Member States on how to accurately define rural areas. This definition is crucial for EU rural development policy design and ensuring its complementarity with other EU funds aimed at developing rural areas, especially those with distinct needs.

Figure 1 EU Rural Regions.

1. Thematic Working Group on Rural Areas

Thematic Working Group 1 was set up in 2009 to address these issues and specifically aimed to improve the efficiency of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the targeting of territorial specificities and needs of rural areas. Chaired by the Commission (Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development— DG AGRI) it carried out an in depth analysis of 23 national and 12 regional 2007-2013 RDPs⁶⁹.

⁶⁶ [Territorial typologies manual - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶⁷ [Glossary:Rural area - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶⁸ [OECD regional typology Nov2012.pdf](#)

⁶⁹ "Building Blocks for a Revised Typology of Rural Areas", [D438E7EF-0810-7B5E-49F2-8DA65CD7F698.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



It found that the OECD definition of rural areas, offered by the European Commission for use by Member States, was only taken up by a minority of national and regional RDPs and the findings of the working group suggest that it may not meet the needs of many Member States. Rather, Member States or regions use a wide variety of territorial definitions to target their RDP measures. Depending on their focus these definitions can be broadly clustered, either as sectoral (e.g. farming and forestry) or territorial (e.g. areas eligible for axis 3 measures). There is a strong awareness among the Member States of the need for clear demarcation between EU funds, and also of the potential for complementarity between the EAFRD and other funds, so as to ensure developmental needs of EU rural areas are met.

Building Blocks	Factors
Rural Definition	1 Population Density
	2 Urban Areas
	3 Land Use
Block 1- Physical handicap	4 Physical Handicap
Block 2 - Environmental Sensitivity	5 Environmental Sensitivity
Block 3 - Socio-economic disadvantage	6 Demography
	7 Socio-economic problems
	8 Economic structure
	9 Access to urban services/economies

The Working Group concluded that given the diversity of rural areas within the EU, it is important that each Member State and region applies not only an appropriate definition of rural areas, but also has the opportunity to apply a context relevant typology of rural areas. In this context three “Building Blocks”, which can be used to define a typology of rural areas,

were proposed: • degree of physical handicap; • environmental sensitivity, and; • socio-economic disadvantage. The weight accorded to each building block can be used to create individual typologies that are appropriate given Member State or regional specificities. Each building block is a composite of individual factors (see table), and each factor can be measured by a specific set of indicators. Building blocks for a revised typology of rural areas. In this way, specific typologies relevant for rural development policy targeting purposes can be developed. The potential to address the ‘new challenges’ of rural development policy are also important aspects for consideration in a typology. However, the indicators relating to these issues do not lend themselves to being categorised in a common way.

1.1 Insights and recommendations for PoliRuralPlus:

The report from the Working Group provides the following valuable insights and recommendations for PoliRuralPlus:

1. Importance of context-specific typologies:

- The report emphasises that a "one-size-fits-all" definition of rural areas is not effective due to the high diversity within the EU.
- PoliRuralPlus should advocate for and support the development of context-specific typologies that consider factors like physical handicap, environmental sensitivity, and socio-economic disadvantage.
- This would allow for more targeted interventions and policies that better address the unique needs of different rural areas.

2. Building block approach:

- The report proposes three "building blocks" (physical handicap, environmental sensitivity, socio-economic disadvantage) as a flexible framework for constructing typologies.
- PoliRuralPlus can utilise this framework to guide its own research and analysis of rural areas.
- By understanding the relative weight of each block in different contexts, PoliRuralPlus can develop more effective strategies for rural development.

3. Addressing new challenges:

- The report acknowledges that emerging challenges like climate change and demographic shifts are not easily captured in the existing typology framework.



- PoliRuralPlus should consider how these challenges can be integrated into its understanding of rural areas and its policy recommendations.
 - This might involve developing additional indicators or using alternative methodologies.
4. Collaboration and knowledge sharing:
- The report highlights the importance of collaboration between Member States and regions in developing and applying rural typologies.
 - PoliRuralPlus can facilitate this collaboration by providing a platform for knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices.
 - This could involve organising workshops, seminars, or online resources.
5. Policy implications:
- By understanding the different types of rural areas and their specific challenges, PoliRuralPlus can provide more informed advice to policymakers.
 - This can help to ensure that rural development policies are effective, efficient, and equitable.
 - PoliRuralPlus should actively engage with policymakers and stakeholders to promote the use of context-specific typologies in rural development planning.

By embracing the concept of context-specific typologies and collaborating with different actors, PoliRuralPlus can play a key role in shaping more effective and inclusive rural development policies across the EU. So, as the fundamental approach of PoliRuralPlus is to be user-driven by the stakeholders in each region, it will adopt the local stakeholders' own definition of which of their local regions they consider to be rural or urban.

2. Territorial Cohesion of Rural and Urban areas

Rural areas account for more than 341 m ha, which represent 83% of the total EU area in 2018. Agricultural land, forest and natural areas account for almost 80% of the EU's area⁷⁰. While in 2021, 8.9 % of the EU population was living in a city, with lower shares living in towns and suburbs (35.9 %) and in rural areas (25.2 %).

Territorial cohesion can be seen through a simplified rural–urban lens. To examine disparities between areas based on their degree of urbanisation, it is first necessary to define a usable metric of what is rural and what is urban. Despite the myriad of research projects comparing demographic and socioeconomic indicators across the rural–urban spectrum, the distinction between rural and urban areas is not clear-cut. The urban–rural continuum may include metropolitan areas, capital regions, cities, medium-sized towns, small towns, peri-urban areas, rural areas and remote areas, for example. It can vary from country to country and over time within countries.³ The definition may be based on a minimum population threshold or population density, or simply administrative boundaries, as well as on the proportion of the workforce employed in (non-)agricultural sectors or the availability of specific health, educational or other infrastructure (UN, 2019)⁷¹.

Some experts highlight the limitations of the rural–urban distinction, noting that it can do more harm than good by encouraging stereotyping and oversimplification, and by creating morally charged symbolic rural–urban divides. Instead of looking at rural and urban locations as if they determine people's lifestyles, a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between space and society should be used. More peripheral rural areas and even small cities are often omitted from the definition of 'metropolitan regions' (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Dymitrow, 2017; Westlund, 2017; de Olde and Oosterlynck, 2021). Proietti et al (2022) introduced the spatially embedded concept of 'lonely places'. These places are defined by certain vulnerabilities, manifesting in a lack or insufficiency of local endowment of resources or connectivity (digital and/or spatial) compared with other territories. Places

⁷⁰ [Rural areas in numbers \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/Pages/infographic-rural-areas-in-numbers.aspx)

⁷¹ "Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities", [Massimiliano Mascherini, Marie Hyland, Garance Hingre, Marta Anzillotti, Daniel Molinuevo, Eleonora Peruffo, Viginta Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė](#), EuroFound Research Report, 18 October 2023, [Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)



(cities, towns and rural areas alike) are labelled as 'lonely' if they experience, for example, depopulation, high-level socioeconomic deprivation, a lack of everyday services or digital remoteness.

Despite these criticisms, the conceptual rural–urban distinction, along with other regional classifications, remains an important categorisation, especially in cross-national studies. Eurostat – the statistical office of the EU – has produced a range of statistics covering different classifications and typologies of diverse EU territories that are indispensable in monitoring EU regional policy targets. One of the most used classifications is the hierarchical Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) system, which divides the EU into smaller regions. The current NUTS 2021 classification has 92 regions at NUTS 1 (major socioeconomic regions) level, 242 regions at NUTS 2 (basic regions for the application of regional policies) level and 1,166 regions at NUTS 3 (small regions for specific diagnoses) level. The NUTS 2 level is used to define regions that are eligible for support from cohesion policy. Similarly, cohesion reports conduct analyses at NUTS 2 level (Eurostat, undated-a).

Analyses of the rural–urban divide can also use Eurostat's degree of urbanisation classification. What constitutes rural and urban has changed over time. Originally introduced in 1991, the degree of urbanisation classification distinguished between densely populated, intermediate-density and thinly populated areas. At that time, it was based on the number of inhabitants, population density and local administrative units. Since 2012, an improved methodology for measuring metropolitan areas has been used. This was the result of the joint efforts of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, and the European Commission's directorates-general for regional and urban policy, Eurostat, and agriculture and rural development. The current degree of urbanisation classification classifies local administrative units as 'cities' (densely populated areas), 'towns and suburbs' (intermediate density) and 'rural areas' (thinly populated) based on a combination of geographical contiguity (neighbouring cells) and population density, measured by minimum population thresholds applied to 1 km² population grid cells⁷².

This three-category classification is used to analyse the rural–urban divide.

In 2020, based on the current degree of urbanisation classification, almost 40% of Europeans lived in cities, one-third lived in towns and suburbs, and the remaining 28% lived in rural areas (Figure 1). However, there is notable variation across Member States. Close to 90% of Maltese people lived in cities, compared with 19% of the population in Luxembourg and Slovenia. In Belgium, 55% of people lived in towns and suburbs, compared with 9% in Estonia. The biggest shares of people living in rural areas were in Lithuania and Slovenia (close to 45% in both countries), and the smallest share was in Malta (0.2%).

Taking 'rural' and 'urban' as two broad categories, data show that in Europe more than 75% of the population live in areas that can be broadly defined as 'urban'. This is well above the global average of 56%, but slightly below the share in the United States (83%). Over the past several decades, the shares of populations living in urban areas have been steadily increasing. Compared with today, when more than half of the world's population lived in urban areas, in 1972, just over one-third of the population did. Different regions of the world saw their degree of urbanisation change at different paces. Across the world, the degree of urbanisation in North America is greater than in any other region. However, countries in Latin America and healthcare and housing, with which policy may struggle to keep pace. As discussed later in the report, outward migration from rural areas to towns and cities can lead to inequalities in living conditions and opportunities and has the potential to foster political and ideological polarisation. The Caribbean has experienced rapid growth in the share of the total population living in urban areas, from 49% in 1960 to 81% in 2021. A sharp increase in urbanisation rates can also be seen in the East Asia and the Pacific region, from 23% in 1960 to 61% in 2021. The trend in the movement of people from rural to urban areas reflects economic development, as activity moves away from agriculture and towards industry and services, and

⁷² "Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities", [Massimiliano Mascherini, Marie Hyland, Garance Hingre, Marta Anzillotti, Daniel Molinuevo, Eleonora Peruffo, Viginta Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė](#), EuroFound Research Report, 18 October 2023, [Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)



may be associated with the fact that urban areas provide more jobs and higher income. However, the concentration of more and more people in urban areas can put pressure on essential services.

Administrative divisions were originally designed for top-down governance, control, and revenue collection. But they were created in a different time with limited individual freedom and mobility. Today, these divisions lead to fragmentation, inequality, poor coordination, and complexity in navigating public services. Citizens now identify more with functional living and working areas based on economic and social activities. Planning for these areas can promote efficient resource use, lower costs, and support sustainable growth, but it requires voluntary cooperation from all administrations with diverging interests, financial capacity, natural resources, and innovation.

Functional living and working areas encompass a range of spaces that interact with and rely on each other for optimal functioning. The urban-rural gradient classification system categorizes these areas based on varying degrees of human impact on the environment. The classes of the system include: the densely populated and developed urban core, suburban areas with lower population density and less developed infrastructure, exurban areas where urban and rural land uses intermingle, rural areas characterized by agriculture and limited infrastructure, and remote natural areas with limited human influence and high ecological value.

To achieve balanced and effective development in functional living and working areas, several issues need to be addressed, including economic exchange, labour force, tourism and recreation, innovation, environmental impact and ecosystem services, infrastructure, social connections, and governance and public services. Rural areas provide food, raw materials, and workers to urban areas, while urban areas provide goods, services, and job opportunities to rural areas. Rural areas offer cultural and natural attractions for urban visitors and opportunities to test and implement new technologies. Urban areas generate pollution and waste that can impact rural areas, while rural areas provide ecosystem services that benefit urban areas. Urban areas often have better infrastructure that can facilitate rural economic development, and rural and urban areas can have different social networks, identities, governance structures, and priorities.

Annex D Rural-Urban Linkages

1. Definition

A basic definition of rural-urban linkages is that they consist of flows (of goods, people, information, finance, waste, information, social relations) across space, linking rural and urban areas. Perhaps a less descriptive definition is of the functional links between sectors (agriculture, industry and services). The latter is central to structural change taking place in both rural and urban areas⁷³.

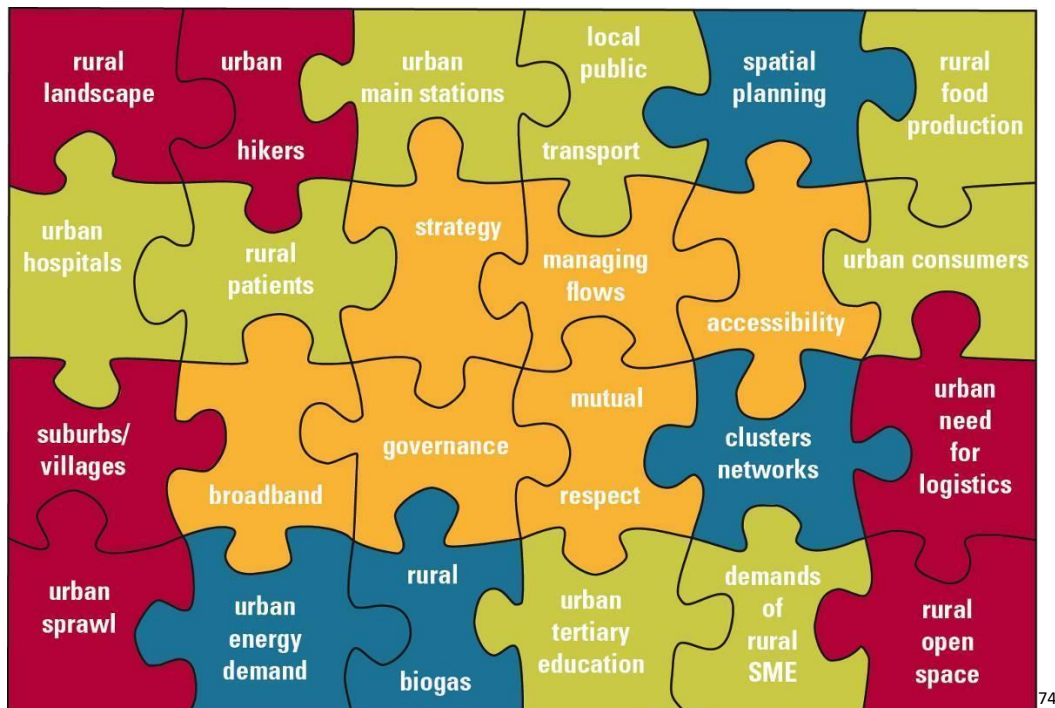


Figure 1 RURBAN Urban-Rural Linkages

To address the multidimensional nature of connections between rural and urban areas, the EU cohesion policy promotes functional area approaches, in particular through its new policy objective 'Europe closer to citizens'⁷⁵. The concept of functional areas is at the heart of cohesion policy territorial development as well as territorial cooperation as it makes it clear that policies cannot be designed separately by each side of the border but jointly on the joint territory that people share in their daily lives.⁷⁶ It is also the approach adopted by PoliRuralPlus.

In the following sections, the literature review identifies and summarises relevant academic literature on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, exploring studies, reports, and scholarly articles on integrated territorial policies, place-based development, and fostering bi-directional urban-rural synergies. The review examines policy literature, such as publications from the European Commission and other regional development organisations, focusing on strategies and initiatives that promote rural-urban collaboration.

⁷³ [session-1-insight-tacoli-ii.pdf \(oecd.org\)](https://www.oecd.org/els/region/Session-1-insight-tacoli-ii.pdf)

⁷⁴ Adapted from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/urban-rural-linkages/rurban_short.doc

⁷⁵ [Inforegio - Urban-rural linkages \(europa.eu\)](https://inforegio.europa.eu/en/urban-rural-linkages)

⁷⁶ <https://functionalareas.eu/>



Rural-urban linkages are essential for fostering sustainable development and enhancing the overall quality of life in the European Union. Rural-urban linkages are essential for the economic, social, and environmental development of both rural and urban areas in Europe, as follows:

- **Economic development:** Rural-urban linkages support economic development in both rural and urban areas. For example, food production and supply provide jobs and income in rural areas, while tourism attracts visitors and revenue to rural communities.
- **Social development:** Rural-urban linkages also promote social development. For example, education and training opportunities help people to develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the 21st century economy.
- **Environmental development:** Rural-urban linkages also support environmental development. For example, research and innovation in agriculture and energy can help to reduce pollution and conserve natural resources.

While specific linkages can vary depending on regional contexts and priorities, based on their importance for the economic, social, and environmental development of both rural and urban areas, PoliRuralPlus identified in the GA that the following key linkages consistently play a significant role across the EU:

R-U Linkage	Commentary
1. Food production and supply:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural areas are responsible for producing the food that we eat in our cities. Through agriculture, rural areas provide urban areas with a secure and sustainable supply of food. ● Agriculture is a cornerstone of rural economies. It provides food and raw materials for urban centres. The linkage ensures the flow of products, supports local agriculture, and ensures food security.
2. Employment and labour markets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural and urban areas are increasingly interconnected in terms of labour markets. Many people live in rural areas and commute to jobs in urban areas, and vice versa. Rural-urban labour mobility is important for the economic development of both rural and urban areas. ● Labour mobility between rural and urban areas allows for the exchange of skills and expertise, helping urban industries and rural communities to thrive
3. Tourism:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural areas are increasingly popular tourist destinations, attracting visitors from both within and outside of the EU. Rural tourism provides economic opportunities for rural businesses and communities and helps to promote rural culture and heritage. ● Rural areas often possess unique cultural and natural attractions. Tourism and cultural exchange benefit rural economies and offer urban residents' opportunities to experience rural life and heritage.
4. Education, training, healthcare, and social services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural and urban areas are increasingly collaborating to provide high-quality education and training opportunities for all residents. This is important for ensuring that everyone has the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the 21st century economy. ● Education and training institutions in both rural and urban settings support the development of a skilled workforce. This linkage ensures that both areas have access to quality education and training opportunities. ● Rural-urban healthcare linkages ensure that both areas have access to medical facilities and services. It is essential for the well-being of rural residents and for supporting the healthcare industry.
5. Research and innovation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural and urban areas are working together to promote research and innovation in a wide range of areas, including agriculture, food, energy, and the environment. This collaboration is helping to develop new technologies and solutions that can benefit both rural and urban communities. ● Collaboration between urban research institutions and rural innovators can lead to new technologies and practices that benefit both regions, fostering economic development and sustainability.

R-U Linkage	Commentary
6. Infrastructure and transportation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural and urban areas are interconnected by a network of roads, railways, and other infrastructure. This infrastructure is essential for the movement of people, goods, and services between rural and urban areas. The development of efficient transportation infrastructure, including roads, railways, and ports, is essential for the movement of goods and people between rural and urban areas. It reduces isolation and supports economic growth.
7. Environmental protection and management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural and urban areas are increasingly collaborating to protect and manage the environment. This includes working together to reduce pollution, conserve natural resources, and address climate change. Collaborations in sustainable agriculture and nature conservation between rural and urban areas help maintain ecosystems, support rural livelihoods, and provide urban residents with access to green spaces.
8. Social and cultural exchange:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural and urban areas are increasingly interacting and exchanging social and cultural ideas. This is helping to promote understanding and appreciation for the diversity of European culture. Cultural and artistic linkages promote the sharing of creative ideas, cultural experiences, and artistic expression. They enrich the cultural fabric of both rural and urban areas.
9. Governance and policy-making:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural and urban areas are increasingly working together to develop and implement policies that benefit both rural and urban communities. This is important for ensuring that everyone has a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Government bodies at the local, regional, and national levels play a critical role in shaping policies, regulations, and investments that impact rural-urban development. They provide the necessary framework for collaboration and resource allocation.
10. Digital connectivity and technologies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital connectivity and technologies are playing an increasingly important role in rural-urban linkages. For example, digital technologies can be used to improve access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities in rural areas. Access to digital technologies and high-speed internet in rural areas is crucial for rural-urban linkages. It supports remote work, e-commerce, and access to educational and healthcare services.

Table 1 The Major Rural-Urban Linkages

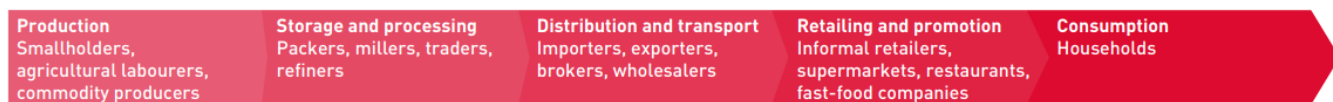
These linkages are essential in the EU because they support the balanced and sustainable development of both rural and urban regions. They foster economic growth, create employment opportunities, improve living standards, and enhance overall well-being for citizens. Additionally, they help bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, reducing disparities and ensuring that development is equitable and inclusive across the EU.

The trends in rural-urban linkages in the first and key food sector are illustrated in the following figure⁷⁷:

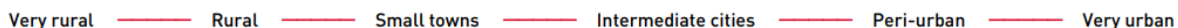
⁷⁷ "Better Food Systems For Better Rural-Urban Linkages", [Rural21 4 2018.Pdf](#)



SUPPLY CHAIN ACTIVITIES AND ACTORS



RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM



FOOD-SECTOR FLOWS



Figure 2 Food from small farms to big cities

While the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)⁷⁸ supported by enhancing rural-urban linkages are as follows:



Figure 3 SDGs supported by enhancing rural-urban linkages

Rural-urban linkages that help achieve the core improved food systems and multiple SDGs are as follow⁷⁹s:

⁷⁸ [Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals)

⁷⁹ From “Better Food Systems For Better Rural-Urban Linkages”, [Rural21 4 2018.Pdf](#)



Activities for enhancing rural-urban linkages	Benefits to food systems and residents in		SDGs supported*													
	Rural areas	Urban areas	1	2	3	8	9	10	11	12	13	15	16	17		
	Investing in rural feeder roads and cooled transportation	Connects smallholders to input and output markets, generates employment, improves incomes and value-added, and diversifies food production and diets	Improves availability and accessibility of staples, high-value foods and other agricultural products and generates non-farm employment and incomes	●	●	●	●									
Establishing processing centres and storage facilities	Increases value-added of agricultural products and incomes, spurs employment, and reduces food losses	Improves availability of diverse foods and increases incomes	●	●		●	●		●		●	●				
Using information and communications technologies (such as mobile phones) to link farmers to processors, retailers, and consumers	Improves market participation, incomes, and livelihoods of smallholders	Improves availability of diverse foods	●	●			●	●								
Facilitating in-country movement of people while providing assistance to people who move to cities	Allows rural workers to mitigate income risk through migrant work and remittances, improving income and livelihoods	Improves food security and nutrition through social safety nets and rural-to-urban food and cash transfers	●	●		●		●						●		
Improving co-ordination and planning between rural and urban areas, especially as related to food and agriculture	Opens labour opportunities and markets for smallholders	Helps manage land use and reduces food insecurity and malnutrition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Leveraging small and medium-sized cities as key nodes to link smallholders to big cities	Allows for growth in scale of markets (such as processing, cold storage) and improves access to input, output, and credit markets and can dynamise employment generation	Increases food access, consistency, and quality and dynamises employment generation	●	●	●	●	●									

Figure 4 Rural-urban linkages can help achieve improved food systems and multiple SDGs

By working together, rural and urban communities can create a more sustainable and prosperous future for all. This is the main aim of PoliRuralPlus.

2. Rural-Urban Linkages and Opportunities in the EU

The European Union is a highly populated, culturally diverse union of 27 member states. As of 1 January 2023, the population of the EU is slightly over 448 million people⁸⁰. EU citizenship and the rights it confers lie at the heart of the EU⁸¹. The Treaty on the functioning of the European Union⁸² gives EU citizens the right to:

- non-discrimination on the basis of nationality
- move and reside freely within the EU
- vote for and stand as a candidate in European Parliament and municipal elections
- consular protection (help from the embassy or consulate of any other EU country to EU citizens in distress in a country outside the EU where they have no embassy or consulate of their own country)
- petition the European Parliament and complain to the European Ombudsman
- launch or support a [European citizens' initiative](#), asking the European Commission to propose legislation on an issue that matters to them

⁸⁰ [Statistics | Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸¹ [EU citizenship \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=en>



- [contact and receive a response](#) from any EU institution in one of the EU's official languages

The Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007, established territorial cohesion as the third dimension of European cohesion. It put forward the objective of ensuring geographically balanced development across European regions in order to reduce spatial inequalities across and within Member States. Eliminating inequalities between places with different degrees of urbanisation is an important element of promoting territorial cohesion. In May 2007, the first ‘territorial agenda’ was agreed. The agenda highlighted the importance of promoting sustainable, polycentric development, ensuring equal access to infrastructure and knowledge. It also emphasised the importance of strengthening regional identities and making better use of the territorial diversity of Europe. The territorial agenda was updated in 2011; the Territorial Agenda 2030 was adopted in 2020⁸³. According to this new agenda, inequalities between people and places in Europe had reached a critical level. It set out actions that would be taken to pursue territorial cohesion under the overarching objectives of building a just Europe and a green Europe. In addition to being at the centre of broader cohesion policy, the challenges and opportunities faced by rural areas receive specific attention in the Rural Pact. The pact was launched by the European Commission in 2021 and established a framework for cooperation among stakeholders at European, national and local levels, with the aim of amplifying the voices of rural communities. Cohesion policy is delivered through several specific funds, including the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development⁸⁴.

Eurostat defines a rural area⁸⁵ as “an area where more than 50 % of its population lives in [rural grid cells](#), as used in the [degree of urbanisation](#).” And an urban area⁸⁶ as “Densely populated and intermediate density area ... [cities, towns and suburbs](#).” In 2021, 38.9 % of the EU population was living in a city, with lower shares living in towns and suburbs (35.9 %) and in rural areas (25.2 %)⁸⁷.

3. Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide

Even though the Treaty of Lisbon established territorial cohesion as the third dimension of European cohesion. Despite the high priority given in policy to achieving geographically balanced economic development, gaps in living conditions still exist between rural and urban areas. In some cases, these gaps are growing. A recent EuroFound study report documents rural–urban differences in social, political, cultural and economic outcomes⁸⁸.

These differences may pose a serious threat to social cohesion in Europe. Indeed, this report finds that rural residents more often perceive themselves as disregarded by governments and have lower levels of trust in governments and institutions than urban residents. Moreover, public service provision in rural areas is poorer than in urban areas, and gaps in provision are continually emerging. To ensure a bright future for all areas, innovative solutions to combat economic decline must be found. This report outlines creative solutions that are being deployed across Member States to provide services in remote areas.

The study found:

⁸³ territorialagenda.eu/ta2030/

⁸⁴ “Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities”, [Massimiliano Mascherini](#), [Marie Hyland](#), [Garance Hingre](#), [Marta Anzillotti](#), [Daniel Molinuevo](#), [Eleonora Peruffo](#), [Viginta Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė](#), EuroFound Research Report, 18 October 2023, [Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸⁵ [Glossary:Rural area - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸⁶ [Glossary:Urban area - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸⁷ [Urban-rural Europe - introduction - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸⁸ “Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities”, [Massimiliano Mascherini](#), [Marie Hyland](#), [Garance Hingre](#), [Marta Anzillotti](#), [Daniel Molinuevo](#), [Eleonora Peruffo](#), [Viginta Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė](#), EuroFound Research Report, 18 October 2023, [Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)



- The goal to ensure balanced geographic development across European regions is rooted in the Lisbon Treaty. Despite this commitment, however, notable gaps in income and living conditions persist between rural and urban areas in Europe with rates of employment and levels of human capital higher on average in urban areas and where the gap in median income has increased by almost 20% over the past decade.
- Inhabitants of rural areas experience an advantage in housing costs and conditions: only 6% of households are overburdened with housing costs, compared to 9% of urban households. Rural residents are more likely to own their homes and to live in larger homes, suffering less from pollution and crime. The natural surroundings in which they live also provide opportunities to pursue climate neutrality.
- It is important for good-quality public services to be available in all areas to build trust amongst those citizens who feel their communities are being left behind, as findings show that unequal opportunities and lack of recognition can foster discontent, eroding social tolerance and trust. This general lack of trust among residents in rural areas is especially concerning and calls for increased political attention to be paid to rural areas and their economic investment.
- Women in rural areas face additional challenges, including a higher gender employment gap and more conservative attitudes. Policies will therefore need to focus on encouraging women in rural areas to enter and remain in the labour force. An important component of this is ensuring that good-quality childcare facilities are available in rural areas.
- It will be critical for Member States to prioritise investment in education and training for rural communities as rural residents do not enjoy the same access to services and infrastructure that is available in urban areas, including schools and high-speed broadband. These rural–urban differences in living conditions and public services appear to be taking a toll on social capital with rural residents being more likely to feel that their role, and that of their communities, is not recognised by central governments.

Key findings

1. On average, incomes are higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and the rural–urban income gap has increased by approximately 19% over the past decade. But this average increase masks the fact that rural–urban inequalities in income have been falling in some Member States, including Germany and the Netherlands.
2. While the share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion is higher, on average, in rural areas than urban areas, the rural–urban gap in this metric has narrowed by approximately 0.4 percentage points over the past decade. £
3. The different trajectories of the gaps in income and the at risk of poverty or social exclusion rate may be related to underlying differences in living conditions, of which one component is housing. The housing cost overburden rate is higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and urban neighbourhoods suffer more with the problems of pollution and crime.
4. The employment rate is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. While there has been a general increase in the employment rate over the past decade, the rate has increased faster in urban areas than in rural areas, resulting in a slight increase in the rural–urban gap.
5. A higher percentage of young people are not in education, employment or training in rural areas than in urban areas, while in urban areas the rates of attainment of tertiary education are higher.
6. There is evidence of a digital divide between rural and urban areas. Rural residents are less likely to have digital skills, are less likely to own a computer and have slower internet connections than those in urban areas
7. The socioeconomic gaps between rural and urban communities can have profound implications for how rural and urban residents feel. Rural residents are more likely than those in urban areas to feel that they themselves or their communities are mistreated, disrespected or ignored by their government.
8. Attitudes are also, on average, more conservative in rural areas than in urban areas. Rural residents have less favourable views towards gender equality, they are more cautious about accepting immigrants, and they generally have lower levels of social tolerance than urban residents.
9. Rural residents are less likely to be politically engaged than urban residents, but only when it comes to informal political engagement, such as attending protests or signing petitions.



10. Rural residents have lower levels of trust in their governments and in the European Union, and express lower levels of satisfaction with democracy, than those in urban areas.
11. Gaps in the provision of public services between rural and urban areas are increasing. Declining and ageing populations pose challenges to future service provision, especially in rural areas. However, across Member States, there are many examples of innovative solutions to providing public services to those living in remote areas.

Policy pointers

1. Investing in education and training for rural communities needs to be prioritised. Urban areas with young, educated populations have been able to reap the advantages of globalisation. It is essential that rural communities foster the necessary human capital to be resilient to changing macroeconomic conditions.
2. The rise in remote work triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity to turn back the tide of rural depopulation. Across Europe, less densely populated areas have become more attractive to those who can work remotely and those who are attracted by the lifestyle offered outside large cities. To ensure the continuation of this trend, high-speed broadband access needs to be available in all areas.
3. A shift in public service provision to online methods could bridge the growing gap in service provision between urban and rural areas. Digital connectivity is also essential for this alternative method of service delivery.
4. Rural areas have many advantages in terms of quality of life, space and natural surroundings, and lower living costs. They also provide opportunities to pursue climate neutrality. The natural advantages of rural areas should be fostered and promoted in a sustainable way.
5. The general lack of trust in government among residents in rural areas is very concerning. Inequalities in economic development and declining public services may be driving this. Good quality public services should be made available in all areas to build trust amongst those citizens who feel their communities are being left behind.
6. There is a great diversity of challenges between and within each degree of urbanisation. To design appropriate and targeted policy responses, reliable data should be collected and made available across all countries and regions.
7. The voices of rural communities must be amplified. Their residents should be included in development plans, and their concerns should be listened to and respected. Giving a voice to local communities has been shown to be instrumental in the successful implementation of local economic development projects. Equally, attention must be paid to the opinions of populations in urban and suburban areas who feel that they are being left behind in the process of globalisation.
8. The use of innovative solutions to provide public services in rural areas is already widespread across Europe. These have included the successful delivery of telehealth services, the repurposing of abandoned buildings and the provision of public transport. Local governments and Member States must learn from each other how to scale up these programmes or tailor them to other contexts.
9. Women in rural areas face additional challenges, as the gender employment gap is higher in rural areas and rural residents are less likely to voice strong views in favour of gender equality. Policies should focus on encouraging women in rural areas to enter and remain in the labour force. An important component of this is ensuring that good-quality childcare facilities are available in rural areas.
10. The provision of childcare facilities in rural areas, as well as good quality physical and digital infrastructure, and the availability of cultural amenities could boost the attractiveness of rural areas to young people of working age who may otherwise choose to relocate to cities.

By learning from and building on the results of this study, the PoliRuralPlus project work will contribute to the development and implementation of effective strategies for enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the post-COVID-19 era in a number of ways:

- PoliRuralPlus will identify and assess the best practices for enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the post-COVID-19 era. The study provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities for rural-urban linkages in the EU. It also identifies a number of best practices that have



been implemented in different regions of the EU. The project work will use this information to develop and implement tailored strategies for enhancing rural-urban linkages in the nine pilot regions.

- PoliRuralPlus will proactively work to understand the specific needs and challenges of each pilot region. The study provides a detailed analysis of the rural-urban linkages in various regions. It also identifies the specific needs and challenges that each region faces. The project work will use this information to develop and implement targeted strategies for each pilot region.
- PoliRuralPlus will develop and implement integrated urban-rural strategies. The study emphasises the importance of integrated urban-rural strategies for enhancing rural-urban linkages. The project work will use the study's findings to develop and implement integrated urban-rural strategies in the nine pilot regions.
- PoliRuralPlus will promote collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders. The study highlights the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders for enhancing rural-urban linkages. The project work will promote collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders in the nine pilot regions by organising workshops, conferences, and other events.

In addition to the above, the project work will also learn from and build on the study by:

- Using the study's findings to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for the project. This framework will be used to track the progress of the project and to identify areas where improvement is needed.
- Disseminating the findings of the project to a wider audience, will be done through publications, presentations, and other communication channels.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- **Invest in Rural Education and Training:** Focus on improving education and skills development in rural areas to make them more competitive and able to capitalise on technological and economic changes.
- **Ensure High-Speed Internet Access:** Guarantee reliable, high-speed broadband in rural areas. This is vital for remote work, accessing services, and overall participation in the digital economy.
- **Prioritise Community Involvement:** Actively engage rural communities in the design and execution of policies and projects affecting their areas. This builds trust and ensures solutions are locally relevant.
- **Find Innovative Service Delivery Solutions:** Support creative approaches to providing essential services (healthcare, transport, etc.) specifically tailored to rural challenges. Explore repurposing buildings and technology-driven solutions.
- **Promote Rural-Urban Cooperation:** Encourage partnerships between rural and urban areas to leverage strengths and share resources. PoliRuralPlus pilots are a great way to test such models.

Some of the key findings, trends, and recommendations specifically relevant to PoliRuralPlus pilots, considering insights from various sections of the Eurofound report are:

1. Bridging Gaps in Income and Living Conditions

- **Income Disparity:** Rural-urban gaps in income are a persistent challenge. Addressing this means supporting rural entrepreneurship, attracting new businesses, and improving income-generating opportunities outside traditional agriculture sectors.
- **Housing and Quality of Life:** Understand the differences in housing costs, pollution levels, and service access. Initiatives that improve infrastructure, public services, and quality of life, while addressing any shortcomings, can mitigate income-based disadvantages for rural populations.
- **PoliRuralPlus Action:** Pilots can explore how to boost rural incomes while ensuring the livability of communities. Diversifying economic sectors and focusing on green, sustainable development could be key.

2. Jobs, Opportunities, and the Digital Divide



- **Employment Trends:** While overall employment rates might be similar, specific challenges exist, especially with youth unemployment in rural areas. This calls for targeted training, skills development, and promoting the potential of remote work for particular roles.
- **Educational Gaps:** Investments in education, particularly tailored to the rural context and evolving labor markets, are essential.
- **Digital Infrastructure and Skills:** Closing the digital gap is vital for unlocking future opportunities across many sectors. This means improving broadband access and promoting digital literacy programs for rural residents of all ages.
- **PoliRuralPlus Action:** Pilots should identify local skills needs and work with educational institutions, develop workspaces with strong connectivity, and promote the viability of remote work.

3. Values, Identity, and the Recognition Gap

- **Cultural Differences Matter:** Acknowledge the diverse values and identities within both rural and urban settings. Avoid oversimplified narratives and seek to bridge communication and understanding between groups.
- **Feeling Ignored:** Rural populations often feel overlooked and disrespected. This can breed resentment and social division. Policies and projects must demonstrate genuine consideration of rural needs and concerns.
- **Community Engagement:** Actively involve rural communities throughout all project stages, from defining problems to proposing solutions. This fosters a sense of ownership.
- **PoliRuralPlus Action:** Pilots should embrace local perspectives. Ensure communication materials and outreach efforts are tailored to rural audiences in terms of language, style, and content.

Additional Recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots:

- **Think Regionally:** Cooperation and knowledge sharing among rural areas can be key. Encourage clusters or networks within pilots to exchange lessons learned and strengthen their impacts.
- **Cross-Sectoral Partnerships:** Involve businesses, educational institutions, NGOs, and local governments in projects. This builds a broader base of support and leverages diverse expertise.
- **Promote Rural Success Stories:** Share inspiring projects that revitalise rural economies, showcase innovation, and improve community well-being. This can address the negative stereotypes and encourage a positive outlook for rural areas.

The following summaries of the examples highlighted in the report and the key lessons they offer for PoliRuralPlus pilots are:

1: Economic and social impacts of COVID-19 in rural and urban areas

- **Key Findings:** The COVID-19 pandemic impacted rural and urban areas differently:
 - **Financial Hardship:** Rural areas had higher levels of financial difficulty (trouble paying bills, making ends meet) in the initial stages of the pandemic.
 - **Employment Recovery:** Rural employment levels recovered faster as COVID restrictions eased, unlike in cities. Remote working was more feasible in cities during the pandemic.
- **Lessons for PoliRuralPlus:**
 - **Crisis Response:** Local initiatives need to be sensitive to immediate financial needs, especially in rural communities during economic downturns.
 - **Resilience and Work:** The pilot projects should explore strategies to enhance rural employment resilience to future shocks, and examine the potential and barriers to remote working in rural settings.

2: Mansfeld-Südharz – Economic and demographic challenges of a former copper mining county in Germany

- **Key Findings:** This region faces intertwined problems:
 - **Deindustrialization:** Loss of industry led to population decline and reduced job opportunities.
 - **Service Decline:** Public services (schools, healthcare) have been reduced, impacting quality of life.



- **Lack of Investment Impact:** EU structural funds have been invested, but haven't reversed these trends, likely due to administrative limitations and scepticism about external projects.

- **Lessons for PoliRuralPlus:**

- **Local Buy-In:** Project success hinges on engaging local communities and building trust.
- **Capacity Building:** Projects should focus on strengthening local administrative capacity to effectively use funding and implement initiatives.

3: Ciugud – Innovation and growth in a ‘smart village’ in rural Romania

- **Key Findings:** This village showcases successful rural revitalisation through:

- **Smart Investments:** Technology focused on enhancing education (smart school) and public services (digital payments, Wi-Fi).
- **Traditional and Modern Jobs:** Supporting both agriculture and tourism, plus building an industrial zone for additional employment opportunities.

- **Lessons for PoliRuralPlus:**

- **Forward-Thinking Technology:** Pilots should explore how technology can improve service delivery and quality of life for rural residents.
- **Diversified Opportunities:** Consider a mix of traditional strengths and new economic sectors to boost employment potential in rural areas.

4: Peccioli – Investments in sustainability and culture, ensuring prosperity in rural Italy

- **Key Findings:** This area focused on sustainable growth strategies:

- **Eco-Friendly Development:** A landfill was turned into a renewable energy source and a recycling centre promotes sustainability.
- **Cultural Attraction:** Investing in culture and heritage led to a thriving arts scene.
- **Result:** This revitalised the area, making it economically successful and attracting new residents.

- **Lessons for PoliRuralPlus:**

- **Environmental Focus:** Explore green initiatives that can both address environmental concerns and create economic opportunities.
- **Unique Assets:** Identify and leverage local cultural and historical assets for tourism and community development.

Annex E Definition of functional rural areas in the EU⁸⁹

A recent paper by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) proposes a methodology for the definition of functional rural areas in the EU and seeks feedback on the method and results.

The paper features a description of the methodology in layman's terms and a comparison of functional rural areas' population and area size with those of smaller units (municipalities) and larger units (NUTS-3 regions). It makes the case for using functional areas for a more robust picture of population change and distance to schools than one based on municipalities, and more detailed than one based on NUTS-3 regions.

Functional rural areas can inform policies that promote access to services and respond to demographic change. They can also be used to inform transport infrastructure investments and public transport provision.

This paper develops a methodology to define functional rural areas in the EU and seeks feedback on the method and the results. Functional rural areas are designed to cover all the territories outside functional urban areas. They are constructed in three steps. First, we define rural centres: they are the largest town or village within a 10-minute drive. Second, we create catchment areas by assigning every grid cell to the nearby rural centre that has the greatest gravitational pull. Third, we combine small and nearby catchment areas. We combine catchment areas until each has at least 25,000 inhabitants or is more than an hour's drive away from the surrounding catchment areas. We also combine catchment areas that have centres that are less than a 30-minute drive apart, even if they have a population of at least 25,000 inhabitants. Next, we show that functional rural areas are more harmonised in terms of population and area size than LAUs and NUTS-3 regions. The analysis of population change and of the distance to the nearest school shows that the results by functional area are less volatile than the results per LAU and show more detail than the results per NUTS-3 regions. Functional rural areas can inform policies that promote access to services and that respond to demographic change. They can also be used to inform transport infrastructure investments and public transport provision.

These functional rural areas will be updated using the 2021 population grid, the updated functional urban areas and applied to the census 2021 LAU boundaries. The update should be available in 2024.

The same methodology can also be applied to other countries as long as a population grid, a road network and FUA boundaries are available. The OECD is developing FRAs for some of its Member States and has received the necessary computer code and technical assistance to generate their own versions.

This paper proposes several hypotheses that we cannot test empirically for all EU Member States, but we may be able to find the right data to test these in some Member states. We will therefore test our hypotheses against real-world data where possible. The tested hypotheses include: Most daily trips start and end within a FRA.

Most FRAs provide a wide range of daily services: i.e, do most FRAs have at least one of each type of 'important local service' like health care facility, secondary school, etc? Do they tend to have multiple options for some or all services?

Rural centres function as community centres with a wide range of public and private services.

Employment is less concentrated in a rural centre as compared to a city, so that commuting in a rural centre is less unidirectionally, i.e. less focused on one destination agglomeration.

Commuting within a FRA is less intense than within a FUA, so that a comparatively small share of FRA citizens commute long distances. There is some evidence that working rural district inhabitants in the UK are more likely to work from home, with the remainder seemingly either commuting shorter distances, or much longer distances.

— Finally, it would be useful to assess whether labour market areas produce a similar geography or whether it shows consistent differences.

⁸⁹ Dijkstra, L. and Jacobs-Crisioni, C., Developing a definition of Functional Rural Areas in the EU, European Commission, 2023, JRC135599 https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC135599/JRC135599_01.pdf



Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website (european-union.europa.eu).

- **EU publications**, op.europa.eu/en/publications
- **EU law and related documents**, eur-lex.europa.eu
- **EU open data**, data.europa.eu

The portal data.europa.eu provides access to open datasets from the EU institutions, bodies and agencies. These can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes. The portal also provides access to a wealth of datasets from European countries.

Annex F OECD Principles on Rural Policy⁹⁰

The OECD Principles on Rural Policy aim to guide policymakers in crafting effective policies that enhance the well-being of rural communities and support sustainable rural futures. Drawing on two decades of work in rural development, they focus on three key pillars: Scale, Strategy, and Stakeholders.

Key Principles and Implications for PoliRuralPlus:

SCALE

- **Maximising Potential (Principle 1):** Recognizes the potential of diverse rural areas to contribute to national prosperity. PoliRuralPlus should champion and unlock the unique strengths of rural areas, fostering their role as valued contributors to regional and national development.
- **Geographic Scale (Principle 2):** emphasise s tailoring policies based on the appropriate geographic scale of impact. PoliRuralPlus projects should carefully consider the administrative scale (local, regional, national) that has the most influence when designing interventions.
- **Rural-Urban Cooperation (Principle 3):** Stresses the importance of collaborations between rural and urban areas for mutual benefit. This is a core focus for PoliRuralPlus pilots, who should strive to build bridges and promote win-win scenarios for both rural and urban regions.



STRATEGY

- **Forward-Looking Vision (Principle 4):** emphasises a long-term, future-oriented, and adaptable policy approach. PoliRuralPlus should work towards a comprehensive rural development vision, anticipating future trends and challenges.
- **Leveraging Globalization & Digitalization (Principle 5):** Calls for harnessing global trends for rural benefit. PoliRuralPlus can explore how digital connectivity and participation in global value chains can support rural economies.
- **Entrepreneurship (Principle 6):** Promotes entrepreneurship as key to rural job creation. PoliRuralPlus pilots can foster innovation by supporting rural businesses and start-ups.
- **Aligning Public Service Delivery (Principle 7):** Stresses the importance of ensuring that public services match the needs of rural populations. PoliRuralPlus should assess gaps in services and design innovative delivery models that are accessible to rural communities.
- **Resilience (Principle 8):** Highlights building multidimensional resilience in rural communities. PoliRuralPlus can focus on enhancing economic, social, ecological, and cultural resilience in the face of potential shocks.

STAKEHOLDERS

- **Whole-of-Government Approach (Principle 9):** Advocates for integrated, cross-sectoral policy making. Effective rural development requires overcoming silos between governmental departments. PoliRuralPlus projects should encourage such collaboration.

⁹⁰ [OECD PRINCIPLES ON RURAL POLICY - OCDE](#)



- **Inclusive Engagement (Principle 10):** Prioritises involving diverse stakeholders in shaping rural policies. PoliRuralPlus should ensure the active participation of rural communities, businesses, and other actors from the outset of project design.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability (Principle 11):** emphasises the need for data-driven policy and robust monitoring to evaluate impact. PoliRuralPlus should set clear metrics and monitoring plans to track progress and optimise interventions.

Implications for PoliRuralPlus:

- The OECD Principles provide a comprehensive framework for crafting rural development policy, serving as a valuable resource for PoliRuralPlus initiatives.
- Rural areas are not homogenous. Tailor strategies to specific local needs and strengths, adopting a context-sensitive approach.
- Collaboration is crucial. Foster partnerships between rural and urban areas, and across different government levels for maximum impact.
- Embrace a forward-looking vision for rural areas that anticipates change, ensuring that initiatives are sustainable in the long term.
- Actively involve rural communities throughout the policy development process to ensure solutions align with local priorities and realities.

1. OECD Principles on Urban Policy⁹¹

The OECD Principles on Urban Policy offer a comprehensive framework to help policymakers create thriving cities that contribute to overall national development. The focus is on smart, sustainable, and inclusive urban environments, emphasising three key pillars: Scale, Strategy, and Stakeholders.

Key Principles and Implications for PoliRuralPlus:

- **Scale**
 - **Principle 1: Cities as Drivers of National Well-Being:** PoliRuralPlus should recognize rural areas as potential contributors to overall regional and national prosperity. Foster strategies that maximise synergies.
 - **Principle 2: Place-Based Approach:** Tailor initiatives to specific local contexts. PoliRuralPlus pilots should consider the unique needs and assets of each rural community they aim to support.
 - **Principle 3: Rural-Urban Cooperation:** emphasise s the critical importance of fostering collaboration between rural and urban regions. PoliRuralPlus should design projects that facilitate interconnectedness and shared benefits.
- **Strategy**
 - **Principle 4: National Urban Policy Vision:** While focused on cities, this highlights the need for a coherent development vision encompassing both rural and urban areas. PoliRuralPlus can contribute to shaping this broader vision at the regional level.



⁹¹ [OECD Urban Studies | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/)



- **Principles 5 & 6: Sustainability and Inclusion:** PoliRuralPlus pilots should emphasise environmentally sound and socially equitable development strategies.
- **Principle 7: Multi-Level & Cross-Sectoral Governance:** Effective implementation requires multi-level coordination across different sectors and departments. PoliRuralPlus projects should actively build such partnerships.
- **Principle 8: Securing Funding:** PoliRuralPlus needs to advocate for adequate resources to support rural development initiatives within a broader national policy framework.
- **Stakeholders**
 - **Principle 9: Stakeholder Engagement:** Meaningful participation by various stakeholders - rural communities, businesses, local governments - is crucial. PoliRuralPlus should prioritise bottom-up approaches and ensure a voice for rural residents.
 - **Principle 10: Building Capacity:** Strengthen the abilities of local actors for effective implementation. PoliRuralPlus can offer training, skill development, and knowledge-sharing initiatives to enhance rural capacities.
 - **Principle 11: Monitoring & Evaluation:** PoliRuralPlus pilots should have strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track their impact on rural-urban linkages and overall well-being.

Implications for PoliRuralPlus:

- The OECD Principles provide a valuable blueprint for guiding policy decisions. Even though focused on urban policy, they offer insights applicable to rural development strategies.
- Pilots should embrace a systems thinking approach that recognizes rural areas not simply as isolated entities but as interconnected parts of a broader regional and national ecosystem.
- Collaborations across sectors, regions, and levels of governance are essential for holistic development.
- PoliRuralPlus can play a key role in promoting a place-based and inclusive approach to rural development, prioritising engagement of rural communities throughout all project stages.

2. OECD Rural-Urban Partnerships - An Integrated Approach to Economic Development⁹²

Urban and rural areas enjoy different and often complementary assets, and better integration between them is important for socio-economic performance. This report provides a framework to understand the changing relationships between urban and rural areas. It is focused on one approach that can enhance and better manage rural-urban relationships – the use of rural-urban partnerships. Specifically, it documents the characteristics of these partnerships and the factors that can hinder as well as enable rural-urban co-operation. Different governance approaches to manage rural-urban relationships are identified and discussed. Finally, recommendations are provided to help national, regional and local policy makers to build effective and sustainable rural-urban partnerships for better economic development.

The key points of this report are:

- **Integration is Key:** Urban and rural areas are increasingly interdependent, and greater integration brings benefits to both thanks to their complementary strengths.
- **Rural-Urban Partnerships Defined:** These partnerships are a governance tool to manage these complex relationships and promote economic development.
- **Functional Regions:** Partnerships work best when focused on "functional regions" (areas connected by flows of resources, people, etc.) as opposed to rigid administrative boundaries.

The report includes 11 case studies, but those most that are probably relevant with insights directly applicable to the PoliRuralPlus project, are the following that highlight different successful partnership models in various European contexts:

⁹² [Rural-Urban Partnerships : An Integrated Approach to Economic Development | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://oecd-ilibrary.org/)



- **Jyväskylä and Saarijärvi-Viitasaari (Finland):** Collaboration between a core city and its surrounding rural areas. Focus: Sustainable development, tourism, education
- **Rennes Métropole (France):** Large metropolitan area partnering with surrounding rural communities. Focus: Economic development, transport, environmental protection
- **Nuremberg Metropolitan Region (Germany):** Strong partnership built over time, spanning a large functional region. Focus: Balanced development through coordinated planning
- **Province of Forlì-Cesena (Italy):** Partnership between smaller cities and rural areas. Focus: Economic revitalisation, innovation, service provision

Key Lessons for PoliRuralPlus:

- **Partnerships can take many forms.** Each pilot region needs to tailor its partnership to its specific needs and assets.
- **Shared vision and goals are vital.**
- **Partnerships evolve over time.** Start with achievable goals and build trust before tackling complex challenges.
- **Focusing on functional regions is essential.** Look beyond administrative boundaries to the true areas of interdependence in your region.

3. Networks and rural-urban linkages for rural innovation: OECD working paper

This OECD working paper⁹³ examines the role of networks and rural-urban linkages in absorbing and enhancing innovation in rural areas. The analysis focuses on the distinctive characteristics of rural areas that determine the different ways in which they adopt and diffuse innovation. The problem is that rural areas often lag behind urban centres in innovation. This paper examines how networks and rural-urban connections can help rural regions better absorb and spread innovative practices.

Key Findings:

- Rural innovation exists and matters: Although rural areas face lower density and distance from markets, they still innovate. Adopting this innovation is vital to overcome challenges in access to key resources.
- Networks are crucial: Rural entrepreneurs need strong networks for suppliers, knowledge exchange, and market access.

Policy Takeaways:

- **Digital Infrastructure:** Ensure high-quality broadband access in rural areas, particularly for "last-mile" connections. This is crucial for innovation beyond just urban centres.
- **Promote Mobility:** Allow for remote working and support interregional mobility to bring talent and ideas into rural areas. Include this in regional planning policy.
- **Build Firm-Level Networks:**
 - Support university-industry collaboration in rural areas, focusing on training and real-world research projects.
 - Facilitate rural businesses' participation in trade networks and global value chains.
 - Use cluster development strategies and smart specialisation to create innovation ecosystems tailored to rural strengths.

⁹³ [Networks and rural-urban linkages for rural innovation | en | OECD](#)

Annex G Foresight

Foresight studies have the potential to enhance strategic planning processes at both urban and regional levels, including in the context of rural-urban linkages⁹⁴. This is particularly relevant in the context of sustainable rural development, where foresight technologies can be used to form and implement development strategies⁹⁵. A key aspect of this is the identification of marketing linkages, which can be facilitated by a simplified planning methodology⁹⁶. Furthermore, rural entrepreneurs play a crucial role in bridging the rural-urban divide, with their linkages to urban areas contributing to sustainable economic relationships⁹⁷.

Foresight studies have been identified as a valuable tool in strategic planning processes at the urban and regional level⁹⁸. This is particularly relevant in the context of rural development, where the use of foresight methodologies can enhance the long-term economic and social components of strategic plans⁹⁹. The application of foresight technologies in the Russian practice of planning and forecasting sustainable development of rural municipalities has been emphasised, with a focus on the interconnection of strategic priorities and the interests of key entities in regional development¹⁰⁰. Furthermore, the use of foresight in designing strategic plans and programs for the socio-economic development of rural areas has been highlighted, with a proposed unified foresight research methodology for this purpose¹⁰¹.

Foresight is increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for regional development, with its ability to analyse long-term perspectives and adapt to diverse stakeholder interests¹⁰². It is particularly relevant in forecasting the strategic directions of socio-economic policy and human potential development at the regional level¹⁰³. Foresight can complement and reinforce strategic planning processes in urban and regional contexts, offering conceptual and

⁹⁴ CAN FORESIGHT STUDIES STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES AT THE URBAN AND REGIONAL LEVEL ?, José Miguel Fernández Güell , 2009, 3 citations, Foresight can complement and reinforce strategic planning processes at the urban and regional level.

⁹⁵ The foresight technologies as a tool for strategic planning of sustainable rural development, A. Askarov +2, IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environment, 2019, 1 citation, PDFDOI The main directions of the introduction of digital technologies in rural areas and in the rural region are identified.

⁹⁶ Rural-urban marketing linkages : an infrastructure identification and survey guide, J. Tracey-White , 2005, 12 citations, The guide provides a simple planning methodology and framework that focuses on linking farmers to market outlets for their produce.

⁹⁷ Rural–Urban Linkages and Sustainable Regional Development: The Role of Entrepreneurs in Linking Peripheries and centres, H. Mayer +2, 2016, 79 citations, DOI, Rural entrepreneurs with urban linkages might contribute to sustainable economic relationships between urban and rural areas.

⁹⁸ CAN FORESIGHT STUDIES STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES AT THE URBAN AND REGIONAL LEVEL ?, José Miguel Fernández Güell , 2009, 3 citations, Foresight can complement and reinforce strategic planning processes at the urban and regional level.

⁹⁹ Foresight as a strategic planning and forecasting tool of sustainable development of rural areas, Евгений Стовба +5, Agrarian Bulletin of the, 2019, 2 citations, PDFDOI, The strategic priorities for rural areas development in the long term are defined in the rural municipal foresight.

¹⁰⁰ The foresight technologies as a tool for strategic planning of sustainable rural development, A. Askarov +2, IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environment, 2019, 1 citation, PDFDOI, The main directions of the introduction of digital technologies in rural areas and in the rural region are identified.

¹⁰¹ The foresight forecasting of social development in rural areas of the region, E. Stovba +4, SHS Web of Conferences, 2021, 0 citations, DOI, The foresight technologies should be used as a system tool for developing a strategy for sustainable development of rural territorial systems.

¹⁰² Foresight and the Long-Term View for Regional Development, J. Gavigan +1, 2001, 7 citations, Foresight methods have to adapt to a different and more critical combination of issues, contexts and stakeholder interests than those found nationally

¹⁰³ Foresight technology using in the strategic forecasting of human potential development of the region, Marina Kryvtsova , Socio-Economic Research Bulletin, 2020, 1 citation, DOI, The creation of appropriate socio-economic conditions for human potential formation is a major prerequisite for regional development.



operational opportunities¹⁰⁴. However, its use also raises important questions about democratic governance, as it requires broad participation and can be seen as a form of network governance¹⁰⁵.

Foresight is a core element of the PoliRuralPlus methodology, so a recent EU report is very relevant to the project¹⁰⁶. The report outlines the current state of the play in relation to institutionalised R&I foresight and proposes a way forward for extending and strengthening R&I foresight in government. It showcases exemplary R&I foresight practice and related strategic processes, structures and capacities at EU level and in participating countries and beyond. It draws on these country cases to provide a guidance towards a handbook on tailored tools and approaches for applying R&I foresight in a range of contemporary policy contexts, including smart specialisation, mission-oriented policy, citizen engagement and twin transition and disruptions. The Report recommends coordinated efforts between Member States and the EU to invest in the enabling conditions for enhanced R&I foresight in government, in particular futures literacy and related foresight studies

The report describes a Mutual Learning Exercise (MLE) that focussed on Research and Innovation (R&I) foresight which refers to foresight activities for and in R&I systems, including the disciplined analysis of alternative futures. In an uncertain, complex, and highly dynamic global environment, foresight has gained significance and particular relevance in the policy context. The interest and relevance of R&I foresight in support of policy at European and national level has grown in response to a number of important geopolitical, economic, technological, social, and environmental challenges. R&I foresight can prove an important vehicle for actions to cope with disruption, while disruption can provide the impetus for more anticipatory, future-proofed policies. This is especially relevant for rural-urban linkages. Foresight provides a creative space to unpack and explore the transformative potential of new ideas, technologies, and societal developments that can reshape existing policy frameworks and governance structures.

The MLE was set up at the request of a group of Member States (MS) with the underlying goal to identify and showcase exemplary R&I foresight practices and related strategic processes, structures, and capacities at EU level, MS level, and beyond. An important outcome of this exercise is the advancement of a form of R&I foresight that is tailored to governments and their strategic needs and context. The range of country examples and contexts captured through the MLE, highlights that foresight works and can deliver in response to specific government and public sector initiatives, including those related to smart specialisation, missions, partnerships, and citizen engagement. This has resulted in the drafting of this final report, which provides guidance towards the development of a handbook that should encourage, /inspire and facilitate the more systematic use of R&I foresight in a broader range of policy areas.

The report highlights the following main findings:

1. Foresight has developed and diffused widely and strongly in the public sector, at international, EU, and national level, becoming increasingly critical, in its broad application, for supporting anticipatory governance.
2. Foresight can address complex combinations of roles and impacts. This calls for clarity and consensus on its goals at the outset and a degree of expectation management is advisable.
3. In addressing these goals, foresight generates significant process benefits. Foresight plays a crucial role in initiating debates on the future, in providing intermediation between different stakeholders and ensuring a systematic approach to reflecting on long-term perspectives and respective actions. In co-designing and

¹⁰⁴ CAN FORESIGHT STUDIES STRENGTHEN STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES AT THE URBAN AND REGIONAL LEVEL ?, José Miguel Fernández Güell , 2009, 3 citations, Foresight can complement and reinforce strategic planning processes at the urban and regional level.

¹⁰⁵ Regional Foresight, Modes of Governance and Democracy, G. S. Hanssen +2, 2009, 19 citations, DOI, Foresight processes most closely resemble network governance as a general mode of governance.

¹⁰⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Cassingena Harper, J., *R&I foresight in government – A handbook for policymakers – Final report*, Cassingena Harper, J.(editor), Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/505702>, [R&I foresight in government - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/505702)



implementing transformative R&I policy, it is important to stress the power of collective foresight in generating new ideas and opportunities and building collaborative implementation initiatives.

4. Foresight has become increasingly embedded and institutionalised in the public sector. For R&I foresight, this also has impacts in terms of its positioning in the wider ecosystem of national and EU-level public sector foresight.

5. There has been a growing tendency towards the instrumentalisation of foresight. This refers to the capture and use of foresight by policymakers to serve their own needs and to fit their own agenda - There is an urgent need to ensure that core characteristics of foresight are preserved, especially the exploratory nature that provides an open space for reflection and co-creation. Foresight, including R&I foresight, should have a challenging function.

6. R&I foresight practitioners will need to sharpen their focus as they are increasingly in competition with other public sector foresight activities.

7. The history of national public sector foresight shows that even if it is institutionalised, R&I foresight regularly faces the risk of being downsized or discontinued. Given these experiences across EU MS, it is critical for R&I foresight projects to clearly demonstrate their benefits and focus on a sustainable form of foresight institutionalisation.

8. R&I foresight is being used in an impressive range of government contexts, policy domains and initiatives, as evidenced by the country examples (section II). On the one hand, it enhances or reinforces traditional functions of government: intelligence gathering, stakeholder and public consultations, consensus-building, stress-testing, and future-proofing of policies. However, foresight has a greater potential for government policymaking, in terms of process and content. In the MLE discussions, the pivotal role of foresight in underpinning transformative R&I policy was highlighted.

9. Emerging practices increasingly gaining importance include participatory and citizen engagement approaches, gaming and experiential approaches, Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based foresight, as well as integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches.

1. The key recommendations of the MLE are:

1. R&I foresight conducted for national government requires tailored foresight approaches, adapted to the national context.
2. The MLE has showcased the rich diversity of R&I foresight capacities and activities in governments in the participating countries. This can also provide an important basis for collaborative initiatives on R&I foresight, especially larger scale initiatives requiring shared investments.
3. The MLE has distilled a preliminary toolset, which is useful for policymakers. More needs to be done to refine this into a comprehensive toolkit and to keep it up to date.
4. The drive to extend institutionalised R&I foresight across Europe calls for a cautious mainstreaming of government R&I foresight at national and regional level and in key EU policy initiatives, in particular the EU Framework Programmes.
5. Develop an EU level capacity for scanning and tracking of signals of change and disruption.
6. Coordinated efforts are needed and joint actions be put in place enabling conditions, including building foresight competences at all levels in government, both at organisational and project level. This requires an EU-wide effort to promote futures literacy and foresight training at all levels of education, in order to advance future studies and research and to promote collaborative initiatives.
7. R&I Foresight depends on the vision of citizens and the expertise of scientists. To safeguard the public interest and common good, R&I foresight needs to provide a truly open space for dialogue, co-creation, and co-construction with key stakeholders. Collective foresight implies explicitly addressing the perspectives of citizens, science, and research institutions, as well as business and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

These are important for the PoliRuralPlus project in learning from and building on the study and MLE's recommendations, to better promote the use of R&I foresight to support rural-urban linkages in the EU, in a number of ways:

- Understand the role of R&I foresight in supporting anticipatory governance. The study highlights the importance of R&I foresight in helping governments to anticipate and prepare for future challenges and opportunities. This is especially important for rural-urban linkages, which are complex and dynamic.



- Develop tailored R&I foresight approaches. The study emphasises the need to tailor R&I foresight approaches to the specific needs and context of each government. This is particularly important for smaller MS and AC, which may have limited resources and expertise.
- Promote regular exchanges and interactions between governments. The study recommends regular exchanges and interactions between governments on R&I foresight. This will help to share knowledge, approaches, tools, and skills development. It will also provide a basis for collaborative initiatives.
- Develop a comprehensive R&I foresight toolkit. The study recommends the development of a comprehensive R&I foresight toolkit. This toolkit will be used by governments to implement effective R&I foresight practices.
- Support the institutionalisation of R&I foresight. The study recommends the institutionalisation of R&I foresight at national and regional levels. This will help to ensure that R&I foresight is used on a regular basis to support policymaking.
- Develop an EU level capacity for scanning and tracking signals of change and disruption. The study recommends the development of an EU level capacity for scanning and tracking signals of change and disruption. This will help governments to identify and prepare for future challenges and opportunities.
- Coordinate efforts within the European Research Area (ERA). The study recommends coordinated efforts within the ERA to take forward the MLE's work and recommendations. This will help to leverage joint EU and MS/AC investment in institutionalised R&I foresight.
- Promote future literacy and foresight training. The study recommends the promotion of future literacy and foresight training at all levels of education. This will help to advance future studies and research and to promote collaborative initiatives.
- Ensure that R&I foresight is inclusive and participatory. The study recommends that R&I foresight is inclusive and participatory. This means explicitly addressing the perspectives of citizens, science, and research institutions, as well as business and NGOs.
- Applying the recommendations of the study to the specific context of rural-urban linkages. The study provides a general overview of R&I foresight in government. The project work will develop more specific recommendations on how R&I foresight will be used to support rural-urban linkages.
- Developing case studies of R&I foresight initiatives that have been successful in supporting rural-urban linkages. The study provides a number of examples of R&I foresight initiatives in government. However, it does not specifically focus on R&I foresight initiatives that have been successful in supporting rural-urban linkages. The project work will develop case studies of these initiatives to provide more concrete examples of how R&I foresight will be used to support rural-urban linkages.

Disseminating the findings of the project work to a wider audience. The project work will disseminate its findings to a wider audience through publications, presentations, and other communication channels. This will help to raise awareness of the importance of R&I foresight in supporting rural-urban linkages and to promote the use of R&I foresight by governments.



Annex H EU Policies for its Rural and Urban Areas

The EU has established several policies and instruments that require better integrated urban and rural development if their objectives are to be met, including the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Rural Development Policy, Urban Agenda for the EU, European Innovation Partnership (EIP), Digital Agenda for Europe¹⁰⁷, Cohesion Policy, and European Green Deal. These policies recognize the need for integrated approaches and the importance of coordinated action across sectors to urban and rural development and highlight the interdependencies between rural and urban areas to achieve sustainable and equitable development.

Designing effective rural-urban linkages' policies requires a good understanding of the socioeconomic conditions that exist in urban and rural areas, which in turn depends on building a solid base of knowledge about people, their activities, communities, well-being and interaction with the environment. Reliable, timely and comparable datasets can only be produced on the basis of a coherent and harmonised methodology that delineates cities, urban and rural areas in a consistent manner. This article provides a general introduction detailing the principal statistical building blocks for compiling subnational statistics that can then be used to analyse a broad range of issues impacting rural areas, towns and suburbs, and cities of the European Union (EU)¹⁰⁸.

European policy background

European policymaking is inherently multidimensional: on the one hand, it has to encompass a broad framework providing objectives for the EU as a whole, while on the other it needs to acknowledge the often specific needs of national and subnational territories. Recent challenges such as the global financial and economic crisis, security concerns from terror attacks, the refugee crisis, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU (Brexit), the COVID-19 pandemic (and associated measures), the war in Ukraine, energy security or the cost-of-living crisis provide a few examples of the two-sided nature of delivering both EU-wide and local solutions in a coherent manner.

One of the EU's main challenges is to ensure that policy developments are scrutinised to ensure that they take account of the considerable geographical diversity within the EU. The territorial dimension of EU policy is increasingly recognised underlining the need to make the best use of all assets while ensuring that common resources are employed in a coordinated and sustainable way.

1. Cohesion policy

EU cohesion policy is designed to promote harmonious development within the EU by strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion. In doing so, it aims to promote job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth and [sustainable development](#), thereby improving the overall quality of life experienced by people in the EU.

During the period 2021–2027, the framework for regional development and cohesion policy provides support to all EU regions, while focusing on less developed regions. The policy targets five key investment priorities:

- smarter Europe, through innovation, digitalisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses;
- a greener, carbon-free Europe, implementing the [Paris Agreement](#) and investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change;
- a more connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks;
- a more social Europe, delivering on the [European pillar of social rights](#) and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare;

¹⁰⁷ [Digital agenda for Europe | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁰⁸ [Urban-rural Europe - introduction - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)



- a Europe closer to citizens, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

The total budget for cohesion policy and the rules associated with its allocation are jointly decided by the [Council](#) and the [European Parliament](#). A total of €377.5 [billion](#) allocated in the multiannual financial framework is available for programming between 2021 and 2027. A large part of this budget is provided to regions whose development lags behind the EU average, in particular less developed regions predominantly located in the south or the east of the EU, the Baltic Member States and several outermost regions.

Regional policy and funding help deliver many of the EU's overall policy objectives. Cohesion policy programming is embedded within overall economic policy coordination, in particular the [European Semester](#), the digital transition, [A European Green Deal](#) and the promotion of the [European pillar of social rights](#). These links between cohesion policy and broader reforms have been strengthened such that the European Commission may suspend regional funding to any EU Member State which does not comply with the EU's economic rules.

1.1 The future of EU Cohesion Policy

The Group of high-Level specialists on the future of Cohesion Policy, set up by Commissioner Elisa Ferreira to reflect on the future of Cohesion Policy, presented its Final Report on 20 February 2024. The Report "Forging a sustainable future together: Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe,"¹⁰⁹ identified the following key challenges facing the EU:

- **Economic Decline:** The EU's global economic share is shrinking, and many regions are experiencing stagnating growth or even decline.
- **Polarisation:** Economic growth is concentrated in a few urban centres, while many regions are stuck in development traps.
- **Lack of Opportunities:** Vulnerable groups (women, youth, elderly, minorities, etc.) face barriers to inclusion and opportunity.
- **Global Turbulence:** Deglobalization, geopolitical tensions, and technological disruptions like automation pose significant challenges.

Risks of Inaction

- **Economic Risks:** Failure to address these issues means Europe won't use its full potential, leading to economic decline.
- **Political Risks:** Growing discontent and a potential loss of faith in the EU project.
- **Risks to Fundamental Values:** Cohesion is the 'glue' that binds Europeans and ensures no one is left behind. Inaction risks undermining this cohesion.

Who Should Cohesion Policy Work With?

- **Build Synergies:** Cohesion Policy must work in concert with other EU policies (like the European Semester), as well as national initiatives. All policies must be coordinated for maximum impact.
- **The Green Transition:** Ensuring that vulnerable regions are not left behind in the shift to a greener economy.
- **Enlargement:** Supporting successful integration of future Member States, without compromising investment in existing regions.

What is Cohesion Policy?

- A systemic, dynamic policy to unlock Europe's untapped economic potential, especially in less developed areas.
- Promotes territorial fairness, addressing structural economic challenges across the EU.
- A borderless policy that builds bridges within the EU and with its external neighbors.

¹⁰⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/future-cohesion-policy_en



How Should Cohesion Policy Work?

- **Place-based:** Focused on the unique strengths and needs of each region. It aims to drive transformation and build future opportunities.
- **Builds Institutions and Connects:** emphasises capacity building, participation, and connecting people and regions to wider knowledge networks.
- **Improving Governance:** Strong institutions are key to effective policy and investment. Cohesion policy needs to prioritise improving governance across the EU.
- **Performance-Based and Simplified:** Streamlining procedures and focusing on results, while tailoring actions to the needs of specific territories.

1.2 Implications and recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

Based on this analysis PoliRuralPlus could contribute to cohesion by optimising rural-urban linkages in Europe as follows:

- **Focus on local strengths and potential:** PoliRuralPlus pilots should highlight unique rural assets (culture, natural resources, skills) that can create value for both rural and urban areas, moving away from a deficit-based approach to rural development.
- **Economic diversification and transformation:** Encourage rural regions to reinvent themselves. Pilots could focus on new business models, innovative agri-food systems, tourism, cultural industries, or the bioeconomy – these create linkages with urban needs and markets.
- **Investing in capacity and institutions:** Strong local governance and cooperation are key to making rural-urban linkages work. PoliRuralPlus can support training programs for officials, fostering networks between communities and facilitating participatory decision-making.
- **Access to knowledge and networks:** Facilitate connections between rural stakeholders and wider knowledge pools (universities, research centres, urban businesses). This helps introduce fresh ideas and potential partnerships.
- **Green Transition as opportunity:** Support rural initiatives in the transition toward renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, or eco-tourism. This aligns with the EU's focus and can create new linkages and value for both urban and rural areas.

The PoliRuralPlus pilots could address these, along with specific pilots' actions as follows:

1: Showcase place-based examples: PoliRuralPlus can document and promote successful projects that demonstrate different models of rural-urban linkage (e.g., short food supply chains, rural hubs for remote work, nature-based solutions jointly developed by urban and rural stakeholders).

- **Pilots as models:** Each pilot could serve as a case study of effective rural-urban linkages, focusing on the specific type of linkage they foster (e.g., circular economy, cultural exchange, service provision).
- **Knowledge sharing platform:** Create a PoliRuralPlus platform to highlight project profiles, success stories, lessons learned and best practices. This enables replication and adaptation by other regions.

2: Multi-stakeholder involvement: emphasise involving both rural and urban communities, businesses, and authorities in project design and implementation for genuine collaboration and shared benefits.

- **Participatory planning:** Pilots should actively engage rural and urban residents, businesses, NGOs, and local authorities throughout the project - from needs identification to implementation.
- **Identify urban counterparts:** Seek partnerships with specific urban communities, businesses, or entities that share common goals and could benefit from the linkage.

3: Focus on inclusivity: Projects should pay particular attention to marginalised groups in rural areas, ensuring they benefit equitably from new opportunities.

- **Target vulnerable groups:** Consider projects designed to increase economic opportunities for marginalised rural populations (youth, women, minorities), linking them to urban markets or support networks.



- **Accessibility:** Ensure physical and digital infrastructure is inclusive for all in the pilot regions to bridge the rural-urban divide.

4: Leverage EU policies: Cohesion Policy can provide funding, but PoliRuralPlus should also guide projects to synergise with other EU initiatives like the European Green Deal and programs focused on innovation and smart specialisation.

- **Funding alignment:** Map out relevant funding sources within Cohesion Policy, the Green Deal, and other EU initiatives that align with the pilot's goals. Proactively seek out these opportunities.
- **Smart specialisation alignment:** Identify how the pilot can contribute to the region's smart specialisation strategy, demonstrating added value and attracting potential support.

5: Data and Monitoring: Develop indicators and monitoring systems specifically focused on the benefits and impacts of rural-urban linkages for both sides, going beyond just GDP growth.

- **Establish shared indicators:** Collaborate with urban partners to define indicators that track mutual benefits, not just rural outcomes (e.g., increased market access for rural producers, reduced urban ecological footprint, improved quality of life in both areas).
- **Regular monitoring:** Implement a system to track these indicators and showcase the benefits of rural-urban cooperation.

In addition the project should consider:

- **Policy advocacy:** PoliRuralPlus could aggregate learnings from the pilots to advocate for policy changes at the EU level that better support rural-urban linkages.
- **Communication campaign:** Launch awareness-raising initiatives to promote the value of rural-urban cooperation and combat outdated stereotypes about rural areas.

1.2.1 PoliRuralPlus Contribution to EU Cohesion

The PoliRuralPlus project work will be driven by and contribute to EU Cohesion policy in a number of ways:

- The project will align with the five key investment priorities of EU Cohesion policy: smarter, greener, more connected, more social, and closer to citizens. For example, the project will support innovation and digital transformation in rural areas, invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency, improve transportation and digital infrastructure, support quality employment and education, and promote sustainable urban development.
- The project will contribute to the European Union's long-term vision for rural areas. The project will support the development of stronger, connected, resilient, and prosperous rural areas by addressing the challenges and concerns of rural communities and capitalising on the emerging opportunities of the green and digital transitions.
- The project will be implemented in close collaboration with stakeholders at all levels, including EU institutions, national and regional governments, local authorities, businesses, and civil society organisations. This will ensure that the project is well-aligned with the needs and priorities of rural communities and that its results are sustainable and impactful.

Some specific examples of how the project work will contribute to EU Cohesion policy:

- Support the development of smart rural communities. This will be done by investing in digital infrastructure, providing training on digital skills, and supporting the development of new digital businesses and services.
- Promote the transition to a green economy in rural areas. This will be done by supporting investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable agriculture.
- Improve access to quality services in rural areas. This will be done by investing in transportation and digital infrastructure, supporting the provision of healthcare and education services, and making public services more accessible online.



- Create jobs and support economic growth in rural areas. This will be done by supporting the development of new businesses and industries, attracting investment to rural areas, and providing support to entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- Empower rural communities and promote social inclusion. This will be done by supporting the development of rural civil society organisations, promoting participation in decision-making, and combating poverty and social exclusion.

By contributing to EU Cohesion policy, the project work will help to create stronger, more resilient, and more prosperous rural areas in the European Union.

2. Urban development policy in the EU

The various dimensions of urban life – economic, social, cultural and environmental – are closely interrelated. Successful urban developments are often based on coordinated/integrated approaches that seek to balance these dimensions through a range of policy measures such as urban renewal, increasing education opportunities, preventing crime, encouraging social inclusion or environmental protection.

At the end of May 2016, a meeting of ministers responsible for urban matters was held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It reached an agreement on an [Urban Agenda for the EU](#) as established by the [Pact of Amsterdam](#). This agreement sets out the development of 12 priority areas for partnerships between EU institutions, EU Member States, cities and other stakeholders. These priority areas are: the inclusion of migrants and refugees; air quality; urban poverty; housing; the circular economy; jobs and skills in the local economy; climate adaptation; energy transition; sustainable land use; urban mobility; digital transition; public procurement.

EU policymakers recognise the important role that may be played by the urban dimension of regional policy, in particular concerning measures designed to reduce poverty and social exclusion. In doing so, the urban dimension of cohesion policy will be strengthened during the period 2021–2027, with a minimum of 6 % of the [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#) dedicated to sustainable urban development strategies, alongside a new [European Urban Initiative \(EUI\)](#).

3. Rural development policy in the EU

The European Commission is implementing a [long-term vision for EU's rural areas](#) that aims for stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040. The vision comes with an [EU rural action plan](#), designed to help rural areas meet a wide range of economic, social and environmental challenges. Under this long-term vision, the European Commission has proposed [the Rural Pact](#), a framework for cooperation that facilitates interaction on rural matters between public authorities and stakeholders and invites them to act on [a set of 10 shared goals](#) of the rural vision and to help rural communities and businesses reach their full potential.

The [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development \(EAFRD\)](#) is intended to help develop farming and rural areas by providing a competitive and innovative stimulus at the same time as seeking to protect biodiversity and the natural environment. There are six priority areas, namely to promote: knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture and forestry; the viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture and support sustainable forest management; the organisation of the food production chain, animal welfare and risk management in farming; the restoration, preservation and enhancement of agricultural and forest ecosystems; the efficient use of natural resources and support the transition to a low-carbon economy; social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

At the end of 2021, a political agreement was reached on a [new common agricultural policy for the period 2023–2027](#). This legislation aims to make the [common agricultural policy \(CAP\)](#) more responsive to future challenges, while continuing to support EU farmers within a sustainable and competitive agricultural sector. The new policy is



built around 10 key objectives that are focused on social, environmental and economic goals: ensure a fair income for farmers; increase competitiveness; improve the position of farmers in the food chain; climate change action; environmental care; preserve landscapes and biodiversity; support generational renewal; vibrant rural areas; protect food and health quality; foster knowledge and innovation.

EuroStat “Key figures on the European food chain”¹¹⁰

Key figures on the European food chain provide a selection of recent data from the domains of agriculture and fisheries statistics, as well as the wider farm to fork chain. The publication is divided into ten chapters, providing facts and figures about farms, farmers, farm production and prices, the economic performance of the agricultural sector, fisheries activities, food and beverages processing, trade, distribution, wholesale activities and the consumption of food and beverages. It concludes with a chapter on environmental issues related to some of the stages of the food chain. It presents key messages for the EU, and highlights the main players and key specialisations, accompanying analysis with intuitive visualisations and innovative data presentations. Information is presented for the European Union (EU) and its Member States, and is supplemented (when available) with data for EFTA members

Following the allocation of the EU’s long-term budget – the multiannual financial framework (2021–2027) – a [transitional regulation](#) intended to ensure continued support for agriculture, forestry and rural areas was agreed concerning funding for 2021 and 2022. This extends most of the rules relating to the CAP that were in place during the 2014–2020 period, while also including new elements to encompass stronger green ambitions. In total, some €387 billion of funding has been allocated to the CAP for the period 2021–2027. This comes from two different funds: €291 billion from the European agricultural guarantee fund (EAGF) and €96 billion from the [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development \(EAFRD\)](#).

3.1 Long Term Vision for EU Rural Areas

The European Commission has put forward a [long-term vision for the EU's rural areas](#)¹¹¹, identifying the challenges and concerns that they are facing, as well as highlighting some of the most promising opportunities that are available to these regions. Based on foresight and wide consultations with citizens and other actors in rural areas, the EU Vision proposes a Rural Pact and a Rural Action Plan, which aim to make our rural areas stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous¹¹².

To successfully respond to the megatrends and challenges posed by globalisation, urbanisation, ageing and to reap the benefits of the green and digital transitions, place-sensitive policies and measures are needed that take into the account the diversity of EU's territories, their specific needs and relative strengths.

In rural areas across the EU the population is on average older than in urban areas, and will slowly start to shrink in the coming decade¹¹³. When coupled with a lack of connectivity, underdeveloped infrastructure, and absence of diverse employment opportunities and limited access to services, this makes rural areas less attractive to live and work in. At the same time, rural areas are also active players in the EU's green and digital transitions. Reaching the targets of the EU's digital ambitions for 2030 can provide more opportunities for the sustainable development of rural areas beyond agriculture, farming and forestry, developing new perspectives for the growth of manufacturing and especially services and contributing to improved geographical distribution of services and industries.

This long-term Vision for the EU's rural areas aims to address those challenges and concerns, by building on the emerging opportunities of the EU's green and digital transitions and on the lessons learnt from the COVID 19

¹¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/15216629/18054337/KS-FK-23-001-EN-N.pdf/048e130f-79fa-e870-6c46-d80c9408620b?t=1706540737399&download=true>

¹¹¹ [Home \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹¹² [Long-term vision for rural areas \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹¹³ [Rural areas in numbers \(europa.eu\)](#)



pandemic, and by identifying means to improve rural quality of life, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth.

The [Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas](#) for stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas in the EU.

EU's rural areas cover 83% of the EU territory and are home to 30% of the EU population. In 2021, the European Commission presented [its Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas](#), identifying the challenges and concerns that they are facing as well as the many opportunities available to them. In addition to all [the EU funds](#) contributing to supporting prosperous rural areas, the vision relies for its implementation on two pillars that complement each other: the [Rural Action Plan](#) and the [Rural Pact](#). The Action Plan puts forward **four areas of action** for the European Commission to prompt **stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous** EU rural areas. The [Rural Pact](#) is a framework for cooperation among authorities and stakeholders willing to act for rural development at the European, national, regional and local level.

Detailed statistics and analyses on the EU rural areas, covering economic, social and environmental aspects, are available on the [Rural Observatory](#).

3.2 EU Rural Action Plan

The Commission has also put forward an Action Plan to prompt sustainable, cohesive and integrated rural development. Several EU policies already provide support to rural areas, contributing to their balanced, fair, green and innovative development. Among those, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Cohesion Policy will be fundamental in supporting and implementing this Action Plan, while being accompanied by a number of other EU policy areas that together will turn this Vision into a reality.

The Vision and Action Plan identify four areas of action, supported by flagship initiatives, to enable:

- **Stronger:** focus on empowering rural communities, improving access to services and facilitating social innovation;
- **Connected:** to improve connectivity both in terms of transport and digital access;
- **Resilient:** preserving natural resources and greening farming activities to counter climate change while also ensuring social resilience through offering access to training courses and diverse quality job opportunities;
- **Prosperous:** to diversify economic activities and improve the value added of farming and agri-food activities and agri-tourism.

The Commission will support and monitor the implementation of the EU Rural Action Plan and update it on a regular basis to ensure that it remains relevant. It will also continue to liaise with Member States and rural actors to maintain a dialogue on rural issues. Furthermore, “**rural proofing**” will be put in place whereby EU policies are reviewed through a rural lens. The aim is to better identify and take into consideration the potential impact and implication of a Commission policy initiative on rural jobs, growth and sustainable development.

Finally, a **rural observatory** will be set up within the Commission to further improve data collection and analysis on rural areas. This will provide evidence to inform policy-making in relation to rural development and support the implementation of the Rural Action Plan.

3.2.1 Review of the EU Rural Action Plan

A COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT “Taking stock of the implementation of the EU rural action plan (2021-2023)” was published in March 2024.

The report highlights the importance of revitalising rural areas in the European Union and addressing the key challenges they face. The challenges it Identified include :

- **Demographic Decline & Depopulation:** Many rural areas struggle with population loss, ageing communities, and limited economic opportunities.
- **Limited Access to Services:** Rural populations often experience reduced access to essential services like healthcare, education, and transportation.



- Inequalities in Socioeconomic Development: Rural areas may lag in terms of income levels, job growth, and overall prosperity compared to urban centres.
- Digital Divide: Rural communities often have slower or less reliable internet connectivity, hindering digitization efforts.
- Vulnerability to Climate Change: The impacts of climate change disproportionately affect rural areas reliant on agriculture and natural resources.

The report reinforces the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to rural development, emphasising the crucial role of strong urban-rural linkages. PoliRuralPlus, with its focus on data analysis, best practice sharing, and collaborative tools, is well-positioned to support regional stakeholders in optimising these linkages for the benefit of both rural and urban areas.

3.2.1.2 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

The report underscores the following areas where the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and tools can be especially significant for regional action plans focused on urban-rural linkages:

1. **Data-Driven Revitalisation:**
 - **Challenge:** Limited data on rural trends hampers effective policymaking.
 - **PoliRuralPlus Response:** Provide regional stakeholders with granular data on demographics, economic indicators, and service availability to tailor revitalisation strategies and address depopulation.
2. **Bridging Service Gaps:**
 - **Challenge:** Rural areas need innovative solutions to ensure essential service provision.
 - **PoliRuralPlus Response:** Showcase best practices in telemedicine, e-learning, and shared service models that can work in rural-urban partnerships.
3. **Strengthening Rural-Urban Economic Ties:**
 - **Challenge:** Rural areas may be isolated from urban markets and value chains.
 - **PoliRuralPlus Response:** analyse supply chains and identify opportunities for collaboration between rural producers and urban consumers, facilitating short supply chains and local markets.
4. **Enhancing Rural-Urban Connectivity:**
 - **Challenge:** Improving transportation links and digital infrastructure.
 - **PoliRuralPlus Response:** Map areas of weak connectivity, highlight funding opportunities for broadband development, and explore innovative rural mobility solutions.
5. **Climate Resilience and Rural-Urban Collaboration:**
 - **Challenge:** Mitigating climate risks and pursuing sustainable rural development.
 - **PoliRuralPlus Response:** Promote examples of rural-urban cooperation on renewable energy initiatives, resource management, and climate-smart agriculture.

Specific Actions from the Report that PoliRuralPlus could Support

- **Rural Revitalisation Platform:** PoliRuralPlus can be a dissemination channel for this platform, ensuring regional stakeholders are aware of the resources and networking opportunities it offers.
- **Research & Innovation for Rural Communities:** PoliRuralPlus can share project outcomes and best practices from Horizon Europe, focusing on those relevant to rural-urban linkages.
- **Startup Village Forum:** PoliRuralPlus can connect regional players with learnings from this forum to foster entrepreneurship that benefits rural-urban connections.
- **LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages Networking:** PoliRuralPlus can create a tailored interface for stakeholders involved in these initiatives, promoting knowledge sharing across regions on rural-urban focused actions.

3.3 Horizon Europe projects on rural areas and rural communities

The report lists the following Horizon Europe projects on rural areas and rural communities (including PoliRuralPlus). As well as providing a context for PoliRuralPlus, these active projects could be good collaboration partners for PoliRuralPlus and its work.

Project acronym	Project title	CORDIS Factsheet
Cluster 2: "Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society"		
ReSChape	REshaping Supply CHAins for Positive social impact	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061729
TWIN SEEDS	Towards a World Integrated and Socio-economically Balanced European Economic Development Scenario	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101056793
RETHINK-GSC	Rethinking Global Supply Chains: measurement, impact and policy	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061123
EXIT	Exploring sustainable strategies to counteract territorial inequalities from an intersectional approach	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061122
Maplneq	Mapping inequalities through the life course	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061645
IN SITU	Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061747
MOBI-TWIN	Twin transition and changing patterns of spatial mobility: a regional approach	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101094402
Re-Place	Reframing non-metropolitan left behind places through mobility and alternative development	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101094087
PREMIUM_EU	Policy REcommendations to Maximise the beneficial Impact of Unexplored Mobilities in and beyond the European Union	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101094345
Cluster 5: "Climate, Energy and Mobility"		
PYRAGRAF	Decentralised pyrolytic conversion of agriculture and forestry wastes towards local circular value chains and sustainability	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101114608
VALUE4FARM	Sustainable renewable energy VALUE chains for answering FARMers' needs	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101116076
ECOLOOP	Ecoloop	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101118127
Cluster 6 "Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment"		
GRANULAR	Giving Rural Actors Novel data and re-Useable tools to Lead public Action in Rural areas	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061068
RUSTIK	Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061051
RURALITIES	Climate smart, ecosystem-enhancing and knowledge-based rural expertise and training centres	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060876
XGain	Enhancing Competitiveness, Resilience and Sustainability of Remote Farming, Forestry and Rural Areas through Holistic Assessment of Smart XG, Last-mile and Edge Solutions' Gains	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060294



COMNECT	Bridging the digital divide and addressing the need of Rural Communities with Cost-effective and Environmental-Friendly Connectivity Solutions	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060881
FLIARA	FLIARA: Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084234
Grass Ceiling	Gender Equality in Rural and Agricultural Innovation Systems	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101083408
SWIFT	Supporting Women-led Innovations in Farming and rural Territories	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084561
SafeHabitus	Strengthening farm health and safety knowledge and innovation systems	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084270
FUTURAL	Empowering the future through innovative smart solutions for rural areas.	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101083958
RURACTIVE	Empowering rural communities to act for change	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084377
SMART ERA	SMART community-led transition for Europe's Rural Areas	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084160
TRANS-Lighthouses	More than green - Lighthouses of transformative nature-based solutions for inclusive communities	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084628
COEVOLVERS	Coevolutionary approach to unlock the transformative potential of nature-based solutions for more inclusive and resilient communities	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084220
NATURESCAPES	Naturescapes: nature-based solutions for climate resilient, nature positive and socially just communities in diverse landscapes	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084341
ESIRA	Enhancing Social Innovation in Rural Areas	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101136253
SERIGO	Social Economy for Resilience, Inclusion and Good life in Rural areas	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101136899
RURBANIVE	Rural-urban synergies emerged in an immersive innovation ecosystem	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101136597
PoliRuralPlus	Fostering Sustainable, Balanced, Equitable, Place-based and Inclusive Development of Rural-Urban Communities' Using Specific Spatial Enhanced Attractiveness Mapping ToolBox	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101136910
RIBES	Regional Inclusive Biobased Entrepreneurship Solutions	https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101134911

3.4 EU Rural Pact: A collective effort to empower rural communities

A new Rural Pact will engage actors at EU, national, regional and local level, to support the shared goals of the Vision, foster economic, social and territorial cohesion and respond to the common aspirations of rural communities. The Commission will facilitate this framework through existing networks, and encourage the exchange of ideas and best practices at all levels.



3.5 The Rural Pact and LEADER: mutually reinforcing instruments¹¹⁴

How can the EU Rural Vision and Rural Pact strengthen LEADER? And what is the added value LEADER can bring to the Pact's implementation at the local level? Explore the outcomes of our session at the LEADER Congress of December 2023.

A thematic session during the recent LEADER Congress (18-19 December 2023) explored ways in which the EU Rural Vision and Rural Pact can strengthen LEADER and Local Action Groups (LAGs), as well as the added value LEADER can bring to the Pact's implementation at the local level.

The session, jointly organised by the [Rural Pact Support Office](#) and the European Commission's DG AGRI, highlighted the mutual benefits of collaboration between Rural Pact and LEADER actors. By harnessing the potential of LEADER, the Pact can enhance its recognition at national and EU levels, while LEADER can leverage the Pact to bolster its visibility and effectiveness in addressing rural challenges.

The value of the Rural Pact for LEADER

Despite being a new framework, the [Rural Pact](#) has the potential to raise the visibility and profile of rural issues and local actors, enhancing recognition of LAG initiatives and mobilising support around shared values. Giving more weight to LEADER in EU and national policy agendas, the Pact is well placed to bring new energy to both LAGs and the rural communities they support.

In practical terms, the Pact could contribute to improved planning of funding sources for rural areas, thus facilitating local strategy development.

LEADER contribution to Rural Pact implementation

A well-established and successful instrument, LEADER could bring the Pact to the local level. LAGs and their national or regional networks can provide support by animating stakeholders and disseminating information, thus mobilising local communities to implement actions that contribute to the Rural Pact.

LAGs could further contribute to stronger rural development policies at the regional, national, and EU levels by highlighting innovative solutions and up-to-date information on rural areas.

National and regional dimensions of the Rural Pact

The session highlighted two examples illustrating the translation of the Rural Pact into national and regional contexts:

- The [Catalan Rural Pact](#) emphasised the importance of involving LAGs and regional networks for engaging local stakeholders and achieving multi-level governance in the building process of Rural Pacts.
- The [French Rural Agenda](#) demonstrated the contribution of LEADER to the development of new tools for French territories, such as a platform consolidating all available aids and funds.

¹¹⁴ [The Rural Pact and LEADER: mutually reinforcing instruments | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\), https://www.moving-h2020.eu/news/eu-rural-pact-a-collective-effort-to-empower-rural-communities/?fbclid=IwAR3r4wcppEhsGUlqK6-cEtellgx2MReM3TkPJDj3fXXQalVeVYgp2Xh-qNI](https://www.moving-h2020.eu/news/eu-rural-pact-a-collective-effort-to-empower-rural-communities/?fbclid=IwAR3r4wcppEhsGUlqK6-cEtellgx2MReM3TkPJDj3fXXQalVeVYgp2Xh-qNI)



3.5.1 European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) statement re Rural Development¹¹⁵

The LEADER program keeps showing great interest in innovative responses to needs in rural areas across the European Union. More than ever, LEADER and, more generally, local development led by local players appear to be one of the answers for a Europe closer to its citizens. The 2023 LEADER European Congress was a great opportunity to recall the importance of the LEADER program for democracy in Europe and for all rural areas.

To reinforce the program's power, there is a need for simplification. It is also important to keep in mind that cooperation, which is at the heart of the program, is a vector for mutual enrichment and makes our projects grow.

During her 2023 State of the Union Address, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the launch of a Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture in the European Union. Further details on the scope of the European Commission's Strategic Dialogue were set out in President von der Leyen's opening speech of the EU Agri-Food Days on 6 December.

This Dialogue will allow to listen to the concerns from across the agri-food chain, the environment and rural areas. By combining different perspectives from various actors, the Dialogue aims to bring about new solutions and to cultivate a common vision for the future of agriculture in Europe.

Represented by its President Mr. Thibaut Guignard, ELARD was one of the 30 organisations which were invited to this meeting, on the 25th of January.

After having highlighted that without agriculture, there are no vibrant rural areas, and without vibrant rural areas, there will be no farmers anymore, Thibaut Guignard talked about the importance to have generational renewal, an European rural strategy, and a coherence between funding and strategy. This is what was asked by almost 700 rural stakeholders during the European LEADER Congress last December in Brussels.

During his speech, the president of ELARD emphasised that rural areas should be taken into account as a whole in European policies, and not only agriculture. Indeed, new activities, services and culture should be developed in rural areas to attract new and young farmers. He recalled that local development strategies implemented through LEADER are a key and, generally, the only tool used in CAP strategic plans to address the multiple needs.

The importance of having an European rural strategy was also reminded, despite the fact that it has already been mentioned and asked by the European Institutions several times in meetings and resolutions.

Finally, he underlined the deep need to reinforce the financial support for rural areas to address all the challenges.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is currently drafting its own initiative opinion on "Future of the Common Agricultural Policy " in view of the launch of the structured dialogue on the future of agriculture. The CoR own-initiative opinion is seeking to enable local and regional authorities to make a contribution to the design of the future legislative framework tailored to their needs and expectations.

The agreed timetable for the adoption of the opinion is as follows:

- Exchange of views at the NAT meeting on the 5th February 2024;
- First discussion and adoption of the draft opinion at the NAT meeting on the 22nd of March;
- Adoption at the plenary session of 19-20 June 2024.

In order to better understand the needs and expectations, the co-rapporteurs Isilda Maria Prazeres Gomes (PES/PT), Mayor of Portimão and Piotr Całbecki (EPP/PL) and President of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region asked the views of key stakeholders.

¹¹⁵ https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/good-practices_en



The working document highlights that additional efforts are needed, and shows the main challenges for local and regional authorities, which are :

- Strengthening the key role played by regional authorities in managing and implementing the CSPs;
- Maintaining agriculture and farmers in all territories to keep vibrant rural areas;
- Supporting the overall social and economic development of rural areas;
- Supporting the transition of the European food and agricultural system to achieve farm-to-fork goals.

ELARD contributed to the stakeholder consultation and sent its comments.

An EU-level webinar was organised by LDnet on behalf of AEIDL and the other REBOUND partners on the 23rd of January to talk about rural resilience, but also to present the REBOUND project (an ERASMUS + project).

This online event presented key concepts and models for rural resilience, practical experience based on case studies, as well as tools and practices to foster rural resilience.

Participants from the training courses, set-up by the REBOUND project, shared their experiences.

Panel discussions with several speakers were also organised. Speakers and panellists of the webinar included EP members, ELARD representatives, REBOUND researchers, project members, and local development experts.

ELARD stated how much the concept of rural resilience in local development is important. After explaining why LEADER is in itself a resilient program, ELARD mentioned the role played by LEADER in fostering the resilience of rural communities. The importance of LAGs was of course recalled.

3.5.1.2 Key Recommendations for optimising Urban-Rural Linkages in PoliRuralPlus from the LEADER Congress Declaration:

1. Strengthen the LEADER/CLLD approach:

- **Mandatory budget lines and targets:** Emphasise the value of the bottom-up approach and unlock LEADER's potential in territorial cohesion, green and digital transitions, and community development.
- **Financial support:** Ensure adequate funding with simplified procedures to implement the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and monitoring systems.
- **Community-led development:** Recognize Local Action Groups (LAGs) as essential partners and actively involve them in governance and policy making.

2. Enhance territorial connections:

- **Multi-sectoral approach:** Encourage territorial and inter-fund approaches based on LEADER principles to increase overall EU financial support for rural development.
- **Networking and knowledge sharing:** Facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange between rural and urban communities through LAGs.
- **Joint strategies and projects:** Support joint urban-rural strategies and projects addressing shared challenges and opportunities, aligned with PoliRuralPlus objectives.

3. Simplify administration and reporting:

- **Reduce bureaucracy:** Streamline implementation and management procedures of LEADER/CLLD programs for LAGs and beneficiaries.
- **Harmonisation:** Ensure consistent application of regulations across member states to avoid gold-plating and administrative burdens.
- **Capacity building:** Provide training and support to LAGs and rural stakeholders on simplified reporting and administrative procedures.

4. Leverage digital tools and platforms:



- **Develop online platforms:** Facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and joint project development between urban and rural actors through digital tools.
- **Promote e-commerce and digital marketing:** Support rural businesses in accessing online markets and connecting with urban consumers.
- **Bridge the digital divide:** Invest in broadband infrastructure and digital skills development in rural areas to enable equal participation in the digital economy.

5. Advocate for policy coherence and integration:

- **Align urban and rural development policies:** Ensure coherence between national and EU policies to promote balanced territorial development and address urban-rural inequalities.
- **Promote rural-urban partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between urban and rural authorities, research institutions, and civil society organisations.
- **Monitor and evaluate:** Regularly assess the impact of urban-rural linkages initiatives and adapt policies based on evidence and stakeholder feedback.

By implementing these recommendations, PoliRuralPlus can contribute to building stronger, more inclusive, and resilient rural-urban partnerships, unlocking the full potential of rural areas and fostering sustainable development across Europe.

3.6 Rural vision ten shared goals¹¹⁶

The ten shared goals of the rural vision are the common aspirations of rural communities and stakeholders on how they wish EU’s rural areas to be in 2040.

These aspirations emerged from the numerous conversations held with a wide range of people from very diverse rural areas. They are the common ground on which the vision is built, the goals that both the EU rural action plan and the rural pact seek to achieve.

1. *Attractive spaces, developed in harmonious territorial development, unlocking their specific potential, making them places of opportunity and providing local solutions to help tackle the local effects of global challenges.*
2. *Engaged in multi-level and place-based governance, developing integrated strategies using collaborative and participatory approaches, benefitting from tailor-made policy mixes and interdependencies between urban and rural areas.*
3. *Providers of food security, economic opportunities, goods and services for wider society, such as bio-based materials and energy but also local, community-based high-quality products, renewable energy, retaining a fair share of the value generated.*
4. *Dynamic communities focusing on well-being, including livelihoods, fairness, prosperity and quality of life, where all people live and work well together, with adequate capacity for mutual support.*
5. *Inclusive communities of inter-generational solidarity fairness and renewal, open to newcomers and fostering equal opportunities for all.*
6. *Flourishing sources of nature, enhanced by and contributing to the objectives of the Green Deal, including climate neutrality, as well as sustainable management of natural resources.*
7. *Fully benefiting from digital innovation with equal access to emerging technologies, widespread digital literacy and opportunities to acquire more advanced skills.*
8. *Entrepreneurial, innovative and skilled people, co-creating technological, ecological and social progress.*
9. *Lively places equipped with efficient, accessible and affordable public and private services, including cross border services, providing tailored solutions (such as transport, education, training, health and care, including long-term care, social life and retail business).*
10. *Places of diversity, making the most out of their unique assets, talents and potential.*

¹¹⁶ [Shared goals \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)



3.7 Interreg Europe Programme¹¹⁷

The Interreg Europe program helps people in different regions of Europe share solutions with each other. It does this by funding projects and providing a platform for people to connect. Some of the resources the program offers include project ideas, good practices, and a policy learning platform.

3.7.1 Learnings for PoliRuralPlus:

- Collaboration and knowledge sharing: Interreg Europe emphasises collaboration and knowledge sharing between different regions. PoliRuralPlus can learn from this by promoting collaboration between its pilot regions and facilitating the sharing of best practices.
- Funding opportunities: Interreg Europe provides funding for projects that promote cooperation and innovation. PoliRuralPlus can explore the possibility of applying for Interreg Europe funding to support its pilot projects.
- Policy learning: Interreg Europe offers a platform for policy learning. PoliRuralPlus can use this platform to learn from other regions' experiences in developing and implementing rural development policies.
- For instance a webinar that the program had on Smart Villages¹¹⁸, discussed what Smart Villages are and the challenges they face. It also details solutions and funding opportunities with a key learning for PoliRuralPlus that Smart Villages should be community-driven and use a participatory approach. They should also be built on existing initiatives and funds.

4. Energy challenges in rural and urban areas across the EU

The European Commission recently published a series of recommendations on measures and policies that can be adopted by EU countries to tackle energy poverty. These include good practices for structural improvements that Member States can take to address the root causes of energy poverty. Investments into structural measures to tackle the low energy performance of homes and appliances are also highlighted. Other measures include providing clear information on energy bills and energy-saving practices and encouraging citizens to join energy communities or shift towards renewable energy solutions.

Energy poverty affects citizens across every EU country. In 2022, high energy prices together with the cost-of-living crisis meant that an estimated 9.3% of Europeans were unable to keep their homes adequately warm, compared to 6.9% in 2021. Recognising the need for even more coordinated action to counter the trend, the Commission has today published a series of recommendations on measures and policies that can be adopted by EU countries to tackle [energy poverty](#). Protecting vulnerable citizens and ensuring that Europe's energy transition is fair and just is a cornerstone of the [European Green Deal](#).

Investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy are among the structural measures included in today's [Recommendation](#). These measures are designed to have a long-lasting impact, addressing the root causes of energy poverty such as the low energy performance of homes and household appliances, high energy expenditure in proportion to household budgets and lower income levels (exacerbated by inflation). The recommendations are accompanied by a [Staff Working Document](#) which contains a more detailed analysis of the recommended measures. Following the recently adopted revision of the [Energy Efficiency Directive](#) which includes, for the first time, an EU-wide definition of energy poverty, the Recommendation also outlines how energy poverty can be diagnosed at national level.

Both documents point to the [National Energy and Climate Plans](#) (NECPs), as well as The Social Climate Plans, as opportunities for EU countries to reflect today's recommendations in their policy framework to combat energy poverty. The EU legal framework requires that energy poverty is identified and tackled in the National Energy and

¹¹⁷ <https://www.interregeurope.eu>

¹¹⁸ www.interregeurope.eu/find-policy-solutions/webinar/key-learnings-of-the-webinar-on-smart-villages



Climate Plan (NECP) of each EU country, due to be updated in 2024. EU countries must draft and submit their Social Climate Plans to the Commission by 30 June 2025 in order to avail of the [Social Climate Fund](#).

The publication of the Recommendation and Staff Working Document follows extensive consultations carried out by the Commission with Member States and with stakeholders including consumer and civil society organisations, trade unions, anti-poverty groups, social housing providers, environmental campaigners, health organisations, energy cooperatives and energy providers.

This initiative was accompanied by the renewal of the [Joint Declaration on enhanced consumer protection for the winter](#), originally [signed in December 2022](#). With the support of the Commission, key stakeholders representing consumers, regulators, energy suppliers and distributors pledged to respect common principles and adopt measures, going beyond existing legislation, to support households throughout the 2022-23 winter. Although wholesale energy prices have decreased from the highs reached during last winter, vulnerable customers and those in energy poverty continue to face difficulty paying bills and the cost of living remains high. Therefore, stakeholders have agreed to renew the Joint Declaration for the 2023-2024 winter¹¹⁹.

4.1 Learnings for PoliRuralPlus

In December 2023, the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) issued two opinions on the rural challenges of the energy crisis and youth empowerment¹²⁰. The main learning's for the PoliRuralPlus project are as follows:

1. **Empowering youth is crucial for rural development.** The EESC's opinion on the role of youth in rural development highlights the importance of engaging young people in decision-making processes and providing them with opportunities to participate in rural life. The PoliRuralPlus project can support this by providing training and mentorship opportunities for young people in rural areas, as well as by creating spaces for them to connect and share ideas.
2. **Addressing the energy crisis is essential for rural resilience.** The EESC's opinion on the impact of high energy prices on the agricultural sector and rural areas emphasise s the need to develop sustainable energy solutions and to provide financial assistance to rural communities. The PoliRuralPlus project can contribute to this by supporting the development of renewable energy projects in rural areas, as well as by providing information and training on energy efficiency measures.
3. **Collaboration between stakeholders is key to achieving rural goals.** Both opinions emphasise the importance of collaboration between different stakeholders, including policymakers, businesses, civil society organisations, and local communities. The PoliRuralPlus project can facilitate collaboration by creating platforms for dialogue and exchange, as well as by providing support for joint projects.
4. **Data and evidence are essential for informed decision-making.** Both opinions call for a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing rural areas. The PoliRuralPlus project can contribute to this by collecting and analyzing data on rural development, as well as by producing evidence-based policy recommendations.
5. **Innovation and diversification are important for rural resilience.** Both opinions highlight the need for rural areas to diversify their economies and to embrace innovation. The PoliRuralPlus project can support this by promoting entrepreneurship and supporting the development of new products and services.

5. Nature Based Solutions (NBS)

The ambition of research and innovation policy is to position the EU as leader in innovating with nature to achieve more sustainable and resilient societies.

¹¹⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/representations/redirection/link/804620/en/mainUR>

¹²⁰ [Youth empowerment and the energy crisis – Two new EESC opinions on rural challenges | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)



The Commission defines nature-based solutions¹²¹ as

“Solutions that are inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience. Such solutions bring more, and more diverse, nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes, through locally adapted, resource-efficient and systemic interventions.”

Nature-based solutions must therefore benefit biodiversity and support the delivery of a range of ecosystem services.

Nature-based solutions support major EU policy priorities, in particular the European Green Deal, biodiversity strategy and climate adaptation strategy, as a way to foster biodiversity and make Europe more climate-resilient¹²². The Commission actively pursues policy dialogues and outreach initiatives at EU and global level to foster engagement, develop a broad knowledge base and stimulate market supply and demand.

Current policy goals

- provide the evidence for nature-based solutions
- improve framework conditions for nature-based solutions at EU policy level
- develop a European research and innovation community
- advance the development, uptake and upscale of innovative nature-based solutions
- mainstream nature-based solutions in international research and innovation

The EC defines NBS as “solutions that are inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience; such solutions bring more, and more diverse, nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes, through locally adapted, resource-efficient and systemic interventions.” It further emphasise s that “nature-based solutions must benefit biodiversity and support the delivery of a range of ecosystem services.”¹²³

Reports

1. 28 April 2022, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
 - [The vital role of nature-based solutions in a nature positive economy](#)^{EN•••}
 - A first step in addressing knowledge gaps in the potential economic benefits of Nature-Based Solutions and the challenges facing Nature Based Enterprises
2. 30 August 2021, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
 - [Evaluating the impact of nature-based solutions](#)^{EN•••}
 - A summary for policy makers
3. 15 April 2021, [Nature-based solutions in Europe: European Environment Agency report](#)^{EN•••},
 - European Environment Agency report on policy, knowledge and practice for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction
4. 16 October 2020, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, [Public procurement of nature-based solutions](#)^{EN•••}, Addressing barriers to the procurement of urban NBS : case studies and recommendations
5. 13 July 2020, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, [Biodiversity and nature-based solutions](#)^{EN•••}, Analysis of EU-funded projects
6. 1 February 2020, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, [Municipal Governance for Nature-based Solutions](#)^{EN•••}, Executive summary of the Unalab municipal governance guidelines (August 2019)
7. 22 October 2019, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, [The EU–Brazil sector dialogue on nature-based solutions](#)^{EN•••}, Contribution to a Brazilian roadmap on nature-based solutions for resilient cities

¹²¹ [Nature-based solutions \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹²² [Research policy \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹²³ [Nature-based solutions - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)



8. 14 June 2023, [The European Commission welcomes the EIB report on financing Nature-based Solutions](#),
The EIB report on financing Nature-based Solutions (NBS) is an important step forward in investing in NBS to address the climate and biodiversity crisis

5.1 Nature-based solutions: state of the art in EU-funded projects

Summary of outcomes from the Commission individual expert reports delivered through its 'Valorisation of NBS Projects' initiative. 23 December 2020, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation

This document summarises outcomes from the Commission individual expert reports delivered through its 'Valorisation of NBS Projects' initiative. EU research and innovation projects were scanned for results pertaining to key areas such as biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation (including flooding), water quality, air quality and microclimate, sustainable communities, innovative governance and business models, and market challenges and solutions. Evidence from the reviewed projects (and the EC's NBS policy topic area) is framed within knowledge from the wider literature, to give as full a picture as possible about the state of the art.

Contextualised information is provided on policy developments, research results and key lessons. The resulting evidence base includes figures and monetary values showing the relative cost-effectiveness of NBS, and exploring how they support policy implementation. Policy recommendations and knowledge gaps are also highlighted to support the strengthening of strategies and practical action for the uptake of NBS, to deliver targeted and efficient interventions to help solve societal challenges in Europe and beyond.

Evidence from reviewed projects is framed within knowledge from the literature to give a fuller picture of the state of the art, showing how NBS can address a series of societal challenges. Contextualised information is provided on relevant policies, research results and key lessons. The resulting knowledge base includes figures and monetary values showing the relative cost-effectiveness of NBS and exploring how they support EU policy implementation.

Urban and rural communities alike rely heavily on 'conventional' infrastructures and systems for water supply, heating, lighting, drainage, cooling and other services such as places to meet or relax. The evidence is that several of these older systems and technologies may no longer be fit for purpose in the light of global changes whose impacts are being felt with increasing severity and frequency. The urgency of these issues is accompanied by the need for rapid changes to deeply embedded and often highly valuable cultural heritage, legal frameworks, governance systems and professional and personal norms - which have developed gradually, i.e. over millennia. The networks and systems that have been built up are central to the ways in which we make agreements and handle disputes between people, communities, cities, regions and countries, or even continents. The scope for making mistakes is therefore huge, but the opportunities are also great, particularly if we innovate together and learn from one another.

Concludes that NBS offers a major chance for innovation, with possibilities to deliver lasting and tangible benefits across different social groups, in a range of environmental, economic and cultural settings, and in sharp contrast with the ways in which conventional, 'traditional' or 'grey' solutions are designed, constructed and managed over time. The present report describes evidence on many known advantages and successes with NBS. However, many NBS remain relatively novel solutions, presenting important challenges and unknowns in terms of their (co)design, operation, maintenance and how we organise their implementation. This report therefore concludes with an analysis of knowledge gaps, future research and innovation needs, and key policy development priorities, with a particular focus on Horizon Europe and the European Green Deal.

5.2 NBS related EU funded Projects

This document¹²⁴ summarises outcomes from the EC individual expert reports delivered through its 'Valorisation of NBS Projects' initiative. EU research and innovation projects were scanned for results pertaining to key areas such as biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation (including flooding), water quality, air quality and microclimate, sustainable communities, innovative governance and business models, and market challenges and

¹²⁴ [Nature-based solutions - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)



solutions. Evidence from the reviewed projects (and the EC's NBS policy topic area) is framed within knowledge from the wider literature, to give as full a picture as possible about the state of the art. Contextualised information is provided on policy developments, research results and key lessons. The resulting evidence base includes figures and monetary values showing the relative cost-effectiveness of NBS, and exploring how they support policy implementation. Policy recommendations and knowledge gaps are also highlighted to support the strengthening of strategies and practical action for the uptake of NBS, to deliver targeted and efficient interventions to help solve societal challenges in Europe and beyond.

1. **AMBER** (Adaptive Management of Barriers in European Rivers). H2020, Jun 2016 – Sep 2020, EU contribution €6,020,172, [project link](#)
2. **AQUACROSS** (Knowledge, Assessment, and Management for AQUatic Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services across EU policies), H2020, Jun 2015 – Nov 2018, EU contribution: €6,343,614, [project link](#)
3. **AQUANES** (Demonstrating synergies in combined natural and engineered processes for water treatment systems), H2020, Jun 2016 – May 2019, EU contribution: €7,837,292, [project link](#)
4. **AQUAVAL** (Sustainable Urban Water Management Plans, promoting SUDS and considering Climate Change, in the Province of Valencia), LIFE, Jan 2010 – Sep 2013, EU contribution: €499,458, [project link](#)
5. **ARTS** (Accelerating and Rescaling Transitions to Sustainability), FP7, Dec 2013 – Nov 2016, EU contribution: €2 996 826, [project link](#)
6. **ASTI** (Forecasting System for Urban Heat Island Effect), LIFE+, Sep 2018 – Aug 2021, EU contribution: €736,823, [project link](#)
7. **BASE** (Bottom-up Climate Adaptation Strategies towards a Sustainable Europe), FP7, Oct 2012 – Sep 2016, EU contribution: €5,899,442, [project link](#)
8. **BESAFE** (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Arguments for our future Environment), FP7, Sep 2011 - Aug 2015, EU contribution: €3,009,973, [project link](#)
9. **BIOMOT** (MOTivational strength of ecosystem services and alternative ways to express the value of BIOdiversity), FP7, Sept 2011 – Aug 2015, EU contribution: €3,152,839, [project link](#)
10. **BLUEHEALTH** (Linking Up Environment, Health And Climate For Inter-Sector Health Promotion And Disease Prevention In A Rapidly Changing Environment), H2020, Jan 2016 – Jun 2020, EU contribution: €5,998,671, [project link](#)
11. **BRIGenAID** (BRIdges the GAp for Innovations in Disaster resilience), H2020, May 2016 – Apr 2020, EU contribution: €7,739,806, [project link](#)
12. **BRIDGE** (sustainaBle uRban plannIng Decision support accountinG for urban mEtabolism), FP7, Dec 2008 - Nov 2011, EU contribution: €3,100,000, [project link](#)
13. **CASCADE** (Community Safety Action for Supporting Climate Adaptation and Development), DG ECHO (European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid), Jan 2019 – Dec 2020, Budget: €850,871, [project link](#)
14. **CLARITY** (Integrated Climate Adaptation Service Tools for Improving Resilience Measure Efficiency), H2020, Jun 2017 – May 2020, EU contribution: €4,999,999, [project link](#)
15. **CLEARING HOUSE** (Collaborative Learning in Research, Information-sharing and Governance on How Urban tree-based solutions support Sino-European urban futures), H2020, Sep 2019 – Aug 2023, EU contribution: €4,986,464, [project link](#)
16. **CLEVER CITIES** (Co-designing Locally tailored Ecological solutions for Value added, socially inclusiveE regeneration in Cities), H2020, Jun 2018 – May 2023, EU contribution: €14,214,661, [project link](#)
17. **CONEXUS** (CO-producing Nature-based solutions and restored Ecosystems: transdisciplinary neXus for Urban Sustainability), H2020, Sep 2020 – Aug 2024, EU contribution: €4,999,940, [project link](#)
18. **CONNECTING** (Connecting Nature), H2020, Jun 2017 – May 2022, EU contribution: €11,394,282, [project link](#)
19. **CLIMARK** (Forest management promotion for climate change mitigation through the design of a local market of climatic credits), LIFE, Oct 2017 – Sep 2021, EU contribution = €716,947, [project link](#)
20. **DESSIN** (Demonstrate Ecosystem Services Enabling Innovation in the Water Sector), FP7, Jan 2014 – Dec 2017, EU contribution €5,980,942, [project link](#)
21. **ECOADAPT** (Ecosystem-based strategies and innovations in water governance networks for adaptation to climate change in Latin American Landscapes), FP7, Jan 2012 – Jan 2016, EU contribution: €1,899,000, [project link](#)



22. **ECONADAPT** (Economics of climate change adaptation in Europe), FP7, Oct 2013 – Sep 2016, €2,928,618, [project link](#)
23. **ECOPOTENTIAL** (Improving future ecosystem benefits through earth observations), H2020, Jun 2015 – Oct 2019, EU contribution: €14,874,340, [project link](#)
24. **EKLIPSE** (Establishing a European Knowledge and Learning Mechanism to Improve the Policy-Science-Society Interface on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), H2020, Feb 2016 – Jul 2020, EU contribution: €2,997,272, [project link](#)
25. **EKOROB** (ECOtones for Reducing Diffusion Pollution), LIFE+, Jan 2010 - Sep 2015, EU contribution: €624,368, [project link](#)
26. **ENABLE** (Enabling Green and Blue Infrastructure Potential in Complex Social-Ecological, project link Regions), BiodivERsA, Dec 2016 – May 2020, Total grant: €2,540,309 (co-funded by the EU), [project link](#)
27. **ENROUTE** (Enhancing Resilience of urban ecosystems through green infrastructure), JRC project, Dec 2016 – Feb 2018, [project link](#)
28. **ESMERALDA** (Enhancing ecoSystem sERvices mApping for poLicy and Decision mAking), H2020, Feb 2015 – Jul 2018, EU contribution: €3,002,166, [project link](#)
29. **GREEN4GREY** (Innovative design & development of multifunctional green & blue infrastructure in Flanders grey peri-urban landscapes), LIFE, Jul 2014 – Dec 2019, EU contribution: €1,671,415, [project link](#)
30. **GREENINURBS** (Green Infrastructure approach: linking environmental with social aspects in studying and managing urban forests), COST, Feb 2013 – Jun 2017, EU contribution: €706,000, [project link](#)
31. **GREEN SURGE** (Biocultural diversity, green infrastructure and ecosystem services), FP7, Nov 2013 – Oct 2017, EU contribution: €5,701,837, [project link](#)
32. **GRIN** (Promoting urban integration of GReen INfrastructure to improve climate governance in cities), LIFE, Jun 2018 – Dec 2021, EU contribution: €1,015,505, [project link](#)
33. **GROW GREEN** (Green Cities for Climate and Water Resilience, Sustainable Economic Growth, Healthy Citizens and Environments), H2020, Jun 2017 - May 2020, EU contribution: €11,224,058, [project link](#)
34. **IMAGINE** (Integrative Management of Green Infrastructures Multifunctionality, Ecosystem integrity and Ecosystem Services: From assessment to regulation in socioecological systems), BiodivERsA, Feb 2017 – Jan 2020, Total grant: €1,495,876 (co-funded by the EU), [project link](#)
35. **INHERIT** (INter-sectoral Health Environment Research for InnovaTions), H2020, Jan 2016 – Dec 2019, EU contribution: €5,952,903, [project link](#)
36. **INTERLACE** (International cooperation to restore and connect urban environments in Latin America and Europe), H2020, Sep 2020 – Aug 2024, EU contribution: €5,476,165, [project link](#)
37. **ISCAPE** (Improving the Smart Control of Air Pollution in Europe), H2020, Sep 2016 – Aug 2019, EU contribution: €5,850,829, [project link](#)
38. **LAND4FLOOD LAND4FLOOD** (Natural Flood Retention on Private Land), COST Action, Sep 2017 – Sep 2021, [project link](#)
39. **MARS** (Managing Aquatic ecosystems and water Resources under multiple Stress), FP7, Feb 2014 – Jan 2018, EU contribution: €8,996,782, [project link](#)
40. **MERCES** (Marine Ecosystem Restoration in Changing European Seas), H2020, Jun 2016 – May 2020, EU contribution: €6,651,118, [project link](#)
41. **MOORLIFE** (Moor Life 2020), LIFE+, Oct 2015 – Feb 2021, EU contribution: €11,984,887, [project link](#)
42. **NAIAD** (Nature Insurance Value: Assessment & Demonstration), H2020, Dec 2016 – May 2020, EU contribution: €4,994,370, [project link](#)
43. **NATURAL COURSE** (Integrated water management approach to delivery of the North West England River basin management plan). LIFE-IP, Jan 2015 – Dec 2019, EU contribution: €11,988,811, [project link](#)
44. **NATURE4CITIES** (Nature Based Solutions for re-naturing cities: knowledge diffusion and decision support platform through new collaborative models). H2020, Nov 2016 – Oct 2020, EU contribution: €7,499,981, [project link](#)
45. **NATURVATION** (NATure-based URban innoVATION), H2020, Nov 2016 – Oct 2020, EU contribution: €7,797,878, [project link](#)
46. **OPENNESS** (Operationalization of natural capital and ecosystem services), H2020, Dec 2012 – May 2017, EU contribution: €8,999,193, [project link](#)



47. **OPERANDUM** (OPEn-air laboRAtories for Nature baseD solUTions to Manage environmental risks), H2020, Jul 2018 – Jun 2022, EU contribution: €12,257,343, [project link](#)
48. **OPERAS** (Operational Potential of Ecosystem Research Applications), FP7, Dec2012 – Nov 2017, EU contribution: €8,997 910, [project link](#)
49. **OPTWET** (Finding optimal size and location for wetland restoration sites for best nutrient removal performance using spatial analysis and modelling), H2020, Apr 2015 – Mar 2018, EU contribution: €240,507, [project link](#)
50. **PATHWAYS** (Transition pathways to sustainable low carbon societies), FP7, Dec 2013 – Nov 2016, EU contribution: €2,998,498, [project link](#)
51. **PEARL** (Preparing for Extreme And Rare events in coastaL regions), FP7, Jan 2014 – Apr 2018, EU contribution: € 4 998 851,04, [project link](#)
52. **PEGASUS** (Stimulating long-lasting improvements in the delivery of social, economic and environmental benefits from PEARL agricultural and forest land), H2020, Mar 2015 – Feb 2018, EU contribution: €2,977,525, [project link](#)
53. **PHENOTYPE** (Positive health effects of natural outdoor environments in typical populations in different regions in Europe), FP7, Jan 2012 – Dec 2015, EU contribution: €3,499,403, [project link](#)
54. **PHUSICOS** (“According to nature”: Solutions to reduce risk in mountain landscapes), H2020, May 2018 - Apr 2022, EU contribution: €9,472,200, [project link](#)
55. **PLACARD** (PLATform for Climate Adaptation and Risk reduction), H2020, June 2015 – May 2020, EU contribution: € 2 852 760, [project link](#)
56. **POWER** (Political and sOcial awareness on Water EnviRonmental challenges), H2020, Dec 2015 – Nov 2019, EU contribution: €3,747,938, [project link](#)
57. **PREPARED** (Prepared Enabling Change). FP7, Feb 2010 – Jan 2014, EU contribution €6,993,815, [project link](#)
58. **PROGIREG** (productive Green Infrastructure for post-industrial urban regeneration: nature for renewal), H2020, Jun 2018 – May 2023, EU contribution: €10,432,512, [project link](#)
59. **RAMSES** (Reconciling Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainable Development for Cities), FP7, Oct 2012 – Sep 2017, EU contribution: €5,200,000, [project link](#)
60. **RECONNECT** (Regenerating ECOsystems with Nature-based solutions for hydro-meteorological risk rEduCTion), H2020, Sep 2018 – Aug 2023, EU contribution: €13,520,690, [project link](#)
61. **RECREATE** (REsearch network for forward looking activities and assessment of research & innovation prospects in the fields of Climate, Resource Efficiency & raw mATERials), H2020 Jul 2013 – Jun 2018, EU contribution: €2,996,868, [project link](#)
62. **REFORM** (Restoring rivers for effective catchment management), FP7, Nov 2011 – Oct 2015, EU contribution: €6,997,603, [project link](#)
63. **REGREEN** (Fostering nature-based solutions for smart, green and healthy urban transitions in Europe and China), H2020, Sep 2019 – Aug 2023, EU contribution €4,996,172, [project link](#)
64. **RESCUE** (River flood Embankments Subject to Climate change: Understanding Effe cts of future floods and novel ‘low-carbon’ adaptation measures), FP7, May 2014 – Sep 2016, EU contribution: €231,283, [project link](#)
65. **RESCCUE** (Resilience to Cope with Climate Change in Urban Areas), H2020, May 2016 – Apr 2020, EU contribution: €6,896,992, [project link](#)
66. **RENATURE** (Promoting Research Excellence in NAture-based soluTions for innovation, sUstainable economic GRowth and human wEll-being in Malta), H2020, Sep 2018 – Aug 2021, EU contribution: €995,885, [project link](#)
67. **RESIN** (Climate Resilient Cities and Infrastructures), H2020, May 2015 – Oct 2018, EU Contribution: €7,466,004, [project link](#) RISC-KIT (Resilience-Increasing Strategies for Coasts – toolkit), FP7, Nov 2013 – Apr 2017, EU contribution: €5,999,692, [project link](#)
68. **RISES-AM** (Responses to coastal climate change: Innovative Strategies for high End Scenarios - Adaptation and Mitigation), FP7, Nov 2013 – Oct 2016, EU contribution: €4,407,648, [project link](#)
69. **ROBIN** (Role Of Biodiversity In climate change mitigationN), FP7, Nov 2011 – Oct 2015, EU contribution: €6,985,678, [project link](#)
70. **SCALLUVIA** (Habitat Restoration of alluvial forests and creeks within the flood controlled Scheldt estuary site Kruikebeke-Bazel-Rupelmonde), LIFE+, Sep 2013 – Aug 2018, €1,744,732, [project link](#)



71. **SHARECITY** (Sustainability of City-Based Food Sharing), ERC, Oct 2015 – Jul 2021, EU contribution: €1,860,009, [project link](#)
72. **SECOA** (Solutions for Environmental contrasts in COastal Areas), FP7, Dec 2009 – Nov 2013, EU contribution: €6,159,118, [project link](#)
73. **SIMETORES** Urban Adaptation And Community Learning For A Resilient Simeto Valley, LIFE, Jun 2018 – Dec 2021, EU contribution: € 568 037, [project link](#)
74. **SMR** (Smart Mature Resilience), H2020, Jun 2015 – Jun 2018, EU contribution: €4,641,233, [project link](#)
75. **SOILWINE** (Innovative approach to soil management in viticultural landscapes), LIFE+, Jan 2017 – Dec 2019, EU contribution: €914,999, [project link](#)
76. **TESS** (Transactional Environmental Support System), FP7, Oct 2008 - Jun 2011, EU contribution: €1,801,112, [project link](#)
77. **THINKNATURE** (Development of a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform and Think tank to promote innovation with Nature based solutions), H2020, Dec 2016 – Nov 2019, EU contribution: €2,974,164, [project link](#)
78. **TREECHECK** (Green Infrastructure Minimising the Urban Heat Island Effect), LIFE+, Sep 2018 – Aug 2022, EU contribution: €944,000, [project link](#)
79. **TURAS** (Transitioning towards Urban Resilience and Sustainability), FP7, Oct 2011 – Sep 2016, EU contribution: € 6,813,819, [project link](#)
80. **UNALAB** (Urban Nature Labs), H2020, Jun 2017 – May 2020, EU contribution: €12,768,932, [project link](#)
81. **URBAN ALLOTMENTS**, COST action, Oct 2012 – Oct 2016, [project link](#)
82. **URBANGenAIA** (Managing urban Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure to increase city resilience), BiodivERsA, Mar 2017 – Feb 2020, Total grant: € 692,715 (co-funded by the EU), [project link](#)
83. **URBAN GREENUP** (New Strategy for Re-Naturing Cities through Nature-Based Solutions), H2020, Jun 2017 – May 2020, EU contribution: €13,970,642, [project link](#)
Nature-Based Solutions **State of the Art in EU-funded Projects**
85. **URBES** (Urban Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), BiodivERsA, 2010-2011: € 2,662,281, [project link](#)
86. **URBINAT** (Healthy corridors as drivers of social housing neighbourhoods for the co-creation of social, environmental and marketable NBS), H2020, Jun 2018 – May 2023, EU contribution: €13,019,300, [project link](#)
87. **WISER** (Water bodies in Europe: Integrative Systems to assess Ecological status and Recovery), FP7, Mar 2009 – Feb 2012, EU contribution: € 6,984,092, [project link](#)
88. [GO-GRASS – circular business models for rural agri-food value chains - GO-GRASS](#), October 2019 - March 2024
89. [SUPER-G – Sustainable Permanent Grassland](#), March 2018 - February 2024.

5.2.1 Conclusions and Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

From a review and analysis of these projects we learn that the main conclusions for the PoliRuralPlus project are:

1. **Nature-based solutions (NBS) can play a significant role in achieving the goals of the PoliRuralPlus project.** NBS are actions that mimic or enhance natural processes to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development. They can be used to improve water quality, reduce flood risk, enhance biodiversity, and create more liveable and resilient communities.
2. **There is a need for better integration of NBS into rural development policies and practices.** This includes developing and sharing knowledge about NBS, providing financial and technical support for NBS implementation, and creating incentives for farmers and other stakeholders to invest in NBS.
3. **Collaboration between different actors is essential for successful NBS implementation.** This includes collaboration between scientists, policymakers, practitioners, and communities.
4. **Monitoring and evaluation of NBS is critical to ensure that they are achieving their intended outcomes.** This will help to identify which NBS are most effective and to improve their implementation.
5. **NBS can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).** The SDGs are a set of 17 goals that aim to achieve a more sustainable and equitable future for all. NBS can help to address a number of the SDGs, including those related to climate action, sustainable consumption and production, and life on land.



By following the following recommendations, the PoliRuralPlus project can make a significant contribution to the development of sustainable and resilient rural communities in Europe.

1. **Develop and implement a comprehensive NBS strategy for the PoliRuralPlus project area.** This strategy should identify the most appropriate NBS for the local context and provide a plan for their implementation.
2. **Increase investment in NBS research, development, and demonstration.** This will help to improve the understanding of NBS and make them more widely available to farmers and other stakeholders.
3. **Create incentives for farmers and other stakeholders to invest in NBS.** This could include financial incentives, technical assistance, and access to markets for NBS-based products.
4. **Strengthen capacity building for NBS implementation.** This includes training for farmers, policymakers, and other stakeholders on NBS planning, design, and implementation.
5. **Monitor and evaluate the implementation of NBS.** This will help to ensure that NBS are achieving their intended outcomes and identify areas for improvement.

5.3 Evaluating the impact of Nature-based Solutions: a handbook for practitioners

A new handbook¹²⁵ aims to provide practitioners with a comprehensive Nature-based Solutions (NBS) impact assessment framework, and a robust set of indicators and methodologies to assess impacts of NBS across 12 societal challenges: Climate Resilience; Water Management; Natural and Climate Hazards; Green Space Management; Biodiversity; Air Quality; Place Regeneration; Knowledge and Social Capacity Building for Sustainable Urban Transformation; Participatory Planning and Governance; Social Justice and Social Cohesion; Health and Well-being; New Economic Opportunities and Green Jobs. The accompanying Appendix of Methods provides a brief description of each indicator and recommends appropriate methods to measure specific impacts, along with guidance for end-users about the appropriateness, advantages and drawbacks of each method in different local contexts.

The handbook has the objectives of: Serving as a reference for relevant EU policies and activities; Orienting urban practitioners in developing robust impact evaluation frameworks for NBS at different scales; Providing a comprehensive set of indicators and methodologies and build the European evidence base regarding NBS impacts. The handbook is the result of a unique collaborative effort of 17 EU-funded Horizon 2020 NBS projects and collaborating institutions such as the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC), as part of the European Taskforce for NBS Impact Assessment.

[Evaluating the impact of nature-based solutions: a handbook for practitioners](#)

[Evaluating the impact of nature based solutions: appendix of methods](#)

Publication date 6 May 2021

The Handbook aims to provide decision-makers with a comprehensive NBS impact assessment framework, and a robust set of indicators and methodologies to assess impacts of nature-based solutions across 12 societal challenge areas:

1. Climate Resilience;
2. Water Management;
3. Natural and Climate Hazards;
4. Green Space Management;
5. Biodiversity;
6. Air Quality;
7. Place Regeneration;
8. Knowledge and Social Capacity Building for Sustainable Urban Transformation;
9. Participatory Planning and Governance;
10. Social Justice and Social Cohesion;

¹²⁵ [Evaluating the impact of nature-based solutions: a handbook for practitioners](#)

[Evaluating the impact of nature based solutions: appendix of methods](#)



11. Health and Well-being;
12. New Economic Opportunities and Green Jobs.

Indicators have been developed collaboratively by representatives of 17 individual EU-funded NBS projects and collaborating institutions such as the EEA and JRC, as part of the European Taskforce for NBS Impact Assessment, with the four-fold objective of:

1. serving as a reference for relevant EU policies and activities;
2. orient urban practitioners in developing robust impact evaluation frameworks for nature based solutions at different scales;
3. expand upon the pioneering work of the EKLIPSE framework by providing a comprehensive set of indicators and methodologies;
4. and build the European evidence base regarding NBS impacts.

They reflect the state of the art in current scientific research on impacts of nature-based solutions and valid and standardised methods of assessment, as well as the state of play in urban implementation of evaluation frameworks.

5.4 Conclusions and Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

1. **Strategic Alignment with EU Priorities:**
 - a. **Conclusion:** Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) align with the European Commission's vision to position the EU as a leader in sustainable and resilient innovation, particularly within the European Green Deal, biodiversity, and climate adaptation strategies.
 - b. **Recommendation:** Continue prioritising and integrating NBS efforts into overarching EU policies to ensure a unified and impactful approach towards sustainability.
2. **Comprehensive Policy Framework:**
 - a. **Conclusion:** Current policy goals emphasise evidence provision, framework improvement, community development, and innovation advancement in the realm of NBS.
 - b. **Recommendation:** Strengthen collaboration across policy, research, and implementation domains to achieve comprehensive and effective policy frameworks supporting the development and uptake of NBS.
3. **Knowledge Dissemination and Collaboration:**
 - a. **Conclusion:** Reports contribute to a robust knowledge base on NBS projects, providing evidence, monetary values, and policy recommendations.
 - b. **Recommendation:** Promote effective knowledge dissemination, collaboration, and information sharing among stakeholders to maximise the impact of NBS initiatives, fostering a collective understanding of successful strategies.
4. **Holistic Impact Assessment:**
 - a. **Conclusion:** The evaluation handbook offers a comprehensive framework and indicators for assessing the impact of NBS across various societal challenges.
 - b. **Recommendation:** Encourage widespread use of the evaluation handbook among practitioners involved in NBS projects to ensure standardised and holistic impact assessments, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of NBS implementation.
5. **Innovation Opportunities and Challenges:**
 - a. **Conclusion:** NBS presents significant opportunities for innovation, delivering tangible benefits across diverse social, economic, and environmental settings. Challenges include co-design, operation, maintenance, and implementation complexities.
 - b. **Recommendation:** Invest in research and innovation to address challenges associated with NBS, fostering collaborative efforts to enhance effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability. prioritise funding for projects exploring novel aspects of NBS design and implementation.



6. New European Bauhaus (NEB)

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) Initiative aims to 'green' neighbourhoods and bring Europe's architectural and cultural heritage into the net-zero era.

The New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative is an enabler for the green transition of our societies and economy. It calls on all Europeans to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for our eyes, minds, and souls. It aims at transforming different sectors of the economy, especially the built environment, making them contribute to our climate goals and to an improvement of the quality of life of all citizens.

The New European Bauhaus activates different actors at different levels, from big companies to citizens' initiatives, from national governments to city councils. It is a project of hope and perspectives that bring a cultural and creative dimension to the Green Deal- the European Climate Agenda- to enhance sustainable innovation, technology and economy. The initiative brings out the benefits of the environmental transition through tangible experiences at the local level. It gives space for creation and experimentation founded on:

- **aesthetics**, quality of experience and style, beyond functionality;
- **sustainability**, from climate goals, to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity;
- **inclusion**, from valuing diversity and equality for all, to securing accessibility and affordability.

Beautiful, Sustainable, Together

To achieve the goals of the European Green Deal and the transition towards a sustainable society, a fundamental change needs to happen on many levels. Sustainability is achievable only through collective effort by many actors. On a societal level, environmental innovations will only happen with changes in the economic framework or power relations. The technological shift needs to be supported by deeper changes that address behaviours, worldviews and paradigms.

On the individual level, sustainability depends critically on compassion, empathy, unity, creativity, and the ability to shift paradigms. People will embrace or drive change when they see it. The quality of our living environments is essential, and art and culture play a key role in improving it. We therefore build on existing frameworks like the Davos Baukultur Quality System.

The transition is just as much a cultural and a social transition as a green one: this is the key idea that the New European Bauhaus wants to explore.

All values and principles are not new as such, but the NEB has the ambition that all six would be integrated in NEB projects – at least at basic level.

The highest levels of ambitions in each value and principle always include the word **transformation**.

- In the case of the sustainability value, it is a paradigm shift towards regeneration and creating new positive relations with nature.
- For the beautiful value, it is about meaningful experiences that work towards a broader 'us', and for together, we work towards breaking with local to global injustices and obsolete social models.
- The working principles give guidance on how transformative projects are implemented. Projects with the highest ambition on participatory processes empower communities to take decisions and self-govern.

Transdisciplinary initiatives take a collaborative approach to knowledge creation between local, traditional and academic knowledge holders. They engage at multi-levels and connect local place-based strategies to a global network of actors while considering the initiatives' wider global impact.

From hopes to ambitions

To build a liveable future together, we need to turn our hopes into clear ambitions and set out coherent pathways to reach them. In its 2021 Communication on the New European Bauhaus, the European Commission announced the development tools to identify how the values and principles of the initiative can translate into concrete projects. The NEB labelling strategy, a Commission-led NEB lab project, will deliver on this promise by providing a series of instruments for recognising, characterising, and assessing quality in relation to the New European Bauhaus. The NEB labelling strategy will work at two different but interconnected levels: the NEB Compass and the NEB (self)-assessment tools.

The Compass sets out the key characteristics for exemplary NEB projects. It can be applied to a wide range of typologies: buildings, products, services, education models, etc. It also indicates possible directions for change, with three growing levels of ambition, to support (decision and project) makers at the earliest stage of their activities. **The (self)-assessment tools** will then add granularity to this framework and introduce specific lists of measurable criteria for specific types of projects.

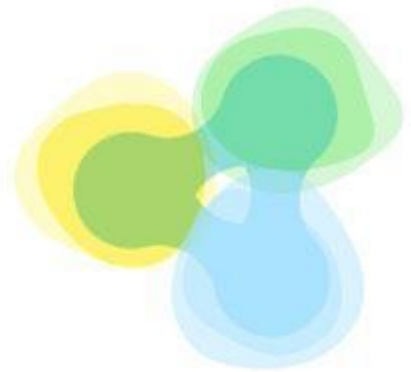
6.1 New European Bauhaus Approach

The New European Bauhaus is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative that connects the European Green Deal to our living spaces and experiences.

The New European Bauhaus initiative calls on all of us to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for our eyes, minds, and souls.¹²⁶

Beautiful are the places, practices, and experiences that are:

- **Enriching**, inspired by art and culture, responding to needs beyond functionality.
- **Sustainable**, in harmony with nature, the environment, and our planet.
- **Inclusive**, encouraging a dialogue across cultures, disciplines, genders and ages.



The New European Bauhaus is:

- **A Creative, Interdisciplinary Movement:** It aims to bridge the worlds of art, culture, science, and technology, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive future.
- **Connecting the Green Deal to Lived Experience:** The initiative seeks to make the goals of the European Green Deal (sustainability, resilience) tangible and desirable by focusing on the quality of our living spaces.
- **Three Core Values:**
 - **Sustainability:** Solutions should align with goals of circular economies, reduced pollution, and biodiversity.
 - **Aesthetics:** emphasise s the importance of beauty and positive experience alongside functionality.
 - **Inclusion:** Prioritises diversity, accessibility, and affordability for all.

The New European Bauhaus Matters because¹²⁷ :

- **Addressing Complex Challenges through Co-creation:** The NEB encourages collaboration across disciplines to address societal problems.
- **Form Follows Planet:** NEB promotes design that prioritises sustainability, finding creative solutions that are also climate-friendly.
- **Beyond Buildings:** While focused on shaping built environments, the NEB's impacts extend to improving overall quality of life.

The New European Bauhaus Works as follows:

- **Community-Driven:** Citizens, experts, businesses, and institutions collaborate to reimagine sustainable living throughout Europe.

¹²⁶ [About the initiative \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹²⁷ [files_en \(europa.eu\)](#)



- **Experimental Approach:** The NEB supports pilots and innovative projects.
- **Access to Funding:** Projects aligned with NEB values can access EU funding opportunities.
- **Policy Influence:** The NEB contributes to the EU's NextGenerationEU recovery plan and directly supports the goals of the European Green Deal.

The EIT Community NEB's Role

- **Mentorship and Guidance:** The EIT Community NEB offers mentoring for start-ups, scale-ups, students, spin-offs, communities, and public decision-makers focused on NEB goals.
- **Focus on Sustainability, Aesthetics, and Inclusion:** EIT's role is to identify and support projects embodying these NEB values.
- **Coordinated Approach:** Led by EIT Climate-KIC, the EIT Community NEB partners with EIT Urban Mobility, EIT Food, and EIT Manufacturing.

Other Key Points

- **Neighbourhood-Level Transformation:** A proposed EU mission would focus on improving neighbourhoods for beauty, sustainability, and inclusion, increasing community buy-in for Green Deal policies.
- **The Power of Inspiration:** The NEB highlights successful projects to spark further innovation and replication.

The 3 key concepts of the NEB – sustainability, inclusivity and aesthetics – are embodied in Europe's shared cultural heritage and are key to collectively (re)imagine the future of our society¹²⁸

75 Inspiring projects and ideas - Beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive projects inspiring positive transformation around us.¹²⁹

6.2 NEB Compass¹³⁰

The New European Bauhaus Compass is a guiding framework for decision and project makers wishing to apply the NEB principles and criteria to their activities. The Compass proposes directions for the development of NEB projects and lays the foundation for more detailed assessment tools.

The NEB Compass describes the three core values of the initiative and traces the path for a project to become truly “NEB”. To achieve this, the Compass also sets out three working principles that apply across the system of values. More specifically, the Compass:

- exemplifies what beautiful, sustainable, and together mean, at three levels of ambition;
- expands on the three core principles that define a NEB way of working: participatory process, multi-level engagement and a transdisciplinary approach;
- focuses on the capacity of NEB projects to test and promote new visions and processes, with a long-term vision;
- is grounded in existing theories and models while remaining open to evolution in line with the experimental nature of the initiative;
- will be tested through interaction with the NEB community. From the start, the NEB is committed to learn from experience and improve over time.
- the Compass does not replace criteria of calls for funding.

How does the Compass work?

¹²⁸ [New European Bauhaus: moving from co-design to delivery - CHARTER \(charter-alliance.eu\)](https://charter-alliance.eu/)

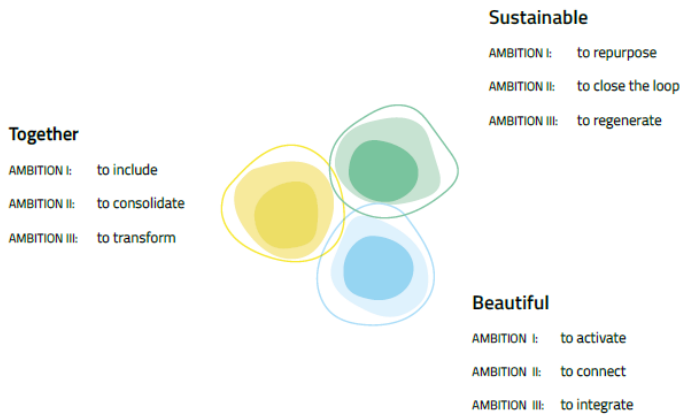
¹²⁹ [Inspiring projects and ideas \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/)

¹³⁰ new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/NEB_Compass_V_4.pdf

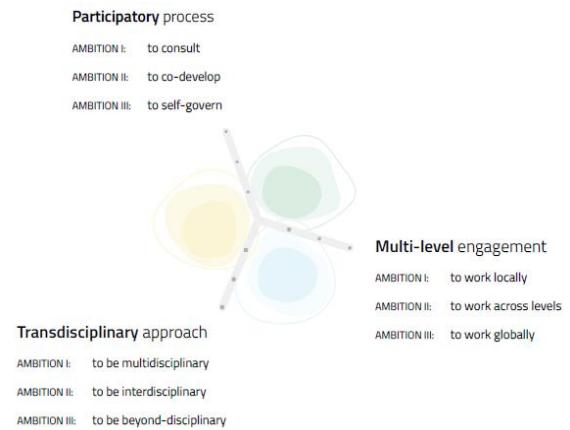


For each value and for each working principle, the NEB Compass presents three levels of ambition, to inspire and guide the design of a project from its first stages. It does this mainly through questions and examples. The Compass sets out to create a workable and clear reference framework, with distinctions between more and less ambitious endeavours.

NEB Compass Values



NEB Working Principles



Any decision and project maker can test their NEB ambitions with the project examples and guiding questions as reference material.

- The first ambition level sets the baseline. Here, the Compass sets out the basic features of a New European Bauhaus project. Only if this level is reached, a project can claim to be NEBish.
- The second and third levels build on the starting definitions, expanding them with growing aspirations. The higher the ambition, the more the project’s values and working principles will connect and overlap.
- The highest levels of ambition show what the ideal end state of a value or principle is. Each project will have its specific mix of ambitions, depending on context and resources available.

For each level of ambition of all values and principles, guiding questions have been developed. Some of them only work at the beginning of a project; most can be applied also to projects that are already under development or even accomplished. Depending on the nature of the project, other questions could be added, based on the description of the values and principles. For all the questions, there should not only be a yes or no answer, but they are an invitation to think about how to fulfil the ambition.

The power of examples

To aid understanding of the different levels, every ambition description is accompanied by an exemplary project piece, either from the NEB prizes finalists or from other dedicated NEB call beneficiaries. These texts extracts are chosen because they best illustrate the practical application of a certain level of ambition of a value or principle. In addition, six projects are analysed on all values and working principles to show how the Compass can be applied to a project. Just like the New European Bauhaus initiative, this Compass also relates to a number of policy tools and legislations.

6.3 Conclusions and Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus work

From a review and analysis of the NEB references in the database the main conclusions for the PoliRuralPlus project are:

1. **The New European Bauhaus can be a valuable tool for promoting sustainable and inclusive rural development.** The New European Bauhaus is a design and innovation framework that aims to create a more beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive future for Europe. The PoliRuralPlus project can use the New European Bauhaus to develop and implement innovative solutions for rural development.
2. **There is a need for a more holistic approach to rural development that considers the social, economic, and environmental dimensions.** Traditional approaches to rural development often focus on one or two of



these dimensions, but a more holistic approach is needed to address the complex challenges facing rural communities. The New European Bauhaus can help to promote a more holistic approach to rural development by emphasising the importance of integrating social, economic, and environmental considerations into planning and decision-making.

3. **There is a need to empower rural communities and give them a voice in the development process.** Rural communities often have unique challenges and opportunities that are not well-understood by policy-makers and planners. The New European Bauhaus can help to empower rural communities by providing them with the tools and resources they need to participate in the development process.
4. **There is a need to invest in innovative technologies and solutions for rural development.** New technologies and solutions can help to address the challenges facing rural communities, such as climate change, population decline, and economic hardship. The PoliRuralPlus project can work to identify and implement innovative solutions that are appropriate for rural contexts.
5. **There is a need to collaborate and share knowledge across different sectors and disciplines.** The challenges facing rural development are complex and require collaboration from a variety of stakeholders. The New European Bauhaus can help to foster collaboration by providing a platform for knowledge exchange and dialogue.

As result PoliRuralPlus will:

1. **Develop and implement a comprehensive New European Bauhaus strategy for the PoliRuralPlus project area.** This strategy should identify the specific challenges and opportunities facing rural communities in the area and develop tailored solutions.
2. **Foster participatory processes that involve rural communities in the development process from the outset.** This will ensure that the solutions developed are relevant and appropriate to the needs of the communities.
3. **Invest in research and innovation to identify and implement new technologies and solutions for rural development.** This includes supporting pilot projects and scaling up successful initiatives.
4. **Strengthen the capacity of rural communities to develop and implement their own development plans.** This includes providing training, funding, and access to networks.
5. **Promote cross-sectoral collaboration and knowledge exchange among stakeholders.** This will help to ensure that the most effective solutions are identified and implemented.

Overall for the NEB that major conclusions and recommendations are:

Area	Conclusion	Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus
1 Strategic Integration of NEB Principles:	The New European Bauhaus (NEB) Initiative, with its focus on sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics , presents a transformative vision for Europe's future, connecting cultural heritage with the EU Green Deal objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● emphasise the strategic integration of NEB principles into urban and rural development policies. ● Leverage the NEB as a cultural, human-Centred, and tangible experience to foster social acceptance and engagement with EU Green Deal policies.
2 Research and Innovation Mission:	The proposed Horizon Mission on the New European Bauhaus underscores the commitment to research and innovation, aiming to beautify, sustain, and inclusively transform neighbourhoods across Europe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actively engage in the development and support of the proposed mission. ● Encourage collaboration between Member States, communities, and the Commission to define and implement innovative solutions. ● Foster a research-driven approach to address societal challenges and promote behavioral changes aligned with EU Green Deal targets.



3 Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange:	The NEB serves as a creative and transdisciplinary movement, promoting the exchange of knowledge between diverse backgrounds and breaking silos in the wake of interconnected challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance interdisciplinary collaboration by facilitating knowledge exchange platforms. • Support the NEB as a think-do tank, design lab, accelerator, and network to empower sustainable practices, inspire creativity, and drive innovative solutions. • Encourage the co-creation of experimental spaces to reimagine post-pandemic living.
4 Phased Implementation Approach:	The NEB's three-phase approach—Design, Delivery, and Dissemination—provides a structured framework for materialising ideas, implementing pilots, and diffusing successful concepts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the phased implementation of the NEB initiative. • Encourage active participation during the Design phase, provide resources for pilot projects in the Delivery phase, and promote broad dissemination of successful ideas and concepts in the final phase. • Ensure alignment with the Multiannual Financial Framework for sustained impact.
5 Global Impact and Replication:	The NEB aims to transcend European borders, fostering a global impact by diffusing innovative ideas and concepts, inspiring new generations, and supporting lead markets for sustainable living.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promote the global dissemination of NEB success stories. • Facilitate networking and knowledge sharing beyond Europe to encourage the replication of best practices in building harmonious, sustainable living spaces. • Support initiatives that align with NEB principles on a global scale, contributing to a broader transformation of societal norms and practices.

7. Rural-Urban Linkages and Climate Adaptation

Climate change is happening today, so they have to build a more resilient tomorrow. The world has just concluded the hottest decade on record during which the title for the hottest year was beaten eight times. The frequency and severity of climate and weather extremes is increasing. These extremes range from unprecedented forest fires and heatwaves right above the Arctic Circle to devastating droughts in the Mediterranean region, and from hurricanes ravaging EU outermost regions to forests decimated by unprecedented bark beetle outbreaks in Central and Eastern Europe. Slow onset events, such as desertification, loss of biodiversity, land and ecosystem degradation, ocean acidification or sea level rise are equally destructive over the long term.

Economic losses from more frequent climate-related extreme weather are increasing. In the EU, these losses alone already average over €12 billion per year. Conservative estimates show that exposing today's EU economy to global warming of 3°C above pre-industrial levels would result in an annual loss of at least €170 billion. Climate change affects not only the economy, but also the health and well-being of Europeans, who increasingly suffer from heat waves; the deadliest natural disaster of 2019 worldwide was the European heatwave, with 2500 deaths.

7.1 EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change¹³¹

The European Commission announced its new, more ambitious EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change in the Communication on the [European Green Deal](#), following a 2018 [evaluation of the 2013 Strategy](#) and [an open public consultation](#) between May and August 2020. The [European Climate Law proposal](#) provides the foundation for increased ambition and policy coherence on adaptation. It integrates the global goal on adaptation in Article 7 of the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goal 13 action into EU law. The proposal commits the EU and

¹³¹ [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0082 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)



Member States to make continuous progress to boost adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change. Its latest adaptation strategy will help make this progress a reality.

The European Commission has adopted a new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, setting out the pathway to prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. While the EU does everything within its power to mitigate climate change, domestically and internationally, they must also get ready to face its unavoidable consequences. From deadly heatwaves and devastating droughts, to decimated forests and coastlines eroded by rising sea levels, climate change is already taking its toll in Europe and worldwide. Building on the 2013 Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, the aim of today's proposals is to shift the focus from understanding the problem to developing solutions, and to move from planning to implementation.

The EU's action on climate change adaptation must involve all parts of society and all levels of governance, inside and outside the EU. They will work to build a climate resilient society by improving knowledge of climate impacts and adaptation solutions; by stepping up adaptation planning and climate risk assessments; by accelerating adaptation action; and by helping to strengthen climate resilience globally.

Smarter, swifter, and more systemic adaptation

Adaptation actions must be informed by robust data and risk assessment tools that are available to all - from families buying, building and renovating homes to businesses in coastal regions or farmers planning their crops. To achieve this, the strategy proposes actions that push the frontiers of knowledge on adaptation so that they can gather more and better data on climate-related risks and losses, making them available to all. [Climate-ADAPT](#), the European platform for adaptation knowledge, will be enhanced and expanded, and a dedicated health observatory will be added to better track, analyse and prevent health impacts of climate change.

Climate change has impacts at all levels of society and across all sectors of the economy, so adaptation actions must be systemic. The Commission will continue to incorporate climate resilience considerations in all relevant policy fields. It will support the further development and implementation of adaptation strategies and plans with three cross cutting priorities: integrating adaptation into macro-fiscal policy, nature-based solutions for adaptation, and local adaptation action.

The European Commission's climate change adaptation policies aim to match the EU's global leadership in climate change mitigation. The Paris Agreement established a global goal on adaptation and highlighted adaptation as a key contributor to sustainable development. The EU will promote sub-national, national and regional approaches to adaptation, with a specific focus on adaptation in Africa and Small Island Developing States. They will increase support for international climate resilience and preparedness through the provision of resources, by prioritising action and increasing effectiveness, through the scaling up of international finance and through stronger global engagement and exchanges on adaptation. They will also work with international partners to close the gap in international climate finance.

The European Commission EU strategy on adaptation to climate change sets out how the European Union can adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change and become climate resilient by 2050. The Strategy has four principle objectives: to make adaptation smarter, swifter and more systemic, and to step up international action on adaptation to climate change.

1. Smarter adaptation

- Adaptation actions must be informed by robust data and risk assessment tools that are available to all – from families building homes, businesses in coastal regions and farmers planning their crops.
- To achieve this, the strategy proposes actions that push the frontiers of knowledge on adaptation so that they can gather more and better data on climate-related risks and losses, and enhance [Climate-ADAPT](#) as the European platform for adaptation knowledge.

2. Faster adaptation



- The effects of climate change are already being felt, and so they must adapt more quickly and comprehensively.
 - The strategy therefore focuses on developing and rolling out adaptation solutions to help reduce climate-related risk, increase climate protection and safeguard the availability of freshwater.
3. More systemic adaptation
- Climate change will have impacts at all levels of society and across all sectors of the economy, so adaptation actions must also be systemic.
 - The Commission will continue to actively mainstream climate resilience considerations in all relevant policy fields.
 - It will support the further development and implementation of adaptation strategies and plans at all levels of governance with three cross-cutting priorities:
 - integrating adaptation into macro-fiscal policy
 - nature-based solutions for adaptation
 - local adaptation action.
4. Stepping up international action for climate resilience
- The EU will increase support for international climate resilience and preparedness through the provision of resources, by prioritising action and increasing effectiveness, through the scaling up of international finance and through stronger global engagement and exchanges on adaptation.

7.2 Implications for Rural-Urban Linkages

Analysing climate-adaptation and the EU strategy in particular, and the implications for rural-urban linkages concludes that the urban and rural areas must be treated as interlinked systems, tailoring climate adaptation approaches to specific regional contexts, but designed with shared goals and benefits in mind.

The climate adaptation issues relevant to urban-rural linkages are:

- **Extreme Weather Events:** Increased frequency and intensity of floods, droughts, heatwaves, and storms impacting both urban and rural areas.
- **Water Management:** Changes in precipitation patterns affecting water availability for agriculture, as well as pressure on urban water systems.
- **Food Security:** Climate change disrupting agricultural production and supply chains, affecting food availability and prices across urban-rural settings.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** Habitat degradation and ecosystem alteration caused by climate change, impacting essential services in both types of areas.
- **Infrastructure Vulnerability:** Damage to transport networks, energy grids, and built environments in both urban and rural areas due to extreme weather.

7.2.1 Implications for PoiRuralPlus and its Pilots

The implications for the PoliRuralPlus project are:

- **Resilience Planning:** The project needs to integrate climate adaptation into urban-rural development strategies for long-term resilience to climate impacts.
- **Ecosystem-Based Solutions:** Emphasise collaborative projects restoring natural systems and using nature-based infrastructure (green spaces, wetlands) for flood protection, water security, and heat mitigation across regions.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Focus on innovations supporting climate-resilient farming practices, safeguarding food production, and fostering rural economic livelihoods.
- **Just Transition:** Ensure climate adaptation initiatives address social disparities and create equitable opportunities for rural communities that might be disproportionately affected.



- Data-Informed Strategies: Leverage shared data platforms to analyse local climate vulnerabilities and guide targeted adaptation plans across urban-rural boundaries.

The project's pilots could address climate adaptation to optimise rural-urban linkages with the following activities in their respective Regional Action Plans:

Region Type	General Approach	Types of Actions
Coastal Areas (Greece, Italy, Malta)	Explore nature based coastal protection, integrated land and marine planning, and resilient fishing/tourism in collaboration with urban centres.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature-based solutions: Protect shorelines through wetland restoration, dune management, saltmarsh creation for flood buffering and erosion control. - Integrated coastal zone management: Coordinate land-use planning between urban and rural areas, limiting development in high-risk zones, safeguarding ecological buffers. - Adaptive infrastructure: Redesign ports, seawalls, and buildings to withstand storm surges, sea-level rise. Explore 'managed retreat' options where relocation is inevitable. - sustainable livelihoods: Support climate-resilient fisheries, ecotourism, and aquaculture practices to protect coastal economies.
Border Regions (Ireland, Czechia, Latvia, Malta)	Foster cross-border climate risk assessments, early warning systems, and cooperative response mechanisms for shared resource management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transboundary cooperation: Establish shared water management plans for rivers or watersheds crossing borders, ensuring equitable distribution and adaptation measures. - Joint disaster preparedness: Coordinate early warning systems, emergency response plans, and risk-sharing mechanisms across borders. - Knowledge exchange: Promote cross-border learning on climate-resilient farming practices, ecosystem restoration, or adaptive infrastructure solutions. - Resilient trade: Enhance supply chain flexibility, diversification, and local market opportunities to reduce vulnerability to disruptions on either side of the border.
Mountain Regions (Greece, Czechia)	Design integrated watershed management, protective forestry, and ecotourism initiatives that benefit both highland and lowland populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watershed management: Protect forests and natural vegetation in upland areas to regulate water flow, reduce flooding downstream, and maintain water quality. - Slope stabilisation: Implement landslide prevention measures, protect infrastructure and agricultural lands from erosion and instability caused by extreme rainfall. - Adaptive agriculture: Support drought-resistant and flood-tolerant crops, diversified agroecological systems, and water-efficient practices in mountain communities. - Nature-based tourism: Develop sustainable, low-impact tourism activities highlighting mountain ecosystems while managing pressures and generating rural livelihoods.
Sparsely Populated Regions (Slovakia, Czechia, Spain, Latvia)	Support localised food systems, resilient small-scale agriculture, and sustainable infrastructure for remote communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Localised food production: Encourage short supply chains, small-scale farms, and climate-smart agriculture to increase food security in remote areas. - Renewable energy: Invest in distributed solar, wind, or micro-hydro based on local resources to promote energy independence and reduce reliance on vulnerable grids. - Resilient services: Decentralise essential services (healthcare, education) through technology or mobile solutions, ensuring reliable access for underserved rural populations. - Tele-connectivity: Expand broadband infrastructure to foster economic opportunities, social inclusion, and remote service delivery in sparsely populated areas.



Island Regions (Malta)	Focus on water security planning, renewable energy integration, disaster-resilient infrastructure, and preserving fragile ecosystems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated water management: Implement rainwater harvesting, desalination, greywater reuse to address water scarcity, compounded by rising temperatures and drought. - Coastal defence: Explore both hard infrastructure (seawalls, breakwaters) and nature-based options (dune restoration) tailored to local shoreline conditions. - Energy transition: Aggressively adopt renewables (solar, wind) and energy storage to move away from fossil fuels and promote energy independence. - Circular economy: Prioritise waste reduction, recycling, and closed-loop solutions given limited land resources and high vulnerability to resource shortages.
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7.3 EU Adaptation Support Tool (AST)

The aim of the EU Adaptation Support Tool (AST)¹³² is to assist policy makers and coordinators on the national level in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating climate change adaptation strategies and plans. The AST was developed as a practical guidance tool for national level actors for all steps needed to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate a national adaptation strategy. It also supports sub-national actors and trans-national actors to prepare for, develop, implement and monitor and evaluate adaptation strategies. It refers to relevant resources and dedicated tools in climate change adaptation (CCA).

In 2013 the European Commission issued the [EU guidelines on developing adaptation strategies](#) as a component of the [EU strategy on adaptation to climate change](#) with the aim to support EU Member States (MS) in the process of developing, implementing and reviewing their adaptation strategies. They provide a common understanding of key features relevant to adaptation policy processes, building on the experience available in the EU. The guidelines on developing adaptation strategies for climate change, discusses the need for adaptation strategies and the different types of strategies that can be developed. It also includes guidelines for developing adaptation strategies. Some of the important points from the article are that adaptation strategies should be based on science, they should be tailored to specific needs, and they should be regularly monitored and evaluated.

The steps and recommendations of the Adaptation Support Tool are aligned with the contents of these guidelines and further improved based on the most recent information and knowledge available, including the experiences of [EU Member States](#) with adaptation policy making and insights provided by more recent [EU research and innovation projects](#).

Since the EU guidelines on developing adaptation strategies were issued, EU MS have progressed and the status quo of climate change adaptation (CCA) policy processes in [countries](#) has changed since the first publication of the AST. For example, since May 2020, all countries have a national adaptation strategy and many have an adaptation action plan in place (see [Overview of EEA member countries with national adaptation strategies and adaptation plans](#)). Some countries have already traversed a complete adaptation policy cycle, including Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and revision(s) of national policies. On February 24, 2021, the European Commission adopted its [new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change](#).

Also the role and purpose of the AST has changed over time, reflecting on the context, namely more guidance for advancing, improving and updating national adaptation strategies and policies; more focus on [implementation](#) and [Monitoring & Evaluation](#); and raised importance of cross-sector and multi-level governance issues as implementation progresses to more regional and local levels.

The AST is based on the adaptation policy cycle, which is a valuable analytical tool, but in practice, steps may tend to overlap and intermit. Since climate change adaptation (CCA) is not a strictly sequential, linear process and countries may be in very different stages of the process, the AST needs to provide guidance in an iterative process

¹³² [AST Step 0 — English \(europa.eu\)](#)



that will help ensure decisions are based on up-to-date data, information and knowledge. An integral part of this iterative process is the monitoring of implementation progress and effectiveness of measures, their evaluation and the revision of policies. In its design, the Adaptation Support Tool borrows from the UKCIP Adaptation Wizard and various risk assessment frameworks.

Specific guidance, tools and further information sources for adaptation in cities and the urban context are provided in the [Urban Adaptation Support Tool](#) (UAST).

7.3.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

The European Commission's support tools for climate change adaptation (CCA) strategy, include:

1. EU Adaptation Support Tool (AST)
 - Purpose: Guide national-level policymakers to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate effective climate change adaptation plans. Supports sub-national and transnational stakeholders as well.
 - Basis: Aligns with EU adaptation strategy guidelines, based on scientific understanding, tailored responses, and continuous evaluation.
 - Evolution: Updated to reflect growing experience of Member States, progress with policies, and the new 2021 EU adaptation strategy.
 - Key Focus: Emphasises cross-sector issues, multi-level governance, and a focus on iterative improvement. Adapts to the non-linear, ongoing nature of CCA.
2. Urban Adaptation Support Tool (UAST)
 - Purpose: Provides specific resources and guidance for cities and urban regions to develop their own climate change adaptation strategies.

On analysis the Implications for PoliRuralPlus are:

- Framework Alignment: PoliRuralPlus can align its strategy development and implementation with the principles outlined in the AST, considering their iterative nature.
- Tailored Implementation: The project should draw on the AST's resources to create strategies suited to the diverse, complex contexts of its pilot regions.
- Urban-Rural Linkage: PoliruralPlus should prioritise guidance applicable to both urban and rural settings, with an emphasis on collaboration and shared benefits as proposed by AST.
- Data-Driven Updates: Utilising data platforms mentioned in the AST could help continuously track the effectiveness of project actions and make necessary adjustments.
- Cross-Sector and Multilevel: The project needs to address issues arising from interlinked sectors and multiple governance levels, mirroring AST's approach.
- PoliRuralPlus can leverage synergies between the AST and the Urban Adaptation Support Tool, given that many pilots likely span or directly connect with urban settings.

8. Urban-Rural Linkages & Ecosystem Restoration

The UN Global Land Working Paper “URBAN–RURAL LINKAGES AND ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION”¹³³ concludes that rural and urban areas are deeply interconnected, with resource flows and dependencies impacting both and that sustainable development requires integrated policies that address urban-rural linkages, with focus areas include ecosystem restoration, food systems, sustainable infrastructure, and inclusive governance. Analysis of this study concludes that the recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus project are:

- Policy Integration: We need to champion frameworks that break down urban-rural policy silos, enabling more holistic planning for sustainability and well-being.
- Circular & Green Economy: Drive initiatives promoting circular economic models spanning regions, reducing waste and creating rural business opportunities.

¹³³ [UNCCD GLO WP urban-rural linkages.pdf](#)



- **Service Access & Connectivity:** Prioritise improving physical and digital connections between urban-rural areas for better access to essential services and knowledge exchange.
- **Data-Driven Innovation:** Leverage data sources like the ones listed in the UNCCD report to drive informed decision-making and tailor innovations to local contexts.
- **Collaboration:** Emphasise fostering collaboration with initiatives like the New European Bauhaus to promote sharing of ideas and best practices between urban and rural areas.

9. Energy Transition of Rural Areas

A recent good practice webinar explored solutions to boost the energy transition in rural areas¹³⁴. The event, jointly organised with the Covenant of Mayors – Europe, intended to build participants' capacity in designing and implementing high-quality projects aligned with rural needs. An analysis of the information from the webinar, indicates the following recommendations that are relevant for the PoliRuralPlus project:

1. **Raise awareness of energy communities and their benefits.** The webinar participants noted that awareness of energy communities is still relatively low, especially in rural areas. Conducting awareness-raising campaigns and engaging local associations, volunteers, and media can help mobilise the population and encourage them to participate in energy community projects.
2. **Provide political support for energy communities.** Energy communities need political support to succeed. This includes education and networking at various governance levels, as well as ensuring that EU legislation is fully translated into national contexts. Governments can also help by creating dedicated financing mechanisms and adapted business models that are specifically tailored to the needs of rural areas.
3. **Support the implementation of Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) in rural areas.** Mayors play a key role in stimulating energy-related initiatives in rural areas, but they often lack expertise, especially in small municipalities. Cooperation among municipalities can help to share resources and expertise, and regional authorities and Energy Agencies can provide crucial support. It is also important to involve the local population in the development and implementation of SECAPs to ensure that they are tailored to local needs and priorities.
4. **Address energy poverty in rural communities.** Energy poverty is a major challenge in many rural areas, and it disproportionately affects vulnerable populations such as the elderly and low-income households. The webinar participants highlighted the need to raise awareness of energy poverty, carry out energy audits to provide more data, and have clearer legal frameworks defining energy poverty in a comprehensive way. They also emphasised the importance of intermediaries active in the social dimension, such as energy social workers, and the need to involve youth in addressing energy poverty.
5. **Foster social innovation and replication of good practices.** Social innovation can play a valuable role in addressing energy challenges in rural areas. The webinar participants recommended that the PoliRuralPlus project provide more recognition, networking, and showcasing of good practices that can be replicated in other rural communities. They also encouraged the project to address the issue of transport poverty, which is often overlooked in discussions of energy poverty.

In addition to these recommendations, the webinar participants also raised several other key points for consideration, including the need for better data collection and analysis on energy issues in rural areas, the importance of creating a supportive regulatory environment for energy communities, and the need to ensure that energy transition initiatives are fair and equitable for all citizens.

10. Conclusions and recommended actions to optimise rural-urban linkages across Europe

Analysis of the various EU policies and sources concludes that for Rural-Urban Linkages Optimisation: Key Points and Recommendations are:

¹³⁴ [Highlights Report | Good Practice Webinar "Rural areas in the energy transition" | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)



Challenges:

- Persistent gaps: Income, living conditions, and public services differ significantly between rural and urban areas. Rural residents feel disregarded and have lower trust in governments.
- Economic disparities: Widening income and employment gaps favour urban areas. Rural areas face challenges with education, digital skills, and job opportunities.
- Social capital erosion: Rural residents feel disadvantaged, impacting trust in government and participation in democracy.

Advantages of Rural Living:

- Lower housing costs, better housing conditions, and proximity to nature.

EU Efforts:

- Various policies like CAP, Cohesion Policy, and Rural Pact prioritise strengthening rural communities, improving connectivity, greening activities, and diversifying economies.
- LEADER approach supports local action groups and community-led development.

10.1 Key Recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus Project:

- Facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing: Between policymakers, researchers, and communities in rural and urban areas.
- Promote inclusivity: Involve citizens, businesses, and NGOs in rural-urban development.
- Support social innovation: Recognise and replicate successful practices, address transport poverty.
- Strengthen the LEADER approach: Advocate for mandatory budgets, streamlined procedures, and recognition of local action groups.
- Enhance territorial connections: Encourage multi-sectoral approaches, networking, and joint projects.
- Leverage digital tools: Facilitate collaboration, online marketing, and bridge the digital divide.
- Advocate for policy coherence: Promote alignment between urban and rural policies, encourage partnerships, and monitor progress.
- Utilise R&I foresight: Adapt approaches to rural-urban contexts, anticipate future challenges, involve stakeholders.
- Support SECAP implementation: Facilitate cooperation, regional support, and local population involvement.
- Raise awareness and encourage energy community participation: Conduct campaigns, advocate for political support, create dedicated financing mechanisms.
- Address energy poverty: Raise awareness, conduct audits, advocate for clear legal frameworks, support intermediaries.

The benefits of Implementing these Recommendations will be:

- Empowering rural youth.
- Enhancing rural resilience through sustainable energy and addressing energy poverty.
- Fostering collaboration for achieving rural goals.
- Making informed decisions based on data and evidence.
- Promoting innovation and diversification in rural economies.
- Optimising rural-urban linkages through improved energy communities, SECAP implementation, and addressing shared challenges.

Thus, the PoliRuralPlus project will help to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas by promoting collaboration, inclusivity, innovation, and informed decision-making. By incorporating these actions, the PoliRuralPlus project aims to contribute to effective strategies for optimising rural-urban linkages in the post-COVID-19 era, addressing the challenges outlined in the study.



10.2 Detailed conclusions and recommendations

Detailed Analysis of the various EU policies and sources concludes that:

- Rural areas face challenges like demographic decline, infrastructure gaps, and limited access to services.
- The EU has various policies to support rural development, including the CAP, Cohesion Policy, and the Rural Pact.
- These policies emphasise:
 - Strengthening rural communities and economies.
 - Improving connectivity (transport and digital).
 - Preserving natural resources and greening activities.
 - Diversifying economic activities.
- The LEADER approach supports local action groups and community-led development.
- Rural-urban linkages are crucial for sustainable development.
- Collaboration and knowledge sharing: Regular exchanges, interactions, and collaborative initiatives between governments and stakeholders are essential for sharing knowledge, approaches, tools, and skills development.
 - Collaboration is key to achieving rural goals: Facilitating dialogue, exchange, and joint projects between stakeholders is crucial.
 - Collaboration is key: Facilitating dialogue, exchange, and joint projects between stakeholders is vital for achieving rural goals.
- R&I foresight can play a crucial role in supporting anticipatory governance, addressing complex challenges, and informing policymaking for rural-urban linkages, but it requires
 - tailored approaches, i.e the R&I foresight approaches need to be adapted to the specific context and needs of each government and region, especially for smaller areas with limited resources.
 - Comprehensive toolkit: Developing a comprehensive R&I foresight toolkit will equip governments with effective practices for implementation.
 - Institutionalisation: Institutionalising R&I foresight at national and regional levels ensures its regular use in policymaking.
 - Focus on inclusivity: R&I foresight should be inclusive and participatory, explicitly incorporating the perspectives of citizens, science, research institutions, businesses, and NGOs.
 - EU-level capacity: Establishing an EU-level capacity for scanning and tracking signals of change and disruption will aid governments in preparing for future challenges.
- Empowering youth is crucial for rural development: Engaging young people and providing them with opportunities is essential.
 - Importance of youth empowerment: Engaging young people in decision-making and rural life is crucial for development.
- Addressing the energy crisis is vital for rural resilience: Supporting sustainable energy solutions and financial assistance for rural communities is key and is essential for resilience.
- Data and evidence are essential for informed decision-making: Collecting and analysing data, alongside evidence-based policy recommendations, is essential for informed decision-making.
- Innovation and diversification are critical for rural resilience: Promoting entrepreneurship and supporting new products and services are important for rural resilience.
- Raising awareness of energy communities: Their benefits and encouraging participation through local associations, volunteers, and media campaigns is necessary.
 - Political support for energy communities: Education, networking, and ensuring EU legislation translates to national contexts is crucial.
 - Addressing energy poverty: Raising awareness, conducting energy audits, clear legal frameworks, intermediaries like energy social workers, and youth involvement are essential.
- Supporting SECAP implementation in rural areas: Cooperation among municipalities, support from regional authorities and agencies, and local population involvement are key.
- Fostering social innovation and good practice replication: Recognition, networking, showcasing successful practices, and addressing transport poverty are important.



it is clear that PoliRuralPlus can play a significant role in optimising rural-urban linkages and fostering the development of stronger, more prosperous, and inclusive rural communities across Europe if it:

- Considers the specific needs and contexts of different rural areas.
- Builds on existing successful initiatives and best practices.
- Promotes social inclusion and addresses inequalities.
- Ensures long-term sustainability and impact of interventions.

Thus recommendations for PoliRuralPlus for optimising rural-urban linkages:

- Facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange: Foster regular interactions and knowledge sharing between policymakers, researchers, and communities in rural and urban areas.
- Contribute to EU-level capacity building: Participate in and contribute to efforts to establish an EU-level capacity for monitoring and anticipating future changes and disruptions impacting rural-urban linkages.
- Ensure inclusivity and participation: Actively involve citizens, researchers, businesses, and NGOs in R&I foresight processes for rural-urban linkages to ensure diverse perspectives are considered.
- Foster social innovation and replication of good practices:
 - Recognize, network, and showcase successful practices for replication.
 - Address transport poverty often overlooked in energy poverty discussions.
- Strengthen LEADER approach: Advocate for mandatory budgets, streamlined procedures, and recognition of LAGs as key partners.
- Enhance territorial connections: Encourage multi-sectoral approaches, networking, and joint urban-rural projects.
- Simplify administration: Reduce bureaucracy, harmonise regulations, and provide capacity building for LAGs.
- Leverage digital tools: Facilitate collaboration, online marketing, and bridge the digital divide in rural areas.
- Advocate for policy coherence: Promote alignment between urban and rural development policies, encourage partnerships, and monitor progress.
- Utilise R&I foresight: Adapt approaches to rural-urban contexts, anticipate future challenges, and involve various stakeholders.
 - Apply R&I foresight methodologies to anticipate future challenges and opportunities in rural-urban linkages, informing policy and strategic planning.
 - Leverage the comprehensive PoliRural R&I foresight toolkit to guide effective implementation of foresight practices in relevant policies and initiatives.
 - Develop tailored R&I foresight approaches: Design context-specific R&I foresight initiatives suited to the needs of different regions and stakeholders within the rural-urban context.
 - Advocate for institutionalisation: Promote the institutionalisation of R&I foresight at national and regional levels to ensure its sustained application in rural-urban development strategies.
- Support implementation of Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) in rural areas:
 - Facilitate cooperation among municipalities to share resources and expertise.
 - Provide crucial support from regional authorities and Energy Agencies.
 - Involve the local population in development and implementation for tailored solutions.
- Raise awareness and encourage participation in energy communities:
 - Conduct awareness campaigns highlighting benefits and involving local associations, volunteers, and media.
 - Advocate for political support through education, networking, and ensuring EU legislation translates to national contexts.
 - Create dedicated financing mechanisms and business models tailored to rural needs.
 - Address energy poverty in rural communities:
 - Raise awareness and carry out energy audits to provide more data.
 - Advocate for clearer legal frameworks defining energy poverty comprehensively.
 - Support intermediaries like energy social workers and youth involvement.



By implementing these recommendations, the PoliRuralPlus project can contribute significantly to:

- Empowering rural youth.
- Enhancing rural resilience through sustainable energy solutions and addressing energy poverty.
- Fostering collaboration between stakeholders for achieving rural goals.
- Making informed decisions based on data and evidence.
- Promoting innovation and diversification in rural economies.
- Optimising rural-urban linkages through improved energy communities, SECAP implementation, and addressing shared challenges.
- These actions directly address the identified key challenges and learning points from the EESC opinions and good practice webinar.
- They promote rural development, energy transition, collaboration, informed decision-making, innovation, and inclusivity.
- By bridging the gap between rural and urban areas in these aspects, they contribute to optimising rural-urban linkages.
- Address key challenges and learning points from EESC opinions and the good practice webinar.
- Promote rural development, energy transition, collaboration, informed decision-making, innovation, and inclusivity.
- Bridge the gap between rural and urban areas in these aspects, optimising rural-urban linkages.

10.3 Takeaways

Analysis of this section indicates that the recommendations for PoliRuralPlus to address the challenges and contribute to effective strategies for optimising rural-urban linkages in the post-COVID-19 era are summarised as follows::

- **Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitate exchange between policymakers, researchers, and communities across rural and urban areas.
- **Inclusivity:** Involve citizens, businesses, and NGOs in rural-urban development.
- **Social Innovation:** Identify, replicate, and promote successful practices. Address issues like transport poverty.
- **Strengthen the LEADER Approach:** Advocate for its importance, streamline procedures, and ensure recognition of local action groups.
- **Enhance Territorial Connections:** Encourage multi-sectoral collaboration and joint urban-rural projects.
- **Leverage Digital Tools:** Promote their use for collaboration, marketing, and bridging the digital divide.
- **Advocate for Policy Coherence:** Ensure alignment between urban and rural policies.
- **utilise R&I Foresight:** Adapt approaches to rural-urban contexts and anticipate future challenges.
- **Support SECAP Implementation:** Facilitate regional support, cooperation, and local involvement.
- **Raise Awareness and Encourage Energy Community Participation:** Disseminate information, advocate for political support, and create dedicated financing mechanisms.

While suggestions that the PoliRuralPlus pilots might consider to translate these recommendations into practice are as follows:

1. Best Practice Analysis:
 - Form a task force: Create a team within PoliRuralPlus to research and analyse existing successful models of rural-urban linkages. This could involve case studies, literature reviews, and connecting with relevant networks.
 - Pilot region matching: Identify best practices that closely align with the specific challenges and opportunities faced by each pilot region.
 - Adaptation, not duplication: Understand how those models can be adapted for local circumstances, considering factors like demographics, economic sectors, and existing infrastructure.

2. Region-Specific Needs:



- Detailed baseline analysis: Each pilot region should conduct an in-depth assessment of its rural-urban linkages, including strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. This may involve data collection and stakeholder consultations.
- Tailored strategies: Pilot strategies should be designed based on this analysis, ensuring they target the most pressing local needs for strengthening rural-urban connections.

3. Integrated Strategies:

- Cross-sectoral dialogue: Facilitate workshops and meetings that bring together stakeholders from rural and urban areas, across different sectors (e.g., agriculture, tourism, social services, transport).
- Joint project development: Encourage the development of projects with explicit benefits for both rural and urban areas within the pilot regions.

4. Facilitate Collaboration:

- Knowledge sharing platforms: Establish online forums, regular newsletters, or shared databases where actors from different areas within pilot regions can exchange information.
- Matchmaking Events: Organise events that connect rural entrepreneurs with urban investors, or rural service providers with urban expertise, fostering partnerships.
- Celebrate Collaboration: Highlight successful collaborations within pilot regions to inspire replication.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Identify key indicators: Work with pilot regions to select metrics that track the impact on rural-urban linkages (e.g., business partnerships, job creation, service accessibility).
- Data collection mechanisms: Establish ways to collect this data consistently over time to measure progress.
- Regular evaluation: Schedule periodic reviews of the data to identify successes and areas needing adjustment.

6. Disseminate Results:

- Success stories: Create compelling narratives about positive outcomes achieved by pilot projects, emphasising their impact on rural-urban collaboration.
- Wide dissemination: utilise various channels like websites, conferences, publications, and social media to reach policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public.

7. Strengthen LEADER:

- Capacity building for LAGs: Provide training and resources to local action groups within pilot regions, enhancing their ability to implement projects and foster collaboration.
- Showcase LEADER impact: Document how projects initiated by LAGs contribute to strengthening rural-urban connections within pilot areas.
- National-level advocacy: Use evidence from the pilots to advocate for the LEADER approach in national policy discussions.

8. Digital Tools:

- Assess the digital divide: analyse gaps in connectivity and digital skills in each pilot region.
- Targeted solutions: Explore options like co-working spaces in rural areas, digital skills training, and facilitating e-commerce for rural products/services.

9. Advocate for Policy Coherence:

- analyse policy landscape: Map out existing policies impacting pilot regions at different levels (local, regional, national). Identify potential conflicts or synergies
- Form a Policy Working Group: Assemble stakeholders from pilot regions to discuss alignment and advocate for changes that support integrated rural-urban development.



10. Incorporate Foresight:

- Pilot foresight tools: Select one or two pilot regions to trial foresight methodologies, tailored to analyzing long-term trends impacting their specific rural-urban linkages.
- Capacity building: Offer training and support to those pilots in applying foresight tools.
- Share insights: Document the process and lessons learned, creating a model for other pilots to use in their strategic planning.

11. From urban-rural linkages to urban-rural relationships in the EU¹³⁵

This reference discusses the evolving relationship between urban and rural areas in the European Union. It highlights a trend of increasing integration, with both urban and rural areas facing common challenges like climate change and resource management. The European Union (EU) plays a role in facilitating cooperation between these areas through funding and programs that aim to improve cohesion.

Includes the following excellent references:

Rural-Urban Partnerships: an Integrated Approach to Economic Development / OECD, 24 October 2013, 323 p.	This report provides a framework to understand the changing relationships between urban and rural areas. It reflects the characteristics of rural-urban partnerships and the factors that can hinder as well as enable rural-urban co-operation. It includes 9 EU case studies.
Urban. Rural. Europe: Strengthening Partnerships: Discussion Paper / MORO Project, 2012, 5 p.	Prepared on the basis of the meeting of experts from the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development and the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development which took place in Berlin on 28 March 2012 as part of the MORO research project
Urban-to-Rural Population Growth Linkages: Evidence from OECD TL3 Regions / P. Veneri and V. Ruiz , OECD Regional Development Working Papers, 2013/03, 20 p.	The objective of this paper is to better understand how the population growth rates of rural regions are affected by their closeness to urban regions and by the economic performance of the latter.
Peri-Urban open space: how multi-functional land use can bring multiple benefits: topic paper / PURPLE – Peri-Urban regions platform, 2013, 7 p.	
Urban-rural relationships in the new century: clarifying and updating the intervention logic / Andrew Copus, 2012, 15 p.	This paper seeks to clarify the rationale for policy which aims to stimulate growth by strengthening urban-rural linkages.
Connecting Urban and Rural: Final report of the Sustainable Urban Fringes (SURF) Project / Interreg IVB North Sea Region project SURF, 2012, 72 p.	This report sets out a series of local, regional and European policy recommendations that seek to make positive changes to the urban fringe, recognizing how they can add value to the quality of life in urban and rural areas.
Urban-rural relationships in metropolitan areas of influence: best practice examples of metropolitan-rural cooperation / METREX -The network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas, 2011, 68 p.	Best practices compiled by areas of mutual interest and cooperation.
Place Orientation And Rural-Urban Interdependence / Emery N. Castle, JunJie Wu, and Bruce A. Weber. In: Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, vol.33, n°2, 2011. pp.179-204. EconLit with Full Text. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.	This article presents empirical evidence on the decentralising economic activities that proceed from the city to the countryside; and the unequal per capita economic rewards between rural and urban people over time, proposes an integrated framework of rural-urban space, discusses the historic interdependence of rural and urban places from the

¹³⁵ [From urban-rural linkages to urban-rural relationships in the EU | Epthinktank | European Parliament](#)

	perspective of the integrated framework, and looks at the implications for research and public policy.
Peri-urbanisation in Europe: towards European Policies to sustain urban-rural futures: synthesis report / Annette Piorr, Joe Ravetz, Ivan Tosics, Plurel, December 2010, 148 p.	
Regional Development Policies in OECD Countries / OECD, November 2010	In this report, OECD put t he focus is on the spatial and fiscal inter-dependence of urban areas and their neighbouring rural regions, especially on how to control urban growth in the process of urban sprawl. See Annex C: Urban-rural Linkages: In View of Controlling Urban Sprawl
OECD Regional Typology / Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development, 22 February 2010.	Regions of OECD member countries have been classified into Predominantly Urban, Intermediate and Predominantly Rural to take into account geographical differences among them.
Urban-Rural Differences in Quality of Life across the European Union / Mark Shucksmith, et al. In: Regional studies , 2009, v. 43, n. 10, p. 1275-1290	This paper analyses the European Quality of Life Survey 2003 to explore urban–rural differences in income, deprivation, and other life domains. The main conclusion is that the richest countries in the European Union show little evidence of significant urban–rural differences, whereas in the poorer countries of the east and south, rural areas have a much lower level of perceived welfare and quality of life.
Urban-Rural Flows and the Meaning of Borders : Functional and Symbolic Integration in Norwegian City-Regions / Knut Hidle, Arild Aurvåg Farsund and Hans Kjetil Lysegård. In: European Urban and Regional Studies, vol.16, n°4, 2009, pp.409-421	This article focuses on political and everyday interplay and integration between city and hinterland, investigating borders and boundaries in such interplay. Five Norwegian city-regions act as case studies.
Polycentric urban development and rural-urban partnership: thematic study of INTERREG and ESPON activities / ESPON, INTERACT, 2007, 120 p.	This report presents a first review of the work carried out by INTERREG and ESPON projects addressing polycentric urban development and rural-urban partnership. See Chapter 3, Urban-rural relationships .
Cross-Border Urban and Rural Integrated Areas – Challenges and Chances: Final declaration / Annual Conference of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), Liège, 8 November 2013, 3 p.	Cooperation at several levels contributes to cohesion and to development of cross-border regions and helps to cope with challenges in the framework of implementation of the Europe2020 Strategy. AEBR stresses that still the full potential of cross-border cooperation in integrated areas is not used: in the fields of health care, innovation, research and development, infrastructure, public services, as well as for achieving a “critical mass” for common investments and for avoidance of investment errors or environmental protection and networking of protected areas of nature and landscape. Thus, AEBR proposes six actions to achieve this.
Urban-rural partnership: CEMR survey on integrated territorial development / Council of European Municipalities and Regions, June 2013, 12 p.	The purpose of the survey, carried out by CEMR is to take stock of the practices and models of urban-rural cooperation. It could serve as a source of inspiration for better guidance and policy making at the EU level, addressing the issue of cohesion policy instruments in support of territorial urban-rural partnerships.



<p>Rurality and regional development: Unlocking our territories' economic and social potential: political report / AER – Assembly of European Regions, May 2013, 24 p.</p>	<p>This report emphasizes that the territorial approach to the future operational programmes for 2014-2020, based on community-led local development and Integrated Territorial Investments, must take into account the balance between urban and rural territories. To achieve this, there is a need for new more qualitative and more spatially restricted indicators, in order to better appreciate local potentials and requirements.</p>
<p>Territorial Cohesion and Competitiveness through urban-rural cooperation and metropolitan governance / EUROCITIES and METREX, September 2012, 4 p.</p>	<p>EUROCITIES and METREX has joined forces to promote the case for urban-rural cooperation and metropolitan governance. The statement argues for greater recognition of the potential of functional areas and urban-rural partnerships to support the delivery of Europe 2020 objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive development in the EU. It is based on the experience of our networks and the growing evidence from European cities and regions. The statement outlines how urban-rural partnerships can and do work in practice and suggests how to strengthen those partnerships with initiatives both at national and EU level.</p>
<p>European Parliament resolution on European Urban Agenda and its Future in Cohesion Policy, P7_TA(2011)0284, 23 June 2011</p>	<p>European Parliament resolution of 21 February 2008 on the follow-up of the Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter: Towards a European Action Programme for Spatial Development and Territorial Cohesion P6_TA(2008)0069, 21 February 2008</p>
<p>European Parliament resolution of 21 February 2008 on the follow-up of the Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter: Towards a European Action Programme for Spatial Development and Territorial Cohesion P6_TA(2008)0069, 21 February 2008</p>	
<p>Urban-Rural linkages / European Commission. DG Regional Policy.</p>	<p>European Union promotes cooperation between urban, rural and their surrounding areas, in order to make a better use of land, natural resources and public services.</p>
<p>Metropolitan Areas and City Regions in Europe 2020 (own-initiative opinion), ECO/299, Rapporteur: Mr van lersel, 21/09/2011</p>	<p>In the EESC's view, metropolitan developments should effectively help remove polarisation between rural areas and cities.</p>
<p>Résultats du Mos 2012 : la ville se construit majoritairement en recyclage / Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme – Île-de-France, . Note rapide Territoires n° 636, Decembre 2013, 6 p.</p>	<p>Pour la première fois depuis trente ans, le développement urbain se fait majoritairement en recyclage urbain en Île-de-France.</p>
<p>Eurostat regional yearbook 2013 / Eurostat, October 2013, 284 p.</p>	<p>A special focus chapters included in this edition on European cities (p.200-2016) and on Rural development (p.237-262).</p>
<p>Urban-rural typology update: integration of NUTS 2010 and the latest population grid / Eurostat, Statistics in focus, n°16, 2013.</p>	<p>Degree of urbanisation / Eurostat</p>
<p>Degree of urbanisation / Eurostat</p>	<p>Remote rural regions: how proximity to a city influences the performance of rural regions / Regional Focus, n°1, 2008, 8 p.</p>
<p>Remote rural regions: how proximity to a city influences the performance of rural regions / Regional Focus, n°1, 2008, 8 p.</p>	<p>This short paper describes the characteristics of remote rural regions and how remoteness can be defined and measured. This new approach combines a new classification of remoteness, based on driving time to the closest city, with the OECD classification of regions into predominantly urban, intermediate and predominantly rural regions.</p>



URMA – Urban-rural partnerships in metropolitan areas	PLUREL – Peri-urban Land Use Relationships
RURBANCE – Rural Urban Governance	PERIURBAN Parks

11.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

To focus on fostering collaboration between urban and rural areas, PoliRuralPlus needs to :

- **Highlight Common Challenges:** PoliRuralPlus can emphasise the shared challenges faced by rural and urban areas, such as climate change and resource management. This can be a strong foundation for building a collaborative approach where both sides work together for solutions.
- **EU Funding Opportunities:** The document mentions the EU's role in providing funding for cooperation between urban and rural areas. PoliRuralPlus can explore relevant EU funding opportunities to support its pilot projects and collaborative initiatives.
- **Promoting Cohesion:** The EU's goal of improved cohesion between urban and rural areas aligns with PoliRuralPlus's mission. PoliRuralPlus can frame its initiatives as contributing to this broader EU objective.

While the PoliRuralPlus pilots could address the key points from the article on urban-rural relationships, along with examples:

1. Highlighting Common Challenges

- **Joint Needs Assessment:** Pilots could collaboratively identify challenges faced by both their rural and nearby urban areas. This could include:
 - Climate adaptation measures
 - Infrastructure needs (transport, digital connectivity)
 - Attracting skilled workers
- **Coordinated Response Initiatives:** Develop proposals addressing these common challenges in a way that benefits both rural and urban components of the pilot. For example:
 - Joint renewable energy projects
 - Shared digital infrastructure and skills training programs
 - Marketing campaigns promoting regional eco-tourism

2. Accessing EU Funding Opportunities

- **Targeted Research:** Research existing EU funding programs explicitly focused on fostering urban-rural collaboration and cohesion. Align pilot project proposals with these funding priorities.
- **Partnership Development:** Seek out urban counterparts as project partners. Strong urban-rural consortiums can increase the competitiveness of funding applications.
- **utilise Existing Networks:** Leverage networks developed within PoliRuralPlus to identify potential funding opportunities and potential partners within urban areas.

3. Promoting Cohesion

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Raise awareness among communities in both rural and urban parts of the pilot about their interdependence. This fosters an understanding of shared benefits from collaboration.
- **Joint Events and Exchanges:** Organise events, workshops, or exchange programs bringing together stakeholders from across the urban-rural spectrum.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Use the pilot findings to inform policy recommendations at the regional or even national level that promote a cohesive and integrated approach to urban-rural development.

4. Important Considerations for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots

- **Diversity:** Recognize the unique dynamics and needs of each pilot region. Tailor strategies accordingly
- **Adaptability:** Be flexible in your approaches. Urban-rural collaboration is an evolving field, and pilot projects should iterate their strategies based on lessons learned.



- **Communication Is Key:** emphasise the value of urban-rural collaboration in all external communications about the pilot, both to potential partners and funders.

11.1.1 Recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots' Regional Action Plans:

1. **Digital Transformation and Connectivity:** Accelerate the deployment of high-speed internet in rural areas to support digital agriculture, e-health, remote education, and business innovation.
2. **Economic Diversification:** Promote diversification beyond traditional agriculture to include tourism, green energy, and digital services, leveraging rural areas' unique assets.
3. **Sustainable Practices:** Encourage sustainable agricultural practices, renewable energy projects, and conservation efforts to protect rural landscapes and biodiversity.
4. **Skills and Education:** Invest in education and training programs to equip rural populations with the skills needed for modern agriculture, digital services, and green jobs.
5. **Health and Social Services:** Enhance accessibility to health and social services in rural areas through telemedicine, mobile clinics, and community centres to improve quality of life.
6. **Participatory Governance:** Foster participatory governance models that involve rural communities in decision-making processes, ensuring policies reflect their needs and aspirations.
7. **Innovative Financing:** Explore innovative financing mechanisms, including public-private partnerships, to fund infrastructure, services, and development projects in rural areas.
8. **COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery:** Implement strategies to mitigate the pandemic's impacts on rural economies, ensuring support for affected businesses and communities and preparing for future crises.
9. **Trust and Social Cohesion:** Build and maintain trust between governmental authorities and rural communities through transparent communication, reliable information, and involvement in policy development.
10. **Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide:** Develop integrated policies that recognize the interdependence of rural and urban areas, facilitating the flow of resources, people, and ideas between them to address inequalities and empower rural communities.

In Summary:

To enhance rural-urban linkages, PoliRuralPlus and its pilot projects should adopt a multifaceted approach focusing on innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity. Drawing from lessons learned, policy recommendations, and toolkit suggestions across various studies and principles from the OECD, EU initiatives, and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, a coherent strategy is essential. These strategies should address the digital divide, support economic diversification, enhance social cohesion, and foster resilience in the face of challenges like pandemics.

These recommendations align with the overarching goals of PoliRuralPlus to promote sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development across Europe's rural and urban areas. Implementing these strategies requires collaborative efforts from local, regional, and national authorities, alongside engagement with community stakeholders, to ensure that rural regions can thrive in the face of modern challenges.



Annex I Literature Review

This literature review on rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the project area. It identifies, reviews, summarises, and analyses relevant academic and policy literature on rural-urban linkages and opportunities, including related research into the influence of COVID 19 on regional development, Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative, to define the key concepts and themes, identify best practices and lessons learned in enhancing rural-urban linkages and opportunities.

1. EU Policies

The EU has established several policies and instruments that require better integrated urban and rural development if their objectives are to be met, including the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Rural Development Policy, Urban Agenda for the EU, European Innovation Partnership (EIP), Digital Agenda for Europe¹³⁶, Cohesion Policy, and European Green Deal. These policies recognize the need for integrated approaches and the importance of coordinated action across sectors to urban and rural development and highlight the interdependencies between rural and urban areas to achieve sustainable and equitable development.

1.1 PoliRuralPlus and the EU Call: Resilient, inclusive, healthy and green rural, coastal and urban communities (HORIZON-CL6-2023-COMMUNITIES-01)

In response to the call, the PoliRuralPlus project aims to fostering a sustainable, balanced equitable and inclusive development of rural areas, supporting the implementation of the European Green Deal, in particular to the farm to fork and the biodiversity strategies, the organic action plan, the common agricultural policy (CAP), the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas and its objectives (contributing to make rural areas stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous) and to its flagship initiative "Research and innovation for rural communities", and the EU territorial agenda for 2030.

PoliRuralPlus' results are expected to contribute to all of following expected outcomes:

- Improved connections, strategies and governance arrangements that foster synergistic development and just transition of rural and urban areas and more integrated territorial policies and strategies in a growing number of localities;
- Improved business and innovation opportunities thanks to a more proximate, circular and green economy and renewed vitality of rural places through a better connectivity, improved valorisation of cultural and natural heritage, and stronger innovation ecosystems;
- Improved mutual access of rural and urban actors to services provided by either type of areas;
- Improved social connectivity, social capital, resilience, and capacity to face changes as well as of innovating, and increased understanding of the cultural connections between rural and urban communities and strengthened sense of territorial identity.

Rural and urban areas are interdependent and can mutually benefit from a territorial planning that takes into consideration their interactive relationship.

People, goods, services, information, financial capitals, energy, etc. flow between these areas, but these linkages are often neglected by policy makers that tend to deal with rural and urban issues separately. Proposals should aim at improving rural-urban cooperation, connections and planning for an integrated territorial development that adopts equitable measures to respond to socio-environmental disparities and foster sustainable growth.

¹³⁶ [Digital agenda for Europe | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)



PoliRuralPlus will support specific projects for developing rural-urban territorial partnerships to enhance the well-being of rural and urban people, increase resilience and favour a more synergistic/interlinked/networked development of rural and urban areas.

PoliRuralPlus will also prioritise experimentation and innovation in domains that have been demonstrated to favour bi-directional urban-rural synergies and the development of a well-being economy: proximity (shortening distances/value chains including in the agri-food sector with particular attention to organic production), greener economy/society (e.g. ecosystem services and protection and restoration of biodiversity and natural capital, including nature-based solution – NBS), circularity (closing loops/ flows), services (improving social connectivity, new ways of working and living, pooling of and/or itinerant services), culture, landscape and heritage (building territorial identities as well as improving access to a valorised cultural heritage and cultural life) and mobility (sustainable and affordable mobility alternatives for rural residents).

PoliRuralPlus will capitalise on lessons learnt to further upgrade and future-proof policy frameworks and enabling environments.

PoliRuralPlus will pay attention to the ecological and digital transitions, the potential of digital technologies as well as social inclusiveness, environmental knowledge and access of rural communities to good quality services and opportunities. In addition, they should analyse the impact caused by COVID 19 pandemic on integrated territorial development and address challenges that resulted from it.

PoliRuralPlus will implement the multi-actor approach and bring together multiple science fields, in particular the social sciences and humanities (SSH) (e.g., economics, human geography, political science, cultural studies, etc.), and actors with complementary roles and experiences (e.g., service providers, transport services, public authorities, associations, innovators, small and medium enterprises -SMEs - etc.).

PoliRuralPlus will cover a representative variety of European rural areas (e.g. rural-costal areas, mountains areas, remote rural areas) and build on results of relevant Horizon 2020 projects such as RURBAN, ROBUST (e.g., rural-urban learning hub), COASTAL, RURITAGE, RURALURE, SmartCulTour, TExTOUR, and FOODSHIFT 2030 and seek to improve/uptake governance and role models they have identified as promising.

PoliRuralPlus will create synergies with the New European Bauhaus (NEB) projects, facilitating ideas flows from urban to rural settings and vice-versa. For instance, some NEB projects could inspire good practices on the reuse of buildings in rural areas that can function as innovation hubs or build links between urban and rural areas. Proposals should allocate adequate budget and resources to implement this task.

PoliRuralPlus will offer financial support to third parties as an option either to select pilots for developing partnerships or innovative solutions aiming at contributing to integrated territorial development.

PoliRuralPlus will leverage the data and services available through European Research Infrastructures federated under the European Open Science Cloud, as well as data from relevant Data Spaces.

The following PoliRuralPlus outcomes are expected.

- Policy makers and the public will have a better citizens understanding of social inclusion challenges, the circumstances of people in vulnerable situations in rural and coastal areas and how to strengthen social resilience, including in relation to ecosystem services, biodiversity and natural heritage for coastal areas.
- Policy makers will have a better understanding of the behavioural and structural drivers of people's lifestyle choices and people's perceptions of rural life in the aftermath of COVID-19 and of the long-term trends and opportunities for rural areas.



- A sustainable post-COVID recovery will be enabled in urban, rural and coastal communities through biodiversity-friendly actions, and valorisation of natural and cultural heritage for sustainable recovery, professional, collective and personal attitudes.
- There will be an improvement connections, strategies and governance arrangements that enable synergistic development of rural, coastal and urban areas and more integrated territorial policies and interventions in a growing number of localities and across several sectors.
- Rural, urban and coastal actors will be engaged in a just and green transition. They will be equipped with strategies and innovations to contribute to the EU's climate-neutrality by 2050 and benefit from a climate-neutral economy.
- Prosperity will increase thanks to the deployment of business models that are fit for the future and greater job opportunities will be provided for rural and coastal people, particularly in relation to territorial and marine economies and critical resources (soil, water, biodiversity). This is in line with the objectives of the EU Missions 'A Soil Deal for Europe', 'Restore our Ocean and Waters', and 'Adaptation to climate change'.
- More innovative and integrated policy framework will be upgraded and developed, capitalising on international knowledge exchange, including indigenous, traditional and local knowledge[[Reference for using this expression is UNESCO work: <https://en.unesco.org/links.>]] and cultural heritage in a bottom-up approach.
- Knowledge on the costs and benefits of urban farming and improved policy frameworks will be strengthened to maximise its benefits for European society at large across all dimensions of sustainability.
- More diverse and systemic approaches and innovative solutions (digital, nature-based, social and community-led) will be developed with and for local communities and there is an increase in the number of local actors with improved capacity to sustain these innovative processes and take up these solutions.
- Connections between food provision and multi-functional nature-based solutions for the benefit and well-being of people will be increased. Resilience (climate adaptation mechanisms) will also increase through the combination of the vision of the New European Bauhaus initiative to '*call on all Europeans to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for our eyes, minds, and souls*' with a sustainable food systems approach and make use of Novel sources of inspiration will be put to best use.
- Understanding, support and engagement will increase among young people, professionals, authorities, decision makers and the public for all dimensions of sustainability.
- Local, coastal and policy communities will use coastal and nature-based heritage, culture and ecosystem services as a basis for potentially year-round diversified sustainable eco-tourism and rural event industry activities.
- A framework will be developed to measure communities' well-being beyond economic indicators (e.g. social, environmental) and use both to create collaborative community management models, including for sustainable and/or regenerative tourism and rural event industry.

PoliRuralPlus Expected Impact

PoliRuralPlus will set out a credible pathway to achieving resilient, inclusive, just, healthy and green rural, coastal and urban communities and more specifically one or several of the following expected impacts:

- Rural, coastal and urban areas are developed in a sustainable, balanced, equitable and inclusive manner thanks to a better understanding of the i) environmental, socio-economic, behavioural, cultural, architectural and demographic structures, ii) needs and drivers of change and their interconnections, and iii) how digital, nature-based, social and community-led innovations are deployed.



- Rural, coastal and urban communities are empowered to i) act for change, ii) be better prepared to achieve climate-neutrality and adapt to climate change, and iii) use the digital and green transitions to increase resilience and provide positive long-term prospects.
- Rural communities are equipped with upgraded innovation ecosystems and innovative and smarter circular solutions that i) increase access to services and job opportunities, including for women, young people in vulnerable situations, ii) increase their attractiveness and iii) reduce the feeling of being left behind, even in remote locations like mountains and outermost regions.
- Sustainable development of coastal areas, including coastal protection and resilience, is enhanced, reaping the benefits of social, digital and community-led innovations, to deliver nature-based and scientifically validated solutions to current coastal socio-economic and environmental threats.
- Urban and peri-urban communities – including people in vulnerable situations – can access, afford and choose healthy, nutritious and environmental-friendly food.

Communities in natural and coastal areas can offer sustainable, quality, environmentally and socially friendly tourism, events and recreational and leisure activities.

1.1.1 Call Destination: Resilient, inclusive, healthy and green rural, coastal and urban communities (2023/24)

Places and people matter when it comes to achieving of a more sustainable Europe. The Sustainable Development Goals and the ecological and digital transitions brought forward by the European Green Deal with its farm to fork and biodiversity strategies, zero pollution action plan, common fisheries policy (CFP)[[Common Fishery Policy https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/policy/common-fisheries-policy-cfp_en.]], along with the recent pandemic, bring challenges and opportunities that vary for different places and people. Rural (including mountains and sparsely populated areas) and coastal areas, play a key role in protecting, managing, and using natural resources. The provision of both private and public goods from these areas depends on the resilience and attractiveness of communities there and the capacity of people living and working there to enjoy an adequate level of well-being, which should be guaranteed by, e.g. the access to good quality services. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted deficiencies in digital infrastructures and economic opportunities that hamper resilience. It also highlighted the importance of high-quality and biodiverse green and blue spaces for the health and well-being of local communities, in primis, but also for that of visitors of these areas.

Innovation is a key enabler of the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas (LTVRA)[[Long Term Vision for Rural Areas, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en.]] that aims to overcome the challenges outlined above and make rural areas stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous by 2040. Urban communities generally offer better access to many services but are also more vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, they have a key role to play in fostering sustainable production and consumption as major demand drivers. The New European Bauhaus initiative[[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_4627.]] offers possibilities to redesign living spaces to improve sustainability, inclusiveness, and aesthetics, setting out a path to a more resilient, inclusive, healthy and green (built) environment. In all communities, social, cultural and behavioural drivers play an important role in either enabling or slowing down transitions. Knowledge and innovative solutions need to be developed to strengthen every community's resilience and capacity to contribute to and benefit from the upcoming transitions in an economy that works for all territories and ensures a fair and just transition leaving no one behind.

Under this destination, transdisciplinary R&I with a strong social, behavioural and humanities sciences dimension (SSH), which pay attention to gender aspects, will enable a sustainable, balanced, equitable and inclusive development and management of rural, coastal and urban areas in three different ways.



Firstly, it will aim to increase our understanding of the different ways of climate, environmental, socio-economic and demographic changes affect rural, coastal and urban areas in order to identify ways to turn these changes into equal, and, when needed equitable, opportunities for people wherever they live. This would strengthen territorial cohesion and enable a just transition. Secondly, it will explore innovative ways to tailor policy responses to the place-based challenges and needs identified at various levels of governance. Thirdly, it will support bottom-up community-led innovation to empower communities to develop, test and upscale solutions that answer global challenges in locally adapted ways. Achieving policy goals require providing people with more equitable access to the knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices and ensure they are actively engaged in the conservation. It also requires natural resources to be managed in a sustainable and circular manner, from production or service provision to consumption, in the spirit of the EU competence framework for sustainability. Rural, coastal and urban communities need improved labour conditions, quality of life and long-term socio-economic prospects in the context of major transitions and rising threats to climate, resources and health. This is particularly the case for women, young people, older people, people with disabilities, people in vulnerable situations (e.g. income falling below the poverty line, or at risk of poverty), migrants, ethnic minorities and indigenous people and those hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their capacity to drive community-led innovations and their resilience must be increased across the diverse European territories including remote and peripheral places such as mountains, forests, archipelagos, sparsely populated areas, as well as the Arctic. The necessary changes will be facilitated and resilient, smart, and climate friendly production and lifestyles will be supported through mobilising the forces of i) digital transformation, ii) upgraded innovation ecosystems, iii) cultural and natural heritage, iv) nature-based solutions, more sustainable and regenerative tourism as well as social and policy innovation will facilitate necessary changes and support resilient, smart, and climate friendly production and lifestyles.

This destination will in particular:

- Address the spatial and socio-economic or behavioural drivers of the European Green Deal (including farm to fork, biodiversity and sustainable and smart mobility strategies), especially its just transition component.
- It will make a key contribution to the flagship initiative 'R&I for rural communities' and to the four areas of work under the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: making areas stronger, connected, resilient, prosperous. It will in particular help achieve climate targets by putting the focus on the climate-neutrality of rural communities that have specific needs and are often neglected by climate action.
- It will complement the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative that connects the European Green Deal to our living and public spaces; The NEB aims to achieve deep transformation of these spaces, closely involving the public, and integrating the core NEB values of sustainability, inclusion and aesthetics. It will make a key contribution to improving social inclusion in Europe in line with the principles of the European pillar for social rights, the EU social economy action plan and contributing to the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities for 2021-2030.
- It will contribute to the: i) implementation of the new joint communication on the Arctic (adopted on 13 October 2021), ii) the fourth Arctic Science Ministerial Joint Statement[[The Commission has signed the Joint statement of the third Arctic science ministerial and committed to further support Arctic science, including integrating traditional and indigenous knowledge.]] and iii) to the All- Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance.
- It will contribute to the: i) implementation of the competence framework for sustainability prepared by the Commission[[<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/greencomp>.]] and the Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability for learners of all ages and at all levels of education (part of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030)[[https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-01/proposal-council-recommendation-learning-environmental-sustainability_0.pdf.]].
- It will help implement the EU agenda for tourism (expected in late 2022).
- It will contribute and link to the just, green and digital transitions called for by the European Green Deal, the European industrial strategy, the circular economy action plan and the updated bioeconomy strategy, by exploiting the potential of digital technologies (e.g., using local digital twins for participatory urban planning and evidence-based policy-making).



1.2 EU Digitalization Policy

The first Report on the state of the Digital Decade 2030, issued in 2023¹³⁷ takes stock of the EU's progress towards a successful digital transformation for people, businesses, and the environment as set out in the Decision establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030¹³⁸ ("the Digital Decade Decision"). It reviews digital policy developments and describes how the EU is advancing towards the agreed targets and objectives, thus outlining where the EU stands at the outset of the implementation of the Digital Decade Policy Programme. The report finds that the EU's progress towards the digital decade targets is mixed, with some progress being made in digital skills, digital infrastructure and digitalisation of businesses. However, there is still a need for acceleration and deepening collective efforts, including through policy measures and investment in digital technologies, skills and infrastructures. The EU's Digital Decade Policy Programme is a framework for collective progress on digital transformation, and is supported by the European Semester and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade provides a clear reference point for the type of digital transformation that the EU wants.

1.2.1 Findings that are most relevant to the PoliRuralPlus project are:

1. The EU needs to be agile and swift in its digital transformation.
 - The report highlights the rapid pace of technological change and the need for the EU to be able to adapt quickly. This is particularly important in the context of geopolitical tensions and an intensifying technological race.
2. The EU needs to address its strategic dependencies on other countries.
 - The report notes that the EU is overly reliant on other countries for critical technologies, such as semiconductors and cloud computing. This makes the EU vulnerable to disruption and could hinder its attempts to achieve its digital transformation goals.
3. The EU needs to invest in research and innovation.
 - The report emphasises the importance of research and innovation in developing new digital technologies and reducing the EU's strategic dependencies.
4. The EU needs to foster collaboration between Member States.
 - The report calls for the EU to support the development of multi-country projects (MCPs) that can pool resources and expertise. This collaboration is key to achieving the Digital Decade goals.
5. The EU needs to invest in connectivity.
 - The report stresses the importance of high-speed connectivity for the EU's digital transformation. This includes investing in fixed broadband, mobile networks, and backhaul networks.

The PoliRuralPlus project can help to address these insights by supporting the development of rural digital hubs and experimentation facilities, as well as ambitious connectivity projects for the deployment of fixed broadband networks, mobile networks such as 5G networks, as well as backhaul networks, to bring high quality infrastructure to areas suffering from insufficient broadband coverage, in particular in rural and remote areas.

1.3 The Common Agricultural Policy as a driver for rural digital transformation¹³⁹

Through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the EU is making rural areas and agriculture more competitive and sustainable. Part of this is through investing in digital transformation, as part of Member States' CAP Strategic Plans. To promote the necessary investments in digital technologies, services and skills, each Member State's CAP Strategic Plan includes a tailored digital strategy addressing the needs and the circumstances of each country. CAP

¹³⁷ [Report20230929_Ai1lrJlev2WpY8hu8FDXtCIDfk_98641.pdf](#)

¹³⁸ Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, OJ L 323, 19.12.2022, p. 4–26

¹³⁹ [The Common Agricultural Policy as a driver for rural digital transformation | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#)



Plans aim to create the right environment for farmers and rural communities to take advantage of the digital transition, including foster innovation and knowledge exchange in agriculture and rural development. Digital tools and services can increase farmers' productivity and income while providing a good level of living standards for rural communities. This means high-speed broadband infrastructure, IT equipment and uptake of digital tools and services. In their CAP Strategic Plans' digitalisation strategies for agriculture and rural areas, Member States explain how they will plan to fill the digital connectivity gap by using the different instruments available, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the Digital Europe Programme, the Horizon Europe Programme or the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). Member States can benefit from these funds in synergy with their national, regional and private funds.

The digital transformation can help agriculture become greener, more resilient and more sustainable, in line with the European Green Deal objectives.

1.4 EU Single Market Programme Social Economy Missions for Community Resilience in rural areas

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Rural areas are characterised by complex social and economic relations, diverse functions, representations and meanings and varied levels of socio-economic development¹⁴¹. While some European rural areas demonstrate higher levels of productivity, GDP, population growth and have ample access to services, others have lagged behind suffering downward spirals of economic decline, low employment rates, out-migration of the youth¹⁴² and better educated, an ageing population and loss of private and public investment in infrastructure and services.

The capacity to foster rural social entrepreneurship, citizens collective mobilisation and enabling institutional frameworks that support community action have been stressed as elements that empower local communities and actors to be more resilient. In this regard, social enterprises have been identified as organisations that contribute to social inclusion and local development through social innovation, therefore providing new goods and/or services to meet community needs, boost a more sustainable green and digital transition and foster inclusive social and governance relations.

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development ('EAFRD') and Cohesion policy funds in general can foster rural entrepreneurship and provide help in overcoming barriers, such as for example the difficulty in accessing funding. Single small municipalities or social economy SMEs and entities operating in rural contexts often encounter difficulties to benefit from EU funding opportunities as well. Providing them with this opportunity would be also an incentive for clusterisation, making it possible to access and absorb EU funds such as InvestEU¹⁴³. Microfinance tools such as EaSI¹⁴⁴ are also very relevant for rural communities.

The European Green Deal¹⁴⁵ endorses the important role of rural areas in making the EU the first climate neutral continent by 2050. Small and medium-sized enterprises on their side play a crucial role in reaching the objectives of the Green Deal Industrial Plan¹⁴⁶ which aims to enhance the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry and support the fast transition to climate neutrality.

The green transition will therefore require the development of partnerships in economic activities in rural areas, between businesses of all sectors, local authorities, researchers and services based on innovation, knowledge

¹⁴⁰ [The Common Agricultural Policy as a driver for rural digital transformation | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁴¹ 11 Olmedo, L., van Twuijver, M. and O'Shaughnessy, M. (2023). Rurality as context for innovative responses to social challenges – The role of rural social enterprises. *Journal of Rural Studies*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.04.020>

¹⁴² 12 The phenomenon of leaving a region, community, etc., to move or settle into a different part of one's country or home territory is particularly relevant for rural and remote areas.

¹⁴³ 13 About InvestEU (europa.eu)

¹⁴⁴ 14 EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

¹⁴⁵ 3 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

¹⁴⁶ 4 The Green Deal Industrial Plan (europa.eu).



sharing and cooperation. However, SMEs' competitiveness is still affected by a limited exploitation of opportunities and innovation prospects in the Single Market and beyond.

There are several challenges that small and medium-sized enterprises face in rural areas. The most relevant are limited access to finance due to the presence of limited financial infrastructure, inadequate transportation, telecommunications, and energy supply as well as limited market access. Another element that hinders rural areas economic development is the shortage of skilled workers, particularly in high-tech fields. In addition, in many rural areas, SMEs are heavily dependent on agriculture, which can make them vulnerable to fluctuations in crop yields and commodity prices. Finally, it is important to mention that rural areas are lagging behind in terms of connectivity, IT networks/ digital hubs.

Digital social enterprises located in rural areas should be helped and supported as an important tool to provide an answer to several inherent challenges of those areas. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort by governments, private sector actors and other relevant stakeholders. The Long Term Vision for Rural Areas¹⁴⁷ aims to address those challenges and concerns, by building on the emerging opportunities of the EU's green and digital transitions, and by identifying means to improve rural quality of life, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth. In so doing, the Vision highlights Social Economy as one important area of policy intervention. In this context, the Single Market Programme aims to promote growth and to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs with various forms of support, promoting new business opportunities and developing industrial value chains.

The Agency is entrusted by the European Commission with the implementation, inter alia, of parts of the SMP COSME programme. Fostering social innovation at the local, regional and inter-regional level will be crucial to support green transition and stimulate cohesion and inclusiveness so that nobody is left behind. The Social Economy, in all its diversity of forms and business models, brings the potential for the necessary changes. Awareness of the potential of social economy within the EU is not developed homogeneously though. Due to the presence of different sensibilities and definitions Member States apply different subsets of the social economy principles to define and support their social economy actors.

Furthermore, the spread of existing EU tools and supportive schemes for social enterprises and stakeholders is far from being uniform in all EU countries and regions. This often results in limited collaboration initiatives of social economy networks in particular at regional and local level. EU policies in support of the social economy need to be reinforced. In this context, the European Commission launched targeted initiatives to raise awareness and build rural networks of social economy stakeholders at regional and local level¹⁴⁸ and wishes to pursue awareness-raising campaigns and other initiatives to build and strengthen inter-regional collaboration. With the Social Economy Action Plan¹⁴⁹, released in December 2021, the Commission put forward concrete measures to help mobilise the full potential of the social economy sector, building on the results of the 2011 Social Business Initiative¹⁵⁰ and the 2016 Start-up and Scale-up Initiative¹⁵¹. Moreover, the updated EU industrial strategy¹⁵² in May 2021, identified Proximity and Social economy among the 14 industrial ecosystems relevant for recovery post-COVID, resilience and the twin green and digital transitions.

A October 2023 call for proposals, in particular, implements point 3.4 of the Social Economy Action Plan to enable social economy actors of the Proximity and Social Economy ecosystem to develop innovative business practices to boost rural growth and competitiveness and help driving the twin transition. It is aimed at fostering the exchange of good practices, success stories in the various policy domains contributing to reaching the goals of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

Social economy entities are fully part of the Proximity and Social Economy industrial ecosystem as they bring value to local and rural economies by fostering their inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability. They have strong local

¹⁴⁷ 5 The EU Rural vision (europa.eu) Call: SMP-COSME-2023-RESILIENCE — European Social Economy MissionsV1.0 – 05.10.2023 6

¹⁴⁸ 6 European Social Economy Regions (ESER) 2023: Call for Expression of Interest (europa.eu)

¹⁴⁹ 7 Social Economy Action Plan - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

¹⁵⁰ 8 Social enterprises (europa.eu)

¹⁵¹ 9 Idem

¹⁵² European Commission updates the EU Industrial Strategy | Advanced Technologies for Industry (europa.eu) Call: SMP-COSME-2023-RESILIENCE — European Social Economy MissionsV1.0 – 05.10.2023



roots and primarily aim to serve the community where they are based, retaining population, economic activities and revenues locally. As such, they have potential to drive local economic development in rural areas in different areas such as agriculture, energy production, organic food etc.

The aim of the Social Economy Missions is to accelerate the development and acknowledgement of this potential via inter-regional learning and collaboration so contributing to a European Social Economy community and boosting EU Recovery And Resilience Facility¹⁵³

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is the main component of NextGenerationEU, the Union's temporary instrument to support Member States affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The fund is operational from 2021 to 2023 and is linked to the EU budget for the period 2021-2027. The funds made available to Member States under the RRF take the form of grants and loans. To benefit from the financial support of the RRF, Member States have developed national plans for recovery and resilience, which define a set of reforms and public investment projects to be implemented by 2026. The plans should enable the application of the recommendations made by the Commission and the Council under the European Semester (environmental sustainability, productivity, equity and macroeconomic stability), and includes measures to achieve the climate and digital transitions. * constant prices in 2018, used for the calculation of grants and loans to Member States ** current prices in 2021

Link to the Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241>

THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE FACILITY (RRF)

HOW THE RRF WORKS

- The Member States submit their plans for recovery and resilience.
- The Commission assesses them against 11 criteria
- The Council approves the plans on a case-by-case basis the month following the Commission's decision
- The Commission pays 13% of the total grant amount within two months of the Council's approval
- Member States may request payments, up to twice a year, when they reach agreed milestones and targets. The Commission then has two months to prepare a preliminary assessment of the applications.

1.5 European recovery plans: figures and priorities ¹⁵⁴

In an effort to respond to the economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, to limit the risk of differences within the Single Market and to implement the dual climate and digital transition, the European Union has set up a €672.5 billion recovery fund, called the Recovery and Resilience Facility, for Member States in the form of grants and loans.

All Member States have prepared a national recovery plan, which is submitted to the Commission for review and to the Council for adoption. The first plans were adopted on 13 July 2021, allowing for the release of 13% of the amount allocated to each State as pre-financing. Subsequent instalments will be paid out by the end of 2023 if States meet the interim targets set in their plans.

With this interactive map, the Foundation offers you a summary of the plans country by country, showing the amounts, schedules and priorities.

Member state Outside the EU

¹⁵³ [Présentation PowerPoint \(robert-schuman.eu\)](#)

¹⁵⁴ [Plans de relance européens : chiffres et priorités - Fondation Robert Schuman \(robert-schuman.eu\)](#)



1.6 EU Gender Action Plan¹⁵⁵

Gender Equality: EU extends the duration of the Gender Action Plan in external action to build on its achievements towards a gender-equal world

Since its adoption in November 2020, the EU Gender Action Plan III has placed human rights and empowerment, particularly for women and girls, at the forefront of the external agenda of the EU in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and other international commitments. Since 2019, the percentage of new external actions with gender equality as a principal or significant objective has gone from 64.71% to 72% in 2022, in progress towards the target of 85% by 2025. In order to build on these achievements, the EU has decided to extend the duration of the Gender Action Plan from 2025 until 2027 towards a gender-equal world.

Gender Equality: EU extends the duration of the Gender Action Plan in external action to build on its achievements towards a gender-equal world¹⁵⁶

In 2021–2022, during the first years of the new EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III), the European Union committed €22.4 billion to contribute to building a more gender-equal world, finds a joint mid-term report by the European Commission and the European External Action Service on the implementation of the GAP III [just published](#). The EU has supported partner countries and civil society in improving gender equality, with transformative outcomes, including women and girls' increased protection against gender-based violence, expanded participation in public and political life, greater access to education, health and social protection and economic empowerment, as part of a Team Europe approach.

In order to build on these achievements, the EU extends the duration of the Gender Action Plan from 2025 until 2027 towards a gender-equal world.

Three years of the Gender Action Plan

In many places around the world, the rights of women and girls have been threatened, reduced or completely eliminated – significantly pushing back important progress won over decades. Since its adoption in November 2020, the Gender Action Plan III has therefore placed human rights and empowerment, particularly for women and girls, at the forefront of the external agenda of the EU in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and other international commitments.

The percentage of new external actions with gender equality as a principal or significant objective has gone up from 64.71% in 2019, before the adoption of the GAP III, to 72% in 2022, in progress towards the target of 85% of by 2025. EU funding with gender equality and women's empowerment as policy objectives has increased from around €9 billion in 2021 to €13 billion in 2022. The Global Gateway strategy, published in December 2021, will further boost gender equality by integrating the GAP III objectives.

In 2022, gender equality was on the agenda of political, security and/or human rights dialogues between the EU and around 100 partner countries. With 33 countries, the dialogues focused exclusively on gender equality. In addition, EU Delegations have set up 131 country-level implementation plans adapting the Gender Action Plan to local context, enhancing the Team Europe approach of the EU and its Member States.

At global level, the EU and its Member States have partnered with and driven resolutions at the United Nations to combat violence against women, contribute to the Commission on the Status of Women, increase political and civic participation of women and girls, boost support to women rights' organisations and promote gender perspectives in climate and digital decision-making. Against the backdrop of alarming security and conflict shifts and geopolitical power competitions, the implementation of Women, Peace and Security agenda and the commitment to mainstream gender perspective in responding effectively to these security threats is [ever more important](#).

The Gender Action Plan is the EU's ambitious strategy for contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG5, accelerating progress on gender equality and women's empowerment as a priority of all EU external policies and actions, including as a focus of the Global Gateway strategy. It seeks to empower women

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https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_23_5858/IP_23_5858_EN.pdf

¹⁵⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/representations/redirection/link/808343/en/mainURL>



and girls in all their diversity to participate and lead equally in social, economic, political life, and to have a say in all decision making, in all public and private spheres.

In a challenging global context, the EU recommits itself to the political and policy objectives of the Gender Action Plan and will strengthen its impact further by extending its duration from the originally foreseen 2021–2025 until the end of the current multiannual financial framework in 2027.

The EU will continue to enhance gender mainstreaming, increasing gender-targeted actions and funding, and ensuring a gender-responsible review process of all Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives. Gender analysis and data collection are vital for targeted policies and result monitoring. The EU will also continue to step up efforts to ensure that EU-funded humanitarian aid adequately addresses the needs of women, girls, men, and boys.

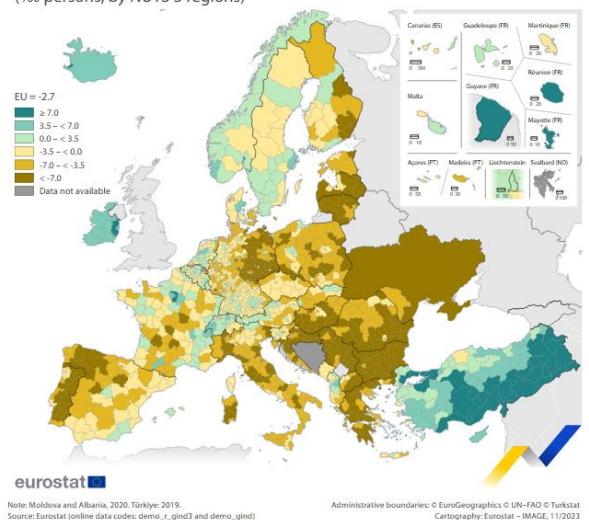
1.7 Natural population decrease in most EU regions in 2021: Ireland bucking the trend

New Eurostat figures¹⁵⁷ show that 980 of the EU's 1,164 regions (for which data are available), had a negative rate of natural population change, i.e. more deaths than births, in 2021. The regions most affected by population loss were all in Bulgaria: Vidin (-25.7 per 1,000 people) and Montana, Kyustendil, Gabrovo, Pernik and Vratsa (all with rates below -20.0 per 1,000 people). By contrast, every region in Ireland had a positive crude rate of natural population change in 2021, ranging from +7.2‰ in the Mid-East region to +3.9‰ in the Border region. The highest crude rates of natural population change were recorded in two French outermost regions: Mayotte (+32.2‰) and Guyane (+23.1‰).

Between 1 January 2021 and 1 January 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU's population decreased by 265 257 people. This reduction could be attributed to natural population changes (more deaths than births), as net migration plus adjustment remained positive (more people entered the EU rather than left it). In addition, the pandemic played a role. In 2021, the EU's crude rate of [natural population change](#) was -2.7 per 1 000 people. At the NUTS 3 level, 980 regions out of 1 164, for which data are available, had a negative rate of natural population change (represented by the gold tones in the map), 173 regions registered a positive rate and 11 regions saw no change (same number of births as deaths), both represented in green-blue tones on the map.

In 2021, every NUTS 3 region of Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Portugal and Romania registered a negative crude rate of natural population change. In Czechia, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia's cases, almost every region recorded a negative rate with one exception each: the capital region of Hlavní město Praha, Bolzano-Bozen, Poznański and Gdański, the capital region of Osrednjeslovenska, and the capital region of Bratislavský kraj and Prešovský kraj, respectively. The regions most affected by population loss were all in Bulgaria: Vidin (-25.7 per 1 000 people) and Montana, Kyustendil, Gabrovo, Pernik and Vratsa (all with rates below -20.0 per 1 000 people). By contrast, every region in Ireland had a positive crude rate of natural population change in 2021, while a relatively high number of regions located in (predominantly northern and eastern) Belgium, France, the Netherlands, (predominantly western) Austria and Sweden also recorded positive rates. This was also the case in Luxembourg and Cyprus (each have only one region). The highest crude rates of natural population change were recorded in two French outermost regions: Mayotte (32.2 per 1 000 people) and Guyane (23.1 per 1 000 people). These were the only regions, where a double-digit increase in the crude rate was observed.¹⁵⁸

Crude rate of natural population change, 2021
(‰ persons, by NUTS 3 regions)



¹⁵⁷ [Natural population decrease in most EU regions in 2021 - Products Eurostat News - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁵⁸ Source datasets: [demo_r_gind3](#) and [demo_gind](#)



The population statistics are in the dedicated section of the [Regions in Europe - 2023 interactive edition](#) and in the [Eurostat regional yearbook - 2023 edition](#), also available as a [set of Statistics Explained articles](#). The corresponding maps in the [Statistical Atlas](#) provide a full-screen interactive map.

1.8 How will Europe's green transition impact employment¹⁵⁹?

Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world. At the beginning of November, EU scientists stated that 2023 is set to be the warmest of the past 125,000 years. The impacts of climate change can be felt throughout European economies and societies. The EU has set out to do its part to address these issues by becoming the first climate-neutral continent, with net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. To achieve this objective, EU policymakers adopted the Fit for 55 policy package in 2021, which contains intermediate decarbonisation objectives aimed at reaching a 55% emission reduction target by 2030 based on 1990 levels. These are important goals for Europe overall. But what impact will they have on our society and economy?

1.9 Eurocities "Delivering EU's Rural Vision 2040 through urban-rural cooperation"¹⁶⁰

By actively promoting and supporting rural-urban cooperation, PoliRuralPlus can play a crucial role in achieving the goals of the EU's Rural Vision 2040 and creating a more balanced and sustainable future for Europe. Key message: Urban-rural cooperation is crucial for achieving the EU's Rural Vision 2040, which aims to create stronger, more connected, resilient, and prosperous rural areas.

Three main areas of action:

1. Strategic involvement of cities and metropolitan areas:
 - Include them in governance frameworks and mechanisms for delivering rural-urban partnerships.
 - Recognize their contribution to mobilising resources and delivering integrated investments.
 - Conduct mid-term assessments and rural proofing at the metropolitan scale.
2. Promotion of strategic rural-urban partnerships:
 - Integrate rural-urban interdependencies into action plans and flagship projects.
 - Encourage cooperation in various sectors, like mobility, public services, tourism, events, innovation, and supply chains.
 - Leverage the potential of short supply chains at the metropolitan level.
3. Political agenda and dialogue:
 - Establish a structured EU dialogue between rural and urban authorities.
 - Support broader evidence gathering and monitoring of rural-urban partnerships.
 - Strengthen connections with other EU initiatives and territorial strategies.

1.9.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus:

- Implement the three areas of action outlined above.
- Focus on building trust and understanding between rural and urban actors.
- Develop concrete initiatives and projects that address shared challenges and opportunities.
- Provide support and resources to facilitate collaboration and joint ventures.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of rural-urban partnerships and adapt strategies based on feedback.

¹⁵⁹ [Episode 17 – How will Europe's green transition impact employment? | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁶⁰ [EU strategy on adaptation to climate change \(eurocities.eu\)](#)



A 'connected' commitment – [Eurocities](#) commits to strengthening urban-rural cooperation based on a territorially balanced development across Europe supported by key actions: promotion of a political exchange at EU level, drafting of a policy statement, '[Delivering EU's Rural Vision 2040 through urban-rural cooperation](#)', and a case studies publication to identify gaps and opportunities in terms of instruments and policies, and implementation of a technical discussion with research organisations such as [ESPON](#) (the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion) and the [Joint Research Centre](#).

1.10 Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States¹⁶¹

This policy briefing outlines the key elements, or ingredients, needed to mobilise stakeholders around the Rural Pact and foster concerted action towards meeting the objectives of the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas in the specific context of each Member State or region. It also presents inspiring examples of how these elements are put into practice.

This publication developed by the Rural Pact Support Office is intended primarily for public authorities at national level (and at regional level in Member States where regional authorities have legislative or programming powers), civil society organisations (especially those involved in policy-making or advocacy), researchers, business organisations and other stakeholders with an interest in rural policies.

Author(s)

The publication has been developed by the Rural Pact Support Office enriched with insights from the collaborative efforts of the Rural Pact Community and the contributions of the members of the Rural Pact Coordination Group.

The Rural Pact ingredients

- Structures and mechanisms to engage with rural communities
- A designated government member and dedicated services to deal with rural issues across policies
- Capacity building and networking support for a broad array of stakeholders
- A forward-looking vision implemented through a holistic strategy/action plan
- Effective rural proofing and adequate data systems
- Appropriate governance systems to facilitate coordination
- Mechanisms to coordinate the allocation of funding and ensure synergies

1.10.1 Conclusions and recommendations for actions to improve rural-urban linkages

EU policies emphasise the importance of optimising rural-urban linkages across Europe to foster sustainable development, reduce spatial inequalities, and enhance the overall well-being of communities. It recognizes that rural and urban areas are interconnected, and a strategic approach is necessary to leverage the strengths of both. The Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas aligns with green and digital transitions, emphasising social economy interventions and innovation for the benefit of all regions.

Recommendations for Actions:

1. Integrated Development Policies:

- Develop and implement integrated development policies that bridge rural-urban divides, ensuring a balanced and harmonised approach to economic, social, and environmental development.

2. Investment in Infrastructure:

- Prioritise investments in infrastructure that improve connectivity between rural and urban areas, including transportation, digital connectivity, and shared services.

3. Support for Social Economy:

- Promote and support social economy initiatives in both rural and urban settings, fostering entrepreneurship, job creation, and social inclusion.

4. Innovation and Experimentation:

- Encourage experimentation and innovation in areas such as proximity services, greener economies, circularity, culture, and mobility to address the unique needs of rural and urban communities.

¹⁶¹ [Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)



5. **Multi-Actor Collaboration:**
 - Foster collaboration across various stakeholders, including local communities, governments, businesses, and academia, to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach to rural-urban linkages.
6. **Inclusive Governance:**
 - Establish governance structures that actively involve rural communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that policies and initiatives reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of these areas.
7. **Resilience Building:**
 - Focus on building resilience in both rural and urban areas, considering climate targets, social inclusion, and initiatives like the New European Bauhaus to create sustainable, inclusive environments.
8. **Tailored Digital Strategies:**
 - Develop and implement tailored digital strategies, especially in rural areas, leveraging funds like RRF, ERDF, EAFRD, Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe Programme, and Connecting Europe Facility.
9. **Awareness and Education:**
 - Increase awareness and education regarding the benefits of rural-urban linkages, promoting a shared understanding of the mutual dependencies and contributions of both settings.
10. **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
 - Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of policies and initiatives related to rural-urban linkages, allowing for adaptive strategies based on real-time feedback.
11. **Community Engagement:**
 - Actively engage local communities in the planning and implementation of projects, ensuring that initiatives are culturally sensitive and aligned with the unique characteristics of each region.
12. **Policy Alignment:**
 - Ensure alignment with overarching EU policies, such as the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals, to guarantee that rural-urban linkages contribute to broader European objectives.
 - By adopting these recommendations, European countries can optimise rural-urban linkages, promoting a more cohesive, sustainable, and resilient future for all communities.

1.11 StartUp Village Forum¹⁶²

Research and innovation play a key role in tackling challenges and reap opportunities for wellbeing and growth in rural territories. The European Startup Village Forum facilitates the exchange of knowledge and expertise on how to promote startup-driven innovation in rural areas. This initiative is part of the European Commission's [long-term vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#), which includes a specific flagship action on research and innovation for rural communities.

The Startup Village Forum was launched in November 2021. Since then, it has promoted the exchange of knowledge and cooperation amongst institutions, entrepreneurs, academia and practitioners.

It has also encouraged public and private organisations to support Startup Villages financially but also through the provision of infrastructure, expertise and training.

1.12 Territorial Agenda 2030¹⁶³

The Territorial Agenda is a policy document for spatial planning in Europe, its regions and communities. It asks policy makers at all governance levels to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable future for all places and to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals in Europe. It aims to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable future for all places and people in Europe. It is run by the Spatial and Urban Planning Department of the Public Service of Wallonia, under the [Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) and hosted by the [ESPON Managing Authority](#).

¹⁶² [European Startup Village Forum - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁶³ [territorialagenda.eu/ta2030/](#)



The report addresses small places and their role in regional development. It discusses the importance of small places for rural areas, and emphasises that small places need to be attractive to young people. It describes details of a pilot action plan that aims to improve conditions in small places.¹⁶⁴

The Importance of Small Places:

- Small towns and villages matter: They play a vital role in balanced territorial development, a key theme of the Territorial Agenda 2030.
- Need for engagement: Success hinges on strong connections between small places and broader regional and European development strategies.
- Cooperation is key: Opportunities for collaboration across regions, with an emphasis on recognizing the unique characteristics of each place.

Small Places Matter Pilot Action in Norway¹⁶⁵

This is a Partnership collaboration led by the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, with partners from multiple European countries. The Action's Focus is on:

- Engaging young people in revitalisation efforts
- Supporting collaboration between municipalities
- Building capacity to respond to challenges
- Addressing demographic shifts and COVID-19 impacts
- Strategic Engagement: Building links to national policy, leveraging European networks, and working with relevant Directorates-General of the European Commission.

Other examples include:

- Poland: Boosting the capacity of local governments to develop strategic projects, promoting inter-municipal cooperation, and focusing on towns facing marginalisation.
- Germany: Highlighting the role of small towns as development leaders, creating knowledge networks, and working on spatial planning and revitalisation.

Emerging Lessons

- Complexity needs coordination: Tackling complex issues in small places requires effective coordination, supported by time, resources, and incentives.
- Capacity building is essential: Enthusiasm for revitalisation needs to meet with the ability to implement good practices, access training, and develop new tools.
- Potential for scaling impact: "Clustering" similar projects, promoting cooperation, and sharing participatory approaches can broaden the reach and impact of initiatives.

1.12.1 Implications and recommendations for PoliRuralPlus:

- Focus on the needs of young people in rural areas: PoliRuralPlus should consider how its actions can make rural areas more attractive to young people. This could include investing in education and job opportunities, as well as creating more vibrant and inclusive communities.
- Find ways to make small places more attractive: PoliRuralPlus could support initiatives that make small places more attractive to residents and visitors. This could include improving infrastructure, public services, and cultural amenities.
- Support cooperation between different levels of government: PoliRuralPlus could help to facilitate cooperation between different levels of government to support the development of small places. This could include national, regional, and local governments.

¹⁶⁴ territorialagenda.eu/pilot-actions/small-places-matter/#:~:text=In%20line%20with%20the%20Territorial,towns%20of%20all%20sizes

¹⁶⁵ [Microsoft PowerPoint - 05 Territorial Agenda 2030 \(TA2030\) - Pilot Action- Small Places Matter - Rural Vision Week 25th March 2021 \(europa.eu\)](#)



- Address the needs of small places in Europe and suggest pathways for their sustainable and inclusive development:
- Recognition: Small places must be recognized as critical components of Europe's territorial balance.
- Targeted support: Policies and funding need to specifically address the challenges of small towns and villages.
- Coordination and Capacity: Initiatives need support for coordination at local, regional, and European levels, alongside capacity-building for effective implementation.
- Knowledge Sharing: Sharing best practices, networking, and cooperation are key to learning from successful projects.

1.13 Functional Areas/Regions

The OECD concept of Functional areas go beyond traditional administrative boundaries (e.g., towns, counties) to capture the real-world dynamics of how people live, work, and access services. They are defined based on the following¹⁶⁶:

- Commuting patterns: Where people live and where they work. A functional region reflects a labour market where a large portion of residents both live and work within its boundaries.
- Flow of Goods and Services: Understanding the supply chains and connections for retail, healthcare, education, or cultural services helps define the wider region that people utilise for their needs.

Understanding functional areas/regions can help optimise rural-urban linkages, as follows:

- Identifying Interdependencies: Functional areas reveal that rural and urban areas are not separate entities. They highlight commuting flows, resource dependencies, and shared service needs, providing a basis for more integrated policy-making.
- Understanding Urban Influence: The concept helps identify urban centres that significantly impact surrounding rural areas. This understanding facilitates planning for infrastructure and services and allows for the potential benefits of proximity to be explored.
- Breaking Down Silos: Focusing on functional areas forces us to move beyond traditional administrative silos, leading to greater cooperation and cross-sectoral planning between urban and rural authorities.
- Targeted Support: Functional regions enable better targeting of resources and policies to support areas spanning urban and rural boundaries. This can help address the needs of rural residents who commute to cities while also supporting urban centres relying on rural resources.

1.13.1 Implications and Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- Beyond administrative borders: Functional areas can help PoliRuralPlus see connections and partnerships across traditional boundaries. Pilot projects might focus on a whole functional region instead of a single village, enabling integrated strategies.
- Data-driven understanding of flows: PoliRuralPlus can analyse how people move for work, shopping, health, or education. This helps identify places of opportunity and areas where services might be lacking.
- Targeted policy: Instead of one-size-fits-all policies, functional areas allow for policies to be tailored to the specific economic and social realities on the ground.
- Collaboration platform: A functional area understanding fosters better cooperation between municipalities within that area. PoliRuralPlus projects could act as catalysts for such collaborations.
- Focus on urban-rural linkages: Many rural areas belong to wider functional regions dominated by an urban core. PoliRuralPlus can help strengthen these connections for mutual benefit, improving access to services and markets for rural areas.

By promoting the concept of functional areas and focusing on enhancing rural-urban linkages, PoliRuralPlus can help foster more integrated, mutually beneficial, and sustainable regional development as follows:

¹⁶⁶ [reg_glance-2013-47-en.pdf \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#) and [OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance 2022 | en | OECD](#)



- Analysis: Support pilot areas in analysing their commuting and service flow patterns to understand their place within a functional region.
- Strategy development: Encourage pilot project strategies to be developed with the functional area context in mind, considering collaborations and resource pooling.
- Data Sharing: Promote the collection and sharing of relevant data that helps map and track changes in functional areas over time within pilot regions. Advocate for the collection of quality data that tracks trends and flows within functional regions, informing evidence-based policy for both rural and urban areas.
- Showcase examples: Highlight successful PoliRuralPlus cases demonstrating the value of adopting a functional area perspective for rural development.
- Governance: PoliRuralPlus can help develop models of collaborative governance that facilitate joint decision-making between urban and rural stakeholders within functional areas.
- Mapping and Analysis: Support pilot areas in mapping their functional regions based on commuting, trade, and service provision patterns. Understanding these linkages will provide a robust foundation for identifying optimization opportunities.
- Bi-Directional Benefits: emphasise the reciprocal nature of rural-urban linkages. Projects should explore not only how rural areas can utilise urban resources but also showcase how they contribute to urban sustainability, food security, and well-being.
- Integrated Transport and Infrastructure: Promote strategies that address the connectivity needs of both rural and urban residents within functional regions. This could involve improved transport links, shared infrastructure, or innovative mobility solutions.
- Collaborative Supply Chains: Encourage partnerships that streamline supply chains connecting rural products and services to urban markets. This could involve supporting e-commerce, local food systems, or rural tourism and rural event industry initiatives.
- Shared Services and Innovation Hubs: Facilitate the development of co-located service centres, digital innovation hubs, or cultural facilities accessible to both rural and urban residents within functional regions.
- Skills and Talent Exchanges: Support initiatives that facilitate knowledge transfer, mentorship, and skills development programs between rural and urban areas, fostering greater economic integration across the functional region.

1.14 OECD Conference on Building Sustainable, Resilient and Thriving Rural Places

The 13th OECD Rural Development Conference¹⁶⁷ emphasised the critical role of rural places in driving sustainable and inclusive growth and reinforced the need to strengthen place-based and place-led opportunities and resilience against global shocks. As OECD countries advance in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine has sent new shock waves around the world, creating significant inflationary pressures and disruptions, most notably to energy and food markets. These shocks are on top of, and compound, many ongoing structural and societal transformations, such as digitalisation, climate change, ageing, migration, population decline, the production revolution, globalisation, and urbanisation. These shocks and transformations present significant challenges for rural areas because they are generally economically less diversified, partly as a result of their role serving urban markets, are more exposed to trade disruptions, and have a large digital divide. Rural communities have, for example, a critical role to play in tackling food insecurity and in developing resilient, secure and sustainable food supply chains. In addition, the potential – especially for remote rural areas – afforded by remote working, the creation of new digitalised service providers and investment in renewable energy sources and industries, is accelerating.

Key Challenges for Rural Areas

- Structural Transformations: Digitalization, climate change, ageing populations, and global disruptions present challenges. Rural areas need support to adapt, become more resilient, and seize new opportunities.
- Digital Divide: Rural areas often lag in internet connectivity and digital skills, hindering innovation, remote working, and service access.

¹⁶⁷ [Rural Development Conference - OECD Rural Development Conference](#)



- Energy Challenges: High energy prices, supply disruptions, and dependency on imports strain rural areas with lower income and specific industry vulnerabilities.
- Demographic Shifts: ageing and shrinking populations in many rural areas impact service provision and economic vitality. This calls for both adaptation and attraction of young people.
- Inclusivity: Rural development needs to ensure opportunities and empowerment for all residents, especially women, youth, migrants, and disadvantaged groups.

1.14.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

PoliRuralPlus's focus on bottom-up development and pilot projects aligns well with the OECD's emphasis on community engagement and place-based solutions. The project can benefit from learning how the OECD works with member countries to promote inclusive and sustainable rural development.

- Support Innovation (broadly): Encourage social innovation and entrepreneurship alongside technological advances. Address barriers specific to rural entrepreneurs and facilitate urban-rural linkages for innovation partnerships.
- Green Transition Leader: Position rural areas as central to reaching climate targets. RuralPlus can develop strategies for just transition and highlight how rural economies can diversify and benefit from the green shift.
- Close the Digital Gap: Target investments and skills training to bridge the rural digital divide. PoliRuralPlus pilots can trial remote working solutions that fit their unique circumstances.
- Resilient to Shocks: Help rural areas develop energy independence and diversified economic bases to withstand potential future crises.
- Demographic Adaptation: PoliRuralPlus can help design services and infrastructure for ageing/shrinking communities, while also exploring strategies to attract and integrate new populations.
- Targeted Inclusion: Actively work to ensure diverse groups (youth, women, migrants) have a voice and economic opportunities. Explore childcare and family-friendly policies.
- Data-Driven Policy: Contribute to the development of harmonised definitions and data collection on rural areas.
- Governance and Partnerships: emphasise cross-sectoral collaboration (agriculture, energy, health) and multi-level governance. Facilitate partnerships between rural areas and urban centres.
- Rural Perspective: Promote policy evaluation through a "rural lens" to ensure that national and regional initiatives address rural needs and opportunities.

1.15 RUSTIK project¹⁶⁸

RUSTIK(Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes) aims to enable rural communities' actors and policy makers to design better strategies, initiatives and policies fostering sustainability transitions of rural areas, through an advanced understanding of different rural functionalities, characteristics and future scenarios of rural areas, their potentials and challenges.

Most efforts to increase innovation capacity and encourage sustainable transitions focus on urban areas; rural and remote areas, not considered a priority, typically fall under the radar. However, remote areas are fertile ground for realising the goals of the European Green Deal, the European Digital Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the EU's long-term vision for rural areas. Focusing on rural areas' socioeconomic, climate and digital transition, the EU-funded RUSTIK project aims to enhance existing policy tools and design better initiatives to enable sustainable transitions in those areas. Project efforts include proposals aimed at decision-makers and stakeholders, improved approaches for rural impact assessment and databases incorporating a variety of data to inform better strategies.

¹⁶⁸ <https://rustik-he.eu>



1.16 Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems

The European Commission emphasizes the importance of effective Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) across the EU to ensure knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders in the agriculture and forestry sectors¹⁶⁹. The goal of AKIS is to support the development of innovative solutions that work in practice, addressing current and future challenges faced by farmers, foresters, and rural communities.

1.16.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots:

1. Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration: PoliRuralPlus can leverage AKIS principles to foster knowledge exchange and collaboration among stakeholders in rural areas. This can be achieved through workshops, seminars, training programs, and online platforms where farmers, researchers, advisors, and policymakers can share experiences, best practices, and innovative ideas.
2. Targeted Innovation: AKIS emphasises the need for innovative solutions tailored to the specific challenges faced by farmers and rural communities. PoliRuralPlus pilots can focus on identifying local problems and developing innovative solutions through research, experimentation, and demonstration projects.
3. Capacity Building: AKIS recognizes the importance of capacity building to enhance the skills and knowledge of farmers, foresters, and other stakeholders in rural areas. PoliRuralPlus can support capacity-building initiatives that empower rural actors to adopt and implement innovative solutions.
4. Policy Support: PoliRuralPlus can advocate for policies that support the development and implementation of AKIS at the regional, national, and EU levels. This includes promoting funding mechanisms, regulatory frameworks, and institutional arrangements that foster knowledge exchange, innovation, and collaboration in the agriculture and forestry sectors.
5. Monitoring and Evaluation: To ensure the effectiveness of AKIS and the success of PoliRuralPlus pilots, it is essential to monitor and evaluate the impact of knowledge exchange, innovation, and capacity-building activities. This will help identify areas for improvement and inform future policy decisions.

By incorporating AKIS principles into its approach, PoliRuralPlus can contribute to creating a more resilient, sustainable, and innovative agricultural and forestry sector in rural areas.

1.16.2 modernAKIS project¹⁷⁰

The ModernAKIS project aims to modernise Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in Europe by strengthening the connections and interactions among stakeholders in the agricultural sector. It seeks to improve the flow of knowledge and innovation, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and competitive agricultural sector. Key Objectives:

- Strengthening the interactions between agricultural advisors, researchers, farmers, and other stakeholders.
- Enhancing the quality of knowledge and advice services for farmers and rural businesses.
- Developing innovative approaches for knowledge sharing and technology transfer.
- Promoting a more demand-driven and participatory approach to agricultural research and innovation.

The ModernAKIS project results and resources webpage focuses on disseminating findings, tools, and best practices developed to modernise Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in Europe. This includes resources for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, covering various topics such as knowledge exchange, innovation, and capacity building.

Key Findings and Resources:

- AKIS Assessment Framework: A framework for assessing the current state and performance of AKIS in different regions and countries, which can help identify strengths and weaknesses and guide future interventions.

¹⁶⁹ [AKIS in the EIP-AGRI spotlight | EIP-AGRI \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁷⁰ [modernAKIS](#)



- AKIS Maturity Model: A model that helps stakeholders understand the different stages of AKIS development and identify areas for improvement.
- AKIS Good Practice Database: A collection of best practices and case studies from across Europe, showcasing successful approaches to AKIS modernization.
- AKIS Training Materials: Resources for training and capacity building, aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of agricultural advisors, researchers, and farmers.
- AKIS Policy Recommendations: Recommendations for policymakers on how to support and strengthen AKIS at the regional, national, and EU levels.

1.16.2.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus and its Pilots:

1. Enhanced Knowledge Exchange: By fostering stronger connections and interactions between stakeholders, ModernAKIS can facilitate the flow of knowledge and information, benefiting PoliRuralPlus initiatives aimed at empowering rural communities. This can be achieved through platforms that encourage knowledge sharing, networking events, and collaborative projects.
2. Improved Advisory Services: The project's focus on improving the quality of advisory services can directly benefit PoliRuralPlus pilots by ensuring that farmers and rural businesses have access to up-to-date and relevant information. This can lead to the adoption of better practices and technologies, ultimately improving the sustainability and competitiveness of rural economies.
3. Innovative Approaches to Knowledge Sharing: ModernAKIS's emphasis on developing innovative approaches for knowledge sharing and technology transfer can provide valuable insights for PoliRuralPlus pilots. By adopting new technologies and methodologies, PoliRuralPlus can effectively disseminate information and promote the adoption of innovative solutions in rural areas.
4. Demand-Driven and Participatory Research: The project's focus on a more demand-driven and participatory approach to research aligns with the objectives of PoliRuralPlus. By involving farmers and rural stakeholders in the research and innovation process, PoliRuralPlus can ensure that solutions are tailored to their specific needs and challenges.
5. Policy Recommendations: The findings and recommendations from the ModernAKIS project can inform the development of effective policies and strategies for rural development. PoliRuralPlus can leverage this information to advocate for policies that support knowledge exchange, innovation, and collaboration in the agricultural sector.
6. Specifically, modernAKIS offers resources¹⁷¹ for:
 - a. Benchmarking and Assessment: The AKIS assessment framework and maturity model can be used by PoliRuralPlus pilots to assess their current AKIS and identify areas for improvement. This can help them tailor their interventions to the specific needs and challenges of their local contexts.
 - b. Best Practices and Lessons Learned: The AKIS good practice database can provide valuable insights and inspiration for PoliRuralPlus pilots. By learning from successful approaches in other regions, pilots can adopt and adapt best practices to their own contexts.
 - c. Capacity Building: The AKIS training materials can be used by PoliRuralPlus to enhance the skills and knowledge of local stakeholders, including farmers, advisors, and policymakers. This can help them better understand the importance of AKIS and contribute to its development.
 - d. Policy Advocacy: The AKIS policy recommendations can inform PoliRuralPlus advocacy efforts at the local, regional, and national levels. By promoting policies that support AKIS modernization, PoliRuralPlus can contribute to creating a more conducive environment for innovation and sustainable development in rural areas.
 - e. Collaboration and Networking: The ModernAKIS project's emphasis on collaboration and networking can be leveraged by PoliRuralPlus to connect with other stakeholders and initiatives working on AKIS modernization. This can lead to the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices, ultimately strengthening the overall impact of AKIS on rural development.

¹⁷¹ <https://www.akisconnect.eu/training-materials>



Overall, ModernAKIS project's results and resources offer valuable insights and tools for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots. By utilising these resources, PoliRuralPlus can enhance its understanding of AKIS, learn from successful approaches, and advocate for policies that support the modernization of AKIS in rural areas.

Overall, the ModernAKIS project provides valuable insights, tools, and recommendations for strengthening the agricultural knowledge and innovation system in rural areas. By adopting a more collaborative, demand-driven, and participatory approach, PoliRuralPlus can foster a more sustainable, resilient, prosperous and competitive agricultural sector in Europe.

1.16.3 ATTRACTISS - AcTivate and TRigger ACTors to deepen the function of Innovation Support Services¹⁷².

The objective of ATTRACTISS is to improve & embed competencies, approaches, instruments & governance models for Member States (MS) AKIS and specifically for Innovation Support Services (ISS) as a crucial AKIS actor, to enable them accelerating individual grassroots innovative ideas to come to fruition & to generate solutions for the transition process to more sustainable agriculture & forestry. ATTRACTISS has the goals to (1) empower ISS & all AKIS actors, through capacity building & provision of effective methods & supportive tools, to discover innovative ideas & enable uptake in a co-creative way thereby fostering AKIS ecosystem building to support the transition to sustainable and circular agriculture & forestry systems (2) support Managing Authorities (MA) in all EU MS to organise & monitor efficient support for ISS; & (3) provide support for new actors in AKIS processes to better facilitate co-creation approaches involving farming, practitioners & research centres.

1.16.3.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus and its Pilots:

ATTRACTISS aims to improve the effectiveness of ISS by:

- Developing a new training program for ISS providers.
- Creating a new online platform for sharing knowledge and resources.
- Establishing a network of ISS providers across Europe.

The project is expected to benefit farmers by helping them to:

- Develop new and innovative ideas for their farms.
- Improve their sustainability practices.
- Reduce their costs and increase their profits.

The project is also expected to benefit ISS providers by:

- Helping them to improve the quality of their services.
- Expanding their reach and impact.
- Building relationships with other ISS providers across Europe.

Thus ATTRACTISS is a valuable resource for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots. The project's findings and recommendations can help PoliRuralPlus to improve the effectiveness of its own ISS and support the development of a more sustainable agriculture and forestry sector in rural areas.

1.16.4 EU-FARMBOOK - Supporting knowledge exchange between all AKIS actors in the EU¹⁷³

The current state of the art is that the project EURAKNOS has analysed the knowledge of 28 Horizon funded Thematic Networks (TNs) and linked operational groups (OGs) and developed a vision and guidelines for a digital knowledge reservoir for an EU-wide agriculture and forestry practice. EUREKA has continued this effort by examining 120 Horizon funded MA projects within the EIP-AGRI and developing a 'proof of concept' of such a knowledge reservoir building on the results of the EURAKNOS project. EU-FarmBook will capitalise on the results of EURAKNOS and EUREKA, making the data taken up in the platform fairer and adding necessary functionalities to the platform based on the users' needs such as interactive peer to peer interaction and user content evaluation

¹⁷² [ATTRACTISS - Empowering Innovation Support Services](#)

¹⁷³ [About EU-FarmBook – EU-FarmBook \(eufarmbook.eu\)](#)



tools. Moreover EU-FarmBook will assure the linkage to traditional dissemination channels, such as agricultural journals, on farm demo activities, and training and education initiatives

1.16.4.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus and its Pilots:

The project provides the EuFarmBook social networking platform for farmers and agricultural stakeholders. It allows farmers to connect with each other, share information and resources, and collaborate on projects. Eufarmbook also provides a marketplace where farmers can buy and sell agricultural products.

The Eufarmbook platform could be a valuable resource for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots. It could provide a way for farmers in rural areas to connect with each other, share information and resources, and collaborate on projects. Eufarmbook could also help farmers to find new markets for their products.

However, there are also some potential challenges associated with using Eufarmbook. For example, it is important to ensure that the information shared on the platform is accurate and reliable. It is also important to be aware of the potential for scams and fraud.

Overall, Eufarmbook is a promising platform that could have a positive impact on rural communities. However, it is important to be aware of the potential challenges associated with using the platform.

1.17 European Rural-Events Industry

The rural events industry in Europe is diverse and evolving: It includes festivals (music, cultural, food, and heritage), sporting events, seasonal celebrations, arts and crafts exhibitions, agricultural shows, and rural tourism experiences linked to local traditions or natural environments¹⁷⁴. The scale of the industry ranges from small community-driven events to larger-scale festivals attracting broader regional or even international audiences .

Examples include: Music Festivals: Glastonbury (UK), Roskilde Festival (Denmark), Wacken Open Air (Germany) often take place in smaller towns or rural areas, bringing in considerable tourism revenue. Cultural Celebrations: Celtic festivals celebrating heritage (e.g., Festival Interceltique de Lorient, France), religious events, and harvest-related festivities provide a focus for unique experiences and Sporting Events: Rural areas host mountain biking competitions, cycle races, adventure sports, and equestrian events, drawing outdoor activity enthusiasts.

These generate and improve Rural-Urban Connections and linkages as follows :

- Target Audience: Events can attract urban visitors, injecting spending into the rural economy while also promoting awareness and appreciation for rural life.
- Partnerships: Collaboration between rural Organisers and urban-based event promoters, tourism agencies, or transport providers can expand the reach and success of events.
- Infrastructure Improvements: Events might catalyse improving transport, accommodation, or digital services in rural areas, benefiting residents and the wider region in the long run.

Their potential and significance for PoliRuralPlus are:

- Economic Diversification: Events boost the local economy, create jobs (seasonal and permanent), and promote rural products and services.
- Cultural Identity and Preservation: Fosters community pride, protects local traditions, and can attract those interested in authentic experiences.
- Social Connection: Events bring communities together, reduce isolation, and can bridge generations enhancing social capital in rural areas.
- Attractiveness and Visibility: Well-run events put rural areas on the map, improving their image and potentially attracting new residents or businesses.

¹⁷⁴ European Travel Commission: <https://etc-corporate.org/> has information on tourism trends, including rural experiences



1.17.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- Pilot Projects: Support events as part of pilot area strategies, focusing on those with strong local roots and potential for sustainability, such as the Finnish Pilot , which aims to build a Rural Event Industry Ecosystem.
- Marketing and Outreach: Assist rural areas in promoting events effectively, targeting urban audiences, and leveraging digital platforms.
- Best Practice Exchange: Facilitate the sharing of successful event models, helping rural communities learn from each other across regions.

1.18 European Commission System Dynamics Working Group¹⁷⁵

System Dynamics Working Group meeting hosted by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, along with implications and recommendations for PoliRuralPlus:

Focus of the Meeting

- System Dynamics (SD): This is a methodology for understanding complex systems. It uses models, simulations, and feedback loops to analyse how different factors interact and influence outcomes over time.
- Applications: The meeting discussed using SD for rural/regional policy design, evaluating policy interventions, and understanding the long-term, systemic impacts of decisions.
- Participants: Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers interested in exploring how SD can improve decision-making in rural development.
- JRC presented the proposed modelling framework (POLYTRoPOS - POLYvalent model for the ex ante evaluation of TRansformative POLicy Scenarios) focused on technology-deployment driven investment and employment, explained the theoretical reasoning and assumptions behind the model, and outlined the structure of the Working Group.

1.18.1 Implications and Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

Implications for PoliRuralPlus:

- Rural systems are complex: This approach acknowledges that rural challenges (depopulation, economic diversification, service access, etc.) are interconnected and influenced by many factors. Traditional policy approaches may be insufficient to address these.
- Need for holistic analysis: SD could be helpful for PoliRuralPlus by allowing pilots to map and understand the web of factors influencing their unique situation. This can lead to more targeted interventions.
- Simulating impact: Before fully implementing initiatives, SD models may help forecast potential long-term outcomes, highlighting potential unintended consequences and allowing for policy adjustments.
- Data-intensive: SD relies on substantial data to model complex systems. PoliRuralPlus should explore how data collection within pilots aligns with SD methodology.
- However, System Dynamics, while powerful, has limitations:
 - Data Quality: The accuracy of models depends on the availability and reliability of data.
 - Complexity: Building comprehensive SD models can be time-consuming and requires specialised expertise.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

¹⁷⁵ [System dynamics Working Group meeting - Smart Specialisation Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)



- Pilot project integration: Consider selectively piloting the use of SD tools in one or two pilot areas with specific, well-defined challenges. This would provide valuable real-world experience for wider application.
- Skills and capacity building: SD requires specialised knowledge. Partner with universities or research institutes experienced in its application to support PoliRuralPlus pilots in using it effectively.
- Knowledge sharing: Document insights from using SD models within PoliRuralPlus, including lessons learned about their feasibility and benefits. This can inform broader rural policy development.
- Collaboration with the JRC: The JRC's working group on SD signifies their interest in applying this methodology to rural challenges. Explore options for PoliRuralPlus to connect with their ongoing work.

2 European Studies and Reports

2.1 ESPON ESCAPE (European Shrinking Rural Areas)¹⁷⁶ study

This study and report was led by ESPON¹⁷⁷, an EU funded programme that delivers quality expertise to public authorities responsible for designing territorial policies. The study reassessed the logic, implementation and effectiveness of European, national, regional and local policy approaches. We are at a critical juncture: rural shrinking has become a very visible phenomenon, fuelling popular discontent. Simultaneously, there is increasing awareness of new opportunities associated with changes in technological, market and social contexts. The COVID-19 crisis accelerated change and stimulated further debate. Repopulation of depleted rural areas, or at least better adjustment to the demographic status quo, are probably more feasible now than they have been for many decades. The first, very simple, step is to acknowledge the increasing divergence between “accumulating” and “depleting” rural areas, and the need for tailored policy responses. Due regard for patterns of rural shrinking becomes important for two reasons:

- Rural shrinking is itself symptomatic of a range of long-established well-being challenges for rural areas.
- Long-standing processes of human capital depletion erode the capacity of rural areas to respond to the expanding opportunities of the Post COVID-19 world, in which the dominant position of cities and towns as the locus of growth and innovation is being challenged

The ESPON ESCAPE study Found

- Shrinking is widespread: Nearly 60% of rural/intermediate European regions are shrinking, meaning they have a sustained pattern of population decline. These regions cover 40% of the EU's land area and house a third of its population.
- Geography matters: Shrinking is concentrated in Eastern and Southern Europe, with scattered pockets in the North and West. Intensity and causes of shrinking vary between regions.
- It's not just about out-migration: Many shrinking areas are losing population due to "legacy effects" (low birth rates, ageing), but out-migration is also a major factor, especially in the most heavily affected regions.
- Complex causes: Economic restructuring, lack of opportunities, locational disadvantage, and major disruptions (e.g., political transitions) all play a role in shrinking.
- Need for better governance: Effective shrinking policies need strong multi-level governance, local devolution of decision-making, and good communication to share best practices.

The ESCAPE report highlights several areas where PoliRuralPlus can make a strong impact :

- Tailored Strategies: PoliRuralPlus, with its focus on place-based, bottom-up approaches, is well-positioned to help rural regions address shrinking. It can help them understand the specific pathways and causes of decline and develop strategies accordingly.

¹⁷⁶ [European Shrinking Rural Areas Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance \(ESCAPE\) | ESPON](#)

¹⁷⁷ [ESPON | Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence](#)



- Focus on Well-being: PoliRuralPlus can support broader goals beyond pure economic growth, such as well-being and spatial justice. This aligns with the ESCAPE report's emphasis on addressing broader societal goals.
- Rural-Urban Linkages: PoliRuralPlus can help shrinking rural areas re-establish connections to growing urban centres, potentially facilitating resource flows and new opportunities.
- Data-Driven Decision Making: The ESCAPE report stresses the need for evidence-based policy. PoliRuralPlus can leverage the data and expertise from European Research Infrastructures to support local action by providing the evidence needed to make informed decisions.
- Capacity Building: Shrinking areas often suffer from limited capacity. PoliRuralPlus can assist in building the necessary skills and resources for these regions to implement revitalisation strategies.

2.1.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- Promote research on the causes of shrinking: This will inform better pilot projects and local initiatives.
- analyse potential benefits of COVID-19 changes: Assess how remote work and de-urbanisation trends could create new possibilities for shrinking regions.
- Support governance and capacity-building tools: Provide resources and training to help rural communities establish effective governance structures and empower local actors.
- Facilitate exchange of best practices: Share knowledge and success stories of shrinking rural areas that have found strategies for renewal.

2.2 Opportunities and challenges for remote rural areas in the European Union¹⁷⁸

This policy brief of the EU Rural Observatory shows how remoteness can increase territorial disparities across the urban-rural continuum and proposes a characterisation and a map of remote rural areas of Europe according to the opportunities and challenges they face.

The Rural Observatory has just published its latest policy brief developed by the European Commission - Joint Research Centre in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) and the DG for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission (DG REGIO), entitled 'Opportunities and challenges for remote rural areas in the European Union'. The policy brief highlights a concerning situation in many remote rural areas, calling for targeted interventions to address population decline, ageing populations, lack of services, and economic disadvantages.

Key Challenges for Remote Rural Areas

- **Depopulation:** Remote rural areas are shrinking, losing 0.49% of their population annually. This trend is expected to continue if not addressed.
- **Ageing:** The ratio of seniors to youth is significantly higher than in urban areas. This poses challenges for social services and the future workforce.
- **Service Accessibility:** Remote areas are further from healthcare and education, which can worsen depopulation trends.
- **Economic Disparity:** These areas experience lower economic performance than non-remote areas, with issues of low productivity and GDP per capita across all sectors.
- **Connectivity:** Poor broadband speeds and inadequate road transport infrastructure create further disadvantages, especially compared to urban centres.

Additional Important Points

- **Natural Assets:** Remote rural areas offer valuable natural capital (forests, etc.), and their preservation is crucial.

¹⁷⁸ [Opportunities and challenges for remote rural areas in the European Union | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC135398), see also <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC135398>



- **Diversity within Remote Areas:** There's significant variation, some remote areas fare decently well socioeconomically, while over half are severely disadvantaged. Policy needs to be tailored accordingly.

In the EU, 37 million inhabitants live in remote rural areas. This is 9 % of the EU population. Remote rural areas also cover almost half of all the land in the EU (177 million ha), which corresponds to 32 % of the EU's municipalities.

- Natural resources and ecosystem services are more abundant in remote rural areas than in other areas. Remote rural areas can support and benefit from the EU's green transition by preserving biodiversity, enhancing ecosystem services, fostering sustainable industries and investing in climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- In some remote rural areas, tourism is an important economic sector. In particular, areas of mountain and nature tourism and certain coastal areas and islands have a high tourist accommodation capacity, which helps these areas to diversify their economy.
- Despite these opportunities, more than half (54 %) of the EU's remote rural areas are characterised as socioeconomically weak areas. These areas host almost 17 million people, who face a range of challenges such as a declining and ageing population, poor digital connections, long distances to services and lower levels of household income.
- By contrast, only 2 % of the remote rural areas are characterised as having good socioeconomic conditions and are well-connected areas. These remote areas host 1.2 million people, located mainly in coastal areas and on islands, in mountainous tourist areas or in groups of remote rural communities.
- Overall, remote rural areas have a lower level of socioeconomic development than rural areas close to a city. Lower broadband speeds, lower road transport performance, larger population reductions, longer road distances to schools and health services and limited economic performance in comparison with other areas are the major challenges that remote rural areas face.

2.3 EU measures to manage the risks floods¹⁷⁹

Floods are the most frequent and costly natural disaster in Europe. Climate change is increasing flood risk and potential economic damage. Floods harm human health, the environment, economic activity, and cultural heritage. The EU emphasises that flood risk management should work in harmony with nature protection and restoration for mutual benefit. The EU's approach to reducing the devastating impacts of floods is to:

- Reduce the likelihood and severity of floods through integrated flood risk management focused on sustainable solutions.
- Protect human health, the environment, cultural heritage, and economic stability.

Key Actions (Floods Directive)

- **Required of EU Member States:**
 - Assess areas of significant flood risk.
 - Produce Flood Hazard Maps and Flood Risk Maps showing at-risk areas and potential consequences.
 - Develop flood risk management plans based on these maps.
 - Ensure public access to information and involvement in the planning process.

Implementation

- **Flood Risk Management Cycles:** The directive works on 6-year cycles to reduce flood impacts. Member States are assessed on their action plans and implementation.
- **Coordination:** Flood risk management is integrated with other water management initiatives like the Water Framework Directive.
- **Tools:** The EU has resources like the flood risk areas viewer to support implementation.

¹⁷⁹ [Floods \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_floods_en.pdf), see also [Working Group Floods in CIRCABC](#)



Let me know if you'd like more detail on a specific aspect of the EU's strategy!

The Commission recently published a flood risk areas viewer to raise awareness about significant flood risks¹⁸⁰

- The online viewer maps over 14,000 areas of significant flood risk across the continent.
- This is the first time such information has been consolidated in one place, making it easily accessible.
- Member States provided the data under obligations set by the EU Floods Directive.
- The viewer includes links to each Member State's flood risk assessments, maps, and management plans in their national languages.
- It's part of a larger strategy on water management and flood risk reduction within the EU.

Why It Matters¹⁸¹

- Devastating floods in Europe highlight the increasing risk linked to climate change.
- Decision-makers need reliable information to prepare for and mitigate flood risks.
- This tool enhances awareness and empowers those responsible for planning and risk reduction.

Commissioner Sinkevičius's Statement stressed that climate change is increasing the frequency of extreme weather events like flooding, and reliable information is crucial for adapting to these risks and protecting people.

2.4 Rural Pact

The Rural Pact is a mechanism to involve and encourage action from all relevant stakeholders and governance levels that can help to achieve the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas. The recommendations for PoliRuralPlus to make the Rural Pact happen in Member States, there are a number of elements that can be implemented¹⁸².

Key Elements

- Structures and mechanisms to engage with rural communities: This includes having a dedicated government member and dedicated services to deal with rural issues across policies, as well as involving stakeholders in rural matters through national and regional rural networks (e.g. Finland's Rural Policy Council).
- Capacity building and networking support for a broad array of stakeholders: This includes providing support for intermediaries to help rural stakeholders participate in the Rural Pact, as well as one-stop shops to help rural actors access funding and implement projects that contribute to the LTVRA at the local level.
- A forward-looking vision implemented through a holistic strategy/action plan: This means having a clear vision for the future of rural areas and a strategy to achieve that vision. The strategy should be holistic and multi-sectoral, taking into account the social, economic, and environmental aspects of rural life.
- Effective rural proofing and adequate data systems: This means identifying and assessing the impacts of new regulations, plans, or programmes on rural areas. It also means having access to high-quality data on rural areas to assess the impact of decisions and measure progress with implementation of policies and strategies.
- Appropriate governance systems to facilitate coordination: This means having a system in place that facilitates coordination between different policy actors, both horizontally (e.g. between different sectoral ministries) and vertically (between different governance levels: national, regional, sub-regional and local).

¹⁸⁰ [Commission publishes new flood risk areas viewer to raise awareness about significant flood risks \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁸¹ [EU flood risk areas viewer](#), [Commission webpage on floods](#), [EEA webpage on floods](#)

¹⁸² [rps-policy-briefing-making-rp-happen-member-states.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



- Mechanisms to coordinate the allocation of funding and ensure synergies: This means linking different sources of funding – European, national, regional and local – to ensure the various instruments combined are sufficient to address rural needs and adapted to target beneficiaries’ reality.

2.4.1 Good practice examples for PoliRuralPlus

- The Latvian Rural Communities Parliament: This event brings together representatives of local and regional authorities, businesses, policy-makers, academics, rural development professionals and enthusiasts to exchange experiences and formulate resolutions.
- Ireland's comprehensive policy for rural areas: This is underpinned by the national long-term development strategy Project Ireland 2040 and based on the vision of a thriving rural Ireland integral to the national economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being and development.
- Involving and building capacity of rural stakeholders in Sweden: This is facilitated by the National Rural Network (NRN), which brings together national and regional rural stakeholders (whether they implement the common agricultural policy or not).
- Programme France Ruralités: This comprehensive programme to boost rural areas has four pillars: technical support on investment projects for municipalities, increased biodiversity funding to valorise rural environmental assets, practical solutions for daily life (mobility, education, health, culture, housing, etc.), and a new system of designating rural revitalisation zones, which benefit from tax relief.
- Helping rural communities access information and funding in the United States: Federal agencies and commissions responsible for rural issues team up to ensure rural communities have equitable access to federal funding. They also provide expertise to help these communities clarify local priorities and apply for funding for job creation, infrastructure and community improvement.
- Combatting rural depopulation in Castilla-La Mancha: In 2021 the Spanish region of Castilla-La Mancha passed a special law on economic, social and tax measures to combat depopulation and develop rural areas. Strong leadership from the regional vice-president, with the support of a dedicated commissioner for the demographic challenge, were key to mobilising and involving all regional government departments (such as agriculture, education, health and transport) in the law’s development and in implementation of a regional strategy to make it a reality.
- Rural Development Concept in Czechia: Czechia combined different EU funds for rural areas in 2014-2020, and its Rural Development Concept in 2020 combined a variety of funding sources through territorial instruments and SMART strategies.

2.5 Rural Pact Community Good practises Database¹⁸³

A large number of past and present projects, policies, tools and methodologies can inspire other actions contributing to rural revitalisation and the objectives of the [Rural Pact](#). Such examples can help mobilise, encourage, or build the capacity of policy makers and local actors, and they can also promote innovative ways to deal with rural challenges.

2.5.1 Learnings for PoliRuralPlus

The Rural Pact Community good practices database¹⁸⁴ was released in December 2023. An analysis the database in January 2024 concluded that the key learnings from the good practice examples for PoliRuralPlus are as follows:

Key Learnings for PoliRuralPlus	Explanation	Best practice examples from the database
1. Empower local communities to	Rural communities are the best placed to know what their needs are and how to address them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Carpathian Civil Society Platform in mountainous rural areas of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine is a network of civil society organisations that works to support sustainable development in the region. The platform helps to connect local communities and share best

¹⁸³ [Good practices | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁸⁴ https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/good-practice_en

Key Learnings for PoliRuralPlus	Explanation	Best practice examples from the database
drive development:	PoliRuralPlus should focus on supporting local communities to develop their own solutions to the challenges they face. This could involve providing funding, training, and technical assistance, as well as creating platforms for collaboration and knowledge exchange.	<p>practices, and it also provides funding and support for community-led projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rural Vision Platform in Finland is an online platform that provides information and resources to rural communities in Finland. The platform helps communities to develop their own visions for the future and to find partners to support them. • The Whole village model revitalises rural areas in Transylvania, Romania. The model involves the entire village community in developing and implementing plans for the village's future. This has helped to revitalise villages and create new opportunities for employment and tourism.
2. Support social entrepreneurship and innovation:	<p>Social entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool for creating jobs, improving livelihoods, and revitalising rural communities.</p> <p>PoliRuralPlus should promote social entrepreneurship by providing funding, training, and mentorship to entrepreneurs in rural areas. It should also support the development of innovative solutions to rural challenges.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Biocluster project by the town of Haapavesi, Finland is a cluster of businesses that are focused on sustainable development and renewable energy. The project has helped to create new jobs and to attract investment to the area. • The Milka social enterprise creates employment for women in Duga Resa, Croatia. The enterprise provides training and support to women who want to start their own businesses. This has helped to create new opportunities for women and to improve the economy of the region. • The Community-owned house in Tuse Naes, Denmark is a model for how communities can work together to own and manage their own housing. This model has been used to provide affordable housing options for people in rural areas.
3. Invest in digital infrastructure and skills:	<p>Good connectivity is essential for rural communities to participate in the digital economy and access essential services.</p> <p>PoliRuralPlus should invest in improving digital infrastructure in rural areas, as well as providing training and support to help people develop digital skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mobile social and health services to advance digitalisation in rural areas of the Pirkanmaa region, Finland is a program that provides mobile health and social services to people in rural areas. This has helped to improve access to essential services and to reduce isolation. • The Adventure hunts connecting youngsters with nature in rural areas in Denmark is a program that uses outdoor activities to connect young people with nature. This has helped to improve the health and well-being of young people and to promote environmental awareness. • The Smart Village Hilvarenbeek in the Netherlands is a village that is using technology to improve its infrastructure and services. This has helped to make the village more sustainable and more livable.
4. Encourage collaboration between different sectors:	<p>Challenges faced by rural communities often require solutions that involve multiple sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, and education.</p> <p>PoliRuralPlus should promote collaboration between different sectors by bringing together stakeholders from these fields to develop and implement joint initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Green Circles Bee Landscape project in South Holland, the Netherlands** is a project that brings together farmers, businesses, and community groups to improve biodiversity. The project has helped to create new jobs and to improve the environment. • The Borabeira village project attracting new residents to the rural border of Portugal and Spain is a project that is working to attract new residents to a rural village. The project has involved partnerships between the local community, businesses, and government agencies. • The Care OneGoal project supports the integration of migrant women in Halland, Sweden. The project brings together migrant women, businesses, and community groups to provide support and training. This has helped to improve the lives of migrant women and to integrate them into the community.



Key Learnings for PoliRuralPlus	Explanation	Best practice examples from the database
5. Promote cross-border cooperation:	<p>Rural areas often share common challenges and opportunities, so there is a lot to be gained from cooperation between different countries.</p> <p>PoliRuralPlus should promote cross-border cooperation by supporting projects that involve partners from different countries and by sharing best practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ConnectRural project connects rural areas in Europe through a network of online and offline platforms. This has helped to facilitate collaboration on projects and to share best practices. • The Remote Villages combine teleworking and rural surroundings in the Canary Islands, Spain. The project encourages people to work remotely from rural areas, which can help to reduce rural depopulation. • The Isle of Eigg in Scotland, UK, produces its own electricity from green energy. The island has adopted a model of community-owned renewable energy, which has helped to reduce the island's reliance on fossil fuels.

2.6 Rural Pact Platform Good Practices¹⁸⁵

A large number of past and present projects, policies, tools and methodologies can inspire other actions contributing to rural revitalisation and the objectives of the [Rural Pact](#). Such examples can help mobilise, encourage, or build the capacity of policy makers and local actors, and they can also promote innovative ways to deal with rural challenges.

Resources

1. Connecting rural youth from Europe with EU institutions, Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Spain, Sweden **English** (PDF - 587.75 KB) [Download](#)
2. The social enterprise Milka creates employment for women in Duga Resa, Croatia **English** (PDF - 439.17 KB) [Download](#)
3. A photovoltaic system at the Aska's biological station, Cyprus **English** (PDF - 431.02 KB) [Download](#)
4. The model of the community-owned house in Tuse Naes, Denmark **English** (PDF - 443.77 KB) [Download](#)
5. The Rural Vision for 2027 of Redon Agglomeration, France **English** (PDF - 369.9 KB) [Download](#)
6. A cooperative community theater - teatro Povero di Monticchiello, Italy **English** (PDF - 380.24 KB) [Download](#)
7. Chalki, the first eco-island model in Greece **English** (PDF - 468.12 KB) [Download](#)
8. Restoring the Luznava Manor to boost community involvement and entrepreneurship in Latvia **English** (PDF - 479.23 KB) [Download](#)
9. The Whole village model revitalises rural areas in Transylvania, Romania **English** (PDF - 437.64 KB) [Download](#)
10. Combining aquaculture and cultural heritage to boost tourism in Posavje, Slovenia **English** (PDF - 466.18 KB) [Download](#)
11. Bioenergy Villages in the region of Göttingen, Germany **English** (PDF - 393.28 KB) [Download](#)
12. A Food Market Code boosts job opportunities in Bátovce, Slovakia **English** (PDF - 373 KB) [Download](#)
13. VirtuALL supports an active ageing in rural areas of the central region of Portugal **English** (PDF - 358.89 KB) [Download](#)
14. Green social entrepreneurship in the municipality of Kotel, Bulgaria **English** (PDF - 410.25 KB) [Download](#)
15. The Biocluster project by the town of Haapavesi, Finland **English** (PDF - 362.45 KB) [Download](#)
16. Remote Villages combines teleworking and rural surroundings in the Canary Islands, Spain **English** (PDF - 390.86 KB)
17. The Care OneGoal project supports the integration of migrant women in Halland, Sweden **English** (PDF - 380.04 KB) [Download](#)
18. The Carpathian Civil Society Platform in mountainous rural areas of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine **English** (PDF - 380.18 KB) [Download](#)

¹⁸⁵ [Good practices | Rural Pact Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)



19. A foundation created by five municipalities boosts tourism in Groningen, The Netherlands **English** (PDF - 342.06 KB) [Download](#)
20. Business incubator in Bačkowice, Poland **English** (PDF - 412.44 KB) [Download](#)

2.6.1 Learnings for the PoliRuralPlus pilots

Analysing these pilots, the learnings for the PoliRuralPlus pilots are as follows:

1. Engaging rural youth is crucial for revitalising rural communities.

- The PoliRuralPlus pilots should demonstrate the importance of engaging rural youth in initiatives that promote their participation, entrepreneurship, and connection to their communities. By providing opportunities for youth to connect with peers, learn new skills, and contribute to their communities, these pilots have helped to foster a sense of belonging and purpose among young people, making rural areas more attractive and vibrant places to live.

2. Social entrepreneurship can play a significant role in addressing rural challenges.

- The social enterprise Milka in Croatia is a prime example of how social entrepreneurship can create employment opportunities and address social issues in rural communities. By providing employment for women in the hospitality sector, Milka has contributed to economic development and gender equality in Duga Resa. Other pilots are also demonstrating the potential of social entrepreneurship to promote sustainability, cultural heritage, and community resilience.

3. Renewable energy can be a sustainable and cost-effective solution for rural areas.

- The photovoltaic system at Aska's biological station in Cyprus and the community-owned house in Tuse Naes, Denmark, highlight the potential of renewable energy to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and enhance energy security in rural communities. These pilots demonstrate that renewable energy can be a cost-effective and sustainable solution for rural areas, promoting both environmental and economic benefits.

4. Cross-sectoral collaboration is key to addressing complex rural challenges.

- The Rural Vision for 2027 of Redon Agglomeration in France and the Carpathian Civil Society Platform in mountainous rural areas of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine demonstrate the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration in addressing complex rural challenges. By bringing together stakeholders from government, businesses, NGOs, and academia, these pilots have developed innovative and sustainable solutions that address the needs of rural communities holistically.

5. Participatory processes are essential for developing and implementing effective rural development strategies.

- The cooperative community theatre in Monticchiello, Italy and the Whole village model in Transylvania, Romania emphasise the importance of participatory processes in developing and implementing effective rural development strategies. By involving local communities in the decision-making process, these pilots have ensured that the solutions are tailored to the specific needs and priorities of the communities they serve, increasing their chances of success.

2.7 Smart Rural 21 Final Report¹⁸⁶

The 1st Preparatory Action on Smart Rural Areas in the 21st Century (Smart Rural 21) operationalises the Smart Villages definition and tests the implementation of smart village strategies in practice. The final report based on the local experience of 21 villages across Europe, offers insights to support rural communities for developing Smart Village Strategies.

The final report of the first Preparatory Action on Smart Rural Areas in the 21st century, commonly called Smart Rural 21, has been published. This action aimed to operationalise the Smart Villages definition (provided by the Eco-social Villages Pilot Project) and to test the implementation of smart village strategies in practice. The Report

¹⁸⁶ [Smart Rural 21 – Spotlight on the Final Report | Rural Pact Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)



based on the local experience of 21 villages across Europe, provides important insights on how to support rural communities to develop Smart Village Strategies.

In recent years, the Smart Villages concept has gained traction across multiple governance levels. Many local communities are actively implementing Smart Village strategies, supported by national and regional policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy. Initiated by the European Parliament and backed by the European Commission's DG AGRI, the concept has evolved through various projects, notably Smart Rural 21 & Smart Rural 27. These projects have empowered 21 European villages to develop smart strategies, addressing modern challenges and opportunities¹⁸⁷.

2.8 Land use assessment: Land system responses to bioeconomy-related policies¹⁸⁸

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) has commenced this project on “Integrated bioeconomy land use assessment: Land system responses to bioeconomy-related policies”, which addresses the problem: The growing bioeconomy (economic activity based on renewable biological resources) puts pressure on sustainable land use. We need better tools to guide land management for both environmental and societal needs.

This project goes beyond traditional economic analysis to find truly sustainable land use solutions for the bioeconomy. It emphasises s:

- Interconnectedness of ecosystems and society
- Balancing environmental limits with human needs
- Collaboration with diverse stakeholders for better outcomes

The project aims to:

- Understand how bioeconomy-related policies impact land systems throughout the EU.
- Develop a framework for assessing the impacts of bioeconomy activities, ensuring ecosystems can provide essential services like food production, flood mitigation, and climate regulation.
- Generate "what-if" scenarios to explore future possibilities and limitations for sustainable bioeconomy practices.
- Work closely with stakeholders (policymakers, land-users, etc.) to ensure solutions are practical and inclusive.

Its key approaches are:

- **Ecosystem Assessment:** Defining "safe operating spaces" for different ecosystems to balance biomass production with ecosystem health.
- **Societal Metabolism:** Viewing society as interconnected with biomass use and production, with implications beyond direct economic activity.
- **MuSIASEM framework:** A tool to analyse the compatibility of the current bioeconomy with environmental, economic, and social wellbeing.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Using workshops and other methods to involve a wide range of voices in developing and evaluating solutions.

2.9 Health services in rural areas

Access to healthcare is a fundamental right for all people, regardless of geographic location. However, in rural and remote areas of Europe, challenges such as an ageing and declining population, inadequate infrastructure and connectivity, and a shortage of essential public services and professionals hinder access to healthcare.

¹⁸⁷ [final report of Smart rural 21](#), tools developed by [Smart Rural 21](#)[Open link in new window](#), activities of [Smart Rural 27](#)[Open link in new window](#)

¹⁸⁸ [Integrated bioeconomy land use assessment: Land system responses to bioeconomy-related policies | Knowledge for policy \(europa.eu\)](#)



The EU Long Term Vision (LTVRA) aims to revitalise rural areas by providing efficient, accessible and affordable public and private services, including personalised healthcare solutions. This vision highlights the crucial role of access to health services in promoting health equity, supporting economic development, facilitating preventive and early intervention and influencing the decision to reside in rural areas. Therefore, improving access to health services across rural Europe goes beyond providing a basic right to healthcare. It is a multidimensional challenge that influences various aspects of rural life and therefore requires an integrated response.

To effectively serve the rural communities, healthcare professionals must be well-equipped for their roles. Medical curricula do not provide enough opportunities to receive training in rural areas or training which equips medical professionals with skills needed to run a practice and provide care in rural areas. Health centres in rural areas may have limited medical equipment and technology, which can reduce the quality of the service provided, increase workloads, burnout and staff shortages. Regulatory measures promoting the right incentives to work in rural areas are not explored enough. This makes it more challenging to attract and retain young healthcare workers in rural areas. Finally, the feeling of social isolation in sparsely populated regions can lead to a reluctance to relocate to these areas.

A recent good practice webinar discussed enhancing access to health services in rural areas¹⁸⁹. Analysis of its discussions and presentation indicates that main learnings for the PoliRuralPlus project are:

1. The EU Long Term Vision (LTVRA) recognizes the importance of access to healthcare in promoting health equity and supporting rural development. The webinar highlighted the need for policies and initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by rural communities in accessing healthcare.
2. There is a need to link rural healthcare with academia and ensure educational opportunities are available. This includes expanding rural placements for healthcare students, developing longitudinal integrated clinical placements, and exploring innovative training models that are tailored to the needs of rural communities.
3. The webinar showed that there is a range of innovative solutions being implemented across Europe to improve access to healthcare in rural areas. These include mobile multidisciplinary health workers, integrated support for remote rehabilitation services, and the use of telemedicine and digital technologies.
4. EU funding programs such as the EU4Health, Third Health, European Social Fund Plus, European Regional and Development Fund, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, and Connecting Europe Facility can play a role in supporting these initiatives.
5. The webinar emphasised the importance of collaboration between stakeholders, including healthcare professionals, policymakers, academia, and the community, to improve access to healthcare in rural areas. This includes sharing best practices, developing joint strategies, and advocating for policy changes.

2.9.1 Conclusions and actions to improve rural-urban linkages

The main conclusions and actions to optimise rural-urban linkages across Europe, based on the provided text, can be summarised as follows:

Conclusions and Key Findings:

1. Demographic Challenges: Remote rural areas in the European Union (EU) face significant demographic challenges, including depopulation, rapid ageing, and economic disparities. Between 2011 and 2018, these regions experienced a decline in population, leading to concerns about their sustainability.
2. Ageing Population: ageing is a pressing issue in remote rural areas, with a low ratio of young people to seniors. Without immigration, these areas are likely to see further population decline, especially in countries like Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Italy, and Portugal.

¹⁸⁹ [Good Practice Webinar: Enhancing access to health services in rural areas | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)



3. **Service Accessibility:** Limited access to healthcare and educational services exacerbates population losses. The distance to these services in remote rural areas is five times longer than in urban centres, impacting the well-being of residents.
4. **Economic Disparities:** Remote rural areas lag behind economically, with lower GDP per capita, productivity, and economic diversification compared to non-remote regions. While some areas rely on tourism, economic performance is generally inferior across all sectors.
5. **Connectivity Challenges:** Issues with connectivity, such as slow broadband speeds and poor road transport performance, pose additional challenges. Over 45% of remote areas fail to reach the EU target of 30 Mbps for broadband speeds, and 71% experience poor road transport.
6. **Agricultural Constraints:** Agriculture, a primary land use in rural areas close to cities, faces constraints in remote rural areas due to dominant forests and natural areas. The importance of preserving natural capital in these regions is emphasised.
7. **Socioeconomic Classification:** The challenges in remote rural areas lead to the classification of three territorial clusters based on socioeconomic conditions, connectivity, and natural capital assets: strong, intermediate, and weak. More than half of EU's remote rural areas fall into the socioeconomically weak cluster.

Actions and Recommendations:

1. **Targeted Interventions:** Urgent and targeted interventions are needed to address depopulation, ageing, and economic struggles in remote rural areas, particularly in regions classified as socioeconomically weak.
2. **Preservation of Natural Capital:** emphasise the importance of preserving natural capital in remote rural areas, recognizing the role of forests and natural areas in providing essential ecosystem services.
3. **Immigration Policies:** Address population decline by considering immigration policies that encourage the influx of residents, especially in countries with higher rates of depopulation.
4. **Enhanced Service Accessibility:** Improve access to healthcare and educational services in remote rural areas to counteract population losses. This may involve infrastructure development and innovative solutions to bridge the gap.
5. **Economic Development Strategies:** Develop and implement economic development strategies tailored to the unique challenges of remote rural areas. This could include targeted investments, support for local industries, and efforts to enhance economic diversification.
6. **Connectivity Improvements:** prioritise infrastructure development to improve connectivity, including broadband speeds and road transport. This is crucial for fostering economic growth and enhancing the overall quality of life in remote rural areas.
7. **Tourism Promotion:** Leverage the potential of tourism and the rural events industry in specific remote rural areas, such as those with picturesque landscapes, to diversify the economy and create employment opportunities.
8. **EU Policy Support:** Advocate for EU policies that provide coordinated support to rural areas, considering the diverse legal, political, and administrative frameworks for inter-municipal cooperation.
9. **Flood Risk Management:** Implement measures to manage and reduce the risks of floods, recognizing their impact on both urban and rural areas. The Floods Directive provides a framework for assessing, mapping, and managing flood risks.
10. **Smart Rural Strategies:** Explore and implement Smart Rural strategies, as evidenced by initiatives like Smart Rural 21, to harness technological advancements and innovation for the benefit of rural communities.
11. **Rural-Urban Partnerships:** Promote and strengthen rural-urban partnerships as an integrated approach to economic development. Recognize the potential of such partnerships in achieving growth and balance in both urban and rural regions.
12. **Territorial Cohesion:** emphasise the importance of territorial cohesion in EU funding programs. Ensure that integrated territorial development strategies, including rural-urban partnerships, receive support and coordination across various funds.
13. **Policy Coordination:** Coordinate policies related to rural-urban partnerships and innovation, considering the specific needs and characteristics of rural areas. This includes targeted support for business networks, digital infrastructure, and interregional mobility.



14. Funding Mechanisms: Explore funding mechanisms that directly support rural-urban partnerships, potentially through multi-fund budgets, joint legal and strategic frameworks, and specific initiatives like "RURBAN" for experimentation and pilot actions.
15. Public Services in Rural Areas: Address challenges related to public service access in remote rural areas by considering initiatives that improve adequacy, availability, and equality of services.
16. Promoting Innovation: Support innovation in rural areas through networks, linkages, and policies that enhance access to digital infrastructure, foster collaboration with universities, and facilitate international trade and foreign ownership.
17. Policy Adaptations: Recognize the diversity of rural-urban partnerships in terms of formal status, structures, size, and spatial levels. Tailor policy adaptations to the specific context of each region.
18. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions in remote rural areas. Regular assessments will inform future policies and ensure adaptive strategies.

By addressing these conclusions and taking these actions, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards optimising rural-urban linkages and fostering sustainable development across Europe.

2.10 Joining Forces for Rural Areas¹⁹⁰

Titled 'Implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030: Joining Forces for Rural Areas – Impulses for cooperative regional development in Germany and Europe', the publication presents the results and lessons learned from the pilot action, where six partner regions from Germany, France, Portugal and Austria have tested innovative measures to provide these services.

A key finding is that rural regions of the pilot action and beyond act as proactive regions that use expertise, cooperation and commitment to achieve a great deal despite limited resources. The pilot action has shown the positive leverage effects that cooperative regional development can have locally.

Discover the final publication of the pilot action 'A future for lagging regions¹⁹¹' of the Territorial Agenda 2030 exploring cooperative regional and local development as contributing factors for the long-term improvement of services such as digitalisation, mobility, health and local supply in rural and peripheral areas.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030) is a political framework agreement of the EU Member States on the key objectives of spatial development in Europe. During the German EU Council Presidency, under the leadership of the German Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB) and the German Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR), the pilot action 'A future for lagging regions' was implemented, considering approaches to securing services of general interest in rural regions.

2.11 Rural Europe: Our Contract with Rural Europe – A Five-Point Plan for Europe's Heartlands¹⁹²

A recent publication by the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies¹⁹³ outlines a five-point plan to place local communities at the heart of EU policies, calling for bottom-up rural development.

The plan's proposed approach takes account of local, rural communities' needs, history and characteristics to recommend:

¹⁹⁰ [Implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030: Joining Forces for Rural Areas. Impulses for cooperative regional development in Germany and Europe \(bund.de\)](#)

¹⁹¹ '[A future for lagging regions](#)'

¹⁹² [Rural Europe: Our Contract with Rural Europe – A Five-Point Plan for Europe's Heartlands | Martens Centre](#)

¹⁹³ [Martens Centre Research Papers Layout template \(martenscentre.eu\)](#)



1. Turning the Green Deal into a positive partnership for farmers;
2. Equal connectivity and skills to those of urban residents;
3. Improved access to essential services;
4. Youth and quality of life as key drivers of lasting growth;
5. Meeting the day-to-day needs of its rural residents.

The EU is much more than just its cities. Beyond the confines of larger urban centres lies a rich tapestry of towns, villages and open countryside. These are the places whose traditions and resilience have helped define Europe's way of life for centuries. They are Europe's heartlands. The EU's rural and exurban areas account for over 80% of its total area and are home to over 30% of its population. Yet across Europe these communities feel disconnected. They feel detached from an increasingly remote political process—one which, they believe, gives precedence to the priorities of urban decision-makers rather than to the needs of smaller, less vocal communities. In many sectors, particularly in agriculture, people believe that their way of life is threatened by an unending deluge of European and national level regulations. Many feel abandoned by traditional political parties and disorientated by the rapid pace of economic and social change. Europe needs a new approach to rural development because not every town needs to become a technology hub, nor every village a tourist hotspot. Our Contract with Rural Europe provides a Five-Point Plan for Europe's Heartlands. First, the Green Deal must become a positive partnership for farmers. Second, rural citizens are equal citizens requiring the same connectivity and skills as those living in urban areas. Third, essential rural communities require essential public services. Fourth, youth and quality of life will drive lasting growth. Fifth, the EU needs to get back to basics and start focusing on meeting the day-to-day needs of its rural citizens.

2.11.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

Analysis of this plan identifies some key recommendations for PoliRuralPlus that align with the five-point plan:

1. Turning the Green Deal into a positive partnership for farmers:

- **Support innovation and new agricultural methods:** Increase funding for research and development to help farmers reduce emissions while maintaining productivity.
- **Simplify and diversify income opportunities:** Streamline rural development funding and create a specific "income diversification" cluster to support new revenue streams in agri-business and rural enterprises.
- **Facilitate farm succession and attract young farmers:** Offer clearer pathways for young people to enter farming, including apprenticeships and blended vocational training, and address tax policies that hinder generational transfer.

2. Equal citizens, equal connectivity, equal skills:

- **Bridge the digital divide:** Accelerate the "Gigabit connectivity for all by 2030" target, including public investment in underserved rural areas.
- **Improve rural public transport:** Protect and enhance existing options, especially for accessing essential services in neighbouring centres.
- **Expand educational opportunities:** Develop national outreach models to ensure equal access to technical, vocational, university, and lifelong learning options in rural areas.
- **Make electric vehicles accessible:** Establish a publicly accessible network of charging facilities in rural towns to ensure everyone benefits from the transition.

3. Essential communities require essential services:

- **Address healthcare professional shortages:** Establish an EU Health Service Corps to place healthcare professionals in underserved rural areas.
- **Strengthen primary healthcare and community nursing:** Develop these services further as crucial components of the social safety net, particularly in smaller communities.
- **Create local government hubs:** Set up information centres in medium-sized towns to connect citizens with local, national, and EU initiatives and facilitate essential public tasks.



- **Ensure cash accessibility:** Require shops and services to accept cash and improve public transport links to larger towns with financial services.
- **Support rural schools:** Cluster them into "Rural School Groups" to enhance viability and operational efficiency, and guarantee physical access to education through school buses.

4. Youth and quality of life will drive growth:

- **Establish "Remote Working centres" in repurposed town-Centre properties:** These can attract hybrid workers, foster community engagement, and benefit local businesses.
- **Offer incentives for renovating and reusing rural properties:** Make it easier for owner-occupiers to convert derelict or under-utilised properties into permanent housing.
- **Accommodate housing needs on family-owned farms:** Adapt local planning rules to allow continued construction of homes, particularly for those working in agriculture.
- **Formalise rural-urban partnerships:** Facilitate better access to jobs, amenities, and services through collaboration between rural and urban governments.
- **Repurpose existing EU funds:** utilise established programs like LEADER to support the above proposals.

5. The EU needs to get back to basics on rural needs:

- Simplify funding procedures and reduce administrative burden.
- Increase access to EU funding through the CLLD portal.
- Refocus the EU's presence on core principles: food security, internal market development, and improved quality of life for all citizens.
- Prioritise maintaining essential rural services to address local concerns.
- Treat rural residents as equal citizens with equal development opportunities.

2.12 Social Impact of integrating Ukrainian refugees¹⁹⁴

This EuroFound report reinforces PoliRuralPlus' potential to be a powerful force in ensuring refugees are seen as an asset, not a burden, to rural revitalisation. To maximise this potential, the PoliRuralPlus Pilots must address the unique needs and challenges of rural areas.

Key Findings

- **High Employment, but Challenges Remain:** Ukrainian refugees have a surprisingly high labor market integration rate compared to other refugee groups. This is aided by their pre-existing skillsets, language similarities with some host countries, and existing diaspora networks. However, their employment is often unstable (temporary, occasional), and below their skill level, impacting their income.
- **Barriers to Integration:** Major hurdles include language differences, childcare limitations, qualification recognition complexities, and lack of information/social networks.
- **Innovative Adaptations:** Member states are employing creative strategies to ease labor market integration, including streamlined qualification recognition and tailored language courses.

2.12.1 Implications and Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- **Rural Opportunity:** The report suggests labour shortages are motivating employers to hire refugees. PoliRuralPlus can emphasise this opportunity to rural areas with workforce gaps. This highlights the need to consider rural-specific barriers and opportunities in its tools.
- **Beyond Employment:** While employment is crucial, PoliRuralPlus needs to adopt a holistic view of integration. Housing instability, access to childcare, and health services (mental health in particular) are vital factors impacting an individual's long-term integration and labor market contribution.
- **Data Driven Insights:** PoliRuralPlus can compile data on rural-specific issues impacting refugee integration. This means collecting data on:
 - Rural childcare availability.

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-03/ef23030en.pdf>



- Rural housing shortages and their impact on integration efforts.
- Regional skills gaps that could be potentially filled by refugees.
- **Highlight Success Stories:** The PoliRuralPlus Dashboard can showcase examples of successful refugee integration into rural communities, emphasising how unique rural strengths (e.g., community cohesion) aid in the process.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- **Needs-Based Tools:** Design tools specifically addressing rural challenges like housing availability, childcare access, and the need for translation services that are more acute in rural settings.
- **Partnership Facilitation:** Create features to connect rural communities with NGOs and organisations that specialise in refugee resettlement and integration support.
- **"Beyond the Job" Focus:** Ensure tools help address the interconnected needs of integration. Housing, childcare, and health recommendations need to be considered on par with labour market analysis.
- **Targeted Data:** Partner with rural stakeholders to gather and analyse local data points that go beyond typical macro-level indicators, allowing communities to tailor integration strategies.

2.13 EuroFound Living and working in the EU e-survey¹⁹⁵

These ongoing surveys capture the experiences and evolving impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of EU citizens, regarding their work, well-being, living conditions, and overall societal outlook.

- **Methodology:** Large-scale online survey with non-probabilistic sampling methods (meaning findings cannot be generalised to the entire population, but still provide valuable insights)
- **Iterations:** Started in April 2020, with five survey rounds completed by May 2022.

Key Themes

- **Teleworking:** The pandemic rapidly accelerated the shift towards remote work, revealing both benefits and challenges.
- **Work-life Balance:** Individuals, especially women, experienced difficulties balancing work and personal life during the pandemic.
- **Well-being and Mental Health:** Declines in mental health, increased feelings of loneliness, and worries about the future were reported.
- **Trust in Institutions:** Varied levels of trust in government and EU institutions across nations, with implications for the effectiveness of policy responses.
- **Financial Hardship:** Many experienced income decline and heightened financial insecurity.

2.13.1 Implications and Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- **Decentralised Work & Rural Opportunity:** The rise of teleworking opens potential for rural areas to attract new residents and create jobs well-suited for remote work. PoliRuralPlus can highlight policies and initiatives to capitalise on this trend.
- **Rural Infrastructure Needs:** The survey reinforces how crucial investments in rural broadband access and digital skills training are, not just for businesses but for residents' well-being and ability to participate in the changing labour market.
- **Mental Health Awareness:** PoliRuralPlus tools could address the issue of rural isolation and its impact on mental health, particularly when combined with economic uncertainties. Resources and strategies to promote community connectedness are essential.

¹⁹⁵ [Living and working in the EU e-survey | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)



- **Data-Informed Policy:** The survey generates insights into how rural vs. urban areas experienced the pandemic differently. PoliRuralPlus could collect and make available similar data specifically focused on rural regions, giving policymakers better tools to design tailored solutions.
- **Evolving Inequalities:** The survey underscores how crises can exacerbate existing inequalities. PoliRuralPlus should emphasise a focus on equity and ensuring that rural communities aren't left further behind as new work models and economic opportunities emerge.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

- **Targeted Data Collection:** Replicate similar surveys specifically focused on rural environments to get more nuanced data on the needs and experiences of rural dwellers.
- **Case Studies:** Showcase examples of successful rural adaptation to remote work and innovative initiatives to address mental health challenges in rural settings.
- **Focus on Equity:** Integrate features or analysis that help communities identify and address potential disparities in access to opportunities, particularly for vulnerable groups in rural areas.

2.14 JRC Study on the long-term implications of the digital transition for EU farmers and rural communities¹⁹⁶

- **Focus:** Explores the potential of digital technologies to address challenges facing European agriculture, including climate change, environmental pressures, and evolving market dynamics.
- **Approach:** Foresight study using scenario-based analysis to examine the complex impacts of digitalization on farmers and rural communities.
- **Key Takeaways**
 - Digital solutions can boost productivity, optimise resource use, and foster sustainability.
 - Resilience must be prioritised; digital systems need to function through disruptions like extreme weather. [emphasising](#)
 - Localised strategies are essential; there is no one-size-fits-all approach for digital transformation in agriculture.
- **Toolkit:** The study provides a toolkit to aid policymakers in developing tailored digital transition strategies for agriculture, emphasising collaboration.

2.14.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

- **Scenario-Based Planning:** PoliRuralPlus can draw inspiration from the study's foresight approach, using scenario analysis (like the "what-if" dashboard feature) to proactively address potential challenges and maximise digital solution benefits.
- **Resilience Focus:** PoliRuralPlus tools and infrastructure should be designed for robustness, with contingency plans in case of technology failures, ensuring functionality for rural users who may have less reliable connectivity.
- **Tailored Approaches:** PoliRuralPlus should support regionally-driven strategies for digital integration. This means involving local stakeholders in the design of solutions, ensuring tools address specific needs and capabilities.
- **Collaboration is Key:** The emphasis on a toolkit for collaboration aligns with PoliRuralPlus's multi-actor approach. The project should facilitate knowledge-sharing and partnerships between rural communities, policymakers, and technology providers.
- **Broadband Awareness:** Since reliable digital infrastructure is crucial, PoliRuralPlus can work in tandem with initiatives like the European Broadband Competence Offices Network to advocate for improved rural broadband access.

¹⁹⁶ [Study on the long-term implications of the digital transition for EU farmers and rural communities | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#)



Additional Considerations from the Video

- **Addressing the Digital Divide:** PoliRuralPlus should prioritise bridging the digital gap in rural areas, ensuring equitable access to technologies and training to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** A platform for exchanging best practices and lessons learned about digital adoption in rural settings would be valuable for PoliRuralPlus stakeholders, mirroring what the BCO Network does for broadband

2.15 Urban-Rural Linkages

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the challenges and opportunities in urban-rural linkages in Europe. The lack of internet access in rural areas has been identified as a significant barrier to economic development¹⁹⁷. However, the pandemic has also led to a shift in residential choices, with an increasing number of people moving from urban to rural areas, presenting an opportunity for rural revival¹⁹⁸. Local development policies, particularly those that facilitate productive diversification and job creation, are crucial for post-COVID-19 recovery in both rural and urban regions¹⁹⁹. The pandemic has also accelerated pre-existing counter-urbanisation trends, leading to increased demand for short-term rentals and second homes in rural and coastal areas, which poses challenges for housing availability and affordability²⁰⁰.

The urban-rural linkages in Europe are complex and dynamic, influenced by a range of socio-economic and institutional factors²⁰¹. Urban pressure, while often seen as negative, can also drive the development of sustainable rural-urban relationships²⁰². This is particularly important in the context of land use changes, where the interdependencies between urban and rural areas are increasingly evident²⁰³. The role of rural-urban relationships in enhancing the rural landscape is crucial, and a territorial approach that integrates the supply of rural goods and services is proposed²⁰⁴. A range of studies have explored the complex dynamics of rural-urban linkages in Europe. This reference and²⁰⁵ both emphasise the need for better relationships between urban and rural areas, particularly

¹⁹⁷ Internet Access in Rural Areas: Brake or Stimulus as Post-Covid-19 Opportunity?

Irune Ruiz-Martinez +1, Sustainability, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229619>

¹⁹⁸ Rejuvenation in rural Ireland in response to the COVID-19 induced urban-to-rural migration phenomenon, Shreyashi Sen , International Journal of Environmental Science & Sustainable Development, 2021, [Rejuvenation in Rural Ireland in response to the COVID-19 induced Urban-to-Rural Migration Phenomenon | Environmental Science & Sustainable Development \(ierek.com\)](https://www.ijesds.com/Rejuvenation%20in%20Rural%20Ireland%20in%20response%20to%20the%20COVID-19%20induced%20Urban-to-Rural%20Migration%20Phenomenon%20-%20Environmental%20Science%20&%20Sustainable%20Development%20(IJESDS).pdf)

¹⁹⁹ Local Development Policies: Challenges for Post-COVID-19 Recovering in Spain, Rodriguez-Cohard, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4468/2020.2.05rodriguez.juste.vazquez>

²⁰⁰ Post-COVID-19 mobilities and the housing crisis in European urban and rural destinations. Policy challenges and research agenda, C. Colomb +1, Planning Practice & Research, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2022.2119512>

²⁰¹ <https://doi.org/10.1080/15239080902774929> The Context of Rural–Urban Relationships in Finland, France, Hungary, The Netherlands and Spain, Almudena Buciega +2, 2009, Urban pressure is not perceived as a negative process by many in different European contexts.

²⁰² [Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships | Semantic Scholar](https://www.semanticscholar.org/entry/Rural%20areas%20under%20urban%20pressure%3B%20Case%20studies%20of%20rural-urban%20relationships) Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships, I. Terluin , 2006, There is increasing interest in enhancing sustainable territorial rural-urban relationships and integrating the supply of public and private rural goods and services in Europe.

²⁰³ <https://doi.org/10.1068/b3902ge> Urban – Rural Linkages—Analysing, Modelling, and Understanding Drivers, Pressures, and Impacts of Land Use Changes along the Rural-to-Urban Gradient, D. Haase +1, 2012, urbanisation is usually detrimental to the environment in different regards.

²⁰⁴ <https://doi.org/10.1080/15239080902775058> Opportunities for Rural–Urban Relationships to Enhance the Rural Landscape, G. Overbeek, 2009, Rural areas could overcome urban ambivalence by establishing better relationships between urban and rural areas.

²⁰⁵ [Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships | Semantic Scholar](https://www.semanticscholar.org/entry/Rural%20areas%20under%20urban%20pressure%3B%20Case%20studies%20of%20rural-urban%20relationships) Rural areas under urban pressure; Case studies of rural-urban relationships, I. Terluin , 2006, There is increasing interest in enhancing sustainable territorial rural-urban relationships and integrating the supply of public and private rural goods and services in Europe.



in the context of urban pressure. They highlight the potential of rural goods and services to enhance the rural landscape and call for a more integrated supply of these. The context of a growing metropolis like Madrid. Nilsson²⁰⁶ adds a policy perspective, identifying strategies for sustainable urban development and urban-rural linkages, including better coordination of transport, land use, and open space planning, urban containment and densification, and preservation of agricultural land.

Nilsson identifies an important driving force behind urban expansion is the growth of the urban population. But for Europe, this is not a sufficient explanation. The major trend is that European cities have become much less compact. Since the mid-1950s European cities have expanded on average by 78%, whereas the population has grown by only 33%. In the PLUREL project²⁰⁷ - an integrated project within the EU's 6th Research Framework Programme - more than 100 researchers from 15 countries analysed the impacts of urban land consumption at a pan-European level and, through six European and one Chinese case studies, identified how land use conflicts and the pressure towards peri-urban areas can be strategically managed in different development and regulatory contexts. To summarise, the following strategies were identified as important steps towards more sustainable urban-rural futures: (i) better coordination of transport, land use and open space planning; (ii) urban containment and densification - development of a green compact city; (iii) preservation of blue and green infrastructure; and (iv) preservation of agricultural land and the promotion of local production. The need also remains to strengthen governance at the regional level while at the pan-European level there is clearly a need for more policy attention to be given to urban-rural linkages.

2.15.1 Food-Energy-Water (FEW) System

The research paper "Urban-Rural Partnership Framework to Enhance Food-Energy-Water Security in the Post-COVID-19 Era"²⁰⁸ emphasises the critical role of collaboration between urban and rural areas in ensuring a secure food, energy, and water (FEW) system, especially in the face of rising demand and disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. It critiques the traditional urban-centric approach to development planning and proposes a framework for urban-rural partnerships to enhance FEW security in a post-COVID world.

2.15.1.1 Key Points for PoliRuralPlus are:

- **FEW Security:** The paper highlights that FEW security is essential for human survival and socioeconomic development. Disruptions like COVID-19 expose the vulnerability of urban areas reliant on rural resources.
- **Urban-Rural Linkages:** The study argues that a shift towards city region-centric planning is necessary to strengthen connections between urban and rural areas. This can improve FEW security for both by:
 - **Shortening Supply Chains:** Reducing reliance on long-distance transportation for food, energy, and water.
 - **Enhancing Sustainability:** Jointly exploring renewable energy sources in rural areas and efficient water management practices across regions.
- **Partnership Framework:** The research proposes a framework for translating physical connections between urban and rural areas into a collaborative partnership. Key elements include:
 - **National Policy Support:** Government policies that incentivise and facilitate collaboration between urban and rural areas on FEW security.
 - **Science-Policy-Action Interface:** A mechanism for translating research findings into actionable strategies for urban-rural partnerships.

²⁰⁶ [Strategies for sustainable urban development and urban-rural linkages | Semantic Scholar](#) Strategies for sustainable urban development and urban-rural linkages, K. Nilsson +18, 2014, Various strategies were identified as important steps towards more sustainable urban-rural futures.

²⁰⁷ [Peri-urban Land Use Relationships - Strategies and Sustainability Assessment Tools for urban-rural linkages | PLUREL | Project | Fact sheet | FP6 | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁰⁸ [\(4\) \(PDF\) Urban-Rural Partnership Framework to Enhance Food-Energy-Water Security in the Post-COVID-19 Era \(researchgate.net\)](#)



The focus on FEW security and urban-rural partnerships directly aligns with PoliRuralPlus' goals of promoting sustainable development in rural areas. The framework proposed in the paper offers valuable insights for pilot projects on how to:

- **Establish Partnerships:** Identify common interests and goals related to FEW security with nearby urban areas.
- **Develop Joint Projects:** Create collaborative initiatives that address shared challenges and create economic opportunities in both rural and urban communities.
- **Advocate for Policy Changes:** Lobby for supportive national policies that encourage collaboration on FEW security between urban and rural areas.

By incorporating these insights, PoliRuralPlus pilots can strengthen FEW security in their regions and contribute to a more sustainable future.

2.15.2 Rural-Urban Food Systems for Zero Hunger and Healthy Diets

The paper "Rural-Urban Food System Transformations for Zero Hunger and Healthy Diets,"²⁰⁹ argues that addressing global challenges like hunger, malnutrition, and unhealthy diets requires a fundamental transformation of the food system. This transformation must centre on strengthening rural-urban linkages and ensuring a more equitable distribution of benefits for both rural and urban populations.

2.15.2.1 Key Points Relevant to PoliRuralPlus

- **Challenges to the Food System:** Problems like hunger, hidden hunger (micronutrient deficiencies), and the rise of diet-related diseases are rooted in an interconnected food system. These issues extend across rural and urban areas and disproportionately impact marginalised populations.
- **Rural-Urban Disconnect:** The current food system often fails to provide healthy, affordable, and sustainable food for both urban and rural populations. This disconnect is worsened by limited market access, inadequate infrastructure, and unequal power dynamics that can exclude small-scale rural producers.
- **The Need for Transformation:** Addressing hunger and malnutrition requires moving beyond focusing on boosting agricultural production solely in rural areas. Instead, a more integrated approach is needed that recognizes the complex relationships and flows of food, people, and resources between rural and urban areas.
- **Strengthening Rural-Urban Linkages:** The article posits that closer collaboration between rural and urban food systems can lead to:
 - **Diverse food production:** Promoting agroecological practices and diverse production systems in rural areas to cater to the varied needs of urban populations.
 - **Reduced Food Loss and Waste:** Improving infrastructure and supply chains to minimise unnecessary food losses that often occur during transport and distribution from rural production zones.
 - **Consumer Awareness and Choices:** Promoting better awareness of sustainable and healthy food options among urban consumers to support local and regional food systems.

Implications for PoliRuralPlus

- **Holistic Approach:** Pilots should adopt a food systems perspective to understand how their rural communities connect with urban areas in terms of food production, processing, distribution, and consumption.

²⁰⁹ [Frontiers | Toward urban-rural linkage development: contribution of climate-adaptive agroecology in the lower Chao Phraya River Basin, Thailand \(frontiersin.org\)](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2021.701111/full)



- **Collaborative Governance:** Build governance structures that bring together diverse stakeholders from both rural and urban areas to collectively shape regional food systems and related policies.
- **Infrastructure and Local Markets:** Support improvements in physical infrastructure and logistics that strengthen connections between rural producers and urban consumers, facilitating local food markets.
- **Consumer Engagement:** Develop educational initiatives in both urban and rural areas that build awareness of sustainable food choices, local sourcing, and reducing food waste.

Additional Considerations:

The article highlights the importance of addressing power imbalances and inequities between urban and rural actors within the food system. PoliRuralPlus pilots should strive to create partnerships that genuinely empower rural producers and ensure a fair distribution of value-added benefits.

2.15.3 Rural-Urban Linkages and Their Contribution to Territorial Development

The results of research assessing Rural-Urban Linkages and Their Contribution to Territorial Development based on Zimbabwe's Small and Medium-Sized Cities²¹⁰ is based on delving into the evolving dynamics of rural-urban linkages in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the context of rapid urbanisation and limited industrial growth. It argues that traditional models of rural-urban connections are no longer sufficient and highlights the need for a fresh perspective, focusing on the rise of small and medium-sized cities and the densification of rural areas.

The study proposes a novel method for assessing these complex linkages, emphasising a holistic approach that considers the unique circumstances of each territory. The method utilises proxy indicators to address data limitations commonly encountered in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2.15.3.1 Key Points for PoliRuralPlus:

- **Shifting Rural-Urban Dynamics:** The research underscores how traditional models of rural-urban connections might not fully capture the complexities of their region. PoliRuralPlus pilots should consider the specificities of their regions, including the potential role of small and medium-sized cities and changing rural demographics.
- **Holistic Assessment:** The study advocates for a comprehensive approach when evaluating rural-urban linkages. PoliRuralPlus pilots should go beyond basic measures and consider social, economic, and information flows when assessing the effectiveness of their initiatives.
- **Addressing Data Limitations:** The research acknowledges the scarcity of data and proposes using proxy indicators to overcome this challenge. PoliRuralPlus pilots can adopt similar creative approaches to gather necessary information and evaluate their impact on rural-urban linkages.

Implications for PoliRuralPlus Pilots:

- **Contextual Understanding:** Before implementing interventions, PoliRuralPlus pilots should conduct a thorough analysis of existing rural-urban linkages within their target regions. This analysis should consider the specific roles of small and medium-sized cities and how these dynamics might influence pilot activities.
- **Tailored Strategies:** Develop Regional Action Plans (RAP) that take into account the unique rural-urban connections present in each pilot region. A one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective in fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and achieving territorial development goals.
- **Data Collection and Proxy Indicators:** Be mindful of potential data limitations and explore creative methods to gather information on rural-urban linkages in your pilot regions. The proxy indicator approach presented in the study can be a valuable tool to address this challenge.

²¹⁰ [Sustainability | Free Full-Text | Assessing Rural-Urban Linkages and Their Contribution to Territorial Development: Insights from Zimbabwe's Small and Medium-Sized Cities \(mdpi.com\)](#)



- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Develop a robust monitoring and evaluation plan that incorporates a holistic assessment of rural-urban linkages as impacted by PoliRuralPlus pilot projects. This will allow for adjustments and improvements throughout the project lifecycle.

By adopting a nuanced understanding of rural-urban connections and employing creative data collection methods, PoliRuralPlus pilots can establish stronger partnerships between rural and urban areas, ultimately contributing to successful territorial development.

2.16 Rural–urban, gender, and digital divides

The Multi-Layered Study on “Rural–Urban, Gender, and Digital Divides during the COVID-19 Lockdown”²¹¹ examined the digital divide’s impact on online learning during COVID-19 lockdowns in five South Asian countries. It analyses these challenges through a framework considering social structures, cultural practices, and individual agency. The study reveals how location (rural vs. urban) and gender (male vs. female) create layers of disadvantage for students. A central finding highlights the unequal experiences of female students and those in rural areas. These groups face more limitations due to social structures and cultural norms, hindering their ability to fully participate in online learning. The research emphasises how existing inequalities are magnified during crises, potentially leading to educational gaps for women in rural communities.

2.16.1 Key Findings for PoliRuralPlus:

- **Gendered Digital Divide:** The study exposes a deeper digital divide specifically affecting female students in rural areas. Structural and cultural barriers restrict their access to technology and limit their ability to learn online.
- **Exacerbation During Crisis:** Crises like pandemics can exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for marginalised groups like rural females. This highlights the need for robust educational solutions that function even under challenging circumstances.
- **Location and Agency:** Students in rural areas often lack the agency to overcome structural limitations like poor internet or limited access to devices.

Implications for PoliRuralPlus Pilots:

- **Inclusive Online Learning:** When designing or implementing online learning initiatives, ensure they are inclusive and address the specific needs and challenges faced by female students and those in rural communities.
- **Bridging the Gender Gap:** Develop strategies that specifically target and empower female students in rural areas to participate effectively in online learning environments. This could involve addressing cultural norms or providing additional support structures.
- **Offline Options:** Consider offering alternative learning methods alongside online options to ensure all students have access to educational resources and can maintain learning continuity during disruptions.
- **Building Agency:** Explore ways to equip students, especially those in rural areas, with the skills and confidence to navigate online learning platforms and access educational resources effectively.

The study emphasises the importance of a nuanced understanding of how social structures, cultural norms, and individual agency intersect to create educational inequalities. PoliRuralPlus pilots should adopt a similar approach when developing solutions to ensure they are truly inclusive and impactful.

²¹¹ [Rural–Urban, Gender, and Digital Divides during the COVID-19 Lockdown: A Multi-Layered Study \(qub.ac.uk\)](https://qub.ac.uk)



By acknowledging the gendered aspects of the digital divide and its impact on rural students, PoliRuralPlus pilots can contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape, especially in the context of promoting online learning opportunities.

2.17 Nexogenous development

The paper "Rural Marginalisation and the Role of Social Innovation; A Turn Towards Nexogenous Development and Rural Reconnection"²¹² explores the challenges of achieving balanced rural development in Europe. It critiques traditional approaches that relied heavily on external interventions ("exogenous development") and argues for a new model - "nexogenous development." Its key points are:

- **Uneven Rural Development:** EU policies aimed at rural development have yielded mixed results, with wealthier rural areas prospering more than marginalised ones. The recent financial crisis has further exacerbated these inequalities.
- **Limitations of Social Innovation:** The article acknowledges the potential of social innovation in rural development, but questions its effectiveness in solely addressing social exclusion and marginalisation without broader structural changes.
- **Social Innovation in Rural Areas:** Rural social innovation is characterised by a strong emphasis on community self-reliance and self-organisation, often driven by austerity measures and reduced government support. It also fosters collaboration across sectors and between different geographic localities ("translocal").
- **Nexogenous Development:** The paper proposes "nexogenous development" as a new approach that moves beyond the divide between external intervention (exogenous) and purely local development (endogenous). Nexogenous development emphasises "socio-political reconnection" as a key driver of rural revitalisation.

2.17.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus:

- **Beyond Traditional Models:** PoliRuralPlus pilots should move beyond simply implementing pre-designed solutions in rural areas. Instead, foster a model that encourages local communities to identify their own needs and develop innovative solutions through self-reliance and collaboration.
- **Social Innovation with Caution:** While social innovation can be a valuable tool, PoliRuralPlus pilots should not view it as a silver bullet. Social innovation initiatives need to be supported by broader structural changes that address underlying causes of rural marginalisation.
- **Building Socio-Political Reconnection:** A core tenet of nexogenous development is "socio-political reconnection." PoliRuralPlus pilots can facilitate dialogue and collaboration between rural communities, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders. This can help ensure that rural voices are heard and rural needs are addressed in policy decisions that impact their development.

By embracing nexogenous development principles, PoliRuralPlus pilots can contribute to a more equitable and sustainable model of rural development in Europe, empowering communities and fostering socio-political reconnection for lasting impact.

2.17.2 A conceptual framework for nexogenous development²¹³

This research proposes a five dimension conceptual framework in contribution to the emerging theorisation of nexogenous rural development, a model for resourceful reconnection beyond place and across rural–urban space.

²¹² [\(4\) Rural Marginalisation and the Role of Social Innovation; A Turn Towards Nexogenous Development and Rural Reconnection | Request PDF \(researchgate.net\)](#)

²¹³ "Rural service hubs and socially innovative rural-urban linkages: A conceptual framework for nexogenous development", [Rural service hubs and socially innovative rural-urban linkages: A conceptual framework for nexogenous development - Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins, Theresia Oedl-Wieser, Ulla Ovaska, Aimee Morse, 2021 \(sagepub.com\)](#), Sage Journals, Volume 36, Issue 7-8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942221082040>



Drawing on examples from Austria, Finland and Wales, it illustrates how diverse service hub models mobilise social innovation, networks, scale and proximity to support service access and provision²¹⁴.

The research examines "rural service hubs" - one-stop shops offering multiple services in rural areas - as a strategy to address longstanding challenges of service access. The study argues that existing research often focuses solely on the location of these hubs. This paper proposes a new framework for analysing service hubs that considers not just physical location, but also social innovation, networks, and the scale of operations.

The authors position service hubs as a form of "resourceful reconnection" between rural and urban spaces, fostering development beyond a purely geographical lens. Key Points for PoliRuralPlus are:

- **Beyond Location:** PoliRuralPlus pilots should look beyond just the physical location of service hubs. Consider how these hubs can foster social innovation, build networks, and operate at a scale that effectively addresses the needs of rural communities.
- **Social Innovation:** Encourage innovative approaches to service delivery within PoliRuralPlus pilot projects. Service hubs can be a platform for piloting new models that improve access and quality of services in rural areas.
- **Network Building:** PoliRuralPlus pilots can play a crucial role in building networks between rural communities, service providers, and other stakeholders. Strong networks are essential for the sustainability and effectiveness of service hubs.
- **Scale Considerations:** The research highlights the importance of considering the scale - size and population density - of rural communities when designing service hubs. A "one-size-fits-all" approach may not be suitable and PoliRuralPlus pilots should explore models tailored to specific contexts.

2.17.2.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus Pilots:

- **Comprehensive Planning:** Move beyond focusing solely on establishing service hubs in a particular location. Develop a comprehensive plan for each pilot that considers social innovation, network building, and the optimal scale of operations to maximise positive impact.
- **Innovation Opportunities:** PoliRuralPlus pilots can serve as test beds for innovative service delivery models within rural service hubs. This could involve piloting new technologies, community-led service approaches, or partnerships with the private sector.
- **Network Facilitation:** Actively work to build connections between service providers, local communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Strong networks can ensure the long-term viability of service hubs and facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration.
- **Tailored Service Hub Models:** analyse the population density and specific needs of each rural community targeted by PoliRuralPlus pilots. Design service hubs with the appropriate scale and service mix to best address local challenges and opportunities.

By adopting this broader perspective on service hubs, PoliRuralPlus pilots can contribute to more effective and sustainable solutions for service provision in rural areas, ultimately promoting positive rural development outcomes.

2.18 Conclusions and recommendations to optimise rural-urban linkages across Europe

The provided academic literature on urban-rural linkages and opportunities post-COVID-19 suggests several conclusions and actions to optimise rural-urban linkages across Europe. Here are the key insights:

Conclusions:

²¹⁴ [Rural service hubs and socially innovative rural-urban linkages: A conceptual framework for nexogenous development - Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins, Theresia Oedl-Wieser, Ulla Ovaska, Aimee Morse, 2021 \(sagepub.com\)](#)



1. Diverse Linkages Based on Region Type (1.1.35):
 - The type of region influences the nature of linkages, necessitating varied solutions.
 - COVID-19 has accelerated the potential for different types of linkages, indicating a need for flexible and adaptive strategies.
2. Urban-Rural Partnership for Food Security (1.1.36):
 - Existing literature emphasises the increasing relevance of urban-rural linkages for food, energy, and water (FEW) security.
 - Urban-rural partnerships play a critical role in enhancing food security, and this connection has gained significance post-COVID-19.
3. Initiating Urban-Rural Linkage Development (1.1.37):
 - A case study proposes initiating urban-rural linkages to enhance sustainable agroecology post-COVID-19.
 - prioritisation of sustainable agroecology suggests a focus on environmentally friendly and resilient practices.
4. Assessment of Rural-Urban Linkages (1.1.38):
 - The paper aims to present and test a method for assessing rural-urban linkages and their potential role in territorial development.
 - There is a recognition of the need to understand and evaluate the dynamics of rural-urban linkages for effective territorial planning.
5. Politicised Mobilities and Rural-Urban Relations (1.1.39):
 - The article analyses politicised mobilities during COVID-19, focusing on rural-urban linkages tied to the sustainability of rural change.
 - Understanding the dynamics of rural-urban relations during disruptions like a pandemic is crucial for sustainable development.
6. Digital Divides and Learning Opportunities (1.1.40):
 - The study highlights the digital divides faced during COVID-19, emphasising the challenges and opportunities for online learning in rural areas.
 - Bridging digital divides is essential for ensuring equitable access to education and opportunities, especially in rural regions.
7. Conceptual Framework for Nexogenous Development (1.1.41):
 - Rural service hubs, framed as place-based solutions, appear in academic literature as potential contributors to nexogenous development.
 - Recognizing the role of rural service hubs suggests the importance of localised strategies for rural development.
8. Importance of Public Transport and Sustainable Employment (1.1.41):
 - High-quality and connected public transport links are identified as vital for rural economies.
 - Sustainable regional employment opportunities are emphasised as key factors for the future of rural economies.

Actions to Optimise Rural-Urban Linkages:

1. Flexible and Adaptive Strategies (1.1.35):
 - Develop strategies that are adaptable to different types of regions and responsive to changing circumstances, such as those accelerated by COVID-19.
2. Strengthening Urban-Rural Partnerships (1.1.36):



- Promote and strengthen partnerships between urban and rural areas, with a specific focus on enhancing food security and sustainability.
3. Promoting Sustainable Agroecology (1.1.37):
 - Support initiatives that prioritise sustainable agroecology, recognizing its importance in the post-COVID-19 era.
 4. Comprehensive Assessment of Linkages (1.1.38):
 - Develop and implement methods to comprehensively assess rural-urban linkages, considering their potential role in territorial development.
 5. Understanding Rural-Urban Relations (1.1.39):
 - Conduct research to understand politicised mobilities and rural-urban relations during disruptive events like pandemics, informing sustainable development strategies.
 6. Addressing Digital Divides (1.1.40):
 - Implement measures to bridge digital divides, especially in the context of online learning, to ensure equitable access to education in rural areas.
 7. Focusing on Rural Service Hubs (1.1.40):
 - Explore the potential of rural service hubs as place-based solutions, recognizing their role in nexogenous development.
 8. Investing in Public Transport and Employment Opportunities (1.1.41):
 - Invest in high-quality and connected public transport links to support rural economies.
 - prioritise the creation of sustainable regional employment opportunities as a foundation for the future of rural economies.

By drawing on these conclusions and taking corresponding actions, policymakers and stakeholders can work toward optimising rural-urban linkages in the post-COVID-19 context, promoting sustainable and resilient development across Europe.

3 National Studies and Reports

3.1 Spain - Law 2/2021 for the Development of the Rural Areas in Castilla-La Mancha²¹⁵

The region of Castilla-La Mancha in Spain (which is one of the PoliRuralPlus pilots)²¹⁶ faces significant depopulation, with low population density in many areas, and predominantly small, rural towns. Their strategy to address this has been to enact the Law 2/2021 of Economic, Social and Tax Measures Against Depopulation and for the Development of the Rural Areas in Castilla- La Mancha. This Law 2/2021 provides a multi-faceted approach with emphasis on:

- Prioritising rural areas in public aid and subsidies
- Integrated governance that includes collaboration and participation
- Addressing economic, social, and territorial cohesion

The Key Aspects of Law 2/2021 are:

1. Area Classification: The law defines areas by population density and risk of depopulation, shaping targeted support.
2. Public Aid and Subsidies: LEADER aid along with other subsidies are prioritised for businesses and projects in depopulated areas. This includes dedicated funding, increased aid amounts, and advantage in scoring.
3. Governance: A Regional Council for Rural Development and Depopulation fosters collaboration between administrative levels and includes social and economic stakeholders in policymaking.

²¹⁵ [tg1-rr-law-combat-depopulation_es_martinez_v3_en_2.pdf\(europa.eu\)](#)

²¹⁶ See Annex A



4. Financing: Earmarking EAFRD for at-risk areas plus other EU funding mechanisms.
5. Economic Cohesion: Focus on job creation in rural areas, business support, and agriculture.
6. Social Cohesion: Emphasis on work-life balance, childcare, housing, and cultural initiatives.
7. Territorial Cohesion: Promotion of renewable energy, water efficiency, and broadband access.
8. Access to Public Services: Guarantees education, health, transport, and social services.
9. Tax Incentives: Tax deductions for residents, home purchase/rehabilitation, and businesses.

3.1.1 Learnings for PoliRuralPlus

PoliRuralPlus can draw inspiration and the following lessons from Castilla-La Mancha's approach:

- Targeted Support: The area classification system facilitates tailored actions. PoliRuralPlus might consider a similar approach for its pilots, considering demographics alongside other factors.
- Prioritised Funding: Increased aid intensity for underpopulated areas is a powerful tool. PoliRuralPlus can explore how its funding and support can be prioritised to have the most impact in areas of greatest need.
- Governance and Participation: PoliRuralPlus's focus on bottom-up and participatory development aligns well with the creation of a Regional Council. Finding ways to formalise multi-actor participation might be fruitful.
- Integrated Approach: PoliRuralPlus, with its focus on various domains, could benefit from looking at how Law 2/2021 seeks to combine social, economic, and infrastructural development.
- Transferability: While some measures (especially the tax-related ones) are specific to the Spanish context, many concepts, such as prioritising funding or emphasising work-life balance, can be relevant for other PoliRuralPlus's pilot regions.

3.2 Ireland's recovery and resilience plan (europa.eu)

Ireland's Recovery and Resilience Plan, driven by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is a comprehensive strategy to address the economic and societal challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan places a strong emphasis on making Ireland's economy and society more resilient and future-ready by aligning with the green and digital transitions outlined in the EU's broader objectives. Key investments and reforms aim to drive sustainable growth, enhance climate action, and foster digital transformation, contributing to the overall optimization of rural-urban linkages.

In the area of climate and environmental policies, Ireland faces several challenges. First, achieving the 2030 climate and energy targets will be a major challenge despite a strengthened legislative framework for climate action linked to ambitious mitigation targets and the climate action plan 2023. Second, Ireland needs to considerably speed up the deployment of renewables, in particular onshore and offshore wind, to reach the 80% renewable electricity target by 2030. Finally, despite the rapid expansion in the use of renewable electricity, Ireland needs to further reduce the reliance on fossil fuels to ensure security of supply and contribute to climate change mitigation.

Ireland's Recovery and Resilience Plan, was created in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the energy disruption caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It utilises the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) for funding and aligns with the larger REPowerEU Plan²¹⁷ to reduce energy dependence and accelerate sustainable energy transition.

Plan Overview:

- **Value:** €990 million, including €914 million in RRF grants.
- **Focus:** Sustainable, resilient, future-ready economy.
- **Targets:** 42% of the plan supports climate objectives, 32% supports the digital transition.

²¹⁷ [REPowerEU Plan](#)



Green Transition

- **Investments:**
 - €164 million for Cork commuter rail electrification to encourage cleaner transport.
 - €155 million in energy efficiency retrofits for businesses, homes, and public buildings.
 - €108 million for restoration of peatlands for biodiversity and carbon capture.
- **Reforms:**
 - Strengthened climate governance framework, enshrining climate neutrality into law.
 - Carbon tax legislation.

Digital Transition²¹⁸

- **Investments:**
 - Data Centre upgrades and digital transformation in the public sector (especially healthcare).
 - €85 million to support the digitalization of Irish businesses, particularly SMEs.
 - €64 million for connectivity and ICT equipment for schools to reduce the digital divide.
- **Focus on Digital Skills:** Development of digital skills across all levels of education.

Economic and Social Resilience

- **Investments:**
 - €27 million for labour market access for jobseekers.
 - €114 million for worker reskilling/upskilling, prioritising green and digital skills.
 - €40 million for higher education development and creating regional innovation hubs.
 - Funding to increase social and affordable housing.
- **Combating Money Laundering:** Strengthening anti-money laundering framework supervision and enforcement.

Alignment with European Initiatives

- **European Semester:** Ireland's plan addresses country-specific challenges previously identified by the European Semester²¹⁹ (economic disparities, skills gaps, housing shortages).

3.2.1 Implications and Recommendations for the Irish PoliRural Pilot

The implications and recommendations of the Irish Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) for the Irish PoliRuralPlus pilot in Monaghan, are:

- **Focus on Green Transition:** Ireland's RRP prioritises energy efficiency, renewable energy, and biodiversity protection. Monaghan's pilot should align closely with these goals to maximise potential synergies and funding sources.
- **Digitalization Emphasis:** The RRP highlights digital skills, digitalization of businesses and public services. Monaghan's pilot should ensure that rural communities are not left behind in these transitions.
- **Social Resilience:** The RRP includes support for reskilling, upskilling, and access to the labour market. Monaghan's pilot can draw on these supports to address challenges like its ageing population and the need to attract new residents with diverse skill sets.
- **Alignment with European Semester Priorities:** The RRP has been designed considering challenges identified during the European Semester process. Monaghan's pilot, by being aligned, is more likely to secure support and funding at the national level.

²¹⁸ [Addressing the digital divide and enhancing digital skills](#)

²¹⁹ [The European Semester explained | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)



Recommendations for the Monaghan Pilot

1. Green Economy Focus: Given that one of the pilot's goals is unlocking the potential of the green economy in Monaghan, focus on:
 - Renewable Energy Initiatives: Explore solar, wind, biomass, or other renewable energy projects suitable for the region.
 - Energy Efficiency Retrofits: Partner with the RRP's residential and public building retrofit programs to enhance energy efficiency and create local jobs.
 - Peatland Restoration: Collaborate with the national peatland project, leveraging its expertise and potential funding.
2. Digital Inclusion and Rural Entrepreneurship: Address the digital divide and boost the local digital economy by:
 - Digital Skills Training: Work with RRP's digital skills programs to offer training for rural residents in various age groups, focusing on practical applications.
 - E-commerce Support for Local Businesses: Help rural businesses and producers adopt online sales or tourism platforms.
 - Telework / Co-working Spaces: Explore how to facilitate remote work opportunities for existing and potential new residents within the area.
3. Social and Economic Integration: utilise the RRP's social resilience focus to address Monaghan's specific challenges:
 - Attracting Newcomers: Create a welcoming environment for new residents, including those from immigrant backgrounds, addressing any skill gaps they may have.
 - Youth Engagement: Ensure programs to connect young people with jobs and support their participation in shaping the region's future.
 - Affordable Housing: Advocate for and potentially collaborate with RRP's efforts focused on housing supply.
4. Leverage RRP Funding:
 - Proactively seek partnerships: Identify projects within Ireland's RRP that have potential for collaboration or alignment with Monaghan's pilot initiatives.
 - Explore grant opportunities: Monitor the RRP for funding opportunities that can support pilot projects in Monaghan.
5. Showcase Success:
 - Document and disseminate results: Measure and promote the pilot's progress in achieving both green transition and rural revitalisation goals.
 - Become a model: Position Monaghan as a leading example of how the RRP can drive positive change in rural Ireland.

3.3 Community Engagement Guides and examples

3.3.1 Ireland: A Guide for Inclusive community engagement in local planning and decision making²²⁰

This guide supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development (Ireland) provides meaningful insights to assist in inclusive local engagement processes, particularly of marginalised communities also in rural areas.

²²⁰

[a547919e-0cf5-412b-8983-f260c8ed66ed.pdf \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/publications-and-statistics/publications/a547919e-0cf5-412b-8983-f260c8ed66ed.pdf), All Ireland Standards for Community Work: <http://www.communityworkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/All-Ireland-Standards-for-Community-Work.pdf>



This report establishes a set of standards for community work practice in Ireland to promote social inclusion, social justice, and equality. Target audience: Community workers, program implementing organisations, employers, policymakers, funders, educators, and organisations/groups involved in community work. With the following Core values:

- Collectivity: Fostering collaboration and participation.
- Community Empowerment: Enabling communities to control their own destinies.
- Social Justice and Sustainable Development: Promoting fairness and meeting diverse needs for current and future generations.
- Human Rights, Equality and Anti-discrimination: Respecting and upholding human rights for all.
- Participation: Ensuring everyone has a voice and opportunity to contribute.

Key points:

- Community workers should be:
 - Self-aware and reflective.
 - Think strategically and critically.
 - Continuously develop their knowledge and skills.
- The document outlines specific knowledge, skills, and qualities needed for effective community work in different areas such as community development, family support, local development, etc.
- It provides guidance on designing, developing, monitoring, and reviewing programs, policies, and initiatives based on the core values.
- It encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders involved in community work.

Additional notes: This document is specific to Ireland and may not be directly applicable to other contexts. It emphasizes the importance of ethics and social responsibility in community work. It acknowledges the evolving nature of community work and the need for ongoing adaptation.)

3.3.2 Ireland: Carlow PPN Toolkit for Consultation: Consultation-Toolkit-2019-Booklet.pdf (carlowppn.ie)

A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement - (2nd Edition)" found on carlowppn.ie, is part of a Dormant Accounts-funded project. Its purpose is to foster meaningful inclusive participation and enhance the capacity of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) to engage marginalised groups in community planning processes. This guide is beneficial for all public authorities and organisations.

3.3.3 Galway City Community Network (GCCN) Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement²²¹

The Galway City Community Network (GCCN) is a civil society network that supports community participation in Galway City, Ireland. They collaborate with other groups and organisations to achieve this goal. Their website also includes news and resources, including the Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement

3.3.4 Ireland: Consultation Principles & Guidance²²²

Ireland's Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan was launched in July 2014 and aims to strengthen democratic reforms by focusing on:

²²¹ <https://galwaycitycommunitynetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/GCCN-Guidelines-forSuccessful-Community-Engagement.pdf>

²²² [Consultation Guidelines 2016 \(assets.gov.ie\)](https://assets.gov.ie)



- Open data and transparency
- Citizen participation
- Stronger governance and accountability

Overall, the guide emphasises the importance of transparency and citizen engagement supporting two specific actions from the OGP Action Plan:

1. Revised principles for public engagement: This aims to create clearer guidelines for public bodies on how to effectively consult with citizens and civil society.
2. Legislative footprint: This requires government departments to publish a detailed record of each legislative initiative, including public consultations and stakeholder feedback.

Benefits:

- Improved public trust in government
- More effective public consultations
- Alignment with international best practices

3.3.5 Ireland: [Carlow Public Participation Network](#) A-Guide-for-Inclusive-Community²²³

The Carlow Public Participation Network (PPN) to facilitate public participation in local government. It aims to empower communities and give them a voice in local decision-making. The PPN also offers training to stakeholders.

Their "Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making": provides guidance on inclusive public participation in local government processes. It emphasises engaging marginalised communities and their representatives.

Target Audience:

- Local authorities
- Public sector bodies
- Any organisation or community group committed to inclusive local decision-making

Benefits:

- Identifying Stakeholders: The guide helps you determine who should be involved in consultations and engagement processes.
- Ensuring Meaningful Engagement: It promotes practices that make public participation effective and impactful.

Key Points:

- Nine Principles: The guide outlines nine principles for inclusive engagement, ensuring the process is:
 - Genuine (authentic and transparent)
 - Purposeful (with clear objectives)
 - Planned (well-Organised)
 - Clear (easy to understand)
 - Inclusive (involving diverse voices)
 - Collaborative (working together)
 - Accountable (transparent about outcomes)
 - Accessible (removing barriers to participation)
 - Fit for Purpose (tailored to the specific issue)
- Case Studies: Real-world examples illustrate how to put these principles into practice.

²²³ [A-Guide-for-Inclusive-Community.pdf \(carlowppn.ie\)](#)



- Three Phases: The guide provides practical advice for each phase of engagement:
 - Planning (including who to involve, objectives, resources)
 - Implementation (putting the plan into action)
 - Review (assessing effectiveness and making improvements)

Additional Resources:

- Checklists for each planning phase are included

3.3.6 Ireland: “Collaboration & Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector”²²⁴

This guide from the [Department of Rural and Community Development](#) outlines an agreed-upon framework: The document establishes values and principles to guide relationships between the government, local authorities, state agencies, and the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. It focuses on supporting communities, especially those that are disadvantaged or marginalised.

The document’s Key Themes are:

- Collaborative Focus: The strategy was developed collaboratively, and a commitment to collaboration is a core theme for its implementation.
- Partnership and Consultation: Effective partnership with the community sector is essential when developing and implementing policy. This aligns with Ireland's commitments to Open Government Partnership and its Public Participation Networks (PPNs).

The document outlines six core values that should underpin collaboration between stakeholders:

1. Social Justice: Prioritise equal opportunities and address root causes of exclusion.
2. Human Rights, Equality, and Anti-Discrimination: Combat discrimination and protect rights.
3. Empowering Communities: Increase community knowledge, participation, and resilience.
4. Active Participation: Ensure meaningful involvement of communities in decision-making.
5. Sustainable Development: Promote practices that balance social, economic, and environmental wellbeing for present and future generations.
6. Social Inclusion: Focus on including those facing social or economic exclusion, like those in rural isolation.

Six principles provide actionable guidelines for effective partnerships:

1. Respect: Value the diverse expertise and experiences of all stakeholders.
2. Subsidiarity: Empower communities to make decisions that directly affect them.
3. Harmonisation: Align with existing development strategies and promote consistent practices.
4. Value for Money: Prioritise approaches that create the most significant social value, while being cost-effective.
5. Implementation: Build on existing local and national structures.
6. Collaboration: Work with stakeholders and communities to create sustainable solutions.

3.3.7 Ireland: Developing local migrant integration strategies²²⁵

The [Immigrant Council of Ireland](#) is a non-governmental organisation that advocates for the rights of migrants. The council offers various services to migrants, including legal advice, training, and support.

Ireland's first National Migrant Integration Strategy ("A Blueprint for the Future") was launched in 2017. This strategy document aims to empower local authorities with the tools and resources to create more inclusive communities for migrants in Ireland.

²²⁴ [gov - Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²²⁵ <http://immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/2018-07/Keeping%20it%20local%20Report%20WEB%20version.pdf>



Its key points are:

- Local authorities have a crucial role in creating welcoming communities for migrants.
- This document offers practical recommendations for local authorities on how to promote integration through various areas like social housing, local businesses, and public services.
- The document emphasises community engagement and encourages migrant participation in local government, including voting and running for office.

The Document reviews previous local migrant integration strategies and local economic and community plans, and the results of a survey with local authorities on local migrant integration strategies. The following key principles and proposed actions for local authorities to adopt in their updated strategies:

Key Principles:

- **Prioritise Local Interaction:** Facilitate interactions between Irish people, migrants, and community groups at the most local level possible.
- **Build Partnerships:** Dedicate time and resources to establish strong partnerships with key stakeholders, including migrants.
- **Allocate Resources:** Ensure sufficient resources and clearly assigned responsibilities for implementation and monitoring of integration actions.
- **Set Measurable Goals:** Establish concrete actions and indicators to track progress, particularly those where local authorities have direct responsibility.
- **Include in LECPs:** Integrate actions outside local authorities' core functions into Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), with Local Community Development Committees overseeing efforts.

Proposed Actions

- **Social Housing:** Collect nationality and ethnicity data for applications and residents; develop policies to ensure diverse housing allocations and address racially motivated anti-social behaviour.
- **Library Services:** Collect nationality and ethnicity data for members; conduct membership drives in migrant communities; expand collections of materials in languages relevant to local populations and ESOL resources.
- **Electoral Register:** Implement targeted plans to increase voter registration among non-Irish citizens before local elections, with outreach in areas with high migrant populations.
- **Residents' Associations:** Support engagement with migrants, and survey membership profiles to encourage diversity in resident groups.
- **Intercultural Grants:** Establish a ring-fenced fund for intercultural events that foster interaction between different cultures.
- **Public Communications:** Use communication channels (like social media) to promote positive messaging around cultural events and celebrations of migrant communities.
- **Local Enterprise Offices:** Gather data on the nationality and ethnicity of service users, identify specific needs, and develop targeted training for migrant entrepreneurs.
- **Equality and Human Rights:** Provide staff and counsellor training on the Public Sector Duty and interculturalism.
- **Community Inclusion Open Days:** Facilitate local, family-friendly gatherings as a neutral space for diverse communities, local groups, and migrants to interact.
- **Migrant Voices:** Actively include migrant perspectives in strategy development across all the local authority's functions.
- **Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs):** LCDCs should integrate migrant integration actions into their LECPs, setting and monitoring actions even in areas outside the local authority's direct control.

Actions for Other Bodies:

- **Education and Training Boards:** Develop national strategies to ensure local ESOL (English as a Second Language) supports are tailored for migrants.



- Employment Offices: Create national strategies for local offices to effectively engage with migrants in finding employment.
- Local Sports Partnerships: Support activities to engage migrant communities.
- Schools: Develop policies to support integration of migrant parents and children.

3.3.8 Equality and Human Rights Duty - Tool for a consultative approach²²⁶

The [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#)'s purpose is to promote and protect human rights and equality in Ireland.

Their "Assisting Effective Implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty - Tool for a Consultative Approach" offers a framework to help Irish public bodies effectively implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (the Duty). It emphasises the value of consultation with stakeholders during the Duty's implementation.

What is the Duty?

- Requires public bodies to consider the elimination of discrimination, promotion of equality, and protection of human rights when performing their functions, developing strategies, and reporting on achievements.
- Focuses on nine protected groups under equality legislation and groups at risk of poverty/social exclusion.

Why Consultation is Important

- Improves evidence base for addressing human rights and inequality.
- Accesses knowledge and perspectives of those affected by discrimination and social exclusion.
- Ensures responsiveness of public body policies and services.

Five Principles of Consultation

1. **Appropriate:** Tailored to the specific task of implementing the Duty, manageable within resources, and avoids tokenism.
2. **Participative:** Inclusive of those experiencing discrimination, empowers historically marginalised voices, and promotes parity between stakeholders.
3. **Accountable:** Transparent process where stakeholders have influence and receive feedback on outcomes.
4. **Enabling:** Provides resources and information to support stakeholder participation.
5. **Accessible:** Identifies and addresses barriers to participation for diverse groups, including those with disabilities.

Five Steps for the Consultative Approach

The tool outlines five steps to guide the consultation process during the assessment of equality and human rights issues:

1. **Identify Purpose:** Clearly define the focus of the consultation.
2. **Key Areas:** Determine the specific topics within the Duty that consultation will address.
3. **Stakeholders:** Select representatives from affected groups, including civil society organisations and relevant internal staff networks.
4. **Approach:** Design the consultation format and methods in collaboration with stakeholders.

²²⁶ [Assisting the Effective Implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty - Tool for a consultative approach \(ihrec.ie\)](#)



5. Feedback: Provide updates and outcomes to those who participated.

3.3.9 Ireland: Imagining 2050 Toolkit²²⁷

University College Cork Environmental Research Institute have developed the referenced toolkit for communities to use in considering various possible futures. They argue that as the future becomes more uncertain, it is important for communities to be able to think about different possibilities and make decisions based on those possibilities. The toolkit is designed to be used by a variety of stakeholders, including community organisations, educators, and activists.

The toolkit includes a variety of resources, including information on how to run deliberative meetings and how to choose topics for discussion. The creators of the toolkit also provide a case study of a project called Imagining2050, which used the toolkit to help communities in Ireland think about how to achieve a low-carbon future.

Some of the key benefits of using the toolkit:

- It can help communities to consider a wider range of possible futures.
- It can help communities to make more informed decisions.
- It can help to build trust and consensus among different stakeholders.

The toolkit's core focus is Deliberative and Participatory Engagement

- Guiding Principles: outlining best practices for inclusion, equal voice, and respectful, well-informed discussions.
- Recruitment Strategies: Advice on how to recruit participants for diverse representation: random sampling, targeted recruitment, or open invitations.
- Topic Selection: Guidance on whether Organisers should choose a focus or allow participants to determine their discussion points within a given theme.
- Framing & Facilitation: Tips for presenting information to participants (expert witnesses, etc.), advice on facilitator roles, and how to structure discussions for effective outcomes.

Some of the specific tools included are:

- Scenario Analysis: Methods to explore various future possibilities, potentially using predictive modelling and contingency planning.
- Visual Engagement: Techniques to present complex information in visual formats (graphs, maps, etc.) and possibly more interactive visual methods to improve understanding and promote discussion.
- Deliberative Dialogues: Structured conversations aimed at fostering deeper understanding of issues and building consensus towards shared visions.
- Pathways Development: Tools for participants to chart steps toward a desired future. These might involve backcasting (starting with the end goal and working backward to outline necessary actions).
- Voting or Decision-Making Tools: Since consensus might be difficult, the toolkit might include clear methods for fair decision-making if disagreements persist.

3.3.10 Ireland: Community engagement concerning energy and climate related infrastructure²²⁸

The [MaREI research Centre](#) works on energy, climate change, and ocean research. They collaborate with businesses, universities, and governments to inform policy decisions and support businesses. The Centre also

²²⁷ [Imagining2050Toolkit.pdf \(ucc.ie\)](#)

²²⁸ [MaREI-Practice-and-Policy-BriefPDF.pdf](#)



educates future leaders in these fields. Their research on policy and practice on community engagement concerning energy and climate related infrastructure (as referenced) highlights the importance of community engagement in planning and developing climate-related infrastructure projects. The report emphasises that co-production, where communities and institutions work together, is crucial for achieving large-scale climate action and infrastructure development for both rural and urban areas:

- Policy Context:
 - International bodies like the UN and Future Earth emphasise co-production (collaboration between communities and institutions) for effective climate action.
 - The EU's Renewable Energy Directive (2018) highlights citizen participation in the energy transition.
 - Ireland's Climate Action Plan, Programme for Government (2020), all emphasise a new model of community engagement for climate action.
- Recommendations:
 - Policy Level:
 - Community engagement should be central to planning climate-related infrastructure across institutions.
 - Empower communities by facilitating their role in initiating projects with public bodies.
 - Regulatory processes should prioritise co-production and citizen participation.
 - Training programs and educational pathways for community engagement professionals are needed.
 - Develop a unified national narrative on infrastructure development aligned with decarbonization goals.
 - Practice Level:
 - Build a community profile before starting a project (identify stakeholders, past engagement efforts).
 - Engage a wide range of stakeholders early, including those with strong opinions.
 - Clearly define the scope of consultation from the outset (what's open for discussion).
 - Regularly check in with the community throughout the process and explain decisions.
 - Prepare reports showing how community feedback is used.
 - Include contingency and legacy planning in project development.
 - General Principles:
 - Be flexible and adapt engagement strategies to different community contexts.
 - A communication-only approach is insufficient for large-scale decarbonization projects.
 - Treat communities as distinct and diverse entities.
 - View infrastructure projects as opportunities to empower communities for broader sustainability initiatives.

3.3.11 UK: People and Participation²²⁹

Involve is a nonprofit organisation that works to make public participation a bigger part of democracy. Some of the ways Involve helps with public participation are citizen assemblies and training on public engagement. The referenced document from Involve offers guidance on public participation in the UK. Its main message is that understanding the purpose, context, and the overall participation process is vital for selecting the right methods and achieving meaningful public participation. It explains that Public Participation is an essential ingredient in modern decision-making and policy development. It helps build active citizenship, improves service design and delivery, and can shift power structures to support 21st-century governance.

- Despite growth in participation activities, shared understanding across all actors remains limited.
- Involve aims to create systems that give people more influence over decisions affecting their lives.

²²⁹ [kate_amended_file.indd \(involve.org.uk\)](https://www.involve.org.uk)



This Guidance Document:

- Purpose: Help people understand and improve participation processes, and aid organisations in transitioning from commissioning participation activities to actively practising them.
- Focus: Examines how neutral participation processes can impact power dynamics within wider decision-making systems.
- Not a 'How-to': Doesn't provide single method solutions, but helps evaluate methods in a contextual way.

The guide emphasises that participation is more than just choosing techniques. Participation is a Process:

- **Purpose:** Clearly define what the process aims to achieve.
- **Context:** Understand unique factors (issues, people involved, institutional systems) that shape possibilities and constraints.
- **Process:** Planning how the purpose will be achieved, including when and which methods to use. Choice of methods depends on these factors.

The Main Sections of the guide are:

1. Introducing participation: Discusses issues affecting participation in the UK.
2. Planning for participation: Steps to ensure participation works well.
3. Methods for participation: Characteristics and pros/cons of different methods.

3.3.12 UK: Scottish National Standards for Community Engagement²³⁰

[VOiCE](#) is planning and recording software that assists individuals, organisations and partnerships to design and deliver effective community engagement. The National Standards for Community Engagement and how they can be used, details resources available to support community engagement. The Standards are designed to improve the process of community engagement. The seven good-practice principles are:

1. Inclusivity: Ensure the process is accessible and inclusive of diverse voices and perspectives from the community.
2. Planning: Develop clear plans with realistic objectives, timelines, and resources, in collaboration with the community.
3. Working Together: Establish open and respectful collaboration between those leading the engagement and the community.
4. Methods: Select engagement methods that are suitable for the specific purpose and community involved.
5. Sharing Information: Provide clear, accessible, and timely information to the community throughout the process.
6. Feedback: Explain how the community's input has influenced decisions and outcomes.
7. Improvement: Continuously reflect, evaluate, and learn from experiences to improve future community engagement practices.

The referenced National Standards for Community Engagement document from voicescotland.org.uk, focusing on the seven principles explains that the National Standards for Community Engagement are:

- A set of principles outlining effective community engagement practices for Scotland.
- A benchmark for best practices, complementing existing frameworks.
- Support the goals of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which promotes strong participation from communities in decisions that affect them.

Who are they for?

- Public sector: Planning community involvement, ensuring fairness.

²³⁰ [NSfCE+online October.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)



- Third sector (voluntary organisations): Involving members and advocating for the community.
- Private sector: Collaborating with communities on developments and service design.

Community engagement is:

- A purposeful process to build relationships between communities, organisations, and public/private bodies.
- Involves respectful dialogue, aimed at understanding, and taking joint actions for positive change.
- Key principles: fairness, equality, and commitment to continuous improvement.

Benefits of good community engagement

- Services that reflect community needs
- Inclusion of those often marginalised
- Effective use of community and agency strengths
- Trust-building between communities and public bodies
- Increased community influence in social development, service delivery, and policy.

The Seven Standards are:

1. Planning: Clear purpose, based on understanding community needs and goals.
2. Working Together: Collaboration to achieve the goals of engagement.
3. Communication: Clear, regular communication with those affected by the engagement process.
4. Inclusion: Identify and include all those impacted by the engagement's focus.
5. Support: Identify and address barriers to participation.
6. Impact: Evaluate the engagement's impact and use the lessons learned for future improvement.
7. Methods: Choose engagement methods that are appropriate to the specific purpose.

Additional materials are available on the VOiCE website (www.voicescotland.org.uk) including:

- Case studies demonstrating real-life applications
- Links to relevant policies and strategies
- VOiCE online system for planning, monitoring, and evaluating community engagement
- Other resources supporting effective engagement

3.3.13 USA: Civicwell in California: Guiding Principles for Equitable Engagement²³¹

CivicWell is a nonprofit that supports sustainable solutions for communities. They work with local leaders to create positive change. Their services include policy development and technical assistance, with a focus on climate change, energy, water, and community design. Relevant to PoliRuralPlus is their work on:

- **Policy Development:** CivicWell are developing policies that encourage sustainable practices in rural areas. This could include policies that promote renewable energy use, water conservation, and sustainable land management
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Accessing and interpreting relevant data (e.g., renewable resource mapping, climate risk assessments) to inform targeted interventions.
- **Community Engagement:** CivicWell engage with local communities in rural areas to develop and implement sustainable solutions. This could help PoliRuralPlus to conduct community needs assessments, develop outreach strategies, and facilitate community meetings.

²³¹ [CivicWell - Transforming Local Vision Into Action](#)



Some specific examples of how CivicWell's work could translate into PoliRuralPlus pilots' initiative include:

1. Energy Transition Focus

- **Policy Development:** developing policies that incentivise community-owned renewable energy projects in rural areas. This could include microgrids, wind turbines owned by local cooperatives, or solar arrays on marginal farmland.
- **Technical Assistance:** guidance to pilot areas on assessing renewable energy potential, feasibility studies for specific technologies, or navigating grant applications and regulations.
- **Community Engagement:** Facilitate discussions between rural communities, energy experts, and potential investors to identify the most suitable renewable energy solutions for different areas, maximising local buy-in and long-term success.

2. Sustainable Land Management and Agricultural Practices

- **Policy Development:** creating policies supporting regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, and biodiversity conservation on farms in pilot zones.
- **Technical Assistance:** best practices from elsewhere, providing training to farmers on implementing sustainable techniques and accessing new markets for eco-friendly products.
- **Community Engagement:** Facilitate workshops and knowledge-sharing sessions between farmers focused on challenges and opportunities in adopting more sustainable practices.

3. Green Infrastructure and Water Stewardship

- **Policy Development:** strategies that prioritise natural flood mitigation projects, wetlands conservation, and rainwater harvesting in rural areas to enhance resilience to climate change.
- **Technical Assistance:** assessing vulnerable areas and designing nature-based infrastructure solutions that serve multiple purposes (environmental, social, recreational).
- **Community Engagement:** Help rural communities understand the benefits of green infrastructure beyond traditional engineered solutions, promoting participation in planning and implementation.

3.3.14 EU Member States: Basic principles on Roma inclusion²³²

This document details the following 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion, created by the European Union. These principles are designed to guide policymakers and practitioners in creating programs to help Roma people integrate into society in all Member States:

1. **Constructive, Pragmatic, and Non-discriminatory Policies:** Policies should be based on evidence and respect human rights and equality.
2. **Explicit but Not Exclusive Targeting:** Focus on Roma people while also considering others in similar social and economic situations.
3. **Inter-cultural Approach:** Promote understanding between Roma and non-Roma people.
4. **Aiming for the Mainstream:** The ultimate goal is for Roma people to participate fully in mainstream society.
5. **Awareness of the Gender Dimension:** Address the specific needs and challenges faced by Roma women.
6. **Transfer of Evidence-Based Policies:** Learn from experiences (successful and unsuccessful) to improve future efforts.
7. **Use of European Union Instruments:** utilise EU legal, financial, and coordination tools to support Roma inclusion.
8. **Involvement of Regional and Local Authorities:** Work with regional and local governments as they are essential for implementation.
9. **Involvement of Civil Society:** Include civil society organisations in the process.

²³² <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/22771>



10. Active Participation of the Roma: Roma people should be involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating all policies and programs that affect them.

The document also provides details and explanations for how to put each of these principles into practice in each Member State.

3.3.14.1 Implications and Recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus pilots

For the PoliRuralPlus pilots, the guides highlight various community engagement approaches essential for effective rural development. These guides recommend incorporating these principles into the pilots to ensure comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable rural development initiatives. By integrating these principles and recommendations into the PoliRuralPlus pilots, they can increase the effectiveness, equity, and long-term impact of their rural-urban development efforts.

Key implications include:

1. emphasise inclusivity, especially of marginalised communities, ensuring their active participation in local planning.
2. Foster collaborative efforts, empowering communities to have control over their destinies.
3. Promote social justice, sustainable development, and uphold human rights and equality.
4. utilise comprehensive and clear consultation principles to enhance public trust and engagement effectiveness.
5. Engage diverse stakeholders early in project planning and maintain transparency throughout the process.
6. Implement a consultative approach that respects, enables, and provides accessible platforms for all community members.
7. Adopt innovative tools for envisioning future scenarios and facilitating participatory decision-making.

Overall Considerations

- Community Engagement is Key: Effective community engagement is essential for the success of sustainable rural development initiatives. It fosters collaboration between communities, policymakers, and program implementers, resulting in more relevant and impactful projects.
- No One-Size-Fits-All: Tailor approaches to the specific context of each pilot area, considering local needs, demographics, and existing relationships.
- Inclusivity & Diversity: Ensure marginalised groups are represented and have a voice throughout the process.
- Build Capacity: Develop skills and knowledge within communities and local authorities, empowering them to lead initiatives and engage in future decision-making.
- Long-Term Commitment: Community engagement requires ongoing effort and trust-building; it cannot be limited to single projects or events.

Key Themes and Recommendations

1. Planning & Process:
 - Clear Purpose & Goals: Define the objectives and desired outcomes of engagement upfront.
 - Collaborative Design: Work with communities to determine the most suitable engagement methods and structures.
 - Transparency & Communication: Keep communities informed at every stage, providing clear and accessible information.
 - Flexibility & Adaptability: Be open to adjusting approaches based on community feedback and evolving circumstances.
2. Inclusivity:
 - Identify Stakeholders: Map all relevant individuals, groups, and organisations, with a focus on marginalised populations.



- Remove Barriers: Address structural obstacles that limit participation (e.g., transportation, language, childcare).
 - Proactive Outreach: Go where your target communities are, rather than expecting them to come to you.
 - Respect Diverse Perspectives: Create spaces where open dialogue is encouraged, and all voices are valued.
3. Partnership & Collaboration:
- Build Trust: Establish strong relationships based on respect, open communication, and shared goals.
 - Share Expertise: Foster collaboration between policymakers, local authorities, community groups, experts, and NGOs, each bringing unique knowledge.
 - Leverage Existing Networks: Engage established community organisations and leaders for greater reach and legitimacy.
 - Support Community Leadership: Build the capacity of community members to play active roles in planning and implementation.
4. Evaluation & Improvement:
- Monitor & Assess Impact: Set clear metrics for evaluating the success of engagement and its outcomes.
 - Feedback Loops: Gather feedback from participants to refine processes and improve future engagement efforts.
 - Document & Share Learnings: Create a knowledge base of best practices and lessons learned for future initiatives within and beyond the PoliRuralPlus pilots.

Additional Considerations from Specific Guides

- Emphasis on ethical community work and adherence to core values (e.g., human rights, social justice, empowerment). [Guides 2.2.3.1 - 2.2.3.8]
- Integration of migrant communities into local planning and decision-making through targeted strategies. [Guide 2.2.3.7]
- Building consensus through inclusive and informed community deliberations. [Guides 2.2.3.9, 2.2.3.10]
- Community-led projects promoting sustainability and climate action. [Guide 2.2.3.11]
- Careful consideration of the overall process: purpose, context and suitable engagement methods. [Guides 2.2.3.12, 2.2.3.13]
- emphasise collaboration between the community and those leading the engagement initiative. [Guide 2.2.3.13]
- Potential for collaboration with CivicWell on energy transition, sustainable land management, and green infrastructure initiatives. [Guide 2.2.3.14]
- The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion provide a framework for addressing the specific needs of Roma communities. [Guide 2.2.3.15]

3.3.15 Ireland: Smart regions plan to boost economic growth

Focus of Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme is to accelerate economic growth and sustainable job creation²³³. A new fund of €145m has been created to build capacity and encourage innovation across all regions of Ireland. The [Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme](#) is aimed at accelerating economic growth and sustainable job creation.

About the Scheme

- Objective: Drive economic growth and job creation across all regions of Ireland.

²³³ [€145m smart regions plan revealed | ThinkBusiness](#)



- Funding: €145 million total, with €35 million available in the current call. Funds provided by the Government of Ireland and the European Regional Development Fund.
- Administered by: Enterprise Ireland
- Alignment: Supports goals of the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) and Regional Enterprise Plans.

Focus of the First Call

- Supports: Innovative clusters, infrastructure projects, feasibility studies, and early-stage project priming.
- Project Requirements: Collaborative, innovative, financially viable, sustainable, and demonstrate clear additionality (providing benefits beyond existing resources).
- Who Can Apply: Eligible promoters who meet the evaluation criteria outlined on the Enterprise Ireland website.

The Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme could benefit the Irish PoliRuralPlus pilot, along with factors to consider:

Potential Benefits

- Funding for Innovation: The scheme provides access to significant funding specifically for innovation in rural regions. PoliRuralPlus pilots could potentially apply for grants to support their initiatives.
- Focus on Collaboration: The scheme promotes collaborative projects, which aligns well with PoliRuralPlus' goal of fostering partnerships for rural development.
- Emphasis on Infrastructure: Funding for local infrastructure projects might help with pilot initiatives that require physical improvements or technological upgrades in rural communities.
- Supporting Early-Stage Development: Feasibility and priming grants could assist in the early planning and research phases of PoliRuralPlus pilot projects.

Factors to Consider

- Alignment with Pilot Objectives: Ensure any proposed projects funded by the scheme directly support the specific goals and needs of the Irish PoliRuralPlus pilot.
- Eligibility Criteria: Carefully review the evaluation criteria for funding to determine if the pilot initiative can meet these requirements.
- Competition: The application process is competitive, so PoliRuralPlus pilot applications need to be strong and demonstrate clear innovation and benefits for the region.
- Community Engagement: Although not explicitly stated in the summary, strong community engagement and buy-in would likely strengthen a project proposal for this scheme.

3.3.16 Ireland sets 'gold standard' for data accessibility in Europe

Ireland's Open Data Portal²³⁴ is a resource for finding Irish public sector data. The data is available in open, free, and reusable formats.

Ireland has a strong track record in Open Data, previously ranking first in Europe for Open Data Maturity. Nearly 15,000 datasets are already freely available through the Open Data Portal.

Open Data is vital for delivering better public services in Ireland. It boosts transparency, accountability, and trust in government. Ireland will continue to be a leader in Open Data management, building on its past successes.

The goals of Ireland's new Open Data Strategy are:

- Make public data freely available and easily accessible for reuse online.
- Promote trust in government through transparency.

²³⁴ [Data.gov.ie](https://data.gov.ie)



- Use data to drive innovation and improve public services.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how Open Data can:

- Enable swift, transparent sharing of vital information.
- Inform decision-making for better public health outcomes.
- Build public trust in government actions.

3.3.17 Ireland Agri-Food statistics in 2022

Irish agri-food exports were worth €19 billion in 2022, with 165,000 people employed across the sector, according to the latest annual review and outlook report from the latest review report from the Irish Department of Agriculture²³⁵.

Last year was another bumper year for Irish agri-food exports, with total sales of €19 billion, up 22% on 2021.

The increase was primarily driven by the increasing value for food products as overall volume of exports rose just 1%.

The figures are contained in the Department of Agriculture's annual review and outlook report for 2023.

The report notes that there are 165,000 people employed across 135,000 farms, 2,000 fishing vessels and aquaculture sites and 2,000 food production and drink enterprises, with agri-food products exported to 180 countries worldwide.

The UK remains Ireland's top export market, followed by the US, the Netherlands, France and Germany.

The report also notes that greenhouse gas emissions from the sector reduced by 1.2% last year compared with 2021.

The Food, Drink and Primary Production sector accounted for 40% of all export sales by Irish-owned companies, directly supporting 165,000 jobs, or 6.5% of total employment predominantly in rural and coastal communities.

This significant domestic economic footprint, including its export profile, reflects the natural comparative advantages of Irish production and a long agricultural tradition..

3.4 Main Conclusions and Recommendations for Actions to improve Rural-Urban linkages

Ireland's Recovery and Resilience Plan, driven by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is a comprehensive strategy to address the economic and societal challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan places a strong emphasis on making Ireland's economy and society more resilient and future-ready by aligning with the green and digital transitions outlined in the EU's broader objectives. Key investments and reforms aim to drive sustainable growth, enhance climate action, and foster digital transformation, contributing to the overall optimization of rural-urban linkages.

Recommendations for Actions:

1. Sustainable and Resilient Investments:

- a. Continue prioritising investments that contribute to sustainable and resilient development, with a focus on green and digital transitions to align with the EU's broader goals.

2. Timely Implementation of Measures:

- a. Adhere to the tight time frame set by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, ensuring that all milestones and targets within the national plan are completed by August 2026.

3. Climate Action and Green Transition:

- a. Address challenges in achieving 2030 climate and energy targets by accelerating the deployment of renewables, particularly onshore and offshore wind projects. emphasise the reduction of reliance on fossil fuels and promote energy-efficient initiatives.

4. Digital Transformation:

- a. Address digital challenges, particularly in businesses, by supporting the digitalization of the public sector, enhancing digital skills, and providing connectivity and ICT devices to schools. Focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to boost their digital capabilities.

²³⁵ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - DAFM Annual Reports (www.gov.ie)



5. **Inclusive Economic and Social Resilience:**
 - a. Tackle macro-economic challenges such as regional disparities, labor market issues, skill shortages, and housing deficits. Implement measures to support access to the labor market, reskilling and upskilling of workers, and the development of social and affordable housing.
6. **Collaboration and Innovation:**
 - a. Encourage collaborative projects that are innovative, financially viable, and sustainable, fostering job creation and enterprise development in all regions of Ireland.
7. **Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme:**
 - a. Leverage the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme to accelerate economic growth, sustainable job creation, and innovation across all regions. Ensure that projects under the scheme are collaborative and contribute to existing regional infrastructure.
8. **Open Data Strategy:**
 - a. Continue to implement and enhance the Open Data Strategy, promoting easy access to high-quality government data. Use open data to drive evidence-based decision-making, stimulate innovation, and ensure transparency in public services.
9. **Agri-Food Sector Support:**
 - a. Recognize the importance of the agri-food sector to the economy and rural communities. Continue supporting the sector through initiatives that enhance productivity, address challenges, and contribute to sustainable and resilient development.
10. **Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation:**
 - a. Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of implemented measures. Use feedback and data to adapt strategies and ensure ongoing alignment with national and EU objectives.

By following these recommendations, member states can optimise rural-urban linkages, enhance resilience, and contribute to the broader European agenda of sustainable and inclusive development.

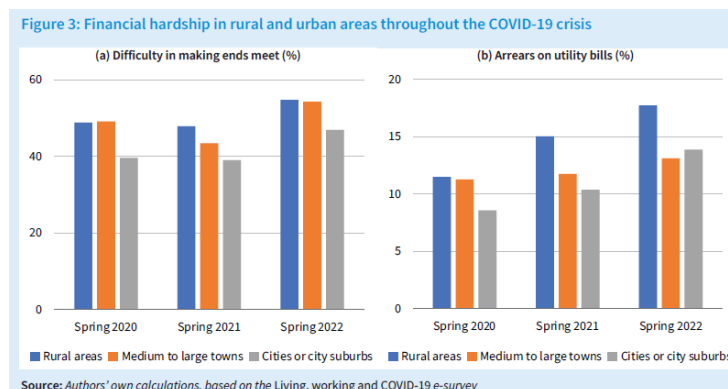
Annex J Analysis of the COVID-19 references and data

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a shift in residential choices, with urban-to-rural migration being a significant trend in Europe²³⁶. However, this migration has highlighted the need for improved internet access in rural areas to support teleworking and e-commerce²³⁷. In response to the pandemic, there is a call for sustainable urban areas, with a focus on innovative research and funding frameworks to drive the transition to climate-neutral cities²³⁸. This transition also requires an integrated approach to housing and mobility, with a focus on resilience, equity, and sustainable transport²³⁹.

This analysis focuses on assessing the impact of COVID-19 on rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. It involved collecting and analyzing the 224 references included in the PoliRuralPlus domain knowledge database to understand the effects of the pandemic on key sectors and activities driving these linkages, identifying both direct and indirect consequences on rural and urban regions and identify the challenges and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic.

1. Influence of COVID 19 on regional development

COVID-19 started as a health crisis, but the containment measures adopted to curb its spread meant that it quickly became a health, economic and social crisis. Earlier studies highlighted the nuanced ways in which rural areas were affected by the crisis. On the one hand, Henning-Smith (2020) reports that existing rural-urban inequalities in health, healthcare and financial resources were worsened by the pandemic. On the other hand, the pandemic promoted the relocation, at least temporarily, of people from cities to more rural areas. While this may have improved consumption levels in rural areas (OECD, 2020), it may also have had an impact on the availability and affordability of housing (Colomb and Gallent, 2022) and put pressure on vital services, including healthcare services.²⁴⁰



²³⁶ <https://doi.org/10.21625/essd.v6i2.835.s403> Rejuvenation in rural Ireland in response to the COVID-19 induced urban-to-rural migration phenomenon, Shreyashi Sen, International Journal of Environmental Science & Sustainable Development, 2021, The regional plan "Our Rural Future" will tackle Ireland's one-off housing and suburban sprawl in the post-COVID-19 era.

²³⁷ <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229619> Internet Access in Rural Areas: Brake or Stimulus as Post-Covid-19 Opportunity?, Irune Ruiz-Martinez, J. Esparcia, Sustainability, 2020, The lack of internet access in most rural areas has become a challenge worldwide.

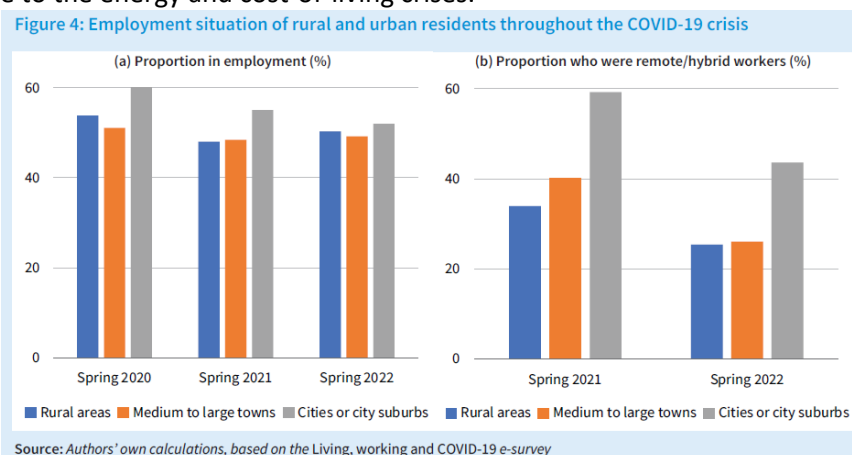
²³⁸ <https://doi.org/10.3390/en14010216> Sustainable Urban Areas for 2030 in a Post-COVID-19 Scenario: Focus on Innovative Research and Funding Frameworks to Boost Transition towards 100 Positive Energy Districts and 100 Climate-Neutral Cities, Shreyashi Sen 2021 Irune Ruiz-Martinez & J. Esparcia 2020 Paola Clerici Maestosi 2021, Cities generate 85% of the EU's GDP.

²³⁹ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2021.05.006> Housing and accessibility after the COVID-19 pandemic: Rebuilding for resilience, equity and sustainable mobility, Nicolás Valenzuela-Levi, T. Echiburru, J. Correa, Ricardo Hurtubia, Juan Carlos Muñoz, 2021, A housing-cycling policy becomes a tool for resilience.

²⁴⁰ "Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities", [Massimiliano Mascherini](#), [Marie Hyland](#), [Garance Hingre](#), [Marta Anzillotti](#), [Daniel Molinuevo](#), [Eleonora Peruffo](#), [Viginta Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė](#), EuroFound Research Report, 18 October 2023, [Bridging the rural-urban divide: Addressing inequalities and empowering communities | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)



An analysis of Eurofound’s Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey finds rural–urban differences over the course of the COVID-19 crisis in income, employment status and mental well-being. Considering first people’s ability to make ends meet, a higher share of people in rural areas and towns than in cities found it difficult to make ends meet in all periods considered (Figure 3a). An alternative measure of financial hardship – households’ likelihood of being in arrears on utility bills – shows that, in the early stages of the pandemic, rural residents and those in towns had similar struggles in this regard and faced more difficulty than those in cities. As the pandemic progressed, rural residents struggled considerably more than those living in towns and cities (Figure 3b). Both panels also show that in spring 2022, despite economies reopening, the percentage of people having financial difficulties continued to increase, perhaps due to the energy and cost-of-living crises.



Differences in the severity of financial hardships over the crisis may reflect underlying differences in employment conditions in rural and urban areas. Figure 4a shows that the rural–city employment gap was about seven percentage points in both spring 2020 and spring 2021. However, employment rates in cities continued to fall in spring 2022, while those in rural areas showed some recovery, so the gap between urban and rural areas largely closed. The employment rate in towns was more stable. Differences in employment rates in the early stages of the pandemic may reflect the fact that workers in cities are more likely to work in sectors, including education and financial and public services, where the possibility of teleworking is greater. The increased capacity of city residents to work from home is confirmed by the survey data, with a larger city–rural gap earlier in the pandemic (Figure 4b). Rates of remote working in towns were only slightly higher than those in rural areas.

“potential impacts will the COVID-19 pandemic have on regions and cities in the EU” study 2020²⁴¹

²⁴¹ [IMPACTS-COVID-19.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

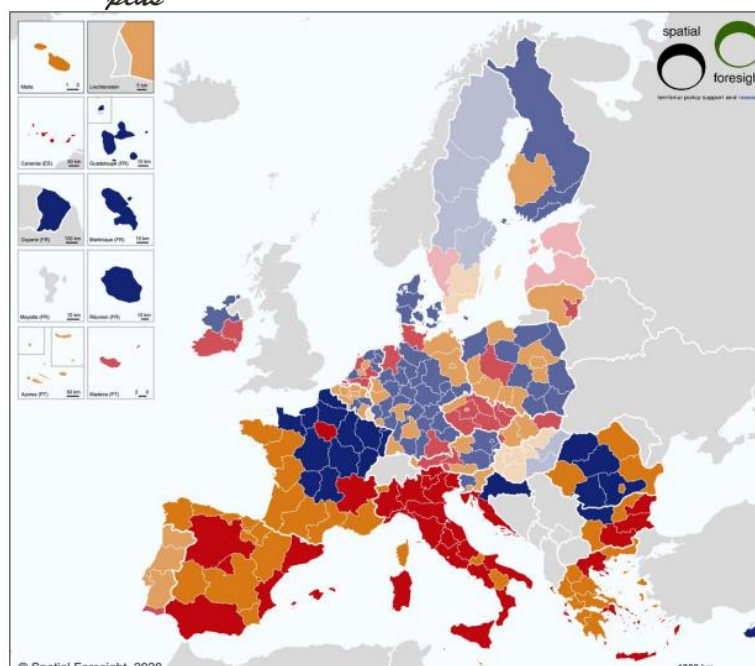


Figure 2 Potential negative impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns

2. Eurostat European Statistical Recovery Dashboard

Eurostat provides a wide range of statistics and data published by Eurostat related to COVID-19²⁴². This provides a baseline against which the impact of the COVID-19 crisis can be measured, the wider background, or help understand the evolution of the crisis. The information covers a range of topics related to the economy, society and work, population and health as well as agriculture, energy, transport and tourism. For each topic, there are [latest news](#), an [interactive data visualisation](#), links to in-depth information in Statistics Explained, and a list of [relevant datasets](#).

The COVID-19 outbreak has affected the ability of statistical authorities to collect and process data in the traditional manner. Face-to-face interviews are being replaced with telephone and web-based surveys. The price observations needed to compile inflation statistics are both harder to collect and, for many goods and services, even missing. Staff numbers are reduced by sickness and family responsibilities, while the massive use of teleworking places demands on technical infrastructure.

Eurostat and national statistical authorities have been working together to develop guidelines to address the methodological issues generated by these changes. This ensures that European statistics continue to be based on sound foundations. Our aim is to focus on solutions and directly help not only to official statisticians in the EU and EFTA countries but also worldwide.

This [methodological page](#) brings together all the new guidelines and methodological notes published by Eurostat and will be regularly updated as new guidelines are developed.

For the PoliRuralPlus ongoing analysis the European statistical recovery dashboard²⁴³ contains monthly and quarterly indicators from a number of statistical areas relevant to tracking the economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, across countries and time

²⁴² [Overview - COVID-19 - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁴³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/recovery-dashboard/>



3. Potential impacts of COVID-19 on regions and cities of the EU

This Study²⁴⁴ concludes from its analysis of potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on cities and regions in Europe suggests there is room for improvement by increasing resilience to crises and by supporting the socio-economic recovery process which started in early summer 2020. The geography of the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as the regional diversity of exposures and sensitivities to policy responses show that territory matters. The diversity of European cities and regions translates into the diverse impacts of COVID-19, how they handle the pandemic and how they manage recovery. The pandemic has demonstrated that European regions and cities are interwoven in tight networks of mutual interdependence. What happens in one place affects developments in other places. This became visible in the territorial spread of the outbreak as well as in the impacts of various lockdowns and will also be seen in the recovery processes. Furthermore, the pandemic has illustrated the mismatch of local, regional and national administrative borders to the functional geographies of people's everyday lives. This could be seen during the outbreak which followed functional interactions and geographies rather than administrative delineations. The mismatch was also evident in the disruptive effects that closed regional and national borders had on integrated labour markets and the provision of services of general interest, especially healthcare.

Therefore, recommendations are that:

1. Europe's territorial diversity needs to be reflected in policy responses which also take into account local and regional knowledge;
2. cooperation between places, cities, regions and countries is crucial since a challenge such as COVID-19 cannot be addressed singlehandedly; and
3. European approaches and solutions are needed – rather than national ones – to better reflect the interdependencies of places and the mismatch of administrative delineations to the geography of a crisis.

4. Report on Public Administrations' Digital Response to COVID-19 in the EU from Directorate General for Informatics²⁴⁵

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the European Union from March 2020, a vast majority of EU governments implemented lockdown measures to counter this health crisis. Consequently, the delivery of public services was disrupted at least to a certain extent in most EU Member States. The countries which could leverage a pre-existing high level of digitalisation in their public administrations were better positioned to rapidly switch to the remote delivery of public services. In this scenario, it comes as no surprise that the developed and implemented digital solutions, which often took place in the wake of the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis, have played a crucial role in what can be described as a truly 'digital response' from EU public administrations working to ensure the continuity of public services. In particular, this report outlined examples of good practices regarding the development and implementation of digital solutions to address challenges faced when it comes to accessing general public services, but also two vital sector-specific public services: education and economic affairs-related public services. The report also gathered insights on the internal factors that enabled public administrations to respond efficiently and swiftly to the crisis through the development and implementation of digital solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that most EU public administrations have the ability to adapt and react to major crises in order to ensure the continuity of their public services. Numerous digital solutions have been developed in a very short timeframe, ranging from three weeks for the Croatian ePass solution to only five days for the Acelera PYME online portal in Spain. Be they developed in-house or with the help of external contractors, these digital solutions were able to meet the increasing needs and demands from both EU citizens and businesses. Several human capital factors such as the availability of in-house eSkills, as well as the capacity to innovate and to adapt to change, have been highlighted as important enablers for the swift development and/or implementation of digital solutions by EU public administrations. Additionally, support from the hierarchy and collaboration between public administrations emerged as key governance factors. Finally, ensuring technical and semantic interoperability, the

²⁴⁴ [IMPACTS-COVID-19.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁴⁵ [Report Public Administrations Digital Response to COVID19.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



scalability of IT infrastructure, and civil servants' access to all the necessary equipment for remote working stood out as crucial elements to enable this swift transition to the digital delivery of public services.

The digitalisation of public administrations remains a priority for the European Commission. The European Commission's Recovery Plan for Europe presented on 27 May 2020 acknowledges the crucial role played by the digital transformation of the public sector for job creation and economic growth in the European Union. This is further evidenced in the upcoming Digital Europe Programme, which acknowledges the importance of the further development of eSkills within public administrations, as well as of interoperable digital public services across the EU. The European Commission is expected to launch a Common Services Platform, a one-stop-shop for EU public administrations, citizens and businesses to enhance their digital government capabilities.

As the second wave of the COVID-19 virus has spread across Europe from September 2020, EU Member States drew on the lessons learned from the crisis on the occasion of the signature of the Berlin Declaration⁶¹ on 8 December 2020. Negotiated by the German presidency of the Council of the EU, the Declaration underlines once more the crucial importance of the digitalisation of public administrations and the provision of digital public services to EU citizens and businesses. The signatories of the Berlin Declaration committed to work on the elaboration of cross-border digital public services, support the development of eSkills within public administrations, and develop digital public services accessible through mobile devices by the end of 2024. At the same time, the Declaration signatories called upon the European Commission to facilitate collaboration between EU Member States to reach these objectives by launching a Digital Skills platform – a one-stop-shop gathering all initiatives regarding eSkills - and strengthening the current European Interoperability Framework.⁶² Therefore, the commitments undertaken by the Berlin Declaration signatories aim not only at strengthening the digitalisation of public administrations to improve their efficiency and efficacy, but also at guaranteeing increased accessibility by making digital public services accessible through mobile devices. This report showed the efficiency of reusing existing digital components and solutions. Looking to the future, greater collaboration and coordination between public administrations could facilitate the faster development of solutions while reducing public expenditure.

5. Impact of COVID-19 on Work Life Balance

A joint report by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and Eurofound concludes that adult work–life balance was significantly affected by measures such as stay-at-home orders and recommendations, closures of day-care, primary and secondary schools and national teleworking recommendations implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study by two EU agencies, ECDC and Eurofound, focused on the impact of selected non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) on the work–life balance of EU adults in the 27 EU Member States between March 2020 and May 2022²⁴⁶.

The study by two EU agencies, ECDC and Eurofound, focused on the impact of selected non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) on the work–life balance of EU adults in the 27 EU Member States between March 2020 and May 2022.

It found that the association between these NPIs and the work–life balance of adults in the EU varied across specific groups. For instance, individuals living with young children suffered more from the stay-at-home policies and school closures, while benefiting less from teleworking. At the same time, people under the age of 35, those living without children, as well as people in the countryside and those living in northern EU countries perceived a positive impact from teleworking policies on their private–professional life balance, with limited or non-significant negative impacts.

Results of the study show that closures of educational facilities and teleworking reduced the pressure of work on personal and family life by decreasing working time and tiredness from work. At the same time, other measures, in particular the stay-at-home policies as well as teleworking, increased European adults' propensity to worry about work outside of working hours and, in some instances, reduced their job concentration and dedicated working time due to family responsibilities.

²⁴⁶ [Impact of selected NPIs on EU adult work-life balance during COVID-19 pandemic.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



The report provides lessons learned for policymakers, healthcare professionals and the scientific community that are particularly relevant at this phase when pandemic preparedness plans are being updated in many countries to incorporate lessons from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following actions are identified:

1. current research efforts should be expanded to appreciate the societal impact of pandemic response measures as well as discern the long-term effects of NPIs' use on different population groups
2. non-mandatory measures should be preferred to legally enforced orders when the effectiveness and adherence of the two different approaches are similar
3. explore the positive impacts observed in the study to identify opportunities for bringing positive changes to adults' work-life balance also in 'peace time'
4. support should be reinforced to affected population groups when implementing measures, to mitigate the negative impacts of some NPIs
5. when planning the implementation of NPIs at the population level, their overall impact on the community and on vulnerable groups should be considered
6. collaboration between public health authorities, behavioural scientists and policymakers should be established, to be able to rapidly launch operational research activities when a crisis arises

The new report is based on data in the ECDC-JRC Response Measures Database and on five rounds of responses to Eurofound's *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey.

6. Impact of COVID-19 on job quality of essential workers

A recent EuroFound study researched the impact of COVID-19 on job quality of essential workers in Europe.²⁴⁷

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a diverse collection of workers ensured the functioning of our societies. In a time of crisis, they maintained access to healthcare, long-term care and other essential goods and services, including food, water, electricity, the internet and waste treatment. These were the COVID-19 pandemic essential, or critical, workers, many of whom risked their physical and mental health by continuing to go to work during the pandemic.

This policy brief investigates the job quality of these critical workers, making use of unique sources of information, including data from the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey 2021, data gathered by correspondents from across the Member States and interviews with EU-level social partner representatives from selected sectors. It examines the experiences of work among critical workers during the pandemic, and highlights imminent challenges to the sustainability of their work. The aim is to discover whether these workers are equipped to support society through future shocks and crises.

Key findings

- Health and care workers, food system workers, cleaners and refuse workers, transport workers, manual workers, and protective services workers are essential, or critical, workers, whose health and well-being were at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. That risk continues post-pandemic because of poor job quality and the weaker sustainability of the work practices they experience. If this is not addressed, it will exacerbate existing labour shortages, which in turn will reduce the capacity of societies to function and benefit from quality services in the future.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, policy measures to support critical workers did not cover all of them, excluding groups less visible and not on the frontline. Critical workers across all occupations need to be recognised and supported, especially in times of crisis.
- Critical occupations that are currently suffering from labour shortages, such as jobs in health and care, can be made more attractive to workers by improving job quality and bringing their pay into line with their value to society. The EU's capacity to deal with future shocks, crises and polycrises while navigating the

²⁴⁷ "Job quality of COVID-19 pandemic essential workers", Agnès Parent-Thirion, Barbora Mackova, Viginta Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė, Jorge Cabrita, Eurofound, 10 October 2023, [Job quality of COVID-19 pandemic essential workers | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](https://www.eurofound.eu/en/publications/job-quality-of-covid-19-pandemic-essential-workers)



demographic, digital and green transitions will depend greatly on the conditions under which critical workers will be able to perform their work.

- Staff shortages or unattractive jobs are considered key challenges by at least one side of industry in five critical sectors: hospitals and healthcare, education, food and drinks, industrial cleaning, and local and regional government. Difficult working conditions were mentioned as one of the main causes of these challenges.
- Many groups of critical workers work in occupations and sectors that are highly imbalanced in terms of gender. The improvement of job quality and the development of sustainable work practices is key to supporting the creation of a more diverse workforce and enlarging the pool of potential workers.

7. Psychosocial risks to workers' well-being: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic²⁴⁸

Psychosocial risks represent a major challenge to the health and well-being of workers in the EU. While the COVID-19 pandemic intensified some of these risks, it also increased awareness of them among policymakers. Using data from the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey 2021 and building on a theoretical model that differentiates between job stressors and job resources, this report examines key psychosocial risks in the workplace and their impact on health.

Its key findings relevant to the PoliRuralPlus project pilots are:

- **Work Stressors are Widespread:** High work intensity and work-life interference are the most common risks, impacting workers' health. This has increased during the pandemic.
- **Disproportionate Impact:** Mid- to low-skilled workers, especially those in the health and transport sectors, experience greater exposure to these risks.
- **Adverse Social Behavior Remains a Problem:** Violence, harassment, and discrimination persist and significantly impact workers' health.
- **Resources are Important but Not Sufficient:** While job resources can mitigate the impact of stressors, addressing the root causes of these risks is critical.
- **Social Dialogue Is Key:** Collaboration between stakeholders is crucial in crafting common standards to address psychosocial risks and minimise disparities across Member States.

7.1 Policy Recommendations Relevant to PoliRuralPlus:

1. **Holistic Approach:** PoliRuralPlus pilots should take a comprehensive view of psychosocial risks in rural contexts. This includes:
 - **Unique Challenges:** Recognize how factors like job insecurity, access to resources, isolation, and seasonal work patterns might contribute to heightened stress and reduced well-being in rural areas.
 - **Support Systems:** Design initiatives emphasising social support and strong workplace culture in rural communities, offsetting potential vulnerabilities.
2. **Targeted Solutions:** Tailor projects to address high-risk groups and sectors:
 - **Focus on Skilled Workers:** Acknowledge the heightened stress experienced by professionals and managers in rural areas. Offer training on stress management, work-life balance, and healthy coping mechanisms.
 - **Support Vulnerable Sectors:** Recognize that rural healthcare and transport workers may be disproportionately affected. Collaborate with local service providers to promote healthy work environments and access to mental health resources.

²⁴⁸ [Psychosocial risks to workers' well-being: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/inline-photos/2022/04/10/Psychosocial_risks_to_workers_well-being_Lessons_from_the_COVID-19_pandemic_europa.eu)



3. **Flexible Work and Remote Options:** Explore the viability of remote and flexible work for rural areas. This can attract talent and improve work-life balance, but requires attention to:
 - **Clear Policies:** Work with stakeholders to develop guidelines and support for healthy work practices in remote rural settings.
 - **Combat Isolation:** Prioritise virtual community building and collaborative online spaces to mitigate social isolation risks.
 - **Digital Equity:** Advocate for policies that expand reliable and affordable internet access in rural areas, making remote work a realistic option.
4. **Mental Health Awareness:** Incorporate mental health awareness and support into initiatives as a preventive measure:
 - **Reduce Stigma:** Promote open dialogue about mental health challenges common to rural contexts.
 - **Build Capacity:** Offer training for rural employers and community leaders on recognizing signs of stress and burnout, and how to connect individuals with resources.
5. **Promote Social Dialogue:** Actively engage with diverse rural stakeholders to identify context-specific solutions. Key parties include:
 - **Rural Workers:** Involve them in shaping policies that address their unique concerns and build a more supportive work environment.
 - **Employers and Local organisations:** Collaborate to develop practices fostering well-being and resilience within their industries.
 - **Regional Policymakers:** Advocate for policies that support positive work environments, mental health services, and reduce systemic barriers to well-being in rural areas.

8. Maintaining trust during the COVID-19 pandemic²⁴⁹

The report examines how citizens' trust in institutions – including national governments, the EU, science and the media – evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The role of the media is analysed, in particular the relationship between the use of social media and trust and the impact of misinformation (incorrect or misleading information) and disinformation (deliberately deceptive information) during the crisis period. Based on an extensive literature review, the report describes the consequences of COVID-19 policy measures, with a focus on citizens' trust in their national institutions and in the EU. The report outlines the dynamics of trust and discontent in the context of the pandemic, including the influence of the vaccination roll-out.

Key findings

1. During the pandemic, improvements in trust levels, in particular with national institutions, resulted in a higher rate of satisfaction with government policy responses to COVID-19, demonstrating the critical role trust plays in managing a crisis effectively. An understanding of the importance of high-trust societies and the impact of trust is crucial for tackling future crises.
2. The economic concerns of citizens are crucial to building a high-trust society. A fair and inclusive recovery from the pandemic, with equal access to education and training, employment, affordable housing and social security, particularly in the context of the just transition framework where no person or region is left behind, are essential to these efforts.

²⁴⁹ [Maintaining trust during the COVID-19 pandemic | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#) and [Download](#)



3. Findings confirm that individuals with high levels of trust are most likely to participate in immunisation campaigns, highlighting that in order to respond to a health crisis effectively, societies require high-trust populations. Trust in institutions plays a strong role in this relationship.
4. During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals with low levels of trust in institutions, such as governments, science and medical institutions, were linked to low rates of vaccination uptake. Given that trust in the health system and the pharmaceutical industry is particularly pertinent in this context, it is critical that policymakers engage in clear and continuous communication about vaccines and their side-effects.
5. Findings reveal that respondents favouring social media as their main news source tended to have lower institutional trust and lower satisfaction with their governments' measures to contain COVID-19 than those favouring traditional media. Tackling incorrect or misleading information as well as rebutting deliberately deceptive information on social media platforms must therefore be a priority for both the EU and Member States.

8.1 Implications and recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots

- **Trust is Crucial:** High levels of trust in institutions (governmental, scientific, EU bodies) positively impact effective crisis management and policy implementation.
- **Economic Security Matters:** Economic concerns directly impact trust levels. A fair and inclusive recovery with a focus on just transition is essential, especially for rural areas.
- **Vaccination and Trust:** Trust in institutions is closely linked to vaccination uptake. Transparent communication and addressing concerns proactively are key.
- **Social Media's Impact:** Heavy reliance on social media as a primary news source is associated with lower trust in institutions and reduced satisfaction with government responses.
- **for PoliRuralPlus:**
 - **Understanding Rural-Specific Factors:** Explore how trust dynamics differ in rural areas compared to urban settings. Consider potential sensitivities, historical factors influencing trust levels, and unique communication styles in rural communities when designing projects and communication strategies.
 - **Leveraging Rural Strengths:** Focus on building upon existing social capital and strong community networks often found in rural areas to foster trust and create a sense of shared ownership of projects.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus Pilots and their Regional Action Plans:

1. Build Trust Through Participation:

- **Meaningful Engagement:** Prioritise bottom-up approaches and ensure active participation of diverse rural stakeholders at every stage of a pilot project, from conception to evaluation.
- **Transparency:** Be clear about project goals, limitations, and decision-making processes to avoid misunderstandings.
- **Accountability:** Design clear accountability mechanisms and channels for addressing concerns.

2. Address Economic Anxieties:

- **Focus on Sustainability:** emphasise the long-term economic benefits and resilience-building of projects, easing concerns about financial stability.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Ensure that benefits reach all segments of the rural community and address economic disparities. This will help build a sense of fairness and increase trust.

3. Strategic Communication for Trust and Vaccine Uptake (if relevant):



- **Trusted Messengers:** Identify and partner with local leaders, respected community members, and health professionals to deliver project information and address concerns.
- **Targeted Messages:** Tailor communication materials to rural audiences, taking into account specific anxieties and potential areas of distrust.

4. Combat Misinformation on Social Media:

- **Digital Literacy:** Develop training initiatives focusing on critical media literacy and information verification skills, particularly for vulnerable groups in rural areas.
- **Partnerships with Trusted Sources:** Collaborate with local media, community organisations, and reputable platforms to disseminate accurate project information and counter misinformation in online spaces.

9. Young People

The report "Becoming Adults: Young People in a Post-Pandemic World" by Eurofound (2024)²⁵⁰ presents several implications for PoliRuralPlus and its pilots, particularly concerning young people living in rural areas.

9.1 Key Findings and Implications for PoliRuralPlus pilots' RAPs

1. **Housing as a Major Obstacle:** The report highlights housing difficulties as one of the main obstacles to young people's independence. This is especially relevant for rural areas, where housing options might be limited and expensive. PoliRuralPlus pilots could focus on developing affordable and suitable housing solutions for young people in rural areas to enhance their independence and well-being.
2. **Mismatch Between Aspirations and Plans:** The report found a mismatch between aspirations and plans among young people, particularly concerning housing and job prospects. This could lead to feelings of exclusion and depression. PoliRuralPlus could address this by creating programs that provide career guidance, skill development, and entrepreneurial support for young people in rural areas, aligning their aspirations with achievable goals.
3. **Mental Well-being Concerns:** Although youth mental well-being has improved since the pandemic, it remains weaker than that of older adults. The report associates the mismatch between aspirations and plans with an increased risk of depression. PoliRuralPlus could integrate mental health support into its pilots, offering resources and creating awareness about mental well-being in rural communities.
4. **Youth Guarantee Implementation:** The report emphasises the importance of continued support for the reinforced Youth Guarantee, particularly in regions with high NEET rates and regional disparities. PoliRuralPlus could leverage the Youth Guarantee to provide tailored support to young people in rural areas, focusing on education, training, and employment opportunities.
5. **Focus on Young Mothers:** The report identifies young mothers as the group most likely to be NEET in several countries. PoliRuralPlus pilots could incorporate specific measures to support young mothers in rural areas, such as accessible childcare facilities, flexible work arrangements, and educational opportunities.
6. **Decent Work and Fair Conditions:** The report stresses the need for decent work and fair conditions for young people, considering the rising cost of living and housing costs. PoliRuralPlus could advocate for policies that ensure fair wages, job security, and adequate working conditions for young people in rural areas.

Additional Considerations for PoliRuralPlus:

- **Rural-Specific Challenges:** The report's findings on housing, job prospects, and mental well-being could be exacerbated in rural areas due to limited resources and opportunities. PoliRuralPlus should tailor its interventions to address these rural-specific challenges.

²⁵⁰ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-05/ef23097en.pdf>



- **Community Engagement:** Engaging young people and local stakeholders in the design and implementation of PoliRuralPlus pilots is crucial to ensure that the initiatives meet the specific needs and aspirations of rural communities.
- **Collaboration:** Partnering with local organisations, educational institutions, and businesses could enhance the impact of PoliRuralPlus by pooling resources and expertise to support young people in rural areas.

By considering the report's findings and addressing the implications for rural areas, PoliRuralPlus can effectively empower young people in rural communities, foster their well-being, and contribute to the sustainable development of these regions.

10. Intergenerational Issues

The various economic and social shocks of the past decade and a half – most recently the COVID-19 pandemic – have ongoing consequences for the living standards and prospects of Europeans, and sometimes these outcomes have been uneven across age groups. Social policies – such as those in the areas of social protection and housing – in some cases have benefited certain age groups over others. The upshot both of crises and of policies is that inequalities between the generations have widened in important areas.

A recent study²⁵¹ examines some of the intergenerational social trends that either were persistent or changed considerably over the last decade and a half, sometimes contrary to expectations. It focuses on significant developments that have received somewhat less attention in policy planning in the areas of income, housing, work and employment, and health. The study's findings are

Area	Findings	Messages
1. Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Since 2008, incomes in the EU have grown most for the population aged 60 and over. Discrepancies between the old and the young are most pronounced in southern Europe, where the income of the oldest age group has increased, while that of the youngest age group has decreased. By contrast, people aged under 60 have fared better than those aged 60 and over in eastern European countries in recent years. ● The share of benefits (especially pensions) directed towards the population aged 60 and over has increased substantially in the past two decades, especially in southern European countries, with the effect that an increasing share of public benefits is distributed to individuals with the highest incomes. By contrast, income trends among younger groups are mostly driven by employment – or the lack thereof. 	<p>There are intergenerational social trends that have changed significantly over the last 15 years. However, others have remained stable, with several unexpected findings at EU level such as the unchanged percentage of young people living with parents; or, despite the recent cost of living crisis, the percentage of people with difficulty making ends meet remaining considerably lower than a decade ago.</p>
2. Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Renting has become more common among younger age groups and has increased especially among those aged 30–39, rising from 38% to 45% between 2010 and 2019. There has been a notable rise in the proportion of people renting since 2019 across all age groups. ● Housing costs increased more for tenants (by 23%) than for homeowners (by 8%) between 2010 and 2019, deepening an already existing gap between the two groups. ● Severe housing deprivation in the EU is most common among tenants. 	<p>The housing tenure people obtain when they start living independently is changing, and renting accommodation has become more common among younger age groups, increasing especially among those aged 30–39, rising from 38% to 45% between 2010 and 2019. To tackle high housing costs and ensure quality accommodation, it will be crucial for policymakers to address the regulatory set-up and policies for renting, as well as reviewing housing services and increasing housing supply.</p>

²⁵¹ [Intergenerational inequalities: How to close the gaps? | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

Area	Findings	Messages
3. Work and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The share of older workers in the labour market has grown since 2007, driven by employment expansion among people aged 50 and older, especially women. Employment has grown at a far slower pace among young age groups, with considerable declines during the 2008–2012 economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. While employment rebounded after the pandemic, the average hours worked by workers had not recovered by mid-2022, particularly for those in the 25–29 and 30–49 age groups. A large gap has opened up post pandemic between women with high and low educational attainment in average hours worked. It signals a potential polarisation in the female population in terms of labour market engagement. 	<p>Income trends among the older population are influenced by effective social protection over the life course, while those among younger groups are mostly driven by employment. As these trends are likely to persist in an ageing European society, it will be critical for policymakers to focus on improving the labour market participation of young people over the long term to strengthen their income security.</p>
4. Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The self-perceived general health of Europeans has improved on average over more than a decade and mostly in the middle and older age groups. Rates of chronic illness have increased over time too and, concerningly, even among younger age groups. The overall rate of chronic illness in 2020 (35.2%), the first year of the pandemic, was slightly lower than at the peak of the period studied, but it increased subsequently, reaching 36.1% in 2022. An increase from 2020 to 2022 is seen in all age groups, including the youngest (16- to 24-year-olds), for whom the rate of chronic illness in 2022 was 15.8%. Unmet need for medical care increased sharply for all age groups in 2020 and continued growing in 2021. For young people, unmet need for mental health support was a key aspect of this. The proportion of people reporting unmet medical need declined in 2022 but has not fallen to the pre-pandemic level of 2019. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More people across all age groups feel and say their health is good . However, the proportion of people reporting a chronic illness is now higher , even among young people, where the prevalence of mental health issues among young Europeans is also a concern. Sources of resilience across age groups in the EU – such as better self-reported health, rising mental health awareness, a strong labour market, a lower proportion of people having difficulty making ends meet compared with a decade ago, and the increasing employment and incomes of women – are central to shaping policies that can strengthen the EU’s social dimension, highlighting the importance of continued monitoring and tackling of inequalities

10.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

The key findings from the report on intergenerational social trends relevant to the PoliRuralPlus pilots are

- **Income Disparities:** Older generations (60+) have generally seen income gains while younger ones have fallen behind, especially in Southern Europe.
- **Housing Challenges:** Renting has become more prevalent for younger generations, with rising costs impacting tenants disproportionately.
- **Changing Work Patterns:** Older workers are participating in the labor force more, while challenges persist for young people, especially following the pandemic. This impacts income and stability.
- **Health Concerns:** Increased reports of chronic illness across age groups, including young people, signal a public health challenge. Rising mental health concerns among youth are particularly alarming.
- **Considerations for PoliRuralPlus:**



- **Rural-Specific Nuances:** While many recommendations apply broadly, tailor them to the specific needs of rural communities. Consider factors unique to rural areas: isolation, outmigration, ageing populations, etc.
- **Collaborative Approach:** Partner with youth organisations, social service providers, employers, and local governments to understand the multi-faceted challenges and create holistic solutions.
- **Monitor and Evaluate:** Implement data collection strategies to track intergenerational indicators within your targeted rural areas. This will aid in adjusting projects and advocating for policies based on local evidence.

Recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots

1. Addressing Income Gaps and Long-term Security

- **Focus on Sustainable Income Generation:** Prioritise initiatives fostering sustainable livelihoods for younger generations in rural areas. This includes creating opportunities in emerging sectors, supporting entrepreneurship, and skills training relevant to the local economy.
- **Advocate for Equitable Policy:** analyse the impact of social protection programs on different age groups within your region. Advocate for policies that ensure long-term financial security for young rural residents, preparing them for demographic shifts.

2. Supporting Access to Affordable Housing

- **Innovative Housing Solutions:** Explore alternative models like cooperative housing, shared ownership, or housing adapted for young professionals in rural settings.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with housing providers, local governments, and non-profits to address affordability challenges specifically impacting young residents.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for housing policies tailored to rural realities, including incentives for renovation and adaptation of existing buildings to meet youth housing needs.

3. Boosting Youth Employment and Skills Development

- **Targeted Training:** Ensure job training and skills development aligns with local labor markets and growth sectors within the rural economy.
- **Flexibility and Options:** Promote flexible work models (teleworking, hybrid) when viable, to attract young people to rural regions and enhance work-life balance.
- **Mentorship and Networking:** Create programs connecting young rural workers with experienced professionals both within and outside the region.

4. Prioritising Health and Well-being:

- **Accessible Mental Health Support:** Increase access to mental health resources specifically designed for young people in rural areas, combating stigma.
- **Promote Preventive Health:** Develop programs focusing on healthy habits, preventive care, and addressing chronic illness risk factors, reaching rural populations across ages.
- **Address Unmet Needs:** Work with healthcare providers to understand and address gaps in healthcare access in rural areas, where unmet needs, including post-pandemic, remain evident.

11. Rural Ireland and the impact of Covid-19²⁵²

This Social Justice Ireland report on rural Ireland discusses the challenges faced by rural Ireland due to Covid-19. These challenges include an older population, higher unemployment rates, lower median incomes, and less access to services. The tourism industry, which is important for the rural economy, has also been negatively affected by

²⁵² <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/rural-ireland-and-impact-covid-19>



the pandemic. The author argues that the government needs to take action to support rural communities by investing in public services and infrastructure.

11.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

The main takeaway for PoliRuralPlus is “Data is key”: PoliRuralPlus pilots should incorporate analysis of their demographic and economic situation to tailor projects that mirror the key challenges identified in the Irish case. While accepting that the Irish context is not be directly transferable to other PoliRuralPlus regions, as each will have specific socioeconomic circumstances, other recommendations for PoliRuralPlus include:

- **Age-Inclusive Strategies:** The report highlights an ageing population in rural Ireland. PoliRuralPlus projects should consider the specific needs and potential contributions of older residents. This includes ensuring accessibility of services, promoting active ageing initiatives, and encouraging intergenerational interaction.
- **Targeted Economic Support:** Rural Ireland faces challenges like lower income levels and greater unemployment. PoliRuralPlus interventions should focus on boosting sustainable, diversified forms of employment. This could involve support for rural entrepreneurship, skills development programs, and promoting value chains that connect rural production to wider markets.
- **Essential Services and Infrastructure:** Ensure that PoliRuralPlus pilot projects factor in accessibility to essential services. This might include innovative transport solutions, telemedicine, mobile service centres, or developing shared facilities that benefit the wider region.
- **Remote Working Potential:** While not explicitly the focus of the report, PoliRuralPlus can explore how the pandemic-driven shift towards remote work presents opportunities for rural areas. Projects can test strategies to improve digital infrastructure, develop shared co-working spaces, and attract digital nomads.
- **Rural Tourism Reimagined:** If tourism is a key economic sector in pilot regions, PoliRuralPlus can help re-imagine tourism for a post-COVID world. This might include developing niche tourism products, promoting sustainability, and enhancing digital marketing capabilities of rural tourism businesses.
- **Community Resilience:** The emphasis on social justice aligns well with PoliRuralPlus' focus on bottom-up development. Successful projects could include a strong element of community capacity-building, fostering local leadership, and addressing potential social inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus Pilots' Regional Action Plans

1. Adapt Strategically to COVID-19's Legacy:

- **Support Economic Recovery:** Focus on sustainable income generation in rural areas, particularly for groups hardest hit by the pandemic.
- **Digital Opportunities and Inclusion:** Help leverage remote work potential while ensuring reliable internet access.
- **Apply Lessons from Public Services:** Draw on successful digital innovations implemented rapidly by government agencies.

2. Prioritise Worker Well-Being

- **Understanding Sectoral Stressors:** Identify which workers are most impacted by psychosocial risks (healthcare, transport, etc.). Tailor initiatives accordingly.
- ****Promote Mental Health Support:** Actively integrate awareness and support resources into pilot projects. Reduce stigma.
- **Healthy Workplaces:** emphasise positive, supportive work environments as a preventive health measure.

3. Build and Maintain Trust:

- **emphasise Participation:** Involve diverse rural stakeholders at every stage, building ownership and trust.



- ****Transparency and Accountability: **** Design communication and decision-making to be clear and open.
- **Communicate Effectively:** Partner with local trusted messengers and platforms, especially in rural areas.

4. Enhance Rural-Urban Linkages

- **Adopt the RUI Lens:** Support projects explicitly fostering collaboration, innovation, and shared benefit across rural-urban divides.
- **Funding Expertise:** Help pilots develop diverse funding strategies, aligning with project goals and local needs.
- **Inspired by RURBANIVE:** utilise case studies and frameworks to adapt successes to pilot regions.
- **Sharable Mobility Solutions:** Draw on SMARTA insights for integrating shared transport, ensuring ease of use for all.

5. Address Intergenerational Needs:

- **Youth Voice:** Actively seek their input on pilot design, addressing mobility, jobs, and social connection.
- **Combat Isolation:** Focus on how initiatives, especially those related to mobility, improve access to services and activities, benefiting all ages.

PoliRuralPlus Can Best Support Pilots through:

- **Knowledge Sharing:** Disseminate these insights via workshops, trainings, and a platform for pilot sites to exchange best practices.
- **Leveraging Expertise:** Connect pilots with SMARTA, RURBANIVE experts, and with each other to share lessons learned.
- **Data-Driven Advocacy:** Help pilots design evaluation metrics tracking progress on key indicators (jobs, trust, well-being), informing refinement of solutions and supporting policy change

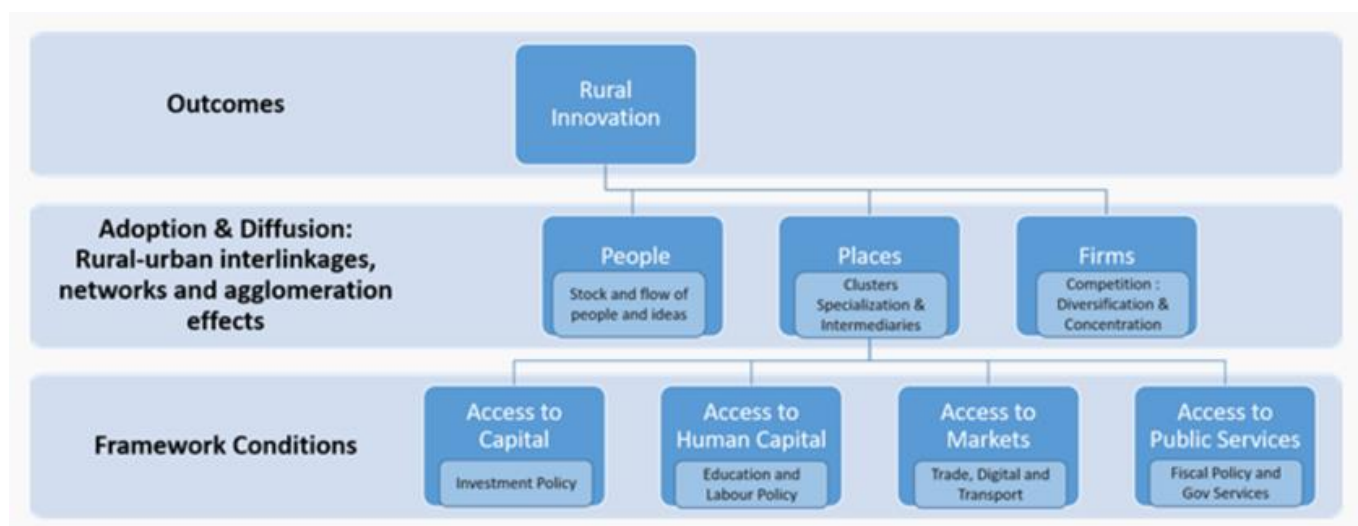
Annex K Innovation in Rural Areas

In rural regions, innovation comes from a variety of sources, which are different to that found in urban areas. Formal science based innovation systems are typically found in larger cities with universities and large enough firms to have a formal R&D function. These science-based activities can be highly successful and have application in rural areas – for example, forest based bio-energy research. However, innovation is largely different in rural regions to cities and can take a number of different forms²⁵³.

The OECD believes that Innovation is the key to unlocking opportunities in rural regions. However, what drives innovators and early innovation adopters in a rural context is not well understood. So the OECD is exploring how best to help rural areas improve their growth and well-being prospects, including better engaging women, youth and older workers. And help policy makers support reforms to shift rural policies on place-based innovation beyond a subsidy and sector-specific approach, understand how to overcome challenges of scale and density for delivering innovation and entrepreneurship support; and go beyond a science and technology-based approach to innovation. Which it terms “Reducing the geography of discontent for innovation and well-being in rural regions”²⁵⁴.

1. OECD conceptual framework

The OECD conceptual framework is as follows:



10 key drivers of rural change²⁵⁵

The next production revolution (NPR) entails a confluence of technologies ranging from a variety of digital technologies to new processes. Rural areas are characterised by low density economy and by shortage of labour including depopulation and ageing, and these emerging technologies may help overcome these challenges in rural areas.

²⁵³ [Rural-innovation-background.pdf \(oecd.org\)](#)

²⁵⁴ [Enhancing Innovation in rural regions - OECD](#)

²⁵⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/regional/rural-development/Rural-innovation-background.pdf>



Why innovation is important for business

Why innovation is important for well-being



In summary the OECD's insights on rural innovation and recommendations directly applicable to the PoliRuralPlus project are:

Rural Innovation Challenges and Opportunities

- **Innovation isn't just about tech:** The OECD emphasise s that rural innovation encompasses social innovation, new business models, and rethinking governance approaches to meet the needs of distinct rural communities.
- **Rural Advantages:** Rural areas possess unique strengths (like social ties, natural resources) that can be leveraged for innovative solutions, addressing challenges ranging from ageing populations to resource efficiency.
- **Place-Based Strategies:** Generic "one-size-fits-all" approaches won't work. Effective rural innovation requires understanding local context and specific needs.
- **Skills and Talent:** Rural areas need investment in developing skills relevant to modern economies, along with policies to attract and retain talent.

Rural innovation differs from typical urban innovation:

- **Innovation isn't Just Formal R&D:** While science-based research centres in cities are valuable, most rural innovation takes different forms out of necessity.
- **Absorbing & Adapting Innovation:** Rural areas can benefit greatly from external innovations, but need the capability to access and adapt them successfully.
- **SME-Driven Economy:** Since large employers are rare in rural areas, the focus is on supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to be innovative and competitive.



- **Niche Markets & Value-Adding:** Distance makes mass-market strategies difficult. Rural SMEs must find specialised niches and focus on adding value to products/services.
- **Global Impacts on Rural Areas:** Rural regions are deeply impacted by globalisation and must constantly innovate to compete.
- **Need for Rural-Specific Innovation Support:** Traditional policies focused on subsidies and individual sectors are insufficient. Place-based innovation support tailored to rural areas is essential.

The Main Focus Areas of OECD Regional Development Work²⁵⁶

- **Understanding Regional Disparities:** The OECD gathers data and analyses trends to identify the causes and consequences of economic, social, and environmental inequalities between regions.
- **Place-Based Policies:** They advocate for moving away from one-size-fits-all approaches and towards tailored strategies that leverage the specific strengths and address the unique challenges of different regions.
- **Supporting Transitions:** The OECD helps regions navigate transformations caused by factors like globalisation, demographic shifts, and climate change, finding ways to adapt and create new opportunities.
- **Innovation as a Driver:** Innovation, in its many forms, is seen as crucial for regional revitalisation and ensuring competitiveness in a changing world.
- **Wellbeing Focus:** Economic growth alone is insufficient. The OECD emphasises policies that promote inclusive development and improve quality of life for all residents of a region.

The OECD have various rural policy reports & papers, some of the most relevant to PoliRuralPlus are summarised as follows:

[Edinburgh Policy Statement on Enhancing Rural Innovation](#)²⁵⁷

The 11th OECD Rural Development Conference confirmed that rural development is essential to inclusive growth and issued its Edinburgh Policy Statement on Enhancing Rural Innovation:

Main Points:

- Rural development is crucial for inclusive growth – no one should be left behind.
- Rural areas offer unique assets and opportunities beyond agriculture.
- Policies should leverage these assets and consider the diversity of rural regions (urban-adjacent, remote, etc.).
- Technological advancements like digital connectivity, 3D printing, and drones can reshape rural economies.
- Rural areas play a key role in tackling climate change, food security, and resource management.
- Innovation is essential for rural competitiveness and sustainability.

Challenges:

- Population decline, ageing demographics, and limited public services threaten rural attractiveness.
- Climate change impacts require adaptation and mitigation strategies in rural areas.

[Networks and Rural-Urban Linkages for Rural Innovation](#)²⁵⁸

Key Points

- **Innovation is crucial for rural development:** Rural regions need to innovate to ensure economic growth, sustainability, and resilience.

²⁵⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/regional/>

²⁵⁷ <https://www.oecd.org/regional/Edinburgh-Policy-Statement-On-Enhancing-Rural-Innovation.pdf>

²⁵⁸ [Networks and Rural-Urban Linkages for Rural Innovation \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)



- **Re-think innovation in a rural context:** It goes beyond technical R&D and includes organisational, social, and resource-based innovation.
- **Innovation needs a supportive environment:** This includes access to skills, infrastructure, knowledge networks, and enabling policies.
- **Policies need to be place-based:** Solutions must be tailored to the unique characteristics and challenges of different rural areas.
- **Innovation is Essential for Rural Success:** Rural areas globally face challenges but also hold unique opportunities. Innovation is vital for creating sustainable, resilient, and prosperous rural economies.
- **Rural Innovation's Unique Nature:** It extends beyond tech; social innovation, new organisational models, adapting external ideas, and harnessing rural resources creatively are key.
- **Innovation Needs a Supporting Ecosystem:** It's not just about ideas, but access to skills, capital, knowledge networks, and infrastructure (including digital).
- **Governance Matters:** Rural innovation thrives with enabling policies, multi-level coordination (local to national), and bottom-up, participatory approaches.
- **No Universal Playbook:** Strategies must be sensitive to the specific assets, challenges, and diversity within the rural landscape.

[Innovation and Modernising the Rural Economy](#)²⁵⁹

Main Themes

- **Rural Areas Are Not Obsolete:** They possess unique assets, but must adapt and innovate to contribute to national and global economies.
- **Innovation = More Than Tech:** It includes business models, organisational improvements, tapping into local resources, and social innovation – all relevant in rural contexts.
- **Unlocking "Hidden" Potential:** Many rural areas already possess innovative practices that need to be identified, scaled, and connected more widely.
- **Barriers to Overcome:** Limited resources, digital gaps, skills imbalances, and unfavorable policy frameworks hinder rural innovation.
- **Importance of National Frameworks:** National-level strategies and investment are critical for creating an enabling environment for rural innovation to thrive.

[Enhancing Innovation in Rural Regions of Switzerland](#)²⁶⁰

Main Focus of the Report

- **Beyond GDP:** Well-being in rural areas depends on many interconnected factors, not just economic growth.
- **Disparities Exist:** There's significant inequality both between rural and urban regions, and within the diverse rural landscape itself.
- **Data & Measurement:** The OECD has created a framework to track rural well-being across multiple dimensions (income, jobs, health, environment, etc.), enabling more informed policy-making.
- **Improving Opportunities:** The report calls for tailored approaches to enhance rural well-being based on specific local advantages and challenges.

[Enhancing Rural Innovation in the United States](#)²⁶¹

This report discusses the economic benefits of innovation in rural counties . The report finds that innovation is associated with higher productivity and GDP growth . However, there are challenges to rural innovation, including lack of access to broadband and education . The document recommends that policymakers consider these

²⁵⁹ [Innovation and Modernising the Rural Economy | READ online \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

²⁶⁰ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/307886ff-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/307886ff-en>

²⁶¹ [Enhancing Rural Innovation in the United States | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)



challenges . Some recommendations include improving access to broadband and education, and supporting entrepreneurship .

[Enhancing Rural Innovation in Scotland, UK](#)²⁶²

This is about innovation in rural Scotland . It discusses labour productivity growth, which has been higher in rural areas than in urban areas . There is evidence, however, that this growth is unequal . The article also explores the potential of the rural labor force . Social innovation is another important aspect of rural areas .

2 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

Analysing the various OECD reports identified a wealth of learnings and recommendations for the PoliRural project and pilots. But the key point is: Rural innovation is driven by necessity and resourcefulness. Projects like PoliRuralPlus must foster an environment where this unique form of innovation can thrive.

1. Champion A Holistic View and Broad Definition of Innovation

- **Communicate the diverse forms of innovation:** Technological, business model improvements, service delivery, optimising local resources.
- **Identify and showcase "untraditional" rural innovation:** Successful examples from your regions or elsewhere that don't fit the high-tech mold.
- **Move Beyond Tech Focus:** Alongside technological solutions, champion new business models, service delivery improvements, and social innovations tailored to rural needs.
- **Value 'Hidden' Innovation:** Help regions identify and build upon existing innovative practices that may not fit the traditional high-tech mold.

2. Strengthen the Rural Innovation Ecosystem

- **Map Skills Gaps:** Assess both tech-specific and broader adaptability, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial skills needed for innovation. Assess not just technical skills, but data literacy, adaptability, and entrepreneurial mindsets that underpin innovation in rural contexts.
- **Digital Inclusion with Purpose:** Beyond infrastructure, ensure rural users have the skills to leverage digital tools.
- **Facilitate Knowledge Sharing:** Connect rural stakeholders within your regions and to external innovators, potentially with a focus on specific sectors.
- **Connectivity is Crucial:** Alongside broadband, advocate for policies supporting rural digital infrastructure specifically geared towards innovation (coworking hubs, etc.).
- **Fostering Networks:** Facilitate knowledge-exchange between rural areas (within your pilot regions and beyond), but also with tech centres and research institutions.
- **Harness Innovation:** Facilitate the adoption of new technologies and support the development of rural-specific innovations.
- **Connectivity Matters:** Advocate for high-speed internet access and improved infrastructure in rural areas.

3. Governance & Participation Matter

- **Empower Communities:** Support community-led initiatives and social innovation for climate change adaptation and improved quality of life.
- **Rural-Urban Linkages:** Foster collaboration between rural and urban areas for mutual benefit.
- **Building Relationships:** Facilitate potential connections between PoliRuralPlus regions and those featured in OECD studies, fostering peer-learning.

²⁶² [Enhancing Rural Innovation in Scotland, United Kingdom | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)



- **Importance of Partnerships:** Collaboration between businesses, local government, researchers, and social groups is key to successful rural innovation. PoliRuralPlus should foster such networking within regions.
- **Building Trust:** Rural communities may be hesitant towards change. PoliRuralPlus must prioritise transparent and inclusive participation
- **Role of Governance:** Explore how the OECD's policy recommendations for multi-level governance align with the challenges of your pilot regions.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Ensure diverse rural voices are integrated in defining challenges and identifying innovative solutions, not just beneficiaries.
- **Advocacy Beyond Your Project:** Share findings with policymakers to highlight the need for rural-specific innovation support mechanisms.
- **Policy Toolkit:** Develop resources and models to help local governments foster an enabling environment for experimentation and bottom-up innovation.

4. Advocate for Supportive Policies

- **Participatory Solutions:** Actively involve diverse rural voices in identifying challenges and proposing policies that enable innovation.
- **Policy Influence:** Use PoliRuralPlus findings to advocate for national and EU-level policies informed by the OECD's emphasis on regional development.
- **Showcase National Models:** Use OECD examples of successful national-level strategies that enable localised rural innovation.
- **Policy Toolkit for Governments:** Compile resources and models demonstrating how local governments can support rural innovation.

5. A Holistic Understanding of Rural Success

- **Multi-Dimensional View:** Help stakeholders define what "well-being" means in their region, moving beyond basic economic indicators.
- **Data as a Tool:** PoliRuralPlus data collection and dashboards should potentially incorporate well-being metrics aligned with the OECD's framework.
- **Showcasing Interdependencies:** Use data visualisation to illustrate how factors like health access, environmental quality, and social connections impact rural economic vitality and attractiveness.

6. Addressing Rural Inequalities

- **Internal Disparities:** Avoid the trap of treating "rural" as a monolith. Support pilot regions in mapping well-being gaps within their areas.
- **No One-Size-Fits-All:** Showcase OECD case studies illustrating how tailored policies improved well-being outcomes for different types of rural communities.

7. Identifying Opportunity Levers

- **Assets to Opportunities:** Help regions connect their strengths (natural resources, cultural heritage) to concrete well-being improvement strategies.
- **Beyond Services:** While basic service provision is vital, focus on how PoliRuralPlus tools can facilitate innovative approaches that build on local strengths to increase well-being.

8. Data-Driven Understanding of Rural-Urban Linkages

- **Collaboration with OECD:** Explore if existing OECD data sets can enrich PoliRuralPlus analysis of pilot regions, potentially comparing them to other regions globally.
- **Beyond Basic Indicators:** Aim for data that reveals the complexities of rural-urban flows (people, goods, knowledge) and the interdependence between areas.



- **Importance of Data:** Good data is essential for understanding rural specificities and evaluating innovation impacts. PoliRuralPlus should assist with this. Data for Understanding Rural Regions: Explore the potential of OECD datasets for analysis of your regions. The project should advocate for evidence-based rural development policies informed by the OECD framework. PoliRuralPlus can play a role in strengthening data collection on diverse rural areas.
- **Data & Long-Term Vision:** Collect data to understand rural trends, inform policy decisions, and ensure long-term sustainability.

9. Data for Advocacy

- **Regional Comparisons:** See if the OECD's regional well-being dataset allows your pilot regions to benchmark themselves internationally.
- **Evidence-Based Arguments:** Use the OECD report to bolster the case that rural well-being improvements are crucial for national prosperity.

10. emphasise the Value of Place-Based Strategies

- **No Copy-Pasting:** Highlight to stakeholders that successful solutions must be tailored to their region's specific context, not just blindly imported from elsewhere.
- **Showcase Success Stories:** Draw on OECD case studies to illustrate how place-based approaches have revitalised other rural areas or fostered integrated development.
- **Place-Based Approach:** Tailor interventions to the specific assets and challenges of each pilot region.

11. Support Diverse Rural Transitions

- **Proactive, Not Reactive:** Help regions anticipate disruptions (e.g., agriculture shifts) and use PoliRuralPlus tools to explore scenarios and adaptation strategies.
- **Skills for the Future:** Integrate a focus on future-proofing the rural workforce, preparing them for evolving economic realities and digital transformation.

12. Highlight Diverse Forms of Innovation

- **Echo the OECD Definition:** Consistently reinforce the broad view of innovation as a key theme for PoliRuralPlus, empowering regions to be creative in their solutions.
- **Rural Innovation Hubs:** Explore models for facilitating local knowledge exchange, idea generation, and prototyping, potentially inspired by OECD examples.

13. Wellbeing as an Outcome

- **Focus on Well-being:** Define and measure well-being across social, economic, and environmental aspects in your pilot regions.
- **Quality of Life for Attractiveness:** Frame rural well-being in terms of talent attraction and combating population decline – a concern for many regions.
- **Measure What Matters:** Alongside economic indicators, help regions track the impact of PoliRuralPlus interventions on aspects like community vibrancy, environmental quality, and social inclusion.
- **Aligning with OECD Frameworks:** Demonstrate that PoliRuralPlus supports broader sustainable development goals shared by the OECD.

14. Broaden Your Understanding of "Innovation"



- **Prioritise Social Innovation:** Facilitate solutions aimed at rural service delivery gaps, community well-being, and digital inclusion.
- **Support New Models:** Help pilot regions explore innovative business models like cooperatives, social enterprises, or circular economy initiatives that align with rural strengths.
- **Governance Innovation:** Pilot tools or approaches for participatory decision-making that are suitable for smaller or more dispersed populations.

15. Tailor Initiatives to the Local Context

- **Detailed Regional Profiles:** Go beyond demographics; analyse each pilot region's unique cultural assets, resources, and existing innovation activities.
- **Bottom-up Approach:** Actively involve rural stakeholders in identifying challenges and opportunities where innovation is most needed.
- **Cross-Region Learning:** While strategies should be place-based, facilitate sharing lessons learned between PoliRuralPlus pilot regions (even across countries) for inspiration and adaptation.

16. Address the Skills & Talent Gap

- **Digital Literacy as a Foundation:** Ensure PoliRuralPlus tools and platforms come with training for rural users at varying skill levels.
- **Beyond Tech:** emphasise capacity-building around data analysis, innovative problem-solving, entrepreneurship, and collaboration – these are transferable skills vital for rural economies.
- **Highlight Rural Possibilities:** Counteract the "brain drain" narrative by showcasing compelling examples of successful entrepreneurship and innovation in pilot regions.
- **Role of Talent Attraction:** Consider strategies that make rural regions attractive for innovators and skilled individuals to relocate or set up businesses..

Questions that the PoliRuralPlus pilots should consider

Which of these recommendations resonate most strongly with challenges you've observed in the PoliRuralPlus pilot regions?

- Are there specific types of innovation (social, business, etc.) that a particular region should prioritise?
- Are there specific OECD reports or data sets particularly relevant to challenges in your pilot regions?
- How can PoliRuralPlus best showcase the importance of place-based approaches to its stakeholders?
- Which of these implications are top priorities in your pilot regions, given their existing strengths and weaknesses?
- Are there specific barriers to rural innovation (policy-related, cultural, etc.) that PoliRuralPlus should be prepared to address?
- Which dimensions of well-being (from the OECD's framework) are the most pressing concerns within your pilot regions?
- Are there instances where pursuing a well-being goal (e.g., environmental protection) also presents new economic opportunities for rural areas?
- Consider focusing on the economic benefits of innovation in rural areas when developing programs.
- Take into account the challenges of rural innovation, such as lack of access to broadband and education.
- Develop programs that support entrepreneurship in rural areas.
- Consider focusing on rural areas with lower productivity growth to ensure equitable distribution of benefits.
- Explore the potential of the rural labour force by providing training and resources to help them develop new skills.
- Support social innovation in rural areas by creating spaces for collaboration and knowledge sharing.



3. PoliRuralPlus Rural Innovation Actions

Based on the above list of insights extracted from the OECD reports an action plan for PoliRuralPlus is as follows:

Given that rural innovation is multifaceted and requires policies and programs that support an entire ecosystem – from skills to networks to a shift in mindset. The following is suggested:

1. Mindset & Communication

- **Broad Definition of Innovation:** Develop a communication toolkit to promote this understanding to stakeholders (illustrations, stories, regional examples)
- **Highlight Rural Possibilities:** Gather real-world success stories within the pilot regions, and from the OECD, to inspire and combat outdated views.

2. Ecosystem Building

- **Skills Mapping:** Design adaptable surveys or workshops to help regions detail their current strengths AND gaps (beyond basic digital literacy).
- **Knowledge Exchange Platform:** Create mechanisms for the 9 regions to share best practices + connect to external networks.
- **Rural Innovation Hubs:** Research models (online, physical) that fit sparsely populated areas.

3. Policy & Advocacy

- **Stakeholder Participation Toolkit:** Methods for inclusive engagement throughout projects, not just at the end.
- **"Rural-Fit" Policy Toolkit:** Gather case studies and templates that demonstrate how to make policies work for rural needs.
- **Advocacy Strategy:** Plan outreach to policymakers with PoliRuralPlus findings, timed to key policy windows.

4. Data & Insights

- **OECD Data Exploration:** With an OECD expert, see if datasets can be used by pilots for benchmarking or analysis.
- **Well-being Metrics:** Design adaptable indicators in consultation with pilot regions, aligned with the OECD's framework where possible.

5. Project-Specific Actions

- **"Untraditional" Innovation Showcase:** Could be a contest, virtual gallery, or part of the dashboard.
- **Place-Based Emphasis:** Make it a mandatory element of project proposals – require analysis of the region's unique starting point.

Questions to Spark each Pilot's Implementation:

- **Prioritisation:** Have each pilot region rank the top 3 recommendation categories most urgent for them, allowing for focused support.
- **Quick Wins:** Are there actions in the "Mindset & Communication" category a pilot can do immediately to shift the narrative around rural innovation?
- **Data Champions** Does a pilot region have the interest or capacity to lead in experimenting with OECD-aligned metrics

3.1 Potential actions for each pilot region

The analysis identified 3 potential actions for each of the PoliRuralPlus pilot regions, considering their unique focus areas, along with explanations for why those actions align with overall PoliRuralPlus goals:

Pilot 1 (Ireland)

● Action 1: Participatory Action Plan Development

1. utilise mapping tools and workshops to identify areas with the highest potential for rural-urban integration (housing, transport links, shared services, etc.)



2. **Why:** emphasises a place-based approach, fosters stakeholder ownership, and aligns with the need for an inclusive community.
- **Action 2: Pilot Smart Village Initiatives:**
 1. Select one smaller community to experiment with tech-enabled solutions for service delivery OR remote work facilitation.
 2. **Why:** Demonstrates the innovation theme, tests practical solutions with potential for scaling within the region.
 - **Action 3: "New Entrants" Skills Survey**
 1. Target those who've moved to the region recently, identify what attracted them, and what gaps they see in support for non-traditional rural entrepreneurs.
 2. **Why:** Data-informed policy support, could uncover barriers to attracting more nontraditional enterprises.

Pilot 2 (Slovakia)

- **Action 1: Future Visioning Workshops**
 - Facilitate creative exercises with diverse stakeholders to imagine an ideal future for rural areas, beyond fixing problems, focusing on aspirations.
 - **Why:** Combats deficit-based thinking, sparks long-term vision for policy alignment.
- **Action 2: Rural Leadership Exchange**
 - Connect emerging rural leaders with their counterparts in regions with successful revitalisation stories (could be in other EU countries).
 - **Why:** Capacity-building, combats isolation, builds a network for new ideas.
- **Action 3: Pilot "Participatory Budgeting"**
 - Select one municipality, allocate a small fund, let residents propose and vote on projects directly.
 - **Why:** Experiment with boosting engagement, data on what matters most to residents, builds trust for larger initiatives.

Pilot 3 (Greece)

- **Action 1: Agritech Skills Academy:**
 - Partner with existing educational providers, focusing on practical applications in the region's specific agricultural context.
 - **Why:** Supports core goals, builds local human capital vital for innovation.
- **Action 2: Agritourism Business Challenge**
 - Open to rural entrepreneurs, prioritise ideas with clear links to local assets and potential to attract urban visitors.
 - **Why:** Spurs innovative thinking, could uncover niche markets, aligns with economic diversification.
- **Action 3: Digital Storytelling for Farmers**
 - Low-cost training in using social media to market products directly, emphasising authentic stories that resonate with urban consumers.
 - **Why:** Focus on accessible, high-impact digital skills, empowers producers directly.

Pilot 4 (Italy)

- **Action 1: Short Supply Chain Mapping**
 - Go beyond existing farmers' markets, identify informal sales, online platforms, and direct producer-restaurant connections.
 - **Why:** Baseline understanding of strengths, highlights gaps where pilots can focus support.
- **Action 2: Urban Food Festival Collaboration**
 - Partner with existing urban events, secure a dedicated space for rural producers from the region to showcase and sell.
 - **Why:** Direct market access, builds relationships with potential ongoing buyers, promotes rural "brand".



- **Action 3: Storytelling for "Rural Lifestyle"**
 - Beyond healthy eating, use social media to highlight positive aspects of rural life (slower pace, community) that may resonate with urbanites seeking a change.
 - **Why:** Supports long-term attraction goal, combats negative stereotypes about rural areas.

Pilot 5 (Finland)

- **Action 1: Regional Event Asset Mapping**
 - Collaborate with even the smallest communities to identify unique cultural events, existing festivals, etc. that could be expanded or better marketed.
 - **Why:** Leverages existing strengths, promotes a cohesive rural identity, first step for an event ecosystem.
- **Action 2: Urban Audience Research**
 - Online survey, targeted promos at urban events, to understand what types of rural events would attract visitors to the region.
 - **Why:** Avoids building supply without understanding demand, essential data for targeted promotion.
- **Action 3: Rural Event-Preneur Incubator**
 - Online cohort-based training on the business side of events (marketing, logistics, partnerships), aimed at local creatives.
 - **Why:** Supports new enterprise, links cultural vibrancy with the goal of economic development.

Pilot 6 (Bavaria-Czechia)

- **Action 1: "Reverse" Incubator Workshop**
 - Identify urban-based startups with potential to address unmet rural needs (e-health, logistics, etc.), bring them to the region to pitch.
 - **Why:** Innovation doesn't just flow one way, it attracts outside talent with fresh perspectives.
- **Action 2: Pilot Border Area Grant Fund**
 - Small funding for joint projects between Bavaria-Czechia communities, prioritise those with economic, social, or cultural impact.
 - **Why:** Breaks down silos, encourages cross-border thinking on shared challenges.
- **Action 3: Rural-Urban "Swap" Program**
 - Facilitated short-term exchange where a rural professional shadows their counterpart in the city and vice versa, to build understanding.
 - **Why:** Low-cost way to build empathy, can spark new ideas for collaboration.

Pilot 7 (Spain)

- **Action 1: Archaeological Site "Hackathon"**
 - Partnering with tech/design groups, invite ideas for apps, interactive tools, etc., that enhance visitor experience OR leverage the site's legacy in innovative ways.
 - **Why:** Attracts a non-traditional audience, positions cultural heritage as a driver of innovation.
- **Action 2: Urban Influencer Partnerships**
 - Identify social media figures with travel/history focus, host them in the region, incentivising them to promote it positively.
 - **Why:** Taps into existing networks for visibility, reaches new demographics who may not think of rural tourism.
- **Action 3: Rural Entrepreneur Microloans**
 - Very small amounts of capital targeted at businesses that directly support tourism OR that add vibrancy for residents in the area around the site.
 - **Why:** Direct economic impact, encourages a synergistic ecosystem around the park.

Pilot 8 (Latvia)

- **Action 1: Data-Driven Decision Making**



- Workshop for local officials on free/accessible data tools for visualising demographics, service gaps, etc. related to rural-urban flow.
- **Why:** Supports evidence-based planning, PoliRuralPlus can help with resource identification.
- **Action 2: "Future of Work" Scenario Planning**
 - Hold workshops with a cross-section of residents to explore how automation, remote work, etc., could impact rural areas differently, focusing on both threats and opportunities.
 - **Why:** Proactive approach to economic shifts, prepares the region to adapt policies and supports.
- **Action 3: Participatory Platform Pilot**
 - Select one municipality to test digital tools for citizen input on local budgets OR for submitting and discussing local improvement ideas asynchronously.
 - **Why:** Builds digital inclusion, tests new engagement methods, data could inform how to scale such a platform regionally.
- **Considerations for Latvia**
 - **Tailoring the Scale:** Ensure actions can be implemented at the Vidzeme Planning Region level while also demonstrating value to individual municipalities within.
 - **Data Focus:** Explore how PoliRuralPlus tools can better track rural-urban flows of people, goods, etc., within Latvia, supporting their focus on resilience.

Pilot 9 (Malta):

- **Action 1: Digital Transformation Audit**
 - Design a survey for farmers focusing on their current use of tech (marketing, data analysis, etc.) AND their openness to adopting new tools.
 - **Why:** Moves beyond assumptions about rural digital skills, identifies both quick fixes and longer-term needs.
- **Action 2: Circularity Innovation Challenge**
 - Contest for new ideas to utilise agricultural waste, link food production to other industries, or closed-loop processes, open to urban-rural teams.
 - **Why:** Sparks creative solutions to a key challenge, promotes collaborative thinking across boundaries.
- **Action 3: Youth Skills & Mentorship**
 - Partner with educational institutions to prioritise coding, data-related skills, and entrepreneurship training relevant to rural needs.
 - **Why:** Investing in the future workforce is essential for long-term transformation and retention of talent.
- **Additional Considerations for Malta:**
 - **Key Takeaway:** It's important to tailor actions in Malta not just to the agricultural focus, but also to the particular nature of rurality within its geographic context.
 - **Small Scale Matters:** Ensure actions aren't designed only for large operations, but support the small-scale farming that's prevalent in the region.
 - **Island Perspective:** Consider the unique aspects of rural-urban divides on an island, potentially highlighting logistics or market specificities.
 - **Tourism Angle:** How can the data and tools being developed in PoliRuralPlus better inform how tourism benefits rural producers and communities?
 - Are there other sectors (besides agriculture) in Malta where you see a need for rural-focused digital transformation?
 - Could any of these actions involve partnerships with institutions in other pilot regions facing similar challenges?



To ensure a balance between alignment with broad PoliRuralPlus goals and addressing the specific needs of each pilot. It would be useful for the pilots to reflect with their stakeholders

- Do these actions resonate with the vision of those involved in the pilots?
- Capacity: Are there existing resources or partners (universities, tourism boards) that could be leveraged for implementation?
- Collaboration Potential: Are there any pilot regions where a shared approach on a similar action would make sense?

4. Online Toolkits

As discussed in section 1, task T2.3 “Data Analysis” will provide a dashboard for PoliRuralPlus stakeholders to be able to look at what-if analysis of changing particular opportunities, and use it as the basis for further discussion and consultation. To ensure its value and optimise its utility for its users, as a Regional Dashboard to analyse and optimise Rural-Urban Linkages and strategies, it will need to complement and fully utilise existing online services. So this subsection explores the most useful available relevant online toolkits.

4.1 Rural Pact Community Platform²⁶³

This is a website about the Rural Pact. It outlines a framework for collaboration among various stakeholders to achieve positive change in rural areas. The Rural Pact has three core objectives:

- **Listening to Rural Residents:** This involves ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are understood.
- **Connecting Rural People:** The Pact aims to foster connections and collaboration among rural communities to share knowledge and experiences.
- **Encouraging Action:** The initiative encourages concrete actions and commitments to address challenges and improve the wellbeing of rural areas.

4.1.1 Implications for PoliRuralPlus

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The Rural Pact emphasises the importance of collaboration between diverse stakeholders. PoliRuralPlus pilots can adopt a similar approach, engaging rural communities, policymakers, research institutions, the private sector, and other relevant actors in the design and implementation of their initiatives.
- **Community-Driven Approach:** The Pact highlights listening to and understanding the needs of rural residents. PoliRuralPlus pilots should ensure rural communities are actively involved in defining priorities and developing solutions for their regions.
- **Taking Action:** In line with the Pact's focus on concrete action, PoliRuralPlus pilots should move beyond planning and develop clear implementation plans with measurable goals and activities to achieve positive change in rural areas.

By following these principles, PoliRuralPlus pilots can leverage the collaborative spirit of the Rural Pact to contribute to more effective and sustainable rural development initiatives across Europe.

4.2 Tools4CAP inventory of methods and tools²⁶⁴

A new database developed by the Tools4CAP project brings together a comprehensive collection of existing methods and tools used for the design, implementation and monitoring of the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plans in the aim of supporting their implementation.

²⁶³ [Learn more about the Pact | Rural Pact Community Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁶⁴ [Tools - TOOLS4CAP](#)



The inventory allows browsing the tools by: stakeholder needs assessment; policy choices; policy analysis for evidence-based decision; and monitoring and data collection.

Look out for upcoming editions of the [Tools4CAP Academy](#) for training, capacity building and peer-learning related to the content and use of the inventory.

An inventory of existing methods and tools used for the design, implementation and monitoring of CAP Strategic Plans has been collected through a combination of extensive desk research and interviews with relevant actors at the local, national and EU level across EU Member States. Updates for this inventory will take place over the course of the Tools4CAP Project. Continuous monitoring will be conducted to enrich the inventory with new methods and tools introduced by Member States, approaches used in previous programming periods, and relevant tools from science and third countries that have not yet been implemented in the EU.

Summary of Tools4CAP Inventory with Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus:

What it is:

- A database of methods and tools used for designing, implementing, and monitoring CAP Strategic Plans (2023-2027).
- Categorised by stakeholder needs assessment, policy choices, analysis, and monitoring.
- Offers training and capacity building through the Tools4CAP Academy.

4.2.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus:

- Utilise the inventory to find:
 - Tools for stakeholder engagement (e.g., focus groups, consultations, surveys).
 - Methods for policy analysis and decision-making (e.g., SWOT analysis, multicriteria analysis).
 - Tools for monitoring and data collection (e.g., online platforms, mobile apps).
- Consider specific examples relevant to rural-urban cooperation:
 - Stakeholder engagement: Organise joint workshops, conferences, or online consultations with rural and urban stakeholders.
 - Policy analysis: Use tools to assess the impact of CAP interventions on both rural and urban areas (e.g., job creation, environmental benefits).
 - Monitoring: Develop indicators to track progress towards rural-urban partnerships and shared goals.
- Contribute to the inventory: Share your own methods and tools with the Tools4CAP project to benefit others.
- Promote the Tools4CAP Academy: Encourage rural and urban stakeholders to participate in training and capacity building activities.

Additional Notes:

- The inventory is currently under development and will be updated with new tools and methods.
- PoliRuralPlus can play a key role in promoting and facilitating the use of these tools to support effective rural-urban cooperation.

Examples from the inventory:

- Stakeholder engagement:
 - Focus groups and meetings (Belgium, Ireland, etc.)
 - Online consultations and surveys (Croatia, Finland, Hungary, etc.)
 - Workshops and conferences (Germany, Lithuania, Romania, etc.)
- Policy analysis:
 - SWOT analysis (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, etc.)
 - Multicriteria analysis (Finland)
 - Expert judgement (Lithuania)



- Monitoring:
 - Performance monitoring tools (Czechia, Portugal)
 - Compliance monitoring tools (Portugal)
 - Online platforms for data collection (Portugal, Romania)

By using and contributing to the Tools4CAP inventory, PoliRuralPlus can help build a more collaborative and effective approach to rural-urban development in Europe.

4.3 Rural Toolkit on EU Funding²⁶⁵

The EU Rural Toolkit²⁶⁶ Rural toolkit is the first comprehensive online guide to EU funding and support opportunities for rural areas in the European Union. An interactive funding finder, with tips & inspiring stories, and translations in 24 languages

An interactive guide mapping all funding opportunities available at EU level for rural areas. EU funds and programmes that can foster sustainable growth and well-being in rural areas abound. However, identifying the most appropriate option is not always straightforward for potential beneficiaries. The Rural toolkit gathers funding opportunities from 26 different EU funds, from the Common Agricultural Policy to Cohesion Funds, Horizon Europe and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. In just a few clicks, rural entrepreneurs and local authorities can find out the best funding available to help them develop their project.

This financial toolkit for rural areas funding opportunities is for citizens and organisations working in rural areas. The funding comes from the European Union. There are grants, loans, and technical assistance available. The site also lists specific EU initiatives that offer funding. Some examples are the Single Market Programme and the Erasmus+ programme. Some funding sources that might be relevant to the PoliRuralPlus pilots are:

- **Single Market Programme:** This program supports the development of a strong single market in Europe. It could be relevant for PoliRuralPlus pilots that focus on economic development or business creation in rural areas.
- **Erasmus+ programme:** This program supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It could be relevant for PoliRuralPlus pilots that focus on skills development or capacity building in rural communities.

These are just a few examples, and there may be other EU funding programs that are relevant to PoliRuralPlus pilots. The Rural Development funding finder on the website can be a useful tool to explore other options.

4.4 InvestEU Portal²⁶⁷

The InvestEU Portal provides a valuable resource for PoliRuralPlus pilots seeking to connect with investors and secure funding to realise their rural and urban development goals.

The InvestEU Portal is a:

- **Centralised Investment Database:** It's an EU-wide platform for connecting project promoters (those seeking funding) with investors across Europe, Norway, and Iceland.
- **Opportunity for Rural Projects:** PoliRuralPlus pilots can utilise the portal for increased visibility and access to potential investors to support their rural development initiatives.
- **Successor to the European Investment Project Portal (EIPP):** The InvestEU Portal builds on the EIPP, offering a more streamlined and user-friendly experience.

²⁶⁵ [Rural toolkit \(europa.eu\)](#) and [Rural toolkit launch event - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁶⁶ [interactive funding finder](#)

²⁶⁷ [InvestEU Portal - European Union \(europa.eu\)](#)



How it Works

- **Project Submission:** Project promoters submit their proposals after registering and meeting eligibility criteria. The process is guided by user-friendly tools.
- **Increased Visibility:** Submitted projects become visible to a wide network of European and international investors seeking promising ventures to support.
- **Project Review:** The European Commission can forward eligible projects to relevant implementing partners (like the European Investment Bank) or the InvestEU Advisory Hub.

How to Engage with the InvestEU Portal:

1. **Project Eligibility:** PoliRuralPlus pilots should carefully review the admission criteria to ensure their projects qualify before submission.
2. **Strong Proposals:** Focus on crafting high-quality project proposals that highlight the impact, sustainability, and potential returns, enhancing their appeal to investors.
3. **Leverage the Advisory Hub:** As needed, consider seeking guidance from the InvestEU Advisory Hub on improving project design and investment readiness.

4.4.1 Benefits for PoliRuralPlus Pilots:

- **Funding Access:** The portal increases the chances of PoliRuralPlus pilots finding potential investors willing to support their rural development initiatives.
- **Wider Audience:** Project proposals gain broader visibility beyond traditional local or regional funding channels.
- **Targeted Support:** The dedicated user profiles facilitate matching investors with projects aligned with their interests, potentially leading to more suitable funding opportunities.

4.5 FAO City Region Food System (CRFS) Toolkit²⁶⁸

The City Region Food System (CRFS) toolkit aims to help local authorities and other stakeholders to strengthen the understanding of the current functioning and performance of a food system in the context of a city region within which rural and urban areas and communities are directly linked. It forms the basis for further development of policies and programmes to promote the sustainability and resilience of CRFS. The toolkit is based on the experience of the CRFS assessment and planning process in seven cities around the world: Colombo (Sri Lanka), Lusaka and Kitwe (Zambia), Medellín (Colombia), Quito (Ecuador), Toronto (Canada) and Utrecht (the Netherlands). A CRFS process must take into account existing and specific agronomic, economic and institutional-political conditions, the variety, interests and expertise of the different stakeholders involved, available resources, existing data and information, and specific goals set in the local context. The process, structured in a number of steps, is cyclical, not linear. In a nutshell, a CRFS assessment and planning process may include the following results: A mapping and characterisation of the local city region food system. This includes understanding and mapping of the city region foodshed, how food is processed, distributed and marketed, what people eat and what their food security and nutrition status is, how food waste is managed and who the government and institutional actors involved in the food system are. An analysis of current food system performance with regard to different sustainability dimensions, food system vulnerabilities, threats and weaknesses. Also, identifying the opportunities for strengthening the CRFS. Proposals for concrete policy and planning interventions and action plans through a multi-stakeholder dialogue process. This may also include the identification of policy lobbying needs and elaboration of specific advocacy materials. The process fosters inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue to support local governments and multi-stakeholder bodies in taking informed decisions on food planning, recognising the great importance and added value in consultation-participative processes and knowledge sharing. The assessment helps city stakeholders to spot the links between food and various other sectoral policies, such as transport (as a large part of city transport is food-related), health (malnutrition, obesity, school feeding), land-use planning for agricultural and multi-functional areas, community development and revitalisation, employment generation (in food production, processing and retail) and waste management (productive use of waste and waste water, management of food

²⁶⁸ [Introduction to the Toolkit | Food for the cities programme | منظمة الأغذية والزراعة للأمم المتحدة \(fao.org\)](#)



waste). In addition, a CRFS approach helps cities to understand the extent to which their urban food security is dependent on rural production areas and how the food system impacts both urban and rural populations in the city region. This understanding helps city governments to start seeing food as a driver for other sustainable urbanisation policies. Guido Santini, FAO

4.6 EU convergence monitoring hub²⁶⁹

Ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion is one of the objectives of the European Union. Member States and their citizens, by signing up to be part of the EU, have the implicit expectation that EU membership will lead to economic prosperity and social progress, for themselves and everyone across the community.

Upward convergence is defined as an improvement in performance towards a desirable policy target and convergence itself, in other words reducing disparities in performance.

Upward convergence lies at the heart of the EU project. Member States and their citizens sign up to be part of the Union, as they expect their membership will lead...

Importance of cohesion

Less developed countries have joined the EU with the aspiration to converge towards the most richer countries, therefore of becoming wealthier and making progress towards better working and living conditions, by reaping the fruits of the internal market. If these expectations of balanced growth and progress are not met, the EU stops being perceived as a win-win scenario and discontent may set in.

For this reason, measuring cohesion and the improvement of economic and social performance is key for understanding the state of the European Union. Cohesion and improvements are measured through upward convergence, that is the analysis of the development of the level of disparities across Member States and regions across time.

While the concept traces back to the treaty of Rome in 1957, the term upward convergence entered in the policy debate as part of the discussion around the European Pillar of Social Rights.

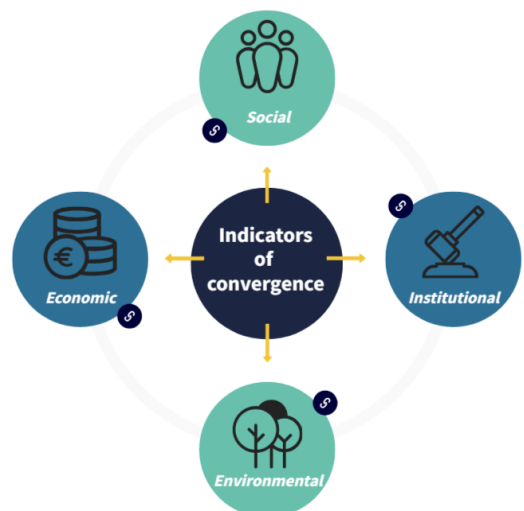
Measuring upward convergence

Measuring upward convergence involves quantifying two concepts, improvement and convergence.

Improvement is usually measured through changes in unweighted averages of Member States' performance on selected indicators. Unweighted averages are used to give each Member State, or geographical entities, the same representation and importance in determining the overall trend.

Convergence is measured as a decrease in inequalities or a catch up of least performing countries towards best performing Member States. Convergence could be measured in three different ways, each of which with its own political meaning:

- **Beta convergence** is used to measure whether countries starting from initially low performance levels grow faster than better performing countries. This process is referred to as catching up.
- **Sigma convergence** refers to the overall reduction in disparities among countries over time and is measured by the evolution of the statistical measures of dispersion, such as the standard deviation or the coefficient of variation. A decrease in the standard deviation or coefficient of variation over time indicates convergence.
- **Delta convergence** is used to analyse countries' distance from the best performing country. Delta convergence is usually measured through the sum of the distances between the Member States and the top performer.



²⁶⁹ [EU convergence monitoring hub | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e300042c-326c-4761-995d-639071394108/asset/document/eu-convergence-monitoring-hub-2019-2024.pdf)



At the beginning of the 21st century, there was upward convergence between the EU Member States for most of the indicators considered in this analysis. However, social and economic indicators were strongly affected by the financial crisis of 2008, and during the subsequent economic crisis between 2008 and 2013 disparities between the EU Member States tended to increase. These disparities highlight the need for current efforts to bolster Member States' resilience to economic shocks. It remains to be seen what possible impact COVID-19 will have on European societies in the long term and the implications of this for achieving upward convergence.

Indicators of convergence

As part of its convergence monitoring hub, Eurofound monitors the following indicators.

In addition to these dimensions, convergence analysis is also applied to the policy dimensions covered by the European Child Guarantee. The European Child Guarantee aims to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing effective access of children in need to early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing. To provide a snapshot of the direction in which countries have moved so far, an analysis of trends and disparities will be provided as part of this monitoring hub in a dedicated European Child Guarantee section.

For further insights into the methodology and the tools, are described at [convergence methodology page](#).

Perform convergence analysis

As part of this monitoring hub, Eurofound has developed a web-based tool to perform analysis of upward convergence for the indicators listed in the Social Scoreboard accompanying the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as for a selected set of indicators drawn from its European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) and European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS).

4.6.1 [convergEU app](#)

Perform convergence analysis in the EU using the [convergEU app](#)²⁷⁰

The web-based tool 'convergEU' permits the analysis of upward convergence for the full set of indicators part of the Social Scoreboard accompanying the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as for a selected set of Eurofound indicators drawn from the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) and the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). In five easy steps, the web-based tool can create a full upward convergence analysis: it downloads the data from Eurostat website automatically, then includes beta, sigma, delta, and gamma convergence measures as well as other measures to better understand country dynamics in a selected time period. A full indicator report or a country dynamic focus report are produced within 60 seconds. If you are planning to use your own dataset with the app, please read the [dataset preparation instructions](#) explaining how the data should be organised.

4.7 Rural Community Health Toolkit²⁷¹

This toolkit provides rural communities with the information, resources, and materials they need to develop a community health program in a rural community.

4.8 Rural Residential Density Toolkit - Kildare County Council²⁷²

Rural Residential Density Toolkit. To start, please click the green icon then choose a location at the centre point of the application site to run the rural ...

²⁷⁰ [Perform convergence analysis in the EU using the \[convergEU app\]\(#\) | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁷¹ <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/rural-toolkit>

²⁷² <https://webgeo.kildarecoco.ie/rrdt>



4.9 Rural Needs Toolkit for Health and Social Care - Engage²⁷³

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has produced guidance for public authorities on the Act “A Guide to the Rural Needs Act ...

4.10 BioRural Toolkit²⁷⁴

BioRural Toolkit is an online repository of bio-based solutions that enables the interaction between rural actors and provides the ground for wider ...

4.11 Rural Coworking Toolkit - NICRE²⁷⁵

Run by the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) is an organisation that helps rural businesses and communities thrive. They focus on three interconnecting activities: filling gaps in knowledge, developing practical solutions, and providing evidence. They have made progress in these areas by securing the support of Defra, hosting knowledge exchange events, publishing research, and working with partners.

innovation efforts, sustainable growth and creation of high-value jobs with particular focus on rural areas.

4.12 Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action (europa.eu)

The Commission has recently adopted a Communication presenting a set of policy tools available to Member States for managing demographic change and its impacts on the EU's society and economy, including its global competitiveness. The Communication outlines the wide range of tools (including regulatory instruments, policy frameworks and funding) available to Member States to do so. These tools can be effectively combined with national and regional policies to empower and support everyone in reaping the benefits and smoothly face off the challenges of demographic change.

Decisive and concerted EU action to manage demographic change

The demography toolbox draws on experiences from across the EU and sets out a comprehensive approach to demographic change structured around four pillars:

- 1) support **parents** by better reconciling family aspirations and paid work, notably by ensuring access to quality childcare and good work-life balance;
- 2) supporting and empowering **younger generations** to thrive, develop their skills, facilitate their access to the labour market and to affordable housing;
- 3) empowering **older generations** and sustaining their welfare, through reforms combined with appropriate labour market and workplace policies;
- 4) where necessary, addressing labour shortages through managed legal **migration**, in full complementarity to harnessing talents from within the EU.

The toolbox recognises the need to take on board the territorial dimension of demographic shifts, specifically in regions that experience the phenomenon of population decline and a significant outward mobility of young workers ('brain drain').

Implementing the demography toolbox

The demography toolbox can help spur, fine-tune and better coordinate policies at the EU and national level. The Commission calls on Member States to develop and implement integrated policies to tackle demographic change and to mainstream demographic concerns into all policy areas.

²⁷³ [221007 NI Rural Health and Care v4 \(hscni.net\)](https://hscni.net/221007-NI-Rural-Health-and-Care-v4)

²⁷⁴ [BioRural Toolkit - BioRural](#)

²⁷⁵ <https://nicre.co.uk/case-studies/rural-coworking-toolkit/>



Member States' policies should be grounded in the local realities as demographic challenges differ across Member States and regions. Gender equality, non-discrimination and intergenerational fairness must be at the heart of policy choices. Digital technologies can boost Europe's competitive edge and help offset the impacts of demographic change. Policy-makers should promote citizens' active participation in this effort and involve all players – social partners, civil society organisations, and others.

In addition to regulatory instruments and policy frameworks, a number of financing instruments are available at EU level to support Member States, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Social Fund+ (ESF+). Furthermore, with a view to enhancing the available tools to tackle demographic challenges, the Commission will:

- Reinforce the data and evidence base, notably by further developing the Atlas of Demography, by supporting Member States in enhancing their population and housing statistics and by supporting relevant analytical activities and research;
- Support the development and/or upgrading of demography-related policies at all levels, notably by making use of the Technical Support Instrument and by mainstreaming, where appropriate, demographic concerns in relevant policy proposals at EU level;
- Ensure that no region in the EU is left behind, notably by officially launching the Harnessing Talent Platform on 23-24 November 2023 and proceeding with further calls under the Talent Booster Mechanism.

Demographic change is reshaping our economies and societies

According to a recent Eurobarometer survey on demography²⁷⁶, 7 in 10 Europeans agree that demographic trends put at risk the EU's long-term economic prosperity and competitiveness. The most pressing demographic challenges are considered to be population ageing (42%) and the shrinking of the working-age population and labour shortages (40%).

In the coming years, in the absence of concerted and decisive action on these issues, the EU population may continue to shrink and age, having a negative impact on the EU's economy, society, and long-term competitiveness. If such trends do continue, they might exacerbate labour shortages and increase pressure on public budgets, while having a profound impact on investments and productivity.

Some Member States and regions are currently more affected than others: demographic change also affects the social, territorial, and intergenerational cohesion of our democratic societies, potentially worsening existing socio-economic rifts to the detriment of everyone.

Europe is undergoing a major demographic transformation. Demographic change has a profound impact on everyday life and requires holistic and integrated solutions.

The [June 2023 European Council conclusions](#) called on the Commission to put forward a toolbox to support Member States in addressing demographic challenges and their impact on Europe's competitive edge.

The Commission is already supporting Member States in their efforts to manage demographic change through a range of legal, policy and financial instruments. Today's Communication identifies the key reforms and investments needed, using all possible instruments in combination, to maintain the EU's competitive edge.

4.13 Digital Twin on Food Flows

A digital twin on food flows provides one kind of an important rural-urban interaction mapping and high tech tool relevant to PoliRuralPlus.

Food Twin²⁷⁷ is a proof of concept digital twin of the United States food system. Recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have revealed inherent gaps in the way food systems are modelled. Particularly, these events have exposed how these shocks cascade through food systems and impact food security at an individual and community level. Digital twins of food systems hold massive potential to fill the decision making under food crises, including those caused or exacerbated by climate change.

²⁷⁶ [Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁷⁷ <https://food.theplotline.org>. Food Twin is a collaboration between [Zia Mehrabi](#) and [the Plotline](#). Application development was led by [Development Seed](#).



This tool visualises a model designed to predict where food is grown and connecting that food to where it is consumed. Each coloured point moving on the map correlates to a set number of calories from that food group. In the consumer view the map shows how the food that is consumed in a county travels to that region; in the producer view it shows where food that grows in that county is consumed and how it gets to that region. It shows the roads where food flows down from fork to fork, and how climate shocks in one region propagate through the supply chain and impact on the availability of food in consumers' food baskets.

The model that powers this tool uses satellite data and survey statistics to generate an estimate of the types of crops that are grown in different regions across the United States along with data on imported foods. Food balance sheets and consumption surveys were used to model consumption. These two data sets were connected via a matrix that took into account routes between where food is produced and consumed. Reduced yield due to climate stress was generated using statistical crop yield models. Users can find data and code they used. For interested users, including a deeper dive into the data used check out [blog post on this project](#).

4.14 Implementation toolkit of the OECD Principles on urban policy"²⁷⁸

A self-assessment framework²⁷⁹ provides a comprehensive framework for governments to assess their progress in implementing the OECD Principles on Urban Policy. The toolkit consists of two main components: a self-assessment framework and a policy database.

- **Purpose:** Helps governments assess and improve urban policies based on the OECD Principles.
- **Framework:** Four-step self-assessment:
 1. Setting objectives and scope
 2. Conducting a diagnosis using guiding questions and indicators
 3. Identifying and prioritising policy reforms
 4. Creating an action plan and report
- **Relevance to PoliRuralPlus:** While focused on urban policy, this framework can be adapted by pilots to assess their rural-urban partnerships or broader rural development initiatives. Consider modifying the guiding questions and indicators to emphasise rural development goals.

Key Resources to Consider in the Rural Context

- **Rural-Urban Partnerships Report (2013)**²⁸⁰: Offers guidance on effective rural-urban partnerships for economic development. Pilots seeking to strengthen collaboration between rural and urban areas can use this to identify key governance approaches and potential synergies.
- **Urban-Rural Linkages in Poland Report (2022)**²⁸¹: Provides frameworks for measuring linkages (flows, commuting patterns) and policy recommendations for integrated territorial development. PoliRuralPlus pilots can use this to assess and monitor the interconnectedness of their target regions.
- **Global State of National Urban Policy Report (2021)**²⁸²: Contains a survey on NUPs and 10 key recommendations. PoliRuralPlus pilots can utilise this to learn about NUP best practices and benchmark their initiatives against global trends.

²⁷⁸ [630e0341-en.pdf \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#),

²⁷⁹ OECD (2022), "Implementation toolkit of the OECD Principles on urban policy", *OECD Regional Development Papers*, No. 31, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/630e0341-en>.

²⁸⁰ OECD (2013), *Rural-Urban Partnerships: An Integrated Approach to Economic Development*, OECD Rural Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264204812-en>.

²⁸¹ OECD (2022), *Urban-Rural Linkages in Poland*, OECD Regional Development Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/94b5c782-en>.

²⁸² OECD/UN-Habitat/UNOPS (2021), *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021: Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Delivering Climate Action*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/96eee083-en>.



Other Helpful Tools

- **Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals** Provides a benchmark to measure progress toward SDGs at the regional level.
- **OECD Regional Well-being Webtool:** Allows for comparing well-being across regions against key metrics.
- **Circular Economy in Cities and Regions:** Offers policy recommendations, checklists, and examples of circular economy practices. While urban-focused, some aspects may be adaptable to the rural context.
- **Decarbonising Buildings in Cities and Regions:** Provides tools to assess policies aimed at making buildings more environmentally sustainable.
- **Effective Public Investment Toolkit:** Helps evaluate public investment capacity.
- **Online Pilot Database on Regional Government Finance and Investments:** Offers data on regional finances for comparisons.

4.14.1 How PoliRuralPlus Pilots Can Use These Resources

1. **Customise Frameworks:** Adapt the assessment frameworks from the OECD Implementation Toolkit or other reports to focus specifically on rural development and rural-urban linkages.
2. **Benchmarking:** utilise tools like the OECD Regional Well-being Webtool to compare progress against other regions and track the impact of pilot initiatives.
3. **Seek Inspiration:** Explore the best practices, case studies, and policy recommendations highlighted in these resources to inform pilot projects.
4. **Identify Gaps:** Use self-assessment tools to pinpoint existing weaknesses and areas for improvement.
5. **Data-Driven Approach:** Leverage tools like the Online Pilot Database on Regional Government Finance for data to support project planning and monitoring.

The OECD Survey on Decarbonising Buildings in Cities and Regions, policy recommendations and a checklist for public action in Decarbonising Buildings in Cities and Regions (2022)²⁸³. The OECD survey on decarbonising buildings provides useful questions for self-assessment on subnational policies and challenges, allowing cities and regions to assess current policies by identifying key obstacles and good practices in implementing building policy measures. Some of the questions can also be adapted for national governments. The policy recommendations and a checklist for public action help both national and subnational governments assess the state of play and develop policy options for improvement.

Self-assessment section of the Effective Public Investment Toolkit (2019)²⁸⁴. This tool can help governments assess the strengths and weaknesses of their public investment capacity, with a focus on the sub-national level. The proposed indicators can be used at city, regional and national levels. Comparative data on regional government accounts in Online Pilot Database on Regional Government Finance and Investments (2020)²⁸⁵ This tool can be used to analyse and compare regional government expenditure, revenue, investment, and debt, over the 2010-2016 period across 494 regional governments in the OECD and the European Union.

4.15 Recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard

Analysing these online tools the main recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus Regional Dashboard in task T2.3, focusing on its ability to help optimise rural-urban linkages are as follows:

1. **Promote Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement:**

²⁸³ OECD (2022), Decarbonising Buildings in Cities and Regions, OECD Urban Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a48ce566-en>.

²⁸⁴ [Effective Public Investment Toolkit - OECD](#)

²⁸⁵ [Regional Government Finance and Investment Database \(oecd.org\)](#).



- Incorporate features that facilitate communication and knowledge sharing among diverse stakeholders (rural residents, businesses, policymakers, researchers). This aligns with principles emphasised by the Rural Pact and the OECD.
- Provide tools for organising joint workshops, online consultations, or focus groups specifically centred on rural-urban cooperation, drawing from the Tools4CAP inventory.

2. Foster a Place-Based, Locally Driven Approach:

- -Acknowledge that rural areas are not monolithic. Ensure the dashboard allows users to customise data analysis and policy recommendations based on their region's specific characteristics.
- Include tools that help users assess challenges and opportunities within their local context, in line with OECD Principle 2 of the geographic scale of policies.

3. Focus on Optimising Rural-Urban Linkages:

- Design the dashboard to explicitly analyse and highlight the interconnections between rural and urban areas.
- Include indicators from the OECD and other toolkits that measure flows between regions (commuting patterns, trade, resource sharing), enabling the analysis of how policy changes might impact rural-urban dynamics.

4. Leverage Existing Resources:

- Integrate with existing databases and toolkits, such as those found in the Tools4CAP inventory or the Rural Toolkit on EU Funding. Avoid reinventing the wheel and aim instead to create a platform that brings valuable information together for the convenience of stakeholders.
- Ensure clear guidance on how the dashboard complements these existing resources and adds unique value for analyzing rural-urban linkages.

5. Data-Driven and Policy Focused:

- Provide access to relevant data on rural-urban dynamics (demographics, economic trends, infrastructure) for evidence-based decision-making.
- Include tools for policy analysis (such as SWOT analysis or multicriteria analysis as outlined in the Tools4CAP database) that can help users evaluate the potential impact of different policy actions on both rural and urban areas.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- emphasise the importance of tracking progress and impact. Integrate features that support monitoring frameworks with indicators specifically relevant to rural-urban linkages. This aligns with Principle 11 of the OECD Principles on Rural Policy.
- Facilitate data collection and analysis, possibly through mobile apps or online platforms, providing policymakers with real-time information.
- **User-Friendliness:** Design the dashboard with a focus on usability. Information should be easy to visualise and analyse, even for those without extensive data expertise.
- **Capacity Building:** Consider linking the dashboard with training and support resources. This can help users maximise its potential and build their skills in analysing data for improving rural-urban cooperation. This aligns with calls for capacity building from both the Rural Pact and the OECD Principles.

Example PoliRuralPlus Dashboard Features might include:



- **Interactive Maps:** Allow users to visualise rural-urban linkages spatially (e.g., commuting flows, infrastructure networks).
- **Policy Simulation Tools:** Help users understand how changes in policies (investments in rural infrastructure, incentives for urban businesses to collaborate with rural suppliers, etc.) might impact both rural and urban areas.
- **Benchmarking:** Allow regions to compare themselves against others on key indicators of rural-urban integration. This feature can leverage the OECD Regional Well-being Webtool's functionality.
- **Funding Finder:** Connect users to relevant funding opportunities tailored to their proposed initiatives with a focus on projects that strengthen rural-urban cooperation. This can integrate the functionality of the InvestEU Portal.
- **Stakeholder Community:** Provide an online forum for networking, knowledge exchange, and best practice sharing by different stakeholders involved in rural-urban cooperation.

To ensure that the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard can effectively complement and build upon existing online tools, focusing on synergies and maximising its value for stakeholders, the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard should leverage the strengths of existing tools and address noted gaps:

- **Rural Pact Community Platform:** Focuses on connecting rural stakeholders and enabling dialogue.
- **Tools4CAP Inventory:** Offers resources for designing, implementing, and assessing policies.
- **Rural Toolkit on EU Funding:** Facilitates access to funding opportunities for rural areas.
- **InvestEU Portal:** A broad investment platform for projects with potential for rural development.

Complementing Existing Tools: Key Areas for Integration

1. **Thematic Focus:** The PoliRuralPlus Dashboard should have a primary focus on optimising rural-urban linkages. This would distinguish it from more general platforms and avoid unnecessary duplication.
2. **Data Aggregation and Visualisation:** Draw on datasets from existing tools, providing a centralised platform with data specifically focused on rural-urban trends, interactions, and impact analysis of policies in both types of regions.
3. **Functionality:** utilise analysis tools from existing sources (Tools4CAP Inventory, OECD toolkits), tailoring them with a specific focus on rural-urban policy impacts. For example, a SWOT analysis could include prompts specifically highlighting cross-regional factors.
4. **User Interface:** Build a user-friendly interface specifically designed for:
 - **Regional stakeholders:** Aim for ease of use by local and regional policymakers, businesses, and community groups with varying levels of technical expertise.
 - **Rural-Urban Focus:** Visualisations and analysis features should clearly depict flows, interdependencies, and the distinct needs and contributions of both rural and urban areas.

Building on Existing Tools: How to Add Value

1. **Hyper-local Customizability:** While some tools offer regional data, allow for even more localised analysis. This will aid users in tailoring their strategies to place-specific needs in a way that broader tools might not.
2. **Rural-Urban Policy Simulation:** Develop unique functionality that helps users visualise the potential impact of policy changes on both rural and urban areas, considering their interconnectedness.



3. **Collaborative Features:** Facilitate joint planning and project design between rural and urban stakeholders.
 - Provide communication tools (forums, workshops, shared proposal development spaces) tailored to rural-urban collaboration.
 - **Funding Finder for Collaborative Initiatives:** Prioritise highlighting funding opportunities that explicitly encourage rural-urban partnerships.
4. **Best Practice Library:** Create a searchable repository of successful rural-urban cooperation projects:
 - utilise case studies, reports, and other resources, allowing users to easily learn from successful models.
 - Enable users to contribute their own examples and lessons learned, fostering a knowledge-sharing community.

Key Considerations

- **Linkages:** Provide clear navigation links to existing tools, guiding users to more detailed resources on specific topics as needed.
- **Data Sharing:** Seek partnerships with data providers to ensure the dashboard offers up-to-date analysis features.
- **Feedback Loops:** Build mechanisms for ongoing feedback and improvement based on user experiences.

By offering a specialised focus, tailored functionality, and acting as a hub for rural-urban focused insights, the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard can become a powerful asset for stakeholders working to bridge divides and optimise the potential of rural-urban linkages in Europe.

4.15.1 PoliRuralPlus Services and existing online toolkits

As discussed in Annex M, the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and tools can complement and integrate with existing toolkits, along with specific examples focused on the needs of both Sarah (Policy Analyst) and Mary (Community Development Administrator) as follows:

How PoliRuralPlus Can Enhance Existing Toolkits

- **Centralised Knowledge Hub:** PoliRuralPlus can aggregate relevant information, best practices, and funding opportunities from the various toolkits listed, saving users time and effort.
- **Tailored Insights:** PoliRuralPlus, with its focus on rural-urban linkages, offers a lens that complements broader toolkits. It can filter recommendations or insights specifically relevant to rural areas and rural-urban collaboration.
- **Data Driven Analysis:** PoliRuralPlus, by gathering and analysing rural-specific data, fills potential gaps in existing toolkits, allowing for more nuanced decision making for rural regions.

Integration Strategies

1. **Smart Referrals:** PoliRuralPlus can include links/references to relevant sections of existing toolkits within its dashboard. For example:
 - **Mary:** When exploring land repurposing, a link to the relevant part of the Rural Residential Density Toolkit appears.
 - **Sarah:** When examining a policy intervention, a link to relevant monitoring tools in the Tools4CAP inventory is provided.
2. **API Integrations (where possible):** For toolkits with APIs, PoliRuralPlus could establish live data feeds or pull real-time information, creating a more dynamic user experience. Example:
 - **Sarah:** When exploring funding opportunities, project eligibility criteria from the InvestEU Portal is automatically cross-referenced, streamlining the application process.



3. **Collaborative Knowledge Exchange:** PoliRuralPlus can facilitate a forum for users to share experiences using the various toolkits, fostering peer-to-peer learning and highlighting successful adaptations in the rural context.

4.15.2 Examples of Integrating PoliRuralPlus with Specific Toolkits

Rural Pact Community Platform

- **PoliRuralPlus Enhancement:** Dashboard features a section showcasing real-life examples of effective rural-urban stakeholder engagement inspired by the Rural Pact principles.
- **Toolkit Enhancement:** The platform could link directly to PoliRuralPlus's "What-if" scenario tool, helping stakeholders visualise the potential impacts of different collaboration models.

Tools4CAP Inventory

- **PoliRuralPlus Enhancement:** Sarah's search results on policy analysis or evaluation would include cross-references to the most applicable Tools4CAP resources.
- **Toolkit Enhancement:** Include a dedicated filter within the inventory to highlight tools explicitly focused on rural development, enhancing its utility for PoliRuralPlus users.

Rural Toolkit on EU Funding:

- **PoliRuralPlus Enhancement:** Mary accesses a simplified version of the funding finder, directly embedded within the PoliRuralPlus dashboard. It pre-filters opportunities relevant to her region's profile based on data she already inputs on PoliRuralPlus.
- **Toolkit Enhancement:** Offers links to PoliRuralPlus's best practice examples and case studies specifically for successful recipients of EU rural development funding.

Additional Considerations:

- **User Profiles:** PoliRuralPlus could have tailored user interfaces for Mary and Sarah. Sarah's view may emphasise policy analysis and benchmarking tools, while Mary's focuses on practical project planning and stakeholder engagement resources.
- **Community Generated Content:** Beyond linking to toolkits, creating a space within PoliRuralPlus where users can contribute their own tools, templates, or successful approaches enhances the value further.

4.15.3 Implementing integration of PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and existing online toolkits.

Key Success Factors

- **User-Centric Design:** Every integration should provide real value to PoliRuralPlus users.
- **Flexibility:** API availability and other technical constraints are unpredictable - build agile integration processes.
- **Communication:** Keep users informed about new integrations, how to use them, and where to provide feedback.
- **Partnerships:** Collaboration can amplify the impact of all platforms involved.

Start with simple steps demonstrating the benefits, and build towards a truly connected ecosystem of resources.

For instance, **PoliRuralPlus & Rural Toolkit on EU Funding**

1. **Smart Referral:** PoliRuralPlus embeds a simplified funding search bar, linking to the Toolkit's finder but pre-filtered based on region.
2. **API Feasibility:** Investigate if an API allows pulling real-time funding eligibility criteria into PoliRuralPlus project planning tools.
3. **Community Share:** PoliRuralPlus forum includes a section for successful use cases of toolkit integration, driving uptake.

A possible roadmap for a phased approach to implementing integration between the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and existing rural development toolkits, might be as follows:.



Phase 1: Initial Integration – Building the Foundation

- **Prioritisation:**
 - Identify toolkits with the broadest relevance to PoliRuralPlus users and the highest synergy potential (e.g., Rural Toolkit on EU Funding, InvestEU Portal).
 - Consider toolkits already used by stakeholders, making integration seamless.
- **Smart Referrals:**
 - Embed strategic links directly within the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard to relevant sections of priority toolkits.
 - Start with static links curated by the PoliRuralPlus team, ensuring they match typical user journeys.
- **Knowledge Base:**
 - Create a dedicated resource section on the PoliRuralPlus website.
 - Provide clear descriptions, usage guides, and links to all relevant toolkits, even those not yet fully integrated.

Phase 2: Enhanced Connections – Deeper Integration & Feedback

- **API Exploration:**
 - Where toolkits offer APIs, conduct a feasibility study for dynamic, two-way data exchange.
 - Consider cost/benefit - API integration can be time-consuming. Focus on features that truly streamline user experience.
- **User Feedback:**
 - Collect feedback on which toolkits users value most. This guides future integration priorities.
 - Provide surveys and space for comments on PoliRuralPlus.
- **Demonstration Project:**
 - Select 1-2 toolkits for "model" integration.
 - Showcase in a case study or webinar how PoliRuralPlus and other tools can be used together effectively.

Phase 3: Ecosystem Creation – Collaboration & Community

- **Partnership Outreach:**
 - Initiate dialogue with the owners of key toolkits.
 - Discuss potential API sharing, joint promotion efforts, or content exchange.
- **Community Forum:**
 - Establish a dedicated space within PoliRuralPlus for users to:
 - Share how they use various toolkits in conjunction.
 - Suggest new integrations.
 - Showcase successful projects resulting from toolkit integration.
- **Cross-Promotion:**
 - Include links to PoliRuralPlus within relevant sections of other toolkits.

5 Relevant Horizon 2020 projects

By 2022 the EU had supported 3,000 papers on COVID-19 research²⁸⁶ The previous two EU research funding programmes - the 7th Framework Programmes for Research, and Horizon 2020 - supported around 3,000 papers on COVID-19 research. Many of these were produced by grantees of the European Research Council (ERC), second only to the FP7 and Horizon 2020 specific health programmes. Overall, around 80% of the papers identified were supported by the Health Programme, the ERC and the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions.

²⁸⁶ [Tackling Covid-19 – the role of European research | ERC \(europa.eu\)](https://erc.europa.eu)



A 2021 Commission R&I working paper²⁸⁷ identified 2,721 COVID-19 relevant publications (as defined by the Cord-19 dataset) to which the EU research and innovation funding through the successive Framework Programmes has, at least partially, contributed (using open funding information). These publications come from a variety of components of the Framework programme, are from a diverse range of research fields and are mostly internationally co-authored and co-funded. This analysis reveals that retrospective studies involving linking of operational data (projects and results) and external data (specific datasets and bibliometric databases) can provide insights into the impact of the funding programmes, which are otherwise not captured when limiting the analysis to operational data.

The report also offers some qualitative insights on the instrumental role that the EU funding has played in tackling the pandemic. Examples include:

- The development of the first diagnostic tool, published almost immediately after the release of the Sars-cov2 virus genome
- The findings of epidemiological studies, which have been used in WHO clinical guidelines and other guidance documents.
- The seminal role played by EU funding in tackling previous coronavirus outbreaks, in particular MERS-CoV

The report presents also finding from previous analysis, which shows for instance that:

- The EU contributed a third of the funding for the development of Chadox technology on which the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is based (ranking first among listed funders)
- The EU research funding programmes significantly supported the early stages of the mRNA vaccine research of Professor Ugur Sahin. The report identified 10 grants from FP6, FP7 and Horizon 2020 totalling about €10.7 Million. They include a 600k grant from the EUs programme FP6, a €4.5 Million grant to the startup BioNTech (that brought the Pfizer vaccine to market), from the Health Programme and an ERC Advanced Grant of 2.5 Mio € from H2020.

5.1 PoliRural

H2020, PoliRural, 2019-2022, Future Oriented Collaborative Policy Development for Rural Areas and People Provides knowledge by combining key activities needed to design effective place based, human-centric and forward-looking rural policies.

Digital Innovation Hub.

Compendium of ICT supported foresight.

PoliRural Best practises Atlas.

Policy options explorer.

Rural attractiveness explorer.

PoliRural pilots' action plan and roadmap.

PoliRural regional multi-actor panel.

MID, MAC, SUA, SRY, AUA, GenAIA, TIN, SML, CCSS, P4A, SINNO, CKA, VPR

PoliRuralPlus is building directly on the PoliRural H2020 project, which developed an Action-orientated Foresight Process and ICT Tool Box that was validated by 12 Regional Action Plans (RAP) focused on rural areas and people.

The PoliRural project emphasised the importance of taking an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to rural-urban development, and called for more concerted action at the local, regional, national, and European levels to promote sustainable and inclusive development across rural and urban areas. Key recommendations for further work included:

- Developing and implementing new governance models that are better suited for addressing the complex and interconnected challenges facing rural and urban areas.
- Enhancing the capacity of local and regional authorities to develop and implement effective integrated rural-urban strategies.

²⁸⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Mugabushaka, A., *Meeting the pandemic challenges – Contribution of EU R&I funding to COVID-19 related research*, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/616617>



- Improving communication and collaboration between different stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, civil society organisations, and private sector actors.
- Fostering innovation in areas such as digital technologies, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy to promote economic development and environmental sustainability in rural areas.
- Ensuring that rural areas are included in national and European policy frameworks, and that policies are tailored to meet the specific needs and characteristics of rural areas.
- Strengthening the evidence base on integrated rural-urban development through rigorous research and evaluation of policies and interventions.

Its “ Future Outlooks Methodology²⁸⁸” document provides a suggested methodology for the exploration of Future Outlooks. The term itself is ambiguous. It is given meaning by embedding it as a specific process in the overall Foresight methodology being adapted by the Foresight in each of the 12 regions of the project. The document starts by describing the work done so far or currently underway in each of the regions.

By describes the remaining work that to be done, in order to complete the production of the Foresight package, namely the Foresight Vision, Action Plan and Roadmap, whose implementation will be followed by WP6. Based on this framework, the Future Outlooks methodology has its place in the development of the action plan. It involves the creation of scenarios representing regional programs for growth and development to be implemented by appropriate agents of the public sector. It concludes with the selection of scenarios that are in some sense deemed to be “optimal.” One of the innovative aspects of this approach is the use the development of Future Outlooks as a laboratory for experimenting with the application of System Dynamic Modelling. The expectation is that this will improve understanding by stakeholders of the dynamics of regional socio-economic systems, the mutual interactions between measures, the way they evolve over time and their impact on the region as measured by key performance indicators. It is hoped that this will lead to fuller participation by stakeholders in decision making related to the design of programs for regional growth and development. The application of this methodology relies on the use of accompanying tools and resources, some of which have already been developed, many of which will be developed in the coming months. These include: • The STEEPV Inventory of Drivers of Change • The Guides to Deep Dives on o COVID-19, o The Green Deal, o CAP reform, o The role of Biodiversity in rural economies, • The Inventory of policy options. They include key project deliverables of WP5, in particular those dealing with the application of SDM, represented by deliverables D5.1-5, the software tools and datasets to which these refer as well as the alpha- and beta- three-layer SDM models described later on in this text.

Thanks to everyone who attended yesterday’s webinar. I want to thank especially Gabriel and John from the Monaghan pilot, Santa from the Vidzeme pilot, and Tuula from the Southern Finland pilot, who shared feedback based on their experience with doing Foresight in the POLIRURAL project. Thanks also to those who are new and commented or asked questions, and to those who shared useful links in the chat. The links are provided below...

The WP3 webinar on 27 March 2023 reviewed the following learnings from PoliRural²⁸⁹ The main points covered in the webinar were as follows

- A review the policy challenge faced by local government in rural (and urban) areas
- Their need to respond to an increasing number of issues on shorter time-scales
- Their need to include “finding finance” as a part of the action plan
- Their need for tools to enable local government to
- What was done in terms of Foresight in POLIRURAL,
- What resources were created, which can be reused or adapted in POLIRURAL plus

²⁸⁸ <https://polirural.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/D1.8..pdf>

²⁸⁹ See https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1R_gse2KUscIAefZLMPWaCml5zGbQhBfk/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=103938768336576879168&rtfpof=true&sd=true



Referred links included the following

- The POLIRURAL website: <https://polirural.eu/>
- The pilot page: <https://polirural.eu/pilots/>
- The Foresight Results Page: <https://polirural.eu/results/foresight-results/>
- The Compendium of Foresight Pilots : https://polirural.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Summary-of-PoliRural-Compendium-of-Regional-Foresight-Initiatives_final.pdf
- Recommendations for the future: <https://polirural.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Lessons-and-Recommendations.pdf>
- The More Local Staff for Climate campaign: <https://www.localstaff4climate.eu/>
- The PROSPECT+ project to train local administrators on innovative finance: <https://www.h2020prospect.eu/>
- The EU Vision for rural areas: https://rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-vision_en
- The vision for Slovakia: https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/news/new-slovak-vision-more-attractive-rural-areas_en
- The EU action plan for rural areas: https://rural-vision.europa.eu/action-plan_en
- The shared goals of the LTVRA: https://rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-vision/shared-goals_en
- The Rural Toolkit: <https://funding.rural-vision.europa.eu/?lng=en>
- The Rural Observatory: https://rural-vision.europa.eu/maps-data_en
- Introducing Functional rural areas: https://rural-vision.europa.eu/maps-data_en#functional-rural-areas
- The ENRD: https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/enrd-thematic-work/long-term-rural-vision/long-term-rural-vision-portal_en.html
- The CAP network: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/index_en

5.1.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

An analysis of the above links and learnings from PoliRural on how the PoliRuralPlus pilots could address challenges commonly faced by rural and urban areas, along with examples and recommendations for maximising the benefits of optimising urban-rural linkages are as follows:

Understanding Urban-Rural Linkages

- Interdependence: Urban and rural areas are not isolated. They rely on each other for resources, economic opportunities, and social well-being.
- Shared Challenges: Both rural and urban areas can face issues like climate change impacts, ageing populations, and limited access to services.
- Strengths and Weaknesses: Understand the unique assets (e.g., natural resources, cultural heritage in rural areas; innovation hubs, skilled workforce in urban areas) and the challenges each area faces.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus Pilots

1. Highlighting Common Challenges
 - Joint Needs Assessment: Collaboratively identify challenges faced by both rural and nearby urban areas. This could include:
 - Climate adaptation measures
 - Infrastructure needs (transport, digital connectivity)
 - Attracting skilled workers
 - Coordinated Response Initiatives: Develop proposals addressing these common challenges in a way that benefits both rural and urban components of the pilot. For example:
 - Joint renewable energy projects
 - Shared digital infrastructure and skills training programs
 - Marketing campaigns promoting regional eco-tourism
2. Accessing EU Funding Opportunities



- Targeted Research: Research existing EU funding programs explicitly focused on fostering urban-rural collaboration and cohesion. Align pilot project proposals with these funding priorities.
 - Partnership Development: Seek out urban counterparts as project partners. Strong urban-rural partnerships increase the competitiveness of funding applications.
 - utilise Existing Networks: Leverage networks developed within PoliRuralPlus to identify potential funding opportunities and potential partners within urban areas.
3. Promoting Cohesion
- Awareness Campaigns: Raise awareness among communities in both rural and urban parts of the pilot about their interdependence. This fosters an understanding of shared benefits from collaboration.
 - Joint Events and Exchanges: Organise events, workshops, or exchange programs bringing together stakeholders from across the urban-rural spectrum.
 - Policy Recommendations: Use the pilot findings to inform policy recommendations at the regional or even national level that promote a cohesive and integrated approach to urban-rural development.

Important Considerations for PoliRuralPlus Pilots

- Diversity: Recognize the unique dynamics and needs of each pilot region. Tailor strategies accordingly.
- Adaptability: Be flexible in your approaches. Urban-rural collaboration is an evolving field, and pilot projects should iterate their strategies based on lessons learned.
- Communication Is Key: emphasise the value of urban-rural collaboration in all external communications about the pilot, to both potential partners and funders.

Analysing its “Inventory of Policy Options Part 1: Sources of Finance” the conclusions to optimise urban-rural linkages in PoliRuralPlus are:

1. Policy initiatives must be funded. So PoliRuralPlus will identify and develop a range of funding options to support the implementation of its action plans by expanding on this report.
2. There are a wide range of funding options available. These options include grants, loans, bonds, concessions, crowdfunding, and public-private partnerships.
3. PoliRuralPlus will consider the specific needs of each region when selecting funding options. Some regions may be better suited to certain types of funding than others.
4. PoliRuralPlus will develop a financing strategy that outlines how it will secure the necessary funding for its action plans. This strategy will include a timeline for securing funding and a contingency plan for unforeseen events.
5. PoliRuralPlus will monitor its progress in securing funding and make adjustments to its strategy as needed.

So PoliRuralPlus will support each pilot to:

1. Develop a financial analysis of each action plan to identify the total funding needed, identifying the specific
 - a. funding needs of each measure in the action plan.
2. Identify potential funding sources for each measure in in action plans, including both public and private sources of funding.
3. Assess the feasibility of each funding option to select the most appropriate options for each measure, by considering factors such as the availability of funding, the terms of the funding, and the risk associated with each option.
4. Develop a financing plan that outlines how the pilot will secure the necessary funding, with a timeline for securing funding and a contingency plan for unforeseen events.
5. Monitor the progress in securing funding and make adjustments to the financing plan as needed, ensuring that each plan has the resources it needs to succeed.



5.2 RURBAN - Partnership for sustainable rural-urban development: existing evidences

The RURBAN²⁹⁰ study reported on rural-urban partnerships backed up on examples to show good or best practice, to demonstrate approaches, difficulties as well as their solutions and to learn about the effort and output of these initiatives. The empirical situation is fragmented, because the approaches seem to be very different, and often, projects are labelled in a different way – not only as rural-urban co-operation or rural-urban alliances, but sometimes even not mentioning the rural-urban context at all, although doing so. This starting point is complex, anyhow, the broad portfolio of approaches across Europe is an asset, because it enables to rely on very different experiences in various settings with different local actors. The study concludes

1. Although there are many good examples of rural-urban partnerships throughout Europe, most of them located in the old member states, it is still not a widely spread development approach.
2. The Territorial Agenda 2020 with its focus on functional regions is an important step for promoting rural-urban partnerships. Anyhow, their general acceptance has not yet fully emerged.
3. Rural-urban partnerships can be an approach to combine both growth and balance in urban and rural regions. The connection of all complementary and similar potentials and the existing linkages are the basis for a partnership.
4. Both urban and rural regions with their individual potentials have the chance to contribute, and the idea of a partnership implies also that both should benefit.
5. Rural-urban partnerships are an ample concept in spatial, in thematic and in governance terms. As specific form of inter-municipal cooperation, there is a great variety in formal status, structures, composition, size, spatial levels and scope.
6. The establishment of rural-urban partnerships needs time and small steps can be of high importance for a region. This is especially the case in regions without a longer tradition of regional co-operation.
7. The spatial extent of rural-urban partnerships ends where places cannot contribute any more with their potentials to the partnership and where the linkages become scant.
8. Based on the Lisbon Treaty and the new Community objective of territorial cohesion as well as the priorities of the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020, the European cohesion and rural development policy should provide coordinated support to rural-urban partnerships.
9. The EU should apply a flexible and multi-level approach for promoting rural-urban partnerships in line with the diverse national and regional legal, political and administrative framework for inter-municipal cooperation.
10. In its role as a supranational facilitator, the EU can help to further develop the rural-urban partnership approach by promoting existing examples and by acting as an important networking platform across the EU member states.
11. ERDF, ESF, EAFRD and EMFF can provide finance to a broad range of topics relevant for rural-urban partnerships (e.g. social services and basic infrastructure, economic development, management of natural and cultural resources). However, they are rather implemented in a sectoral approach and less in form of a functional area.
12. Due to its place-based and integrated, functional territorial approach, rural-urban partnerships valuably contribute to a better funds coordination and to achieve the aim of territorial cohesion.
13. Integrated territorial development strategies and governance processes for functional areas should become a stronger basis for EU funding and receive direct technical and financial EU support.

²⁹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/urban-rural-linkages/rurban_study_long.doc



14. Rural-urban projects should get direct access to EU funding by an own operational multi-fund budget for functional areas and/or a funding preference in different programmes.
15. The proposed joint legal and strategic framework for cohesion and rural development policy post 2013 provides a good basis for integrated territorial approaches and rural-urban partnerships. It is now up to the member states and regions to use the EU funds for promoting rural-urban partnerships in a pro-active way.
16. The partnership contracts and operational programmes shall clearly set out an integrated territorial development approach with rural-urban partnerships at its heart and provide mechanisms for inter-fund coordination and joint multi-fund programming and funding.
17. The operational programmes should include specific priorities or measures for integrated territorial development for urban, peri-urban, rural and rural-urban areas and apply mechanisms for sub-delegation to functional areas.
18. The proposed territorial instruments of “Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)” and “Community Led Local Development (CLLD)” can be used for supporting rural-urban partnerships and for pooling funding from different CSF funds.
19. To strengthen the legal and strategic basis in favour of rural-urban partnerships the regulation for all CSF funds would need to
 - explicitly mention functional (rural-urban) areas as spatial category for integrated territorial development approaches (besides the named urban and rural territories),
 - extend the option of multi-fund programming to EAFRD (EMFF) and in parallel also include EAFRD (EMFF) funding in the construction of ITIs,
 - extend the geographical and population scope of CLLD to larger areas encompassing urban and rural territories in the case of rural-urban partnerships.
20. The European Commission should launch a specific initiative “RURBAN” for experimentation, innovative pilot actions, capacity building and policy development funded by Art. 9 of the future ERDF regulation in combination with EAFRD means. This initiative could develop a “RURBAN Acquis” to be shared and spread by various existing European and national networks which constitutes the basis for future support to rural-urban partnerships through EU funding.

5.2.1 Learnings for the PoliRuralPlus project

Analysing this study and its conclusions, the main learnings for the PoliRuralPlus project are as follows::

1. **Rural-urban partnerships can be an effective approach to combine both growth and balance in urban and rural regions.**
 - a. The study found that rural-urban partnerships can help to connect the strengths and resources of both urban and rural areas, leading to more balanced and sustainable development. By pooling resources and expertise, rural-urban partnerships can address common challenges such as economic development, infrastructure, and social services.
2. **Both urban and rural regions have the opportunity to contribute to rural-urban partnerships, and both should benefit from them.**
 - a. The study emphasise s that rural-urban partnerships should be based on a mutual exchange of benefits. Urban areas can provide access to markets, services, and technologies, while rural areas can offer natural resources, cultural heritage, and a sense of community. When partnerships are well-designed, both urban and rural areas can benefit from the collaboration.
3. **Rural-urban partnerships can vary greatly in their size, scope, and governance structure.**
 - a. The study found that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to rural-urban partnerships. Partnerships can be small or large, focus on a specific issue or a broad range of issues, and be led by local governments, businesses, or citizen groups. The key is to find a structure that works for the specific context and needs of the partnership.
4. **Rural-urban partnerships need time to develop and build trust.**



- a. The study found that it can take time for rural-urban partnerships to become established and effective. Building trust between partners from different backgrounds and cultures is essential for successful collaboration.
5. **The European Union can play a role in supporting rural-urban partnerships by providing funding, technical assistance, and policy guidance.**
 - a. The study recommends that the European Union provide more support for rural-urban partnerships, such as funding for pilot projects, training for local leaders, and policy recommendations that encourage cooperation between urban and rural areas.

The PoliRuralPlus project can use these learnings to develop a strategy for supporting rural-urban partnerships in Europe. The project will focus on providing resources and training to local governments and organisations, promoting best practices, and advocating for policies that support rural-urban cooperation.

5.3 RURBANIVE - RUrban-uRBAN synergies emerged in an immersIVE innovation ecosystem

RURBANIVE will establish a novel Rural-Urban innovation framework, supported by technical and social innovations to enhance territorial governance and existing policy tools.

A community store of Rural-Urban Enablers realised through Rural-Urban immersiveness (RUI) will promote experimentation and innovation focused on building up the well-being economies of rural and urban areas. In addition, a Community of Practice Suite will challenge the current status quo by putting rural citizens at the centre of policy.

Together, they will enable rural-urban interactions through enhanced social connectivity, cooperation, and instant realisation. Participatory processes will support dialogue and cooperation and enable stakeholders to assess and evaluate processes and future scenarios that contribute further to the development of synergies and recommendations.

RURBANIVE seeks to foster stronger connections and balanced growth between rural and urban areas through the concept of Rural-Urban Immersiveness (RUI). RUI emphasise s:

- **Integrated Strategies:** Connecting rural and urban development, bridging gaps in policy, and fostering shared visions for territories.
- **New Economic Opportunities:** Stimulating innovation, diversification, and circularity, generating employment locally.
- **Improved Services & Connectivity:** Enhancing access to crucial services like healthcare, education, and transport, with a focus on digital solutions.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Prioritising green infrastructure, sustainable resource management, and fostering climate resilience across rural-urban linkages.

Key Components & Tools

- **RURBANIVE Enablers:** These are factors identified as crucial for successful rural-urban collaboration (e.g., governance, knowledge exchange, accessibility).
- **Case Studies:** The project analyses successful models of RUI in areas like mobility, food systems, energy, social inclusion, and more.
- **RURBANIVE Roadmap:** A practical guide and toolbox for local and regional actors to implement their own strategies.

5.3.1 Implications and recommendations for PoliRuralPlus include:

- **Adopting RUI lens:** PoliRuralPlus can draw inspiration from the RURBANIVE approach to better integrate rural areas into regional development strategies.
- **Importance of Enablers:** The project highlights the significance of elements like governance partnerships, capacity building, and targeted financing. PoliRuralPlus should ensure support for these underlying drivers within pilot projects.



- Learning from Case Studies: The wide range of examples provides valuable templates for adapting and replicating success stories for PoliRuralPlus pilot regions.
- Action-Oriented Focus: RURBANIVE's Roadmap aligns well with PoliRuralPlus' ambition to deliver tangible outcomes. It offers valuable tools for translating concepts into action.

Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

The RURBANIVE project demonstrates that rural-urban linkages are not just about physical proximity but about collaboration, shared innovation, and mutual benefit. PoliRuralPlus can benefit significantly by incorporating these principles into its strategies and tools.

In particular PoliRuralPlus should:

1. analyse RURBANIVE Enablers: Assess the current strengths and weaknesses of pilot regions in terms of governance, skills, and resources, referencing the RURBANIVE framework.
2. Focus on Transferability: Identify RURBANIVE case studies closely matching pilot areas' challenges and opportunities and prioritise learning from them.
3. Integration into Pilot Projects: Ensure pilot initiatives align with the principles of RUI, actively fostering linkages, sustainability, and aiming for co-benefits across rural-urban divides.
4. Collaboration & Knowledge Exchange: Facilitate a platform for cross-pilot learning, building RURBANIVE insights into the PoliRuralPlus process.

5.4 SHERPA

H2020, 2019-2023, Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors Recommendations for future policies by creating a science-society-policy interface.

Policy makers engagement protocols. Position papers for rural areas. Monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques.

5.4.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

The project issued its second set of recommendations for future rural policies in December 2023²⁹¹. Analysing these the main recommendations for the PoliRuralPlus project are:

1. **Establish and maintain Science-Society-Policy interfaces aimed at fostering interactions, deliberation and decision-making.** These multi-actor platforms have shown to be effective hubs for the co-creation of solutions to tackle complex issues faced by rural areas.
 - a. The PoliRuralPlus project could support this by facilitating collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and rural communities to develop evidence-based policies that address the challenges and opportunities facing rural areas.
2. **Empower rural citizens through existing or new governance structures which draw upon approaches such as LEADER and CLLD.** These structures, paired with appropriate capacity building, will empower rural citizens to participate in citizen-led allocation of funds and to be directly implicated in opportunities such as Horizon Europe rural projects.
 - a. The PoliRuralPlus project could support this by providing training and resources to help rural communities develop their own governance structures and to participate in decision-making processes.
3. **Establish exchange programmes, e.g. Rural Erasmus, which will enable the exchange of experiences between rural areas on Europe facing similar social problems.** This will foster the exchange of good practices and help rural areas to learn from each other's successes and failures.

²⁹¹ [SHERPA-D7.5-Second-Set-of-Recommendations-for-development-of-Future-Rural-Policies.pdf \(rural-interfaces.eu\)](#)



- a. The PoliRuralPlus project could support this by providing funding and support for exchange programmes.
4. **Develop citizen-led approaches to climate action aimed at stimulating place-based, territorial actions.** This will encourage rural communities to take ownership of their own climate action plans and to develop solutions that are tailored to their specific needs and circumstances.
 - a. The PoliRuralPlus project could support this by providing funding and technical assistance to help rural communities develop and implement their own climate action plans.
5. **Encourage local food provision, including actions to stimulate entrepreneurial initiatives within local and sustainable value chains.** This will help to create jobs in the rural economy and to ensure that rural communities have access to fresh, locally produced food.
 - a. The PoliRuralPlus project could support this by providing funding and support to help rural communities develop local food production and distribution systems.

5.5 PROSPECTPLUS²⁹²

PROSPECT+ is building on the results and success of the previous H2020 project – PROSPECT that enabled over 150 cities and regions to learn from their peers about innovative financing schemes and how implement sustainable energy projects. Now, the aim is to engage over 300 Public Authorities (PAs), and over 400 public officers. This will be accomplished through the Capacity Building Programme and additional replication activities.

Cities are the main contributors to pollution and climate change, but they also have the power and opportunity to deliver the highest savings, provide a good example and drive the energy transition. Financing local authorities' sustainable energy and climate projects is hindered primarily by a lack of internal capacity to identify the most appropriate and cost-effective financing instruments and implementation models.

In this respect, PROSPECT+ continues to support EU cities and regions on their way to successfully implement their local energy and climate actions using innovative financing. The Capacity- Building Programme aims to promote synergies and enhance city decision-making processes regarding the implementation of energy efficiency measures. The Capacity- Building Programme consists of five (5) thematic learning modules 1. Public Buildings, 2. Private Buildings, 3. Transport, 4. Public Lighting, 5. Cross Sectoral:

5.6 SMARTA

The SMARTA project aimed to improve accessibility and mobility in rural areas of Europe through the use of shared mobility and public transport solutions. The project identified several challenges faced by rural areas, including limited public transport options, car dependence, and an ageing population. To address these challenges, the SMARTA project proposed a three-phase pathway for the development of rural shared mobility solutions:

1. Phase 1: Experimentation and Learning: This phase would involve piloting new shared mobility and public transport solutions in rural areas, such as carpooling, demand-responsive transport, and microtransit.
2. Phase 2: Scaling Up and Replication: This phase would focus on scaling up successful pilot projects and replicating them in other rural areas.
3. Phase 3: Mainstreaming and Integration: This phase would aim to mainstream shared mobility and public transport into rural transport planning and policy.

The SMARTA project also identified a number of good practices and solutions that could be implemented in rural areas, such as:

- Demand-responsive transport: This type of transport service provides rides on flexible routes and schedules, based on real-time demand.

²⁹² [Home | PROSPECT+ \(h2020prospect.eu\)](https://h2020prospect.eu)



- Carpooling: This involves sharing car rides with other people who are travelling in the same direction.
- Microtransit: This type of public transport uses small, flexible vehicles to provide on-demand services in areas with low ridership.
- Integration of different modes of transport: This involves making it easier for people to switch between different modes of transport, such as walking, cycling, public transport, and shared mobility.

The SMARTA project concluded that there is a need for an EU action plan to support the development of sustainable shared mobility and public transport solutions in rural areas. Such an action plan could help to overcome the challenges faced by rural areas and improve accessibility and mobility for all residents.

5.6.1 Recommendations for PoliRuralPlus

An Analysis of SMARTA indicates that the top recommendations SMARTA could make for PoliRuralPlus:

1. prioritise shared mobility solutions in rural areas: Integrate shared mobility options like carpooling, demand-responsive transport, and microtransit into PoliRuralPlus pilot projects. These solutions can address challenges like limited public transport and car dependence in rural areas, enhancing accessibility and connectivity. SMARTA's experience with piloting and evaluating such solutions can be valuable to PoliRuralPlus.
2. Focus on seamless integration and user experience: Ensure smooth integration of shared mobility and public transport options within PoliRuralPlus initiatives. Develop user-friendly apps, ticketing systems, and information channels to encourage adoption and overcome potential barriers for residents unfamiliar with these services. SMARTA's insights on user experience and behavioural change can be crucial here.
3. Build capacity and partnerships for long-term sustainability: Equip local authorities and stakeholders in PoliRuralPlus pilot areas with the knowledge, skills, and resources to manage and sustain shared mobility solutions beyond the project lifespan. Facilitate partnerships between public and private actors, drawing on SMARTA's experience in fostering collaboration and securing funding for rural mobility initiatives.

These recommendations would leverage SMARTA's expertise in shared mobility for rural areas, aligning with PoliRuralPlus' objectives of promoting connectivity, innovation, and inclusive development. By integrating these suggestions, PoliRuralPlus can further enhance its impact on rural communities and contribute to a more sustainable and equitable transportation landscape across Europe.

The SMARTA Insight Papers at <https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/insight-papers-page/> give the framework within which collective and shared mobility services are planned and implemented affects and impacts substantially on quality of life in rural areas. The framework involves from one side the planning and organisation of the transport services and the management and coordination of the different local mobility measures. The SMARTA Consortium carried out an in-depth analysis of the rural mobility frameworks in the EU-28 Member States (plus other countries such as Albania, Macedonia, Moldova, Canada, and Australia) which resulted in the production of a set of Insight Papers, documents that describe the framework (policy, obligations, resources, targets, etc.) within which rural shared mobility sits in a specific country.

5.7 Other Projects

Project	Comments & Relevance to PoliRuralPlus
AgriHub	H2020, AgriHub CZ&SK,2021-2022, Digital innovation hub for agri-food domain. Promotes digital innovation and realisation of Innovation Experiments (IEs). Experimental culture to promote Innovation experiments (IE) for the Czech Republic (pilot 6) and Slovakia (pilot 2).



Cities2030	H2020, Cities2030, 2020-2024, Co-creating resilient and sustainable urban food systems Innovation Action which aims to co-create future-proof and effective Urban Food Systems. Cities2030 fosters City Region Food System transformation. Innovation Action that applies Experimental Culture and open innovation principles. System Thinking and System Dynamics Modelling. Multi-Actor Approach Tool, to monitor and measure engagement and effectiveness of the common/individual actions aligned with PoliRuralPlus.
COASTAL	COASTAL, H2020, COASTAL, 2018-2022 Enhancing coastal-rural collaboration and synergies. System Dynamics approach to deliver Knowledge Exchange Platform ¹⁵ . PoliRuralPlus examines the solution and available data in Task 7.3. Open access resources+meetings
EMFAF	EMFAF, 2023-2025, Women in the Blue Economy Support, mentoring and coaching of Women entrepreneurs coming from coastal or island regions. Bi-directional engagement with PoliRuralPlus actions that are targeting women from rural or coastal areas to share lessons learnt.
Enfasys	HE, Enfasys, 2022-2026, Encouraging Farmers towards sustainable farming Systems through policy and business Strategies Aim is to foster a transition to sustainable, and resilient farming systems by policy and business interventions and strategies. Systems analysis, behavioural and experimental studies, during project implementation will uncover lock-ins and will design policy mixes, business strategies and social innovations, which might be used as baselines for this project.
FoodRuS	H2020, FoodRuS, 2020-2024, An Innovative Collaborative Circular Food System Aims to limit food losses and waste, and to promote resource efficiency across agri-food value chain. Examine and replicate Circular Economy solutions to agri-food chain resource efficiency, performance and yield. Projects Main aim of the project Potential uptake Resource
FOODSHIFT 2030	
PLOUTOS	H2020, PLOUTOS, 2020-2023, Data-driven sustainable agri-food value chains The project will develop a Sustainable Innovation Framework. Promote to leverage agri-food related data sources to leverage food value chain performance, sustainability, and business options.
QuantiFarm	HE, QuantiFarm, 2022-2025, Assessing impact technology solutions in agriculture To further deployment of digital technologies and assessment framework in agriculture. The concept of DAT (Digital technologies in agriculture) and cost v.s DAT assessment framework.
ROBUST	ROBUST (e.g., rural-urban learning hub), H2020, ROBUST, 2017-2021 Unlocking Rural-Urban Synergies. PoliRuralPlus exploits Rural-Urban Learning Hub ¹³ at project capacity-building actions at pilots and to nurture knowledge exchange in Task 7.3. Open access resources+meetings
RURALURE,	
RURITAGE	RURITAGE, H2020, RURITAGE, 2018-2021 Heritage for Rural Regeneration. PoliRuralPlus examines RURITAGE solution: 'From Role Models to Replicators' ¹⁴ in T7.3. Open access resources + meetings
SmartCulTour,	
TEXTOUR	TEXTOUR, H2020, TExTOUR, 2021-2024 + H2020, SmartCulTour Participative and smart cultural tourism in rural areas and regions. PoliRuralPlus pilots whose focus area is rural tourism, explore in T7.3 in meetings the findings of TExTOUR and SmartCulTour. Such pilots are e.g. Ireland, Finland, Greece. Open access resources + meetings
MOVING	MOuntain Valorisation through INterconnectedness and Green growth

5.8 Managing Complex Change

As discussed in PoliRuralPlus D5.1 "Prepared pilot by Stakeholder Multi-Actor Approach" the RAPs require complex changes to achieve real and lasting impact. The Lippitt-Knoster Model²⁹³ is a framework designed to guide the process of implementing and managing complex change within organisations or communities. It outlines seven

²⁹³ [Lippitt-Knoster Model article](#)



crucial phases that, when followed systematically, increase the likelihood of successful change initiatives. These phases are:

1. **Sense of Urgency:** Establishing a shared understanding of the need for change and its importance.
2. **Guiding Coalition:** Forming a team of influential individuals who will lead and champion the change effort.
3. **Vision and Strategy:** Developing a clear and inspiring vision for the future, along with a well-defined strategy to achieve it.
4. **Communication:** Effectively communicating the vision and strategy to all stakeholders, ensuring their understanding and buy-in.
5. **Empowerment:** Empowering individuals and teams to take action and contribute to the change effort.
6. **Short-Term Wins:** Creating and celebrating small victories along the way to maintain momentum and motivation.
7. **Consolidation and Institutionalisation:** Solidifying the changes made and integrating them into the organisation's culture and systems.

The Lippitt-Knoster Model emphasises six key components necessary for managing complex change: vision, consensus, skills, incentives, resources, and an action plan. The absence of any component can lead to negative outcomes such as confusion, sabotage, anxiety, resistance, frustration, or false starts (as discussed in D5.1)

5.8.1 Implications for the PoliRuralPlus Pilots RAPs

The Lippitt-Knoster Model offers valuable insights for the PoliRuralPlus pilots as they develop and implement their Regional Action Plans (RAPs). Implementing the following elements can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the RAPs, ensuring sustainable and inclusive rural-urban development across the regions

1. **Vision:** Ensure a clear and shared vision for each pilot to prevent confusion.
2. **Consensus:** Build consensus among stakeholders to avoid resistance and sabotage.
3. **Skills:** Provide necessary training to mitigate anxiety.
4. **Incentives:** Create incentives to engage stakeholders and reduce resistance.
5. **Resources:** Ensure adequate resources to prevent frustration.
6. **Action Plan:** Develop detailed action plans to avoid false starts and maintain momentum.

The following are some tailored recommendations for each PoliRuralPlus pilot's Regional Action Plan (RAP) to optimise rural-urban linkages and opportunities, based on their unique contexts and themes so far:

- **Building Consensus and Momentum:** The initial phases of the model emphasise the importance of creating a shared sense of urgency and building a strong coalition of supporters. This is crucial for the PoliRuralPlus pilots to gain buy-in from diverse stakeholders and generate momentum for their RAPs.
- **Strategic Planning and Communication:** The model's emphasis on developing a clear vision and strategy, along with effective communication, aligns with the PoliRuralPlus approach of using data-driven insights and collaborative planning to create impactful RAPs.
- **Empowerment and Participation:** By empowering local communities and stakeholders to take ownership of the change process, the PoliRuralPlus pilots can foster a sense of ownership and ensure that the RAPs are implemented effectively and sustainably.
- **Celebrating Success:** Recognizing and celebrating short-term wins is essential for maintaining motivation and building momentum for long-term change. The PoliRuralPlus pilots can use this principle to showcase the positive impacts of their RAPs and encourage continued support from stakeholders.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** The final phase of the model focuses on consolidating and institutionalising the changes made. This is crucial for the PoliRuralPlus pilots to ensure that the positive impacts of their RAPs are sustained over time and become embedded in the region's development trajectory.

By incorporating the principles of the Lippitt-Knoster Model, the PoliRuralPlus pilots can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of their RAPs, fostering positive change and creating a lasting impact on rural-urban linkages and development in their regions.



6 Annex L: PoliRuralPlus Pilots' Regional Action Plans

Building on the discussions and learnings in this deliverable and its Annexes, the GenAI was trained on the aims, objectives and methodology of PoliRuralPlus, and its 9 pilot regions (based on their DoA summaries in this Annex, and updates in WP5 and WP7). The GenAI was then used to analyse and provide recommendations for each pilot's Regional Action Plan (RAP) to optimise their rural-urban linkages and opportunities, based on the data of best practices and lessons learned in the references of the PoliRuralPlus domain database knowledge space. The process is described in Annex B.

As a Proof of Concept (POC) and to explore how the PoliRuralPlus references database knowledge space might be best used by the Dashboard in T2.3, both Gemini Advanced and ChatGPT4 were trained on PoliRuralPlus and its 9 pilot regions, based on their summaries in this Annex A and their in WP7. To optimise each region's rural-urban linkages, both Generative AIs (GenAI) recommended integrating insights from diverse sources in their Regional Action Plans (RAPs). This integration would foster a more holistic approach towards achieving sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development across rural and urban areas. Their specific recommendations for each pilot are shown in the second and third columns of the following table. Both GenAIs then analysed the database of all of the references in this deliverable for their diverse sources and wealth of information, to generate the fourth and fifth column recommendations for each pilot's RAP.

Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
1. Ireland / Monaghan County (MID, MAC)	<p>Focus on the Green Economy: Explore pathways for green business development, startups, and social enterprises with job creation potential. Highlight opportunities in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable tourism. Link these opportunities to available broadband services and the untapped potential in your rural areas.</p> <p>Skills and Talent Development: Identify emerging green economy sectors and innovative practices. Research and training initiatives in these areas will boost the skills of the local workforce, leading to better-paying jobs and economic growth for the County.</p> <p>Strategic Collaboration: Facilitate collaboration between urban and rural areas to foster innovation and attract potential talent from urban centres.</p>	<p>Develop Green Economy**: Foster enterprise development in the green economy to create jobs and stimulate growth through green businesses, startups, and social enterprises.</p> <p>Broadband Utilisation**: maximise the potential of broadband rollout for service provision and employment, especially in remote rural areas, to bridge the digital divide.</p> <p>- **Cultural and Economic Integration**: Encourage the integration of diverse communities into the local economy to enhance cultural richness and economic vibrancy.</p>	<p>Theme: Green Economy, Skills, and Strategic Collaboration</p> <p>Skill-Focused Green Job Initiative: Launch a skills audit to pinpoint the precise skill sets that future green industries in the County will demand. Develop training programs, apprenticeships, and upskilling schemes in partnership with local educational institutions and green businesses.</p> <p>Green Tech Incubation and Support: Establish a rural-focused green technology incubator to nurture startups, offer mentoring, and provide access to seed funding. This can be enhanced with knowledge transfer partnerships with urban tech hubs.</p> <p>Regional Green Branding and Marketing: Collaborate with urban areas to develop a unified regional branding strategy focused on Monaghan's green credentials, highlighting its commitment to renewable energy, sustainable practices, and eco-tourism.</p>	<p>Develop a green enterprise hub to support startups and SMEs in the environmental sector, focusing on innovation in sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and eco-tourism.</p> <p>- Focus on the Green Economy: emphasise green business development with an eye on renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable tourism, leveraging broadband to connect and uplift rural areas.</p> <p>- Skills and Talent Development: Target skill gaps and foster talent in emerging green sectors through dedicated training and research initiatives.</p>



Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
2. Slovakia (SUA, WPMS)	<p>Vision and Revitalisation: Ensure your "Vision for more attractive rural areas" document is widely disseminated and feeds into public consultations. Build awareness of its potential impact on the ground to attract broad stakeholder interest.</p> <p>Cross-Sectoral Alliances: Establish cross-sectoral governmental platforms to overcome siloed approaches in addressing rural challenges. Engage diverse stakeholders to collaborate on solutions.</p> <p>National Policy Influence: Use the project to actively contribute to the EU Rural Pact and to shape national policies for rural development.</p> <p>Empowering Rural Communities: Provide the foundation for an active network of stakeholders who are empowered and committed to revitalising rural regions in Slovakia</p>	<p>- **Cross-Sectoral Cooperation**: Establish a governmental platform for breaking silos and fostering cross-sector collaboration among stakeholders to revitalise rural areas.</p> <p>- **EU Rural Pact Contribution**: Facilitate Slovakia's contribution to the EU Rural Pact by promoting national strategies aligned with broader EU goals.</p> <p>- **Constitutional and Administrative Reform**: Initiate reforms to streamline processes, improve governance, and better support rural development.</p>	<p>Theme: Revitalisation, Cross-Sector Collaboration, Policy Influence</p> <p>Vision Dissemination and Participatory Consultation: Widely promote the "Vision for more attractive rural areas" document. Hold open forums with diverse rural and urban stakeholders to gather input, refine the vision, and build collaborative momentum.</p> <p>Inter-Ministerial Platform for Rural Development: Advocate for a dedicated cross-sectoral governmental platform focused on integrated rural development. This would break down silos, ensure consistent policy focus, and involve multiple ministries (not only agriculture-focused).</p> <p>Shaping the EU Rural Pact: Leverage the pilot to actively shape the EU Rural Pact at the national level. Contribute insights and best practices from the Slovakian experience. Secure commitments and policy support for rural revitalisation efforts from the national government</p>	<p>Launch a multi-stakeholder platform to facilitate dialogue and collaboration among rural and urban stakeholders, focusing on sustainable land use, biodiversity conservation, and rural tourism development.</p> <p>- Vision and Revitalisation: Promote a shared vision for rural attractiveness, facilitating broad stakeholder engagement and public consultations.</p> <p>- Cross-Sectoral Alliances: Create platforms for cross-sector collaboration to break down silos and foster unified approaches to rural revitalisation.</p>



Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
3.Greece (AUA, GAIA, NP)	<p>Agritech Skills Development: Train rural stakeholders in sustainable agritech technologies to increase digital skills and boost the efficiency of local agricultural knowledge systems (AKIS).</p> <p>Tourism and Promotional Campaigns: Develop targeted promotional plans to showcase local agritourism, highlighting the region's natural beauty and agricultural products. These plans should attract urban residents and inspire other interested stakeholders.</p> <p>Strengthening the Value Chain: emphasise the potential for diversification in agritourism and explore financial opportunities to promote the region and its products to a wider audience.</p>	<p>Sustainable Agritech Training**: Provide training in sustainable agritech technologies and promotional services for agritourism to boost the local economy and conserve natural resources.</p> <p>Agritourism Diversification**: Promote agritourism and the local agricultural products to create economic opportunities and preserve the region's rich natural heritage.</p>	<p>Theme: Agritech Skills, Tourism and Promotion, Value Chain Targeted Agritech Training: Develop training programs tailored to the local agricultural context. emphasise sustainable technologies, smart farming techniques, and data-driven decision-making to improve efficiency and productivity.</p> <p>Integrated Agritourism Packages: Collaborate with urban tour operators, accommodation providers, and local cultural organisations to design comprehensive agritourism experiences showcasing traditional practices, local food products, and the region's unique charm.</p> <p>Farmer's Market and E-Commerce Platform: Create a shared physical marketplace in a key urban Centre and an online platform for direct producer-to-consumer sales. This strengthens rural-urban value chains and increases visibility for rural products.</p>	<p>Implement training programs in agritech and sustainable practices for farmers, alongside developing agritourism packages that showcase the region's natural and cultural heritage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agritech Skills Development: Prioritise training in sustainable agritech practices to enhance local agricultural systems and promote efficiency. - Tourism and Promotional Campaigns: Leverage the region's natural beauty and agricultural heritage to boost agritourism and local value chains.

Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
4. Italy (TIN)	<p>Spotlight on Short Supply Chains: Promote the benefits of short supply chains and other connected practices (e.g., educational farms, social farms, agrotourism) as tools for creating direct links between rural producers and urban consumers. Position these as opportunities to attract young people to rural agriculture.</p> <p>Digital Tools: Support the digitization of the agricultural sector and foster the adoption of technologies to boost efficiency and reach.</p> <p>Learning and Innovation Hub: emphasise opportunities for continuous learning and training of existing and prospective farmers, facilitating the exchange between technology experts, policymakers, and local stakeholders.</p>	<p>Strengthen Short Supply Chains**: Deepen the implementation of short supply chains to enhance the connection between rural producers and urban consumers, promoting healthy lifestyles and sustainable agriculture.</p> <p>Digitize the Agricultural Sector**: Support the digitization of agriculture and related educational activities to attract young people and innovate traditional farming practices.</p>	<p>Theme: Short Supply Chains, Digitalization, Innovation Hub</p> <p>Short Supply Chain Educational Initiatives: Promote short supply chains to urban consumers through workshops, partnerships with urban schools, and engaging marketing campaigns emphasising health, sustainability, and connection with farmers.</p> <p>Agribusiness Digitization Program: Provide targeted training, mentoring, and funding for rural enterprises to adopt digital tools for production, sales, and marketing. This empowers farmers and facilitates direct connections with urban markets.</p> <p>Smart Village Innovation Hub: Establish a co-working space and knowledge Centre where farmers, technology providers, researchers, and urban entrepreneurs work together on solutions tailored to local agriculture, fostering innovation.</p>	<p>Promote digital marketplaces for short supply chains, linking farmers directly with consumers and restaurants in urban areas, and supporting agritourism initiatives that educate urbanites on rural life and sustainable farming.</p> <p>- Spotlight on Short Supply Chains: Enhance connections between rural producers and urban consumers, promoting sustainable agriculture and lifestyles.</p> <p>- Digital Tools and Innovation Hub: Foster digital transformation in agriculture, supporting learning and innovation at the intersection of technology and rural development.</p>
5. Finland (MYA, SML)	<p>Rural Event Industry Strategy: Develop the Rural Event Industry strategy 2040 for Mallusjoki Youth Association, including a state-of-the-art vision, roadmap, and action plan.</p> <p>Community Empowerment: Support community-led initiatives that build self-esteem, increase cooperation, and celebrate local heritage through events that attract attention from Southern Finland.</p>	<p>Rural Event Industry Development**: Build a Rural Event Industry Ecosystem that supports community engagement, tourism, and cultural events, creating employment opportunities and enhancing self-esteem among rural residents.</p>	<p>Theme: Event-Driven Rural Development, Community and Tourism</p> <p>Rural Event Toolkit and Training: Create a comprehensive guide for rural communities to Organise impactful events that celebrate local heritage, attract urban visitors, and build community spirit. Provide training on event planning, promotion, and collaboration.</p> <p>Creative Sector Partnerships: Incentivise</p>	<p>Create a calendar of rural events that attract urban visitors, focusing on themes like local food, traditional crafts, and nature-based activities, supported by a digital platform for event promotion and booking.</p> <p>- Rural Event Industry Strategy: Develop a comprehensive strategy for rural events, emphasising community empowerment and tourism through creative exchange.</p> <p>- Tourism and Creative Exchange: Attract urban visitors and creative professionals to rural events, promoting cultural and economic exchange.</p>



Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
	<p>Tourism and Creative Exchange: Promote rural events to urban audiences and attract creative professionals from cities to contribute content and ideas. Cultivate tourism based on the unique and authentic experiences offered in rural Finland.</p>		<p>collaborations between urban-based artists, event Organisers, and rural communities. This can bring fresh perspectives while creating opportunities for showcasing unique aspects of rural life.</p> <p>Tourism-Focused Event Network: Build a network focused on promoting events that blend authentic rural experiences with high-quality offerings. This will attract a wider audience from urban areas and increase the economic impact of rural events.</p>	
6.Czech Bavarian Border (P4A, THD)	<p>Incubator Model Adaptation: Focus on adapting urban incubator concepts to rural settings where flexible working, networking, and meeting spaces are in demand. Build hubs specifically for startups in rural areas.</p> <p>Cross-Border Knowledge Transfer: Prioritise knowledge exchange and collaboration between the German and Czech border regions. Explore how the successful Technology Campus model can be transferred and adapted to benefit both regions.</p> <p>Innovation Ecosystem Development: Facilitate the creation of localised innovation ecosystems that support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region, bridging rural-urban divides.</p>	<p>Rural Innovation Network**: Establish a rural innovation network to transfer knowledge and experience, particularly in technology and innovation, fostering economic opportunities and cross-border cooperation.</p> <p>Technology Campus Model Adaptation**: Adapt urban incubator models to rural settings, promoting localised innovation ecosystems that support SMEs and startups.</p>	<p>Theme: Rural Incubation Model, Knowledge Transfer, Innovation Ecosystem Flexible Rural Coworking and Networking: Adapt the urban incubator model by focusing on flexible coworking spaces, networking hubs, and shared resources suited to remote work and rural startups.</p> <p>Cross-Border Skills Exchange: Facilitate student exchanges, internship programs, and joint projects between startups and institutions across the border. Leverage the Technology Campus model's success, adapting it to address unique border region challenges.</p> <p>Rural Entrepreneurship Grants: Offer targeted funding with mentoring support for rural entrepreneurs. Focus on those bridging the rural-urban divide through cross-border collaboration, innovative service models, or leveraging local resources in unique ways.</p>	<p>Establish a cross-border innovation network for rural SMEs, focusing on sustainable forestry, eco-tourism, and renewable energy, with a special emphasis on involving young entrepreneurs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incubator Model Adaptation: Adapt urban incubator models to rural contexts, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas. - Cross-Border Knowledge Transfer: Leverage the Technology Campus model for cross-border cooperation, enhancing the region's innovation ecosystem.



Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
7.Spain (SINNO, P4A)	<p>Synergies with Segobriga Archaeological Park: Strengthen the park's role as a central hub for cultural, economic, and educational activities benefiting the region. Explore diverse business models, collaborations, tools, and policy support to maximise impact.</p> <p>Quality of Life Focus: Highlight growing interest in rural living and promote the increased quality of life offered in rural areas to attract urban residents, professionals, and those seeking a more balanced lifestyle.</p> <p>Strengthen Rural-Urban Bridges: Continue to build connections between rural and urban areas, focusing on cooperation, knowledge sharing, and mutually beneficial opportunities.</p>	<p>Rural-Urban Synergies & Cultural Heritage**: Leverage cultural heritage sites like Segobriga Archaeological Park to foster rural-urban synergies, supporting local economies and enhancing community cooperation.</p>	<p>Theme: Segobriga Archaeological Park as Hub, Quality of Life, Rural-Urban Bridges Segobriga-Centred Business Development: Support the development of diverse businesses (tourism, cultural activities, services) using the archaeological park as a central attractor. Provide mentoring and resources tailored to this context.</p> <p>Quality of Life Marketing: Promote rural living to urbanites as a positive lifestyle choice. Highlight improved work-life balance, access to nature, and lower costs. Link with remote work opportunities and connectivity initiatives.</p> <p>'Living Labs' for Rural Relocation: Establish 'living lab' spaces where urban residents can experience rural life for extended periods. This encourages relocation and investment, reversing outmigration trends.</p>	<p>utilise cultural heritage sites as catalysts for rural development, developing integrated tourism experiences that include local food, crafts, and accommodation, and support the digitalization of cultural heritage storytelling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Synergies with Cultural Heritage: utilise cultural heritage as a catalyst for economic and educational activities, enhancing rural-urban synergies. - Quality of Life Focus: Promote rural living as a high-quality lifestyle choice, building bridges between rural and urban areas.



Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
8. Latvia - Vidzeme Planning Region (VPR)	<p>Transparent Monitoring Framework: Develop a unified monitoring framework to track progress on the Vidzeme Planning Region Development Programme. Ensure that activities directly address inhabitants' needs and promote active involvement in regional development.</p> <p>Stakeholder Involvement: Make citizen and stakeholder participation the central focus in decision-making processes to ensure sustainable and inclusive development for the Vidzeme region.</p> <p>Sustainable and Resilient Economy: emphasise diversification of the rural economy towards sustainable, environmentally conscious, and socially responsible business models.</p>	<p>Monitoring Framework Development**: Establish a unified monitoring framework to support effective development management and engage residents in the region's development.</p> <p>Economic Diversification**: Promote economic diversification towards sustainable practices, enhancing the region's resilience and prosperity.</p>	<p>Theme: Transparent Monitoring, Stakeholder Participation, Sustainability Participatory Monitoring Tools: Design simple digital tools accessible to residents to track progress on the Development Programme. Integrate feedback mechanisms and foster active citizen involvement.</p> <p>Stakeholder Engagement Campaigns: Conduct inclusive outreach campaigns to inform and engage rural and urban residents in shaping the regional development agenda. emphasise how their participation shapes outcomes.</p> <p>Resilient Economy Business Support: Facilitate training and funding schemes for rural businesses focusing on circular models, eco-innovations, and value-added products/services. This creates economic opportunities aligned with sustainability goals.</p>	<p>Vidzeme Planning Region**:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a regional monitoring system that tracks progress on sustainable development goals, integrating citizen feedback through digital platforms to ensure community engagement in planning processes. - Transparent Monitoring Framework: Implement a unified monitoring system to track progress and ensure stakeholder involvement in regional development. - Sustainable and Resilient Economy: emphasise economic diversification towards sustainable practices, enhancing regional resilience.



Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
9.Malta (AcrossLimits)	<p>Skills and Capacity Building: Focus on tailored training to enhance digital and entrepreneurial skills in the agricultural sector, targeting youth and existing workforce to stem the brain drain from rural areas.</p> <p>Rural-Urban Connections: Support collaborations and knowledge exchanges between rural and urban stakeholders to address the disconnect stemming from mentality differences.</p> <p>Circular Economy and Connectivity: Encourage the adoption of circular economy practices in rural sectors and work to improve connectivity between rural communities and other areas throughout Malta and Gozo.</p>	<p>Digital Transformation in Agriculture**: Enhance digital and entrepreneurial skills in the agricultural sector to support sector modernisation and attract youth, addressing the workforce decline and ensuring the continuity of Maltese agriculture.</p>	<p>Theme: Skills and Capacity Building, Bridging the Rural-Urban Disconnect, Circularity</p> <p>Next-Gen Farmer Training: Develop training programs that integrate digital skills, sustainable agritech, and entrepreneurial mindsets to attract youth. Partner with agricultural institutions and innovative farmers for mentorship experiences.</p> <p>Mentality Shift Workshops: Hold workshops for rural and urban stakeholders to understand different perspectives, break down stereotypes, and find common ground for collaboration, addressing the identified disconnect.</p> <p>Circular Business Models and Networking: Support rural businesses in adopting circular economy principles. Facilitate knowledge exchange with urban businesses and mentors with expertise in waste minimisation, resource efficiency, and sustainable practices.</p>	<p>Launch an accelerator program for agri-tech startups, focusing on sustainable practices, water management, and digital agriculture solutions, and facilitate partnerships between these startups and rural communities to pilot innovative projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills and Capacity Building: Enhance digital and entrepreneurial skills in the agricultural sector, targeting youth to prevent brain drain. - Rural-Urban Connections: Strengthen connections between rural and urban stakeholders, promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange.



Pilot	GeminiA recommendations	ChatGPT4 Advice	Gemini refined using refs. DB	ChatGPT4 refined using refs. DB
Overall	<p>Remember: These recommendations are tailored to the specific goals and challenges of each pilot project. It's essential to continuously monitor and evaluate their implementation to ensure success. Additionally, leveraging the PoliRuralPlus tools and resources will aid in effective decision-making and data-driven policy development.</p>	<p>Each of these recommendations is aligned with PoliRuralPlus's overarching objectives of fostering sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development across rural and urban areas. They focus on improving connections, governance arrangements, and integrated territorial policies that prioritise experimentation and innovation. By implementing these strategies, the pilots aim to enhance the quality of life, stimulate economic growth, and ensure the resilience and prosperity of their regions.</p>	<p>A refined set of recommendations for your PoliRural Plus pilots, integrating insights from your provided resources and descriptions. I've focused on aligning them with the identified themes and addressing challenges within each pilot: These recommendations are a starting point. Further discussion with stakeholders in each pilot is crucial for tailoring them specifically to your regions and maximising impact.</p>	<p>General Expansion and Refinement for All Pilots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced Digital Infrastructure: Prioritize the development and enhancement of digital infrastructure in rural areas to ensure seamless connectivity. This includes expanding broadband access and supporting digital literacy programs, aiming to reduce the digital divide and enable the digital transformation of rural economies. - Sustainable Agricultural Practices and Food Systems: Encourage sustainable agricultural practices and the development of short supply chains that link rural producers directly with urban consumers. This approach supports local economies, reduces carbon footprints, and promotes the consumption of fresh, local produce. - Innovative Financial Mechanisms: Explore and implement innovative financial mechanisms such as green bonds, social impact bonds, and crowdfunding platforms to finance sustainable rural-urban development projects. These mechanisms can support initiatives ranging from renewable energy projects to sustainable tourism and agri-tech innovations. - Strengthening Rural-Urban Partnerships: Establish formal partnerships between rural and urban areas to facilitate knowledge exchange, collaborative planning, and joint project implementation. This could include twinning programs, joint economic development zones, & urban-rural councils - Focus on Nature-Based Solutions (NBS): Integrate nature-based solutions to address environmental, social, and economic challenges in rural and urban areas. NBS can contribute to climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and the provision of ecosystem services, while also offering opportunities for local development and tourism. - Support for Social Innovation and Community-Led Initiatives: Foster social innovation and support community-led initiatives that address local challenges and leverage local strengths. This could involve supporting social enterprises, community-owned renewable energy projects, and initiatives that promote cultural heritage and local identity. <p>By integrating these refined recommendations into the RAPs, PoliRuralPlus pilots can enhance their impact on rural-urban linkages, fostering sustainable development, social inclusion, and resilience in their regions.</p>



1. Conclusions and Recommendation

Reviewing the above results table and each GenAI's explanations and general recommendations, it was concluded that Gemini Advanced provided a more useful analysis and results. Thus its recommendations (in column 5) were taken as the results reported in section 6 of the main report.


In addition it was concluded that the POC experiment of using GenAI with the PoliRuralPlus References Data in the Dashboard was confirmed and recommended that it should be used in the Regional Analysis Dashboard of task T2.3, to support the pilots in developing their RAPs.



Annex M: PoliRuralPlus Services


WP2 will provide a dashboard for the stakeholders to be able to look at what-if analysis of changing particular opportunities. Use this as the basis for further discussion and consultation.


The PoliRuralPlus Regional Dashboard is for regional stakeholders to do “What if” analyse of changing particular opportunities, and optimise Rural-Urban Linkages and strategies in the post-COVID-19 era based on the PoliRuralPlus database of relevant domain references, studies and best practice examples, for use as the basis for further discussion and consultation.



References database Google Spreadsheet at XXX

- Complements & builds on the **European statistical recovery dashboard** & others






Regional Dashboard
Analyse & optimise Rural-Urban Linkages strategies

- Example of using **Gemini** as a very fast prototype to demo a powerful “**What If**” **Analysis Dashboard** for regional stakeholders & recommendations of post-COVID-19 era strategies
 - Given the **PoliRural+** references & the **Monaghan Pilot** action plan, what best practice examples should the Pilot explore, & what 3 actions should it undertake first, & why, to optimise its rural-urban linkages?


Initial Actions that the Monaghan Pilot should undertake first to optimize its rural-urban linkages:

- Immediate actions:**
 - Conduct a comprehensive **assessment of the current state** of rural-urban linkages in **Monaghan**: Identify the strengths & weaknesses of existing linkages & identify opportunities for improvement.
 - Develop a **strategic plan** for strengthening rural-urban linkages: outline specific goals, objectives, & strategies for achieving them.
 - Establish a **dedicated team to oversee the implementation** of the strategic plan: & be responsible for coordinating & monitoring all efforts to strengthen rural-urban linkages.
- Best Practice examples:**
 - For bridging the digital divide between rural & urban areas:** Irish smart regions plan, Rural service hubs & socially innovative rural-urban linkages; The Carlow PPN Toolkit for Consultation.
 - For fostering collaboration & knowledge exchange between rural & urban areas:** Civicwell in California; Guiding Principles for Equitable Engagement, About InvestEU, The Galway City Community Network (GCCN) Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement.
 - For promoting rural entrepreneurship:** Rural service hubs & socially innovative rural-urban linkages; The Food Twin app, The New European Bauhaus Initiative.

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WP4 Tools: Integrate existing approved technologies from PoliRural project (PoliRural Hub, Rural Attractiveness, Policy Option Explorer) with existing and emerging AI/DL technologies that can support decision-making and foresight in the rural-urban interaction. To communicate new developments within the development of the Methodological Framework in WP3. Develop and integrate innovative and collaborative PoliRuralPlus solution with AI/DL. To re-use existing Data Spaces and EOSC platforms that can enhance decision-making and foresight in the rural-urban interaction.

Design of an extended PoliRuralPlus solution. The focus of the work will be on identification of AI/DL technologies and their integration with approved PoliRural Technological solutions (PoliRural Hub, Rural Attractiveness, Policy Option Explorer).

Task T4.1 involves conducting a comprehensive review of existing AI/DL technologies that are relevant to the PoliRuralPlus project. The goal is to identify and adjust the most promising technologies (benchmarking) that can be integrated with existing PoliRural solutions to enhance decision-making and foresight in rural-urban interaction. Based on inputs from T2.3, in this task we will focus on designing and development of machine learning models supporting improvements in attractiveness indicators in all three areas - citizen science approach, area development and remote/local data and extreme weather probability as described in 1.1.2. Task 4.1 will also select data and components from existing EOSC platforms and developed Data Spaces

1 PoliRuralPlus User Stories

The PoliRuralPlus project is user-driven by its Pilots. So, this section identifies typical user personas for whom PoliRuralPlus' services are intended. Their stories and benefits from using the tools and dashboard.

1.1 Mary – community development social enterprise

Mary is an administrator in a community development social enterprise. She lives in a community that has an urban centre but is mainly rural in county Monaghan. Monaghan is a mainly rural county in Ireland, with rich rolling dairy grass farmlands, on the Border with the UK (Northern Ireland). Its population of 61,386 people is static, with 63% living in rural areas. The county has a strong tradition of unique indigenous industry and is a hub for innovation in business & agriculture in Ireland. Monaghan's regional challenges include:



- Limited access to adequately paid job opportunities for people living in rural areas,
- Lack of viable opportunities to repurpose land or farm assets,
- low numbers of businesses realising the potential for business expansion and job creation in the rapidly expanding environmental products and services sector across Europe,
- Inability to fully exploit the untapped potential of the roll out of broadband across rural County Monaghan for provision of services and employment.
- An Urban-Rural divide that has widened in recent decades.

Monaghan is at a pivotal "Moment of Change" due to the EU Green agenda, Brexit, Covid-19, Ukraine war, Climate change, which are all big Challenges & Concerns However, there are emerging Opportunities from the EU Long-Term Vision & policies for rural areas, the EU's green & digital transitions, programmes & funding, Rural Pact & EU Rural Action Plan, new CAP & LEADER, PEACEPLUS. As well as National opportunities from Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan, Rural Development Policy & National Recovery/Resilience Plan & Ireland North-East Regional Enterprise Plan.

Mary believes that new rules & governance need to become the "new norm" for Ireland to counter-balance Ireland's over centralised governance & policy making using the LEADER methodology of locally-orchestrated bottom-up to meet top-down.

Mary is rightly seen as a Champion of her local community, with which she tirelessly works to its improve its strength, connectivity, resilience and prosperity. Mary is passionately committed to ensuring that her local community takes control of its own future & makes the future of their region the way they want it to be. Mary drives this by planning & Using locally orchestrated & implemented regional development policies & initiatives to continuously improve the region's strength, connectivity, resilience and prosperity for all its inhabitants, as a thriving, integrated rural-urban area with equal quality of life for all its inhabitants. In consultation with her community, they have decided that success will depend on strong urban-rural ties, particularly collaboration for green business, shared marketing of the region, digitalisation and ensuring broadband access and use, and ensuring a vibrant local innovation ecosystem of urban and rural actors, entrepreneurs & smart villages, iteratively updating their agreed Action Plan & Roadmap.

Mary needs the PoliRuralPlus Regional Dashboard and Tools to support her to identify, explore, plan, promote, fund and successfully implement their locally orchestrated integrated rural and urban policies and initiatives.

Mary wants to interactively and very simply use the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools on her laptop to

1. Explore "what-if" advice, recommendations and analysis of changing opportunities and macro level post-COVID-19 era strategies and Rural-Urban Linkages, based on PoliRuralPlus' database of European and National Policies, best practice examples and experience, research, funding opportunities, and other contextual knowledge.



2. At a micro level specific to her region, provide data, forecasts, and outputs such as diagrams and charts that she can use as the basis for further discussion & consultation with her community of stakeholders, funding programmes and other external bodies.
3. Develop coherent and viable plans, with quantified impact KPIs and forecasts.
4. Thus to be useful and very easy to use.

1.1.1 Potential examples of Mary's use of the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools

Given her priorities and the specific challenges of County Monaghan, Mary might use the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard, as follows:

1. Exploring Land Repurposing Opportunities:

- **Query:** "What are successful examples of converting underutilised farmland or agricultural buildings into eco-tourism venues or renewable energy hubs in regions similar to ours?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Case studies from the PoliRuralPlus database, focusing on regions with comparable land types and pre-existing tourism infrastructure. Visualisations of the economic impact and job creation potential of such initiatives.

2. Green Business Development & Rural-Urban Linkages

- **Query:** "How could Monaghan better connect rural producers of organic products with the growing urban market in our region and beyond?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Analysis of potential supply chains, highlighting gaps in infrastructure or logistics. Examples of farmer-led collectives that have successfully negotiated with urban retailers. Relevant funding sources for developing such networks.

3. Remote Work and Revitalising Rural Towns

- **Query:** "What incentives or programs have proven effective in attracting remote workers to settle in smaller rural towns like those near our urban Centre?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Compilation of policies from other regions (tax breaks, co-working space subsidies, targeted recruitment). Analysis of what broadband speeds and quality-of-life factors were essential for success.

4. Digital Skills Gap Analysis

- **Query:** "To what extent are our rural residents equipped with the digital skills required for the post-Covid job market, and where are the biggest gaps?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Overlays local workforce data (if Mary can upload this) with PoliRuralPlus's information on emerging sector-specific digital skills needs. This could identify priority areas for training programs.

5. "What-if" Scenario: Impact of a New Agri-Tech Incubator

- **Query:** Mary inputs the basic parameters of a potential incubator located within her region (e.g., focus on dairy technology).
- **Dashboard Output:** Projected job creation numbers (direct and indirect) based on similar incubators. Visualisations of potential knock-on effects on ancillary businesses. Potential funding streams relevant to the incubator's focus.

6. Addressing the Rural-Urban Divide in Healthcare

- **Query:** "How have other regions addressed limited access to specialised healthcare in rural areas, particularly those with ageing populations?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Case studies of successful telemedicine programs, mobile health units, and cross-regional transport initiatives relevant to an ageing population. Analysis of infrastructure investments necessary for such programs.

7. Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

- **Query:** "What are the projected impacts of climate change on Monaghan's agricultural sector over the next decade, and what adaptation measures are recommended?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Regionalised climate projections, specifically highlighting the risks to traditional dairy. Links to EU and national programs supporting agricultural transition and resilience.



8. Cross-Border Collaboration Post-Brexit

- **Query:** "What are examples of successful rural-urban partnerships for supply chain development and business cooperation across the border with Northern Ireland?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Case studies highlighting how communities have navigated trade regulations. Specific focus on PEACEPLUS and other border-region funding opportunities.

9. Data-Driven Grant Proposal

- **Query:** Mary wants to develop a project concept around upskilling unemployed rural residents for the green construction sector.
- **Dashboard Output:** Identifies relevant funding calls (EU and national), generates data points on skill shortages in the region, and suggests potential project partners based on PoliRuralPlus's stakeholder database.

10. Youth Retention Strategy

- **Query:** "What factors have led to successful youth retention in rural areas and how can they be applied in our region?"
- **Dashboard Output:** Best practices emphasising a holistic approach: affordable housing options, quality broadband, vibrant community spaces, showcasing career opportunities in emerging sectors relevant to Monaghan.

The utility of these examples depends on the quality and granularity of data that PoliRuralPlus can provide. In addition, complementary PoliRuralPlus WP4 Tools to enable Mary to include local data and possible SDM simulations will greatly enhance the usefulness of the results.

1.2 Sarah, Government Rural Policy Analyst



Sarah is a well experienced and highly qualified Rural Policy Analyst in a government department focused on rural development. Her work involves accessing and communicating relevant data and insights to stakeholders, and formulating regional policies and programmes that address the needs of rural and urban communities in line with her government and EU policies. For this she needs to understand trends in rural areas (e.g., demographics, economic shifts, infrastructure challenges), identify policy interventions that have proven successful in similar rural regions, and compares her region's performance to other rural areas on key indicators.

Sarah would like to use the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and WP4 tools to empower her to formulate data-driven, impactful policies and programs for her regions. Ideally, when fully optimised, the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and WP4 tools, could become Sarah's one-stop shop for rural development data, analysis, and best practices, by providing functionality such as the following:

Understanding Trends

- **Interactive Map Visualisations:** PoliRuralPlus's interactive map can be a goldmine for Sarah. Layers displaying demographic shifts, economic activity changes, and infrastructure gaps (broadband access, transportation networks) across various regions will allow her to visualise trends at a glance.
- **Customizable Charts and Graphs:** Sarah can delve deeper by creating custom charts and graphs to compare trends over time, for example, population changes in different age groups across rural areas.
- **Regional Drill-Down:** The dashboard can offer functionalities to zoom in on specific regions, enabling Sarah to focus on a specific region and its neighbouring areas. This allows for a more granular understanding of local dynamics.

Identifying Successful Interventions

- **Policy Spotlight Section:** This section can be a powerful tool for Sarah. Curated case studies featuring successful policy interventions in similar rural regions will provide valuable inspiration. Filters based on region, policy focus area (e.g., green business development, digitalization), and outcomes (economic growth, service improvement) can help her target relevant examples.
- **Database of Best Practices:** PoliRuralPlus's database of studies and best practice examples can be a goldmine for Sarah. Search functionalities based on keywords and filters can help her find interventions that have addressed challenges similar to those faced by specific regions.

Regional Performance Comparison



- **Comparative Metrics:** The dashboard should allow Sarah to compare a specific region's performance on key indicators (unemployment rates, income levels, education attainment) against other rural regions. This will highlight areas where each region excels and areas needing improvement.
- **Benchmarking Tools:** Ideally, PoliRuralPlus would have benchmarking tools allowing Sarah to compare each specific region against pre-defined successful rural regions or national averages.

Formulating Regional Policies & Programs

- **Scenario Modeling (Potential Feature):** A "what-if" scenario modelling tool (if available) would be a game-changer for Sarah. This would allow her to simulate the potential impact of different policy options based on parameters like investment levels and targeted demographics.
- **Data-Driven Policy Narratives:** PoliRuralPlus can generate data-driven narratives that explain trends and support the formulation of effective policies. This can be particularly helpful when presenting findings or recommendations to stakeholders.

Communication & Stakeholder Engagement

- **Data Export & Visualisation Tools:** The dashboard should allow Sarah to easily export key data points and visualisations she generates for presentations or reports when discussing rural development strategies with stakeholders.
- **Customizable Reports:** The ability to create reports tailored to specific audiences (government officials, community leaders) would be highly beneficial.

Additional Considerations

- **Policy Alignment Highlighting:** The dashboard can highlight how specific regional interventions align with national and EU rural development policies, strengthening Sarah's proposals.
- **Funding Opportunity Matching:** Ideally, the platform would integrate with funding databases, allowing Sarah to identify potential funding sources that match her policy priorities.

1.2.1 Potential examples of Sarah's use of the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard & Tools

Sarah could use the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools to gather insights, identify solutions, and shape policies that truly address the needs of specific rural and urban communities as follows:

Understanding Trends & Challenges:

1. **Demographic Shifts:** Sarah uses the dashboard to visualise population changes across different age groups in rural areas over the past decade. This helps her understand population ageing, potential workforce shortages, and implications for social services.
2. **Economic Landscape:** She explores data on rural business trends, like the rise of e-commerce or the decline of specific sectors. This informs policy decisions to support rural entrepreneurship and economic diversification.
3. **Infrastructure Analysis:** Sarah utilises the dashboard to compare broadband access rates and quality across different rural regions. This helps identify areas needing investment and prioritise infrastructure development plans.

Identifying Successful Interventions:

4. **Policy Inspiration:** Sarah explores the "What-if" scenario tool to analyse the potential impact of implementing telemedicine programs in underserved rural areas. This helps her assess the feasibility and benefits for rural healthcare access.
5. **Best Practice Examples:** She investigates how other European regions have successfully revitalised town centres through creative placemaking initiatives. This helps formulate strategies to attract residents and businesses to rural towns in her region.
6. **Funding Opportunities:** Sarah uses the dashboard to identify funding programs (EU, National, Regional) that support specific rural development initiatives. This helps her connect stakeholders with relevant funding opportunities.

Benchmarking & Performance Comparison:

7. **Regional Performance:** Sarah compares her region's performance on key indicators (e.g., unemployment rates, educational attainment) against other rural areas. This helps identify areas where her region excels or needs improvement.



8. **Success Story Analysis:** She delves into case studies of rural regions that have achieved significant improvements in areas like job creation or environmental sustainability. This helps her understand best practices and adapt them to her region's context.
9. **Impact Measurement:** Sarah utilises the dashboard's data visualisation tools to showcase the socioeconomic impact of existing rural development programs in her region. This helps demonstrate policy effectiveness to stakeholders and decision-makers.
10. **Collaborative Planning:** Sarah shares the PoliRuralPlus platform with regional stakeholders (community leaders, NGOs) to facilitate collaborative planning processes. Stakeholders can access data, explore scenarios, and contribute to developing evidence-based regional development strategies.

1.3 Sandra – Innovative Entrepreneur



Sandra, founder of the cutting-edge AgriSafe, understands firsthand the challenges and risks of rural life. Her background in both farming and aeronautical engineering gives her a unique perspective on addressing farm safety risks. Recognising the power of technology and understanding the specific needs of both children and older adults in rural settings, Sandra is on a mission to bring peace of mind to farm families.

Key Takeaway: Sandra's success is a microcosm of what PoliRuralPlus aims to achieve. Her story isn't just about a device; it's about using data and innovation to enhance rural well-being, create new types of jobs, and bridge generations within communities.

Harnessing the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard

- **Localising the Data:** While national farm safety statistics are important, Sandra needs hyper-local data. The PoliRuralPlus dashboard helps her visualise accident hotspots within her region, and demographic breakdowns of those most affected. This informs how AgriSafe markets its solutions, tailoring messages for specific communities.
- **Beyond Safety:** Sandra sees farm safety as a key part of rural well-being. She works with local officials to advocate for including metrics in the dashboard that track reductions in farm accidents and their associated healthcare costs. This demonstrates AgriSafe's impact on the resilience of the entire rural economy.
- **Tracking Community Engagement:** Knowing that a device alone is not enough, Sandra uses the dashboard to monitor indicators of social connectivity in rural areas. She identifies locations where there may be untapped potential for building "guardian networks" - older adults looking out for children, neighbours supporting each other - and targets these communities with AgriSafe's integrated approach.

PoliRuralPlus Tools for AgriSafe's Growth

- **Foresight for Future-Proofing:** Sandra's proactive. Using PoliRuralPlus foresight tools, she participates in scenario workshops on the future of farming. Topics like automation and changing demographics help her refine the features of AgriSafe devices and adapt her training materials to stay ahead of emerging risks.
- **Remote Work Case Study:** Sandra's own business model - based in a town, with rural employees, enabled by tech – is a powerful one. She leverages PoliRuralPlus resources to create a case study highlighting how AgriSafe contributes to diversified job creation in rural areas, making her an attractive partner for local development initiatives.
- **Connecting with Innovators:** AgriSafe isn't just about the device. It's about building a culture of safety. Sandra utilises the PoliRuralPlus networking tools to find like-minded projects across Europe. She learns from initiatives focused on behavioural change and tech-enabled community support, integrating those lessons into her outreach for maximum impact.



1.3.1 Potential Examples of Sandra Using the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools

- **Advocacy with Data:** The dashboard reveals that her region has a higher proportion of farmers over 65 compared to the national average. Sandra uses this to argue for a targeted subsidy program to increase uptake of safety tech in this vulnerable group. Her proposal becomes more compelling as it's backed by localised data. The dashboard can provide Sandra with data on the current state of rural tech adoption in different regions. This data can be used to identify areas most in need of support and tailor her arguments accordingly.
- **Identifying Skills Gaps:** AgriSafe isn't just about selling devices, it's about proper use. The dashboard shows low digital literacy scores in certain rural areas. Sandra partners with adult-education providers to design tailored training specifically for using AgriSafe devices, enhancing their effectiveness.
- **School Partnerships Through Foresight:** Sandra participates in PoliRuralPlus-facilitated foresight workshops exploring the ageing workforce in rural areas. This reveals a potential opportunity: many older adults WANT to stay engaged after retirement. AgriSafe develops a program where tech-savvy retirees help onboard less tech-able farmers with their devices, creating meaningful intergenerational roles.
- **Visualising Success:** The dashboard lets Sandra map the locations of AgriSafe users and overlay it with public accident data. Over time, she's able to showcase a correlation between adoption and lowered incident rates – powerful evidence for policymakers and potential investors.
- **Data-driven advocacy: Success stories:** The dashboard might showcase examples of successful rural tech adoption initiatives in other regions. Sharing these success stories can inspire policymakers and demonstrate the potential benefits of such programs.
- **Cost analysis tools:** The dashboard might offer tools to estimate the potential economic and social impact of rural tech adoption programs. This can help policymakers understand the return on investment.
- **Communication and outreach:** The platform might offer features to connect Sandra with other rural advocates and policymakers. This can help her build a network, share best practices, and amplify her message.

1.4 Potential impact of the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools.

1.4.1 Rural-Urban Regional and community level

Mary's Current Challenges are:

- **Lack of Consolidated Information:** Finding relevant data, policies, and funding opportunities for rural development is scattered across multiple sources. This leads to:
 - Time wasted searching for reliable information.
 - Limited knowledge of successful strategies and best practices.
- **Data Interpretation:** Accessing raw data is not enough. Mary needs tools to help her understand trends in her region and their implications. Currently, this requires time-consuming analysis or external support.
- **Limited "Visioning" Capability:** Exploring potential scenarios and visualising their impacts on her community is difficult without specialised tools. This leaves her reliant on educated guesses rather than data-driven insights.
- **Resource Bottlenecks:** Identifying relevant EU and national funding programs is complex. This makes it hard to align local needs with available support.
- **Siloed Communication:** Collaborating with diverse stakeholders, explaining complex data, or building consensus lacks the support of dedicated platforms for discussion and visualisation.

Assuming the availability of quality regional and local data, that Mary can upload or contribute, the tailored and impactful insights generated will be address these challenges as follows:

- **Centralised Resource Hub:** PoliRuralPlus becomes a one-stop shop for relevant rural development data, best practices, funding opportunities, and policy analysis, tailored to her region.
- **Actionable Data Analysis:** The dashboard provides easy-to-use tools that:
 - Visualise demographic and economic trends tailored to Mary's region.



- Generate custom reports and charts for stakeholder consultations.
- Offer "What-if"? scenario modelling for policy or project ideas.
- **Inspiration & Knowledge-Sharing:** PoliRuralPlus showcases success stories from similar regions, sparking new ideas and strategies for addressing issues like rural-urban divide or youth retention.
- **Simplified Funding Search:** Integration with funding databases streamlines the process, pre-filtering opportunities based on her community's profile and needs.
- **Enhanced Stakeholder Collaboration:** Tools for data-driven presentations, shared project planning, and community forums enhance Mary's ability to communicate effectively and build consensus.

The Impact on Mary, her work, and community will be profound through:

1. **Empowered Decision-Making:** Mary works with greater confidence, armed with reliable data and insights to support her initiatives within her community.
2. **Efficient Project Development:** The time spent on data searching and analysis decreases, allowing greater focus on strategizing and execution of plans.
3. **Stronger Proposals & Funding Success:** Mary generates more persuasive grant proposals backed by data and best practices, increasing her community's access to funding.
4. **Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement:** Clear communication of trends and potential impacts increases buy-in for Mary's projects, fostering collaborative efforts.
5. **Positive & Sustainable Change:** Ultimately, PoliRuralPlus helps Mary drive positive development in her region, leading to a stronger, more connected rural-urban partnership and greater well-being for her community.

1.4.2 Government Policy Level

Sarah's current challenges as a Rural Policy Analyst are:

- **Fragmented Data:** Sarah struggles to find comprehensive, reliable and comparable data on rural regions across various sources. This leads to:
 - Time-consuming data collection and harmonisation.
 - Potentially inconsistent data quality affecting analysis.
- **Limited Benchmarking:** Comparing her region's performance to similar areas is difficult. This hinders identifying its strengths, weaknesses, and progress against specific policy goals.
- **Evaluating Intervention Effectiveness:** Assessing the real-world impact of existing rural development programs and their best practice elements is challenging. It makes it harder to advocate for successful policies or course-correct those that aren't working.
- **Narrow Policy Focus:** Without a holistic view of rural-urban linkages, Sarah's analysis may lack insight into interconnected challenges and the potential for cross-sectoral solutions.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited funding might make it difficult to commission external research or access specialised analysis tools.

Assuming that PoliRuralPlus will curate and ensure the quality and depth of the data it curates, then its Dashboard and tools will empower Sarah's work with quantitative and qualitative insights to address these challenges as follows:

- **Centralised Data Source:** The dashboard provides a curated repository of rural-focused data, including socioeconomic indicators, policy outcomes, and best practices. This saves Sarah valuable time on data searches.
- **Powerful Analysis Tools:** PoliRuralPlus allows Sarah to:
 - Visualise trends and patterns across different rural regions.
 - Generate custom reports for internal use and presentations to stakeholders.
 - Use "what-if" scenarios to assess the potential impact of policy changes.
- **Comparative Benchmarking:** Sarah can easily benchmark her region against others on key metrics. This helps identify areas for improvement and learn from high-performing regions.



- **Holistic Policy Perspective:** PoliRuralPlus emphasises the rural-urban nexus, encouraging Sarah to analyse data through this lens. This fosters policies addressing challenges like rural service gaps or boosting the rural-urban green economy.
- **Robust Impact Evaluation:** Case studies and analysis tools help Sarah assess the effectiveness of different policy interventions. This allows her to back recommendations with convincing evidence.

The impact on Sarah's work will be better and more resilient and community friendly rural-urban regional policies due to:

1. **Data-Driven Advocacy:** Sarah becomes a stronger advocate for rural development, presenting compelling insights to policymakers and stakeholders.
2. **Targeted Policy Design:** Sarah can identify specific areas needing intervention, and tailor policies based on regional trends and successful examples from other regions.
3. **Evidence-Based Decision Making:** PoliRuralPlus helps shift discussions from opinions to data-backed arguments, driving more efficient use of resources and effective policies.
4. **Enhanced Collaboration:** Sarah can share dashboard visualisations and insights with regional players, driving collaborative planning and integrated development initiatives.
5. **Positive Regional Outcomes:** Ultimately, Sarah's work, supported by PoliRuralPlus, contributes to policies that enhance competitiveness, well-being, and resilience in rural and urban areas.

1.4.3 New Innovative Businesses

Sandra knows her success isn't just measured in devices sold. Through her strategic use of the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and tools, she becomes a visible leader in rural innovation. Her work makes farms safer, enhances the well-being of families, champions rural-focused technology for good, and demonstrates that entrepreneurial success is possible from anywhere. The PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools can help Sandra's business to grow and prosper at many levels:

- Sandra:
 - **Data-Driven Leader:** She gains authority in the rural safety space, becoming a sought-after speaker and commentator.
 - **Targeted Expansion:** The dashboard helps her identify expansion markets with similar demographics and challenges, making growth more strategic.
- Services:
 - **Enhanced Value Proposition:** AgriSafe becomes more than a device, it's a holistic, data-informed safety solution.
 - **Scalability:** Partnerships formed using PoliRuralPlus resources allow for faster rollout, maximising impact.
- Employees:
 - **Job Satisfaction:** Working for a socially impactful company with a strong track record boosts morale and retention.
 - **Upskilling Opportunities:** Dashboards and tools may require employee training, opening doors to career development.
- Company:
 - **Investment Attractiveness:** Evidence-based results appeal to both traditional and impact-focused investors.
 - **Reputation:** AgriSafe becomes known for innovation, rural understanding, and cross-sector collaboration.
- Family:
 - **Community Pride:** Sandra's work makes the region safer, reflecting well on her family.
 - **Role Model:** If Sandra has children, they see entrepreneurship serving a social purpose firsthand.

Economic Benefits:



- **Closing the digital divide:** Rural tech adoption can bridge the gap between rural and urban areas in access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities. This can lead to increased economic activity and growth in rural communities.
- **Precision agriculture:** Technology can improve agricultural practices by optimising resource use, increasing yields, and connecting farmers with better markets. This translates to higher incomes for rural residents.
- **Entrepreneurship and innovation:** Increased access to technology can foster the growth of rural businesses and startups. This can create new jobs and diversify the rural economy.

Social Benefits:

- **Improved access to services:** Telemedicine, e-learning, and online government services can be crucial for rural residents who face geographical limitations in accessing essential services.
- **Bridging the social gap:** Technology can help connect rural communities to the outside world, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering social interaction.
- **Education and skills development:** Online training and educational resources can empower rural residents to develop new skills and improve their employability.

Addressing Concerns:

- **Cost-effectiveness:** Sandra can highlight that investing in rural tech infrastructure can be more cost-effective in the long run compared to maintaining outdated systems.
- **Sustainability:** Technology can be used to promote sustainable practices in agriculture and resource management, benefiting both rural communities and the environment.

By using a combination of compelling arguments and data-driven insights from PoliRuralPlus, Sandra can effectively persuade policymakers to invest in rural tech adoption programs, ultimately leading to a more prosperous and connected future for rural communities.

2 Functional Specification of the PoliRuralPlus Services

This functional specification for the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and online tools, builds upon the insights of the user stories and use cases. It organised it for clarity and to highlight the connections between user needs, dataset requirements, and dashboard features.

2.1 Core Principles

- **User-Centric Design:** Tailor functionalities directly to the needs of Mary, Sarah, and Sandra using simple language, intuitive workflows, and role-focused views.
- **Data-Driven Empowerment:** Enable users to make informed decisions, build persuasive arguments, and explore alternative strategies.
- **Rural-Urban Interconnection:** emphasise linkages and co-dependencies between rural and urban areas throughout the platform.
- **Evolving Platform:** Allow for the integration of new data sources, tools, visualisation methods, and user feedback over time to ensure the platform stays relevant.

2.2 Dataset Requirements

The following categories of data are essential for a robust and impactful platform:

- **Demographic and Socioeconomic Data:** Population trends, age breakdowns, income levels, education attainment, employment sectors, migration patterns, etc. – at regional and sub-regional levels.
- **Infrastructure:** Broadband coverage and quality, transportation networks, healthcare facilities, education facilities, energy infrastructure, etc.
- **Environmental:** Land use patterns, agricultural data, resource availability, climate risk projections, etc.



- **Policy:** Regional, national, and EU-level policies affecting rural areas, funding programs, case studies, and impact evaluations.
- **Best Practices:** Examples of successful projects in green business, digitalization, social innovation, rural-urban collaboration, etc.
- **Technology Uptake:** Data on the adoption of various technologies in rural settings, digital skills levels, and existing infrastructure.
- **User-Generated Data:** Mechanisms for stakeholders (Mary, Sarah) to upload relevant local datasets or project results for integration and sharing (subject to governance structures).

2.3 Dashboard Functionalities

1. Data Exploration & Visualisation

- **Interactive Maps:** Visualise various data layers (demographics, infrastructure, land use), with zoom functions to focus on specific regions.
- **Customizable Charts & Graphs:** Allow users to generate comparisons over time, across regions, and against benchmarks.
- **Filtering & Aggregation:** Filter data by policy area, topic, timeline, etc. Aggregate data for broader views or drill down for detailed insights.
- **Trend Analysis:** Visual tools and statistical summaries to identify patterns and correlations within regional data.

2. Scenario Modelling & "What-If" Analysis

- **Simulation Tools:** Allow users to input parameters (policy changes, investments) and model potential outcomes on key indicators, with sensitivity analysis features.
- **Interactive Visualisations:** Graphically represent simulation results and comparisons between different scenarios.
- **Assumptions Library:** Clearly outline methodologies and assumptions used in models to promote transparency.

3. Knowledge Sharing

- **Policy Briefs:** Concise summaries of relevant policies, their impact assessments, and recommendations for regional contexts.
- **Case Study Database:** Searchable repository of successful rural initiatives with details on context, implementation, and lessons learned.
- **Success Stories:** Feature inspiring narratives of rural innovators (like Sandra) and the broader impact of their work.
- **Regional Comparisons:** Tools for benchmarking a region's performance on key indicators against other similar regions, with options to filter by region (rural-urban divide, population density)

4. Communication & Collaboration

- **Data Export:** Allow for downloading charts, data, and reports in various formats (.csv, .pdf, etc.) for presentations and further analysis.
- **Discussion Forums:** Facilitate dialogue between stakeholders within and across regions.
- **Shared Project Spaces:** Enable regional stakeholders to upload plans, documents, and collect feedback through the platform.

IV. PoliRuralPlus Tools (WP4)

- **Foresight Tools:** Support workshops and activities that help users explore future trends and uncertainties shaping rural-urban interactions.
- **AI/DL Integration:** Develop and integrate machine learning models using existing PoliRural solutions and external data, focusing on:



- **Attractiveness Indicators:** Enhance predictions and analysis of factors influencing rural attractiveness.
- **Data Gap Filling:** Employ techniques for filling in missing data or estimating values in underserved regions.
- **Risk Identification:** Apply models to highlight potential risks related to climate change, resource availability, etc.

V. Additional Considerations

- **Governance:** Establish clear data ownership, sharing, and privacy protocols.
- **Accessibility:** Design with users of various technical skill levels in mind.
- **Tutorial & Support:** Provide guidance materials and technical assistance.
- **Funding Finder:** Integrate database of relevant funding programs.

2.4 Examples of use

The following envisions how Mary, Sarah, and Sandra would use the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools, focusing on specific actions, data inputs, and the potential insights they glean.

Example 1: Mary – Revitalising a Rural Town Centre

Task: Mary wants to explore ways to attract businesses and residents to a declining town Centre in her region.

Dashboard Interactions:

Maps: Visualises demographics in surrounding areas (identifying potential customer base and workforce). Spots underutilised commercial spaces.

Best Practice Database: Searches for "town Centre revitalisation", filtering for regions with similar population size. Finds case studies showcasing successful placemaking, incentives for small businesses, and mixed-use development.

"What-if" Scenario Tool: Inputs the basic parameters of a potential co-working hub (size, estimated operational costs). The tool projects potential job creation and economic spillover effects.

Funding Finder: Matches this project concept with potential EU and national grant programs.

Insights:

Identifies a growing young professional population within commuting distance, suggesting a niche market for the town Centre.

Learns about creative placemaking strategies that have worked elsewhere (e.g., public art installations, pop-up markets).

Estimates the number of new jobs a co-working space could realistically support, making a stronger case for funding.

Discovers relevant grant programs aligned with rural revitalisation and co-working initiatives.

Example 2: Sarah – Addressing Healthcare Gaps

- **Task:** Sarah needs to analyse the impact of limited healthcare access in rural areas and suggest policy interventions.

- **Dashboard Interactions:**

- **Maps:** Overlays healthcare facility locations with population density and age distribution. Identifies regions with long travel times for older adults.

- **Comparative Metrics:** Compares her region's health indicators (hospitalisation rates, chronic disease prevalence) with national averages and other rural areas.

- **Policy Briefs:** Explores summaries of telemedicine programs, transport subsidies, and innovative mobile clinic models in other EU countries.

- **Economic Data:** Examines the correlation between healthcare access and workforce participation rates in rural areas of different demographic profiles.

- **Insights:**



- Pinpoints specific towns where ageing populations are most underserved by existing healthcare infrastructure.
- Discovers that her region lags significantly in certain health outcomes, providing evidence-based justification for policy action.
- Learns about cost-effective and successful telemedicine approaches tailored to rural contexts.
- Quantifies the potential economic boost if healthcare access were improved, enabling higher workforce participation among older residents.

Example 3: Sandra – Expanding AgriSafe's Reach

- **Task:** Sandra wants to identify new markets where AgriSafe's technology could have the greatest impact.
- **Dashboard Interactions:**
 - **Maps:** Visualizes farm accident 'hotspots' overlaid with the percentage of farms using safety monitoring technologies. Finds low-tech-adoption regions.
 - **Demographic Data:** Drills down into accident statistics by age. Discovers a worrying trend of accidents involving young children in certain areas.
 - **Foresight Tools:** Participates in a workshop on the future of farm labour. Explores scenarios with increased automation and reliance on remote monitoring.
 - **Success Stories:** Reads about a partnership between a tech company and a rural school district to promote farm safety education.
- **Insights:**
 - Identifies regions with both high accident rates and low technology uptake, suggesting priority markets for expansion.
 - Realises the need to tailor the messaging of AgriSafe, emphasising child safety for a specific market segment.
 - Foresees a shift in how farm safety is managed, affirming the need for AgriSafe to adapt and integrate with emerging technologies.
 - Gets inspired to explore collaborations with schools, potentially increasing adoption and building brand trust.

2.4.1 Regional users

Initial Prototype PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools tailored to Mary's needs and understanding her Priorities.

- **Locally Driven Development:** emphasise tools focused on empowering Mary to devise and implement strategies specific to her region.
- **Rural-Urban Linkages:** Highlight data and analysis that shed light on strengthening collaborations and breaking down the rural-urban divide.
- **Opportunity-Driven:** Focus on surfacing potential projects aligned with emerging EU and national programs, especially in the green/digital sectors.
- **Actionable Insights:** Prioritise tools that help Mary translate data into concrete plans with measurable targets.
- **Ease of Use:** Design the interface to be extremely intuitive for Mary, who may not be a data analysis expert.



3. Users' Stories

3.1 Mary – Champion of Rural Prosperity

Nestled in the heart of rural County Monaghan, Ireland, lives Mary. She is a woman with a deep-seated passion for her community, driven by the desire to see her beloved countryside thrive. Mary's world is shaped by the unique beauty and challenges of Monaghan – its rolling dairy farmlands, proud tradition of innovation, and a border with Northern Ireland. It's a place where close-knit communities and entrepreneurial spirit exist side-by-side with difficulties such as limited employment opportunities, underutilised land and resources, and a widening urban-rural divide.

For years, Mary worked in community development, witnessing the struggles and untapped potential firsthand. She saw her neighbours grappling with:

- *Scarcity of Well-Paid Jobs: Many, especially in rural areas, lacked access to jobs with salaries that could support a comfortable living.*
- *Stagnant Land Use: Farmland and assets often lay underutilised, with few opportunities to repurpose them for new economic ventures.*
- *Missed Green Opportunities: The burgeoning environmental sector offered lucrative potential, but many local businesses struggled to tap into this expanding market.*
- *Unleashed Digital Potential: While broadband was coming to rural Monaghan, its true use for service delivery and remote work possibilities remained unexplored.*

Mary recognized that these challenges were not unique to Monaghan. The impacts of Brexit, COVID-19, the Ukraine war, and climate change painted a picture of uncertainty worldwide. Yet, even amidst this turmoil, she saw a ray of hope – opportunities emerging from the EU's Green Agenda, its vision for a vibrant rural future, and funding programs like LEADER and PEACEPLUS. Ireland's own national policies offered support, but Mary believed a fundamental shift was needed.

The Power of Local Action

Mary championed a new approach, inspired by the LEADER philosophy: bottom-up development, with communities themselves shaping their destinies. She firmly believed that lasting change must come from the grassroots, with solutions tailored to the specific needs and strengths of rural Monaghan.

In her role as an administrator for a community development social enterprise, Mary found the platform to turn her vision into reality. She tirelessly rallied her community, fostering a shared purpose to build a future where rural and urban areas worked in harmony, offering equal opportunities for all. Their focus?

- *Green Business Collaborations: Fostering cooperation between rural producers and urban markets to promote sustainable value chains.*
- *Shared Regional Marketing: Creating a unified brand to showcase Monaghan's unique assets and attract investment.*
- *Digital Empowerment: Maximising broadband access to expand remote work, distance learning, and online services.*
- *Thriving Innovation Ecosystem: Building a network of rural-urban actors, entrepreneurs, and "smart villages" to drive new solutions.*



PoliRuralPlus: Fueling the Vision



Mary understands the power of knowledge. That's why she turned to the PoliRuralPlus Regional Dashboard and Tools. PoliRuralPlus became her go-to resource for:

- Exploring "What-ifs": Analysing potential policies, strategies, and rural-urban partnerships, informed by best practices and data drawn from across Europe.
- Region-Specific Insights: Accessing tailored data, forecasts, and visualisations about Monaghan, empowering her to engage stakeholders with compelling evidence.
- Crafting Impactful Plans: Developing strategies with concrete, measurable targets, underpinned by insights from PoliRuralPlus.

Mary envisions a future where the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard graces her laptop, an invaluable companion on this journey. It's a tool that empowers her, her community, and Monaghan as a whole to transform challenges into opportunities, and create a sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive region for generations to come.

3.2 Sarah - Architect of Data-Driven Rural Policy



In her Riga city-centre office, Sarah's desk is often a whirlwind of reports, policy documents, and spreadsheets. A committed Rural Policy Analyst, she dedicates herself to crafting strategies that revitalise rural communities, ensuring that they are just as vibrant and prosperous as their urban counterparts. Sarah knows that data is her most powerful tool. It allows her to understand the complex realities of rural life, identify successful policy approaches, and justify her recommendations to stakeholders.

In the past, this data collection and analysis was cumbersome. She'd source information from various websites, sift through dense reports, and reconcile datasets manually. Often she'd find herself wishing for a single, intuitive platform that brought all the critical insights directly to her fingertips.

Enter the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools. Her government department recently adopted the platform, and it has transformed her workflow. Sarah now begins her days by logging into PoliRuralPlus. Instead of disparate sources, she finds everything she needs, carefully curated and designed for ease of use.

Unveiling Rural Trends

The dashboard's interactive map is Sarah's first port of call. With a few clicks, it reveals the demographic and economic landscapes of different rural regions. Colour-coded overlays highlight trends like ageing populations, employment hotspots, and infrastructure weaknesses. Sarah focuses on a region of interest, drilling down to granular data that allows her to see the specific challenges and opportunities that local communities are facing.

To gain a deeper understanding, Sarah turns to PoliRuralPlus's charting tools. She customises a graph to visualise how education levels have changed over time across several regions, revealing some stark disparities. This evidence becomes a compelling cornerstone for a policy brief she's preparing on the need to boost rural education initiatives.

Inspiration from Best Practices

With her regional analysis complete, Sarah wants to learn from other areas facing similar issues. PoliRuralPlus's curated case studies and best practice database are her go-to resources. She filters for regions that have successfully addressed rural youth unemployment, uncovering an initiative in a neighbouring country that leveraged digital skills training and remote work opportunities. This sparks ideas for policies that she can adapt for her region.

Benchmarking for Better Performance



Sarah now needs to compare her region against others. PoliRuralPlus's comparative metrics tool enables her to generate charts displaying key indicators like broadband access, business start-up rates, and well-being indices. This helps her identify areas where her region excels and highlights those in need of targeted policy action.

The platform's benchmarking functionality is particularly insightful. Sarah analyses her region against a rural region known for its strong innovation ecosystem. The comparison reveals gaps in venture funding and university-business partnerships in her region, informing her policy recommendations for fostering greater entrepreneurship.

From Insights to Impact

Sarah's next task is to formulate a comprehensive regional development plan. The scenario modeling 'what-if' tool (if available) is invaluable in this phase. She tests several policy options, simulating their potential outcomes based on demographics, budget projections, and historical performance data. This empowers her to propose a strategy with quantifiable impacts, bolstering her case with compelling data visualisations.

PoliRuralPlus even guides her in framing her findings. The platform generates targeted narratives for different stakeholders, ensuring that her message resonates with each audience, whether it's policymakers, funding bodies, or community groups. Her presentations are clearer, more persuasive, and underpinned by robust evidence.

The Result: A Policymaker with Power

Sarah, armed with the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools, has become a champion for evidence-based rural development. Her policies are targeted and effective, responsive to the unique dynamics of her region while informed by proven successes from across Europe. Importantly, her data-driven arguments build consensus and secure buy-in, driving meaningful change in the rural communities she serves.

3.3 Sandra - Young Entrepreneur with a Vision



Born and raised on her family's dairy farm. Developed a deep connection to the land, but also a keen awareness of the risks inherent to farm life from a young age. A tragic incident: At 15, Sandra witnessed a close childhood friend injured in a machinery accident. This left a lasting impact, fueling her determination to find ways to make farming safer. Sandra excelled in school, particularly in her science and math subjects. While she found farming fulfilling, she also had a thirst for innovation and problem-solving.

Sandra chose a path that merged her interests, earning an advanced certificate in agriculture. Here, exposure to emerging technologies like farm monitoring systems sparked ideas for safety applications.

Inspired by the structure and precision involved in aircraft systems, Sandra pursued a degree in aeronautical engineering. While seemingly unrelated, this honed her analytical thinking and deepened her understanding of complex mechanical interactions.

During her master's in business, a project on risk management in industries brought her back to her roots. Sandra's two children, a rambunctious six-year-old son and a curious three-year-old daughter, adore farm life but keeping them safe is a constant worry, especially during busy harvest seasons.

One evening, her daughter wanders too close to a running tractor. While no harm is done, the experience brings Sandra's worst fears to the surface, becoming a catalyst for finalising a "virtual tether" feature. Realising the gap in safety technology tailored to the unique aspects of farming reignited her passion and AgriSafe was born.

The Entrepreneur Emerges:

- *Recognizing the Need: Sandra spent months researching farm safety statistics and talking to farmers. She saw a pattern: traditional warnings weren't enough for the most vulnerable, and existing tech was often either too expensive or poorly designed for the realities of farm work.*



- *Driven by Purpose: Motivated by a desire to prevent the kind of tragedy she witnessed as a child, Sandra decided to create her own solution, bringing together her diverse skillset.*
- *AgriSafe is Born: Leveraging her technical knowledge, farm background, and business acumen, Sandra began sketching out the concept for AgriSafe. Support agencies like Enisa provided her with the guidance and mentorship to turn her vision into a viable company.*

Sandra's Defining Traits:

- *Pragmatic Idealist: Sandra combines an understanding of rural realities with a drive to implement innovative solutions that make a real-world difference.*
- *Community Minded: Sandra recognizes that technology is only part of the answer. AgriSafe emphasises outreach and education, knowing that true adoption leads to greater impact.*
- *Resilience: Starting a business, especially in a niche field, is no easy feat. Sandra's determination, forged from her farm upbringing, allows her to overcome setbacks and adapt her strategy.*
- *Balancing Roles: Sandra juggles running AgriSafe with being a present mother. Sometimes, product testing sessions turn into family adventures, letting her children see the impact of her work firsthand.*

Sandra's Vision: Safer Farms, Thriving Communities

- *Sandra has young children herself, adding a personal layer of urgency to her mission.*
- *Initial Resistance: When Sandra first presents AgriSafe to local farming groups, some older farmers are sceptical. They see the tech as complex, a potential distraction, maybe even an implication that they aren't careful enough. Sandra's Approach:*
 - *Emphasising Shared Values: She doesn't lead with technology, but by stressing their common goal – keeping loved ones safe.*
 - *Storytelling over Tech Talk: Sandra shares stories of incidents prevented by early AgriSafe users, focusing on the emotional impact.*
 - *Hands-On Demos: Instead of just presentations, Sandra Organises field days where farmers can try the devices in real-life scenarios, addressing anxieties head-on.*
- *Breaking Through: Gradually, through patience and tailored messaging, Sandra wins over sceptics. Some of the most resistant become her greatest advocates, seeing how AgriSafe allows them to continue farming independently for longer.*

Impact of These Challenges:

- *Community Leader: Sandra isn't just selling a product; she's seen as someone who genuinely understands BOTH the traditions of farming and the potential of innovation to support them.*
- *Company Culture: AgriSafe employees understand that empathy is as crucial as technical expertise. Their customer service reflects this, further building trust.*

4. Stakeholders Analysis and Management

While analysis of user personas and usage scenarios is very useful, the pilots will need to relate to their actual stakeholders, which is much more nuanced in reality. As discussed in D2.1, stakeholder analysis is a task that should be carried out by all pilot regions as part of the work they will do to develop a series of RAPs. This is brief guidance to the regional pilots from the WP3 methodology, as to how they can carry out stakeholder analysis, especially in view of the pressures faced by people in local government.

- Lack of time
- Lack of resources
- Lack of knowledge, skills and capabilities



At one level stakeholders are all citizens, in a region, in a member state, across the EU. Yet it is neither possible nor desirable, to include every conceivable organisation or community or so called²⁹⁴ community representative in a Foresight or other policy initiative.

Part of the essential guidance that WP3 will provide will help pilots avoid ending up in a situation where they have long lists of “stakeholders,” most of whom are irrelevant or at a remove from the work at hand, and wonder what to do about them, or how to deal with the workload suggested by a long unqualified list of people and organisations with which to engage.

Although some researchers may like to be developed complex taxonomies of stakeholders, there are really only 3 kinds of stakeholders to be considered in the context of local policy development:

- **Actors:** Those who work in local government, who will ultimately take charge of the delivery of the policies by enacting legislation, mobilising financial resources, designing and running related programs.
- **Beneficiaries:** Those who will be supported by the policy measures and the associations that represent them. Those who rely on the implementation of policy measures to adapt and draw and prosper in the region.
- **Enablers:** Those who facilitate the process in some way. They include but are not limited to research institutes, and technical service providers.

It is worth noting that stakeholders are a very heterogeneous group. Not all stakeholders have the same “stake.” For example, consider property owners in a given region. Some of those may live and work in the region, whereas others may live and work elsewhere, visiting only occasionally at weekends or during holiday periods. There have been cases where the visiting property holders have systematically opposed measures intended to provide employment and develop the local economy, to the detriment of locals who remain with poor employment opportunities. Situations such as these illustrate the complexity that can arise in stakeholder management, the need for skills that go beyond following a “recipe” or good practice.

The designation ‘actor,’ beneficiaries, enabler, is not absolute. It is a role. The same actor may play any of these roles depending on the policy context. Furthermore, not all actors are equally relevant, depending on the policy challenge being considered. Many actors playing a key role in a region, may be unknown to professionals in regional administration. They may reside outside the region, they may be short lived, existing only to manage a fund or program championed by the central government. Their relevance may not be apparent until late in the project cycle.

Stakeholder analysis is not a simple task to be done at the start of a policy exercise, especially at the start of an open-ended policy exercise such as the development of RAPs in line with the PoliRuralPlus WP3 methodology.

The best and most time and labour efficient approach is to

- Start with a key “actor” as defined above,
- Work with that actor to identify and address issues they consider important,
- Work with them to explore the related needs of identifiable beneficiaries,
- Gradually include other actors and beneficiaries as needed to ensure design and delivery of a complete and effective solution to the policy challenges being addressed.

²⁹⁴ « so called » because many who claim to represent communities do not really do so. This is one of the reasons why so many demonstrations feature people carrying placards that say things like “not in my name.” This is why one needs to exercise some form of worldly social intelligence to work effectively with stakeholders and avoid being hijacked by what are effectively minority vested interests



In this sense stakeholder analysis and management is an on-going task, to which those developing the RAPs, will return again and again, in the course of their project. It will interact closely with other tasks such as Policy Gap Analysis (PGA) and Review of Institutional Arrangements (RIA).

What is needed is

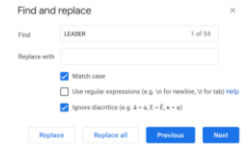
- An understanding of how people working in local administration undertake stakeholder mapping, analysis and management (or avoids it), as an ongoing task throughout the course of RAP development.
- The co-design, prototyping and testing of tools that will facilitate the real work that this entails.
- Iterations on this process over the lifetime of the project, to arrive at something useful, that will help people tasked with the management of a RAP development process, to do this on a recurring basis, as needed, in an efficient and timely manner.

This advice will be addressed in more detail in task T3.2, to start in July 2024. In a first phase at least, T3.2 is intended to support the co-design of tools to support tasks such as stakeholder mapping, PGA and RIA.

Annex N: Example of a Pilot using this report

While the main report (sections 1 to 9) are meant to be read, the repository of the detailed results and analysis of the key reports and studies on which the sections are based, are documented separately in the relevant, but extensive, **Annexes A to N**, to allow pilots to drill down for specific information they require.

This drill-down analysis can be done by simple keyword searches, e.g. using FIND



However a more useful approach is to interactively query the content using GenAI. The following dialogue is an example of a pilot user **[User]** using Gemini Advanced **[GA]** based on the complete text of this deliverable's main sections and all of its annexes.

[User] *Given the content of the document what should the Monaghan Pilot include in its RAP*

[GA] *The Monaghan Pilot should focus on the following key areas in its Regional Action Plan (RAP):*

1. **Skill-focused green job initiative:** *Conduct a skills audit to identify gaps and needs in the green sector, then develop targeted training programs and apprenticeships to prepare the local workforce for green jobs.*
2. **Green tech incubator and support:** *Establish an incubator to nurture green technology startups, providing mentoring, funding, and networking opportunities.*
3. **Regional green branding and marketing:** *Develop a unified branding strategy that highlights Monaghan's commitment to renewable energy, sustainable practices, and eco-tourism, attracting businesses and residents interested in a green economy.*

These strategies align with the pilot's goals of unlocking the potential of the green economy in Monaghan and promoting sustainable development in the region.

[User] *What EU policies should the Monaghan Pilot consider in a sustainable tourism theme of its RAP*

[GA] *The Monaghan Pilot should consider aligning its sustainable tourism initiatives with the following EU policies:*

1. **The European Green Deal:** *This overarching policy framework emphasises sustainability and environmental protection, which are central to the concept of sustainable tourism. The pilot can leverage the Green Deal's funding mechanisms and initiatives to promote eco-friendly practices, reduce carbon emissions, and conserve biodiversity in its tourism offerings.*
2. **The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP):** *The CAP provides funding for rural development projects, including those related to tourism. The Monaghan Pilot can explore opportunities to integrate sustainable tourism initiatives with agricultural practices, such as agritourism or farm-to-table experiences, to create a more holistic and sustainable approach.*
3. **The EU Rural Action Plan:** *This plan aims to revitalise rural areas by promoting sustainable tourism that showcases the unique cultural and natural heritage of these regions. The Monaghan Pilot can align its tourism strategy with the Rural Action Plan's objectives to attract visitors, create jobs, and boost the local economy while preserving the environment and cultural identity of the region.*

By aligning with these EU policies, the Monaghan Pilot can access funding opportunities, gain support from relevant stakeholders, and ensure that its sustainable tourism initiatives contribute to the broader goals of the European Union.

[User] *Which funding opportunities should the Monaghan pilot pursue first ?*

[GA] *The Monaghan pilot, with its focus on the green economy, skills development, and rural-urban collaboration, should prioritise the following funding opportunities:*



1. **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD):** This fund supports a wide range of rural development projects, including those related to environmental protection, renewable energy, and job creation. Given Monaghan's focus on green initiatives, the EAFRD could provide substantial financial support for projects like the skill-focused green job initiative and the green tech incubator.
2. **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF):** This fund aims to support the green and digital transitions in EU member states. Monaghan's focus on green technology and sustainable practices aligns well with the RRF's objectives, making it a potential source of funding for projects like the green tech incubator and regional green branding initiatives.
3. **Horizon Europe:** This research and innovation program funds projects that address societal challenges, including climate change and environmental sustainability. The Monaghan pilot could explore opportunities to collaborate with research institutions and businesses to develop and implement innovative green technologies and practices, potentially securing funding through Horizon Europe.

These funding opportunities align with the Monaghan pilot's goals and priorities, offering the potential for significant financial support and collaboration opportunities to drive the region's sustainable development agenda.

[User] What about LEADER funding ?

[GA] LEADER funding is a rural development program under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that supports local action groups (LAGs) in implementing bottom-up, community-led projects. It emphasises innovation, collaboration, and sustainable development in rural areas.

Key points about LEADER funding relevant to the Monaghan Pilot:

- **Flexibility:** LEADER funding is flexible and can be used for a wide range of projects, including those related to the green economy, skills development, and rural tourism. This aligns well with the diverse focus areas of the Monaghan Pilot.
- **Community-Led:** LEADER projects are community-led, meaning that local stakeholders have a significant role in identifying needs, designing projects, and implementing them. This aligns with the pilot's emphasis on bottom-up development and community engagement.
- **Innovation:** LEADER encourages innovative approaches to rural development. The Monaghan Pilot's focus on green technology and sustainable practices could be well-suited for LEADER funding, as it seeks to support projects that test new ideas and approaches.
- **Partnership:** LEADER projects often involve partnerships between different stakeholders, including local businesses, community groups, and public authorities. This collaborative approach aligns with the pilot's emphasis on building strong rural-urban linkages and fostering collaboration between different sectors.

Given these points, the Monaghan Pilot should strongly consider pursuing LEADER funding as a primary option. It aligns with the pilot's goals, values, and priorities, offering the potential for financial support and fostering community-led, innovative, and collaborative projects that can drive sustainable development in the region.

[User] Thanks

[GA] You're welcome! Let me know if you have any other questions.

In addition, to the analysis and many references footnoted in this report, the PoliRuralPlus AI-driven Regional Analysis Dashboard service using the complete domain knowledge space database data that will be developed in task T2.3, will enable a similar but more powerful interactive dialogue with a simpler interactive user interface (see section 9).



Annex O: Example of a Pilot using the PoliRuralPlus GPT



The following is an example of a pilot stakeholder using the [PoliRuralPlus GPT](#), which enables pilots to easily query into the PoliRuralPlus description, extensive references analysis and the evolving pilot RAPs to address specific topics that interest them.

The screenshot shows a chat window titled "PoliRuralPlus GPT". The user's query is: "How can I develop an excellent RAP for my region?". The response is as follows:

Developing a comprehensive and effective Regional Action Plan (RAP) requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning. Here are key steps and considerations to help you create an excellent RAP for your region, drawing on the information from the uploaded documents and general best practices:

- 1. Understand the Regional Context**
 - Analyze the Current Situation:** Assess the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural context of your region. Identify key challenges and opportunities.
 - Review Existing Data:** Utilize data from the uploaded documents, such as the "PoliRuralPlus References Database" and the reports on stakeholders and rural-urban linkages, to gain insights into your region.
- 2. Identify and Engage Stakeholders**

At the bottom of the chat window, there is a footer: "Mac Limited workspace chats aren't used to train our models. ChatGPT can make mistakes."

The pilot user's dialogue was as follows:

[User] How can I develop an excellent RAP for my region?

[GPT] Developing a comprehensive and effective Regional Action Plan (RAP) requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning. Here are key steps and considerations to help you create an excellent RAP for your region, drawing on the information from the uploaded documents and general best practices:

1. Understand the Regional Context

- **analyse the Current Situation:** Assess the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural context of your region. Identify key challenges and opportunities.
- **Review Existing Data:** utilise data from the uploaded documents, such as the "PoliRuralPlus References Database" and the reports on stakeholders and rural-urban linkages, to gain insights into your region.

2. Identify and Engage Stakeholders

- **Stakeholder Mapping:** Identify key stakeholders, including local government, businesses, community organisations, and residents. Refer to the "Stakeholders Identification" document for detailed guidance.
- **Engagement Strategies:** Develop a plan to engage stakeholders through workshops, surveys, interviews, and public meetings. Ensure that all voices, especially marginalised groups, are heard.



3. Define Clear Goals and Objectives

- **Vision and Mission:** Establish a clear vision and mission for the RAP. What are the long-term goals you aim to achieve?
- **Specific Objectives:** Break down the vision into specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives.

4. Conduct a SWOT Analysis

- **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats:** Conduct a SWOT analysis to identify the internal strengths and weaknesses of the region, as well as external opportunities and threats.
- **Strategic Implications:** Use the SWOT analysis to inform strategic priorities and actions.

5. Develop Strategic Actions

- **Action Plans:** Based on the SWOT analysis and stakeholder input, develop detailed action plans. Each plan should include specific actions, responsible parties, timelines, resources required, and expected outcomes.
- **Integration of Rural-Urban Linkages:** Ensure that actions promote synergies between rural and urban areas, leveraging their respective strengths.

6. Allocate Resources

- **Budgeting:** Prepare a budget that aligns with the action plans. Identify funding sources, including government grants, private investments, and community contributions.
- **Resource Mobilisation:** Develop strategies for mobilising resources, including partnerships and collaborations.

7. Implement and Monitor

- **Implementation Framework:** Establish a framework for the implementation of action plans. Assign roles and responsibilities clearly.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Set up an M&E system to track progress and measure impact. Use indicators to assess the effectiveness of actions and make necessary adjustments.

8. Communicate and Adjust

- **Communication Plan:** Develop a communication plan to keep stakeholders informed and engaged. Use various channels to share progress, successes, and challenges.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Be prepared to adapt the RAP based on feedback and changing circumstances. Continuous learning and improvement should be integral to the RAP process.

Utilising Uploaded Documents

- **PoliRuralPlus D2.1 Stakeholders Identification:** Use this document to guide the stakeholder mapping and engagement process.
- **PoliRuralPlus D5.1 Prepared Pilot by Stakeholder Multi-Actor Approach:** Refer to this for best practices in implementing a multi-actor approach in your region.
- **PoliRuralPlus D2.2 Rural-urban Linkages & Opportunities post COVID-19:** This will provide insights into how to leverage rural-urban linkages and opportunities in the post-COVID-19 context.



Practical Steps:

1. **Kick-off Meeting:** Organise a meeting with key stakeholders to present the RAP process and gather initial input.
2. **Data Collection and Analysis:** Collect data relevant to your region, utilising the uploaded documents and additional sources.
3. **Drafting the RAP:** Develop a draft RAP incorporating the elements discussed above.
4. **Stakeholder Review:** Share the draft with stakeholders for feedback.
5. **Finalization and Approval:** Finalise the RAP based on feedback and seek formal approval from relevant authorities.
6. **Launch and Implementation:** Officially launch the RAP and begin the implementation phase, ensuring regular monitoring and updates.

By following these steps and leveraging the information in the provided documents, you can develop a robust and impactful RAP that addresses the unique needs and opportunities of your region.