



# **D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline**



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101136910



## Document information

<b>Key information</b>	<b>Open calls strategy, timeline, Open call package, dissemination strategies, application process, selection process, contract preparation, financial and administrative support, results evaluation</b>
Project reference number	101136910
Project acronym	PoliRuralPlus
Project title	Fostering Sustainable, Balanced, Equitable, Place-based and Inclusive Development of Rural-Urban Communities' Using Specific Spatial Enhanced Attractiveness Mapping ToolBox
Work package (WP) and deliverable number and name	WP6 - D6.1 – Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline
WP leader and co-leader	P4A
Deliverable leader and key author(s)	Tomas Mildorf (P4A)
Contributors and authors	Tomas Mildorf, Marketa Kollerova (P4A), Karel Charvat (CCSS)
Peer reviewers	David Pesek, Petra Skalska, Petra Ritschelova (CVUT)
P.R. approval date/version	28-06-2024   Version V2
Document type	R
For public dissemination	Yes, PU-public
Brief abstract	D6.1 outlines the strategy and timeline for open calls, structured to enhance rural-urban development. It covers call preparation, objective setting, application and selection process as well as dissemination strategies. Furthermore, D6.1 covers the overall transparent proposal management incl. preparation of contracts, financial and administrative support and results evaluation.

## Disclaimer

Funded by the European Union.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

## Document history

Version	Date	Main measures/changes	Authors
V0.1	03-03-2024	Table of contents	Tomas Mildorf/P4A
V0.2	18-03-2024	Initial draft	Karel Charvat/CCSS, Marketa Kollerova/P4A
V0.3	25-03-2024	Finalisation of all chapters	Tomas Mildorf/P4A
V0.4	26-03-2024	Final formatting	Marketa Kollerova/P4A
V0.5	27-03-2024	Incorporation of reviewers' comments	Tomas Mildorf/P4A
V1	29-03-2024	D6.1, version 1 uploaded to the EU portal/SYGMA	Coordinator
V2	27-06-2024	Update based on changes introduced before the Outreach call publication (flat rate funding for all calls)	Tomas Mildorf/P4A
V2	28-06-2024	D6.1, version 2 uploaded to the EU portal/SYGMA	Coordinator



## Table of contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Overview of the Project	5
1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Deliverable	6
<b>2 Third Party Calls Preparation and Management</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Defining Scope and Objectives of Calls	7
2.1.1 General Objective of the Call	7
2.1.2 Specific Objectives per Pilot Area	8
2.2 Expected Results	10
2.3 Open Call Packages	11
2.4 Dissemination Strategies for Calls	12
2.5 Application Process	13
2.6 Selection Process	14
<b>3 Realisation of Activities Based on Calls</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Contract Preparation with Selected Parties	17
3.2 Financial and Administrative Support, Progress Monitoring and Collaboration	17
3.3 Evaluation of Results	18
<b>4 Conclusions</b>	<b>20</b>

## Abbreviations

AI/DL	Artificial Intelligence / Deep Learning
AI/ML	Artificial Intelligence / Machine Learning
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems
CCSS	Czech Center for Science and Society
CVUT	Czech Technical University in Prague
EC	European Commission
EOSC	European Open Science Cloud
EU	European Union
FTSP	Financial Support to Third Parties
GIS	Geographic Information System

## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



IoT	Internet of Things
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
PU	Public
P4A	Plan4all
R	Report
WP	Work Package



## Executive Summary

The PoliRuralPlus project is an ambitious initiative that builds on the success of the PoliRural H2020 project, aiming to foster sustainable, balanced, equitable, place-based, and inclusive development of rural-urban communities across Europe. With a comprehensive approach that encompasses the use of cutting-edge technologies such as AI/ML, GIS, and IoT, PoliRuralPlus is set to enhance the quality of life for EU citizens by developing robust rural-urban partnerships. These partnerships are designed to support resilience and interconnectedness between diverse geographical settings, demonstrating effective funding mechanisms like public-private partnerships and crowdfunding for long-term sustainability.

A significant focus of the PoliRuralPlus project is on digital innovation and data-driven decision-making. By augmenting its Digital Innovations Tool Box, the project aims to enable policymakers and planners to make more informed decisions, leveraging state-of-the-art AI and Deep Learning algorithms. This strategic initiative seeks to implement an EU-wide, regional-driven integrated territorial planning and implementation Action-Foresight Process & Toolbox, in collaboration with European Digital Innovation Hubs.

The project dedicates almost €900,000, constituting 16% of the requested EU contribution, for Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) including the cost for the evaluation of proposals, aiming to involve additional parties to expand the project's reach and impact. This move is expected to broaden the geographic coverage and thematic scope, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of rural-urban interactions and fostering collaboration between rural and urban areas.

Through a series of four open calls, PoliRuralPlus seeks to attract and fund innovative proposals that align with the project's overarching aims. These calls are designed to encourage innovative approaches to rural development, promote collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and generate insights and solutions that can inform policy and practice, contributing to the broader objectives of balanced rural-urban development.

The project's strategy for third-party calls preparation and management outlines a thorough plan to engage, support, and collaborate with stakeholders across different regions. The initiative emphasises the importance of transparent and efficient proposal handling, detailed financial support mechanisms, and engagement strategies to attract diverse applicants. By integrating successful innovations into the PoliRuralPlus project, this deliverable is essential for catalysing impactful solutions for EU rural and urban communities, driving innovation, and strengthening rural-urban connectivity and sustainability.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of the Project

Building upon the success of the PoliRural H2020 project, PoliRuralPlus sets its sights on fostering coordinated and collaborative development across urban and rural areas within the EU. The project stems from the recognition of the critical need for integrated approaches to address the challenges facing both rural and urban communities.

At its core, PoliRuralPlus aims to enhance the quality of life for EU citizens residing in diverse geographical settings. By supporting nine pilot projects, the initiative seeks to develop robust rural-urban partnerships that support resilience and interconnectedness between these regions. Moreover, PoliRuralPlus seeks to demonstrate effective funding mechanisms, including public-private partnerships and crowdfunding, to sustain these partnerships over the long term.

A key aspect of the project lies in the realm of digital innovation and data-driven decision-making. PoliRuralPlus seeks to augment its Digital Innovations Tool Box with cutting-edge technologies such as AI/ML, GIS, and IoT. These tools will enable policymakers and planners to harness disparate data sources, facilitating more informed and effective decision-making processes.

PoliRuralPlus extends its ambitions into the area of territorial planning, aiming to implement an EU-wide regional-driven integrated territorial planning and implementation Action-Foresight Process & Tool Box. This expansion involves leveraging state-of-the-art AI and Deep Learning algorithms in real-time analysis, facilitated through collaboration with European Digital Innovation Hubs.

PoliRuralPlus aims to deliver a range of outcomes with far-reaching implications. From socio-economic analyses to the evaluation of ecosystem services, the project promises to provide valuable insights that inform policy and investment decisions. Additionally, by promoting Nature-Based Solutions and fostering collaboration between rural and urban areas, PoliRuralPlus seeks to pave the way for sustainable and resilient development.

In addition to its core objectives, the PoliRuralPlus project will allocate 900k EUR, constituting 16% of the requested EU contribution for Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP). This funding will be instrumental in involving additional parties to expand the project's reach and impact.

By dedicating resources to realising additional activities, the project aims to broaden its geographic coverage and thematic scope, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of rural-urban interactions. Moreover, the extension of the initial pilots will enable the exploration of new possibilities for fostering collaboration between rural and urban areas.

The expected results of the planned open calls for proposals are ambitious and wide-ranging. PoliRuralPlus anticipates the emergence of new ideas and pilot activities in the pilot regions, with experiences transferred to new areas to foster innovation and collaboration. Complementary digital applications and methodologies will be integrated into the PoliRuralPlus platform, enhancing production advice and reducing costs for solution development.

## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



Moreover, the project will develop innovative digital solutions leveraging AI/DL and emerging technologies to enable performance comparison across different computing architectures in rural-urban interaction contexts. Tangible deployments of digital and data technology will facilitate real-time data processing in remote production processes, even in environments with limited connectivity and energy availability.

### **1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Deliverable**

This deliverable covers the strategy and timeline for the initiation of open calls. It includes a structured framework for third-party calls that aligns with enhancing rural-urban development. It encapsulates the process from call preparation to defining objectives and criteria, through management and administration, ensuring transparent and efficient proposal handling. It details financial support mechanisms, including funding criteria and activity monitoring, to ensure project objectives are met. Furthermore, it emphasises engagement strategies to attract diverse applicants and foster collaboration, integrating successful innovations into the PoliRuralPlus project. This deliverable is essential for catalysing impactful solutions for EU rural and urban communities, driving innovation, and strengthening rural-urban connectivity and sustainability.



## 2 Third Party Calls Preparation and Management

### 2.1 Defining Scope and Objectives of Calls

Within the framework of the PoliRuralPlus project, a series of four open calls are anticipated. These calls are designed to attract and fund innovative proposals that align with the project's overarching aims. The primary objective of these calls is to extend the impact of the PoliRuralPlus initiative, exploring new methodologies, technologies, and strategies for rural-urban development.

#### 2.1.1 General Objective of the Call

The general objective of the calls under the PoliRuralPlus project is to stimulate and support activities that contribute to the project's general objectives. These include enhancing rural attractiveness, fostering rural-urban integration, and leveraging technological innovations for sustainable rural development. Proposals selected through these calls are expected to provide significant inputs into deliverables D2.4 Stakeholder Feedback and Data Analysis Final and D6.3 Comprehensive Report on Funded Activities and Impact Assessment, which focus on the evaluation and integration of the results achieved by these funded activities.

The calls aim to:

- Encourage innovative approaches to rural development that can be replicated or scaled across different regions.
- Promote collaboration among stakeholders from various sectors, including technology, agriculture, and regional planning, to address rural challenges in a holistic manner.
- Generate insights and solutions that can inform policy and practice, contributing to the broader objectives of balanced rural-urban development.

#### Objectives across calls:

##### 1. Outreach Call:

- **Foster Grassroots Innovation in Rural-Urban Interactions** - uncover and support unique ideas that redefine rural-urban interactions, demonstrating a deep dive into regional intricacies and fostering grassroots innovations.

##### 2. Mobilise Call:

- **Leverage AI for Community-Driven Innovation** - mobilise local stakeholders, IT experts, and regional advisors, leveraging AI/DL tools to illuminate their potential in transforming rural-urban interactions, and fostering community-driven innovations.

##### 3. Develop Call:

- **Showcase Scalable Solutions for Rural-Urban Dynamics** - curate and support innovative solutions that address the unique challenges and opportunities within rural-urban dynamics, showcasing the adaptability and applicability of these solutions across the EU.

##### 4. Enhance Call:

- **Advance Rural-Urban Models through Innovation** - refine and augment existing models of rural-urban interactions with new, innovative approaches that address specific challenges, ensuring continuous improvement and sustainability.

## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



By achieving these objectives, the PoliRuralPlus project seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the understanding and enhancement of rural-urban dynamics, ensuring that rural areas remain vibrant, resilient, and interconnected with urban centres.

### 2.1.2 Specific Objectives per Pilot Area

#### Introduction to pilot areas

In line with the overarching objectives of the PoliRuralPlus project, nine distinct pilot areas have been identified to validate methodologies, enhance tools, and unearth practical policy innovations. These pilots serve as crucial testing grounds, where the project's outcomes can be applied and refined to address diverse regional challenges and opportunities.

The selection of these nine pilots across diverse geographical regions in Europe is strategic, aiming to encompass a broad spectrum of rural-urban interactions, challenges, and opportunities. This diversity ensures that the PoliRuralPlus project can validate methodologies, enhance tools, and develop practical policy innovations across various contexts.

Each pilot is designed with unique goals: from fostering vibrant communities in Ireland's Monaghan County to revitalising rural Slovak areas and promoting agritech in Greece. Italy focuses on short food supply chains, while Finland seeks to build a rural event industry. The Bavaria-Czechia and Spain pilots aim to enhance social connectivity and leverage cultural heritage, respectively. Latvia and Malta focus on sustainable rural economies and digital transformation to bridge societal divides.

Despite their differences, all pilots share the core mission of enhancing rural-urban connectivity, innovation, sustainability, and community engagement. They strive for integrated development where rural and urban areas can mutually benefit from innovative technologies, economic development, and sustainable practices.

The pilots differ in their regional challenges, strategic approaches, and thematic priorities. Some focus on digital aspects (e.g. Malta) and agritech innovations (e.g. Greece), while others emphasise cultural connectivity (e.g. Bavaria-Czechia, Spain). Strategies for stakeholder engagement and achieving objectives vary according to each region's socio-economic landscape, reflecting tailored approaches to ensure effective participation and the realisation of project goals.

Together, these pilots represent a comprehensive approach to understanding and enhancing rural-urban interactions. By addressing specific regional challenges while aiming for broader thematic goals, the PoliRuralPlus project leverages these diverse contexts to foster sustainable, inclusive development across Europe.

#### Pilots' contribution

Geographically, the pilot areas are spread throughout Europe:

- Pilot 1: Ireland / Monaghan County
- Pilot 2: Slovakia
- Pilot 3: Greece
- Pilot 4: Italy
- Pilot 5: Finland
- Pilot 6: Czech-Bavarian border region (Bavaria-Czechia)
- Pilot 7: Spain
- Pilot 8: Latvia - Vidzeme Planning Region
- Pilot 9: Malta -Malta and Gozo



### Key topics to be addressed by the piloting regions

**Pilot 1, situated in Ireland's Monaghan County**, aims to foster a vibrant and integrated Rural-Urban community by 2030. Through the "Rural and Urban Monaghan County Action Plan," the pilot endeavours to create an inclusive environment where all residents enjoy an enhanced quality of life while promoting innovation and prosperity.

Topics to be addressed:

- Uncover pathways for enterprise development in the green economy
- Identifying emerging sectors and innovative practices in the green economy.
- Highlight opportunities for growth in the environmental sector.
- Inform strategies for promoting sustainable livelihoods and community development.
- Identification of social enterprise opportunities and support mechanisms, the research could strengthen the social enterprise sector.

**Slovakia's pilot (Pilot 2)** focuses on envisioning more attractive rural areas, striving to revitalise Slovak rural regions through stakeholder engagement, political leadership, and capacity-building efforts. This pilot serves as a platform for inclusive consultations and decision-making processes, essential for shaping impactful policies.

Topics to be addressed:

- Vision for more attractive rural areas
- Revitalization of Slovak rural areas
- Stakeholder engagement and capacity building
- Inclusive consultations and decision-making processes

**Pilot 3, located in Greece**, is geared towards providing training in sustainable agritech technologies and promotional services for agritourism. By enhancing digital skills and promoting local agricultural products, this pilot aims to stimulate economic diversification and capitalise on the region's natural resources.

Topics to be addressed:

- Training for sustainable agritech technologies
- Promotional services for agritourism
- Increase in digital skills among AKIS actors
- Diversification of agritourism opportunities and promotion of local agricultural products

**Italian pilot (Pilot 4)** emphasises the establishment of short food supply chains to strengthen connections between rural and urban areas. By promoting healthy diets and rural lifestyles, this initiative aims to foster synergies and attract urban dwellers to rural communities.

Topics to be addressed:

- Establishment of short food supply chains
- Promotion of healthy diets and rural lifestyles
- Creation of direct linkages between rural and urban citizens
- Attraction of urban dwellers to rural areas

**Pilot 5 in Finland** aims to build a Rural Event Industry Ecosystem, fostering community engagement, cooperation, and economic opportunities through rural events. By leveraging the region's natural assets and creative sector, this pilot seeks to attract visitors from urban areas and stimulate rural development.

Topics to be addressed:

- Building the Rural Event Industry Ecosystem
- Community engagement and cooperation
- Economic opportunities through rural events
- Attraction of urban visitors to rural areas



The **Bavaria-Czechia Rural Innovation Network**, the focus of **Pilot 6**, aims to enhance connectivity, innovation, and social capital across rural and urban areas. By establishing incubators and fostering cultural connections, this pilot strives to create a conducive environment for rural startups and strengthen territorial identity.

Topics to be addressed:

- Establishment of the Bavaria-Czechia Rural Innovation Network
- Improvement of connections and strategies for synergistic development
- Enhancement of business and innovation opportunities
- Strengthening of social connectivity and territorial identity

**Spanish pilot (Pilot 7)** centres on rural-urban synergies and cultural heritage, leveraging the Segobriga Archaeological Park as a focal point for community collaboration and economic development. This initiative aims to attract visitors, foster local entrepreneurship, and bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.

Topics to be addressed:

- Promotion of rural-urban synergies and cultural heritage
- Utilisation of the Segobriga Archaeological Park as a focal point
- Economic development through community collaboration
- Bridging the gap between rural and urban areas

**Pilot 8 in Latvia's Vidzeme Planning Region** aims to promote sustainable and resilient rural economies through citizen engagement and diversified business practices. By facilitating multi-level consultations and inclusive decision-making, this pilot seeks to ensure governance that meets the needs of rural and urban stakeholders.

Topics to be addressed:

- Promotion of sustainable and resilient rural economies
- Citizen engagement in decision-making processes
- Diversification of business practices and multi-level consultations
- Inclusive governance for rural and urban stakeholders

Lastly, **Pilot 9 in Malta** targets digital transformation and entrepreneurial capacity building in rural areas, aiming to level up agricultural sectors through digitization and youth empowerment. By fostering collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders, this pilot endeavours to bridge societal divides and promote circularity.

Topics to be addressed:

- Digital transformation and entrepreneurial capacity building in rural areas
- Levelling up of agricultural sectors through digitization
- Empowerment of youth and promotion of circularity
- Bridging societal divides between rural and urban areas

Together, these pilots represent a diverse array of approaches to address rural challenges and capitalise on opportunities, ultimately contributing to the project's overarching goal of fostering sustainable and prosperous rural communities across Europe. Through the open calls, the project aims to introduce innovative concepts of rural-urban interaction and to facilitate the transfer of experiences to new areas.

## 2.2 Expected Results

**Call 1: Outreach** 9 proposals to be funded

**Expected Results:**

- Generation and support of innovative ideas aimed at redefining rural-urban interactions, gathered from workshops across key EU regions.
- Funding of the most promising project from each region with a lump sum of 5 kEUR to stimulate regional innovation and the development of grassroots initiatives. (9 financed projects are expected)

## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



- As a result, the database of PoliRuralPlus stakeholders will be extended, a set of innovative ideas will be collected and described, and at least one post for the PoliRuralPlus blog will be published.

### **Call 2: Mobilise** 9 proposals to be funded

#### **Expected Results:**

- Successful Hackathon/Ideathon events across EU regions, showcasing the impact of AI/DL tools on rural-urban dynamics.
- Active engagement of local stakeholders, leading to the creation of prototypes and solutions that integrate technology with local insights.
- A dedicated budget of 10 kEUR for each region to support participation and innovation. (9 financed projects are expected)

### **Call 3: Develop** 5-15 proposals to be funded

#### **Expected Results:**

- Funding and support for new use cases that offer innovative approaches to rural-urban interaction challenges, with financial support ranging from 30 to 100 kEUR based on their complexity and potential impact.
- Encouragement of collaboration across single and multi-organizational teams to foster a wide range of solutions.

### **Call 4: Enhance** 7-15 proposals to be funded

#### **Expected Results:**

- Proposals that offer significant improvements and added value over existing models, with selected initiatives receiving up to 25 kEUR based on their scope and potential.
- Integration of 7-15 initiatives that align with PoliRuralPlus objectives, ensuring continuous innovation and improvement in rural-urban dynamics.

## **2.3 Open Call Packages**

Given the unique nature and specific targets of each call within the PoliRuralPlus project, it is imperative that a dedicated set of documents (Call Announcement, Guidelines for Applicants, and Contracts for third parties and evaluators) be prepared for every individual call. This approach ensures that the documentation accurately reflects the objectives, requirements, and evaluation criteria relevant to each call, thereby facilitating clear communication and understanding among all potential applicants.

#### **Rationale:**

Each call under the PoliRuralPlus project is designed to address distinct challenges and opportunities within the broader aim of enhancing rural-urban interactions. Recognizing that these challenges can vary significantly across different regions and thematic areas, tailored documentation is essential to:

## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



- Clearly define the scope and objectives of each call.
- Outline specific eligibility and submission requirements.
- Detail the evaluation process and criteria.
- Provide a bespoke contract template that addresses the unique aspects of each call.

Furthermore, due to the interrelated nature of the project's various components, some calls may build upon the outcomes or learnings from previous calls. As such, creating dedicated documentation for each call allows for the incorporation of insights gained, adjustments in strategy, or shifts in focus that may arise as the project progresses.

### **Implementation:**

To ensure the effective preparation and dissemination of these documents, the following steps will be undertaken under the leadership of Plan4all:

1. **Call-specific planning:** Prior to the announcement of each call, the project team will review the intended focus areas and objectives to identify any specific requirements or considerations that need to be addressed in the documentation.
2. **Documentation development:** A tailored set of documents, including the Call Announcement, Guide for Applicants, and Contracts, will be drafted to reflect the unique aspects of each call. This includes detailing any specific targets, deliverables, and evaluation criteria.
3. **Review and approval:** The draft documents will undergo review by the project coordinator and relevant stakeholders to ensure accuracy, clarity, and alignment with the project's overall goals. Necessary revisions will be made based on feedback received.
4. **Dissemination:** Once finalised, the documents will be made available to potential applicants through the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub and other appropriate channels. Announcements regarding the availability of call-specific documentation will also be made to ensure wide reach.

## **2.4 Dissemination Strategies for Calls**

By employing following dissemination strategies, the open calls can reach a diverse audience and attract a wide range of potential applicants, ultimately maximising the impact and success of the funding initiative.

**Multimedia:** Leveraging multimedia channels such as press releases, social media platforms and partners' websites to disseminate information about the open call to a wider audience.

### Press Releases:

Draft and distribute press releases to relevant media outlets, including online news portals, magazines, and industry-specific publications.

Reach out to journalists and media contacts to pitch the story of the open call, highlighting its significance, objectives, and potential impact.

Customise press releases to cater to different media platforms and audiences, ensuring maximum visibility and coverage.

### Social Media Platforms:

## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



Create dedicated posts about the open call on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Utilise engaging visuals, including infographics, images, and videos, to accompany social media posts and attract attention.

Share the open call across relevant groups, forums, and communities on social media platforms to reach a targeted audience interested in similar topics.

Encourage stakeholders, partners, and followers to share the open call posts within their networks, thereby expanding its reach organically.

### Partner Website Features:

Collaborate with partner organisations to have the open call prominently featured on their websites.

Request partners to dedicate a section or page on their website specifically for promoting the open call.

Ensure that the information provided on partner websites includes key details such as objectives, eligibility criteria, application process, and deadlines.

Include direct links to the open call web page or application portal on websites, ensuring easy access for visitors interested in applying.

**Webinars:** Hosting webinars to provide detailed information about the open call, its objectives, eligibility criteria, application process, and any other relevant details. Webinars allow for direct interaction with potential applicants and can facilitate clarifications regarding the call.

**Cascade Funding Calls on SEDIA/EC portal:** Ensuring that the open call is featured on the SEDIA/EC portal, which serves as a centralised platform for accessing funding opportunities. This increases the visibility of the open call among stakeholders who regularly visit the portal for funding-related information.

**Partner projects:** Collaborating with partner projects to disseminate information about the open call to their networks and stakeholders. Partner projects can help amplify the reach of the call by sharing it with their respective audiences and communities. This is the initial set of projects that will be used for open call networking: Cities2030, Enfasys, QuantiFarm, FooDRuS, TExTOUR, EMFAF, DALIA, trans4num, Plus Change.

## 2.5 Application Process

The application process for the PoliRuralPlus open calls led by Plan4all is designed to be transparent, inclusive, and straightforward, ensuring a wide range of innovative proposals are received and evaluated fairly. The process includes several key components aimed at facilitating the submission of high-quality applications aligned with the project's objectives. The application process will be managed through the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub, which will serve as the central hub for all application-related activities.

### Timeline:

The application timeline is critical for ensuring that applicants have sufficient time to prepare and submit their proposals. The preliminary timeline for each call is depicted in the following figure including the call opening, evaluation of applications, contract preparation, sub-project implementation and evaluation.



## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



internal experts from pilot regions and external experts, enhancing the diversity and comprehensiveness of the evaluation process.

The independent experts will be involved in two batches:

- **Internal Call for Experts:** Scheduled for April 2024, this call aims to enrich the pool of evaluators with individuals possessing insights into specific challenges and opportunities within the PoliRuralPlus thematic areas.
- **Contracting External Experts:** External experts will be contracted through CVUT, ensuring an external viewpoint in the evaluation process. This approach broadens the evaluative perspective, incorporating wide-ranging expertise and experiences. External experts will be suggested by the project partners and will be selected by CVUT, Plan4all and CCSS. The external experts will receive financial contributions for their review. 12,000 EUR will be allocated by CVUT to cover these costs. It's expected to hire 5 external reviewers.

### Evaluation Criteria:

The evaluation of proposals is based on the same principles as established by the European Commission (EC) for Horizon Europe proposal evaluation, tailored to assess the relevance, impact, innovation, and feasibility of the proposed activities. These criteria ensure that selected projects are aligned with the overall goals of the PoliRuralPlus project and the broader Horizon Europe framework.

Similarly to the Horizon Europe proposals, there are three main evaluation criteria: Objectives, Impacts and Implementation. Below is an example of the specific criteria for the Outreach Call. Specific criteria for other calls will be defined at a later stage when preparing the open call packages.

### **Objectives (0-5 points)**

- Linkage with regional specific objectives: Evaluate how well the proposal's objectives align with the specific objectives identified in the selected pilot region (Section 2.1.2).
- Extension of these objectives: Assesses the proposal's ability to build upon or enhance existing regional specific objectives with innovative or expanded approaches.
- Clarity, feasibility, and appropriateness of the proposed approach for identifying, recruiting, and engaging stakeholders, including selection criteria, communication channels, and collaboration tools.
- Clarity and soundness of proposed methodologies for collecting, analysing, and synthesising user needs, including specific techniques, inclusivity strategies, and plans to address potential challenges.
- 

### **Impacts (0-5 points)**

- Level of KPIs: Considers the specificity and ambition of the proposed Key Performance Indicators related to stakeholder engagement and sectoral impacts.
- Selected Stakeholders: Evaluate the diversity and relevance of the targeted stakeholder groups, emphasising engagement breadth and depth.
- Covered Sectors: Reviews the range of sectors the proposal aims to impact, looking for a comprehensive approach that addresses multiple areas of regional development.
- Impact on Region: Assesses the potential long-term benefits to the pilot region, including economic growth, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and overall enhancement of rural-urban interactions.

### **Implementation (0-5 points)**



- Financial plan: The credibility and justification of the proposed budget and the level of the organisation's own contribution.

Evaluation process:

- Each proposal will be evaluated on three main criteria: Objectives, Impacts and Implementation with a scoring range from 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest) for each criterion (see proposal scoring below).
- Proposals must achieve a minimum score of 3 in all criteria and an overall score of at least 11 11 to be considered for selection.
- Priority will be given to selecting one proposal per pilot region. If no proposals qualify in a specific region, the option to select two proposals from another region will be considered.
- In the event of equal overall scores within a region, the proposal with higher Impact KPIs will be selected to ensure that the most potentially transformative project is chosen.
- Impact KPIs as Tiebreaker: In the event of equal overall scores within a region, the proposal with higher Impact KPIs will be selected to ensure that the most potentially transformative project is chosen.

Proposal scoring:

- Evaluation scores are awarded for the criteria, and not for the different aspects in each criterion.
- The evaluators provide a score in the range from 0-5 to each criterion based on their textual comments.
- The whole range of scores should be used with steps of 0.5.
- Interpretation of scores:
  - **0** - The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
  - **1 - Poor.** The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
  - **2 - Fair.** The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
  - **3 - Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
  - **4 - Very Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
  - **5 - Excellent.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Definitions for score descriptors:

- A '**minor shortcoming**' is an issue that relates only to a marginal aspect of the proposal with respect to the criterion and/or can easily be rectified (it will not impact the scoring).
- A '**shortcoming**' is a problem that relates to an important aspect of the proposal. It impacts the scoring but does not render the proposal inappropriate for funding, i.e. the proposal is still expected to lead to useful results with positive impact.
- A '**significant weakness**' means that the proposal addresses the criterion in a limited and/or not sufficiently effective way (will lower the score below threshold). This can also be the case when the proposal includes a large number of shortcomings, each one of them not rendering the proposal inappropriate for funding, though all together make the proposal not addressing the criterion sufficiently in an effective way.



## 3 Realisation of Activities Based on Calls

The successful execution of activities based on open calls represents a crucial phase in the PoliRuralPlus project. This chapter outlines the comprehensive strategy for the realisation of these activities, focusing on contract preparation with selected parties, providing financial and administrative support, facilitating communication and collaboration, and evaluating the outcomes of the supported initiatives.

### 3.1 Contract Preparation with Selected Parties

Following the selection process, the focus shifts to formalising agreements with the successful applicants. The Czech Technical University in Prague (CVUT), as the entity responsible for distributing the financial support, will take the lead in preparing contracts with the selected parties. This preparation involves:

- Clarifying terms and conditions: Ensuring all parties are aware of their obligations, project timelines, deliverable expectations, and reporting requirements.
- Setting milestones: Establishing clear, measurable milestones for project progress assessment, including financial disbursements tied to these milestones.
- Intellectual property rights: Outlining the management of intellectual property rights to foster innovation while protecting the interests of both the project and the participants.

### 3.2 Financial and Administrative Support, Progress Monitoring and Collaboration

The PoliRuralPlus project is committed to providing comprehensive financial and administrative support to ensure the smooth implementation of selected initiatives. This support lead by CCSS includes:

- Financial administration, monitoring and guidance: A continuous process to monitor the financial health of the initiatives, offering guidance on budget management, and eligibility of expenses. This ensures that all financial activities comply with the overarching EU funding rules and the specific regulations of the PoliRuralPlus project. All four calls will be based on a lump sum basis.
- Administrative assistance: Beyond financial management, the selected parties receive ongoing administrative support. This encompasses assistance in meeting contractual obligations, navigating project management challenges, and ensuring timely delivery of milestones and deliverables.

#### Preliminary payment schedule:

The payment schedule for the PoliRuralPlus project's open calls is designed to ensure financial support is provided efficiently and effectively, facilitating the successful delivery of project results. Below is a detailed outline of the preliminary payment schedule.

**Outreach and Mobilise calls** - These calls will be paid as a lump sum basis following the delivery and acceptance of results. 100% of the grant amount is paid after the results have been delivered and formally accepted by the responsible consortium body (P4A, CCSS and CVUT).

**Develop and Enhance calls** - Payments for these calls are distributed in several instalments based on specific project milestones, including a prepayment, a mid-term review, delivery of results, and following the final payment of the PoliRuralPlus project by the European Commission. These two calls will be based on a lump sum basis too.

- Prepayment (upon contract signing): 40% of the grant amount is provided as an initial prepayment to support the commencement of the project activities.



- After Mid-term Review: 40% of the grant amount is paid upon successful completion of a mid-term review, assessing the progress and interim outcomes against the planned milestones and deliverables.
- Upon Delivery and Acceptance of Results: 20% of the grant amount is disbursed after the project results have been delivered and accepted by the responsible consortium body, ensuring that the project is on track to achieve its objectives.

Recognizing the pivotal role of collaboration in driving innovation and impact, the PoliRuralPlus project places a strong emphasis on fostering robust networks among the selected third parties and the wider project consortium:

- Regular meetings and workshops: Organising periodic meetings and workshops to provide platforms for knowledge exchange, discussing progress, challenges, and brainstorming solutions. These gatherings are crucial for maintaining alignment with the project's goals and reinforcing a sense of community among participants.
- Networking events: Hosting networking events to broaden the collaborative ecosystem, these events connect selected initiatives with a wider network of stakeholders, including industry experts, policymakers, and potential investors. This exposure not only amplifies the projects' impacts but also opens avenues for future collaborations and support.

### 3.3 Evaluation of Results

The evaluation phase of the PoliRuralPlus sub-projects along with the PoliRuralPlus results is critical for measuring the effectiveness and impact of financial support on the third-party initiatives. This phase aims to capture the broader outcomes, assimilate lessons learned, and disseminate best practices. This evaluation also seeks to ensure the integration of advancements made in this project with the foundational work laid out in WP4, enhancing decision-making and foresight capabilities in rural-urban interactions through AI/DL technologies. The following points outline the structured approach towards this evaluation:

#### Evaluating the Impact of Financial Support

- Performance assessment: Systematically evaluate how the financial support has facilitated the development and implementation of innovative solutions by third parties. This includes reviewing progress against predefined milestones, effectiveness in achieving set objectives, and the overall quality of deliverables.
- Impact analysis: Analyse the tangible and intangible impacts of the supported projects on rural-urban dynamics. This includes socio-economic benefits, improvements in policy-making processes, and enhanced rural attractiveness.
- Lessons learned and best practices: Compile and disseminate the lessons learned and best practices identified during the implementation of supported projects. This initiative aims to inform future research and innovation efforts, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and knowledge sharing within the wider community.

#### Integration with WP4 Objectives

- Technology integration: Evaluate the degree to which supported projects have successfully integrated and leveraged existing technologies from the PoliRural project (e.g., PoliRural Hub, Rural Attractiveness, Policy

## D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline



Option Explorer) alongside new AI/DL technologies. Assess the synergies created and their impact on enhancing decision-making and foresight in rural-urban interactions.

- Collaboration with WP3 and WP5: Highlight the collaborative efforts with WP3 in communicating new methodological developments and WP5 in conducting real-scenario experiments. This includes assessing how the integration of PoliRural+ solutions with existing Data Spaces and the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) platforms has supported the project's goals.

### Pathway towards sustainability

- Sustainability assessment: Define and evaluate the pathways towards the sustainability of the developed solutions beyond the lifespan of the PoliRuralPlus project. This encompasses economic viability, environmental impact, social acceptability, and technological scalability.
- Recommendations for scaling-up: Based on the experimentation and evaluation results, formulate recommendations for the adoption and scaling-up of the most promising IT solutions in selected domains. This includes identifying potential barriers to adoption and suggesting strategies to overcome them.
- Impact on decision-making and foresight: Specifically evaluate how the developed solutions have influenced decision-making processes and foresight capabilities in the context of rural-urban interactions. This involves both qualitative and quantitative assessments to capture the breadth and depth of the impact.



## 4 Conclusions

The PoliRuralPlus project, as detailed in this strategy and timeline deliverable, represents a comprehensive and forward-looking initiative aimed at fostering sustainable, balanced, equitable, place-based, and inclusive development of rural-urban communities across Europe. Building upon the success of the PoliRural H2020 project, it extends its vision with the integration of innovative digital solutions, leveraging AI/DL and emerging technologies to address the complex dynamics of rural-urban interactions.

Throughout the various stages of third-party calls preparation and management, the project has laid down a meticulous plan to engage, support, and collaborate with stakeholders across different regions. The calls are strategically designed to promote innovative approaches to rural development, stimulate collaborative efforts across sectors, and integrate advanced technological solutions to enhance decision-making and policy development processes.