POLIRURAL *plus*

DEVELOP CALL

Guidelines

for Applicants

Financial Support for Third Parties

Disclaimer
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.

**Funded by
the European Union**

1. Table of Contents

2. Introduction

The PoliRuralPlus project, under the Horizon Europe framework, extends an invitation to submit proposals that advance rural-urban interactions across the European Union. This guide facilitates applicants in crafting and submitting their proposals.

Within the PoliRuralPlus project, a series of four open calls is 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 in enhancing rural attractiveness, fostering rural-urban integration and leveraging technological innovations for sustainable rural development.

This document provides guidelines for applicants for the third open call, hereinafter referred to as the call or the Develop Call.

2.1. Develop Call Objective

The objective of the Develop Call is to fund applied, small-scale innovation projects that address specific rural-urban challenges in PoliRuralPlus pilot regions while contributing to the technical advancement of the project. Funded projects must:

- **Develop and deploy practical, place-based digital applications** aligned with PoliRuralPlus pilot-specific objectives (Section 2.4).
- **Translate promising concepts into action**, moving from ideation to implementation by funding pilot activities that apply advanced technologies such as AI, machine learning, Internet of Things (IoT), geographic information systems (GIS), or data-driven decision tools.
- Be designed to be interoperable with the **PoliRuralPlus digital tools** (Chapter 4) and technical frameworks, allowing for smooth integration and exchange of data if required, including licensing and communication compatibility.
- **Demonstrate replicability and scalability**, showing how proposed solutions could be adapted and applied across other regions or contexts in the EU.
- **Support the principles and values of the New European Bauhaus (NEB)** by promoting sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics in the development of rural-urban solutions.
- Ensure that **all data** collected during implementation is **incorporated** into PoliRuralPlus tools, including the JackDaw platform and related AI components, to enhance decision-making capabilities and generate stronger project-wide results.

2.2. Quick Facts

- **Budget:** €30,000 - 100,000 per project
- **Total projects funded:** 5 - 15
- **Estimated implementation period:** October 2025 - June 2026
- **Applicants:** A single legal entity or a consortium of up to three entities may apply.

2.3. Expected Results

Projects funded under the Develop Call are expected to deliver the following results:

- **Operational digital applications** tailored to pilot-specific rural-urban challenges, deployed and tested in real or near-real conditions within one or more PoliRuralPlus pilot regions.
- **Demonstrated integration** of advanced technologies (e.g. AI, ML, GIS, IoT, or data analytics) that provide tangible added value to rural-urban development processes.
- **Interoperability with PoliRuralPlus digital tools** (as described in Chapter 4), including successful data integration with the Jackdaw GeoAI Chatbot.
- **Transferable methodologies** or documentation outlining how the application can be replicated or scaled in other contexts or regions, ideally in the form of user guides, APIs, or open standards.
- **Structured contribution of collected data** into the PoliRuralPlus data ecosystem, enhancing the AI components and decision-support functionalities of the project.
- **Evidence of stakeholder engagement**, showing how end users (e.g. local authorities, SMEs, NGOs) contributed to and benefited from the application's development and deployment.
- **Visible alignment with New European Bauhaus (NEB) values**, illustrated through design, accessibility, and inclusive stakeholder involvement.

2.4. Specific Objectives per Pilot Area

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. Applicants are expected to align their proposals with the goals of the selected pilot area and must demonstrate how their activities contribute to at least one specific objective defined for that pilot.

Pilot 1, situated in Ireland's Monaghan County, aims to foster a vibrant, integrated, and sustainable rural-urban community supported by a circular and green economy by 2040. Reflecting the Irish Pilot's commitment to sustainability, the roadmap has updated its research focus to "Advancing the Circular Economy in County Monaghan: Exploring Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Environmental Products and Services."

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Uncover pathways for sustainable enterprise development in the circular economy
- Identifying emerging sectors and innovative practices in the circular economy.
- Highlight opportunities for growth in the circular economic sector with a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Full integration of social enterprises advancing inclusive, community-driven circular growth.
- Enhanced quality of life, with Monaghan serving as a model for balanced and regenerative rural-urban collaboration.

Slovakia's pilot (Pilot 2), **covering the entire country**, serves as a strategic framework for partnerships to revitalize rural areas by addressing key challenges and unlocking new opportunities for sustainable development. Aligned with regional, national, and EU-level priorities - such as the

European Green Deal, the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, and Slovakia's national rural development strategies - the RAP aims to foster thriving, resilient rural communities while strengthening rural-urban linkages.

As a stakeholder-driven pilot, the main theme, core areas and strategic goals were identified in a series of 3 conferences involving over 250 participants over a period of 1 year (March 2024 till March 2025).

Main theme formulated: From Dialogue to Action: Strengthening Rural-Urban Linkages through Multi-Sector and Multi-Actor Cooperation & Innovation

The RAP focuses on three core areas:

1. Enhancing Rural Leadership: Equipping local leaders with digital and AI tools to address rural challenges and opportunities effectively.
2. Boosting Governance: Improving decision-making processes and increasing rural engagement to ensure inclusive and effective policies.
3. Encouraging Collaboration: Strengthening ties between sectors and communities to foster a cohesive approach to regional development.

To address regional challenges and opportunities effectively, the Slovak RAP has identified three strategic goals:

1. Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Building
2. Drive Digitalisation and Smart Transformation
3. Enhanced Cross-Sector Strategic Cooperation

Through digital tools, foresight methodologies, and cross-sector collaborations, the RAP aims to bridge the urban-rural divide and create a future-ready roadmap for Slovakia's rural transformation. By leveraging innovative approaches like the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA) and advanced digital tools such as the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Space and the Spatial Enhanced Attractiveness Mapping Toolbox (SEAMT), the RAP provides a data-driven roadmap for rural transformation.

Pilot 3, located in the region of Central 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.

Specific objectives 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), situated in Apulia, emphasises the promotion of short food supply chains (SFSC) to strengthen connections between rural and urban areas. By promoting healthy diets and lifestyles, this initiative aims to foster synergies and collaborative models between urban dwellers and rural communities.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
● Support measures for the establishment of short food supply chains
● Promotion of healthy diets and lifestyles
● Creation of direct linkages between rural and urban citizens

- Enhance awareness about the quality and accessibility of local food products
- Explore and/or implement digital solutions and tools that contribute to SFSC innovation

Pilot 5 in Finland, situated in the Mallusjoki rural district, aims to build a Rural Event Industry Ecosystem, fostering community engagement, public-private partnership, and economic opportunities through rural events. By enhancing and leveraging the region's natural and human assets, innovativeness and creative sector, this pilot seeks to attract visitors from urban areas and stimulate community-driven rural development.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Promote the rural events industry **ecosystem dynamics and economic opportunities**. The ecosystem includes businesses involved in local food production, nature and outdoor activities, culture, and the creative arts.
- Strengthening territorial identity and legacy for **community spirit and well-being** for example, through digital cultural heritage platforms, community storytelling by augmented reality or digital archives and memory projects.
- Use publicly available geospatial data such as **infrastructure, land use, mobility, and waste management** combined with AI-driven models to help individuals, businesses, and communities plan socially and environmentally sustainable solutions, in line with New European Bauhaus principles. These may include energy-efficient building upgrades, sustainable land use strategies, circular economy initiatives, and improved rural-urban connectivity.

Pilot 6, the Bavaria-Czechia Rural Innovation Network

Located in the Bohemian Forest (Šumava and Bayerischer Wald), this cross-border pilot aims to support small and medium-sized farms in navigating climate change, digital transformation, and evolving policy demands. Building on a strong rural identity and traditional industries, the pilot will establish a Rural Innovation Hub to promote sustainable agriculture, precision farming, and access to shared digital tools and services.

By 2030, the Hub envisions becoming a trusted partner for rural communities, offering hands-on support to help farms remain competitive, resilient, and sustainable.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Establish a cross-border Rural Innovation Hub to support climate-smart and sustainable agriculture.
- Support small and medium-sized farms in adopting precision farming, drone services, and AI-powered decision tools.
- Deliver AI and digital skills training for farmers, youth, and public sector workers.
- Foster cross-border collaboration through joint activities with Bavarian innovation hubs and shared solution development.
- Enhance access to funding via AI-powered tools for grant matchmaking and expert consulting.
- Improve access to affordable and shared digital technologies to increase adoption in rural areas.
- Strengthen territorial identity and enable inclusive, community-driven rural development.

Spanish pilot (Pilot 7), situated in the region of Sierra & Mancha Conquense, centres on rural-urban synergies and cultural heritage, leveraging the Archaeological Parks 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.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Promotion of rural-urban synergies and cultural heritage
- Utilisation of interconnected sites engaging public and private stakeholders, supported by ADESIMAN as Local Action Group
- Economic development through community collaboration
- Bridging the gap between rural and urban areas

Pilot 8 in Latvia's Vidzeme Planning Region is a public regional development institution. Its mission is to coordinate and promote long-term and well-balanced development of the region, which is guided by the VPR Development Programme (DP). So far, there are no systematic mechanisms to monitor the progress of VPR DP on a territorial level, and so far, it is monitored only on an organization level. It is very important that each goal and planned activities of a VPR DP respond directly to the needs of inhabitants and, where possible, actively involve them in the action. Therefore, a transparent, reliable system for collecting, aggregating and communicating regional development progress to the public is a necessity. The establishment of a unified monitoring framework in the Vidzeme planning region as a territory is very important in order to ensure a successful development management process and feedback to each of the parties involved in the implementation of the VPR Development Programme, thus also promoting the interest and involvement of each resident of the region in the development of their place, region and Vidzeme region as a whole.

Specific objectives to be addressed:

- Develop an integrated, intuitive and sustainable ICT solution/tool for the systematic impact monitoring of the Development Programme of the Vidzeme planning region.
- The ICT solution/tool must include a section on the assessment of the development of the Vidzeme planning region as a territory (NUTS 3) that reflects the regional data and their sources, linkages with municipal and regional planning documents, relevant interventions, measures, KPIs, SDGs etc. It also should include a section containing a monitoring and evaluation system of interventions implemented by the administration of the Vidzeme planning region, following best practices used in impact monitoring.
- The ICT solution/tool has a dashboard that creates interactive and visual information (including GIS-based) on the regional development progress and foresight in correlation with macro-level indicators.
- The main user of the developed ICT solution/tool is the administration of Vidzeme planning region that can also measure internal contextual and financial contribution to the overall Development Programme for the whole territory, at the time the ICT solution/tool provides the opportunity for external stakeholders (municipalities, LAGs, NGOs) to create their own profile and monitor their own progress on the development.
- Iterative involvement of the users should be ensured during the development of the ICT solution/tool.

Pilot 9 in Malta targets digital transformation and entrepreneurial capacity building in rural areas, aiming to level up agricultural sectors through digitisation and youth empowerment. By fostering

collaboration between rural and urban stakeholders, this pilot endeavours to bridge societal divides and promote circularity.

Specific objectives to be addressed:
- Digital transformation and entrepreneurial capacity building in rural areas
- Levelling up of the agricultural sectors through digitisation
- Empowerment of youth and promotion of circularity
- Bridging societal divides between rural and urban areas

3. Eligibility Criteria

In order to ensure the integrity and impact of the PoliRuralPlus project, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. **Type of entities:** Any type of entity can apply for the Develop call funding as long as they have the operational and financial capacity to carry out the tasks that they propose.
2. **Individual or consortium applications:** Single applicants or consortia of up to **three entities** are eligible to apply. In the case of consortia, one partner must act as the lead applicant (hereinafter referred to as the Coordinator). The contract for provisioning of financing will be concluded only with the Coordinator, who will be responsible for making internal arrangements within the consortium, distributing the funds, and coordinating reporting (the power of attorney is attached to the contract for provisioning of financing as annex 6). All members of the consortium must be eligible under the same conditions listed here.
3. **Eligible countries:** Applicants must be legally established in an EU Member State or an Associated Country as outlined by the Horizon Europe rules.
4. **Third parties:** The proposal should not include any subcontracting or transfer of financial contribution to third parties.
5. **One proposal per applicant:** Only one proposal will be accepted for funding per applicant (including consortium members). In the case of multiple submissions, only the last one received (timestamp of the system) will enter into the evaluation process, the rest being declared as non-eligible.
6. **Declaration of honour:** Applicants must declare their eligibility and no conflict of interest in the online application.
7. **Pilot-specific proposals:** The proposal must address specific objectives identified within one of the 9 designated pilot regions of the PoliRuralPlus project (Section 2.4).
8. **Language:** English is the official language for PoliRuralPlus open calls. Submissions and deliverables done in any other language will not be evaluated. Any supporting documents requested at the time of proposal submission must also be in English, except the document proving the legal status of the organisation.
9. **GDPR compliance:** Any project involving personal data must adhere to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to ensure data privacy and protection.
10. **Non-beneficiary clause:** PoliRuralPlus beneficiaries and their affiliated entities are ineligible to apply.
11. **Deliverable obligations:** Applicants commit to produce obligatory deliverables as outlined in Chapter 6.
12. **Proposal page limit**: The total length of Part B is 13 pages, including the cover page.

4. PoliRuralPlus Tools

Applicants to the Develop Call are strongly encouraged to incorporate one or more technologies developed within PoliRuralPlus into their proposed digital applications. These tools are designed to support data-driven decision-making, promote stakeholder engagement, and enable the practical deployment of innovative rural-urban solutions.

Integration with PoliRuralPlus tools will be considered during proposal evaluation and may be used as a tiebreaker in the case of proposals with equal overall scores within a region (see Chapter 7 for more details).

Technology	Description
Jackdaw GeoAI Chatbot	Jackdaw is an AI-powered chat agent designed for spatially contextualised conversations, addressing challenges in rural development where traditional language models struggle with location-specific queries. It enhances user questions with relevant spatial data, improving accuracy by integrating geographic context before querying AI models. Users interact with Jackdaw by selecting a location on a map and submitting a natural language query. The system analyses the query, determines necessary spatial and temporal parameters, and retrieves relevant data from various sources. This enriched spatial context is integrated into AI-generated responses, which can be presented as text, tables, charts, maps, or dynamic dashboards. Built on a Python-based FastAPI backend, Jackdaw utilises Qdrant for vector embeddings, PostgreSQL for data storage, and AI tools like OpenAI, LangChain, and Scikit-learn. It operates within a mono-repo alongside Magpie and Vulture, secured via OAuth authentication through the Digital Innovation Hub. By merging natural language processing with geospatial intelligence, Jackdaw pioneers the next generation of AI-driven spatial analysis, enabling smarter, data-informed decision-making in rural development.
PoliRuralPlus Hub	Hub4Everybody is evolving into a comprehensive AI-powered data platform, integrating Jackdaw (GeoAI Chatbot), and advanced textual analysis tools to support data management, analysis, and AI training. It will serve as a universal repository for geospatial data, documents, and metadata, ensuring seamless access for AI-driven decision-making. Jackdaw will leverage the Hub's structured and unstructured data for spatial analysis, EO classification, and real-time insights. AI-powered textual analysis will extract insights from reports, policies, and research, enriching decision-making processes. Additionally, the Hub will integrate AI-driven e-learning, offering interactive training modules with personalised recommendations and geospatial insights.

	By standardising data formats, enhancing interoperability, and embedding AI across its ecosystem, Hub4Everybody will become a cornerstone of PoliRuralPlus, driving intelligent data utilisation, policy support, and digital learning innovation.
Map Whiteboard	Map Whiteboard is a real-time collaborative mapping tool that merges traditional web GIS functionalities with interactive features similar to Miro and Figma, enabling seamless shared map interactions. It supports pre-defined maps, GeoJSON uploads, WMS layer integration, shared cursors, and simultaneous feature editing, allowing users to collaboratively create and edit spatial data. Built on OpenLayers with a WebSocket API for real-time collaboration and a REST API for data management, MapWhiteboard operates on HSLayers-NG, a specialised OpenLayers extension for advanced web mapping. Currently at TRL 7, ongoing enhancements aim to integrate AI tools like Jackdaw for intelligent metadata search, improve interoperability with Hub4Everybody, refine mobile usability, and introduce onboarding tutorials and a light mode for non-technical users. These advancements will expand its utility for geospatial collaboration across industries.
Rural Attractiveness Explorer (RAE)	The Rural Attractiveness Explorer offers data visualisation, filtering, map interactions, and scenario modelling to assess rural region attractiveness. Future development under PoliRuralPlus will tailor the app to individual pilot needs, whether focusing on innovation potential, tourism, or other factors. A key enhancement will be combining statistical data with OpenStreetMap infrastructure data for a more precise attractiveness assessment. Additionally, AI-driven interpretation models will analyse large datasets, generating insights and recommendations to enhance decision-making. With ongoing improvements, the application will remain user-friendly, flexible, and innovative, providing a comprehensive tool for evaluating and enhancing rural region appeal.
PoliRuralPlus Advisor	The PoliRuralPlus Advisor is an interactive tool designed to support the development of Regional Action Plans (RAPs) within the PoliRuralPlus project, fostering sustainable and inclusive rural-urban development through digital innovation. It helps stakeholders align RAPs with EU sustainability goals, centralises knowledge sharing across pilot projects, and integrates digital solutions like low-code platforms and foresight tools. Built on Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) custom GPT technology, it serves as a virtual assistant providing tailored insights, automating knowledge management, and facilitating stakeholder collaboration. The Advisor enables data-driven decision-making,

	analyses socio-economic and environmental impacts, supports AI-driven scenario modelling, and reduces manual documentation efforts, ensuring efficiency and consistency across regions.
Atlas of Best Practices	The Atlas of Best Practices is an interactive web tool showcasing transferable solutions for rural development, innovation, and sustainability. Refined under PoliRural and integrated with the PoliRuralPlus Digital Innovation Hub (DIH), it features region-specific best practices from projects like Enabling, Dalia, and Data4Food2030. With interactive mapping and a collaborative framework, stakeholders can explore, contribute, and update content dynamically. The Atlas fosters collaboration, supports knowledge exchange, and offers scalable solutions to common challenges, promoting sustainable regional development.
E-Market for Local Food	The E-Market for Local Food is a digital marketplace developed under the Data4Food2030 and THEROS projects. It supports the direct sale of regionally-produced, organic, and certified foods by connecting local producers, retailers, and consumers. Built on PrestaShop and hosted by Lesprojekt, it promotes short supply chains and the Farm-to-Fork approach Key features include IoT sensors for real-time monitoring of transport conditions and blockchain technology for traceability and fraud prevention. Integrated data sources like OpenStreetMap and Copernicus optimise logistics and decision-making. The platform enhances transparency, empowers local producers, and promotes sustainability in line with the EU Green Deal.
Vulture: AI-Driven Productivity Sandbox	Vulture is an AI-powered sandbox designed for productivity experimentation, enabling users to efficiently manage, analyse, and retrieve information streams. Developed from WP3 buddy exercises, it integrates AI-driven workflows for intelligent content processing while ensuring privacy compliance and security. Users ingest information by forwarding emails with attachments, which are validated, analysed for context, chunked into vector embeddings, and stored in a private, self-expanding Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) system using Qdrant. Vulture enables natural language search, retrieving relevant documents and generating AI-driven responses through GPT-4o. Beyond email-based ingestion, Vulture supports URL crawling, extracting targeted information for applications like policy impact tracking, as demonstrated in the Vidzeme Planning Region pilot. Technically, Vulture runs on a Python FastAPI backend, with a React front-end, Qdrant for vector search, and PostgreSQL for metadata management. It operates within a mono-repo alongside Jackdaw and Magpie, fostering a modular AI ecosystem. By combining AI-driven search, automated knowledge management, and seamless integration,

	Vulture provides a scalable tool for streamlining information workflows while maintaining user control and data privacy.
Multi-Actor Approach Tool	A collaborative platform designed to support the management of pilots and living labs in rural-urban development. It enables stakeholder engagement, real-time collaboration, and data-driven decision-making through configurable workflows and advanced data visualisation. Technically, the tool integrates modular work entities, supporting multi-layered geospatial, economic, social, and environmental data. It features customizable user roles with secure access controls, interactive dashboards for real-time visualisation, and a scalable, interoperable design that adapts to evolving project needs. With its flexible structure and integration capabilities, the MAA Tool enhances transparency, inclusivity, and efficiency in stakeholder-driven planning and policymaking.

5. Submission Process

Proposal submissions are solely via the online form on the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub available at https://www.poliruralplus.eu/open-calls/.

Upon submission, applicants will receive a confirmation email, ensuring that their proposal has been successfully received.

The proposal contains two parts:

- **Part A: Administrative Form** - This section is designed to collect essential information about your entity/consortium and designated contacts for technical and contractual matters. Please provide accurate and complete details to facilitate smooth communication throughout the application and project implementation process.

  Note: During the application and contracting process, applicants will be required to submit documentation verifying the legal status of their organisation as well as beneficial ownership information, in accordance with EU regulations and financial transparency requirements.

- **Part B: Technical Description** - Part B of the proposal is the narrative part that includes three sections that each correspond to an evaluation criterion:
  - **Objectives**
    - *Problem definition:* Describe the specific rural-urban challenge your digital application addresses, demonstrating its relevance to the selected pilot region.
    - *Innovation and application description:* Explain the digital application to be developed, its innovative aspects, and the expected technological readiness levels (TRLs) at project start and end.
  - **Impacts**
    - *Expected outcomes:* Describe the main results and how they support rural-urban development in your pilot region.

- Stakeholder engagement: Identify key stakeholders (e.g., SMEs, NGOs, citizens) and explain how they will be engaged.
- *Replication, scalability, and New European Bauhaus (NEB)*: Discuss how your solution can be reused or scaled and how it aligns with NEB values—sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics.
  - **Implementation**
    - *Work plan and timeline*: Provide a phased plan including milestones, deliverables, key performance KPIs, and a project timeline.
    - *Budget allocation and justification:* Include a detailed budget breakdown per partner (if applicable) and justification of all costs, covering personnel, travel, other costs, indirect costs, and any co-funding.
    - *Team expertise:* Describe the qualifications and roles of the team members, past relevant experience, and how the consortium (if applicable) adds value.

Part B needs to be uploaded as a single PDF document following the template provided as part of the open call documents. The total length of Part B should not exceed 13 pages, including the cover page. Any excess pages will be disregarded during the proposal evaluation process.

It is highly recommended to submit your proposal application well before the deadline. If the applicant discovers an error in the already submitted application, and provided the call deadline has not passed, the applicant may resubmit the application. Only the latest submitted version (timestamp of the system) will be considered as eligible.

6. Obligatory Deliverables

Selected applicants will be required to deliver the following outputs as part of their contractual obligations. These deliverables will serve as key criteria for monitoring progress, evaluating impact, and ensuring alignment with the goals of the Develop Call and the overall PoliRuralPlus project:

- **Media and dissemination outputs:** To ensure visibility, knowledge sharing, and engagement with wider communities, each project must produce:
  - At least **2 news articles** (for external media or institutional websites),
  - At least **3 blog posts** for the PoliRuralPlus platform,
  - **A set of social media summaries** highlighting key milestones, implementation steps, and results, tailored to different stages of the project (launch, mid-point, final).

  These outputs must include GDPR compliant visual elements where applicable (photos, screenshots, infographics) and acknowledge PoliRuralPlus funding.

- **Mid-term progress report:** Submitted within two weeks after the end of the period from M1 to M4, this deliverable must include:
  - Summary of activities completed and alignment with objectives,
  - A **working prototype** of the digital application, demonstrating core functionality in a real or test environment,
  - Overview of stakeholder engagement and preliminary feedback,

- Description of any collected data and progress on integration with PoliRuralPlus tools,
- Completed financial report and justification of costs.
- Updated timeline and action plan for the second phase, and evidence of publicity for the project.

  This deliverable is a prerequisite for the second instalment of the grant and will be subject to review by the PoliRuralPlus consortium.

- **Final report:** A comprehensive report due at the end of the project, including:
  - Detailed description of the developed application, its deployment, achieved results, and evidence of publicity for the project.
  - Summary of challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations for future use,
  - Documentation of how the solution aligns with PoliRuralPlus tools and integrates collected data,
  - Evidence of replication potential and scalability across regions or use cases,
  - Overview of communication and dissemination activities, with links or annexes to all media outputs,
  - A reflective assessment of how the project addressed the principles of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) — sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics — in both process and outcome,
  - Completed financial report and justification of costs per partner (if applicable).

  This report will be made public, with all sensitive information excluded to ensure compliance with confidentiality requirements.

7. Proposal Evaluation

For evaluating proposals submitted under the Develop call, a detailed evaluation framework is needed to ensure transparency and fairness in the selection process. The framework will assess proposals based on their alignment with objectives and expected impacts, using a scoring system from 0 to 5, where 5 represents the highest level of excellence. The evaluation procedure will follow the same concept as used for Horizon Europe projects by the EU, ensuring consistency with established best practices for assessing project proposals.

7.1. Evaluation Criteria

Objectives (0-5 points)
- Clear **problem definition** addressing rural-urban challenges relevant to the selected PoliRuralPlus pilot region (Section 2.4) and the overall Develop Call objectives.
- Relevance and innovation of the proposed **digital application** in addressing the identified challenge.

Impacts (0-5 points)
- Clear articulation of expected outcomes and their significance for rural-urban development.

- Level of **stakeholder engagement**, including involvement of end users, local actors and PoliRuralPlus partners.
- Potential for **replication and scalability** in other regions or contexts.
- Contribution to the **New European Bauhaus** (NEB) values: sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics.

Implementation (0-5 points)

- **Coherent and realistic work plan** with clearly defined milestones and deliverables (including the prototype at mid-term).
- **Soundness and justification of the budget** in relation to proposed activities.
- **Composition, roles, and relevant experience of the team/consortium**.

7.2. 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 the 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 address the criterion sufficiently in an effective way.

7.3. Evaluation and Selection Process

- Each proposal must pass an eligibility check based on eligibility criteria defined in Chapter 3.
- In order to ensure an unbiased evaluation process, proposals will be assessed by a panel of independent experts (individual evaluations).
- Each proposal will be evaluated based on three main criteria: **Objectives, Impacts and Implementation**, with a scoring range from 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest) for each criterion.
- Individual evaluations, including comments and scores for each proposal, will serve as the main input for a panel review made by selected experts from PoliRuralPlus. The panel of experts reaches an agreement on the scores and comments for all proposals within a call, checking consistency across the evaluations. If necessary, the panel resolves cases where evaluators were unable to agree and ranks the proposals with the same score. As a result, there will be a final ranking list.
- Proposals must achieve a minimum score of 3 in all three criteria and an overall score of at least 11 to be considered for funding.
- 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.
- **Relevance to PoliRuralPlus as tiebreaker:** In the event of equal overall scores within a region, the proposal with better relevance to PoliRuralPlus will be selected to ensure that the most potentially transformative project is chosen. This includes the utilisation of PoliRuralPlus tools mentioned in Chapter 4.

8. Financial Support

8.1. Origin of the Funds

Selected beneficiaries will sign a dedicated contract for provisioning of financing with the PoliRuralPlus project coordinator (CVUT). A model contract for provisioning of financing is part of the open call documents. The funds attached to the contract for provisioning of financing come directly from the funds of the European Project PoliRuralPlus, and the PoliRuralPlus coordinator is managing the funds according to the Grant Agreement No 101136910 signed with the European Commission.

8.2. Use of the Financial Contribution

Each beneficiary commits to a proper use of the funding received, for the purposes of carrying out the sub-project in compliance with the defined work plan and expected deliverables and planned budget. While no financial reporting will be requested within the experiment, teams must ensure that funds are properly spent and in accordance with the project Grant Agreement. See the model contract for provisioning of financing for further details.

8.3. Funding Principle

Successful applicants will receive financial support from the PoliRuralPlus project in the amount ranging from 30,000 to 100,000 EUR for the sub-project implementation. This will be provided as a

lump sum contribution. Proposals requesting amounts outside this range will be considered as ineligible.

In total 450,000 EUR were allocated for the Develop call. It is expected to fund 5-15 sub-projects with a priority of one sub-project per pilot region.

Receiving a grant from the Develop call does not preclude participation in further PoliRuralPlus calls for proposals.

Note: The maximum support for a single entity across all calls is 60,000 EUR.

Please note that subcontracting or transfer of financial contribution to third parties is not permitted.

8.4. Payment Schedule

Payments will be made in instalments based on the achievement of key project milestones and deliverables, ensuring proper financial management and alignment with project progress. The financial support will be disbursed according to the following schedule:
- **Prepayment** (upon contract signing): 40% of the financial support is provided as an initial prepayment to support the commencement of the project activities.
- **Mid-term payment:** 40% of the financial support amount is paid upon successful completion of a mid-term review, assessing the progress and interim outcomes reported in the mid-term progress report against the planned milestones and deliverables.
- **Final payment:** The remaining 20% of the financial support is disbursed after the project results have been delivered and accepted by the responsible consortium body.

9. Key Dates

- **Call opening:** 26 May 2025
- **Submission deadline:** 31 July 2025, 17:00 CEST
- **Expected notification of results:** August 2025
- **Signature of Contract for provisioning of financing:** September 2025
- **Expected implementation period:** 9 months, October 2025- June 2026

10. Processing of Personal Data

10.1. Processing of Personal Data by the PoliRuralPlus Coordinator

The personal data provided by the Applicants in the Develop call will be controlled by the PoliRuralPlus coordinator (Czech Technical University in Prague) and processed by Plan4all z.s., one of the PoliRuralPlus partners. The collected data will be handled according to the GDPR. Personal data will be processed exclusively for the purposes of performing, managing and monitoring the application or protecting the financial interests of the EU (including checks, reviews, audits and investigations). Personal data may be disclosed only to the external evaluators who evaluate their

proposals and to the European Commission. The personal data will be kept for as long as it is necessary to process the application and its participation in the PoliRuralPlus project.

10.2. Processing of Personal Data by the Funded Sub-Projects

The selected sub-projects must put in place appropriate technical and organisational security measures to address data processing risks, and in particular:

- prevent any unauthorised person from accessing computer systems that process personal data;
- ensure that access to personal data is limited to persons with special access rights;
- ensure that, during communication of personal data and transport of storage media, the data cannot be read, copied or deleted without authorisation;
- design its organisational structure in a way that meets data protection requirements;
- ensure that all photographic documentation, screenshots, etc., associated with the sub-project implementation comply with GDPR regulations, as they may be published to the public.

11. Updates, Assistance and Consultancy

For additional support, including consultancy on proposal preparation, applicants are encouraged to contact the designated contact points for each pilot region, whose details can be found on the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub. For any other questions, please use the primary contact details for this call.

Disclaimer: Applicants are advised to regularly check the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Hub for the latest information and updates regarding the open call. PoliRuralPlus reserves the right to make any updates to the open call at any time without prior notice.

12. Conclusion

Your participation in the PoliRuralPlus Develop call contributes to the overarching goal of enhancing rural-urban interactions across the EU. We look forward to innovative proposals that promise significant regional impacts.