



Comparative Study on Rural Proofing in Spain, Bulgaria, Ireland, and Estonia

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Project: Rural Proofing. Cooperation for better sparsely populated rural, coastal and mountain focused governance (Coop4RURALGov)

Interreg
Europe



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the European Union

Coop4RURALGov



Estonian University
of Life Sciences



Project Coop4RURALGov

- **INTERREG** project 2023– 2027
- 7 partners in Bulgaria, Ireland, Estonia, Spain
 - Directorate General of Local Administration and Depopulation of the Government of Navarre (coordinator) (ES)
 - ONGD Cives Mundi (ES)
 - Centre for Sustainability and Economic Growth (BG)
 - Municipality of Bratsigovo (BG)
 - Galway County Council) (IE)
 - Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (ET)
 - Association of Municipalities of Tartu County (ET)
- **The main objective:**
 - to improve governance' capacities for co-design and integration of rural proofing to the decision-making processes and policies, programs and initiatives on rural, coastal, and mountain areas.
- **Activities**
 - Development of methodology and country based models
 - Comparative study
 - Interregional workshops
 - Development of toolbox

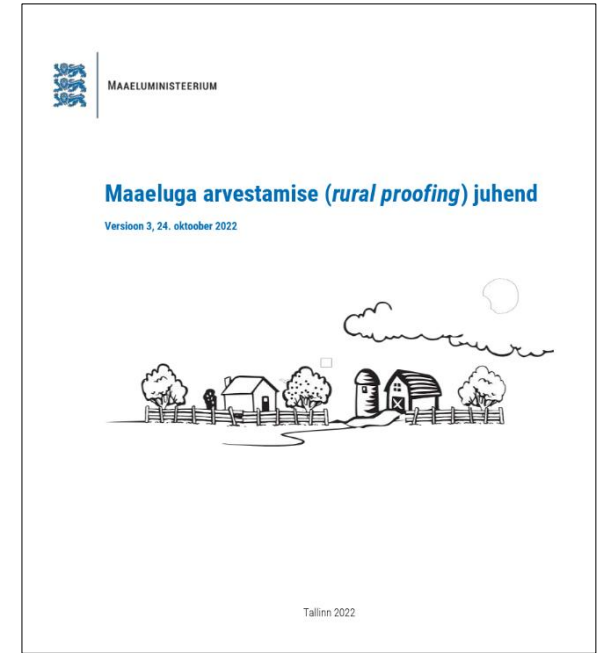


Comparative Study on Rural Proofing in Spain, Bulgaria, Ireland, and Estonia in Coop4RuralGOV

- **Implemented** by Estonian University of Life Sciences on behalf of Coop4RuralGOV 2024- 2025
- **Methods**
 - Synthesis of situational analysis of present state of rural proofing
 - Questionnaire survey of rural stakeholders in four countries; 208 experts
 - Focus groups
 - Interregional workshops
- **Objectives:**
 - to compare the current state of rural proofing in the four countries, incl. present cooperation, implementation and challenges
 - to analyze ways to better integrate the consideration of rural needs into policy planning and implementation.

Country example: Estonia

- **Institution responsible for rural proofing:** Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (previously named Ministry of Rural Affairs)
- 2021 governmental decision to implement rural proofing
- Development of **rural proofing guidelines** (2022) that should be complementing regulatory impact assessment
- Implementation level: **national**
- **Method:** Guidelines with checklist.
- **Rural proofing steps:**
 - Identification of stakeholders
 - Identification of the impact differs between rural and urban
 - Data collection
 - Impact assessment
 - Mitigation measures



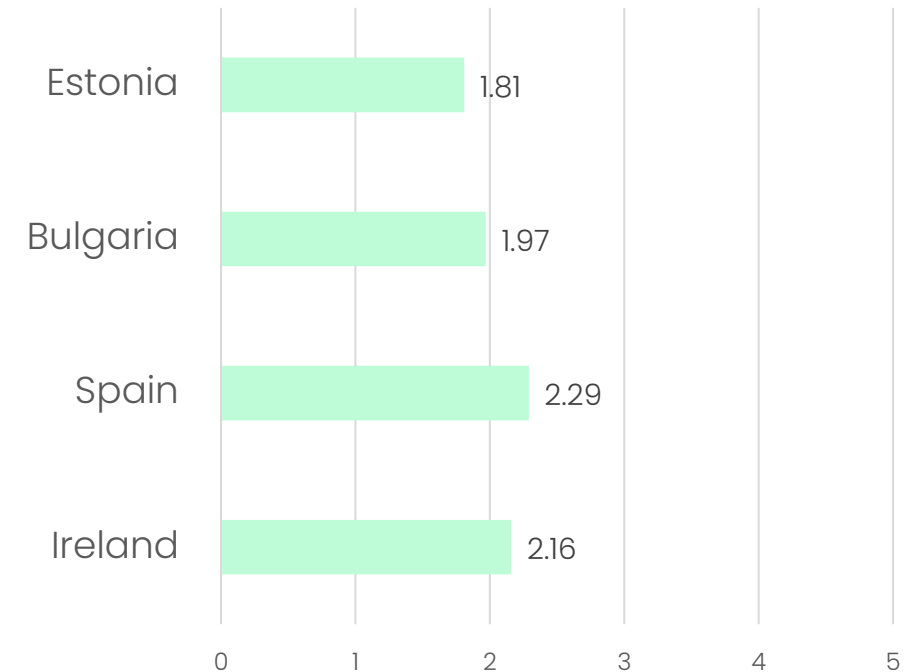
- **Impact assessments:**
 - Impact on employment
 - Competitiveness
 - Population
 - Availability of services
 - Connectivity
- **Monitoring:** no reports and specific evaluation. Ministry monitors proposals as part of regular legislation coordination process



Stakeholder survey: key takeaways

- **Target group: rural stakeholders**, defined as follows: individuals, groups and organizations that are directly or indirectly involved in and impacted by the rural proofing of policies, representing national experts in rural impact assessment, rural policy making and implementation
 - National- level ministries and governmental departments, regional and local authorities, local government associations, non-profits, industry and business associations, university and research organizations

How well does the present policymaking and planning process address the needs of rural areas

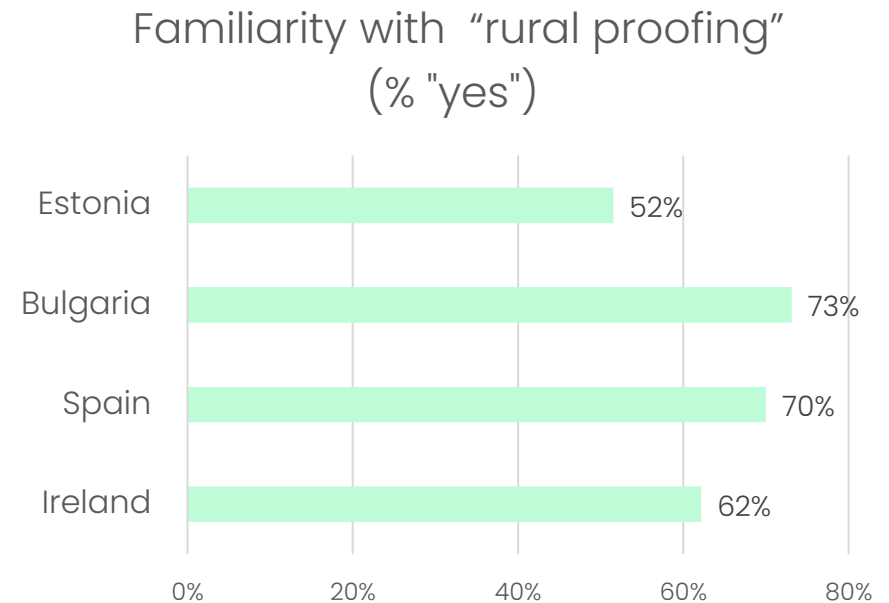


Mean scores in Likert scale (1- very poorly ... 5- very well)

Stakeholder survey: key takeaways (2)



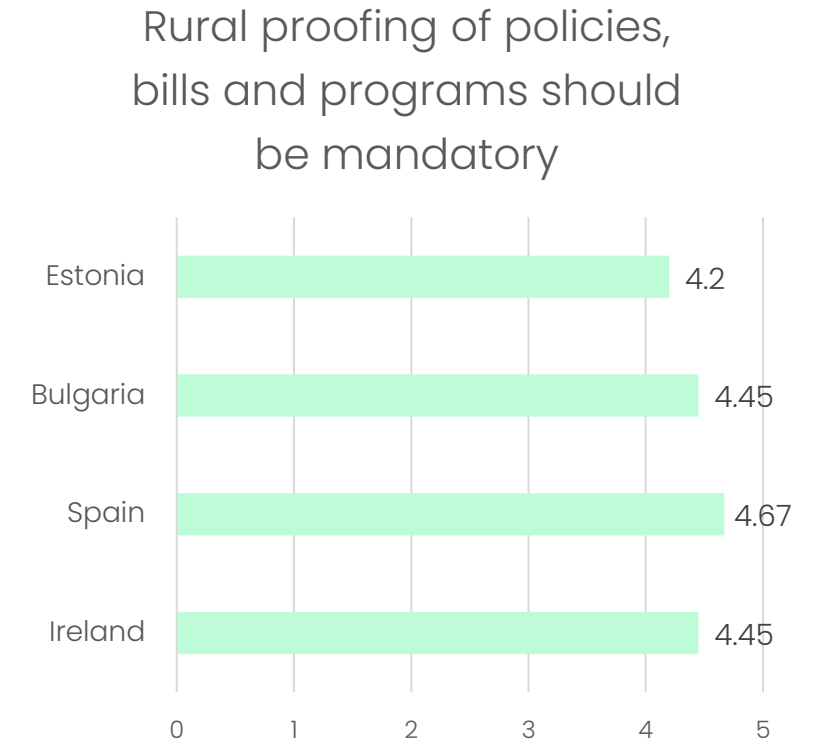
- **Knowledge on the concept (Fig. 2)**, however, stakeholders very limited knowledge
 - if the **country implements rural proofing** of policies, bills, programs, or strategies
 - **at what level** it is conducted (national, regional, local)
 - **how it is or should be conducted** (mandatorily/voluntarily; what methods, in which policy stage and what impacts are assessed)
 - Lack of examples if **any policy was** amended after different rural impacts were detected





Stakeholder survey: key takeaways (3)

- **Expectations** – rural proofing should be **mandatory** and **at national level** mostly (84%; yes), regional level (64%), local level (51%)
- What are the **main obstacles**:
 - Interest of the public sector
 - Follow-up monitoring of implementation
 - Skills and knowledge how to do it effectively
 - Lack of good data for effective analysis and comparison of rural areas



Mean scores in Likert scale (1- strongly disagree ... 5- strongly agree)



Stakeholder survey: recommendations of how to improve rural proofing process

- **Mandatory element** – rural impact assessment is not regularly implemented if fully voluntary; require legislation and policies to undergo rural impact assessments with public participation.
- **Monitoring and systematic evaluation** – lack of data on when and how it has been applied and if any kind of changes were made (and if not, then why), what were shortcomings and successes.
- **Communication** – cross-cutting through all obstacles, activities and implementation process
 - Clear definition of **what falls within the boundaries** of the **rural proofing process** and what does not (e.g. political decision of policies outside the rural proofing process itself)
 - Building the will, awareness and knowledge of public sector parties responsible for rural proofing
 - Clear messages to local stakeholders on how rural proofing is done; how and why they are engaged, how their input is considered and if not, then why
 - Integration of communication tools into the rural proofing toolbox
- **Resources** – allocation of resources (financial, skills, time) for rural proofing process, stakeholder engagement as well as planning policy follow up

Stakeholder survey: recommendations of how to improve rural proofing process (2)



- **Meaningful engagement of local stakeholders :**
 - Well established procedures, stakeholder lists, examples of stakeholder engagement practices
 - Engagement at local level, meaning just not just national-level umbrella organizations, onsite engagement with local actors
 - Bringing more practitioners with rural experience in policymaking and network building
 - Aftercare – feedback after engagement
- **Rural intelligence building**
 - Definition of what is rural, different types of rural and related data availability
 - Collecting input onsite from rural areas themselves
 - Analytical support, particularly at local level
- **Development of rural proofing toolbox** – compilation of examples of good practices, practical advice, demonstrations and tools for communication, engagement, policy development process, data gathering, monitoring, ex-post assessment to support both mandatory and voluntary implementation
 - Integration with support structure/support from rural proofing champion, incl. clarity to whom the parties wanting to implement rural proofing should turn to for advice and skills development



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Thank You!