Rural Proofing to Inform Tailoring Rural Policies

Ecorys and James Hutton Institute

Inputs from AEIDL and Living and Replication Labs

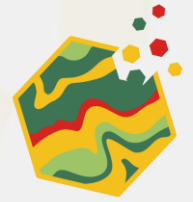*12th June 2025*

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GRANULAR RURAL PROOFING

Aim: To enrich knowledge for rural actors on the diversity of and within rural areas, their functional characteristics, challenges and opportunities

- **EU, national and regional policy contexts**

  For example, contributing to commitments to …

  - Long Term Vision for Rural Areas - "… the Commission will put in place a rural proofing mechanism to assess the anticipated impact of major EU legislative initiatives on rural areas"
  - Vision for Agriculture and Food – "… the rural proofing principle, including territorial impact assessments, will be further operationalised and sufficiently resourced at EU level"

- **Rural proofing outcomes and outputs**
  - Empirical evidence from local communities and stakeholder perspectives of implications of policies on and within rural areas
  - Insights to types of impacts, extent to which they are positive or negative on or within rural areas
  - Insights to coherence or incoherence of policies on rural areas
  - Living and Replication Lab evidence of indicators to monitor progress towards achieving policy aims
 - Ensuring fair and equitable policy outcomes for rural areas
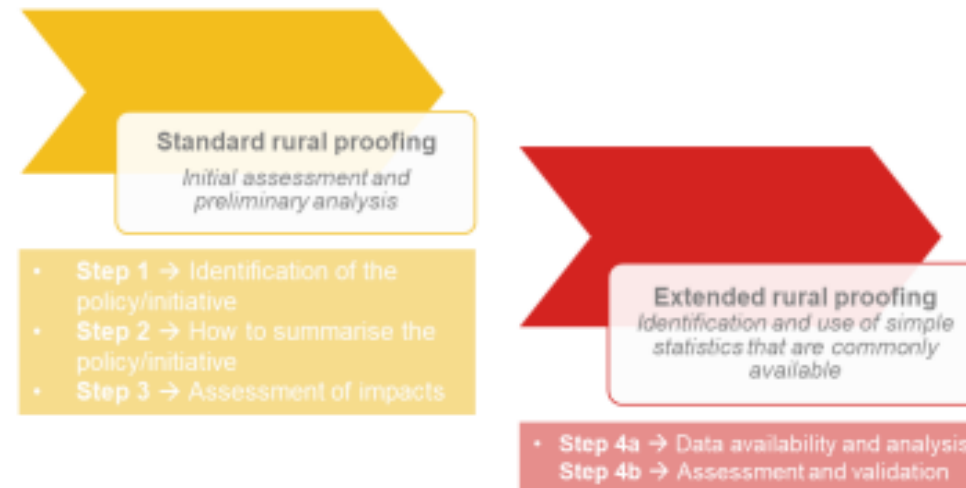
RURAL PROOFING: GUIDELINES ON PROCESS
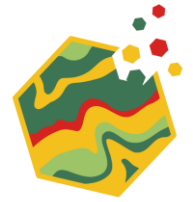
Framework for rural proofing based on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas and GRANULAR Rural Compass

- Reviewing requirements of rural proofing, approaches used in countries or regions

- Links identified with the components of the prototype GRANULAR rural compass

- Aligns with EU Better Regulation Toolbox, complements other instruments (e.g. Territorial Impact Assessments)
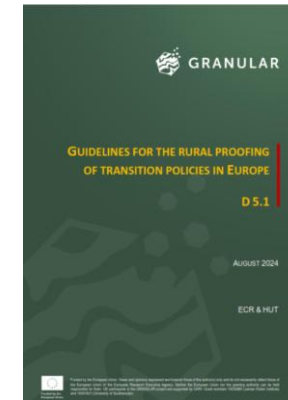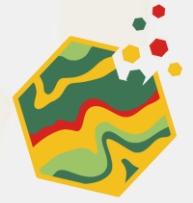
GRANULAR methodology

1. Select the policy/initiative (local, regional, national, EU)

2. Summarise its key components

3. Assess type, direction and magnitude of potential impacts

4. Identify (and use) indicators and data

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GUIDELINES FOR THE RURAL PROOFING
OF TRANSITION POLICIES IN EUROPE

D 5.1

AUGUST 2024

ECR & HUT

Standard rural proofing
Initial assessment and preliminary analysis

- **Step 1** → Identification of the policy/initiative
- **Step 2** → How to summarise the policy/initiative
- **Step 3** → Assessment of impacts

Extended rural proofing
Identification and use of simple statistics that are commonly available

- **Step 4a** → Data availability and analysis
- **Step 4b** → Assessment and validation

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RURAL PROOFING EXERCISES

- Rural proofing run …
  - Within 8 Living and Replication Labs across Europe
  - Across Labs duting a cross-visit in France, assessing carpooling strategy implemented by Région Occitanie

- Assessments reported by Long Term Vision for Rural Areas pillars/Action areas and GRANULAR Rural Compass

- Example findings…
  - Policies/initiatives assessed all deemed rural proof, but several revealed risks of unequal impact across rural areas
  - Quantitative impact ratings (polarity and magnitude) showed internal consistency with qualitative narratives
  - Chacteristic of assessments is positivity or optimism regarding outcomes of initiatives
  - Direct positive impacts often conditional on infrastructure, human capital and funding
  - Indirect impacts often associated with policies/initiatives with no dedicated budget or responsibility for funding

Rural proofing exercise during cross-visit to Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée Living Lab (France)

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'RURAL PROOFERS'

- Engagement with actors in rural areas through **Living** and **Replication Labs**
- Collective approach to considering topics through a rural lens

- **Governance level**
  - Organisation(s) with remits to be involved (and with resources)
  - Thematic or territorially specific – both tested, both identified unintended negative consequences or differences between rural areas
  - Invited participation …
    - ➢ Combination of communities of interest and of place
    - ➢ Public, private and voluntary sectors, research

- **Geographic level**
  - Geographically-focussed – greater prospect of consistency of data across area
  - Inconsistencies may arise between regions within same nation, or lower levels of governance
  - Process helps actors reflect on where effects may be experienced, by who, and whether they differ across social groups and places
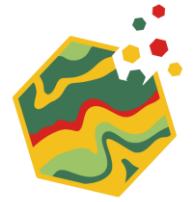
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'RURAL PROOFERS'
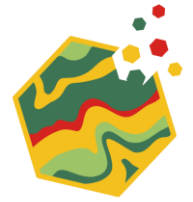
- **Who?**
  - Science, practice and place knowledge
  - Lab model - members knowledgeable of topics assessed, and supporting evidence and its interpretation
    - ➤ Iterative between Lab secretariat and members
  - Formal consultation model – coordinated collection and interpretation of evidence, with invited and/or self-selecting contributions
  - Consultancy model – domain and process experts
  - Public agency/government department responsibility

    (Note: Need sufficient time allocated to the process)

- **When?**
  - If designing tailored policies
    - ➤ Early in process of preparation of policy or initiative
  - Assessments can be ex-ante or ex-post
    - ➤ Lab experiences showed easier, more confident, assessments of effects when initiative already implemented
    - ➤ If required then at scheduled times for subsequent evaluation

RURAL PROOFING EXERCISES: DATA, INDICATORS
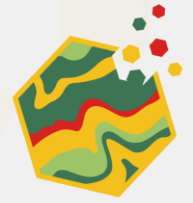
- Empirical evidence of needs of indicators
  - Example findings …
    - Standard indicators often insufficient, especially indirect, systemic, or demographic effects
    - Well-targeted indicators suggested for elements which are conceptually clear, backed by standard data sources
    - Indicators were more reflective of the initiative being assessed rather than elements in the rural proofing framework

  Example from the Greek Replication Lab: "Digital nomads may support rural economies, but infrastructure strains and uneven impacts must be tracked—many areas lack the indicators for that."

  - Where data were lacking, the processes guided towards generating hypotheses or qualitative insights that can be validated quantitatively at a subsequence stage
  - Existing monitoring frameworks (e.g. the EU Bioeconomy Monitoring System) referenced
  - Policy types affect indicator suitability: direct interventions are easier to monitor, while strategic or enabling policies require more nuanced data strategies

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RURAL PROOFING HIGHLIGHTS FICHES

Thank you for your attention

Questions welcome

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