



# GRANULAR

## Rural Proofing to Inform Tailoring Rural Policies

Ecorys and James Hutton Institute

Inputs from AEIDL and Living and Replication Labs

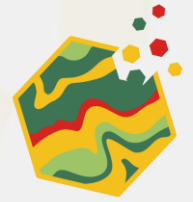
*12<sup>th</sup> June 2025*

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# GRANULAR RURAL PROOFING



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**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”

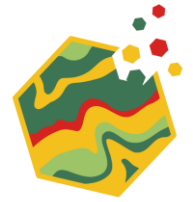
- **Rural proofing outcomes and outputs**

- 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



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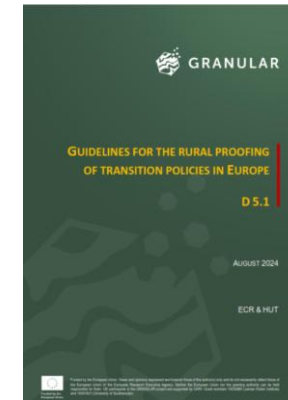
# RURAL PROOFING: GUIDELINES ON PROCESS



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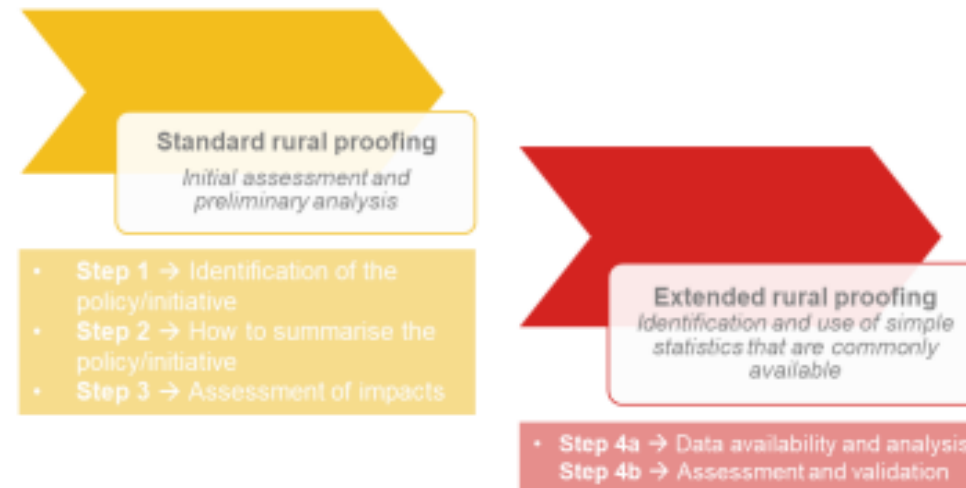
## Framework for rural proofing based on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas and GRANULAR Rural Compass

- 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)



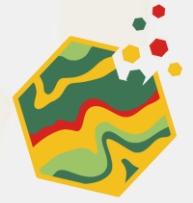
## GRANULAR methodology

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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# RURAL PROOFING EXERCISES



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- Rural proofing run ...
  - Within 8 Living and Replication Labs across Europe
  - Across Labs during 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
  - Characteristic 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



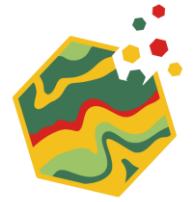
**Rural proofing exercise during cross-visit to Pays Pyrénées Méditerranée Living Lab (France)**



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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

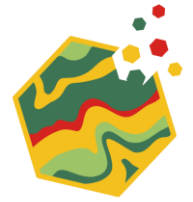


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# ‘RURAL PROOFERS’



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## ■ 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)

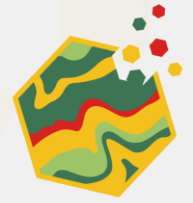
## ■ When?

- 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



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# RURAL PROOFING EXERCISES: DATA, INDICATORS



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- 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.”*

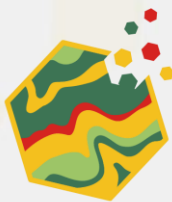
- Where data were lacking, the processes guided towards generating hypotheses or qualitative insights that can be validated quantitatively at a subsequence stage
- Existing monitoring frameworks (e.g. the EU Bioeconomy Monitoring System) referenced
- Policy types affect indicator suitability: direct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



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# RURAL PROOFING HIGHLIGHTS FICHES



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NAME OF THE REPLICATION LAB: **Finland**

COUNTRY/REGION: **Finland**

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE: **Finnish Island Policy**



"The programme aims to ensure the right of islanders to a healthy environment and to influence decisions concerning their living environment"

### Initiative ID

#### Level of initiative

*Multi-level*

The Archipelago Act and the Programme are adopted at the national level, while the implementation is carried out regionally.

#### Rural Relevance

*Proactive rural targeting*

Finland's Island Policy is expressly designed to address the specific circumstances of island municipalities, particularly in remote areas.

#### Stage of the initiative

*Planning stage/implemented*

The Archipelago Act is currently under revision, while the National Archipelago Programme 2024–2027, published in 2024, is currently under implementation.

#### Nature of the initiative

*Binding/Non-binding*

The Archipelago Act is a binding legal framework, while the National Archipelago Programme is a strategic guidance document, recommending priorities, outcome targets and monitoring mechanisms.

### Summary of main impacts

#### Stronger Rural Areas

The Finnish Island Policy is deeply rooted in strengthening participatory governance and local democracy. The Island Development Act supports a long-standing tradition of regional balance by empowering communities, particularly through initiatives like LEADER and CLLD. The programme actively promotes local experimentation and the co-creation of innovative service models. It addresses demographic challenges by recognising the rise of seasonal residency and promoting services tailored to multi-residence patterns.

#### Prosperous Rural Areas


The programme views a vibrant, diverse economy as being key to archipelago vitality. It promotes multidisciplinary entrepreneurship, especially in areas of fishing, tourism, and food production. Networking between local entrepreneurs and youth is supported, with scholarships helping young people establish services and businesses. Although support for the bioeconomy and producer organisations is less explicit, the focus on primary production, innovation, and local value chains underscores an effort to strengthen economic opportunities.

#### Connected Rural Areas

Digital and physical accessibility are central priorities in the Finnish Island Development Act. The programme treats digital connectivity as equally vital as physical access, enabling remote work and service delivery. Strategic objectives include improving infrastructure, such as road and cycling routes, as well as introducing flexible mobility options that cater to seasonal population shifts. Notably, efforts also focus on enhancing digital skills and human capital within the community, which is essential for supporting location-independent lifestyles.

#### Resilient Rural Areas


Environmental and climate resilience are strongly emphasised. The archipelago is seen as a testing ground for sustainable solutions, including renewable energy and circular economy practices. Local experimentation is encouraged to reduce environmental footprints and promote climate adaptation. Legal frameworks embedded in the Island Development Act stress the protection of natural landscapes and fundamental environmental rights. Social inclusion is another priority, with specific recognition of equality and social security.



NAME OF THE LIVING LAB: **Rural Scotland**

COUNTRY/REGION: **United Kingdom**

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE: **Environment Strategy for Scotland**



"From healthy soils to clean air, resilience grows where nature thrives"

### Initiative ID

#### Level of initiative

*Multi-level*

The initiative is multi-level, characterised by a governance model which allows region-specific adaptation of policies under the national framework.

#### Rural Relevance

*Proactive rural targeting*

The initiative explicitly commits "to help ensure that local economies and communities in rural areas thrive," embedding rural considerations throughout its vision and outcomes framework.

#### Stage of the initiative

*Under implementation*

After the official publication in 2020, the Strategy is currently in the implementation stage, with detailed outcome pathways being developed and an initial monitoring framework in place as of January 2025.

#### Nature of the initiative

*Non-binding*

The initiative is non-binding, nonetheless, it sets guiding principles, outcome targets and recommended approaches. The document itself is advisory, framing subsequent legislation and regulation.

### Summary of main impacts

#### Stronger Rural Areas

The Strategy empowers rural communities through place-based planning tools such as Local Development Plans, which promote participatory processes in land use decisions and sustainability goals. These mechanisms encourage local ownership in shaping rural futures, blending environmental stewardship with social inclusion.

#### Prosperous Rural Areas

The Strategy envisions rural areas as drivers of a sustainable economy, advancing the bioeconomy, circular innovation, and small business growth. It promotes green jobs, value-added natural products, and producer group support to foster diversified and thriving local economies.

#### Connected Rural Areas

Although not specifically focused on infrastructure, the Strategy emphasises skills development, digital platforms for reuse and recycling, and smart transport planning, particularly in rural and remote settings. Digital tools and low-carbon mobility are seen as key enablers of inclusion and environmental justice

#### Resilient Rural Areas

Central to the Strategy is the restoration and protection of natural assets such as soils, peatlands, and biodiversity, alongside reducing emissions from agriculture. Scotland's role in the global climate agenda is clear, as the Strategy commits to nature-based solutions and resource circularity.





**Thank you for your attention**  
**Questions welcome**

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