



Opportunities for rural areas coming from the NRPPs

Rural Pact Policy Lab – «Anchoring rural areas in the NRPPs - Brussels 3 June 2026



NRPP specific objectives: rural areas

Art. 3 NRP Reg.

(a) To support the Union's **sustainable prosperity** across all regions

(b) To support the Union's defence capabilities and security across all regions

(c) To strengthen **social cohesion** by supporting people and strengthening the **Union's societies** and the Union's social model

(d) To sustain the **quality of life** in the Union

(e) To protect and strengthen fundamental rights, **democracy**, the rule of law and to uphold Union values by

(i) Fostering the attractiveness of territories to support the right to stay including by supporting **strategies for the integrated development of urban and rural areas**, including support for territorial services and infrastructure.

(iii) Improving the **attractiveness and living standards, including access to healthcare**, in rural areas and fair work conditions and fostering generational renewal; improving farmers' preparedness and ability to cope with crisis and risks; enhancing the access to knowledge and innovation and accelerating the digital and green transition for a thriving agri-food sector

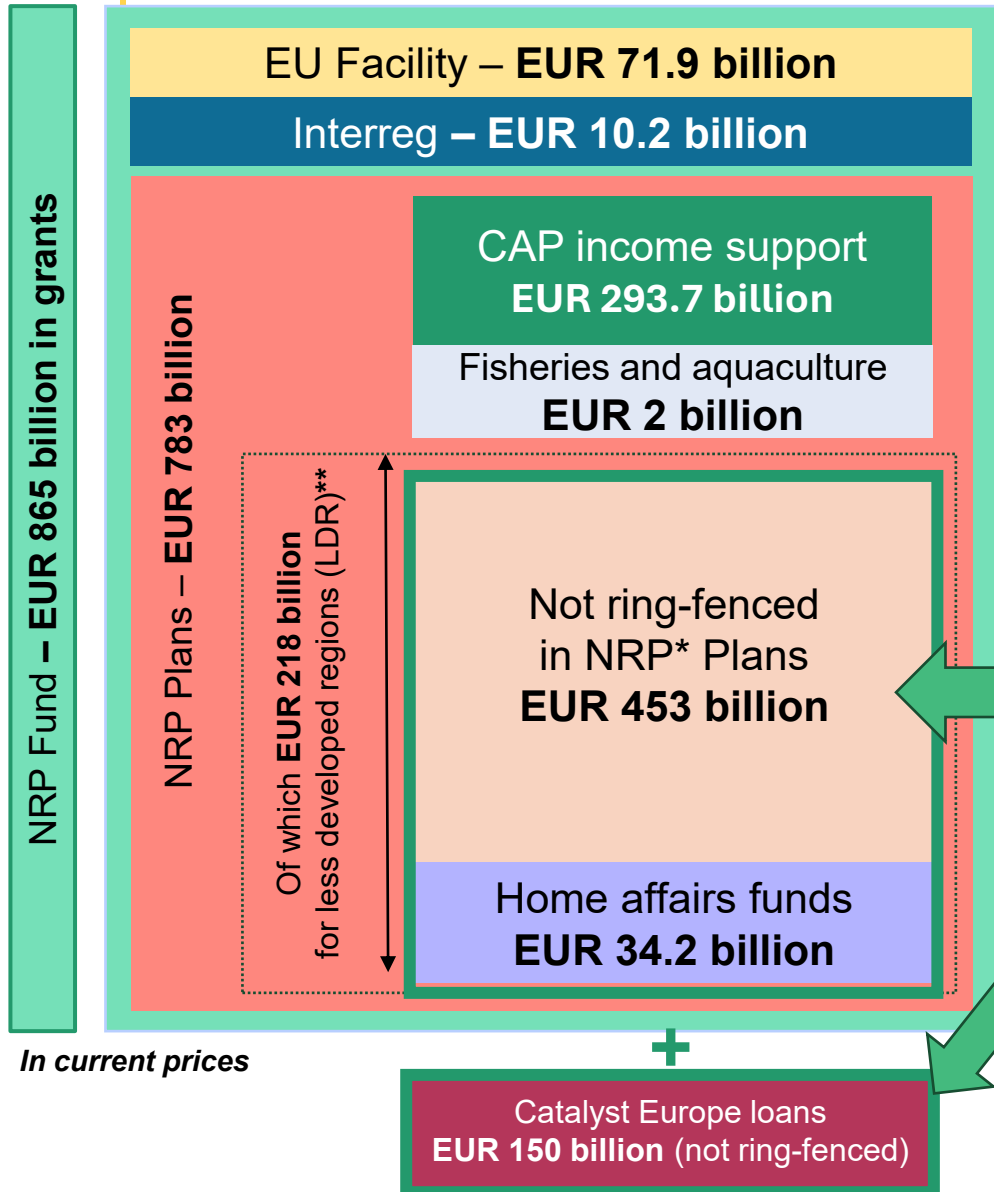
The rural target

Under discussion following proposal from the Commission to the co-legislators (Nov 2025).

Objective: Ensure that rural areas continue to benefit from targeted investments in their development. MS and regions are expected to build a **consistent agenda of measures addressing rural areas' specific needs and challenges**, building on **synergies across all policy areas**.

10% of each plan's NRP envelope (total Union allocation including Catalyst Europe loans, excluding the social climate fund, the EU facility and minimum amounts for CAP and CFP income support to agriculture and fisheries).

EUR 48,7 billion > EU 63,7 billion if loans are used



In current prices

** CAP and CFP interventions above the ringfenced amounts may be counted towards the earmarking for less developed regions provided they are for the benefit of those regions



Defining 'rural areas'

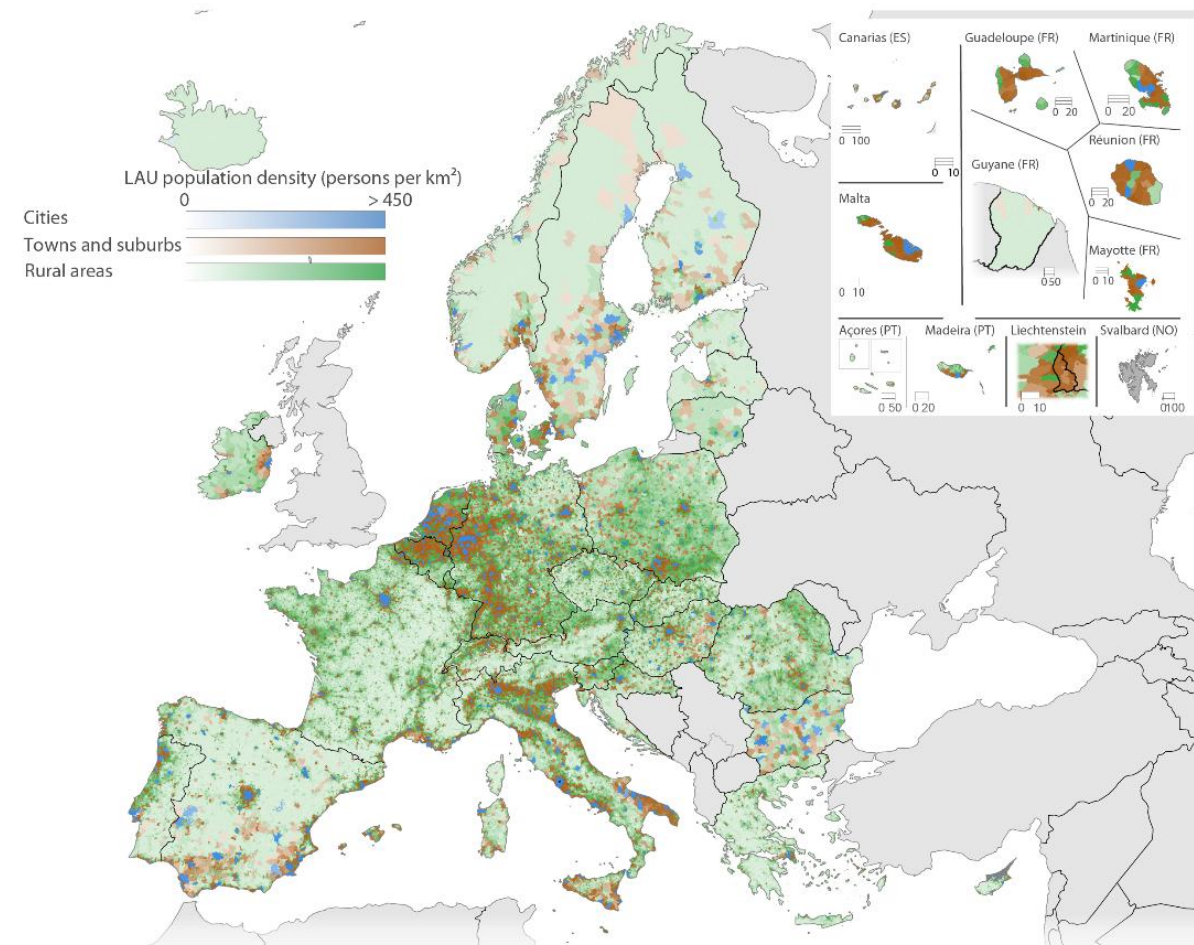
Today (CAP strategic plans): very wide diversity of definitions.

Tomorrow (NRPPs): perceived need for common approach to bring a level playing field across policy domains and ensure funds go to rural territories

Proposal (under discussion at the Council):

- **Local administrative units (LAU) classified as 'rural areas'** under the European territorial typology 'degree of urbanisation'.
- **Possibility to derogate to adjust the classification to take into account national, regional or territorial specificities** (examples of objective criteria discussed: high population density, or insularity).

Degree of urbanisation, 2021



eurostat

Source: Eurostat (based on Census Population Grid 2021 and Local Administrative Units 2021)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 07/2024

Rural areas: 25% of population – 75% of land



'Territorial' requirements for NRP Plans

- **Reduce economic, social and territorial disparities** in less developed, transition and more developed regions, including by focusing on specific needs of **border regions, northern sparsely populated regions, rural, island and outermost regions, urban areas, and areas affected by industrial transition**, based on methodology in **annex VII** (article 22)
- Effectively contribute to promoting the use of **territorial and local cooperation** interventions, including **integrated territorial investments** in ... **rural and coastal areas**, community-led local development or other territorial tools including just transition and smart specialisation strategies, **LEADER** (article 22)
- *Rationale (recital 31): need to ensure **complementarity and synergies** between different measures supporting different policy areas and targeting different groups of beneficiaries, to offer a **comprehensive policy response to develop thriving rural areas**, develop **integrated planning** to ensure rural communities have **access to finance through appropriate mechanisms**, **governance structures to coordinate** programming and implementation, taking into account the **specific context of target beneficiaries**; need to provide **capacity building** for both administrations and beneficiaries*



Relevant (descriptive) planning elements

Annex V NRP Fund Regulation (NRP template):

- Title 1 (overall Plan)
 - Part 1
 - Section 1.1 Support to general and **specific objectives** (Art. 2 and 3) – including **those addressing rural areas explicitly**
 - Section 1.2 **Description of challenges** and **related measures**
 - Section 1.5 Comprehensive overview of the Plan's support to the **territories listed in annex VII** > including “**Rural areas**”
 - Section 1.9 Comprehensive overview of the planned use of **integrated territorial development tools** (incl. CLLD/LEADER)
 - Section 1.10 Comprehensive overview of How the Plans effectively contribute to addressing risk management and **digital transition** (including in rural areas)

Relevant (descriptive) planning elements

Annex V NRP Fund Regulation (NRP template):

- Title 2 (Chapters *including measures within chapters*)
 - Section 1.1- 1.2 **Intervention strategy** (description of needs/challenges/objectives and how the measures address them)
 - Section 1.3 **Description of synergies** of the measures included in the chapter (and, if applicable with other measures in other chapters of the plan or with national measures)
 - Section 2.3 incl. description of the **targeting of the measures** set out in the Plan. - *Art. 36.1 (f)*
 - Section 2.7 territorial dimension of the measure (**territorial tagging – including for code 02- rural areas**)
 - Section 8 Coordination / demarcation and **complementarities** (how the measures included in the Plan are coherent with other measures supported by other Union instruments) – *Art. 7.5*

Which instruments to support rural areas?



A **comprehensive toolbox of instruments...**



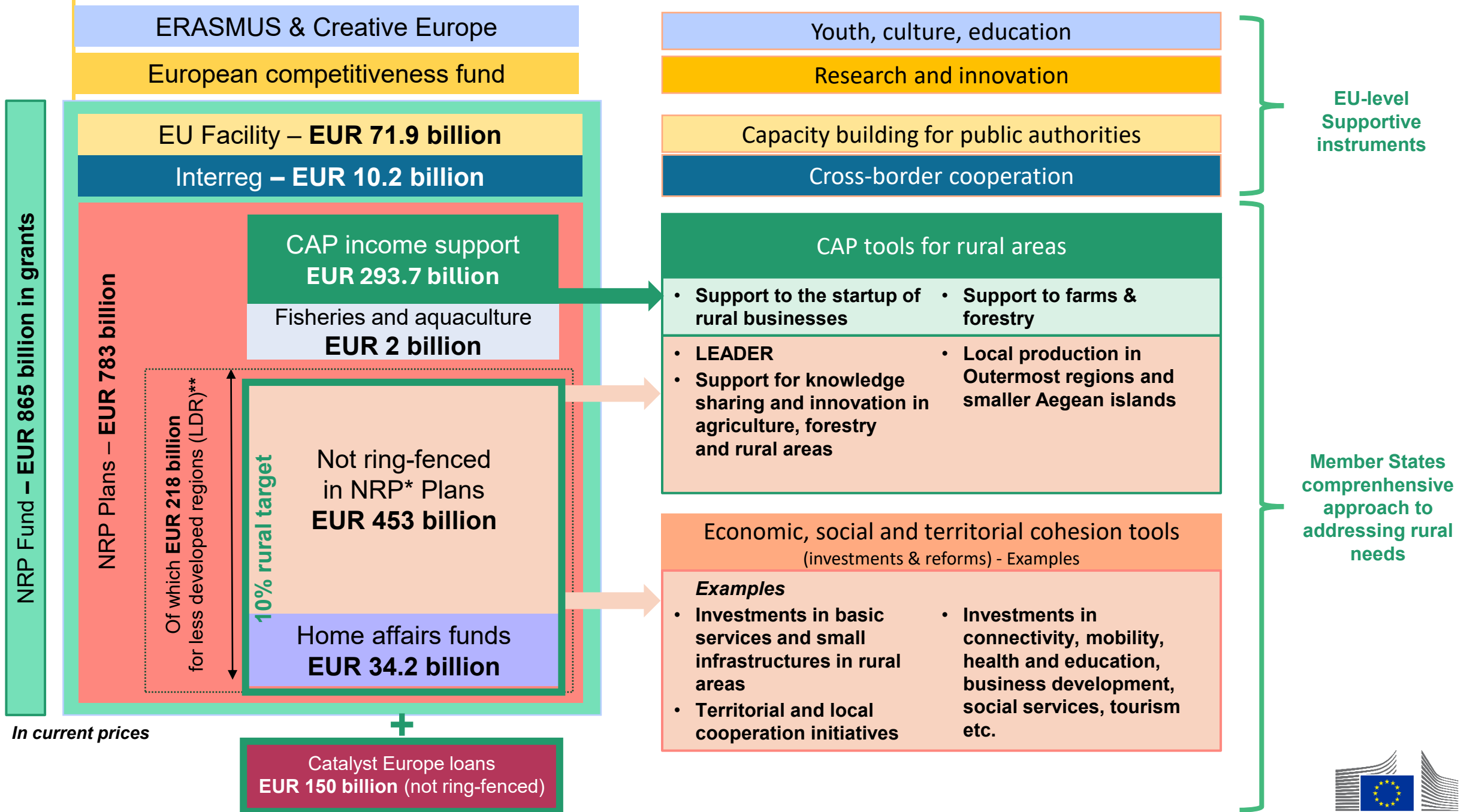
...from the **agriculture policy domain and other domains**



improving **coordination** and increasing **complementarities** and **synergies**



Integrated planning under the NRP plans will help look at challenges in **holistic** terms, bringing together **different policies and funding streams**.



** CAP and CFP interventions above the ringfenced amounts may be counted towards the earmarking for less developed regions provided they are for the benefit of those regions



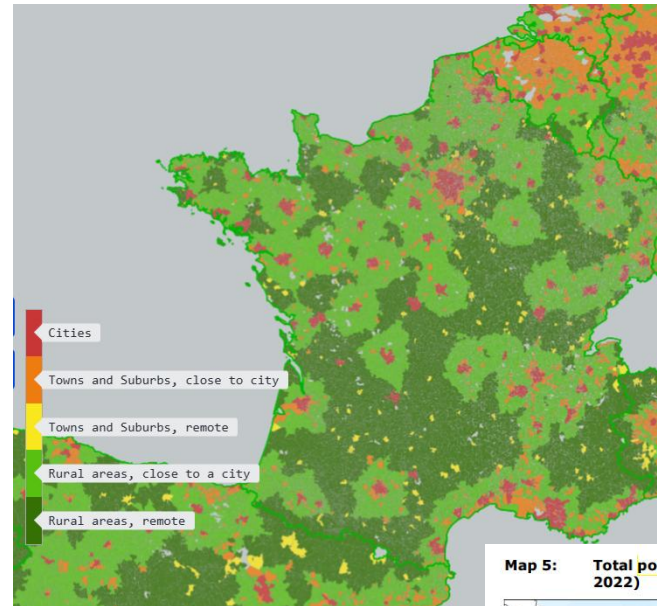
Targeting specific types of rural areas

Possible targeting criteria:

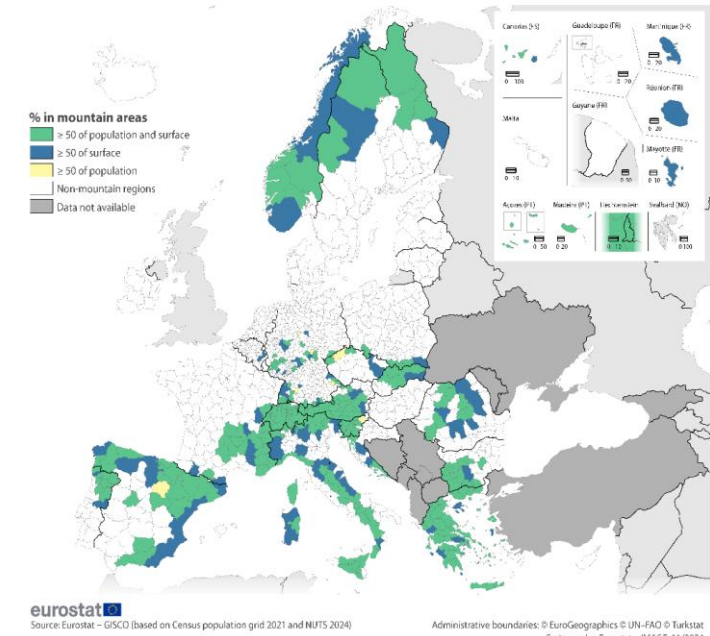
- Remoteness
- Demographic challenges
- Geographic constraints
- Eastern border regions
- Northern sparsely populated areas
- Etc.

Useful resources on targeting:

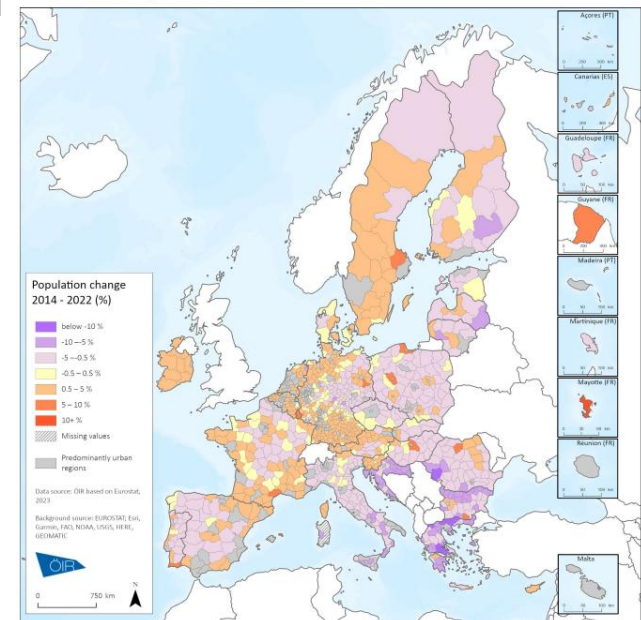
- [Study on EU funds for rural areas](#)
- [OECD Enhancing rural resilience report](#)



Mountain typology (NUTS 2024)



Map 5: Total population change in rural and intermediate regions (EU-27, 2014-2022)



Multi-sector support through community led local development (CLLD) including LEADER

- LEADER is **mandatory** at least in **rural areas facing specific disadvantages**.
- Implemented through **integrated territorial development strategies** > Efficient for social capital, community resilience, business development, social inclusion, services.
- Possibility to **extend to a broad set of policy sectors** > easier with the new framework

- *Example Poland (Multi-fund CLLD) – current programming period example*
- 190 multi-fund local development strategies
- A holistic set of priorities:
 - Economic diversification, local food systems, smart villages (CAP)
 - Infrastructure and village renewal, green transition (ERDF)
 - Employment and job, training, social inclusion and lifelong learning (ESF)



Multi-sector support through territorial instruments

Integrated territorial investments

- ITIs are useful to address **challenges at territorial scale**, coordinating development at territorial level with **several policies contributing to one territorial strategy**.

Example: Portugal

- Water and landscape ecosystems in Algarve and Alentejo regions
- Participatory governance
- Interventions decided through public hearings
- Several sectors addressed:
 - ecological restoration,
 - water re-use strategies,
 - reforestation,
 - fire risk mitigation,
 - climate adaptation measures

RURAL PACT Territorial instrument in rural Portugal addresses climate challenges through coordinated investments and place-based solutions

Stronger
Resilient

SUMMARY

The Integrated Territorial Instrument (ITI) for water and landscape ecosystems in the Algarve and Alentejo regions addresses critical environmental challenges. With a budget of EUR 52.8 million, it supports projects that enhance water resource management, promote biodiversity conservation, and develop nature-based solutions. As a policy instrument, the ITI enables coordinated investments across sectors and regions to implement integrated, place-based solutions. The initiative follows a multi-level governance model, engaging local, regional, and national stakeholders. The participatory approach ensures that local knowledge and citizen-led initiatives inform decision-making.

CONTEXT

The Algarve and Alentejo regions face shared environmental challenges, including prolonged droughts, soil erosion, and increasing wildfire risks. Water scarcity is a persistent concern, limiting agricultural productivity and regional development. Additionally, demographic decline and rural depopulation exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities.

The Integrated Territorial Instrument (ITI) for water and landscape ecosystems covers 17 municipalities across three NUTS III regions (Baixo Alentejo, Litoral Alentejano, and Algarve), forming a functional area requiring coordinated intervention.

The ITI integrates territorial planning across administrative boundaries, ensuring cohesive responses to environmental threats. The strategy is based on fostering resilient ecosystems and improving climate adaptation through participatory governance.

OBJECTIVES

- > Foster cross-regional cooperation for sustainable territorial development;
- > Encourage participatory governance and community engagement;
- > Strengthen water resource management and enhance ecosystem resilience;
- > Promote biodiversity conservation and combat desertification;
- > Develop nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation.

Themes: Demography, governance, climate, nature and environment, soil health, land use

Country: Portugal

Organisations:

- > Coordination and Regional Development Commission of Algarve
- > Coordination and Regional Development Commission of Alentejo

Start & end date: 08/2024 – 12/2029

Budget: EUR 800 000

Funding sources: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), 2021–2027 regional programmes: Algarve 2030 and Alentejo 2030

Website: [ITI Água e Ecossistemas de Paisagem | CCR, Algarve](#)

Contact:
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Tiago Pereira, tiago.pereira@ccdr-a.gov.pt

Unlocking synergies and adopting an integrated approach

The **NRP Plan** should:

- comprise a comprehensive and coherent **package of measures**.
- set out **coherent approaches** to addressing challenges, at the appropriate level
- Justify **complementarity and synergies** between different measures supporting different policy areas and targeting different groups of beneficiaries – Art. 22.2 (n); including coordination, consistency and synergies with other Union programmes and instruments – Art. 4

For illustrative purposes only, this section provides fictional and partial examples of National and Regional Partnership Plans, with the aim of clarifying the delivery model and some of the main programming steps that Member States and their regions will need to undertake when preparing and implementing their Plans.

The requirements presented in the slides are based on the Commission's proposal and do not reflect the changes introduced by the Presidency in the compromise texts.



Addressing rural needs

One project - Multiple benefits

E.g. rural needs to enhance prosperity and competitiveness:

- Investments in **business development** and **skills**, both in the **primary sector** and in **other sectors**
- Provide **diverse and quality job opportunities** building on unique rural assets and **emerging economic opportunities**, including the **green transition**.

Example: Supporting business development with a focus on enhancing local value chains

Calls for projects to support for **local partnerships** of producers, processors, food operators and local businesses to add value to local production, enhance sales, reduce waste and foster circular economy

Requirements: several actors, several types of actors, several objectives (economic, environmental and social)

RURAL PACT Regional innovation hub boosts sustainable food supply and resilience in rural Slovenia

Stronger Connected
Resilient Prosperous

SUMMARY

The 'Green Point' Living Lab is a regional innovation hub in Pomurje, Slovenia which strengthens local food systems through blockchain-based traceability, circular economy pilots to reduce waste, and low-emission logistics to reduce the carbon footprint of deliveries. Coordinated by the NGO Murska Sobota, the initiative connects farmers, SMEs, researchers, and local communities to co-create sustainable food solutions improving food transparency, support innovation, and build resilience in Pomurje's rural economy. Activities include smart delivery, surplus transformation, and hybrid sales models combining digital tools with local retail. Over 100 farmers and producers were involved in the 2022-2025 period, and the model is now being promoted across Europe for replication.

CONTEXT

Green Point operates in Pomurje, a key agricultural region in northeastern Slovenia, located at the crossroads between Austria, Hungary, and Croatia. Known for its fertile land and strong food production sector, the region faces several structural challenges, including a high dependency on imports, fragmented supply chains, and economic pressure on small-scale producers. The initiative responds by strengthening local food systems through a short supply chain that connects producers directly with consumers and public institutions.

OBJECTIVES

- > Improve the transparency and sustainability of local food supply chains by using blockchain technology;
- > Support local farmers and SMEs through circular-economy approaches that reduce food waste and create added value;
- > Promote climate-friendly logistics by using smart tracking and electric vehicles;
- > Engage citizens, businesses, and public institutions in the co-creation of a resilient rural food system;
- > Test and demonstrate scalable models for the digital and green transitions in rural communities.

Themes: research and innovation; access to services; smart and start-up villages; digital technologies; transport and mobility; climate; nature and environment; land use; bioeconomy and circular economy; agriculture and food; value chains.

Country: Slovenia

Organizations:

- Innovation Technology Cluster (ITC) Murska Sobota, NGO
- DIH AGRIFOOD, international rural network
- European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL), international network
- University of Maribor, research institution
- Green Point, private business
- Hudo Dobro, private business
- Green Point Living Lab, association
- Demo farms, association

Start & end date: 11/2022 - 08/2027

Budget: EUR 1 000 000

Funding sources:

- Interreg Alpine Space programme (2021-2027) – 'SmartCommUnity' project
- Interreg Central Europe programme (2021-2027) – 'More than a village' project
- Interreg ADRIAN transnational programme (2021-2027) – 'ADRURAL' project
- Horizon Europe programme (2021-2027) – 'VERNE' project

Website: <https://zelena-tocka.si/>

Contacts:

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- Darja Kukulović (Project Manager, 'SmartCommUnity', 'ADRURAL') darja.kukulovic@itc-cluster.com, +386 41 976 155
- Tomaž Zadavac (Project Manager, 'More than a village', 'VERNE') tomaz.zadavac@itc-cluster.com, +386 31 883 341

Source: ITC – Innovation Technology Cluster Murska Sobota



Addressing rural needs Combining mutually reinforcing measures

E.g. needs to strengthen and empower rural communities:

- Strengthen **human and social capital** and support **rural youth**
- Invest in **basic services and infrastructures**, health, education
- Enhance **innovation**

Example: Supporting access to healthcare through a mix of measures

- **Investments in local medical centres or mobile health units**
- **Tax incentives** to encourage doctors to settle in rural areas (reform).
- Support **partnerships between rural medical centres and metropolitan hospitals and universities** to favour apprenticeship, mentoring and participation of metropolitan regions in mobile healthcare delivery (coordination)
- Support **community-led innovation in care delivery** in remote areas (innovation projects)

Stronger **Connected** **Resilient**

Mobile health workers provide healthcare in Romanian rural areas

RURAL PACT

SUMMARY

The Doctors' Caravan Association (Caravana cu Medic) is an NGO comprising doctors and medical students delivering complementary medical services in rural areas across Romania. Since its establishment in 2014, the association has been enhancing healthcare accessibility within remote regions. Its approach combines mobile units staffed with a multidisciplinary team, operational during weekends, alongside a telemedicine platform and a call centre designed to assist those facing challenges with online access. Diverse types of caravans are deployed to address specific needs. Each caravan can cater to up to 100 people daily. By 2023, over 150 caravans had been deployed and more than 14 000 patients in rural Romania had benefited from their services.

CONTEXT

The Romanian medical system faces the serious challenge of limited access to healthcare services in rural areas. Approximately 46% of Romania's 19 million inhabitants reside in rural areas, yet the bulk of medical professionals and infrastructure is located in urban centres, resulting in significant deficiencies in rural communities.

OBJECTIVES

The association's key objectives are to provide basic and advanced medical care, perform screening and diagnostic tests, and raise awareness of the importance of prevention and a healthy lifestyle among rural residents.

Theme(s): Access to services; Transport and mobility; Health and care
Country: Romania
Organisation: Caravana cu Medic, non-profit organisation
Start & end date: 06/2014 – ongoing
Budget: EUR 20 000 / caravan / 100 patients
Funding sources:

- Private funding
- Donations
- Corporate social responsibility from private companies and social programmes
- Local authorities

Website: www.caravanacumedic.ro/en/index.html
Contact: Dr. Vlad Teodor Berbecar: vlad.berbecar@caravanacumedic.ro +40 723559798



Addressing rural needs Combining mutually reinforcing measures

E.g. needs for more connected rural areas:

- Investments in **digital connectivity, skills, development and adoption** of new technologies
- Invest in **local transport infrastructure** and smart mobility solutions adapted to local needs.

Example: Support rural digital transition

- Investments in **rollout of very high capacity networks**
- Support **innovation to develop technologies answering rural needs.**
- Support actions to **enhance digital skills**

RURAL PACT **Mobile app for sustainable water management in rural Ireland**

Connected
Resilient

SUMMARY

The TRACE project is modernising Ireland's rural water cooperatives (Group Water Schemes, GWS) through a mobile application that integrates Water-Energy-Climate (WEC) data. Launched in November 2024, the app helps communities manage water scarcity, contamination and infrastructure issues by providing real-time monitoring and data collection. The project aims to improve water resilience, digital literacy, and introduce AI systems for better decision-making. Over 400 rural communities benefit from tools for enhanced water management, cost savings, and improved decision-making.

CONTEXT

The TRACE project is implemented in rural Ireland, addressing the critical challenges faced by rural water cooperatives (Group Water Schemes, GWS). These cooperatives are community-owned and managed water systems that provide essential drinking water services to rural households and farms, often in areas where public water infrastructure is unavailable.

The GWS play a vital role in ensuring access to clean water for dispersed rural populations, yet they face mounting pressures that threaten their sustainability. Key challenges include water shortages, ageing infrastructure, and the reliance on manual data management which limits operational efficiency and adaptability. Rising energy costs further strain the financial sustainability of these schemes, while climate pressures, such as increasing water scarcity and contamination risks, exacerbate the stress on rural water resources.

OBJECTIVES

The TRACE project modernises Ireland's GWS through a Water-Energy-Climate (WEC) data-driven management system. Its key objectives are to:

- > Develop and implement a mobile application enabling real-time monitoring, predictive analytics, and renewable energy integration;
- > Enhance water resilience and operational efficiency by replacing manual processes with digital tools;
- > Promote environmental sustainability by reducing energy costs and optimising resource use;
- > Support data-driven decision-making to maximise water conservation and improve infrastructure management;
- > Foster transparency and community engagement by increasing access to performance data.

Themes: Digital, infrastructure, energy, climate, nature and environment

Country: Ireland

Organisations:

- > National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS), NGO
- > Group Water Schemes (GWS), Local Action Group
- > Uisce Eireann, public authority
- > Environmental Protection Agency, public authority
- > Geological Survey Ireland, public authority
- > Local Authorities Water Programme, public authority
- > An Foram Uisce, NGO
- > ACOWAS-EU, international organisation
- > Community Members and GWS Committees, citizens

Start & end date: 09/2023- 02/2025

Budget: EUR 250 000

Funding sources: National Challenge Fund, under the Irish National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) (funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility)

Website: <https://www.sfi.ie/challenges/sustainable-communities-challenge/TRACE/>

Contact: Dr John Gallaghe - J.Gallagher@tcd.ie

PROJECT - EIP-AGRI OPERATIONAL GROUP

**DIGITAL SHEPHERDS AGAINST THE FIRE -
Digital Pyric Silvopastoralism and Commercial Valorization.**

Steps for planning synergies & complementarities

- ✓ Organise a comprehensive **partnership** and multi-level governance in accordance with national institutional framework
- ✓ Identify key **challenges** at national, regional, territorial level
- ✓ Identify the set of **measures** necessary to tackle the challenges
- ✓ Define elements of **costing and implementation** (milestones, targets, outputs) per measure
- ✓ Where relevant, foresee governance structures to **coordinate implementation** and **capacity building** for administrations and project promoters [part. relevant for integrated territorial development]

A comprehensive policy response through national and regional rural strategies

- Holistic strategies for the development of rural areas at **national and regional levels** can be useful to organise a more comprehensive policy response to rural needs under the NRPPs.
- The NRPP framework creates **ideal conditions to support such strategies** in coherence with national and regional instruments.
- Resources are available to help Member States who would wish to develop those:
 - [Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States | Rural Pact Community Platform](#)
 - [OECD Principles on Rural Policy | OECD](#)
 - Examples: [Advancing the Rural Pact: country-specific information | Rural Pact Community Platform](#)
- The next **High-level rural policy forum on 3-4 November** in Naas, Ireland, will focus on this aspect.



Thank you



<https://rural-vision.europa.eu/>

