RURAL PACT

Rural proofing from the EU perspective

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European Commission

ERCA Café - Rural proofing in action: tools, processes and governance

On-line, 26 June 2026

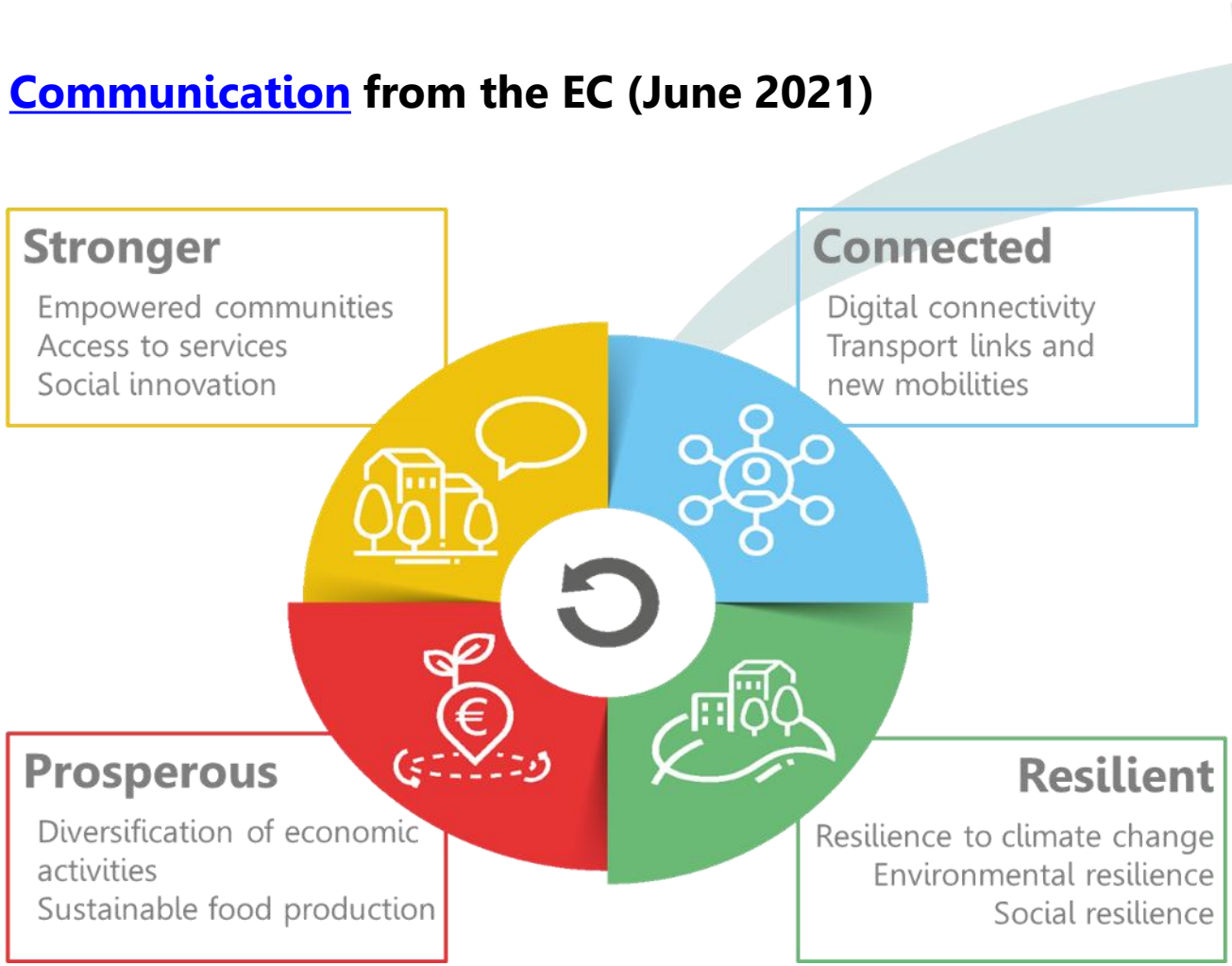


Funded by the European Union

The EU Rural vision: working together for rural areas

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Communication from the EC (June 2021)



Shared goals for 2040

Rural action plan (EC)
&
Rural Pact (everyone)

Vision for Agriculture and food (2025):
> Enhance synergies in support
> Update the Rural action plan
> Strengthen the Rural Pact
> Resource and operationalise rural proofing

Policies for rural areas



The rural action plan: 24 thematic actions

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- **Rural revitalisation platform launched**

- **Research and innovation for rural communities**
  - **60 multi-actor** research **projects** under Horizon EU
  - European **Start-up village forum** launched

- **Networking for LEADER** (EU CAP Network) **and Smart villages** (SmartRural 21 & 27)

- **Study on land-use** for **sustainable agriculture** working on recommendations for local planning and zoning

- **Youth:**
  - Getting more rural young people in **ERASMUS**

- **Networking on mobility** for rural communities under SMARTA-NET

- Urban mobility plans being updated with **more focus on rural-urban linkages**

- **Rural Digital Futures**
  - **€23.5 billion** invested in **connectivity** in market failure areas
  - Pilot on digital education in remote areas "Learning from the extremes"

- **Broadband competency office network** acting for improved connectivity in market failure areas
  - Capacity building/+advice

- **Rural energy communities advisory hub** (RECAH)
  - **27 municipalities** received technical assistance
  - **Guidance** for all

- **Certification of Carbon removals**

- **EU mission: A soil deal for Europe** (R&I calls)
  - Funding for local/regional **living labs** and **lighthouses**

- **Social resilience and Women in rural areas**
  - Raising awareness on the importance of care in rural areas (**European care strategy** 2022)

- **Entrepreneurship and social economy (SE)**
  - Providing **good practices for social economy in rural areas** under "Transition pathway for proximity and social economy"
  - Funding for **consortia in SE in rural areas**

- **Education for youth**
  - Dedicated **content for rural schools** under school education platform & online teacher community

- **Toolkit for producer groups in Geographical Indications**

- **Networking for forest-dominant municipalities**

The rural action plan: horizontal actions
Improving governance

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EU RURAL ACTION PLAN

6 Horizontal actions

1. The EU Rural Observatory (more)
2. Improved Statistics on rural areas
3. Functional Rural Areas
4. **Rural Proofing at EU level**
5. Rural toolkit on EU funding (more)
6. Rural Pact



Purpose and understanding of rural proofing
European Commission level

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*"Rural proofing means "**reviewing policies through a rural lens**, to make these policies **fit for purpose for those who live and work in rural areas**. In practice, it considers, **for policies in the making**, the actual and **potential, positive or negative**, **direct and indirect** impacts and implications on **rural jobs, development prospects, social well-being, equal opportunities for all** and the environmental quality of rural areas and communities."*

Communication "**A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040**", June 2021

*"Territorial impact assessments and rural proofing will be strengthened, so that the **needs and specificities of different EU territories are better taken into account,** for instance of urban/**rural areas**, cross-border areas and outermost regions, to facilitate a more **symmetric recovery** and cohesion."*

Communication "**Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws**", April 2021

European Commission

Rural proofing at European Commission
In practice

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Screening

Annual
EU Commission work programme
(list of initiatives to be adopted the following year)

Lead policy services

Legislative actions **with impact assessment**

e.g.: new law

Use of the **better regulation** and **territorial impact assessment (TIA)** tools

Legislative or non-legislative actions **without impact assessment**

e.g.: communication

Softer mechanisms

[Tools](#) **#18 + #34**
[ESPON TIA tool](#)
« TIA necessity check »
TIA **methods**

Questions to support reflection on rural implications
Building capacity to **« think rural »**

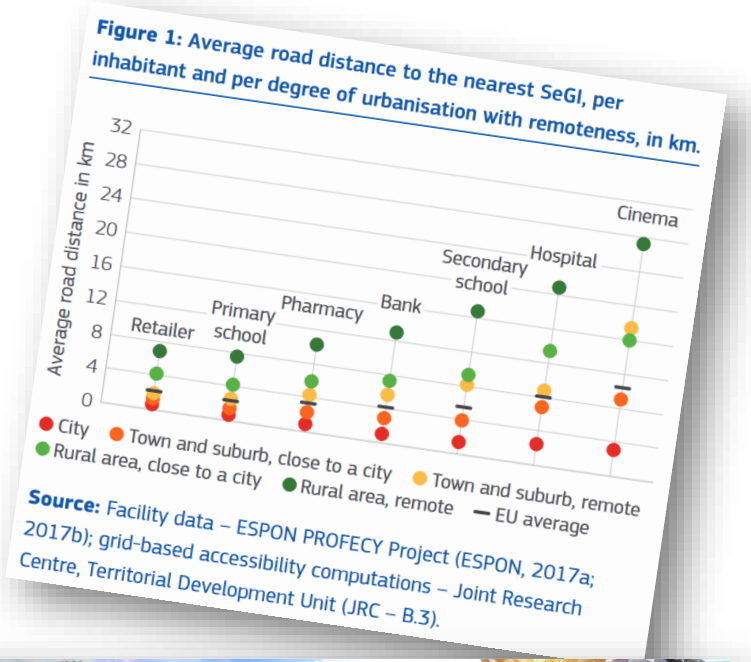
More on [rural proofing](#) on the EU Rural vision website

European Commission

Uptake & progress
Report 2024

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- **Territorial impact assessments**: one in 2022 + territorial impacts explored for revised waste framework directive and framework for income taxation in the EU
- **Softer mechanisms**: acknowledgement of rural specificities but progress needed on formulating policy options *(i.e. taking action)*
- **Ways forward:**
  - Raise **awareness** and **understanding** of **rural issues**
  - Keep improving **data** (regional statistics, EU Rural observatory)
  - Improve **coordination**: **"operationalise and sufficiently resource"** (EC Vision for agriculture and food)





European Commission

Examples of initiatives looked at from a rural lens

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- **Civil society** strategy
- **Generational renewal** strategy
- European **cross-border** associations
- Affordable **housing** action plan
- **Culture** compass

- **Transport poverty** hub
- **Agenda for cities**
- *Single ticketing package*

- Development of **energy communities**
- **Gender equality**
- **Intergenerational fairness** strategy
- Action plan on the European Pillar of **social rights**
- **Eastern Border** Regions Communication
- *Anti-poverty strategy*
- *Child guarantee*

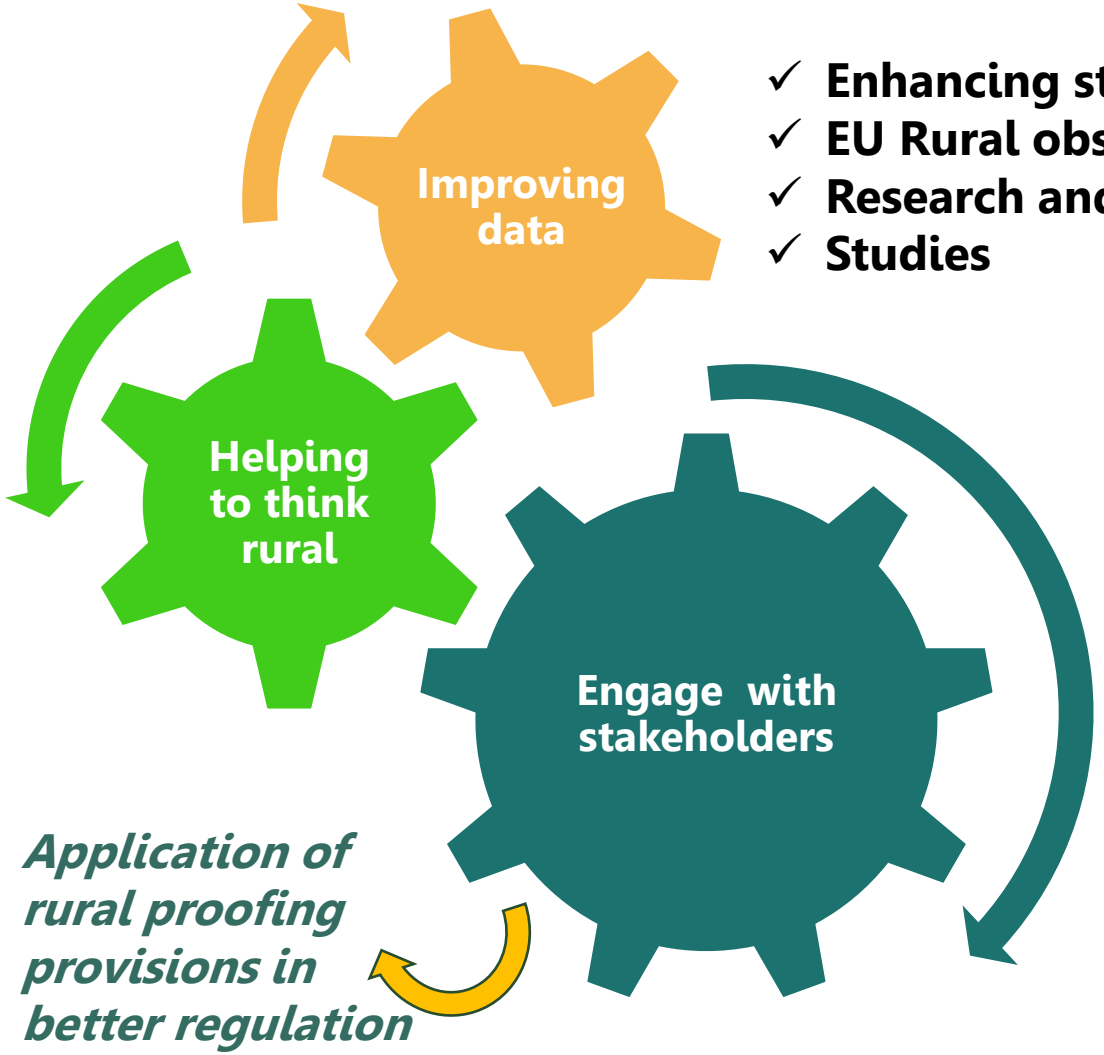
- **Union of skills**: Action plan on basic skills, STEM education strategic plan, *VET strategy*
- **Start-ups and scale-ups** strategy
- **Bioeconomy** strategy
- Mid-term review of the **social economy action plan**
- *Circular economy act*
- *Sustainable tourism*
- *Livestock*

- **European Semester** cycle 2026 and preparation of **CAP national recommendations**

On-going reflections: valorising and integrating rural vision actions for rural proofing

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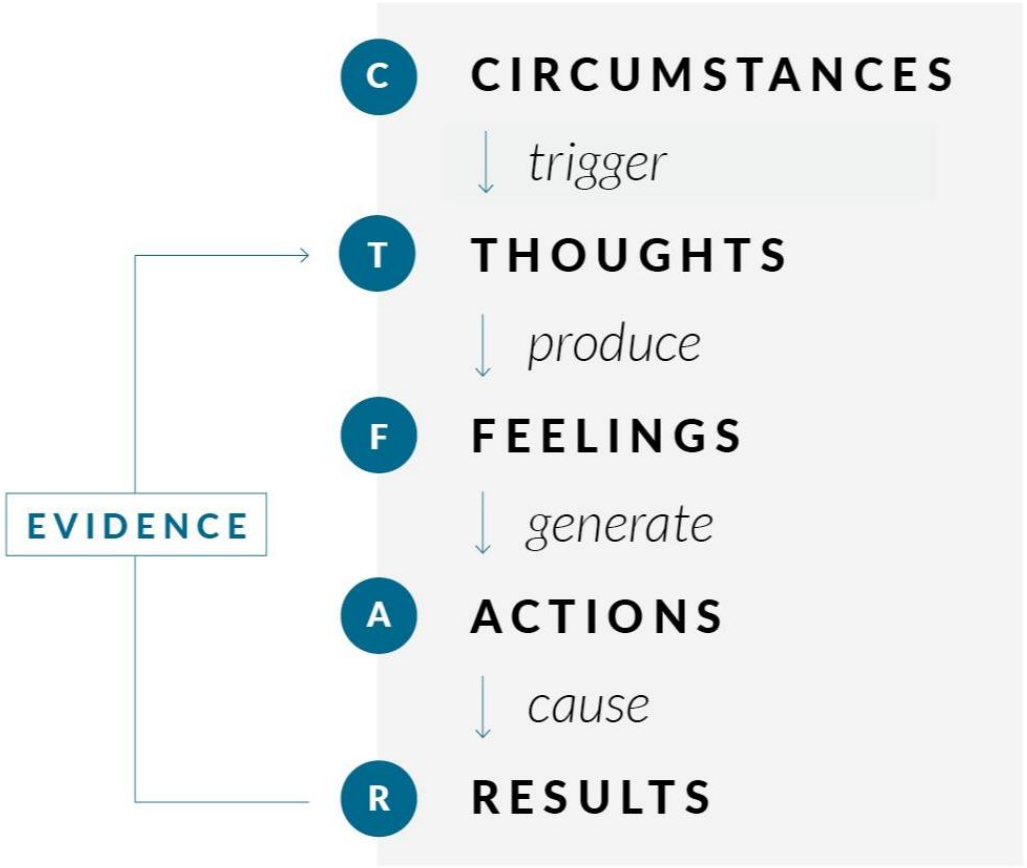
- ✓ **EU Rural action plan - Working collaboratively** on rural actions **with Commission departments, raising awareness in the long-run**
- ✓ **Building capacities** through the Rural Pact activities (good practices, events, knowledge hub)



- ✓ **Enhancing statistics**
- ✓ **EU Rural observatory**
- ✓ **Research and innovation**
- ✓ **Studies**

- ✓ Rural Pact **events & platform**
- ✓ **Rural Pact community groups**
- ✓ Promoting **consultations** to target stakeholder groups

What drives action?
A digression into the Brooke Castillo Model



A common approach

Rural areas are in decline

« It has been like this for 200 years, no political action can really change that… » « The future is in the cities. »

Doubt that taking action would create results
Fear of failing & wasting scarce resources

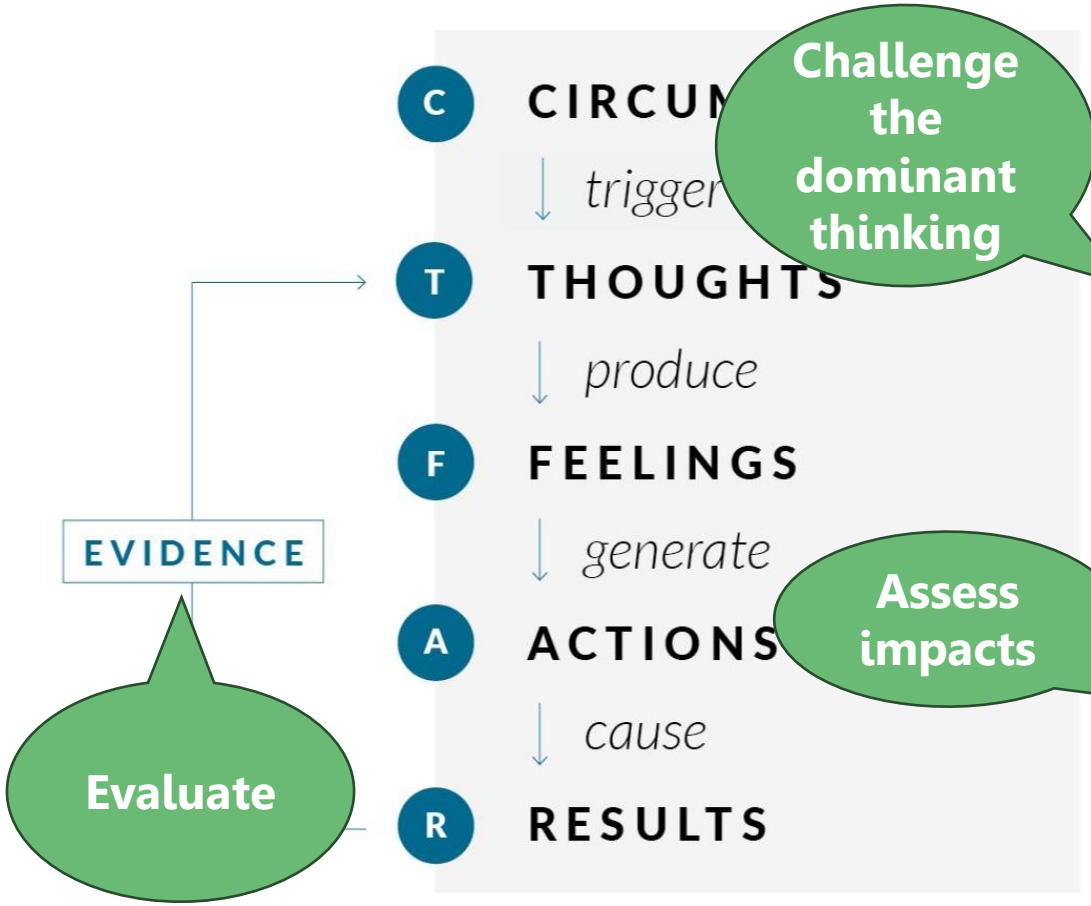
Limited investments to accompany the trends/lighten the consequences/slow down - No investment into reversing the trend.

The trend goes on, though at a slightly lower pace.

What drives action?

A digression into the Brooke Castillo Model

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A more proactive approach

Paint a more accurate and diverse picture

Challenge the dominant thinking

Many rural areas face population loss and lower productivity
Some rural areas show positive signs of progress

« *There is **potential** in rural areas, that can be tapped into if we invest/act in the right way. Rural areas are solutions.* »

Confidence that action could produce results.
Motivation to invest, do the right thing.

Build **Confidence**

Assess impacts

Develop a deeper understanding of the trends.
Identify the positive examples and understand drivers
Invest in what can support these positive trends.

Inspire

Areas were thoughtful action is taken show progress.

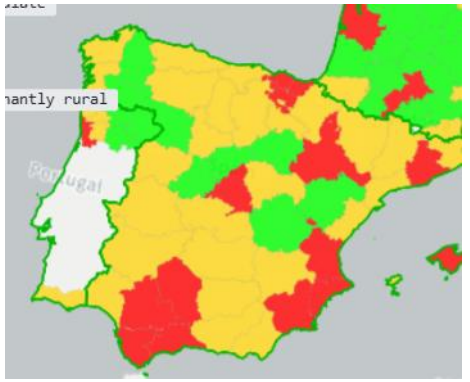
An accurate and diverse picture

- Account for the **diversity** of national situations while ensuring **comparability and** benchmarking
- **Granular** enough, showing **intra country differences**
- **Dynamic** – (temporality)
- **Specific** about what is the real issue
- **Relative vs absolute values** (e.g. urban-rural gaps)

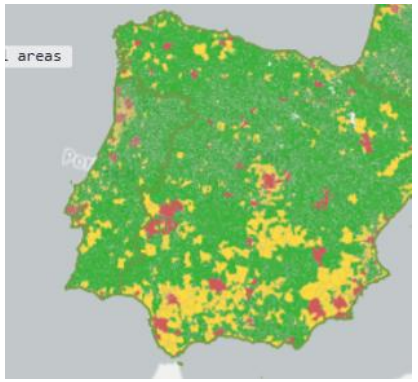
[Rural Europe Statistics explained]

[Rural observatory]

Urban-rural typology

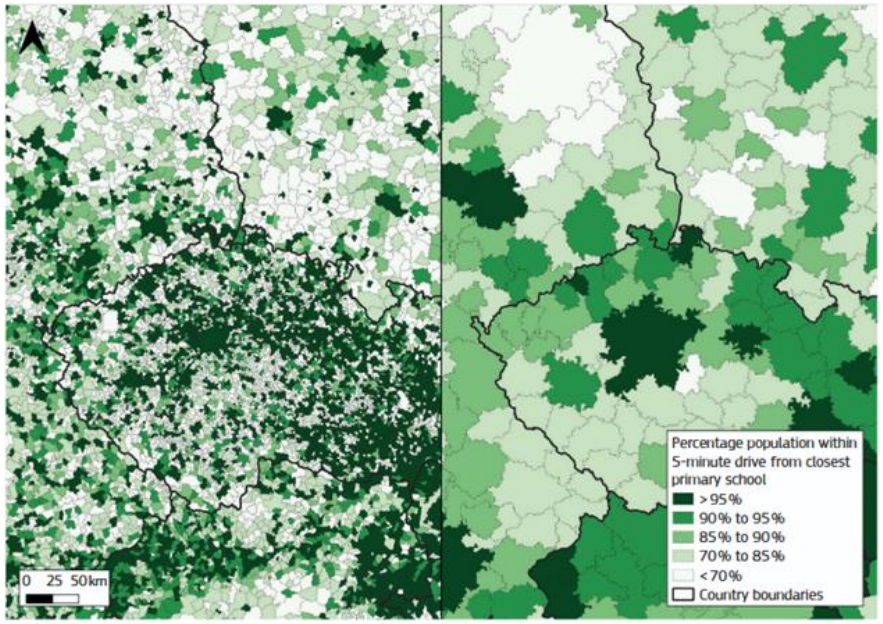


Degree of urbanisation



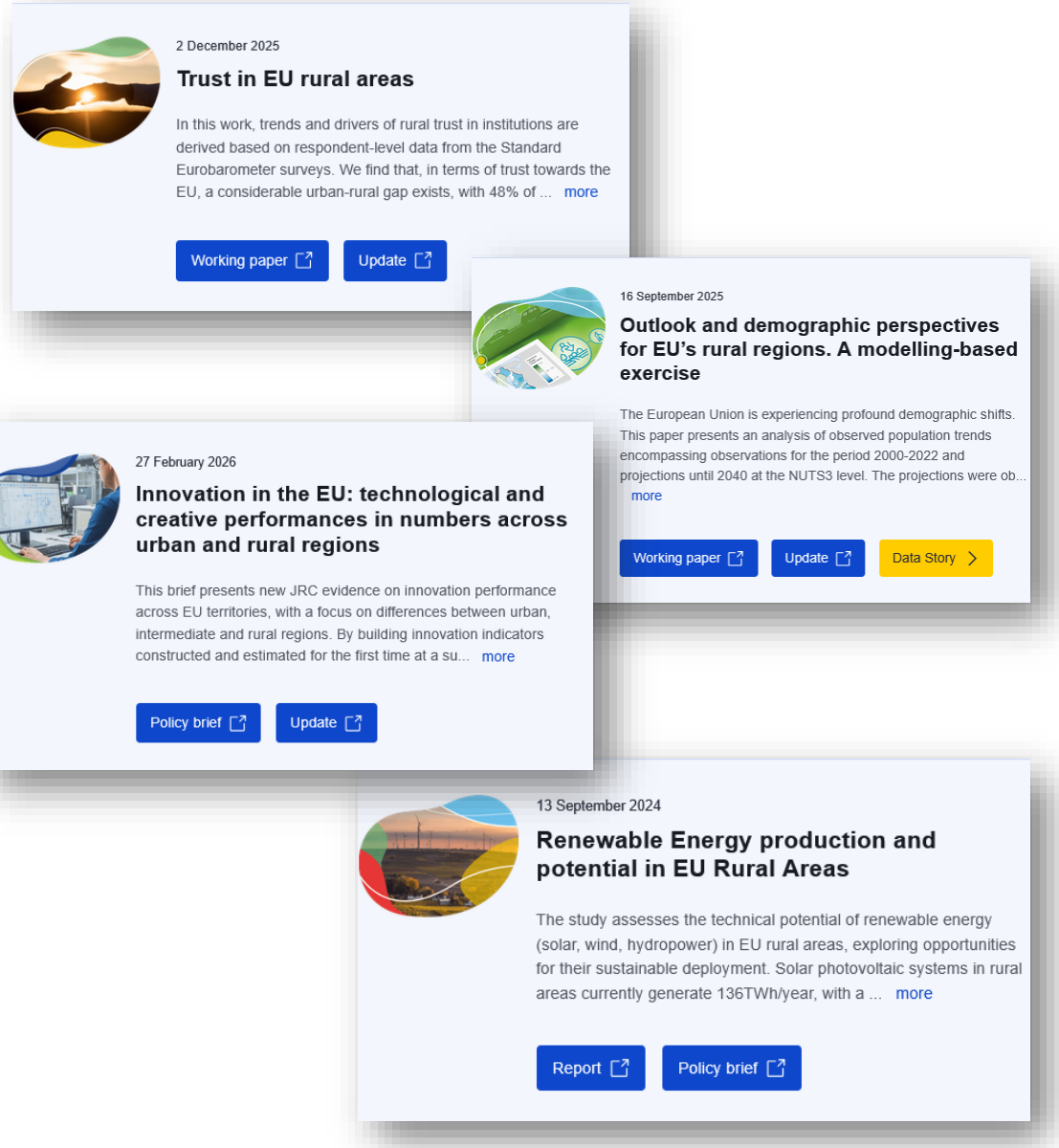
Access to primary schools at LAU and Functional rural area level

Figure 2. Marked differences in the percentage population that is within a 5-minute drive to the closest primary school between the LAU2 (left) and FRA levels (right) with Prague in the centres of the maps.



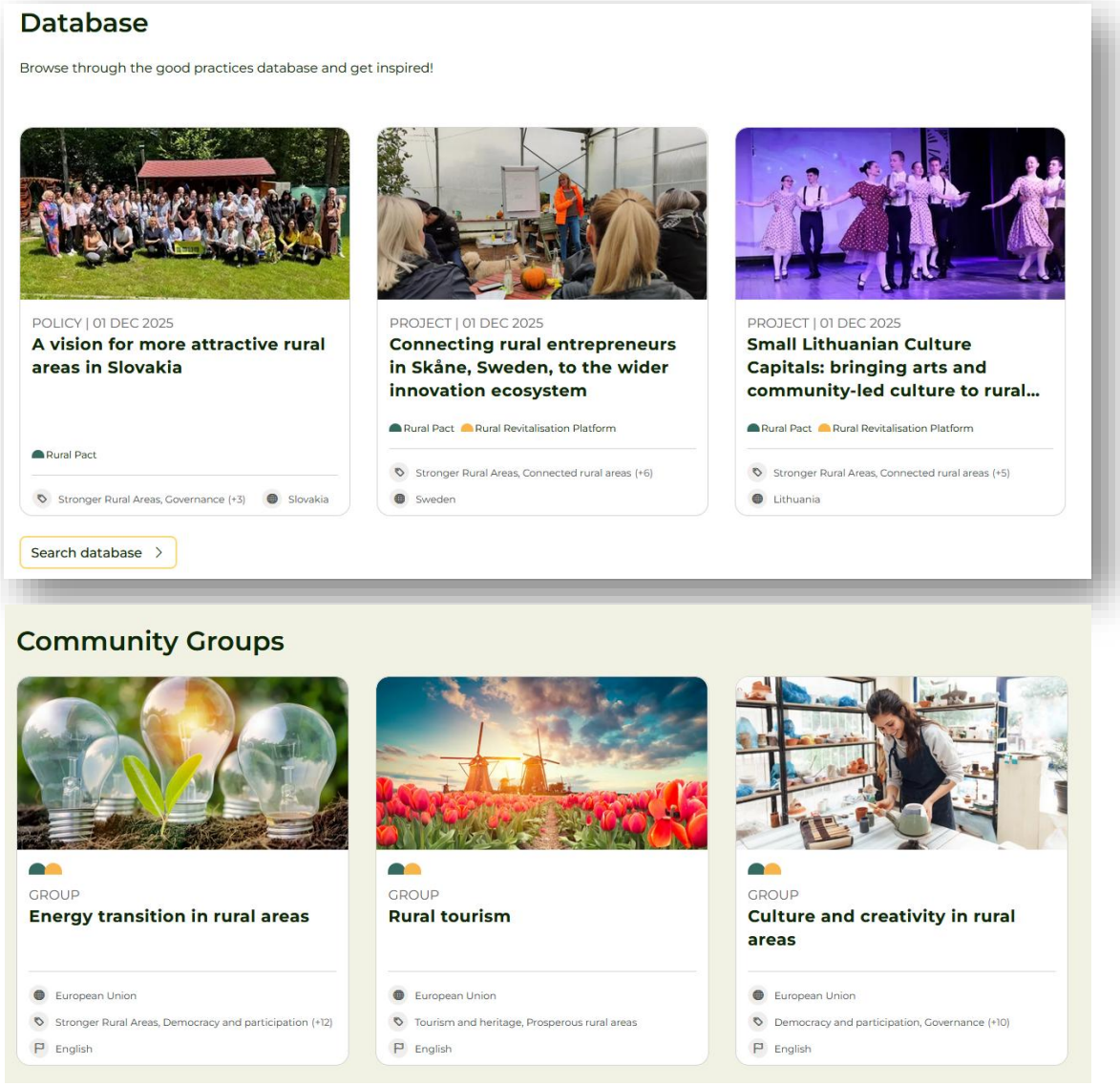
Making the case that positive futures are possible

- Look into **problems** and show the value of solving them
  - How investing in services could help in other domains
  - Show the value of trust and equity
- Look also into **opportunities**
  - Energy potential, innovation potential
  - Importance of social capital for resilience
  - Key role of rural areas for security and strategic autonomy
- Promote the **positive trends/situations** even where they are not dominant (yet)



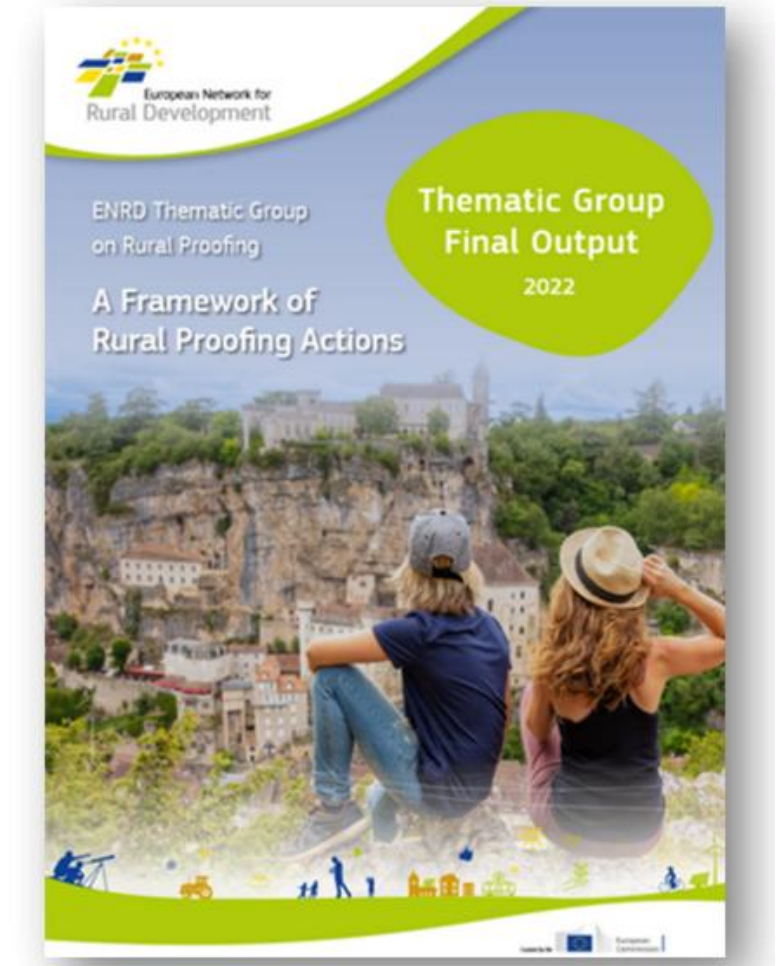
Build confidence, inspire, evaluate

- Promote **positive measures**, **initiatives**, **good practices**
  - Rural Pact good practice database
  - Rural toolkit 'get inspired'
  - Events (Good practice webinars, policy labs)
- **Engage with stakeholders** on what they think could work
  - Rural pact community groups
- **Measure impacts** (and in the long-term)
  - Studies



More on rural proofing on our websites







https://rural-vision.europa.eu/action-plan/cross-cutting/rural-proofing_en

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Thank you!

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

www.ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en

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