

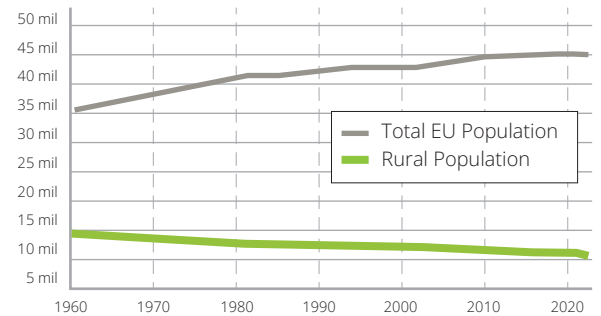
Environmental risks related with depopulation and ageing population in rural areas

Policy recommendations

Depopulation, climate change and rural development

While the overall population of the European Union continues to grow, a contrasting trend emerges in rural areas where populations are steadily declining.


A decreasing and ageing population in rural areas influences the ability to mitigate environmental risks associated with climate change.



Abandoned or underutilised agricultural land is more susceptible to environmental degradation, soil erosion, and reduced biodiversity. Additionally, the dwindling population might result in decreased community engagement in environmental conservation efforts, hindering the implementation of sustainable practices.

The initial diagnosis carried out in the first year of the Down to Earth project has helped partners identify crosscutting issues that determine common challenges and priority action lines for public policies in rural areas.

Key lessons

- Basic services in rural areas require **coordinated strategic planning involving different administrations**. **Public participation** in the planning process is increasingly demanded. 
- Initiatives linked to the **primary productive sectors** are crucial for sustainable territorial management, but other initiatives focusing on **energy efficiency, carbon capture, environmental sustainability measures and renewable energy** can play a complimentary role.
- **Ecosystem services** provided by natural capital need to be **considered in the wider decision-making process as a cross-cutting issue** to ensure its preservation.
- **Cultural and leisure initiatives** should not be disregarded as they **contribute** to the valorisation of rural communities.
- **Training and knowledge transfer** are crucial for more **efficient public policies**.

There are common challenges across Europe regarding environmental risks related with depopulation and ageing population in rural areas. This means that there can also be common solutions.

Policy brief

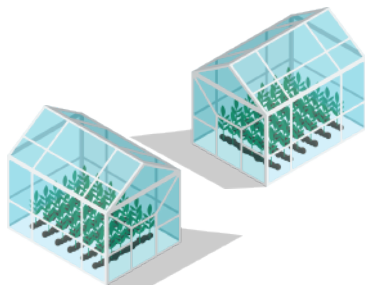
Policy recommendations

- Formulate **comprehensive policies** that address the multifaceted challenges of rural areas through a multi-level approach, notably addressing:
 - the specific causes influencing depopulation and the factors contributing to the resilience of diverse rural regions;
 - the competitive disadvantages faced by rural areas.



- Support **skill development** and **knowledge-sharing** mechanisms to empower rural populations and enhance their ability to adapt to evolving economic landscapes.
- Address **urban-rural linkages** through spatial planning to promote balanced development and prevent the neglect of critical interdependencies.
- **Harmonize** different local and regional **regulations** to create a conducive environment for rural development, promote adaptation to climate change.

- Avoid exclusive focus on primary sectors and consider a **holistic approach** that embraces the diversity and **multifunctionality of the countryside**, contributing to regional resilience.
- Leverage the opportunities offered by **new technologies** to develop innovative solutions to enhance sustainability (e.g. precision farming).



- Support **entrepreneurship** in rural areas as a mean of effective territorial management and retention of populations.
- **Population flows** and **integration of migrants** can be regarded as a way to address demographic challenges.

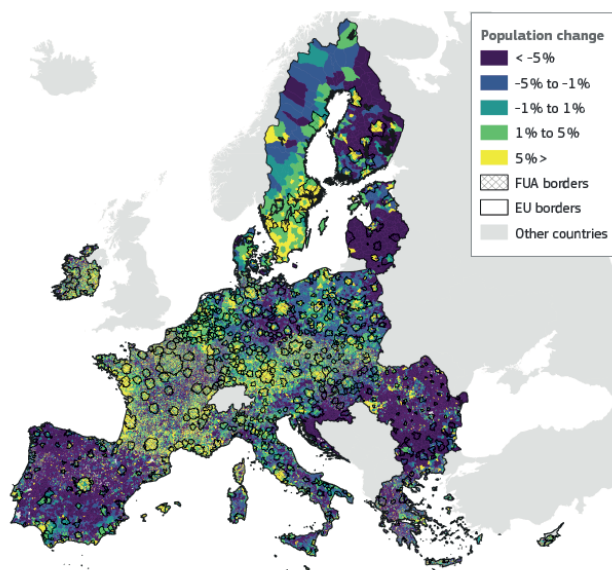


Technical brief: Functional Rural Areas

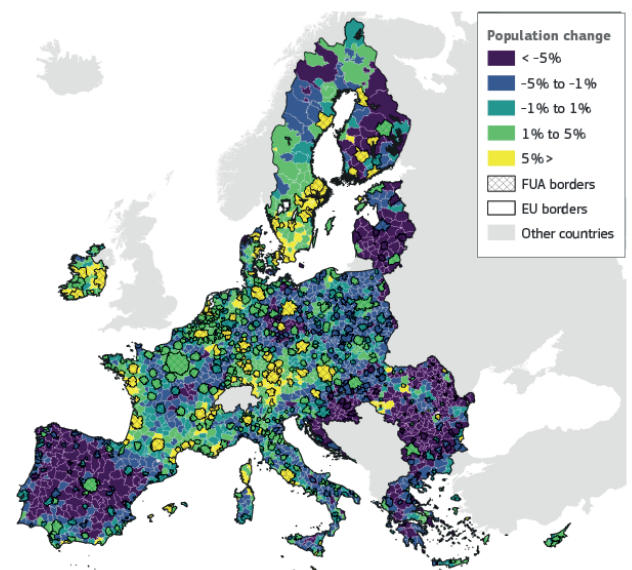
Understanding shrinkage in rural areas through the lens of Functional Rural Areas (FRA)

“The sheer number of small municipalities especially in countries like France and Spain produces a noisy image of population change there, as small population change can lead to high change rates, which gives the false impression that local population changes in countries with much larger municipalities are much less volatile.”

Dijkstra, L., Jacobs Crisioni, C.(2023): Developing a definition of Functional Rural Areas in the EU. JRC Working Papers on Territorial Modelling and Analysis No 11/2023, European Commission, Ispra, JRC135599



LAU Level



FRA Level

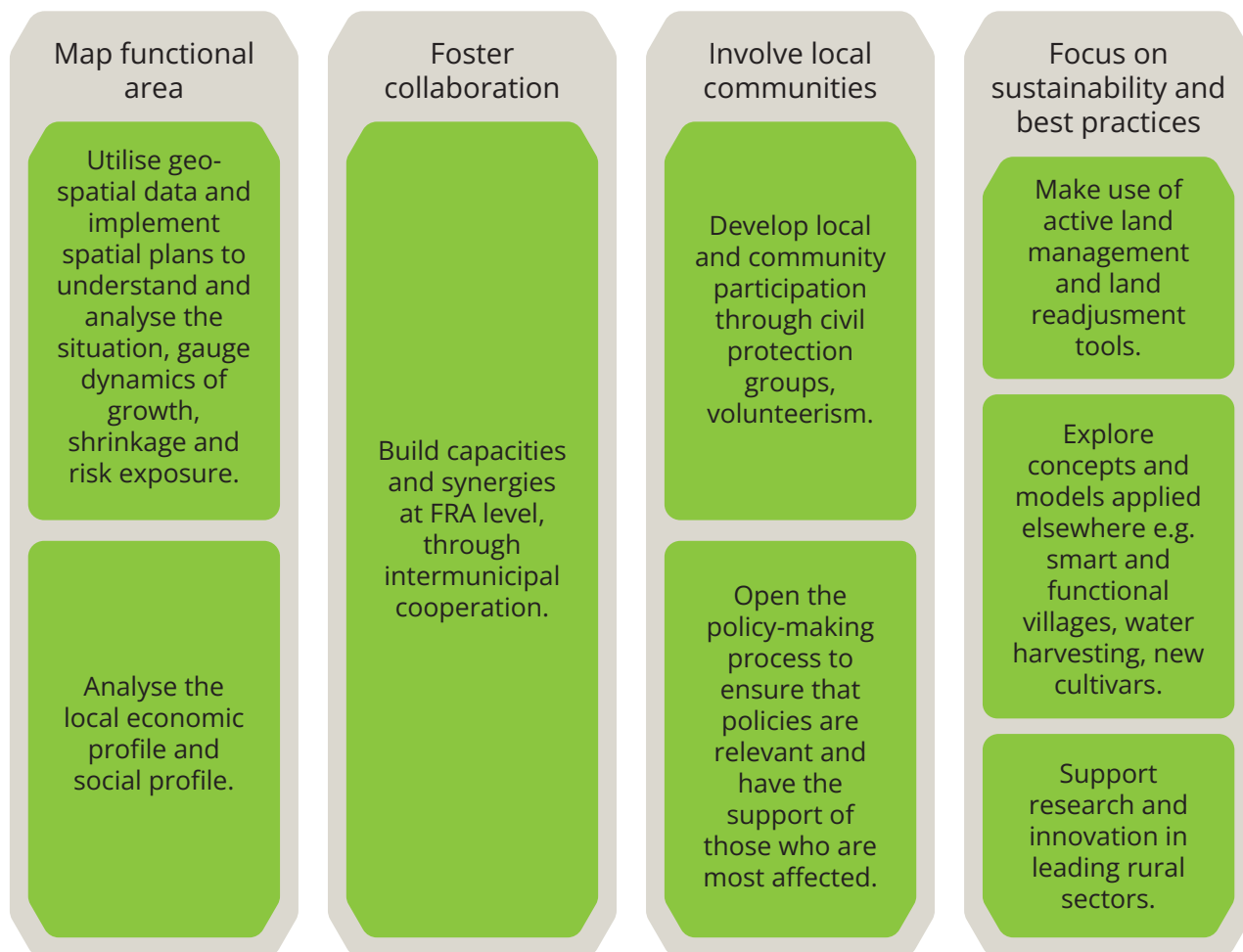
The objective of a functional rural area is to define a daily rural system, i.e. an area which captures the vast majority of daily trips. These trips go beyond travel to work and include travel to services such as schools, hospitals, shops, sport and cultural facilities, as well as travel to friends and family.

Adopting a functional areas approach to territorial policy design ensures that policies are more aligned with real-world conditions, promoting efficiency, coordination, and sustainability.



Technical brief: Functional Rural Areas

Adopting a Functional Rural Areas approach to design territorial policies



References

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Down to Earth Partners

Galician Agency for Rural Development (ES)
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 National Meteorological Administration (RO)
 Regionalverband Neckar-Alb (DE)
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