

An aerial photograph of a park or natural area. In the foreground, a paved path winds through a grassy field. A small pond is visible in the middle ground, surrounded by trees and shrubs. In the background, a residential area with houses and a tall tower is visible under a cloudy sky. A large yellow graphic element is on the left side of the image.

RURAL BRANDING FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING/WORKING/ENTREPRENEURSHIP

#PROJECTIDEA #INTERREGEU



PROJECT IDEA

SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE IN RURAL REGIONS



LIVING



WORKING



ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ABOUT THE PROJECT

RURAL REGIONS OFFER A SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR LIVING, WORKING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EUROPE.

Nevertheless, at the same time, these regions often suffer from an **image problem**, which often leaves them handicapped for the development of living, working and entrepreneurship. The health crisis has led to **increased use of digital tools**. This has given rise to all kinds of home-based work and remote entrepreneurship.

As a result, the countryside is no longer remote and its assets for living, working and doing business are enhanced.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Nevertheless, such regions face **challenges** such as:

- Braindrain
- Ageing population
- Depopulation, liveability problems in villages
- Labour market crunch
- ...

ABOUT THE PROJECT

With the project, we want to examine to what extent rural regions can provide a sustainable alternative for living, working and entrepreneurship. Secondly, we want to examine what mix of policy instruments should be used to optimally position these regions.

We want to achieve **innovation in regional profiling** through exchanges with regions and knowledge institutions working on similar challenges.

A large, bright yellow chevron shape pointing to the right, centered on the left side of the page. It is composed of two thick diagonal lines meeting at a point.

WHO ARE WE?

THE “WESTHOEK” – DVV WESTHOEK

DVV

DVV Westhoek is the **service rendering association of 17 municipalities** and the WVI (West Flanders service rendering association).

By organising cooperation, DVV Westhoek offers **support** to the municipalities in **drawing up local & regional policies** and **carrying out assignments**.

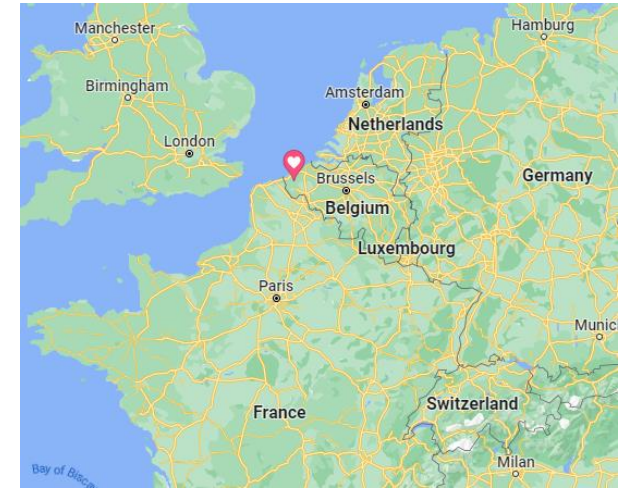
Among other things, DVV Westhoek organises the Westhoek conference known for the **monthly mayors' meetings**.

DVV Westhoek operates mainly on person-oriented activities. For example: social economy, food redistribution, handyman service, renovation assistance and energy loans, leisure and culture, involving disadvantaged groups, digitalisation of services, ...



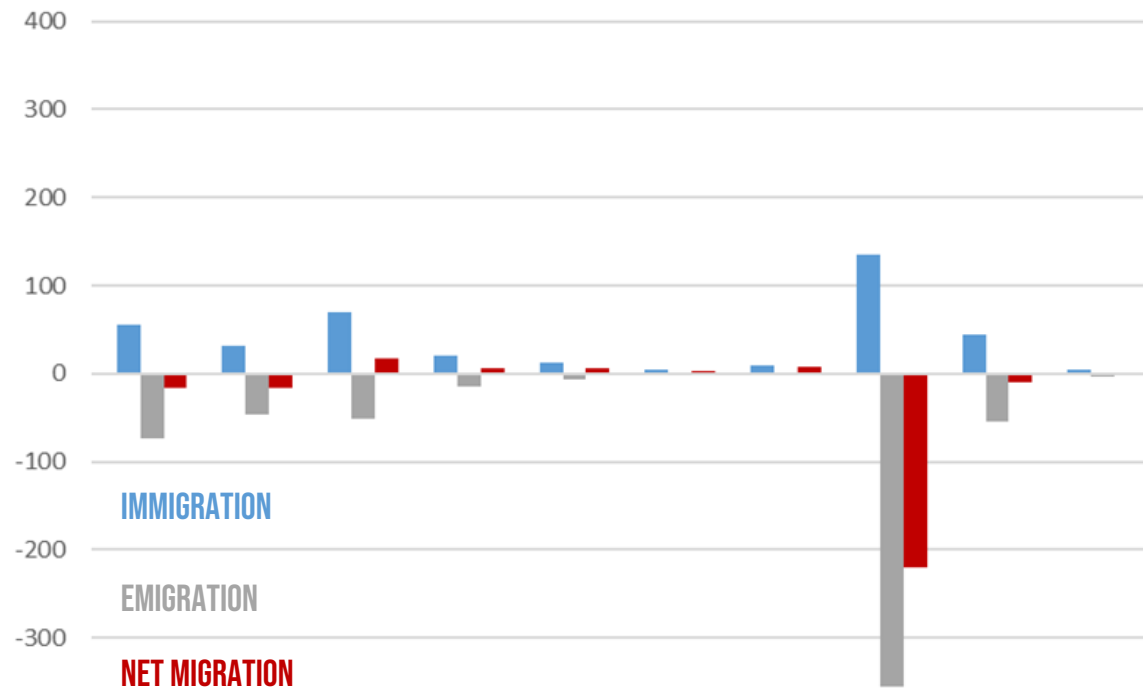
WESTHOEK

- Largest rural region in Flanders
- In West-Flanders, Belgium
- Ca. 200.000 inhabitants
- Ca. 1.200 km²
- 181 inhabitants per km²
- >85% open space
- Four small-town areas (<35.000 inhabitants)
 - West Coast – Furnes
 - Dixmude
 - Ypres
 - Poperinghe
- 102 villages
- Many scattered houses/ urbanised countryside
- Main economic sectors: tourism, agriculture, trade and manufacturing



OUR CHALLENGES

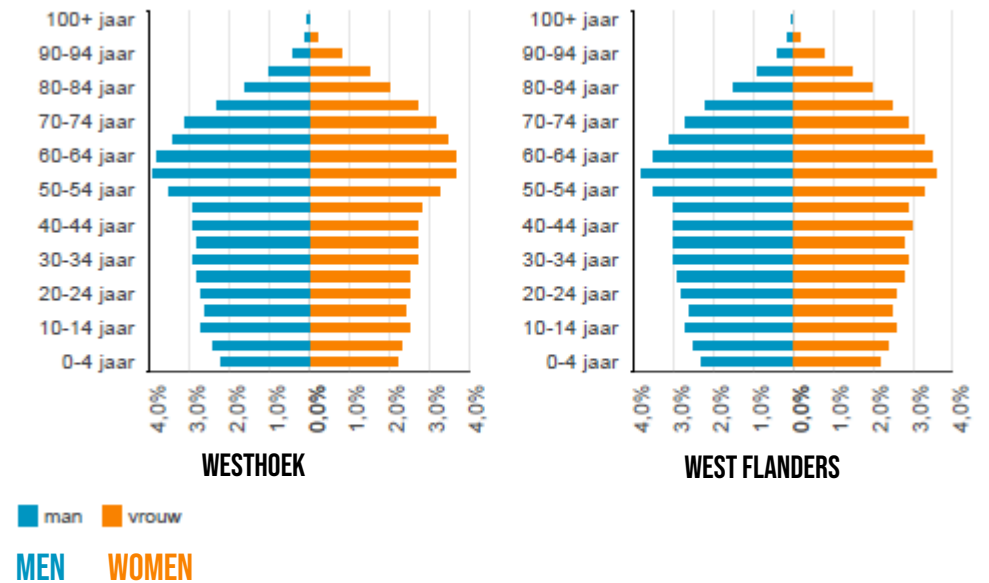
MIGRATION BALANCE WESTHOEK: AGES 20-29



We notice a migration wave to the larger cities, while dealing with an ageing population.

Source: [Dashboard - West-Vlaanderen \(incijfers.be\)](https://incijfers.be)

POPULATION PYRAMID, BY 5-YEAR AGE GROUP, % RELATIVE TO ALL INHABITANTS (2022)



	Antwerpen	Brussels hoofdstedelijk gewest	Henegouwen	Limburg	Luik	Luxemburg	Namen	Oost-Vlaanderen	Vlaams-Brabant	Waals-Brabant
■ Immigratie	56	31	69	20	12	4	9	135	44	4
■ Emigratie	-73	-47	-52	-15	-6	-2	-1	-355	-54	-4
■ Netto-migratie	-17	-16	17	5	6	3	8	-220	-11	1

The background features two thick, parallel yellow diagonal stripes that intersect in the center, forming an 'X' shape. The stripes are set against a plain white background.

INTERREG EUROPE

WHY INTERREG EUROPE?

The expertise for this can hardly be found in Flanders, due to the specific character of our rural region (the Westhoek: a rural region in the urbanised larger Flanders region, lack of knowledge institutions on the subject, less accessible, etc.). Therefore, **foreign expertise is absolutely essential**.

We are looking for a global approach where we can **attract higher-skilled and technical profiles to the region**. To do so, we need to identify and promote the benefits of employment and living in rural regions. In this way, we help entrepreneurs fill their vacancies. At the same time, we **motivate entrepreneurs to invest** further in the region. Ultimately, we also achieve a **better composition of the population** as a result.

WHY INTERREG EUROPE?

In this project, we aim to **collaborate with rural regions across Europe facing similar challenges**.

To what extent do they offer a sustainable alternative for living, working and doing business, and how do they try to promote themselves as such?

In the project, we want to learn from each other to come up with a **policy framework** and a set of **policy tools** for local and regional governments to successfully promote these regions. We want to learn what strategic partnerships are necessary for successful regional branding.



PARTNERSHIPS

PARTNERS WE ARE LOOKING FOR

- **Lead partner**
- Other project partners from southern, eastern and central European rural regions facing the same challenges:
 - Braindrain
 - Depopulation
 - Ageing population
 - Labour market crunch

INTERESTED?

LOUISE CLAEREBOUT

louise.claerebout@dvwwesthoek.be

00 32 51 97 04 06

