

Down to Earth Thematic Report Year 1

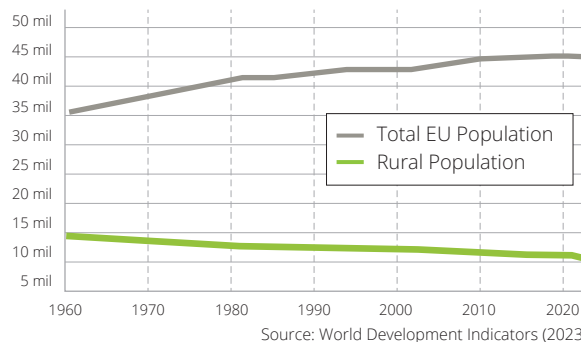
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Down to Earth



Depopulation, climate change and rural development

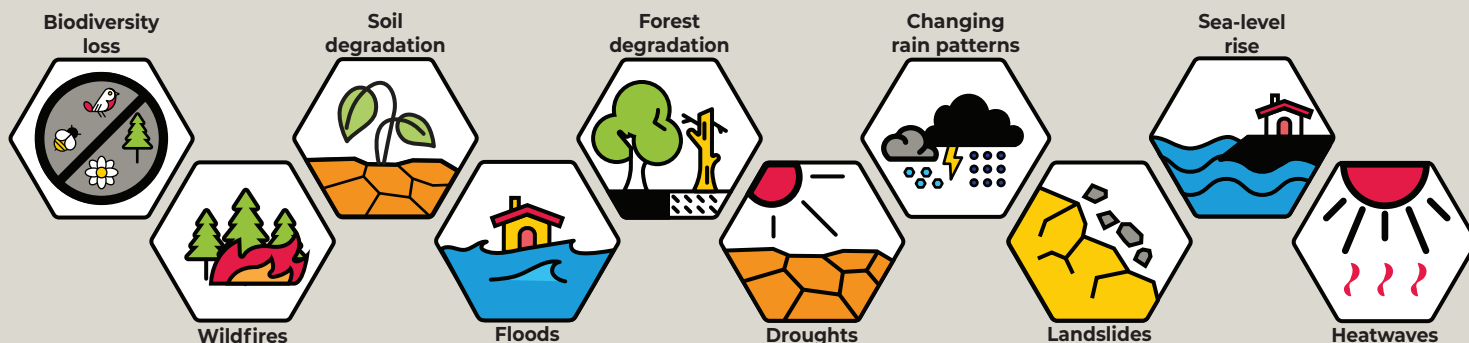
While the overall population of the European Union continues to grow, a contrasting trend emerges in rural areas where populations are steadily declining. Across rural regions in Spain, Italy, Greece, Romania, Slovenia and Germany, common challenges of **population ageing, emigration, and depopulation** are evident. Despite variations in the size and socio-economic conditions of these regions, the shared demographic concerns play a significant role in shaping the character of these areas, particularly impacting key economic sectors such as agriculture, tourism, services, and manufacturing.



Recognizing these challenges, the EU has implemented several policies and strategies, including the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** and the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**, as well as the **Cohesion Policy**. Moreover, the **EU Green Deal**, alongside the **Long-term Vision for Rural Areas**, strives to support sustainable rural development, aiming for the enhancement of stronger, connected, resilient, and prosperous rural communities within the EU.

Environmental risks related with depopulation and ageing population in rural areas

A decreasing and ageing population in rural areas also 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**.

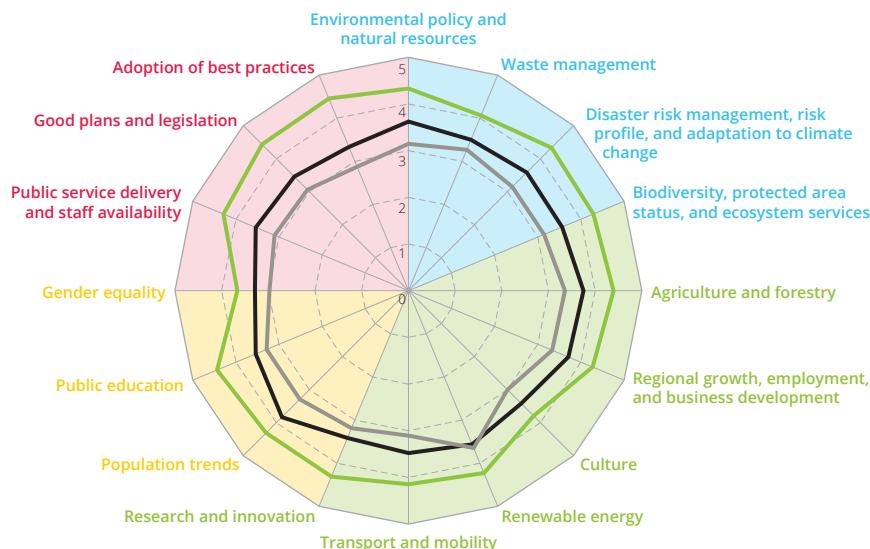


Results from our analysis: main topics and their perceived and ideal regional prioritisation

When intersected with the impacts of the climate crisis, depopulation in rural areas poses unique challenges and opportunities.

Drawing on Down to Earth regional partners' experiences related to depopulation and the impacts of climate crisis, our analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the dynamics, examining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by these regions in relation to four main themes.

- ENVIRONMENTAL AND DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT
- ECONOMIC AND PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENT
- SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES
- GOVERNANCE
- INTENSITY OF OBSERVATION
- PERCEIVED PRIORITISATION
- IDEAL PRIORITISATION



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Project Partners

Galician Agency for Rural Development (ES)
Juana de Vega Foundation (ES)
Municipality of Campobasso (IT)
National Meteorological Administration (RO)
Regionalverband Neckar-Alb (DE)
University of Patras (GR)
ISOCARP Institute (NL)
BSC Business Support Centre L.t.d., Kranj (SI)

Six identified practice cases

ES

Recovery of agricultural land:
"Aldea de Penedo" model village



RO

Increasing energy efficiency of public buildings:
Social centre in Târgu Mureş



GR

Rural Enterprise Development in Etoiakarnania:
Citrus and meat products packing in Thermo



DE

Biosphere reserve Swabian Alb
Photo: Arnulf Hettrich



IT

Active citizenship and networking:
Cultural association "La Faglia"



SI

Triglav National Park
Bio Reserve Area



Recommendations

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.

- 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** 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.

