GRANULAR

GUIDELINES FOR THE RURAL PROOFING OF TRANSITION POLICIES IN EUROPE

D 5.1

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ECR & HUT

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D 5.1 Guidelines for the rural proofing of transition policies in Europe

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v1 D5.1	31/08/2024	Initial version submitted
v2 D5.1	30/01/2026	*Addition of a short "quick-start" overview for new users:* • Pages 115 - 116: "Quickstart to GRANULAR Rural Proofing" added as a final annex (Annex 5)

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List of acronyms

DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DG Agri	Directorate General Agriculture and Rural Development
EATIA	ESPON and Territorial Impact Assessment
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
ERDF	European Rural Development Fund
ESPON	European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion
EU	European Union
GRANULAR	Giving Rural Actors Novel data and re-Useable tools to Lead public Action in Rural areas
IA	Impact Assessment
LL	Living Lab
LTVRA	Long Term Vision for Rural Areas
LUISA	Land Use Integrated Sustainability Assessment
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
RHOMOLO	Regional Holistic Model
RIA	Regional Impact Assessments
RL	Replication Lab
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SHERPA	Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors
TIA	Territorial Impact Assessment
UK	United Kingdom

Executive summary

The concept of reviewing public policies from the perspective of their implications for rural areas and how policies should be adjusted to meet rural needs and circumstances has been formalised in different ways by different countries (e.g. Couper *et al*., 2023). It has been reflected in specific remits of public agencies, such as the Canadian Rural Lens, created in 1998, through to commitments 'rural proofing' policies under best practice or mandatory requirements (Countryside Agency, 2002; Atterton and Korcekova, 2022). Such a commitment has been made in the European Union Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) (European Commission, 2021a), followed in the review of key achievements and ways forward, by the statement

> "*there is a need to review EU policies through a rural lens, considering their potential impacts and implications on rural jobs and growth as well as development prospects, social well-being and equal opportunities for all, and the environmental quality of rural areas"* (European Commission, 2024a).

Implementation of rural proofing would complement existing mechanisms used by the EU for trying to ensure coherence between policies and equalities between territories, such as impact assessments, several of which are documented in the EU Better Regulation Guidelines (European Commission, 2021b) and Toolbox (European Commission, 2023a). In this case the aim is to ensure that there are no unintended adverse consequences of policies or initiatives on rural areas, or of different types of areas within rural areas, and inform the tailoring of such policies to recognise their needs and circumstances.

In GRANULAR, Living Labs tested a proposed approach to rural proofing policies or initiatives, and results presented to EU Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) and members of the GRANULAR consortium. Feedback was used to refine the framework of rural proofing to 27 elements to increase the alignment with the LTVRA pillars and Action Plan (European Commission, 2021a) integrated with the GRANULAR Rural Compass (Oostindie *et al*., 2024).

The elements are grouped under the headings of the four pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas. The building blocks of the LTVRA are included under their relevant pillar, and those which are drawn from the GRANULAR Rural Compass are allocated to the pillar which is likely to be the most relevant. This approach is to enable the final narratives on rural proofing to be developed with a view to their articulation with respect to the framework of the LTVRA (GRANULAR, 2021). In their overall assessment, Living and Replication Labs are asked to comment on the suitability of the use of the four pillars in rural proofing.

Guidelines for rural proofing (Annex 1) have been produced to take users through the process to produce an output of the potential impacts of policies and initiatives on different types of rural areas, negative or positive, and evidence of characteristics required of policies such that they create positive effects on rural areas. The former will be reported in 2025 in GRANULAR Deliverable D5.2, and the latter will be reported in in 2027 in Deliverable D5.3 in a presentation of the tailoring of rural policies.

As part of the rural proofing guidelines, a rural proofing tool has been compiled in MS Excel, containing in the four GRANULAR rural proofing steps. The steps provide information on the policy or initiative and: i) a high level assessment of whether it may have impacts (positive or negative) on rural areas; ii) a summary of the policy or initiative; iii) the responses to the proofing questions. The output of following the guidelines is an overall assessment of the policy or initiative. This comprises a narrative summary, descriptions of the types of impacts, quantitative and qualitative estimates of the magnitude of such impacts (positive or negative), and narratives of means of mitigation.

Reviewing approaches to rural proofing showed that approaches to rural proofing require, or benefit from, transdisciplinary perspectives with inputs from stakeholders from policy, practice, society and research, enabling different types of knowledge to be used and shared (scientific, practice, territorial; Chartier *et al*., 2023; Schwarz *et al*., 2022). Guidelines on stakeholder engagement and approaches to running workshops for the process of rural proofing are provided for Facilitators (Annex 3).

The experiences and feedback on using the developed GRANULAR rural proofing methodology will provide evidence for use in informing the development of skills in integrating rural issues in EU policymaking across departments as envisaged by the European Commission (2024a).

1. Introduction

The Cork 2.0 European Conference on Rural Development (European Union, 2016) identified ten policy orientations to guide innovative, integrated and inclusive rural and agricultural policy in the European Union (EU). The first policy orientation was to promote rural prosperity, with sustainable solutions to societal challenges such as economic prosperity, food security, climate change, resource management, social inclusion, and integration of migrants. It proposed that **a rural proofing mechanism** be used to ensure this is reflected in EU policies and strategies. The role of such a mechanism is reiterated in the European Commission Communication on a Long-term Vision for the EU's rural areas (LTVRA), stating that *"Given the multidimensional nature of rural development and the fact the Treaties aim for economic, social and territorial cohesion, there is a need to review EU policies through a rural lens, considering their potential impacts and implications on rural jobs and growth as well as development prospects, social well-being and equal opportunities for all, and the environmental quality of rural areas."* (European Commission, 2024a).

This Communication also states that: "*As part of the Better Regulation Agenda, a rural proofing mechanism will be put in place, notably to assess the anticipated impact of major EU legislative initiatives on rural area [..]. The Commission also invites Member States to consider implementing the rural proofing principle at the national, regional and local level*." (European Commission, 2024a).

Nevertheless, no clear definition is given for rural proofing. Atterton (2022) defined rural proofing as "*a systematic process to review the likely impacts of policies, programmes and initiatives on rural areas because of their particular circumstances or needs (e.g. dispersed populations and poorer infrastructure networks)*". Shortall and Alston (2016) describe rural proofing as a broad term used to incorporate rural mainstreaming, championing rural policies, and auditing to ensure mainstreaming has occurred.

Rural proofing sheds light on the direct and indirect impacts (Defra, 2022) on rural jobs, development prospects, social well-being, equal opportunities, and environmental quality whilst accounting for the intrinsic diversity of EU rural areas. Fundamentally, it is used to test coherence between existing and new policies and initiatives to ensure that they do not have unintended adverse impacts on rural areas, socially, environmentally or economically, and that residents of all areas (e.g. remote rural, accessible rural, urban; Scottish Government, 2022) receive equitable access to a common set of policies and programmes. In GRANULAR, this perspective is extended to consider whether policies or initiatives may have different adverse impacts within rural areas (e.g. on different types of rural areas based upon characteristics such as demographic change and shrinking areas, Copus *et al*., 2020), and between rural and urban areas.

The GRANULAR project has an aim of developing tailored rural policies, for which a rural proofing approach is adopted, tested and implemented in the project's set of Living and Replication Labs (Living Labs - GRANULAR (ruralgranular.eu)). The objective of this deliverable (D5.1) is to provide a concise overview of both the definition and background of rural proofing (Section 2), and to propose steps and a protocol for an overall GRANULAR rural proofing methodology (Section 3, 4, and 5). The rural proofing methodology developed is designed to ensure that the needs of rural areas are not overlooked nor adversely impacted upon when policies are being developed, and that their diversity is fully encompassed into existing or new policies.

A series of annexes complement the content of this Deliverable, providing resources and tools for implementing the rural proofing methodology. Annex 1 and 2 provide the guidelines and the Excel tool for Living and Replication Labs to carry out the rural proofing process. Annex 3 provides guidelines for engaging members of the Living and Replication Labs during the rural proofing process. Finally, Annex 4 offers an overview of tools used in similar initiatives to rural proofing.

The process of rural proofing should also enable greater multi-level governance and stakeholder co-ordination (OECD, 2024), reflecting the value of two-way exchanges, from top down and bottom-up perspectives, regarding problems and proposed solutions. The outputs sought from the use of rural proofing in GRANULAR are bottom-up reviews of the potential impacts of policies and initiatives on their rural areas, negative or positive, and evidence of characteristics required of policies such that they create positive effects on rural areas. The former will be reported in 2025 in Deliverable D5.2. The latter will be used in consultations at EU level, and between EU and cross-Lab activities, and reported in 2027 in Deliverable D5.3 in a presentation of the tailoring of rural policies

2. Review of rural proofing methodologies

The broad concept of considering public policies from the perspective of their implications for rural areas has been formalised in different ways by different countries (e.g. Couper *et al*., 2023). The focus on rural areas has been reflected in the creation of public agencies and departments, or initiatives, an example of which was the Canadian Rural Lens, created in 1998 as a policy tool to review federal policies or programmes from the perspectives of people living in rural and remote regions (Hall and Gibson, 2016). The creation of the Rural Lens recognised a risk that the design of public policies reflects a 'one size fits all' perspective, with unintended consequences of differences in effects between urban and rural areas, for example in healthcare systems (Couper *et al*., 2023) which risks reinforcing inequities between urban and rural settings (Rural Health Advocacy Project, 2015).

In 2000, the United Kingdom Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) introduced a commitment to rural proofing, to be implemented in England, UK (Defra, 2000). It proposed mandatory assessments to address three requirements:

- To consider whether a policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas, because of particular rural circumstances or needs;
- To make a proper assessment of those impacts, if they are likely to be significant;
- To adjust the policy, where appropriate, with solutions to meet rural needs and circumstance.

UK Government departments and agencies were expected to report annually on progress with such rural proofing (Countryside Agency, 2002).

Bryce (2024) summarises further evolution of rural proofing as processes which enable decision-makers to 'think rural', when designing policy interventions, noting recent developments in the USA, Chile and the EU with reference to the commitment in the LTVRA (European Commission, 2021a). Reflecting the increased level of importance being attributed to rural proofing, the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) set up a Thematic Network on rural proofing to share experience and develop recommendations for guiding mechanisms within the EU, implemented at national, regional and local levels (Atterton and Korcekova, 2022). Amongst those recommendations was recognition of the need to develop a clear template and guidance and robust accompanying evidence. They also argued for a need for 'parallel learning' between different forms of proofing including gender and sustainability, and impact assessments (e.g. geography, communities of interest).

Impact assessments are carried out on initiatives which are expected to have significant economic, social or environmental impacts (European Commission, 2024b) and from part of the EU Better Regulation Guidelines (European Commission (2021b) and Better Regulation Toolbox (European Commission, 2023a). Aspects of such impact assessments have close links to the purpose of rural proofing, although the methods tend to be specific to the topic being considered. The outputs, and notes of methods used, are published in the EU Register of Commission Documents (European Commission, 2024c).

In April 2016, the European Parliament, Council of The European Union, and European Commission signed an Inter-institutional Agreement on better law-making (2016). The agreement includes a section on impact assessments, stating that impact assessments make a positive contribution to improving the quality of Union legislation. It also notes that best practice and methodologies relating to impact assessments will be shared between institutions with the aim of improving methodologies and procedures and the coherence of the work on impact assessments.

Generally, methodologies for rural proofing involve systematically assessing the potential impact of policies, programmes, and projects on rural areas (Atterton, 2022). This process aims to identify and address any unintended negative consequences or disparities that might arise in rural settings of policies and initiatives, aiming to help policy-makers avoid urban-centric biases and promote more equitable and inclusive development across different types of geographical areas. However, there is no specific established or acknowledged methodology within current policy-making frameworks to undertake rural proofing (Couper *et al*., 2023). To date, even the term 'rural proofing' is not widely integrated and/or translated into official EU languages. Table 1 summarises how the term is listed in the translations of the European Commission Communication on key achievements and ways forward for the LTVRA (European Commission, 2024a).

Table 1 - The term 'rural proofing' translated to the official EU languages

Language	Terminology used	Language	Terminology used
Bulgarian	Механизма за проверка на въздействието върху селските райони	Irish	Promhadh leas na tuaithe
Croatian	Učinka na ruralna područja	Italian	La verifica rurale
Czech	Ověřování dopadu na venkovské oblasti	Latvian	Lauku aspektu nostiprināšanu
Danish	Proofing til gavn for landdistrikterne.	Lithuanian	A vidéki térségekre gyakorolt hatásokjogalkotás minőségének javításáról szóló
Dutch	Plattelands / regio toets	Maltese	Verifika rurali
English	Rural proofing	Polish	Weryfikację wpływu polityki na rozwój obszarów wiejskich
Estonian	Maapiirkondadele avalduva mõju hindamise parema õigusloome kohta	Romanian	Naliza din perspectiva mediului rural
Finnish	Maaseutuvaikutusten arvioinnin	Portuguese	Verificação rural
French	Le test rural	Slovak	Vplyvov na vidiecke oblasti
German	Prüfung der Auswirkungen auf den ländlichen Raum	Slovenian	Ukrepov na podeželje
Greek	Την αγροτική θωράκιση για τη βελτίωση της νομοθεσίας π	Spanish	Verificación Rural
Hungarian	Tinkamumo kaimo vietovėms užtikrinimo	Swedish	Landsbygdssäkring

Source: European Commission Communication on key achievements and ways forward for the LTVRA (European Commission, 2024a).

Rural proofing has been tested and implemented in various countries around the world, including the Republic of Ireland, Finland, United Kingdom, Sweden, USA, Australia and New Zealand (Gaugitsch *et al.*, 2022; Annex 4). A short summary of some examples of those uses is provided in Box 1.

Box 1 - Examples of rural proofing applied in Europe

The Republic of Ireland has developed a specific framework for rural proofing known as the Rural Development Policy. This framework aims to address the unique challenges faced by rural communities and promote balanced regional development. The Irish government conducts Rural Impact Assessments (RIAs) to evaluate the impact of policies and programs on rural areas. RIAs consider factors such as rural employment, access to services, infrastructure development, and community well-being.

Finland has implemented rural proofing through its National Rural Policy Programme, which outlines strategies for promoting rural development and enhancing the vitality of rural areas. Finnish municipalities are encouraged to incorporate rural proofing principles into their local development plans and decision-making processes. This includes considering the needs of rural residents in areas such as education, healthcare, transportation, and business support.

Sweden has adopted a comprehensive approach to rural proofing, with a focus on enhancing the quality of life and economic opportunities in rural areas. The Swedish government works closely with local authorities, businesses, and community organisations to identify and address the specific challenges faced by rural communities. This includes investing in infrastructure projects, supporting local entrepreneurship, and promoting sustainable land use practices.

In England **(the United Kingdom)**, rural proofing has been integrated into policy development processes across different government departments. For example, the Rural Communities Policy Unit within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is responsible for ensuring that rural considerations are taken into account in policies related to agriculture, environment, and rural development (Defra, 2024).

In Scotland **(the United Kingdom)**,strategies have been implemented to 'proof' policies and initiatives to ensure that the needs of rural communities are adequately addressed. These include the introduction of Rural and Islands Impact Assessments, which systematically consider the potential impact of proposed policies on rural areas, helping to mitigate any adverse effects and maximise benefits. Scotland has also prioritised investment in rural infrastructure, such as improved broadband and transport networks, to improve accessibility and connectivity for rural residents and businesses .

Source: Consortium.

Specific methodologies and frameworks have been developed to align with the needs of a particular region or country, policy sector (e.g. healthcare; Rural Health Advocacy Project, 2015) but, overall, they all have a common aim of ensuring that rural considerations are mainstreamed across different policy domains. However, when undertaking such assessments, a challenge which often needs to be addressed is the lack of a coherent evidence base for identifying problems faced by rural areas (Sherry and Shortall, 2020).

Differences in requirements and approaches to rural proofing include whether the process is mandatory or recommended, uses quantitative or qualitative information or both, ex-post or ex-ante or both, and the geographic or level of governance at which it can be applied. In reporting on rural proofing to the Committee of the Regions, Gaugitsch *et al*. (2022) note that geographic transferability of rural proofing methods, but of needs to improve qualitative methodologies, including guidance which is targeted at different levels of governance (e.g. community, regional, national international), and templates for explicitly addressing rural areas. The contemporary relevance of such data also needs to be understood by those participating in the rural proofing, not all of whom may be well versed in characteristics of the datasets intended to inform the discussion (e.g. rates of change in values; time periods covered).

Other work in GRANULAR is addressing some of the methodological challenges in identifying and using data at the level or scale most suited to tasks such as characterising and comparing between areas, whether within rural areas, or between rural and urban areas, and at appropriate levels of governance. Those outputs will provide novel sources of data and models for use by a Living and Replication Lab, but is unlikely to be available for the first round of rural proofing guided by this deliverable.

Practical challenges include ensuring that participants are comfortable with the terminology used, both of the policy or initiative and of the process, and, as noted above (Table 1), that it translates into local languages in ways that are consistent with the intention behind the methodology. Other recommendations identified by Gaugitsch *et al*. (2022)

include: i) the provision of clear methodological guidance; ii) targeted training on the process; iii) clear guidance on how to respond to individual questions; iv) the involvement of bodies or individuals with a responsibility for drafting the policy under consideration; v) feedback loops from lower to higher levels of policy development (e.g. within the organisation with the relevant remit); vi) and that timing of the rural proofing is synchronised to ensure that issues are identified early in the design process. The process proposed by GRANULAR seeks to address these issues, with one fullscale trial undertaken to inform modifications of the approach, and feedback mechanisms included to enable the capture of information on weaknesses when used by all Living and Replication Labs.

There are differences between countries in terms of the roles that different types of institutions play in the context of rural proofing, and ultimately on what type of institution has responsibility for the process (Mantino *et al*., 2023). Legislative and institutional 'ownership' and support strongly influence its uptake and authority (e.g. Hall and Gibson, 2016).

A short summary follows of approaches to rural proofing or similar which are used in the European Union and internationally:

- **Data collection and analysis** using surveys, interviews, and leveraging existing datasets are tools and strategies for the collection of data that can be used to identify social, environmental or economic weaknesses in rural areas (Hamilton, 2020; Taherdoost 2021). Data-driven insights enable evidence-based decision-making, aiding policies for aiding rural communities which are considered, responsive and targeted (Shivashankar *et al*., 2024). The collection and public provision of data underlies the purpose of the European Rural Observatory, and novel data being developed within the GRANULAR project (e.g. Kull *et al*., 2023; McCallum *et al*., 2023). However, the collection and analysis of datasets of suitable spatial and temporal resolution require significant resources.

- **Stakeholder engagement** contributes to participatory approaches, often integrated with different methodologies, and enables assessments to be undertaken from multiple perspectives and types of knowledge (academic, practice and territorial), accessed through a transdisciplinary approach (Schwarz *et al*., 2022), prospectively ex-ante and ex-post (Barko *et al.,* 2022). Stakeholder involvement can be designed to provide a bottom-up approach to rural development, as per the Cork 2.0 Declaration (European Union, 2016). Stakeholders are expected to be invited into a process from a range of types of entities, including national or local government, community organisations, businesses (including land management), environmental groups, community groups and researchers (Vitálišová *et al.,* 2021). Such science, policy, and science interfaces should be well-equipped to recognise disparities in the effects of policies and initiatives between urban and rural areas and comprehend the challenges, weaknesses, aspirations, and priorities of rural areas (Chartier *et al*., 2023; Schwarz *et al*., 2022), and likely to evolve over time in light of new scientific evidence and practice experience.

- **Checklists** are a commonly used methodology that functions as a screening tool to help policymakers consider whether a national/EU policy is likely to have a different impact in different rural areas (recognising that rural areas are not homogenous in nature) (e.g. (Delgado-Viñas *et al*., 2022; Defra, 2022; Hall and Gibson, 2016; Mantino *et al*., 2023). Commonly, there are six steps in a checklist methodology, as follows: (i) clarify the objectives of the policy development and intended impacts or outcomes, and the proposed delivery methods; (ii) evaluate the proposed policy against a checklist of questions to identify potential divergent impacts in rural regions; (iii) investigate uncertainties or potentially negative impacts and factor these into the overall assessment of the policy's costs and benefits; (iv) if the potential impact on rural areas differs significantly from urban areas, options should be considered to achieve the desired outcomes or avoid/mitigate undesirable consequences; (v) seek inputs from authoritative sources; and (vi) incorporate the outcomes of the evaluation into the decision-making process. Variations on the approach are used internationally, such as by the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries, and by public authorities in the United Kingdom (e.g. England, Wales, Northern Ireland).

- **Territorial foresight** is a methodology which combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, using foresight and elements of territorial impact assessments (Böhme *et al.,* 2020). The method is in four steps, as follows: (i) define the research question of "what if" (e.g. a policy measure is implemented); (ii) a thorough desk study and background research; (iii) engage experts and stakeholders in a well-structured participatory process**;** (iv) post-processing of desk study and participatory process to develop a coherent assessment

from Steps 1 to 3. The method has not been extensively used for rural proofing, which may pose challenges in adapting it to specific rural contexts (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).

- **Regional impact assessment (RIA)** is an ex-ante methodologies for evaluating the potential effects of policies and measures on regional services which take into account social, economic and environmental impacts on rural communities (Higgins *et al.,* 2015). Such assessments follow standardised guidelines and aim to provide a holistic view but their descriptive nature can limit objectivity, and the absence of quantitative evaluations can limit the evidence base upon which assessments are made (Gaugitsch *et al.*, 2022).
- **Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA)** is a methodology that offers a systematic approach to examining territorially differentiated impacts of policies, strategies and programme, providing insights by pinpointing specific regions or types of regions affected. TIA can be used in ex-post and ex-ante assessments (Herbst *et al.*, 2024). The methodologies used are designed to address the fundamental question: "Which regions or types of regions are impacted and in what manner by the policy?". The methodologies focus upon the assessment of impacts without judging the success of the policy as a whole (Gaugitsch*et al.,* 2022).
- Within the European Commission's Better Regulation Toolbox, Tool #34, titled "Territorial Impacts" (European Commission, 2023a) refers to rural proofing, but does not categorise it as a standalone tool for Territorial Impact Assessment. The Better Regulation Toolbox explicitly mentions three methodologies (TIA Quick Check, RHOMOLO, and LUISA), with other methods cited in academic literature and potentially suitable for rural proofing, such as EATIA and TARGET TIA (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).
- The effectiveness of Territorial Impact Assessments relies upon accurate and comprehensive data, which may be lacking or difficult to obtain for some places, or as relevant to some policies or initiatives. Policies with intricate structures may present challenges for such types of assessment making it more demanding to assess and recommend adjustments. However, by offering a clear understanding of territorial impacts, such assessments can contribute to more informed and effective policymaking.
- Examples of methodologies cited as being used in Territorial Impact Assessments are:
    - **ESPON Territorial Impact Assessment Quick check,** is an interactive web application (ESPON TIA Tool) which can be used to support policymakers and practitioners in identifying potential ex-ante territorial impacts of new EU legislation, policies and directives. This approach combines a workshop setting for expert identification of systemic relations between a policy and quantitative assessments of its territorial consequences with a set of indicators describing the sensitivity of characteristics European regions. The tool combines quantitative data from statistical sources and qualitative data in the form of expert judgments on the strength of the effects of an EU policy proposal (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).
    - **RHOMOLO,** is a Spatial Computable General Equilibrium Model for the assessment of cohesion policy at a regional level, allowing for ex-ante and ex-post assessments (Crucitti *et al*., 2022; Lecca *et al*., 2018), provided as a webtool (RHOMOLO Webtool). The modules of the model can be extended for broader policy assessments in fields beyond economic impacts. As RHOMOLO's results are calculated at NUTS2 level, the distinction between rural and non-rural areas within NUTS2 regions poses a challenge in addressing policy needs specifically for rural areas. The equivalent challenge applies to distinguishing within rural areas and achieving an aim of GRANULAR of shedding light on rural diversity. (e.g. different consequences of drivers of change and shrinking areas, Copus *et al*., 2020). While the methodological approach is transferrable to more detailed geographical levels, the process requires substantial effort to calculate and construct underlying matrices. This may pose a barrier to its practical application in certain contexts. Application of the model to concrete policies requires expert knowledge, potentially limiting its accessibility and usability for individuals without specialised expertise in the field (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).
    - **LUISA,** is a "Territorial Modelling Platform" which "coherently links specialised macroeconomic, demographic and geospatial models with thematic spatial databases." It incorporates historical trends, current state and future projections in order to capture complex interactions between human

activities and their determinants (Jacobs-Crisioni *et al*., 2017). At its core, it is a cross-sectoral model for projecting "land functions" in a grid-based approach to modelling the change in land function for each grid cell over time based on inputs from several external models/sources. The model is primarily used in ex-ante assessments, and not linked to a specific phase of the policy process. It is operated at a spatial resolution which can provide an insight to the effects of land functions on specific geographic areas, and can be integrated with RHOMOLO, leading to a more comprehensive and detailed regional-level analysis (Crucitti *et al*., 2022). LUISA is recognized in the EU Better Regulation Toolbox (European Commission, 2023a). .

- **EATIA** is the ESPON and Territorial Impact Assessment which aims to involve relevant stakeholders and decision-makers alongside experts in the assessment, using participatory approaches. At its core, the EATIA consists of an "impact assessment matrix" which is completed, step-by-step, by the assessors streamlining the expert knowledge gathered through workshops and other consultation formats (Marot *et al.,* 2021). The inclusion of multiple perspectives enhances the robustness of the assessment produced. EATIA is flexible and adaptable, enabling the customisation to different circumstances. It can be utilized at various levels, from European to sub-national, and to address a broad range of topics, or focus on specific areas of interest. The qualitative nature of EATIA makes it suitable for thematic topics for which quantitative data may be limited. The method can be used for both ex-ante as well as ex-post assessments (Gaugitsch 2022).
- **TARGET** is a method which can be used for ex-ante and ex-post assessments. It can use the concept of vulnerability (for hybrid assessments) or qualitative expert judgement (for ex-ante assessments), enabling assessments of impacts along predefined dimensions (socio-economic, environmental, sustainability, governance/cooperation and polycentricity) The TARGET Territorial Impact Assessment methodology can be used flexibly in terms of the data available and geographic level of operation, making it adaptable to various contexts (Mederios, 2020). This flexibility is particularly valuable when dealing with thematic fields that may lack robust supporting quantitative data. The methodology is well-suited for assessing impacts on specific regions, making it useful for evaluating rural regions and comparing them with others (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).

3. The GRANULAR rural proofing methodology

In GRANULAR, the approach to rural proofing is informed by a review of existing initiatives used at different levels of governance internationally, in Europe and the EU as summarised in Section 2. The approach is a combination of tools and methodologies used to evaluate policies that might have an impact on rural areas. These methodologies of rural proofing were screened in the inception phase of the development of the GRANULAR methodology, whilst recognising that a policy approach that works in one country or type of region cannot simply be 'transferred' and adopted in another context. The approach also recognises that rural proofing has been criticised by stakeholders and academics, suggesting that more work needs to be done to maximise its potential positive impacts (e.g. Shortall and Alston, 2016).

An aim of rural proofing is to design and implement better policies (OECD, 2024). The process used should facilitate engagement across levels of governance, within government and between government and institutions with responsibilities in the public, private and civic society sectors (e.g. OECD, 2024). The European Commission recognises the "multidimensional nature of rural areas" and their focus on "social and territorial cohesion" (Rouby and Ptak-Bufkens, 2022). In turn, they reflect on policy areas within their competence.

In GRANULAR, the Living and Replication Labs are at the core of the rural proofing methodology, reflecting the place and context-specific knowledge of their members, and as such they are best equipped to assess the impacts of an initiative on their territory. At the level of the Labs, the process in GRANULAR enables science, policy, practice and civic society to provide bottom up perspectives in their review of policies or initiatives.

Two rounds of rural proofing are envisaged. In the first, the Labs will be invited to choose a policy or initiative to rural proof which is relevant to their remits at the level of their Lab (e.g. topic, geographic coverage). Such a policy may be national or regional in nature, but it is open for the choice to be from an EU level. In the second round, Labs will

be offered the opportunity to rural proof one policy or initiative which is at an EU level and what the effects may be on their territories. Outputs from each round will be used in an event (online) with representatives from an EU level and the Labs to facilitate two-way exchanges of perspectives, top-down and bottom-up.

The final outcome of the rural proofing process will be an overview of the main impacts (positive and negative) of the initiative assessed on the specific area of action of the Living and Replication Labs, and recommendations for characteristics of tailored future rural policies, to be reported in Deliverable D5.3.

The overview will be used with local policy-makers with a view to refining and anticipating any negative externalities stemming from strategies and initiatives relating to their area of responsibility or interest. Through engagement with EU level interests, the assessments by Living and Replication Labs will be used to identify opportunities and possible threats of EU level initiatives at local levels in rural areas. Supported by indicators and quantitative data, the process is expected to provide an understanding of unintended consequences on rural areas of high level policies.

3.1. The framework of the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology

Underpinning the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology is the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework (provided in Annex 2), which guides and orients users in undertaking rural proofing. This framework is based upon the integration of the GRANULAR Rural Compass (Oostindie *et al*., 2023) and its functionalities and components with the actions and activities of the LTVRA Action Plan (European Commission, 2024b). The GRANULAR Framework has been developed by critically assessing their respective aspects, and seeking complementarities and checking for overlaps to ensure both tools are capitalised upon effectively. This combined approach has resulted in a comprehensive framework that addresses various aspects of rurality. The added value of combining these tools is particularly evident in areas such as demographic trends, access to services, cultural heritage, tourism, commuting and migration, environmental performance, ecosystem services, natural capital, and economic diversification, where the GRANULAR Rural Compass offers a more nuanced approach towards such topics.

The integration of the Rural Compass and pillars of the LTVRA ensures that the GRANULAR methodology is aligned and anchored with the broader rural EU policy context as articulated through the LTVRA and Rural Action Plan, reflected in a horizontal action of the LTVRA (European Commission, 2024a). The GRANULAR Framework guides the user through different facets of “rurality” and takes into account the four pillars of the LTVRA (Figure 2 - Pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas.Figure 2): Stronger, Connected, Prosperous and Resilient, thus orientating and providing policy direction, from the policy planning, design, adoption, implementation, evaluation and revision, and through to its monitoring. As such, this tool is fully aligned with the EU Better Regulation Toolkit (European Commission, 2023a).

3.2. Purpose and Principles of the GRANULAR rural proofing Methodology

The main aim of the GRANULAR rural proofing method is to provide a comprehensive toolkit of methods which is tested and reliable, easy and ready-to-use, to be employed in the development of a rural proofing exercise. It aims to be usable by rural actors, public and private authorities and other stakeholders who wish to understand the nature of impacts of a policy on rural areas.

In principle, a rural proofing methodology should be applicable to policies or initiatives pertaining to all levels of governance (i.e. EU, national and local), different in nature (policies, strategies, communications, etc.), and at different stages in their development and implementation (preliminary planning, under consultation, already adopted) (Couper *et al*., 2023). The final outcome of such an exercise should be an insight to the main impacts (positive and negative) of the initiative on the specific area of action of the Living and Replication Labs.

At a project level, the Living and Replication Labs bring together representatives from science, society and policy, providing different perspectives and types of knowledge to assess the potential effects of policies on rural areas. It is expected that local or regional policy-makers will benefit from the information generated from the rural proofing to refine and possibly anticipate any negative externalities stemming from policies and initiatives. The Labs provide bottom-up assessments which can be synthesised for use at an EU level to identify overarching opportunities and possible threats linked to the implementation of a policy across the EU. Such assessments will comprise a combination of quantitative and qualitative information. The rural proofing guidelines (Annex 1) direct the Labs towards the use of existing, reputable, data and indicators, some of which may provide information for the area over time, including projections into the future. At given moments in time, the approach can provide assessments that co-

create knowledge of the trajectory of implications of policies on rural areas, and inform their updating and associated measures.

As noted, Living and Replication Labs play a pivotal role in the rural proofing by GRANULAR. The contextual, practice and scientific knowledge of their members makes them well placed to make the assessments of impacts on their territories. Their needs and reflections on the purpose and added value of rural proofing were captured in a survey of five Living Labs during development of the methodology in spring 2024, summarised in Box 2.

Box 2 - Why Rural Proofing? The Living Labs perspective on the needs for Rural Proofing.

Responses from the survey of facilitators of Living Labs indicated strong support for the implementation of rural proofing methodologies at the local level to ensure that policies are effectively tailored to, and supportive of, rural areas. However, some concerns were raised about capacity and its practical application.

- **Possibility to improve existing policies**: Stakeholders emphasized the importance of having a rural proofing methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of policies in rural areas. This can inform improvements to be made to those policies or initiatives.
- **Need for local level data**: There is a need for detailed data and analyses of local conditions. This includes understanding the dynamics, changing circumstances, and potential for change in rural areas. Such information helps raise awareness and enhance the understanding of decision-makers (especially governments) regarding the specific problems faced by rural communities.
- **Influence on EU policy**: Some stakeholders see rural proofing as potentially useful at the local, regional and national policy levels, and as a tool for lobbying at the EU level. However, there is uncertainty about the capacity of local and regional levels to effectively work with such a methodology, and how to utilize the results if a policy is deemed rural-proofed or not.
- **Specific focus on local areas**: Some stakeholders are interested in applying rural proofing specifically to local policies, notably ageing policies, indicating a need for the methodology to address aspects of policies as they affect rural areas beyond general considerations.

Source: Consortium

Informed by the feedback from the Living Lab facilitators, an approach was developed which is based on six guiding principles, as follows:

- **Principle 1. A method for rural proofing should be designed with different levels of analysis suitable for different needs.** The overall approach contains steps that correspond to two levels of depth of analysis of the rural proofing exercise. The objective is to progressively deepen the understanding of the impact of a policy or initiative on rural areas and facilitate more informed decision-making.
- **Principle 2. Ensure an adaptable/flexible rural proofing method that can be applied to both ex-ante and ex-post situations**. By considering both ex-ante and ex-post, rural proofing provides can provide a comprehensive understanding of a policy's effects, which should enable policymakers to fine-tune strategies for rural development and sustainability.
- **Principle 3. Adaptable rural proofing across governance levels**, ensuring the approach is contextually relevant and can be effective in informing decision-making at different governance levels, fostering a more inclusive and targeted approach to rural policy development and implementation.
- **Principle 4. Rural proofing tailored to functionalities of rural areas, aligned and anchored with the broader rural EU policy context**. Where available, make use of data being collected or created within the GRANULAR project.
- **Principle 5. Stakeholder engagement is essential to reflect on the effects of policies and initiatives on and within rural territories**. The GRANULAR approach makes use of a combination of stakeholders engagement alongside analysis of available data to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the impacts on rural territories.

- **Principle 6. Use of user-friendly, open-access and responsive tools.** The tools used should be intuitive for a diverse range of users, including policy-makers, rural local communities and researchers. Fostering the use of open-source and open-data practices will encourage collaboration, transparency, and the continuous improvement of tools based on user feedback. This principle should help make rural proofing more inclusive and responsive to the dynamic requirements of stakeholders across different levels of governance.

3.3. The overall approach of the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology

The proposed GRANULAR rural proofing methodology was developed and fine-tuned based on in-depth research and testing with members of the project team. As rural proofing is not a new or untested concept, the development of the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology started with screening previously implemented rural proofing approaches and methodologies, and other conceptual rural proofing methodologies (see Section 2 and Annex 4 for an overview of the results of this screening).

The screening results led to the identification of key steps essential for rural proofing, which informed the development of an initial rural proofing methodology. Alongside this methodology, guidelines and an MS Excel file were created to facilitate its implementation.

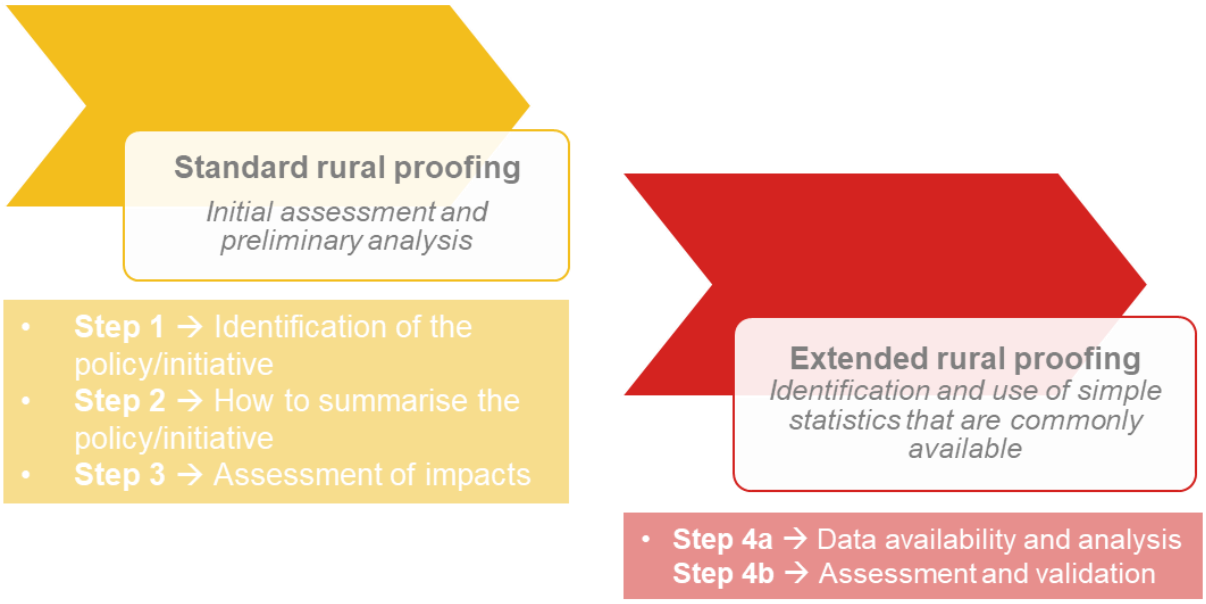
The initial rural proofing methodology and tools were tested it by applying the methodology to the proposed Soil Monitoring Law (European Commission, 2023b) and the Communication on European Care Strategy (European Commission, 2022). From this initial testing lessons learnt included that not all initiatives or policies are appropriate to be subjected to a rural proofing exercise. This reflects the lack of direct impacts of individual activities foreseen in the initiative, such as an (e.g. obligation to perform monitoring activities). Such lessons informed further adaptation and improvements in the proposed methodology and tools.

The revised methodology and tools were shared with the GRANULAR Executive Board for further feedback and revisions, which were made before the draft GRANULAR draft rural proofing methodology was presented to a sample of five Living Labs for a Pilot Phase. A training workshop was run in which the methodology was explained and the Living Labs were guided on the use of the tools to undertake a rural proofing exercise on an initiative or policy of their choice, which they would expect to have some effects on their rural areas.

The main goal of the Pilot Phase was to gather feedback and input for further improvement from a variety of stakeholders with remits at different levels of governance, and to test the overall useability of the proposed methodology. Feedback received informed changes to the rural proofing methodology to enhance its useability for all types of stakeholders, and the rural proofing tools adapted to ensure its use at different levels of governance (e.g. local, regional, national, international).

The GRANULAR rural proofing methodology encompasses two phases, divided into four steps (see) to guide stakeholders through a comprehensive assessment. As explained in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, the goals of the proposed methodology are to determine: (i) whether an initiative/policy/legislation could, potentially, have an impact on a (specific) rural area/community; and if so, (ii) the extent of such an effect. The approach is designed to ensure that rural considerations are integrated into policy development and implementation. The methodology combines quantitative and qualitative information as the basis of the process, which should be accessible to any and all stakeholders, and can be executed ex-ante and ex-post.

Figure 1 - Overview of the proposed GRANULAR rural proof methodology



Source: Consortium

Phase one of the methodology is the **Standard rural proofing** which consists out of three steps. This phase is qualitative in nature.

- **Step 1 – Identification of the policy / initiative**. Select an appropriate initiative / policy / legislation for rural proofing. Not all initiatives / policies are for rural proofing (or at least not at all governance levels), so it is important to critically assess initiatives / policies / legislations that are to be tested for their suitability before proceeding to subsequent steps.
- **Step 2 - Summarising the chosen policy / initiative.** Read the selected policy or initiative carefully and summarise its key components. To undertake a complete and thorough rural proofing, all those involved in its assessment should to become familiar with the content of the initiative / policy, such as its objective, activities, main actors and mechanisms.
- **Step 3** – **Assessment of impact.** Consider whether, potentially, the elements (based on the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework, see Section 3.1) could be effected (positively or negatively) by the implementation of the chosen initiative / policy / legislation in the relevant rural area.

These three steps enable a qualitative understanding of whether and how the initiative / policy could impact upon the rural area(s) under consideration. With this knowledge, stakeholders could develop mitigation measures to prevent possible negative effects from occurring, or identify measures which can ensure / amplify possible positive effects. The resulting knowledge could be used to provide feedback on the initiative / policy.

The second phase methodology is the **extended rural proofing** which comprises one step, split into two activities. Note that this phase is a mix of qualitative and quantitative information. The choice to proceed with the extended rural proofing depends upon the time and knowledge available for the rural proofing exercise, as well as the underlying reason and need , which may be place or context-specific. By executing the second phase of the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology, stakeholders should be positioned to assess the effects of an initiative / policy / legislation on the relevant elements of the framework.

- **Step 4a - Data availability and analysis.** of For the key elements deemed to be affected by the chosen initiative / policy / legislation in step 3. Indicators should be identified which can be used to analyse those effects. As part of this step, the data required for the indicator should also be identified, from where and how it is available, and how it should be interpreted.
- **Step 4b - Assessment and validation.** This step can only be implemented if the rural proofing exercise is executed on an initiative / policy that is being or has been implemented (e.g. mid-term or ex-post evaluation).

Using the indicators identified in step 4a, the available date should be used to assess how the implementation of the initiative / policy has impacted the rural areas in reality, including the use of projections of indicator values, if available, for interpreting possible future impacts .

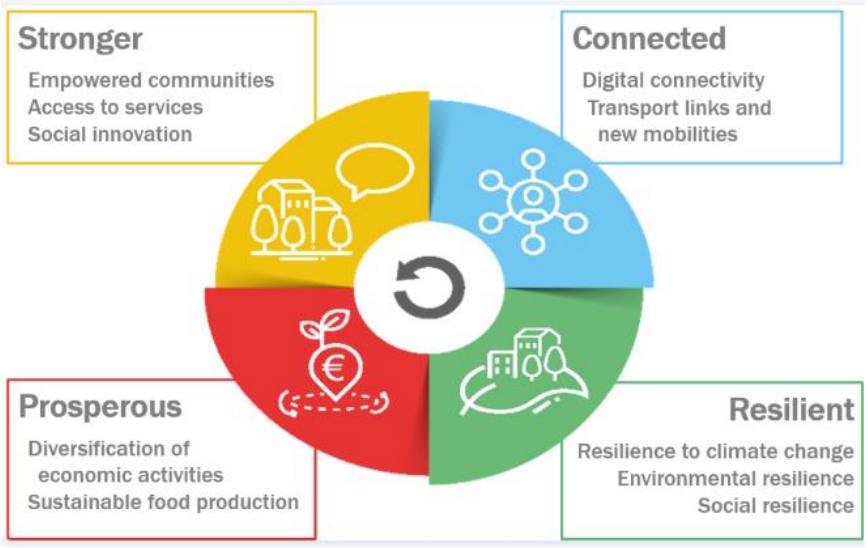
Living Labs can present various degrees of heterogeneity across their territories. For example, the same Living Lab could encompass both mountain as well as coastal areas, each with distinct features and needs. As such, the same initiative could impact in very different ways those different territories, resulting in different and possibly even opposite effects on the individual elements on the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework.

For analytical reasons, and to ensure that the summary note to be produced at the end of the exercise is consistent, Living Labs are invited to refer to the same territory (e.g. with the same features) throughout the entire exercise, especially during steps 3 and 4.

However, as the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology underpins the diversity of European rural areas, Living Labs can indicate and record the different effects that could happen when a different territory within their Living Lab is used as a reference point, and differences in effects between rural areas within their territory.

The steps in the methodology are explained in-depth in the following sub-sections. The guidelines and tool for implementing this methodology can be found in Annexes 1 and 2 respectively.

Figure 2 - Pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas.



Source: The pillars of the EU LTVRA (European Commission, 2024a; https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en).

An objective of GRANULAR is to shed light on dimensions of rurality and rural diversity relevant to identifying pathways towards sustainable and inclusive rural development trajectories to reach the aspirations of the pillars, also referred to as action areas, of the LTVRA (European Commission, 2021a) of Strong, Prosperous, Resilient and Connected rural areas (GRANULAR, 2021). A short description follows of the elements within those action areas, drawn from the LTVRA and the Rural Diversity Compass (Oostindie *et al*., 2024).

- **Stronger Rural Areas**: Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement. In the GRANULAR Framework, the "Stronger Rural Areas" Pillar combines aspects from the LTVRA Action Plan and the GRANULAR Rural Compass to foster resilient and thriving rural communities. The LTVRA Action Plan, incorporates strategies such as participatory processes and democratic engagement, rural revitalization, and support for research and innovation. It also emphasises education, training, youth, and volunteering opportunities. Complementing this, the GRANULAR Rural Compass focuses on topics such as demographic trends, access to services, cultural attractiveness, tourism, commuting and migration, greening farming practices, ecosystem services, natural capital, circularity, and economic diversification.
- **Connected Rural Areas**: Under this action area, rural areas are expected to benefit from actions to boost sustainable transport links and digitalisation through investments in infrastructure, technology development and skills enhancement activities. The "Connected Rural Areas" Pillar in the GRANULAR framework draws

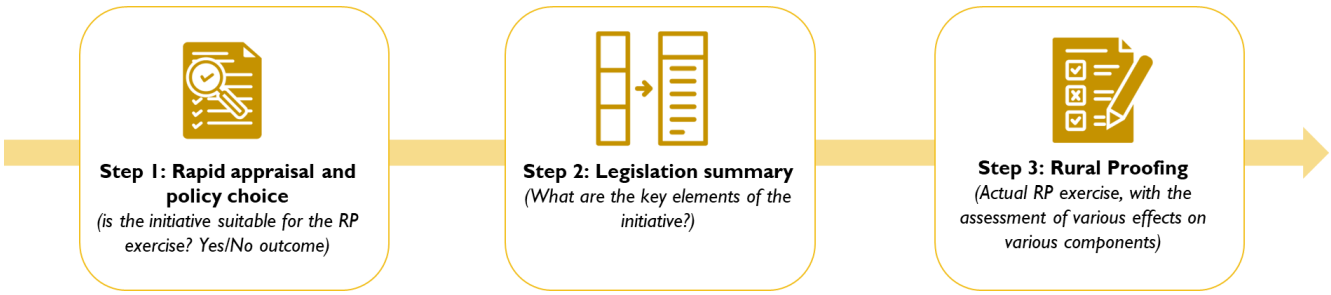
on the LTVRA Action Plan and the GRANULAR Rural Compass to enhance connectivity in rural communities from both a technical as well as a community and human point of view. The LTVRA Action Plan addresses the technical aspects of rural digital futures, including closing the digital divide through high-speed broadband, 5G, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics. Additionally, it addresses transport and mobility through improvements in infrastructure, services, and multi-modal mobility solutions, alongside strengthening urban-rural linkages. Complementing these, the GRANULAR Rural Compass also focuses on human capital, improving digital skills and entrepreneurship to support digital transformation as well as introducing the impact of commuting and migration on rural revitalization and marginalization. It examines how these factors interact with education, skills, and rural-urban dynamics.

- **Resilient Rural Areas**: Under this action area, rural areas are expected to benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience. From the LTVRA Action Plan, key aspects include fostering energy transitions within rural communities through renewable energy projects and climate action initiatives, such as carbon farming in peatlands, which also support biodiversity and offer economic opportunities. Actions include soil health by promoting sustainable land management and enhancing soil monitoring and literacy. Social resilience is further supported through empowering women in entrepreneurship and improving access to education, childcare, and other essential services, alongside integrating minorities, migrants, and people with disabilities into rural communities. The GRANULAR Rural Compass highlights the importance of greening farming practices and measuring agri-environmental performance to understand the broader impacts of agriculture on ecosystem services. It also emphasises the role of rural areas in providing natural capital and implementing circular economy principles to ensure sustainable resource use. Together, these aspects aim to build robust, adaptable rural areas capable of facing environmental and social challenges.
- **Prosperous Rural Areas:** Under this action area, the focus is on revitalizing rural areas through entrepreneurship and the social economy. This includes developing micro- small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through networking and clustering, supporting social economy business models, enhancing local supply chains, and promoting innovation through education and entrepreneurship. Efforts also target increasing employment opportunities for young people, particularly in agriculture, and promoting a sustainable bioeconomy that integrates forestry and carbon farming initiatives to create jobs, support forest management, and enhance biodiversity. The GRANULAR Rural Compass complements these initiatives by emphasizing the importance of diversified rural economies. This includes supporting a mix of agriculture, industry, and services to build robust and adaptable economic structures in rural areas. Together, these aspects aim to create vibrant, economically resilient rural communities with varied and sustainable growth opportunities.

3.3.1. Phase 1 – Standard rural proofing

The three Steps that make up the Standard rural proofing are illustrated in Figure 3. **Step 1** and **Step 2** are preparatory in nature and enable Living Labs and Replication Labs to identify if an initiative/policy is suitable to be subject to a rural proofing exercise and become acquainted with the initiative/policy. **Step 3** focuses on assessing potential impacts on the relevant rural area due to the selected initiative/policy.

Figure 3 - Step 1 to 3 of the standard rural proofing



Source: Consortium

3.3.1.1. Step 1: Identification of the policy/initiative

This step focuses on identifying whether an initiative/policy is suitable for assessment via a rural proofing exercise. Generally, this will be a collaborative effort of members of the Living or Replication Lab.

Before a potential initiative/policy (or a subset of initiatives) is selected, members of the Living or Replication Lab should answer the following two questions (Figure 4):

a) *Would the initiative have any potential social, economic or other impacts, either positive or negative, on rural communities and areas within the territory of their Lab?*
b) *Are you aware of any examples of how the initiative might impact, positively or negatively, on different types of rural communities, or in a way that is different from the impact on urban areas?*

GRANULAR Vocabulary

An initiative can be a public or private sector action which has been proposed or implemented, including laws, regulations, guidelines, and actions.

If the answers to questions (a) or (b) were positive, proceed to Step 2. If the answers were both negative, Living and Replication Labs are encouraged to consider another policy/initiative. In cases of mixed outcomes of answers to questions (a) and (b), such as a YES and a NO, proceed to Step 2 to gain a better understanding of the initiative and to reformulate an assessment on its suitability for the rural proofing exercise.

Figure 4 - Screenshot of Step 1 in the rural proofing spreadsheet tool.

Step 1: Which Policy/Initiative should I choose?			
Would the initiative have any potential social, economic or other impacts, either positive or negative, on rural communities?	Yes/No	Why/justification	
Are you aware of any examples of how the initiative might impact, positively or negatively on different types of rural communities, or in a way that is different from the impact on urban areas?	Yes/No	Why/justification	

Source: Consortium

3.3.1.2. Step 2: How to summarise the policy/initiative

Once the policy or initiative selected to be assessed has been agreed as being suitable for rural proofing, a summary of its key features is to be developed, guided by a set of questions (Figure 5).

The aim of Step 2 is to scrutinise the initiative and address key questions relating to "*who does what, and how*?"

Through this step, Living and Replication Labs should familiarise themselves with the key elements of the initiative that would be used for the assessment in Step 3. The output from the tool will be a simple, concise summary of the initiative based on their responses to the questions. If the Lab chooses to discontinue the analysis they could go back to Step 1 to identify a more suitable initiative or continue the exercise and focus the assessment on any *indirect* impacts that the initiative may have (see Step 3).

GRANULAR Vocabulary

Actors: These include administrators, businesses (to specify the type), NGOs, citizens, and visitors.

Outputs: The results of an action and steps required to achieve the desired outcome.

Outcome: The expected effects or impacts of the initiative.

For this step, the Labs can choose whether their Facilitators complete the summary, or for them to fill in the summary and then discuss it with members for revisions and validation.

Figure 5 - Overview of the guiding questions in Step 2

Step 2: How to summarise the Policy/Initiative information?	
Aspect	**Question to answer**
Which type of initiative are we looking at?	What is the **title** of the initiative? *[please insert the title*
	What it the **author/source** of the initiative? *[EC, EP, Regional Governments, local government]*
	Which **type** of initiative is it? *[Please elaborate on the of public and private sector action, including policy, strategy, Legal text, Regulation, Directives.. Replace this information in the brakets]*
	What is the level of governance of the initiative?
	Which **stage** is the initiative currently in?
What is the initiative about?	Broadly speaking, what is the initiative about? *[please insert text replacing the brackets]*
	What are the **general and specific objectives** of the initiative?
	What are the **expected outputs and outcomes** of the initiative? *[outcome is the desired impact, outputs are the concrete results of the initiative]*
	What are the key **roles/actors** concerned by the initiative?
	Which **sectors** are concerned by the initiative?
	Are there a**ny references to "rural"** (or its synonims that are relevant in your language, e.g. territory, etc) in the body of the iniative?
	If yes, please elaborate *[insert reference to rural from the text of the initiative]*
	Is (a component of) the initiative linked to a **fund or other financial instrumen**t? (e.g. a measure of the CAP)
	If yes, please elaborate [*insert type of fund or financial mechanism attached to initiative, i.e. RDP, national funds, market instruments, etc.*]
How is the initiative functioning?	Which mechanism does the initiative entail?
	Please elaborate on the specific mechanism entailed by the initiative
	What potential social, economic or other impacts, either positive or negative, would the initiative have on different types of rural communities and areas?
	Does the initiative entail or make reference to indicators?

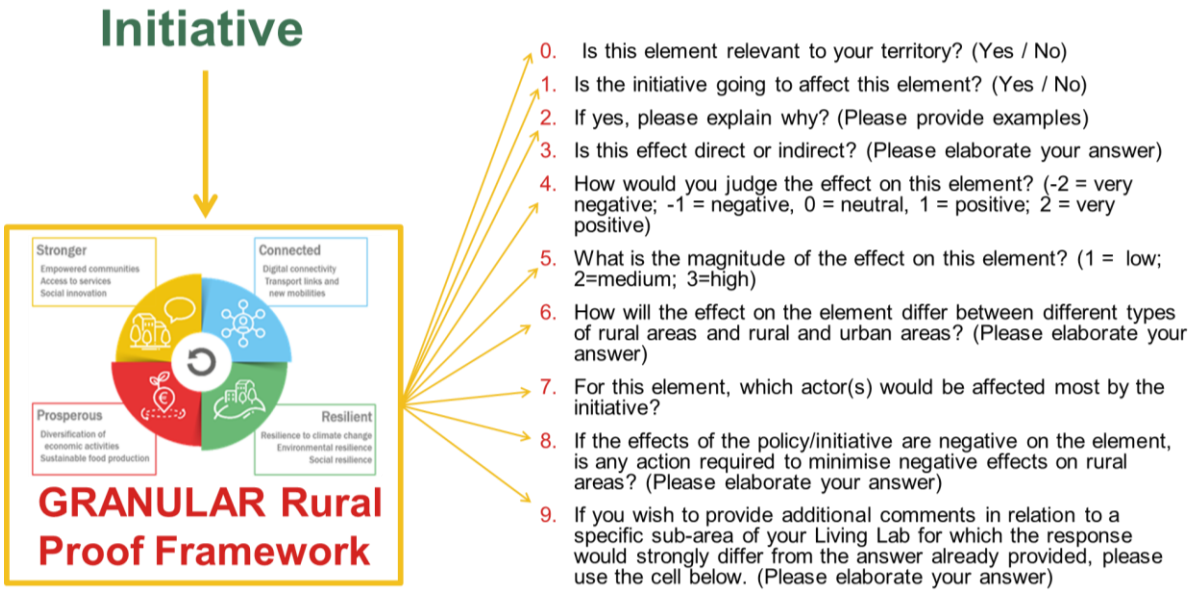
Source: Consortium

3.3.2. Step 3: Assessment of impacts

In this Step, Living and Replication Labs will consider the potential effects of the policy or initiative on each functionality and elements of the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework, organised around the four LTVRA pillars (Stronger Rural Areas, Connected Rural Areas, Resilient Rural Areas, and Prosperous Rural Areas). This reflects one aim of GRANULAR (GRANULAR, 2021) of fitting with the policy context of the LTVRA, with the ambition of contributing disseminating novel frameworks to conceptualise rural diversity (as per the Rural Diversity Compass, Oostindie *et al*., 2023) and to rural-proof policies, as set out in this deliverable.

Figure 6 provides an overview of the questions the Labs have to answer for each pillar.

Figure 6 - Overview of questions to be answered as per each pillar



Source: Consortium

Step 3 uses qualitative information, identifying whether the impact was observed, its direction (negative or positive), and a qualitative assessment of its magnitude. seek The questions in Step 3 primarily qualitative responses, using yes/no responses, or low/medium/high assessments.

The MS Excel spreadsheet for Step 3 is structured as shown in Figure 7. For each element, Labs can address the questions based on the work completed in Step 2. The Excel spreadsheet provides the Labs flexibility to report relevant findings from the policy or initiative being evaluated.

The involvement of members of the Living and Replication Labs is crucial for this step. The Labs can choose to complete the form directly with their members or partially pre-populate it and discuss those entries in a workshop. Once the Excel tool is completed, members of the Labs should reflect on the exercise's outcome and produce a concise summary note of the assessment, in a Word template provided. This summary integrates the assessment information and formulates a final view on the initiative's performance under each functionality, considering all elements under each functionality.

Figure 7 - Structure of Step 3 in the MS Excel spreadsheet.

		Step 3 – Identifying potental impact areas								
LTVRA Pillars	**GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework (these originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)**	0. Is this component relevant to your territory? (Yes/No)	1. Is the initiative going to affect this component? **Yes -> Continue with question 2.** No -> the following questions do not apply, move to the next component	2.If **Yes**, please explain why *(provide examples of those effects)*	3. Is this effect direct or indirect? *(please elaborate on your answer.)*	4. How would you judge the **effect** on this component (-2 = very negative; -1= negative, 0 = neutral, 2 = positive; 3 = very positive)	5. What is the magnitude **of the effect** on this component (1= low; 2=medium; 3=high)	6. How will the effect on the component differ between urban and rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	7. For this component, which actor(s) would be affected most by the initiative? *(please elaborate on your answer)*	8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the component, is any action required to minimize negative effects on rural areas? *(please elaborate on your answer)*
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy** Examples are: i) CAP funded initiatives targeting Communities, e.g. the **LEADER** approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development **(CLLD).** ii) **Smart Villages** and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and local governance quality. Participatory process policies or initiatives									
	Rural revitalisation This component aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable housing and family-friendly									
	Demographic trends This component explores how urbanisation, globalisation, digitalisation, and climate change influence demographic trends in rural areas, leading to outward or inward migration. It aims to support areas distinguished by									

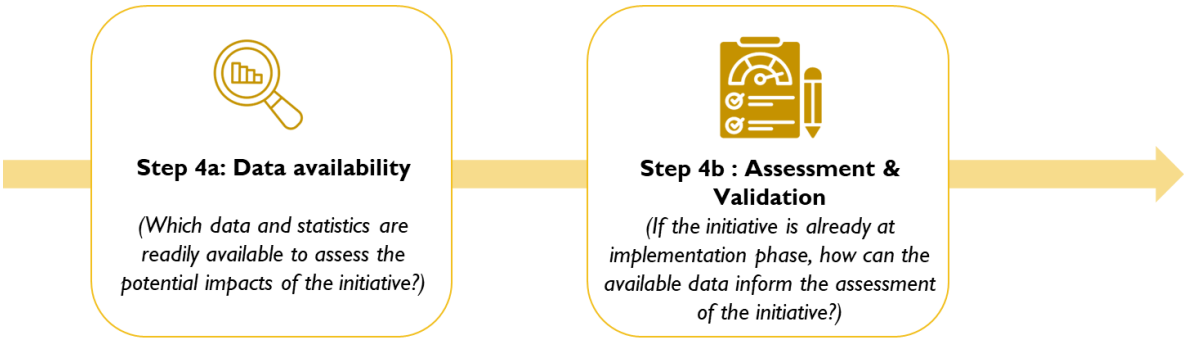
Source: Consortium

3.3.3. Phase 2 - Extended rural proofing

The purpose of the **Extended rural proofing** is to delve deeper into the effects identified in the Standard rural proofing, attempting to quantify these effects through the identification of suitable indicators and the observation of their evolution over time. Step 4 relies on a careful articulation of three components: the initiative, the elements of the GRANULAR framework affected by the initiative, and indicators that can be used to describe characteristics of the area.

Step 4 is closely linked with the work in GRANULAR Work Package 4 (WP 4) on indicators, utilising emerging data from Work Packages 3 and 4 if available for the territory of the Living Labs and Replication Labs. The process involves two main steps, as depicted in Figure 8. First, **Step 4.a** gauges the availability of indicators and data sources for the areas where impacts have been detected and where data is available at the territorial level of the Living or Replication Lab.. Second, **Step 4.b** reflects on the evolution of these indicator values and the possible contribution of the initiative being assessed to these changes.

Figure 8 - Step 4 of Extended rural proofing



Source: Consortium

The Extended rural proofing can be applied to initiatives regardless of their stage in the policy cycle. This means it can be used for initiatives that are already implemented or being implemented (ex-post rural proofing) as well as for those in the design phase (ex-ante rural proofing). For ex-post rural proofing, both Steps 4a and 4b can be implemented. For ex-ante rural proofing, since the effects of the initiative cannot yet be seen, the focus will be on identifying suitable indicators.

3.3.3.1. Step 4a: Data Availability and analysis

After identifying the main areas of impact within the elements of the GRANULAR Framework, the assessment should use the available evidence, such as indicators and data available, with a view to establishing a (semi) quantitative assessment of impacts and their evolution over time.

In Step 4.a, Living and Replication Labs are asked to reflect and identify potential indicators for each element of the GRANULAR Rural Framework where impacts were identified during Step 3. Beyond identifying suitable indicators for the areas of the framework, Living and Replication Labs should reflect on the availability of data to monitor these indicators within their territory.

As in Step 3, in Step 4, answers to questions are primarily ‘yes’ or ‘no’ , but with an emphasis on identifying indicators for selected elements. The structure of the spreadsheet is the same, maintaining the elements and actions necessary to assess impacts against the elements of the framework.

For each element of the framework which was considered relevant during Step 3 i.e., whether the element is pertinent to the initiative and the territory, the Labs should reflect on the elements and identify indicators that are appropriate for tracking changes. Specifically, the Labs should consider the following questions:

- Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy/initiative on this element? If yes, then state the indicator(s) and include a hyperlink if available. [Note, indicators and series of values could include projections of future change, such as population).
- For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [answers: EU, national, local, or state NUTS level].

- For each indicator, provide source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available [are the data sources available at the level of relevance?].

A screenshot of the Framework for Step 4.a is shown in Figure 89.

Figure 9 – Structure of Step 4a in the Excel file

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework (these originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources (insert one indicator per line)		
		Are there **indicator(s)** which can be used to monitor effects of the policy/initiative on this component? If so then state the indicator(s) and include a hyperlink if available. [Note, indicators and series of values could include projections of future change, such as population)	**For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [answers:** *EU, national, local, or state NUTS level]*	**For each indicator,** provide source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink *if available* [are the data sources available at the level of relevance?]
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy** Examples are: i) CAP funded initiatives targeting Communities, e.g. the **LEADER** approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development **(CLLD).** ii) **Smart Villages** and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and local governance quality. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This component aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			

Source: Consortium.

3.3.3.2. Step 4b: Assessment and validation

Similar to Step 4a, the assessment in Step 4b is building on the Matrix of Step 3 and aims at characterizing the impacts identified in Step 3. A mix of qualitative and quantitative (where possible) assessments is envisaged for this step, to attempt to link the contribution of the initiative being assessed in the evolution of the indicators for the areas identified in Step 3, subject to the limitations identified later, in Section 5.2.

In this step, the Labss should reflect on, and try to link, the evolution in time series of the highlighted indicators with the impact of the initiative. This involves analysing both historical data and future projections (e.g., population and demographic profiles).

As this step involves reflecting on the impacts of the initiative, it is most appropriate for use with initiatives that are already being implemented, i.e., when the rural proofing is considered an ex-post assessment. For initiatives still in the design phase, their contribution to the evolution of any indicator is not yet present, making this type of analysis less applicable.

This approach ensures that the impacts of the initiative are thoroughly evaluated, taking into account past trends and potential future developments (where possible) by combining qualitative insights with quantitative data. However, there are limitations to scope for the quantification of the impacts. Even when indicators are identified and relevant local data is available, isolating the effect of the initiative on the evolution of these indicators can be challenging. Multiple factors may influence the evolution of certain indicators. Therefore, the Labs are asked to reflect on the possible influence and contribution of the initiative being assessed on the evolution of the indicators. This reflection serves as a proxy for quantifying the impacts of the initiative on the areas of the GRANULAR framework.

For each indicator, the Living and Replication Labs are asked to address the following:

- If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)

- Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]
- If yes, please explain your answer.

A screenshot of the Framework for Step 4.b is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10 - A screenshot of the Framework for Step 4.b

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework (these originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects (quantitative and/or qualitative)		
		If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy** Examples are: i) CAP funded initiatives targeting Communities, e.g. the **LEADER** approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development **(CLLD).** ii) **Smart Villages** and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and local governance quality. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This component aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			

Source: Consortium

3.3.4. Finalisation of the rural proofing exercise

A key challenge for the approach is in formulating a comprehensive assessment which takes into account the performance of an initiative vis-à-vis all of the elements of the framework, some of which may experience positive effects and some negative effects. After completing the entries to the MS Excel tool for Step 3 and/or Step 4, the Living and Replication Labs should formulate a judgement on the impact of the initiative of choice of the different areas of the GRANULAR rural proofing framework using the template provided in Annex 1. This will integrate the information output from the assessment and formulate it as a final judgement on the performance of the policy/initiative taking account of all of the elements under each pillar of the LTVRA.

Depending on whether the Labs undertake the Standard or the Extended rural proofing, the short summary note will be the final output of the Step 3 or Step 4, respectively.

4. Conclusions

Rural proofing will have a significant role in the delivery of the EU LTVRA and ensuring coherence when elaborating new legislative initiatives, and collecting evidence from territories to reduce risks of adverse impacts on rural areas (European Commission, 2024a). Its use over many years in countries and regions internationally (e.g. United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, USA), is leading to the evolution of the use of its use together with other methods (e.g. Territorial Impact Assessments), and how they complement each other.

The rural proofing process in GRANULAR was tested in spring 2024 with the Living Labs. Feedback from the Living Labs reported strengths and weaknesses in the approach, identifying elements for which assessments were similar for two or more, and as such added little extra value and took time unnecessarily. The listing and wording of elements were simplified accordingly. Similarly, DG AGRI at the European Commission shared perspectives on the role of

outputs from rural proofing in aiding delivery of economic, social and territorial cohesion across public policies (European Commission, 2021).

The output from the testing and feedback have been used to revise the GRANULAR rural proofing framework, linking the LTVRA and the Rural Compass as elements against which to test potential effects of the policy or initiative. Feedback also informed the refinement of steps to be followed by users of the process, The output from the testing and a set of guidelines for the use of rural proofing by the Living and Replication Labs in GRANULAR, presented in Annex 1. Those guidelines are designed such that they can be used out with the GRANULAR project.

The rural proofing of selected policies and initiatives by Living and Replication Labs is scheduled to be undertaken through autumn and winter 2024/25 the outputs of which will be reported in Deliverable D5.2. The lessons learnt from those rural proofing exercises regarding the potential implications for rural areas, of different characteristics, of new legislative initiatives, will be used to inform recommendations for tailoring rural policies in Deliverable D5.3. In turn, the experiences of using the rural proofing and further feedback will provide evidence for use in informing the development of skills in integrating rural issues in EU policy-making across departments as envisaged by the European Commission (2024a).

The GRANULAR project will report on, and learn from, the implementation of the process of rural proofing undertaken in 16 different Living and Replication Labs and the regions they cover across Europe. Outputs from the process of rural proofing will provide assessments of the potential impacts of policies or initiatives in the rural areas within their coverage, reflecting different environmental, socio-economic, and governance arrangements. These assessments will be the integration of up to 27 elements drawn from the EU Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (European Commission, 2021a) and the GRANULAR Rural Compass (Oostindie *et al*., 2024).

The elements are grouped under the headings of the four pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas. Those which are building blocks of the LTVRA are included under their relevant pillar. Elements which are drawn from the GRANULAR Rural Compass are allocated to the pillar which is likely to be the most relevant. This is to enable the final narratives on rural proofing to be developed with a view to their articulation with respect to the framework of the LTVRA, and achieving an aim of GRANULAR of shedding light on dimensions of rurality and rural diversity relevant to setting out routes towards sustainable and inclusive rural development trajectories to reach Strong, Prosperous, Resilient and Connected rural areas (GRANULAR, 2021; European Commission, 2021a).

In their overall assessment, the Living and Replication Labs are asked about the suitability of that approach and their understanding of each of the four pillars. That feedback, and any inconsistencies identified with respect to the LTVRA will be used in the reporting of the rural proofing in Deliverable D5.2.

It is expected that findings from each of the policies analysed will provide evidence and insights as to whether, in relation to given elements, the impacts in rural areas are likely to be in line with the aims of the policy, or if there could be unintended adverse consequences or a lack of coherence and consistency, within the same areas, with other policies that could affect the element. Avoiding such an outcome is one aim of the EU Better Regulation Toolbox 2023 (European Commission, 2023a). The findings will be reported in the GRANULAR deliverable D5.2 on the rural proofing of policies selected by the Living and Replication Labs.

Reporting on policies from the rural proofing will be analysed to identify any common characteristics of policies or initiatives that do not appear to lead to adverse impacts on rural areas, or inconsistency in effects between rural and urban areas. Outputs from that analysis will inform recommendations for tailored future rural policies, to be reported in GRANULAR Deliverable D5.3.

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Annex 1 – Guidelines for the GRANULAR Rural Proofing methodology for Living and Replication Labs

GRANULAR

GUIDELINES FOR THE GRANULAR RURAL PROOFING METHODOLOGY FOR LIVING LABS AND REPLICATION LABS

AUGUST 2024

ECR

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List of acronyms

DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DG Agri	Directorate General Agriculture and Rural Development
EC	European Commission
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
EU	European Union
GRANULAR	Giving Rural Actors Novel data and re-Useable tools to Lead public Action in Rural areas
LTVRA	Long Term Vision for Rural Areas
SHERPA	Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors
UK	United Kingdom

1. Introduction

The GRANULAR project has an aim of developing tailored rural policies, for which a rural proofing approach is adopted, tested and implemented in the project's set of Living and Replication Labs (Living Labs - GRANULAR (ruralgranular.eu)). The objective of these guidelines is to provide a concise overview of the background of rural proofing (Section 2), the overall GRANULAR rural proofing methodology (Section 3) and to provide practical instructions on how to implement the proposed methodology (Sections 4 and 5). The rural proofing methodology developed in GRANULAR as described in these guidelines is designed to ensure that the needs of rural areas are not overlooked nor adversely impacted upon when it comes to policy-making, and that their diversity is fully encompassed into existing or new policies.

1. Background to rural proofing

The Cork 2.0 European Conference on Rural Development (European Union, 2016) identified ten policy orientations to guide innovative, integrated and inclusive rural and agricultural policy in the European Union (EU). The first policy orientation was to promote rural prosperity, with sustainable solutions to societal challenges such as economic prosperity, food security, climate change, resource management, social inclusion, and integration of migrants. It proposed that **a rural proofing mechanism** be used to ensure this is reflected in EU policies and strategies. The role of such a mechanism is reiterated in the European Commission Communication on a Long-term Vision for the EU's rural areas (LTVRA), stating that *"Given the multidimensional nature of rural development and the fact the Treaties aim for economic, social and territorial cohesion, there is a need to review EU policies through a rural lens, considering their potential impacts and implications on rural jobs and growth as well as development prospects, social well-being and equal opportunities for all, and the environmental quality of rural areas."* (European Commission, 2024a).

This Communication also states that: "*As part of the Better Regulation Agenda, a rural proofing mechanism will be put in place, notably to assess the anticipated impact of major EU legislative initiatives on rural area [..]. The Commission also invites Member States to consider implementing the rural proofing principle at the national, regional and local level*." (European Commission, 2024a).

Nevertheless, no clear definition is given for rural proofing. Atterton (2022) defined rural proofing as "*a systematic process to review the likely impacts of policies, programmes and initiatives on rural areas because of their particular circumstances or needs (e.g. dispersed populations and poorer infrastructure networks)*". Shortall and Alston (2016) describe rural proofing as a broad term used to incorporate rural mainstreaming, championing rural policies, and auditing to ensure mainstreaming has occurred.

Rural proofing sheds light on the direct and indirect impacts (Defra, 2022) on rural jobs, development prospects, social well-being, equal opportunities, and environmental quality whilst accounting for the intrinsic diversity of EU rural areas. For example, services directly impacted by a policy or initiative could include changes taking place within a place (e.g. a new medical practice / school/ hospital), or indirect (reduced travel times to a doctor because of a new practice is opened close by the rural area of a Labs) with impacts on food stores or town centres because of the opening of a new school (Defra, 2022). Fundamentally, it is used to test coherence between existing and new policies and initiatives to ensure that they do not have unintended adverse impacts on rural areas, socially, environmentally or economically, and that urban and rural residents receive equitable access to a common set of policies and programmes.

In April 2016, the European Parliament, Council of The European Union, and European Commission signed an Inter-institutional Agreement on better law-making (2016). The agreement includes a section on impact assessments, stating that impact assessments make a positive contribution to improving the quality of Union legislation. It also notes that best practice and methodologies relating to impact assessments will be shared between institutions with the aim of improving methodologies and procedures and the coherence of the work on impact assessments.

Impact assessments are carried out on initiatives which are expected to have significant economic, social or environmental impacts (European Commission, 2024b) and from part of the EU Better Regulation Guidelines (European Commission (2021b) and Better Regulation Toolbox (European Commission, 2023a). Aspects of

such impact assessments have close links to the purpose of rural proofing, although the methods tend to be specific to the topic being considered. The outputs, and notes of methods used, are published in the EU Register of Commission Documents (European Commission, 2024c).

There is a risk that public policies reflect a 'one size fits all' perspective, with unintended consequences of differences in effects between urban and rural areas (e.g. in healthcare systems, Couper *et al*., 2023) which risks reinforcing inequities between urban and rural settings (Rural Health Advocacy Project, 2015). The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Thematic Network on rural proofing was set up to share experience and develop recommendations for guiding rural proofing mechanisms within the EU, implemented at national, regional and local levels (Atterton and Korcekova, 2022).

Generally, methodologies for rural proofing involve systematically assessing the potential impact of policies, programmes, and projects on rural areas (Atterton, 2022). This process aims to identify and address any unintended negative consequences or disparities that might arise in rural settings of policies and initiatives, aiming to help policy-makers avoid urban-centric biases and promote more equitable and inclusive development across different types of geographical areas. However, there is no specific established or acknowledged methodology within current policy-making frameworks to undertake rural proofing (Couper *et al*., 2023). To date, even the term 'rural proofing' is not widely integrated and/or translated into official EU languages. Table 1 summarises how the term is listed in the translations of the European Commission Communication on key achievements and ways forward for the LTVRA (European Commission, 2024a).

Table A1. 1 - The term 'rural proofing' translated to the official EU languages

Language	Terminology used	Language	Terminology used
Bulgarian	Механизма за проверка на въздействието върху селските райони	Irish	Promhadh leas na tuaithe
Croatian	Učinka na ruralna područja	Italian	La verifica rurale
Czech	Ověřování dopadu na venkovské oblasti	Latvian	Lauku aspektu nostiprināšanu
Danish	Proofing til gavn for landdistrikterne.	Lithuanian	A vidéki térségekre gyakorolt hatásokjogalkotás minőségének javításáról szóló
Dutch	Plattelands / regio toets	Maltese	Verifika rurali
English	Rural proofing	Polish	Weryfikację wpływu polityki na rozwój obszarów wiejskich
Estonian	Maapiirkondadele avalduva mõju hindamise parema õigusloome kohta	Romanian	Naliza din perspectiva mediului rural
Finnish	Maaseutuvaikutusten arvioinnin	Portuguese	Verificação rural
French	Le test rural	Slovak	Vplyvov na vidiecke oblasti
German	Prüfung der Auswirkungen auf den ländlichen Raum	Slovenian	Ukrepov na podeželje
Greek	Την αγροτική θωράκιση για τη βελτίωση της νομοθεσίας π	Spanish	Verificación Rural
Hungarian	Tinkamumo kaimo vietovėms užtikrinimo	Swedish	Landsbygdssäkring

Source: European Commission Communication on key achievements and ways forward for the LTVRA (European Commission, 2024a).

Rural proofing has been tested and implemented in various countries around the world, including the Republic of Ireland, Finland, United Kingdom, Sweden, USA, Australia and New Zealand (Gaugitsch *et al*., 2022; Annex 4). A short summary of some examples of those uses is provided in Box A1.1

Box A1. 1 - Examples of Rural Proofing applied in Europe

The Republic of Ireland has developed a specific framework for rural proofing known as the Rural Development Policy. This framework aims to address the unique challenges faced by rural communities and promote balanced regional development. The Irish government conducts Rural Impact Assessments (RIAs) to evaluate the impact of policies and programs on rural areas. RIAs consider factors such as rural employment, access to services, infrastructure development, and community well-being.

Finland has implemented rural proofing through its National Rural Policy Programme, which outlines strategies for promoting rural development and enhancing the vitality of rural areas. Finnish municipalities are encouraged to incorporate rural proofing principles into their local development plans and decision-making processes. This includes considering the needs of rural residents in areas such as education, healthcare, transportation, and business support.

Sweden has adopted a comprehensive approach to rural proofing, with a focus on enhancing the quality of life and economic opportunities in rural areas. The Swedish government works closely with local authorities, businesses, and community organisations to identify and address the specific challenges faced by rural communities. This includes investing in infrastructure projects, supporting local entrepreneurship, and promoting sustainable land use practices.

In England **(the United Kingdom)**, rural proofing has been integrated into policy development processes across different government departments. For example, the Rural Communities Policy Unit within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is responsible for ensuring that rural considerations are taken into account in policies related to agriculture, environment, and rural development (Defra, 2024).

In Scotland **(the United Kingdom)**,strategies have been implemented to 'proof' policies and initiatives to ensure that the needs of rural communities are adequately addressed. These include the introduction of Rural and Islands Impact Assessments, which systematically consider the potential impact of proposed policies on rural areas, helping to mitigate any adverse effects and maximise benefits. Scotland has also prioritised investment in rural infrastructure, such as improved broadband and transport networks, to improve accessibility and connectivity for rural residents and businesses

Source: Consortium

Existing methodologies of rural proofing have been reviewed in the development of the GRANULAR methodology. It is noted that an approach that works in one country may not be directly applicable in another context, and that its application is typically in use between rural and urban areas, and omits to recognise diversity within rural areas. It is also noted that rural proofing has been criticised by stakeholders and academics indicating that its implementation is subject to ongoing improvements, and interpretation of the outputs are topics of discussion.

2. The GRANULAR rural proofing methodology

In principle, a rural proofing methodology is applicable to initiatives pertaining to any level of governance (i.e. EU, national and local), of different natures (policies, strategies, measures) and at different stages (preliminary planning, currently under consultation, already adopted). Such differences will translate into different contexts for the uses of the methodology.

An aim of rural proofing is to design and implement better policies (OECD, 2024). The process used should facilitate engagement across levels of governance, within government and between government and institutions with responsibilities in the public, private and civic society sectors (e.g. OECD, 2024). The European Commission recognises the “multidimensional nature of rural areas” and their focus on “social and

territorial cohesion" (Rouby and Ptak-Bufkens, 2022). In turn, they reflect on policy areas within their competence.

In GRANULAR, the Living and Replication Labs are at the core of the rural proofing methodology, reflecting the place and context-specific knowledge of their members, and as such they are best placed to assess the impacts of an initiative on their territory. The final outcome of the rural proofing process will be an overview of the main impacts (positive and negative) of the initiative assessed on the specific area of action of the Living and Replication Labs.

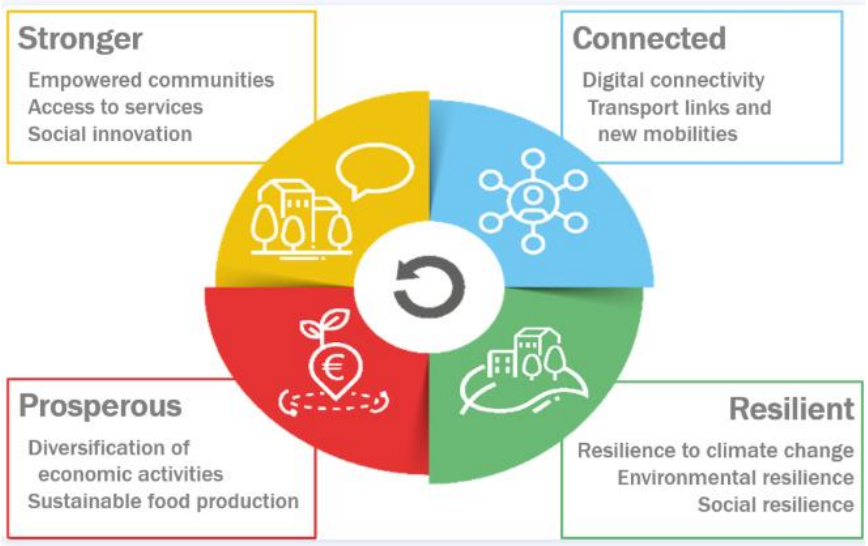
The overview will be used with local policy-makers with a view to refining and anticipating any negative externalities stemming from strategies and initiatives relating to their area of responsibility or interest. Through engagement with EU level interests, the assessments by Living and Replication Labs will be used to identify opportunities and possible threats of EU level initiatives at local levels in rural areas . Supported by indicators and quantitative data, the process is expected to provide an understanding of unintended consequences on rural areas of high level policies.

As a basis for the approach, GRANULAR has provided a Framework which guides and orients users in performing the rural proofing exercise. This framework is based upon the integration of the GRANULAR Rural Compass (Oostindie *et al*., 2023) and its functionalities and components with the actions and activities of the LTVRA Action Plan (European Commission, 2024a).

The GRANULAR Framework has been developed by critically assessing their respective aspects, and seeking complementaries and checking for overlaps to ensure both tools are capitalised upon effectively. This combined approach has resulted in a comprehensive framework that addresses various aspects of rurality. The added value of combining these tools is particularly evident in areas such as demographic trends, access to services, cultural heritage, tourism, commuting and migration, environmental performance, ecosystem services, natural capital, and economic diversification, where the GRANULAR Rural Compass offers a more nuanced approach towards such topics.

The integration of the Rural Compass and pillars of the LTVRA ensures that the GRANULAR methodology is aligned and anchored with the broader rural EU policy context as articulated through the LTVRA and Rural Action Plan. The GRANULAR Framework guides the user through different facets of "rurality" and takes into account the four pillars of the LTVRA (Figure 2 - Pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas.Figure 2): Stronger, Connected, Prosperous and Resilient, thus orientating and providing policy direction, from the policy planning, design, adoption, implementation, evaluation and revision, and through to its monitoring. As such, this tool is fully aligned with the EU Better Regulation Toolkit (European Commission, 2023a).

Figure 11 - Pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas.

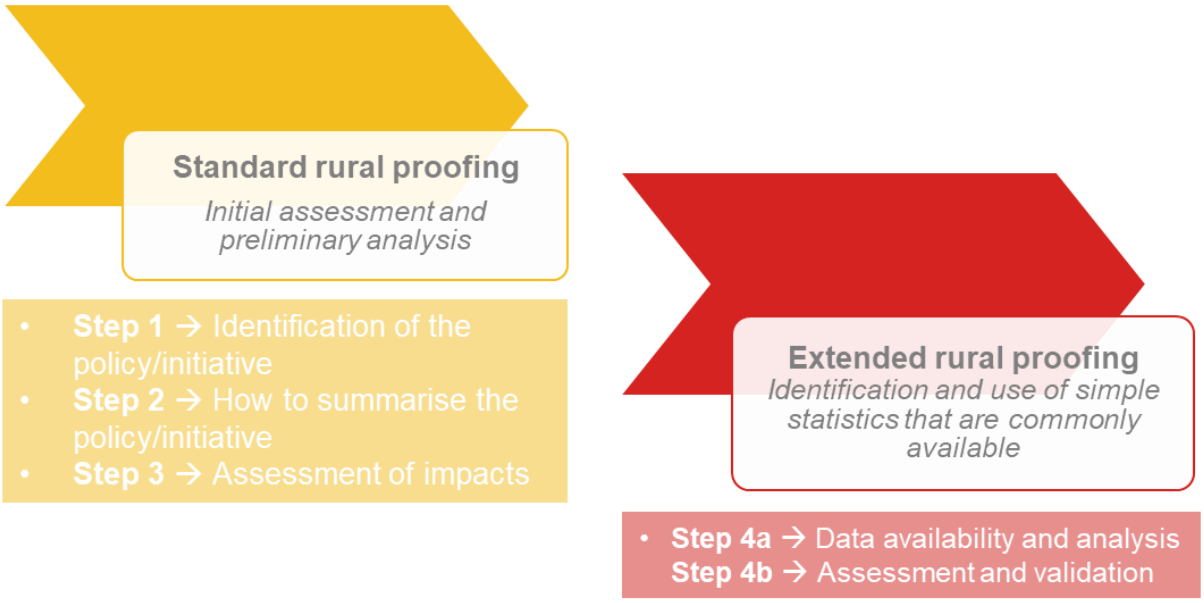


Source: EU LTVRA (European Commission, 2024a ; https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en*).*

3. Execution of GRANULAR rural proofing methodology

The full GRANUALAR rural proofing methodology encompasses two phases and four different steps.

Figure 12 - Overview of the proposed GRANULAR rural proof methodology



Source: Consortium

Phase one of the methodology is the **Standard rural proofing** which consists out of three steps. This phase is qualitative in nature.

- **Step 1 - Choosing the subject for the rural proofing exercise**. Select an appropriate initiative / policy / legislation for rural proofing. Not all initiatives / policies are for rural proofing (or at least not at all governance levels), so it is important to critically assess initiatives / policies / legislations that are to be tested for their suitability before proceeding to subsequent steps.
- **Step 2 - Summarising the chosen policy / initiative.** Read the selected policy or initiative carefully and summarise its key elements. To undertake a complete and thorough rural proofing, all those involved in its assessment should to become familiar with the content of the initiative / policy, such as its objective, activities, main actors and mechanisms.
- **Step 3 - Identifying potential impact areas.** Consider whether, potentially, the elements (based on the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework, see Section 3.1) could be effected (positively or negatively) by the implementation of the chosen initiative / policy / legislation in the relevant rural area.

These three steps enable a qualitative understanding of whether and how the initiative / policy could impact upon the rural area(s) under consideration. With this knowledge, stakeholders could develop mitigation measures to prevent possible negative effects from occurring, or identify measures which can ensure / amplify possible positive effects. The resulting knowledge could be used to provide feedback on the initiative / policy.

The second phase methodology is the **extended rural proofing** which comprises one step, split into two activities. Note that this phase is a mix of qualitative and quantitative information. The choice to proceed with the extended rural proofing depends upon the time and knowledge available for the rural proofing exercise, as well as the underlying reason and need, which may be place and context-specific. By executing the second phase of the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology, stakeholders should be positioned to assess the effects of an initiative / policy / legislation on the relevant elements of the framework.

- **Step 4a - Data availability and analysis.** For the key elements deemed to be affected by the chosen initiative / policy / legislation in Step 3. Indicators should be identified which can be used to analyse those effects. As part of this step, the data required for the indicator should also be identified, from where and how it is available, and how it should be interpreted.
- **Step 4b - Assessment and validation.** This step can only be implemented if the rural proofing exercise is executed on an initiative / policy that is being or has been implemented (e.g. mid-term or ex-post evaluation). Using the indicators identified in step 4a, the available date should be used to assess how the implementation of the initiative / policy has impacted the rural areas in reality, including the use of projections of indicator values, if available, for interpreting possible future impacts .

Living Labs can present various degrees of heterogeneity across their territories. For example, the same Living Lab could encompass both mountain as well as coastal areas, each with distinct features and needs. As such, the same initiative could impact in very different ways those different territories, resulting in different and possibly even opposite effects on the individual elements on the GRANULAR rural proofing framework. As an example, an initiative targeting mobility could have very different implications whether we use a mountain or coastal area as a reference.

For analytical reasons, and to ensure that the summary note to be produced at the end of the exercise is consistent, Living Labs are invited to refer to the same territory (e.g. with the same features) throughout the entire exercise, especially during steps 3 and 4. This means that when filling the Excel tool, we ask you to be consistent and to fill in each raw keeping the same territory in mind.

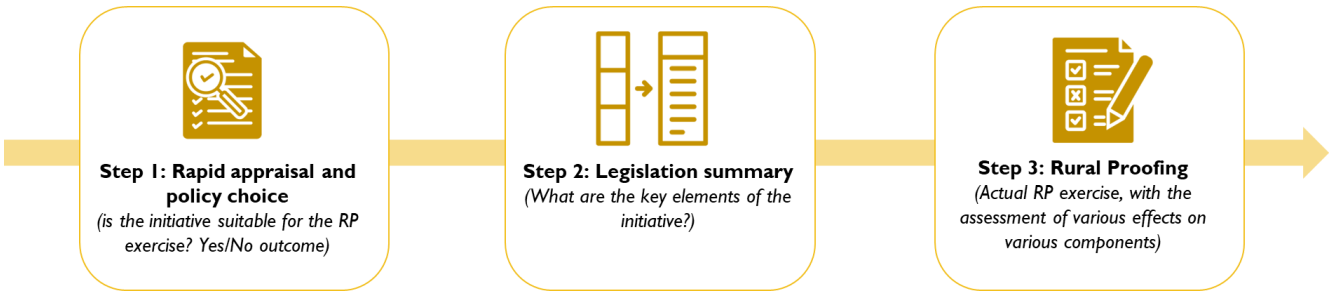
However, as the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology underscore the diversity of European rural areas, Living Labs have the possibility to indicate and record, should they wish, also the different effects that could happen when a different territory within their Living Lab is used as a reference point.

The steps in the methodology are explained in-depth in the following sub-sections.

1.1. Phase 1 – Standard rural proofing

The three Steps that make up the Standard rural proofing are illustrated in Figure 3. **Step 1** and **Step 2** are preparatory in nature and enable Living Labs and Replication Labs to identify if an initiative/policy is suitable to be subject to a rural proofing exercise and become acquainted with the initiative/policy. **Step 3** focuses on assessing potential impacts on the relevant rural area due to the selected initiative/policy.

Figure 13 - Step 1 to 3 of the standard rural proofing



Source: Consortium

Instructions on the three steps are provided in the sections below, detailing how to use the rural proofing tool (i.e. Excel file) you received together with these guidelines.

For this phase, you can operate with a sub-set of members of your Living or Replicate Lab, or with some of your colleagues. You may wish to translate the document and tools into the language most appropriate for use in the Lab.

1.1.1. Step 1: Identification of the policy/initiative

Step 1 in the rural proofing is to select whether an initiative is suitable for assessment. For the rural proofing in GRANULAR, discuss the options with members of the Living Lab, reflecting upon what is expected from the task (i.e. the expected outcome in terms of influencing the policy cycle, test a specific local policy, etc.), the relevance of the policy to the territory, and their own interests and remits. This step could include the use of an online survey.

Once you have selected a policy or initiative in Step 1, you can proceed with the next steps of the methodology. Please answer the following two questions:

a) *Would the initiative have any potential social, economic or other impacts, either positive or negative, on rural communities within the area in the Lab?*
b) *Are you aware of any examples of how the initiative might impact, positively or negatively, on different types of rural communities, or in a way that is different from the impact on urban areas?*

GRANULAR Vocabulary

An initiative can be a public or private sector action which has been proposed or implemented, including laws, regulations, guidelines, and actions.

If the answer to both questions is 'Yes', continue to Step 2. If the answer is 'No', consider choosing another policy/initiative. If you have mixed outcomes, i.e. a 'Yes' and a 'No', proceed to Step 2 to gain a better understanding of the topic under consideration.

How does it look in practice?

The rural proofing tool is provided in an MS Excel file. A tab is labelled as Step 1, a screenshot of which is shown in Figure A1.4.

Figure 14 - Screenshot of Step 1 in the rural proofing tool.

Step 1: Which Policy/Initiative should I choose?			
Would the initiative have any potential social, economic or other impacts, either positive or negative, on rural communities?	Yes/No	Why/justification	
Are you aware of any examples of how the initiative might impact, positively or negatively on different types of rural communities, or in a way that is different from the impact on urban areas?	Yes/No	Why/justification	

Source: Consortium

3.1.1. Step 2: How to summarise the policy/initiative information?

Once the policy or initiative selected to be assessed has been agreed as being suitable for rural proofing, a summary of its key features is to be developed, guided by a set of questions. This is generated from the responses to a series of questions. In Step 2 you scrutinise the initiative and address key questions relating to "*who does what, and how*?"

Through this step, Living and Replication Labs should familiarise themselves with the key elements of the initiative that would be used for the assessment in Step 3.

A feature has been provided that will enable you to create a simple summary of the initiative based on the answers to the questions.

Note that at this stage you might conclude that the policy or initiative selected, which appeared to be appropriate in Step 1 is not entirely appropriate for rural proofing. Should this be the case, return to Step 1 to identify a more suitable policy/initiative. However, you may decide to continue the assessment, perhaps identifying any indirect or surprising impacts it may have on rural areas (Defra, 2022).

GRANULAR Vocabulary

Actors: These include administrators, businesses (to specify the type), NGOs, citizens, and visitors.

Outputs: The results of an action and steps required to achieve the desired outcome.

Outcome: The expected effects or impacts of the initiative.

For Step 2, the Living and Replication Labs can choose whether their Facilitators complete the summary, or to fill in the summary and then discuss it with other members for their validation revisions.

The questions in Step 2 are summarised in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Figure 15 - Overview of the guiding questions in Step 2 to obtain the summary of the initiative

Step 2: How to summarise the Policy/Initiative information?	
Aspect	**Question to answer**
Which type of initiative are we looking at?	What is the **title** of the initiative? *[please insert the title*
	What it the **author/source** of the initiative? *[EC, EP, Regional Governments, local government]*
	Which **type** of initiative is it? *[Please elaborate on the of public and private sector action, including policy, strategy, Legal text, Regulation, Directives.. Replace this information in the brakets]*
	What is the level of governance of the initiative?
	Which **stage** is the initiative currently in?
What is the initiative about?	Broadly speaking, what is the initiative about? *[please insert text replacing the brackets]*
	What are the **general and specific objectives** of the initiative?
	What are the **expected outputs and outcomes** of the initiative? *[outcome is the desired impact, outputs are the concrete results of the initiative]*
	What are the key **roles/actors** concerned by the initiative?
	Which **sectors** are concerned by the initiative?
	Are there a**ny references to "rural"** (or its synonims that are relevant in your language, e.g. territory, etc) in the body of the iniative?
	If yes, please elaborate *[insert reference to rural from the text of the initiative]*
	Is (a component of) the initiative linked to a **fund or other financial instrumen**t? (e.g. a measure of the CAP)
	If yes, please elaborate [*insert type of fund or financial mechanism attached to initiative, i.e. RDP, national funds, market instruments, etc.*]
How is the initiative functioning?	Which mechanism does the initiative entail?
	Please elaborate on the specific mechanism entailed by the initiative
	What potential social, economic or other impacts, either positive or negative, would the initiative have on different types of rural communities and areas?
	Does the initiative entail or make reference to indicators?

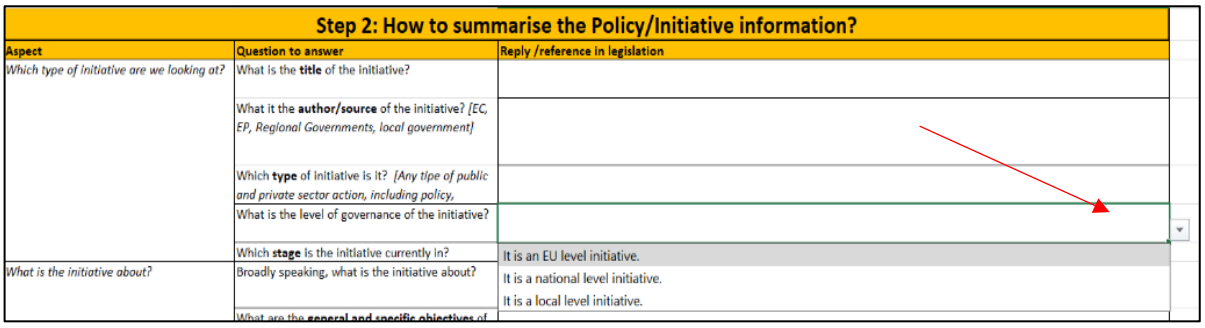
Source: Consortium

How does it look in practice?

A tab of the rural proofing tool is labelled as Step 2, a screenshot of which is shown in Figure A1.6 showing the questions relating to the type of initiative.

Note, for some questions in the table, the response uses a drop-down menu. The cells with drop-down menus are C6, C7, C13, C15, C17, and C20. Free text should be entered as responses in the other cells.

Figure 16 - Example of drop-down menu in Step 2.



Source: Consortium

By populating the table in Step 2, a consolidated summary text will automatically appear in cell B25 (the yellow area in the spreadsheet). This is generated using an Excel formula so please do not modify it or add anything into that yellow space. If you wish to copy this summary into a different Word template, please select the yellow cell, and simply copy and paste its content into Word. If this approach does not work, you can use the replies from the table shown in Figure A1.7.

Figure 17 - Automatic summary tool for Step 2.

SUMMARY NOTE - automatically filled, do not fill in!
The title of the initiative is the Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy. The author of the initiative is The Scottish Government (https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-third-land-use-strategy-2021-2026-getting-best-land/). In terms of type, this initiative is a public policy setting out the long term vision for sustainable land use in Scotland, and objectives and key policies for delivery. It is a national level initiative. It is already adopted. Broadly speaking, the Land Use Strategy sets out the long term vision for sustainable land use in Scotland, the objectives and key policies for delivery. The objectives of the Land Use Strategy is to deliver sustainable land use, using landscapes to understand land use, and the provision of platforms for change. One such platform is the concept of Regional Land Use Partnerships. All actors relating to land use are relevant, from policy, business, communities and research. All sectors of land use are covered by the Strategy. There are explicit references to "rural" in the body of the iniative.The term 'rural' is used extensively in the Strategy. One aims is to ensure that rural communities can thrive and offer opportunities to young people and future generations will be a key priority for not only the new National Planning Framework 4 but is also central to the Green Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative is linked to a fund or financial instrument. An example of a fund linked to the initiative is operational costs covered for each of the pilot Regional Land Use Partnerships. The initiatives define guiding principles and strategic directions for future endaveurs. The Strategy states that it does not set out new policies, instead it brings together numerous other policies and measures of relevance to land use in Scotland. Some of these other policies and measures are used as indicators for one or more of the Objectives of the Land Use Strategy. One specific mechanism set out in the Land Use Strategy is the concept of Regional Land Use Partnerships, of which five pilot partnerships have been setup. The aim of the pilot RLUPs is to test governance options and partnership working on a regional scale to understand how best to work collaboratively; develop a framework to identify potential land use changes; and to facilitate and signpost funding opportunities for land owners, managers and community groups. The initiative has its own set of indicators.

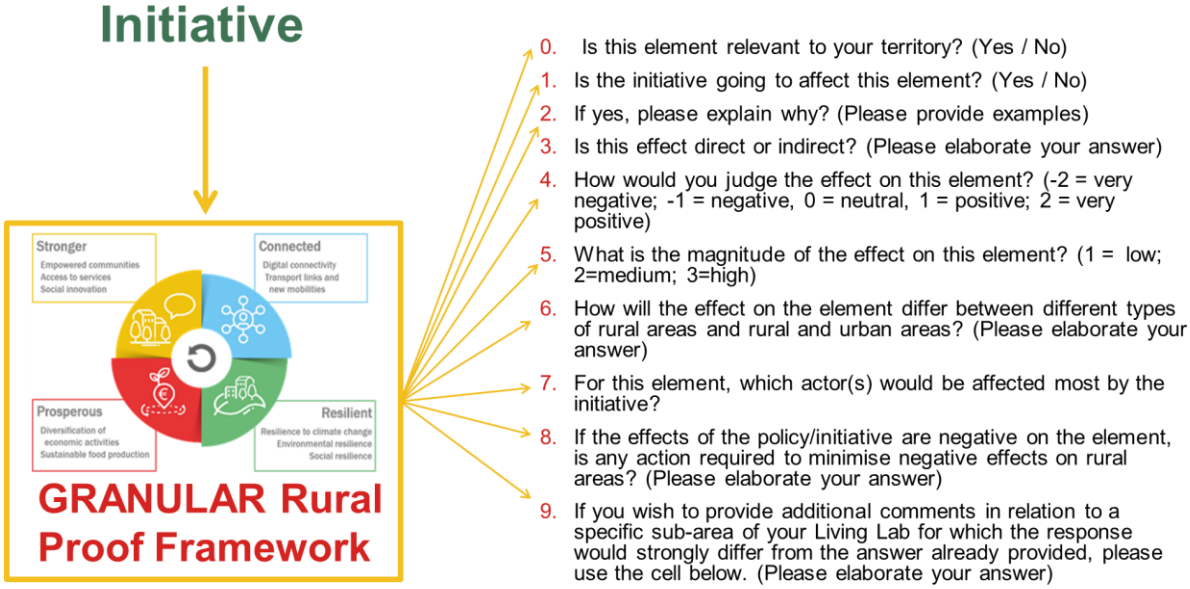
Source: Consortium

3.1.2. Step 3: Assessment of impacts

Step 3 will enable you to dig deeper into the analysis and to focus on the potential effect that the policy/initiative could have on each element of the GRANULAR Framework. Figure A1.8 summarises all of the questions that you will have to answer for each element.

The involvement of members of the Living and Replication Labs is crucial for this step. The Labs can choose to complete the form directly with their members or partially pre-populate it and discuss those entries in a workshop. Once the Excel tool is completed, members of the Labs should reflect on the exercise's outcome and produce a concise summary note of the assessment, in a Word template provided. This summary integrates the assessment information and formulates a final view on the initiative's performance under each functionality, considering all elements under each functionality.

Figure 18 - Aspects to address for each element of the GRANULAR framework, in Step 3.



Source: Consortium

How does it look in practice?

An extract of the MS Excel sheet for Step 3 is shown in Figure A1.9. For each element based on the work done in Step 2, you should be able to address all of the questions, several of which pertain to the type and magnitude of the impact. A list of key words will assist you in grasping the meaning of each element, and translating them correctly into your native language.

No dropdown cells are used in Step 3, providing you the freedom to report any relevant findings from the policy/initiative you are evaluating.

Figure 19 - Screenshot of an extract of Step 3 in the Excel tool

		Step 3 – Identifying potental impact areas								
LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework (these originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	0. Is this component relevant to your territory? (Yes/No)	1. Is the initiative going to affect this component? Yes -> Continue with question 2. No -> the following questions do not apply, move to the next component	2.If Yes, please explain why *(provide examples of those effects)*	3. Is this effect direct or indirect? *(please elaborate on your answer.)*	4. How would you judge the **effect** on this component (-2 = very negative; -1= negative, 0 = neutral, 2 = positive; 3 = very positive)	5. What is the magnitude **of the effect** on this component (1= low; 2=medium; 3=high)	6. How will the effect on the component differ between urban and rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	7. For this component, which actor(s) would be affected most by the initiative? *(please elaborate on your answer)*	8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the component, is any action required to minimize negative effects on rural areas? *(please elaborate on your answer)*
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy** Examples are: i) CAP funded initiatives targeting Communities, e.g. the **LEADER** approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development **(CLLD).** ii) **Smart Villages** and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and local governance quality. Participatory process policies or initiatives									
	Rural revitalisation This component aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable housing and family-friendly									
	Demographic trends This component explores how urbanisation, globalisation, digitalisation, and climate change influence demographic trends in rural areas, leading to outward or inward migration. It aims to support areas distinguished by									

Source: Consortium

To answer the questions in relation to Step 3 in the MS Excel sheet (see below, the numbering is as per the questions in columns in Step 3 of the Excel spreadsheet), please find some further guidance and aspects to consider :

Q0. Is this element relevant to your territory*?* → Is there any aspect of the element listed in column B which is represented in the rural area you are considering for this exercise? If the answer is 'yes', proceed to answering the other questions (1 – 8) . If the answer is 'no', move to the next element of column B.

Q1. Is the initiative going to affect this element? → Could the proposed policy or initiative have any implications for the territory you are considering, or do you believe it should have implications? If the answer is 'yes', continue to question 2. If the answer is 'no', move to the next element of column B.

Q2. If Yes, please explain why (please provide examples of how it is affected) → If the policy or initiative likely to affect the area being considered then explain why, with reference to some examples or evidence in support of that belief. The examples or evidence can be descriptive or numerical.

Q3. Is this effect direct or indirect? (please elaborate on your answer) → Consider whether there are services which are directly impacted upon by a policy or initiative (e.g. a new medical practice, new school, new hospital), or indirect (reduced travel times to a doctor because of a new practice is opened close by the rural area of a Labs) with impacts on food stores or town centres because of the opening of a new school (Defra, 2022).

Q4. How would you judge the effect on this element? (-2 = very negative; -1 = negative, 0 = neutral, 1 = positive; 2 = very positive) →Consider whether, broadly, the effect would be positive, neutral, or negative, and an indication of the magnitude of the impact on the element.

Q5. What is the magnitude of the effect on this element? (1 = low; 2=medium; 3=high) → Consider whether the magnitude of the effect would be zero/negligible, low, medium or high. Note that the impact can be high and very negative. That would stress the direction and magnitude of the anticipated effect. The answer may be based upon quantitative data but that is not required or expected.

Q6. How will the effect on the element differ between different areas? (please elaborate on your answer) → Consider differences between types of areas within the Living or Replication Lab, and external to the Lab if expertise and information is available. Those may include urban and rural areas, or different types of rural areas, guided by existing classifications of relevance if available (e.g. by size of population within the area, accessibility from a settlement of a given size; Scottish Government, 2022).

Q7. For this element, which actor(s) would be affected most by the initiative? (please elaborate on your answer) → Consider the types of actors who would be affected including those in different types of area (e.g. 'very remote rural', accessible rural, very remote small towns, etc.; Scottish Government, 2022).

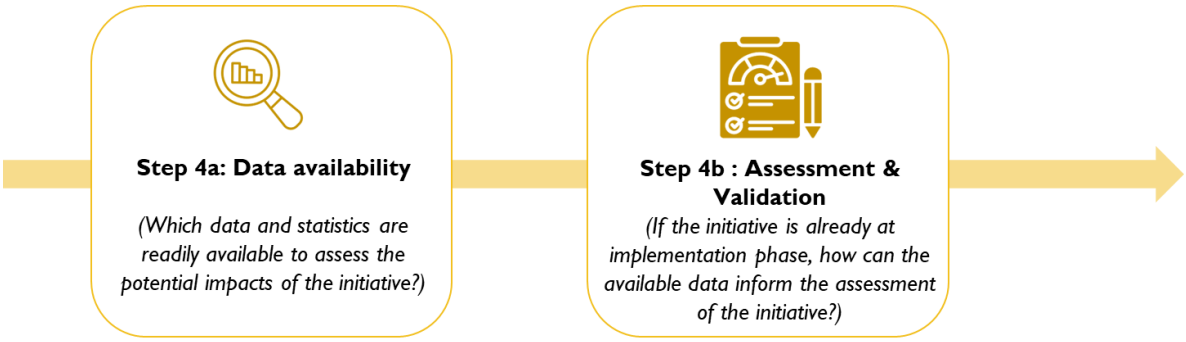
Q8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer) → In responding, please consider and report possible mitigations to adverse potential effects, including approaches between different types of rural areas, or rural compared to urban areas.

3.2. Phase 2 – Extended rural proofing

The second phase of the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology is the final step and is divided into two parts, as depicted in Figure A1.10. The purpose of the Extended rural proofing is to delve deeper into the effects identified in the Standard rural proofing, attempting to quantify these effects through the identification of suitable indicators and the observation of their evolution over time.

Step 4a requires identifying potential indicators for each relevant element determined in Step 3, and sources of data. Step 4b should only be completed if indicators are identified in Step 4a, and if the initiative/policy is already being implemented. It focuses on analysing the impact of these indicators through quantitative and qualitative methods to understand their effects within the rural framework.

Figure 20 - Step 4 of Extended rural proofing



Source: Consortium

The Extended rural proofing can be applied to initiatives regardless of their stage in the policy cycle. This means it can be used for initiatives that are already implemented or being implemented (ex-post rural proofing) as well as for those in the design phase (ex-ante rural proofing). For ex-post rural proofing, both Steps 4a and 4b can be implemented. For ex-ante rural proofing, since the effects of the initiative cannot yet be seen, the focus will be on identifying suitable indicators

1.1.2. Step 4a: Data Availability and Analysis

In this final step, you are tasked with reflecting on and identifying potential indicators for each element that was considered relevant during Step 3 (Standard rural proofing). It is important to consider the availability of data needed to monitor these indicators within the territory.

This step employs a similar approach to Step 3 but with an emphasis on identifying indicators for the selected elements. The questions to be addressed are as follows:

- Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy/initiative on this element? If yes, then state the indicator(s) and include a hyperlink if available.

- Indicators and series of values could include projections of future change, such as population).

- For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [answers: EU, national, local, or state NUTS level].
- For each indicator, provide source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available [are the data sources available at the level of relevance?].

A screenshot of the Framework for Step 4.a is shown in Figure A1.11.

Figure 21 - Screenshot of an extract of Step 4a in the Excel tool.

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework (these originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources (insert one indicator per line)		
		Are there **indicator(s)** which can be used to monitor effects of the policy/initiative on this component? If so then state the indicator(s) and include a hyperlink if available. [Note, indicators and series of values could include projections of future change, such as population)	**For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [answers:** *EU, national, local, or state NUTS level]*	**For each indicator,** provide source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink *if available* [are the data sources available at the level of relevance?]
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy** Examples are: i) CAP funded initiatives targeting Communities, e.g. the **LEADER** approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development **(CLLD).** ii) **Smart Villages** and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and local governance quality. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This component aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			

Source: Consortium

1.1.3. Step 4b: Data availability and analysis

In this step, you are asked to reflect on and link the evolution in the time series of the highlighted indicators with the impact of the initiative. This involves analysing both historical data and future projections to ensure that the impacts of the initiative are thoroughly evaluated by considering past trends and potential future developments (where possible), combining qualitative insights with quantitative data.

As this step involves reflecting on the impacts of the initiative, it is most appropriate for use with initiatives that are already being implemented, i.e., when the rural proofing is considered an ex-post assessment. If the initiative you are testing is still in the design phase, its contribution to the evolution of any indicator is not yet present, making this type of analysis less applicable.

For each indicator, please address the following :

- If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure).
- Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]
- If yes, please explain your answer.

A screenshot of the Framework for Step 4.b is shown in Figure A1.12.

Figure 22 - Screenshot of an extract of Step 4b in the Excel tool.

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework (these originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects (quantitative and/or qualitative)		
		If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy** Examples are: i) CAP funded initiatives targeting Communities, e.g. the **LEADER** approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development **(CLLD).** ii) **Smart Villages** and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and local governance quality. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This component aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			

Source: Consortium

4. Result of rural proofing exercise

After completing the entries in the Excel tool for Steps 3 and/or 4, take stock and formulate a judgement on the impact of the initiative/policy on the different aspects of the GRANULAR rural proofing framework using the template below. This should integrate the information produced during the assessment, and support the formulation of a final judgement on the performance of the initiative/policy. This final judgement is to take into account all of the elements under each pillar of the LTVRA, which form part of the GRANULAR rural proofing framework. You will be invited to comment on how you found reference to the four pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas within the rural; proofing and in summarising the feedback, and whether it was useful or appropriate for the area of your Living or Replication Lab.

Depending on whether you complete the Standard or the Extended rural proofing, this short summary note will be the final output of Steps 3 or 4 respectively.

4.1. Stronger Rural Areas

Taking into account all the elements of the **Stronger** Rural Areas pillar included in the GRANULAR rural proofing framework, please summarise the effects of the policy/initiative, both positive and negative, that the initiative has or will have on rural areas in your territory.

Refer to any elements about which you were uncertain of their meaning, or that they were better or equally appropriate to place in another pillar.

Table A1. 2 – Summary of the positive/negative effects of the policy/initiative tested, in relation to in the Stronger Rural Areas pillar.

Positive effects	Negative effects

Based on this, do you consider the policy/initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the pillar of **Stronger Rural Areas**? Please elaborate on your response.

Box A1. 2 - Considerations regarding the policy/initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the Stronger Rural Areas pillar

4.2. Resilient Rural Areas

Taking into account all the elements of the **Resilient** Rural Areas **p**illar included in the GRANULAR rural proofing framework, please summarise the effects of the policy/initiative, both positive and negative, that the initiative has or will have on rural areas in your territory.

Refer to any elements about which you were uncertain of their meaning, or that they were better or equally appropriate to place in another pillar.

Table A1. 3 - Summary of the positive/negative effects of the policy/initiative tested, in relation to the Resilient Rural Areas pillar.

Positive effects	Negative effects

Based on this, do you consider the initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the **Resilient Rural Areas** pillar? Please elaborate on your response.

Box A1. 3 - Considerations regarding the policy/initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the Resilient Rural Areas pillar

4.3. Connected Rural Areas

Taking into account all the elements of the **Connected** Rural Areas pillar included in the GRANULAR rural proofing framework, please summarise the effects of the policy/initiative, both positive and negative, that the initiative has or will have on rural areas in your territory.

Refer to any elements about which you were uncertain of their meaning, or that they were better or equally appropriate to place in another pillar.

Table A1. 4 - Summary of the positive/negative effects of the policy/initiative tested, in relation to the Connected Rural Areas pillar.

Positive effects	Negative effects

Based on this, do you consider the initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the pillar of **Connected Rural Areas**? Please elaborate on your response.

Box A1. 4 - Considerations regarding the policy/initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the Connected Rural Areas pillar

4.4. Prosperous Rural Areas

Taking into account all the elements of the **Prosperous** Rural Areas Pillar included in the GRANULAR rural proofing framework, please summarise the effects of the policy/initiative, both positive and negative, that the initiative has or will have on rural areas in your territory.

Refer to any elements about which you were uncertain of their meaning, or that they were better or equally appropriate to place in another pillar.

Table A1. 5 - Summary of the positive/negative effects of the policy/initiative tested, in relation to the Prosperous Rural Areas pillar.

Positive effects	Negative effects

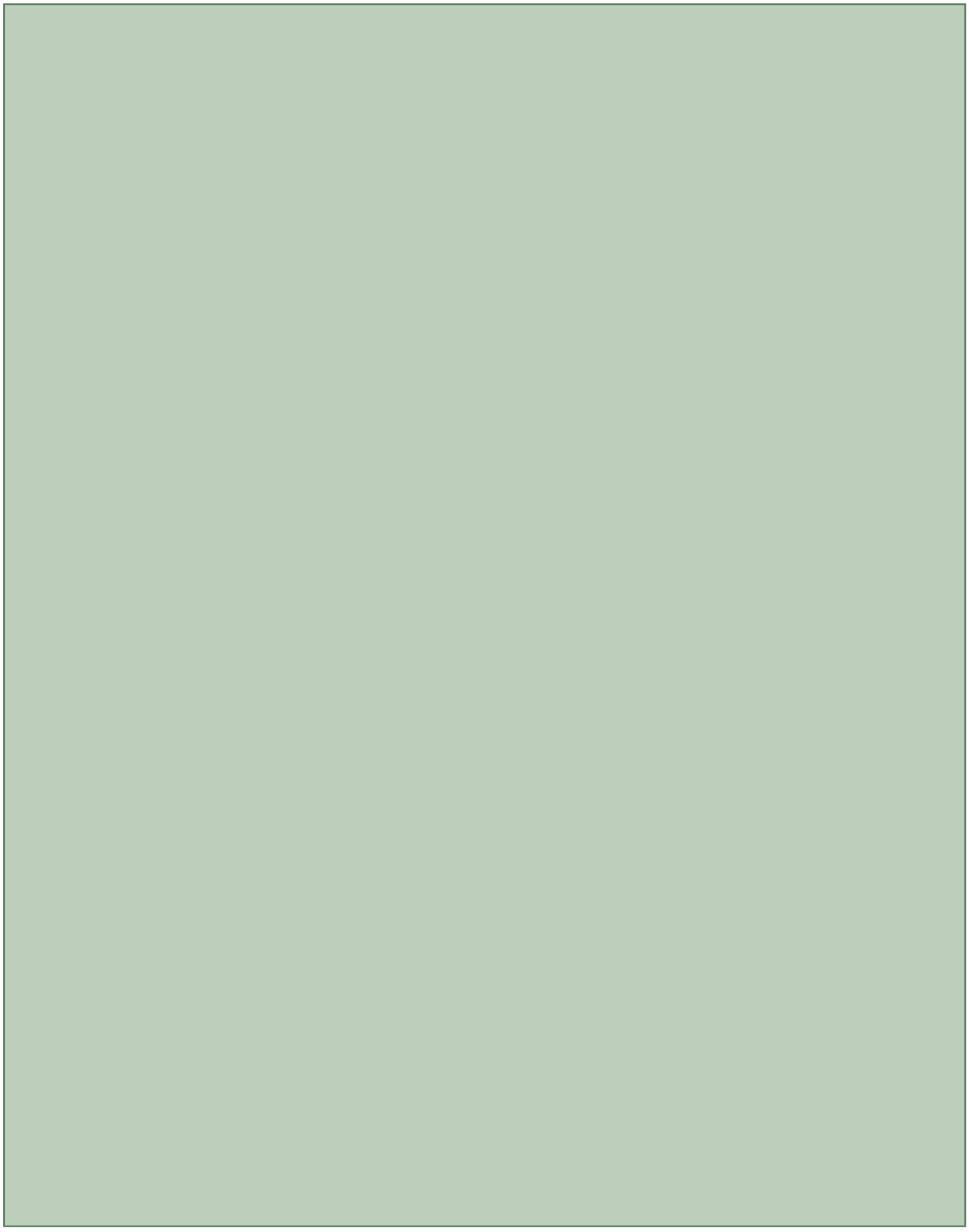
Based on this, do you consider the initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the pillar of **Prosperous Rural Areas**? Please elaborate on your response.

Box A1. 5 - Considerations regarding the policy/initiative 'rural-proof' with respect to the Prosperous Rural Areas pillar

4.5. Final assessment

Taking into account the four pillars assessed above, do you consider the initiative 'rural-proof' *overall*? Please elaborate on your response. Please include a comment on how you found providing feedback with reference to the four pillars of the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas. For example, did you find this approach appropriate and meaningful for your Living or Replication Lab? What is the understanding and familiarity of the Lab of each of the pillars?

Box A1. 6 - Overall assessment and final judgement



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Annex 2 – GRANULAR rural proofing Framework

Please note that the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework will be made available to the Living and Replication Labs in Excel format, in order to complete the entries for the territories of interest to their Labs.

Below, one will find .PDF version of the Excel file, which represents the content for the Framework, though adapted to fit the .PDF format.

Annex 2.1 – Step 1 of the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework

Step 1: Which Policy/Initiative should I choose?			
Would the initiative have any potential social, economic or other impacts, either positive or negative, on rural communities?	Yes/No	Why / justification	
Are you aware of any examples of how the initiative might impact, positively or negatively on different types of rural communities, or in a way that is different from the impact on urban areas?	Yes/No	Why / justification	

Annex 2.2 – Step 2 of the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework

Step 2: How to summarise the Policy/Initiative information?		
Aspect	**Question to answer**	**Reply /reference in legislation**
Which type of initiative are we looking at?	What is the **title** of the initiative? *[please insert the title*	The title of the initiative is XXXX.
	What it the **author/source** of the initiative? *[EC, EP, Regional Governments, local government]*	The author of the initiative is XXXX.
	Which **type** of initiative is it? *[Please elaborate on the of public and private sector action, including policy, strategy, Legal text, Regulation, Directives.. Replace this information in the brakets]*	In terms of type, this initiative is a XXXX.
	What is the level of governance of the initiative?	
	Which **stage** is the initiative currently in?	

Step 2: How to summarise the Policy/Initiative information?		
Aspect	**Question to answer**	**Reply /reference in legislation**
What is the initiative about?	Broadly speaking, what is the initiative about? *[please insert text replacing the Xs]*	Broadly speaking, the initiative deals with XXXX.
	What are the **general and specific objectives** of the initiative?	The objectives of the initiatives are XXXX.
	What are the **expected outputs** (*e.g. desired impact*) **and outcomes** (e.g. *concrete results*) of the initiative?	In terms of outputs and outcomes expected by the initiative, XXXX.
	What are the key **roles/actors** concerned by the initiative?	The main actors concerned by the initiative are XXXX.
	Which **sectors** are concerned by the initiative?	The main sectors concerned by the initiative are XXXX.
	Are there **any references to "rural"** (*or relevant synonyms, e.g. territory*) in the body of the initiative?	
	If yes, please elaborate *[insert reference to rural from the text]*	XXXX.
	Is (a component of) the initiative linked to a **fund or other financial instrumen**t? (*e.g. a measure of CAP*)	
	If yes, please elaborate [*e.g. RDP, national funds, market instruments, etc.*]	XXXX.

Step 2: How to summarise the Policy/Initiative information?		
Aspect	**Question to answer**	**Reply /reference in legislation**
How is the initiative functioning?	Which mechanism does the initiative entail?	
	Please elaborate on the specif mechanism entailed by the initiative	XXXX.
	What potential social, economic, or other impacts, either positive or negative, would the initiative have on different types of rural communities and areas?	XXXX.
	Does the initiative entail or make reference to indicators?	

Step 2: How to summarise the Policy/Initiative information?
SUMMARY NOTE - Authomatically filled, do not fill in!
The title of the initiative is XXXX. The author of the initiative is XXXX. In terms of type, this initiative is a XXXX. Broadly speaking, the initiative deals with XXXX. The objectives of the initiatives are XXXX. The main actors concerned by the initiative are XXXX. The main sectors concerned by the initiative are XXXX. XXXX. XXXX. XXXX. XXXX.

Annex 2.3 – Step 3 of the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas		Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas
		0. Is this element relevant to your territory? (Yes/No)	1. Is the initiative going to affect this element? Yes -> Continue with question 2. No -> Move to the next element	2.If **Yes**, please explain why *(provide examples of those effects)*
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy -** Examples are: i) EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funded initiatives targeting communities, e.g. the LEADER approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). ii) Smart Villages and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and the quality of local governance. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This element aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable the availability of housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			
	Demographic trends This element explores how urbanisation, globalisation, digitalisation, and climate change influence demographic trends in rural areas, leading to outward or inward migration. It aims to support areas distinguished by characteristics of population growth or decline, highlighting socio-economic concerns and urbanisation pressures.			
	Research and innovation This element aims to support the development of innovations by and for rural communities, along with training and knowledge exchange to accelerate their adoption.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas		Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas
		0. Is this element relevant to your territory? (Yes/No)	1. Is the initiative going to affect this element? Yes -> Continue with question 2. No -> Move to the next element	2.If **Yes**, please explain why *(provide examples of those effects)*
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Access to public and private services (including basic services)** This element focuses on improving the accessibility and affordability of public services, such as health, education, and transport, in rural areas, particularly for vulnerable groups. The aim is to ensure that these services are easily accessible and affordable for everyone, regardless of their location or socio-economic status.			
	Cultural attractiveness and heritage This element focuses on regional cultural assets such as architectural, military, and industrial heritage, with the aim of attracting tourism to rural areas. It includes the wider role of cultural attractiveness, which is manifested through rural-urban synergy.			
	Tourism (including infrastructure and creative tourism) This element assesses the quality and socio-economic impact of the infrastructure of rural recreation and tourism, emphasizing the growing importance of the creative sector. It highlights how immersive, culturally engaging experiences drive economic growth, innovation, and personalized tourism.			
	Education, training, youth, sport and volunteering in rural areas This element focuses on creating and enhancing opportnities for education, training and sport in rural areas, encouraging young people and volunteering. Examples of the element include, actions under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes (2021-2027) for boosting rural inclusion through financial support, targeted communications, accessible mobility, digital measures, and training. Initiatives under the EU and Council of Europe Youth Partnership's 2024-2025 plan which focuses on rural youth. Also included in this element are national, regional and local initiatives (i.e. not framed by EU schemes), targeting the topics of education, training, youth, sport and volunteering.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas		Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas
		0. Is this element relevant to your territory? (Yes/No)	1. Is the initiative going to affect this element? Yes -> Continue with question 2. No -> Move to the next element	2.If **Yes**, please explain why *(provide examples of those effects)*
Connected Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to boost sustainable transport links and digitalisation through investments in infrastructure, technology development and skills enhancement activities	**Rural digital futures - human capital and community** This element integrates digital services into rural communities, evolving relationships between individuals and technology in diverse social contexts and life events. It also tackles digitialsation from a human prospective ("human capital"), boosting competencies needed for the digital transformation of rural areas, including digital skills and entrepreneurship.			
	Transport and mobility This element focuses on: - Improving transport infrastructure (e.g. on land, water, e-mobility, cycling paths) - Improving transport services - Rural mobility, including multi-modal digital mobility services and innovative transport solutions - Urban-rural linkages of all forms of mobility.			
	Commuting and Migration This element focuses on how commuting and migration can drive rural revitalization or lead to marginalization, and considers how they interact with education, skills, and rural-urban interactions.			
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Energy transition for rural communities and climate action** This element focuses on activities and initiatives related to energy communities, for example those involved in renovations and European Bauhaus projects, which are crucial for meeting renewable energy targets and decreasing dependence on gas, oil, and coal imports. They also play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.			
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Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Soil health** The objective of this element is to implement innovative sustainable land management practices on the ground, contribute to the harmonisation of soil montirong across the EU, increase soil literacy and the general awareness of the importance of soils through communication and engagement activities. At an EU level, this element is reflected in the EU Mission "A soil deal for Europe" , which contributes to tackling soil challenges in rural areas, and in urban settings, building connections between rural and urban practices.			
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	Greening farming activities and agri environmental performances This element focuses on the promotion of agri-enviromental practices in rural areas. It also addresses measuring agri-environmental performance using indicators for monitoring of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The objective is to understand the outcomes, opportunities, and limitations of agricultural activity in relation to societal ecosystem services that go beyond food provision.			
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Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Diversified economies** This element addresses the diversification of rural economies across sectors of agricutlure, industry and services.			
	Entrepreneurship and social economy This element promotes revitalising rural areas through cooperation, best practices, and knowledge exchange within the EU Single Market. Proposed actions include developing small and medim sized enterprises through clustering and networking, promoting social economy business models through the European Rural Action Plan, boosting retail and local supply chains by enhancing local producer interfaces and creating food hubs, and fostering innovation by education and empowerment of future entrepreneurs.			
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	Sustainable bioeconomy, including forestry in the framework of the EU Forest Strategy and the carbon farming initiative This element aims at promoting sustainable land and forest management practices and investments through the EU Forest Strategy, adopted in July 2021. This initiative aims to create job opportunities, support forest restoration, help farmers adapt to climate change, and protect forest crops from adverse weather events. Instruments of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will fund innovations in the rural bioeconomy, create new employment opportunities, protect biodiversity, and enhance ecosystem services.			

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Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy -** Examples are: i) EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funded initiatives targeting communities, e.g. the LEADER approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). ii) Smart Villages and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and the quality of local governance. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This element aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable the availability of housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			
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	Research and innovation This element aims to support the development of innovations by and for rural communities, along with training and knowledge exchange to accelerate their adoption.			

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	Increasing employment opportunities for young people, including in farming This element aims at addressing the needs of young people in rural and remote areas, with particular attention given to jobs and related opportunities.		
	Sustainable bioeconomy, including forestry in the framework of the EU Forest Strategy and the carbon farming initiative This element aims at promoting sustainable land and forest management practices and investments through the EU Forest Strategy, adopted in July 2021. This initiative aims to create job opportunities, support forest restoration, help farmers adapt to climate change, and protect forest crops from adverse weather events. Instruments of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will fund innovations in the rural bioeconomy, create new employment opportunities, protect biodiversity, and enhance ecosystem services.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		6. How will the effect on the element differ between different types of rural areas, and rural and urban areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	7. For this element, which actor(s) would be affected most by the initiative? (please elaborate on your answer)
Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Strengthening Producer's Organisations in rural development** This element aims at enhancing the fabric of rural society by fostering a sense of belonging and increasing social capital and trust within communities through the efforts of producer organisations. Such organisations can contribute to higher living standards in rural areas by securing jobs and livelihoods, both directly and indirectly through rural products and supply chains. Strengthening producer groups of geographical origins and indications (Protected Designations of Origin, PDOs; Protected Geographical Indications, PGIs; Geographical Indications, GIs). The aims of this element are to protect the names of specific products to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin as well as traditional know-how.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	9. if you wish to provide additional comments in relation to a specific sub-area of your Living Lab for which the response would strongly differ from the answer already provided, please use the cell below.
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy -** Examples are: i) EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funded initiatives targeting communities, e.g. the LEADER approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). ii) Smart Villages and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and the quality of local governance. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.		
	Rural revitalisation This element aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable the availability of housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.		
	Demographic trends This element explores how urbanisation, globalisation, digitalisation, and climate change influence demographic trends in rural areas, leading to outward or inward migration. It aims to support areas distinguished by characteristics of population growth or decline, highlighting socio-economic concerns and urbanisation pressures.		
	Research and innovation This element aims to support the development of innovations by and for rural communities, along with training and knowledge exchange to accelerate their adoption.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	9. if you wish to provide additional comments in relation to a specific sub-area of your Living Lab for which the response would strongly differ from the answer already provided, please use the cell below.
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Access to public and private services (including basic services)** This element focuses on improving the accessibility and affordability of public services, such as health, education, and transport, in rural areas, particularly for vulnerable groups. The aim is to ensure that these services are easily accessible and affordable for everyone, regardless of their location or socio-economic status.		
	Cultural attractiveness and heritage This element focuses on regional cultural assets such as architectural, military, and industrial heritage, with the aim of attracting tourism to rural areas. It includes the wider role of cultural attractiveness, which is manifested through rural-urban synergy.		
	Tourism (including infrastructure and creative tourism) This element assesses the quality and socio-economic impact of the infrastructure of rural recreation and tourism, emphasizing the growing importance of the creative sector. It highlights how immersive, culturally engaging experiences drive economic growth, innovation, and personalized tourism.		
	Education, training, youth, sport and volunteering in rural areas This element focuses on creating and enhancing opportnities for education, training and sport in rural areas, encouraging young people and volunteering. Examples of the element include, actions under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes (2021-2027) for boosting rural inclusion through financial support, targeted communications, accessible mobility, digital measures, and training. Initiatives under the EU and Council of Europe Youth Partnership's 2024-2025 plan which focuses on rural youth. Also included in this element are national, regional and local initiatives (i.e. not framed by EU schemes), targeting the topics of education, training, youth, sport and volunteering.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	9. if you wish to provide additional comments in relation to a specific sub-area of your Living Lab for which the response would strongly differ from the answer already provided, please use the cell below.
Connected Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to boost sustainable transport links and digitalisation through investments in infrastructure, technology development and skills enhancement activities	**Rural digital futures - human capital and community** This element integrates digital services into rural communities, evolving relationships between individuals and technology in diverse social contexts and life events. It also tackles digitialsation from a human prospective ("human capital"), boosting competencies needed for the digital transformation of rural areas, including digital skills and entrepreneurship.		
	Transport and mobility This element focuses on: - Improving transport infrastructure (e.g. on land, water, e-mobility, cycling paths) - Improving transport services - Rural mobility, including multi-modal digital mobility services and innovative transport solutions - Urban-rural linkages of all forms of mobility.		
	Commuting and Migration This element focuses on how commuting and migration can drive rural revitalization or lead to marginalization, and considers how they interact with education, skills, and rural-urban interactions.		
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Energy transition for rural communities and climate action** This element focuses on activities and initiatives related to energy communities, for example those involved in renovations and European Bauhaus projects, which are crucial for meeting renewable energy targets and decreasing dependence on gas, oil, and coal imports. They also play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.		
	Climate action in peatland through carbon farming This element focuses on the role of rural areas in fighting climate change and restoring biodiversity by enhancing ecosystem services. In this context, restoring wetlands and peatlands offers significant climate and ecological benefits. Supported by the Just Transition Fund and carbon farming initiatives, these efforts can provide additional income. At EU level, other initiatives and policies including the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, the proposed carbon removal certification, alongside CAP and LIFE programme support, will aid pilot projects in this sense.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	9. if you wish to provide additional comments in relation to a specific sub-area of your Living Lab for which the response would strongly differ from the answer already provided, please use the cell below.
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Soil health** The objective of this element is to implement innovative sustainable land management practices on the ground, contribute to the harmonisation of soil montirong across the EU, increase soil literacy and the general awareness of the importance of soils through communication and engagement activities. At an EU level, this element is reflected in the EU Mission "A soil deal for Europe" , which contributes to tackling soil challenges in rural areas, and in urban settings, building connections between rural and urban practices.		
	Land use linked to sustainable framing This element aims at the analysis of the main impacts of sectoral developments (agricultural, forestry, energy, protection of natural areas, protection of water, urban sprawl and infrastructure, climate action, mining, consumption patterns, etc.) on land use in the EU's rural areas. It will identify recommendations for optimal land use, in particular to promote sustainable farming in light of competing demands on land.		
	Greening farming activities and agri environmental performances This element focuses on the promotion of agri-enviromental practices in rural areas. It also addresses measuring agri-environmental performance using indicators for monitoring of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The objective is to understand the outcomes, opportunities, and limitations of agricultural activity in relation to societal ecosystem services that go beyond food provision.		
	Natural capital stocks This element focuses on rural areas as the locations of natural resources and ecosystem services. It acknowledges the variety of available resources and associated biophysical flows.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	9. if you wish to provide additional comments in relation to a specific sub-area of your Living Lab for which the response would strongly differ from the answer already provided, please use the cell below.
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Social inclusion - migrants, people with disabilities, minorities (e.g., seasonal workers), LGBTQ+** The objective of this element is to support minorities and promote the inclusion and integration of minorities in rural areas, fostering access to education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare, and effective access to heathy nutrition and adequate housing.		
	Social resilience and women in rural areas The objective of this element is to support women in entrepreneurship, decision-making, and investments in services that aid work-life balance, including early childhood education and care, and services for older people. Opportunities to increase women's participation in the labour market, particularly in agriculture, may arise under the Common Agricultural Policy or through schemes and support from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). The element also encompasses the availability, accessibility, and affordability of quality education and care services for children, older people, and persons with disabilities in rural areas. Special attention will be focused on people in vulnerable situations.		
	Ecosystem services provision This element examines the distribution of ecosystem services delivered in rural areas, taking into account variations in delivery patterns that impact rural-urban spatial planning strategies.		
	Circularity This element assesses the patterns of natural resource use, re-use in rural areas, with a focus on their spatial-temporal dynamics. It highlights the importance of adapting towards sustainability, using principles of a circular economy. Progress towards circularity can be achieved through agro-ecological or agro-industrial pathways, each reflecting different priorities and scales.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	9. if you wish to provide additional comments in relation to a specific sub-area of your Living Lab for which the response would strongly differ from the answer already provided, please use the cell below.
Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Diversified economies** This element addresses the diversification of rural economies across sectors of agricutlure, industry and services.		
	Entrepreneurship and social economy This element promotes revitalising rural areas through cooperation, best practices, and knowledge exchange within the EU Single Market. Proposed actions include developing small and medim sized enterprises through clustering and networking, promoting social economy business models through the European Rural Action Plan, boosting retail and local supply chains by enhancing local producer interfaces and creating food hubs, and fostering innovation by education and empowerment of future entrepreneurs.		
	Increasing employment opportunities for young people, including in farming This element aims at addressing the needs of young people in rural and remote areas, with particular attention given to jobs and related opportunities.		
	Sustainable bioeconomy, including forestry in the framework of the EU Forest Strategy and the carbon farming initiative This element aims at promoting sustainable land and forest management practices and investments through the EU Forest Strategy, adopted in July 2021. This initiative aims to create job opportunities, support forest restoration, help farmers adapt to climate change, and protect forest crops from adverse weather events. Instruments of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will fund innovations in the rural bioeconomy, create new employment opportunities, protect biodiversity, and enhance ecosystem services.		

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 3 - Identifying potental impact areas	
		8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rural areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	9. if you wish to provide additional comments in relation to a specific sub-area of your Living Lab for which the response would strongly differ from the answer already provided, please use the cell below.
Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Strengthening Producer's Organisations in rural development** This element aims at enhancing the fabric of rural society by fostering a sense of belonging and increasing social capital and trust within communities through the efforts of producer organisations. Such organisations can contribute to higher living standards in rural areas by securing jobs and livelihoods, both directly and indirectly through rural products and supply chains. Strengthening producer groups of geographical origins and indications (Protected Designations of Origin, PDOs; Protected Geographical Indications, PGIs; Geographical Indications, GIs). The aims of this element are to protect the names of specific products to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin as well as traditional know-how.		

Annex 2.4 – Step 4 of the GRANULAR rural proofing Framework

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing		
		Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy -** Examples are: i) EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funded initiatives targeting communities, e.g. the LEADER approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). ii) Smart Villages and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and the quality of local governance. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This element aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable the availability of housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			
	Demographic trends This element explores how urbanisation, globalisation, digitalisation, and climate change influence demographic trends in rural areas, leading to outward or inward migration. It aims to support areas distinguished by characteristics of population growth or decline, highlighting socio-economic concerns and urbanisation pressures.			
	Research and innovation This element aims to support the development of innovations by and for rural communities, along with training and knowledge exchange to accelerate their adoption.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Access to public and private services (including basic services)** This element focuses on improving the accessibility and affordability of public services, such as health, education, and transport, in rural areas, particularly for vulnerable groups. The aim is to ensure that these services are easily accessible and affordable for everyone, regardless of their location or socio-economic status.			
	Cultural attractiveness and heritage This element focuses on regional cultural assets such as architectural, military, and industrial heritage, with the aim of attracting tourism to rural areas. It includes the wider role of cultural attractiveness, which is manifested through rural-urban synergy.			
	Tourism (including infrastructure and creative tourism) This element assesses the quality and socio-economic impact of the infrastructure of rural recreation and tourism, emphasizing the growing importance of the creative sector. It highlights how immersive, culturally engaging experiences drive economic growth, innovation, and personalized tourism.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Education, training, youth, sport and volunteering in rural areas** This element focuses on creating and enhancing opportnities for education, training and sport in rural areas, encouraging young people and volunteering. Examples of the element include, actions under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes (2021-2027) for boosting rural inclusion through financial support, targeted communications, accessible mobility, digital measures, and training. Initiatives under the EU and Council of Europe Youth Partnership's 2024-2025 plan which focuses on rural youth. Also included in this element are national, regional and local initiatives (i.e. not framed by EU schemes), targeting the topics of education, training, youth, sport and volunteering.			
Connected Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to boost sustainable transport links and digitalisation through investments in infrastructure, technology development and skills enhancement activities	**Rural digital futures - human capital and community** This element integrates digital services into rural communities, evolving relationships between individuals and technology in diverse social contexts and life events. It also tackles digitialsation from a human prospective ("human capital"), boosting competencies needed for the digital transformation of rural areas, including digital skills and entrepreneurship.			
	Transport and mobility This element focuses on improving transport infrastructure (e.g. on land, water, e-mobility, cycling paths); improving transport services; rural mobility, including multi-modal digital mobility services and innovative transport solutions; and urban-rural linkages of all forms of mobility.			
	Commuting and Migration This element focuses on how commuting and migration can drive rural revitalization or lead to marginalization, and considers how they interact with education, skills, and rural-urban interactions.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Energy transition for rural communities and climate action** This element focuses on activities and initiatives related to energy communities, for example those involved in renovations and European Bauhaus projects, which are crucial for meeting renewable energy targets and decreasing dependence on gas, oil, and coal imports. They also play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.			
	Climate action in peatland through carbon farming This element focuses on the role of rural areas in fighting climate change and restoring biodiversity by enhancing ecosystem services. In this context, restoring wetlands and peatlands offers significant climate and ecological benefits. Supported by the Just Transition Fund and carbon farming initiatives, these efforts can provide additional income. At EU level, other initiatives and policies including the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, the proposed carbon removal certification, alongside CAP and LIFE programme support, will aid pilot projects in this sense.			
	Soil health The objective of this element is to implement innovative sustainable land management practices on the ground, contribute to the harmonisation of soil montirong across the EU, increase soil literacy and the general awareness of the importance of soils through communication and engagement activities. At an EU level, this element is reflected in the EU Mission "A soil deal for Europe" , which contributes to tackling soil challenges in rural areas, and in urban settings, building connections between rural and urban practices.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Land use linked to sustainable framing** This element aims at the analysis of the main impacts of sectoral developments (agricultural, forestry, energy, protection of natural areas, protection of water, urban sprawl and infrastructure, climate action, mining, consumption patterns, etc.) on land use in the EU's rural areas. It will identify recommendations for optimal land use, in particular to promote sustainable farming in light of competing demands on land.			
	Greening farming activities and agri environmental performances This element focuses on the promotion of agri-enviromental practices in rural areas. It also addresses measuring agri-environmental performance using indicators for monitoring of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The objective is to understand the outcomes, opportunities, and limitations of agricultural activity in relation to societal ecosystem services that go beyond food provision.			
	Natural capital stocks This element focuses on rural areas as the locations of natural resources and ecosystem services. It acknowledges the variety of available resources and associated biophysical flows.			
	Social inclusion - migrants, people with disabilities, minorities (e.g., seasonal workers), LGBTQ+ The objective of this element is to support minorities and promote the inclusion and integration of minorities in rural areas, fostering access to education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare, and effective access to heathy nutrition and adequate housing.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Social resilience and women in rural areas** The objective of this element is to support women in entrepreneurship, decision-making, and investments in services that aid work-life balance, including early childhood education and care, and services for older people. Opportunities to increase women's participation in the labour market, particularly in agriculture, may arise under the Common Agricultural Policy or through schemes and support from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). The element also encompasses the availability, accessibility, and affordability of quality education and care services for children, older people, and persons with disabilities in rural areas. Special attention will be focused on people in vulnerable situations.			
	Ecosystem services provision This element examines the distribution of ecosystem services delivered in rural areas, taking into account variations in delivery patterns that impact rural-urban spatial planning strategies.			
	Circularity This element assesses the patterns of natural resource use, re-use in rural areas, with a focus on their spatial-temporal dynamics. It highlights the importance of adapting towards sustainability, using principles of a circular economy. Progress towards circularity can be achieved through agro-ecological or agro-industrial pathways, each reflecting different priorities and scales.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Diversified economies** This element addresses the diversification of rural economies across sectors of agricutlure, industry and services.			
	Entrepreneurship and social economy This element promotes revitalising rural areas through cooperation, best practices, and knowledge exchange within the EU Single Market. Proposed actions include developing small and medim sized enterprises through clustering and networking, promoting social economy business models through the European Rural Action Plan, boosting retail and local supply chains by enhancing local producer interfaces and creating food hubs, and fostering innovation by education and empowerment of future entrepreneurs.			
	Increasing employment opportunities for young people, including in farming This element aims at addressing the needs of young people in rural and remote areas, with particular attention given to jobs and related opportunities.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.a Availability of indicators and data sources		
		10. Are there indicator(s) which can be used to monitor effects of the policy / initiative on this element? If so, state the indicator(s) and a hyperlink if available.	11. For each indicator, at what geographic level is it reported? [EU, national, local, state NUTS level]	12. For each indicator, provide the source of data or presentation of the indicator, including a weblink if available
Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Sustainable bioeconomy, including forestry in the framework of the EU Forest Strategy and the carbon farming initiative** This element aims at promoting sustainable land and forest management practices and investments through the EU Forest Strategy, adopted in July 2021. This initiative aims to create job opportunities, support forest restoration, help farmers adapt to climate change, and protect forest crops from adverse weather events. Instruments of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will fund innovations in the rural bioeconomy, create new employment opportunities, protect biodiversity, and enhance ecosystem services.			
	Strengthening Producer's Organisations in rural development This element aims at enhancing the fabric of rural society by fostering a sense of belonging and increasing social capital and trust within communities through the efforts of producer organisations. Such organisations can contribute to higher living standards in rural areas by securing jobs and livelihoods, both directly and indirectly through rural products and supply chains. Strengthening producer groups of geographical origins and indications (Protected Designations of Origin, PDOs; Protected Geographical Indications, PGIs; Geographical Indications, GIs). The aims of this element are to protect the names of specific products to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin as well as traditional know-how.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Participatory processes and democracy -** Examples are: i) EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funded initiatives targeting communities, e.g. the LEADER approach to create local strategies, expanded through Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). ii) Smart Villages and sustainable coastal communities initiatives, advising stakeholders on inclusive strategies and simpler delivery systems, and boosting social capital and the quality of local governance. Participatory process policies or initiatives can also originate from national or local sources.			
	Rural revitalisation This element aims at addressing the rejuvenation of rural areas to enhance their economic, social, and environmental vitality, recognising demographic challenges such as population decline and aging. Strategies include attracting young families with affordable the availability of housing and family-friendly amenities, encouraging return migration through incentives, and developing retirement communities with tailored services for older adults.			
	Demographic trends This element explores how urbanisation, globalisation, digitalisation, and climate change influence demographic trends in rural areas, leading to outward or inward migration. It aims to support areas distinguished by characteristics of population growth or decline, highlighting socio-economic concerns and urbanisation pressures.			
	Research and innovation This element aims to support the development of innovations by and for rural communities, along with training and knowledge exchange to accelerate their adoption.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Access to public and private services (including basic services)** This element focuses on improving the accessibility and affordability of public services, such as health, education, and transport, in rural areas, particularly for vulnerable groups. The aim is to ensure that these services are easily accessible and affordable for everyone, regardless of their location or socio-economic status.			
	Cultural attractiveness and heritage This element focuses on regional cultural assets such as architectural, military, and industrial heritage, with the aim of attracting tourism to rural areas. It includes the wider role of cultural attractiveness, which is manifested through rural-urban synergy.			
	Tourism (including infrastructure and creative tourism) This element assesses the quality and socio-economic impact of the infrastructure of rural recreation and tourism, emphasizing the growing importance of the creative sector. It highlights how immersive, culturally engaging experiences drive economic growth, innovation, and personalized tourism.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Stronger rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from support to empower communities and have access to services to facilitate social innovation, spatial planning and youth involvement.	**Education, training, youth, sport and volunteering in rural areas** This element focuses on creating and enhancing opportnities for education, training and sport in rural areas, encouraging young people and volunteering. Examples of the element include, actions under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes (2021-2027) for boosting rural inclusion through financial support, targeted communications, accessible mobility, digital measures, and training. Initiatives under the EU and Council of Europe Youth Partnership's 2024-2025 plan which focuses on rural youth. Also included in this element are national, regional and local initiatives (i.e. not framed by EU schemes), targeting the topics of education, training, youth, sport and volunteering.			
Connected Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to boost sustainable transport links and digitalisation through investments in infrastructure, technology development and skills enhancement activities	**Rural digital futures - human capital and community** This element integrates digital services into rural communities, evolving relationships between individuals and technology in diverse social contexts and life events. It also tackles digitialsation from a human prospective (“human capital”), boosting competencies needed for the digital transformation of rural areas, including digital skills and entrepreneurship.			
	Transport and mobility This element focuses on improving transport infrastructure (e.g. on land, water, e-mobility, cycling paths); improving transport services; rural mobility, including multi-modal digital mobility services and innovative transport solutions; and urban-rural linkages of all forms of mobility.			
	Commuting and Migration This element focuses on how commuting and migration can drive rural revitalization or lead to marginalization, and considers how they interact with education, skills, and rural-urban interactions.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Energy transition for rural communities and climate action** This element focuses on activities and initiatives related to energy communities, for example those involved in renovations and European Bauhaus projects, which are crucial for meeting renewable energy targets and decreasing dependence on gas, oil, and coal imports. They also play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.			
	Climate action in peatland through carbon farming This element focuses on the role of rural areas in fighting climate change and restoring biodiversity by enhancing ecosystem services. In this context, restoring wetlands and peatlands offers significant climate and ecological benefits. Supported by the Just Transition Fund and carbon farming initiatives, these efforts can provide additional income. At EU level, other initiatives and policies including the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, the proposed carbon removal certification, alongside CAP and LIFE programme support, will aid pilot projects in this sense.			
	Soil health The objective of this element is to implement innovative sustainable land management practices on the ground, contribute to the harmonisation of soil montirong across the EU, increase soil literacy and the general awareness of the importance of soils through communication and engagement activities. At an EU level, this element is reflected in the EU Mission "A soil deal for Europe" , which contributes to tackling soil challenges in rural areas, and in urban settings, building connections between rural and urban practices.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Land use linked to sustainable framing** This element aims at the analysis of the main impacts of sectoral developments (agricultural, forestry, energy, protection of natural areas, protection of water, urban sprawl and infrastructure, climate action, mining, consumption patterns, etc.) on land use in the EU's rural areas. It will identify recommendations for optimal land use, in particular to promote sustainable farming in light of competing demands on land.			
	Greening farming activities and agri environmental performances This element focuses on the promotion of agri-enviromental practices in rural areas. It also addresses measuring agri-environmental performance using indicators for monitoring of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). The objective is to understand the outcomes, opportunities, and limitations of agricultural activity in relation to societal ecosystem services that go beyond food provision.			
	Natural capital stocks This element focuses on rural areas as the locations of natural resources and ecosystem services. It acknowledges the variety of available resources and associated biophysical flows.			
	Social inclusion - migrants, people with disabilities, minorities (e.g., seasonal workers), LGBTQ+ The objective of this element is to support minorities and promote the inclusion and integration of minorities in rural areas, fostering access to education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day, healthcare, and effective access to heathy nutrition and adequate housing.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Resilient rural areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions to increase environmental, climatic and social resilience by storing carbon in peatland and wetlands, enhancing soil health and improving prospects for women and vulnerable groups.	**Social resilience and women in rural areas** The objective of this element is to support women in entrepreneurship, decision-making, and investments in services that aid work-life balance, including early childhood education and care, and services for older people. Opportunities to increase women's participation in the labour market, particularly in agriculture, may arise under the Common Agricultural Policy or through schemes and support from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). The element also encompasses the availability, accessibility, and affordability of quality education and care services for children, older people, and persons with disabilities in rural areas. Special attention will be focused on people in vulnerable situations.			
	Ecosystem services provision This element examines the distribution of ecosystem services delivered in rural areas, taking into account variations in delivery patterns that impact rural-urban spatial planning strategies.			
	Circularity This element assesses the patterns of natural resource use, re-use in rural areas, with a focus on their spatial-temporal dynamics. It highlights the importance of adapting towards sustainability, using principles of a circular economy. Progress towards circularity can be achieved through agro-ecological or agro-industrial pathways, each reflecting different priorities and scales.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Diversified economies** This element addresses the diversification of rural economies across sectors of agricutlure, industry and services.			
	Entrepreneurship and social economy This element promotes revitalising rural areas through cooperation, best practices, and knowledge exchange within the EU Single Market. Proposed actions include developing small and medim sized enterprises through clustering and networking, promoting social economy business models through the European Rural Action Plan, boosting retail and local supply chains by enhancing local producer interfaces and creating food hubs, and fostering innovation by education and empowerment of future entrepreneurs.			
	Increasing employment opportunities for young people, including in farming This element aims at addressing the needs of young people in rural and remote areas, with particular attention given to jobs and related opportunities.			

LTVRA Pillars	GRANULAR Rural Proofing framework elements (originated from the LTVRA Pillars and the GRANULAR Rural Compass)	Step 4 - Extended Rural Proofing Step 4.b - Assessment of the effects		
		13. If the indicator is reported, describe how the values of the indicator have changed over time (e.g. since implementation of the policy/measure)	14. Do you believe that the effects of the initiative have been reflected in the values of this indicator over time? [a strong impact; a moderate impact; a limited impact; no impact]	15. Please explain your answer to question in column R?
Prosperous Rural Areas Under this action area, rural areas benefit from actions supporting a social economy, addressing needs of young people, promoting a bioeconomy and supporting producer organisations and producer groups.	**Sustainable bioeconomy, including forestry in the framework of the EU Forest Strategy and the carbon farming initiative** This element aims at promoting sustainable land and forest management practices and investments through the EU Forest Strategy, adopted in July 2021. This initiative aims to create job opportunities, support forest restoration, help farmers adapt to climate change, and protect forest crops from adverse weather events. Instruments of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will fund innovations in the rural bioeconomy, create new employment opportunities, protect biodiversity, and enhance ecosystem services.			
	Strengthening Producer's Organisations in rural development This element aims at enhancing the fabric of rural society by fostering a sense of belonging and increasing social capital and trust within communities through the efforts of producer organisations. Such organisations can contribute to higher living standards in rural areas by securing jobs and livelihoods, both directly and indirectly through rural products and supply chains. Strengthening producer groups of geographical origins and indications (Protected Designations of Origin, PDOs; Protected Geographical Indications, PGIs; Geographical Indications, GIs). The aims of this element are to protect the names of specific products to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin as well as traditional know-how.			

Annex 3 – Guidelines for Engagement with Members in Living and Replication Labs

Engagement with members of your Living Labs and Replication Labs is crucial when performing the rural proofing exercise. They are at the core of the GRANULAR rural proofing methodology.

You can engage your members in different ways and at various stages of the rural proofing assessment, depending on their level of expertise and involvement, as well as the specific governance of your Living or Replication Lab. Initially, the Facilitator can complete steps in the MS Excel tool, such as **Step 2** (Summary of the Initiative). However, we recommend using a participatory approach for **Step 1** (Choice of the Initiative) and for **Step 3** (Standard rural proofing). In these steps, the Facilitator can pre-populate some parts of the Excel tool based on desk research and provide a list of indicators relevant to the combination of territory and policy being rural proofed.

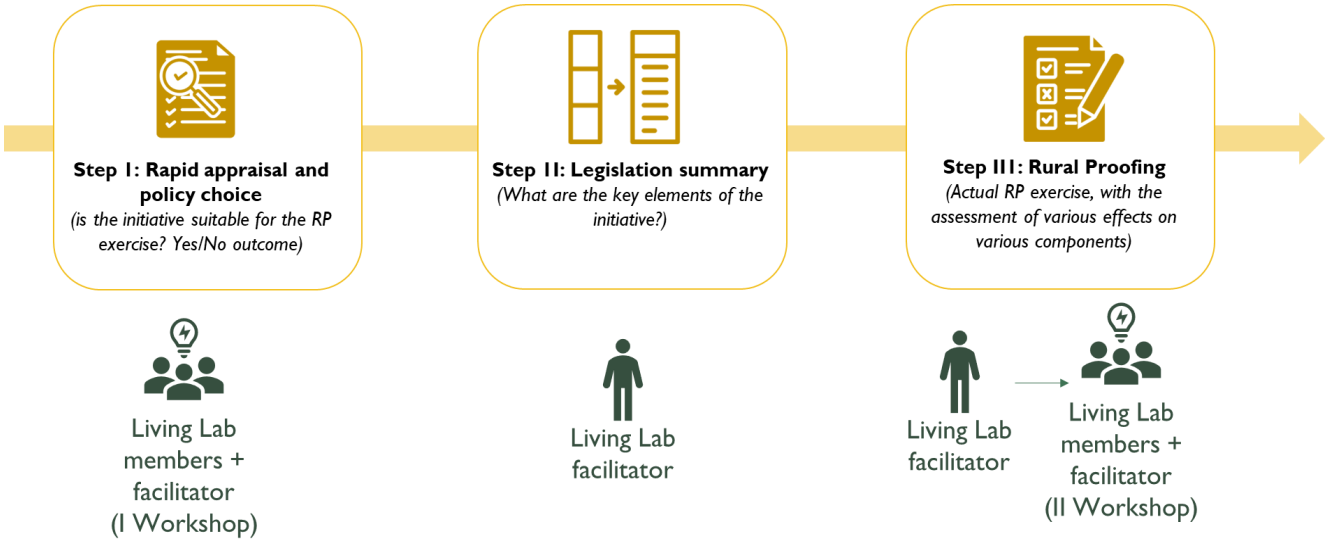
The Living and Replication Labs have the flexibility to organise interactions with their members in ways that best fits their needs and expectations, whether meeting remotely or in person. At the same time, we aim to strike a balance between freedom and guidance to ensure uniformity and comparability of the results. Therefore, suggestions follow on how to achieve the end goal of the process, using with necessary templates, guidelines, and instructions for Facilitators.

An introductory virtual session is planned before the launch of the exercise to take Facilitators through the different steps and tools. Certain segments of the methodology, particularly Step 2 and Step 4.a, are predominantly desk-based and require research into the elements of the policy/initiative.

We understand that these activities will be time and resource-consuming in a collaborative setting. Therefore, we suggest a combination of methods, with some work performed prior to workshops, such as pre-populating certain sections of the tool. This approach ensures that the time spent with members is used well. Additionally, you may wish to collect initial information through a short online survey, enabling members to provide comments and remarks on the final completed tools.

The infographic in Figure A3.1 illustrates one possible configuration of interaction with Living Lab members in the context of the Standard rural proofing (Steps 1 to 3).

Figure 23 - Possible configuration with members of a Living Lab to perform the Standard rural proofing



Source: Consortium

During the development of the GRANULAR methodology, five Living Labs tested the Standard rural proofing (i.e. Steps 1 to 3), providing feedback on the overall process, including on how and where they would involve their members. The key outputs of this exploratory survey are summarised in the box A3.1.

Box A3. 1 - How to engage with members of the Living and Replication Labs? Perspectives from the testing phase

Living Lab Facilitators reported the need to involve their members in the initial phase (Policy Choice and Pre-assessment, **Step 1**) and the actual rural proofing phase (**Step 3**). The Summary of the Initiative phase (**Step 2**) is less frequently targeted for member involvement.

Step 1: Engagement in this step was recommended by the majority of Living Labs. They recognised the importance of involving members early in the process to help choose and pre-assess policies, proposing organizing meetings to brainstorm the options, which provide opportunities for awareness-raising, group discussions, and initiative evaluation. They recommended conducting online surveys to gather opinions on policy options, to obtain wider participation. Living Labs proposed to provide training on rural proofing to local partners and engage in informal discussions to identify and evaluate the best initiatives.

Step 2: Only one Living Lab referred to the involvement of members in this step. However, discussing the elements of the initiative with the members can encourage a free exchange of opinions and comments, helping provide insights to the policy/initiative's potential impacts on the current situation or specific needs of an area, whether systemic or for a particular stakeholder group, thus laying the ground for subsequent steps.

Step 3: Engagement in this step was recommended by the majority of Living Labs. This reflects the importance placed on involving members during the actual rural proofing process**.** Such engagement is envisaged using in-person meetings, with online participation for broader inclusion. Some Labs intended to involve other actors to reflect on the results, whilst recognising uncertainty about the level of local interest.

Rural proofing Workshop Materials

There are a variety of resources available to assist you in engaging with your members and to plan and execute engagement activities in your Living or Replication Lab.

The H2020 Project SHERPA produced a series of information sheets on how to organize stakeholder engagement activities. They provide tips and tricks for effectively engaging with the members of the Labs, for example:

- How to run a focus group (link)
- How to engage in a future workshop (link)
- How to organize a scenario workshop (link)
- How to run a world cafe (link)

The website ActionCatalogue offers an easy to navigate tool that can assist in designing the interactions best suited for your Living or Replication Lab based on the size, format and desired outcome of your meeting.

To inspire you, the box below provides an indicative agenda, for a 3 hour workshop to perform Steps 3 and/or 4. Please adjust the format to suit your needs and expectations.

Box A3. 2 - Indicative agenda for a workshop for undertaking the GRANULAR rural proofing

Duration: c.3 hours
Participants: Members of Living Lab/Replication Lab
Objective: To complete entries in an Excel tool, reflecting on the impacts of a policy / initiative on four main areas based on the GRANULAR rural roofing Framework.

1. Welcome and Introduction (20 minutes)

- **Facilitator's Welcome** (5 minutes): Brief introduction and objectives of the focus group.

- **Ice Breaker Activity** (10 minutes): "Draw what rural proofing is for you!": Each member makes a simple drawing of what the term “rural proofing” means for them, followed by a short discussion led by the facilitators.
- **Participants Introductions** (5 minutes): Each participant briefly introduces themselves.

2. Overview and Collective Reflection on the Selected Initiative (30 minutes)

- **Presentation**: Facilitator presents the policy/initiative to be assessed, including background and relevance for the territory (10 minutes).
- **Interactive Exercise**: Facilitator leads a discussion on the initiative's relevance to the territory. Participants use sticky notes or a whiteboard to share their initial thoughts (20 minutes).

3. Introduction to the GRANULAR rural proofing Method (15 minutes)

- **Presentation**: Facilitator explains the GRANULAR rural proofing method, the four main pillars of the LTVRA, and their relevance in the context of the four pillars of the Long term Vision for Rural Areas (stronger, resilient, prosperous, connected rural areas).
- **Excel Tool Overview**: Walkthrough of the Excel tool to be completed.

4. Coffee Break (10 minutes)

5. Interactive Session on Impact Assessment (70 minutes)

- **Breakout Groups (35 minutes)**: Participants split into smaller groups to reflect on the potential impacts of the initiative on each of the four pillars of the LTVRA, and the suitability of these pillars for articulating impacts, . Each group focuses on Action Area, discussing its elements.
  - **Stronger Rural Areas**
  - **Resilient Rural Areas**
  - **Prosperous Rural Areas**
  - **Connected Rural Areas**
- **Group Presentations (35 minutes)**: Each group presents their findings and reflections to the whole group. Facilitator records key points on a shared document or board.

6. Collective Completion of the Excel Tool (40 minutes)

- **Guided Input**: Facilitator guides the participants through completing the Excel tool, ensuring all relevant impacts and reflections are captured.
- **Interactive Discussion**: Open opportunity for additional comments, ensuring comprehensive input from all participants.

7. Summary and Next Steps (20 minutes)

- **Summary**: Facilitator summarizes key points discussed and inputs added to the Excel tool.
- **Feedback**: Quick feedback round from participants on the session and any additional thoughts.
- **Next Steps**: Outline the next steps in the rural proofing process and how participants can stay involved.

8. Closing Remarks (10 minutes)

- **Thanks and Acknowledgements**: Facilitator thanks participants for their contributions.
- **Contact Information**: Provide contact details for any follow-up questions or input.

Annex 4 – Overview of rural proofing Methodologies

1. Data Collection and Analysis

Data-driven insights enable evidence-based decision-making, ensuring appropriate and responsive policies are developed and implemented for rural communities and areas (Shivashankar *et al.*, 2024). Data collection and analysis are foundational for rural proofing, providing a comprehensive understanding of rural contexts and part of the evidence base upon which interpretations of effects can be made and supported (Mantino *et al.*, 2023). This involves gathering datasets of relevance to the environmental, social and economic characteristics of the area of interest, which may include population demographics, employment, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and environmental factors. Surveys, interviews, and leveraging existing datasets are tools and strategies which can be used to collect and store data that might help identify weaknesses in provision of services or resources in rural areas (Hamilton, 2020; Taherdoost 2021).

Thorough data analysis can empower policy-makers to target specific gaps in policy or its impacts, enabling new forms of intervention (Simonofski *et al.,* 2021). However, the collection and analysis of extensive datasets requires significant resources, and caution is required not to introduce bias (e.g. data of an inappropriate spatial or temporal granularity to interpret with respect to impacts of policies or initiatives). Technological advances offer efficient and cost-effective data collection methods, which could foster innovative approaches to providing evidence for policy development. However, data privacy regulations may limit access to certain datasets. Stakeholder resistance to proposals or arguments about the interpretation of data can hinder evidence-based decision-making, and incomplete or outdated datasets may impede well-informed policy formulation (Janssen *et al.,* 2020).

2. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement, as a participatory approach, is often integrated with various methodologies, in ex-ante and ex-post assessments of policies, initiatives or measures (Barko *et al.,* 2022). Stakeholder involvement can be designed to provide a bottom-up approach to rural development, as per the Cork 2.0 Declaration (European Union, 2016). Stakeholders are expected to encompass representatives from a range of types of entities, including local governments, community organizations, business and agricultural associations, environmental groups, and social welfare organizations and researchers (Vitálišová *et al.,* 2021). Through consultations, workshops, and public hearings, engaging with these stakeholders becomes instrumental for policymakers to comprehend the distinctive challenges, aspirations, and priorities of rural areas (Chartier *et al*., 2023; Schwarz *et al*., 2022). This understanding facilitates the formulation of more inclusive and tailored policies (Jansen *et al.,* 2020; Trivelli *et al.,* 2021).

The involvement of stakeholders should introduce a diversity of perspectives, yielding insights into local needs and challenges. Engaging with local governments and public agencies should enhance policy alignment with their responsibilities in rural areas. Understanding challenges and the development of an evidence base for why they need to be tackled can empower policymakers, improving the prospects of successful policy implementation. However, stakeholder engagement demands significant time and resources, posing challenges in resource-constrained environments (Olofsson *et al.,* 2023). Continuous efforts are required to enhance the inclusivity of stakeholder engagement processes in policy development.

3. Regional Impact Assessments (RIAs)

Regional Impact Assessments (RIAs) are ex-ante methodologies for evaluating government decisions affecting regional services, and analysing social, economic, and environmental impacts on rural communities (Gaugitsch 2022). RIAs follow standardised guidelines, but their descriptive nature limits their objectivity, and the absence of quantitative evaluations can limit their evidence base. RIAs can be done through one or multiple methodologies as listed below (e.g., Territorial Impact Assessment, stakeholder engagement).

The outputs from RIAs provide a holistic view of impacts, however, the lack of standardisation leads to variability in assessments making it challenging to conclude consistently between different implementations. Addressing these limitations is crucial for refining the utility and reliability of RIAs in shaping government decisions impacting rural communities. To enhance objectivity, quantitative evaluations can be incorporated alongside the descriptive approach.

An example of an RIA is an application which was assessed by the Scottish Government, focusing on the health impact assessment of wind farms in the Highlands (Higgins *et al.,* 2015). Following multiple workshops involving local stakeholders, a comprehensive guideline was formulated. That guideline outlines a systematic approach encompassing five key steps:

- **Screening**: To determine the appropriateness of the assessment, evaluating whether it is warranted or not.
- **Scoping:** To establish the geographical, population, and time boundaries for the assessment, defining the scope of the study.
- **Setting up the Assessment Team**: To ensure that the inclusion of appropriate expertise and involving individuals with knowledge relevant to the sector is crucial in this phase.
- **Assessing Impacts**: To collate evidence from a diverse range of sources considered to be essential during the scoping process. This information is used to assess both the likelihood and severity of potential impacts.
- **Making Recommendations**: To utilise the findings gathered during the assessment, recommendations are formulated to propose changes to the policy proposal. These recommendations are designed to enhance the overall effectiveness of the proposed policy.
- By following these outlined steps, the guideline aimed to provide a structured and comprehensive framework for conducting health impact assessments of wind farms in the Highlands of Scotland, UK.

4. Territorial Impact Assessment (TIAs)

Territorial Impact Assessments (TIA) provide a systematic approach to examining territorially differentiated impacts of policies, providing valuable insights for policymakers by pinpointing specific regions or types of regions affected (Böhme *et al.,* 2020; Herbst *et al*., 2024). The neutrality of Territorial Impact assessment methodologies is emphasised, focusing on the assessment of impacts without passing judgment on the success of the policy as a whole. However, often some subjective judgements are required within impact assessments (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).

The approach supports both ex-ante and ex-post assessments for scrutinize the effects of policies and can be used for cross-border studies (Higgins *et al.,* 2015). It facilitates the organisation and understanding of these impacts, thereby simplifying the process of developing recommendations for policy adjustments based on the analysis results.

The results from Territorial Impact Assessments can provide policy makers with a guide of what to adapt in policies to reduce adverse regional impacts such as achieving more equitable policy outcomes. The effectiveness of Territorial Impact Assessments is heavily influenced by the quality and quantity of the data available and used (ESPON, 2013). Policies with intricate structures may present challenges for such assessments, making it more difficult to assess and recommend adjustments. Nonetheless, by offering a clear understanding of territorial impacts, Territorial Impact Assessments can contribute to more informed and effective policy making.

The European Commission's Better Regulation Toolbox, Tool #34, titled "Territorial Impacts" (European Commission, 2023a) makes reference to rural proofing, but does not categorize it as a standalone TIA. The Better Regulation Toolbox explicitly mentions three TIA methodologies (TIA Quick Check, Dallhammer *et al*., 2011; RHOMOLO, Crucitti *et al*., 2022; and LUISA, Jacobs-Crisioni *et al*., 2017). The toolbox also

incorporates other methodologies widely cited in academic literature and deemed potentially suitable for rural proofing, namely EATIA, TARGET TIA, and Territorial Foresight methodologies (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).

4.1 Territorial Impact Assessment - ESPON TIA Quick Check

The ESPON TIA Quick Check methodology is an interactive web application (ESPON TIA Tool) that can be used to support policymakers and practitioners in identifying potential ex-ante territorial impacts of new EU legislation, policies and directives. Its approach combines a workshop setting for identifying systemic relations between a policy and its territorial consequences, with quantitative data from statistical sources in a set of indicators describing the sensitivity of European regions (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022).

The ESPON TIA Quick Check utilizes a hybrid approach, providing a comprehensive analysis of potential territorial impacts. The methodology, grounded in quantitative data for territorial sensitivity, provides a foundation and evidence to support the assessment. Assessments enable the comparison of impacts on rural and urban regions or between different rural regions. The approach is recognised by its inclusion in the EU Better Regulation Toolbox as a territorial impact assessment methodology for EU policy processes (European Commission, 2023a). In 2002, the ESPON European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) project was commissioned to provide support for European-level institutions with the implementation of Territorial Impact Assessments through training, webinars, and application support, enhancing accessibility and usability. A demonstration of its use is accessible online, here.

Its use with quantitative data may pose challenges, especially if there are limitations in data availability or quality which, in turn, affect the accuracy and reliability of the results. The online implementation of the tool is at a spatial resolution of NUTS 3. Although indicators can be tailored towards different effects, the lack of spatial granularity may limit understanding of the impacts of a policy/initiative on the economy, environment, society, and governance.

The method can be used to focus on rural regions, however it has not been used in rural proofing. Its use in rural proofing was a topic in a workshop on the legislative framework law for sustainable food systems in Brussels, Belgium, in June 2023. Recommendations were that its integration with other tools or methodologies could broaden the scope and capabilities of the ESPON TIA Quick Check, making it more versatile in addressing diverse territorial impacts.

4.2 Territorial Impact Assessment - RHOMOLO

The Regional Holistic Model (RHOMOLO) is a Spatial Computable General Equilibrium Model for the assessment of cohesion policy on regional level. The method allows for both ex-ante as well as ex-post assessments (Crucitti *et al*., 2022; Lecca *et al*., 2018).

RHOMOLO is a well-establish method, designed for the assessment of cohesion policy at a regional level, with modules which can be extended to accommodate broader policy assessments in fields beyond economic impacts. The RHOMOLO Webtool provides users with access to the model, promoting transparency and user engagement.

RHOMOLO's results are calculated at NUTS2 level meaning that the distinction between rural and non-rural areas within NUTS2 regions poses a challenge in addressing policy needs specifically for rural areas. While the methodological approach is transferable to more detailed geographical levels, the process requires substantial effort to calculate and construct underlying matrices. This may pose a barrier to its practical application in certain contexts. Application of the model to concrete policies requires expert knowledge, potentially limiting its accessibility and usability by individuals without specialized expertise in the field.

A combination of the RHOMOLO and LUISA (see section 4.3) models offers an opportunity to enhance the assessment capabilities, potentially addressing limitations related to geographical granularity and rural proofing. RHOMOLO's recognition by the European Commission Regulatory Scrutiny Board positions it well for conducting impact assessments of EU policies within its ordinary legislative procedure.

Further details are available at: model RHOMOLO - Regional Holistic Model | Modelling Inventory and Knowledge Management System of the European Commission (MIDAS) (europa.eu).

4.3 Territorial Impact Assessment - LUISA

The Land Use Integrated Sustainability Assessment (LUISA) is a "Territorial Modelling Platform". At its core, it is a cross-sectoral model for projecting "land functions" in a grid-based (e.g. 1km x 1km, 100m x 100m) approach to modelling the change in land function for each grid cell over time based upon inputs from several external models/sources. However, reliance on inputs from external models/sources could be a vulnerability with changes or limitations in such models impacting upon the accuracy and reliability of LUISA's projections (Jacobs-Crisioni *et al*., 2017).

The platform is flexible, allowing the integration of various modules to tailor the analysis to specific needs, enhancing its applicability across different scenarios and policy contexts. The model is primarily used for ex-ante assessments. It has been applied at several stages of the policy process and is not linked to a specific phase. It is included in the European Union Better Regulation Toolbox (European Commission, 2023a), with a track record of use and acknowledgement from regulatory frameworks.

The effective application of LUISA to specific policies requires the inputs of expert knowledge. The need for such knowledge presents an opportunity for collaboration with domain experts. Partnering with experts in various fields can enhance the platform's usability and broaden its application to different policy domains. However, a lack of access to such knowledge could be a barrier for simple impact assessments. The complexity of the modelling platform may also make it challenging for users unfamiliar with its intricacies. This could potentially limit its widespread adoption and usage (Crucitti *et al*., 2022).

As a dynamic platform, LUISA has the opportunity for continuous improvement based on feedback and emerging methodologies. Regular updates and enhancements can keep the platform relevant and effective. Despite being recognized by the European Union Better Regulation Toolbox, limitation to accessibility or usability could hinder its widespread adoption. Addressing this limitation and making the platform more user-friendly might be essential for broader acceptance.

Further details are accessible at: model LUISA - Land Use Integrated Sustainability Assessment | Modelling Inventory and Knowledge Management System of the European Commission (MIDAS) (europa.eu).

4.4 Territorial Impact Assessment - EATIA

The ESPON and Territorial Impact Assessment (EATIA) is a methodology developed within ESPON (Gaugitsch *et al.,* 2022). It consists of an "impact assessment matrix" which is populated by a team of assessors bringing together expert knowledge gathered through workshops and other forms of consultation. As such, it relies upon the involvement of decision-makers alongside stakeholders and experts from policy, practice and research (Marot *et al.,* 2021). The method can be used in ex-ante as well as ex-post assessments. The flexible nature offered by qualitative assessments is well suited for use in ex-ante assessments, which can also aid understanding of impacts, especially in where quantitative data is scarce.

EATIA can be customized to different circumstances and utilized at different levels of governance (European, national, sub-national), and can be used to consider a broad range of topics or to focus on specific areas of interest, such as rural areas. Its initial steps enable the definition of region types, making it adaptable for rural proofing without significant modifications.

The original methodology defines only 2 positive and 2 negative impact classes This could be a weakness of the approach, particularly if a greater level of granularity of impact classes would be appropriate for making the assessment. This could result in oversimplification of impacts and the omission of observations on particular thematic or geographic details.

Numerous consultations may be required, especially when addressing a broad range of topics within a proofing exercise. Over-dependence on consultations may be a weakness if not managed properly, and the disproportionate influence of individual experts could introduce bias.

EATIA has not been widely applied outside the ESPON programme so there is a risk of the lack of external validation, and some uncertainty as to its effectiveness in different contexts.

Further details are accessible in Gaugitsch *et al*. (2022).

4.5 Territorial Impact Assessment - TARGET TIA

The Territorial Impact Assessment TARGET method enables impacts to be determined along predefined dimensions (socioeconomic, environmental, sustainability, governance/cooperation and polycentric). Both ex-ante and ex-post assessments are possible. For ex-ante assessments, the approach is based upon qualitative expert judgement, and for ex-post assessments the approach can be hybrid using qualitative and quantitative data.

The methodology can be adapted or extended to align more closely with the objectives of specific policy initiatives, potentially increasing its acceptance and applicability in diverse regulatory environments. It has been successfully applied in both academic settings and practical scenarios, demonstrating its versatility and real-world relevance. The methodology also provides flexibility in both data collection and territorial level of uses, making it adaptable to different contexts, and creates opportunities for its expansion into new thematic fields that may not be well-supported by other methodologies. This flexibility is particularly valuable when dealing with thematic fields that may lack robust data or could enhance its relevance in emerging policy areas with limited supporting quantitative data (Gaugitsch *et al*., 2022).

The approach is suitable for assessing impacts on specific regions, making it particularly useful for evaluating rural regions in comparison with others. This specificity can lead to targeted interventions and policy adjustments tailored to the unique characteristics of a region.

However, the TARGET TIA is not included in the EU Better Regulation Guidelines (European Commission, 2023a) as one of the standard methodologies of territorial impact assessments. This lack of official recognition may hinder its acceptance and adoption in certain policy and regulatory contexts.

Assessments at a broader scale, involving multiple regions, may require substantial resources and may not be feasible due to the method's resource-intensive nature. This limitation could impede its applicability in large-scale policy assessments and hinder its adoption in policy contexts where a more tailored approach is preferred.

The fixed dimensions of the original methodology are tailored towards cohesion policy, which may not align perfectly with the objectives of specific rural proofing exercises. This could limit its relevance and effectiveness in certain policy contexts.

5. Territorial Foresight

The Territorial Foresight methodology combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, and foresight with elements of territorial impact assessments, designed for ex-ante uses. It provides a flexible tool for developing different possible futures and can be used for assessing the impacts a policy may have on different territories (Gusmanov *et al.,* 2020). The method builds on participatory and co-creation approaches, in combination with thorough desk research and mapping, for identifying territorial implications.

The Territorial Foresight method is divided into 4 steps:

1. Defining the research “what if” question;
2. A thorough desk study and background research;
3. Running participatory processes, i.e., involving experts and stakeholders in well-structured participatory processes, to trigger lateral, out-of-the-box thinking;
4. Post-processing of materials, i.e., developing a combined representation of Steps 1 to 3, and bringing them together into a coherent story.

The method provides an opportunity to design more robust and sound policies by incorporating diverse perspectives and considering various future scenarios. It has not been extensively used for rural proofing which may pose challenges in adapting it to specific rural contexts. However, by addressing future scenarios and impacts, the method enables proactive policy planning, contributing to better anticipation and preparedness by relevant authorities.

Territorial foresight aims to deal with the highly complex and uncertain nature of consideration of futures by incorporating co-creation approaches. It seeks to encourage new thinking in policy-making, ensuring adaptability to evolving circumstances. The inclusion of cross-policy impact analysis aims to ensure a comprehensive understanding of potential consequences, preventing unintended side effects (Lestrelin *et al.,* 2017).

The method makes use of available and accurate of data for the desk study, thus data limitations may compromise the quality of the foresight analysis. There is also a risk of over-emphasizing future scenarios at the expense of present needs, potentially neglecting immediate concerns in favour of long-term considerations.

The participatory process enhances stakeholder engagement (e.g. workshops, surveys), fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration in the policy-making process. However, such mechanisms can be resource-intensive and may require substantial time and effort. Achieving alignment of opinions amongst diverse stakeholders with varying interests and perspectives can be challenging, reinforcing the importance of the quality of the participatory approach Thus good quality facilitation is required to reduce risks of subjectivity in scenario development, potentially leading to biased or skewed outcomes.

The analysis of possible cross-policy impacts enables the identification of synergies or conflicts between policies, an outcome of which is expected to be more coherent and effective governance. However, there is a risk that stakeholders resist the adoption of a foresight method, especially if it challenges existing practices or requires a significant shift in policy development approaches (Amini *et al.,* 2019).

6. Policy Coherence and Mainstreaming

To ensure rural mainstreaming and policy coherence across rural areas and topics, requires rural perspectives to be brought into the formulation and execution of policies such as agriculture, rural development, transportation, environment, education, and social welfare. To be effective in understanding the aims and impacts of policies necessitates coordination and collaboration between ministries, agencies and stakeholders. The goal is to guarantee that rural considerations are consistently woven throughout the policy cycle, preventing inadvertent adverse effects on rural communities and areas, safeguarding their interests and well-being.

Ensuring policy coherence and mainstreaming may require significant resources, both in terms of time and finances, which could be a constraint. However, the incorporation of rural perspectives into policies provides an opportunity to catalyse sustainable rural development, addressing specific needs and fostering economic and social progress. Without careful implementation, there is a risk of policies becoming fragmented or disjointed, especially if different sectors prioritize conflicting objectives.

7. Checklist

A rural proofing checklist is an ex-post screening tool which can be used to help policymakers consider whether a policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas compared to urban areas (Delgado-Viñas *et al.*, 2022). The policy challenges that rural areas present are diverse and the checklist approach requires to be tailored to ensure relevance to particular circumstances or thematic focus (Defra, 2022; Hall and Gibson, 2016; Mantino *et al*., 2023). The approach can be used to complement consultations with rural communities, businesses or organisations, for gathering evidence, or sharing findings.

The checklist methodology has been used in a range of countries and contexts, examples of which follow:

- Canada, The Rural Lens, 2016
- New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries
- United Kingdom
    - The Countryside Agency (England), 2002
    - rural proofing and the Rural Champion (Northern Ireland), 2009

- Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (England), 2022
- Welsh Government, 2015.

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Annex 5 – Quickstart to GRANULAR Rural Proofing

What is rural proofing in GRANULAR?

In GRANULAR, Rural proofing is reviewing policies and initiatives through a rural lens, considering their potential impacts and implications on characteristics of rural areas described by the pillars of the European Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and the GRANULAR Rural Compass.

The intended outcome- Ensuring fair and equitable policy outcomes for rural areas

The outputs from the rural proofing process are:

- Empirical evidence of implications of policies on and within rural areas
- Insights to types of impacts, extent to which they are positive or negative on or within rural areas
- Insights to coherence or incoherence of policies on rural areas
- Information on indicators to monitor progress towards achieving policy aims

Rural proofers -

- Governance level – Organisation(s) with remits and resources for participation, with thematic or territorial remits
- Geographic level – Territorially focused with representation at multiple levels of geographic relevance (e.g. national, regional, place specific)
- Who – Collaboration between actors from communities of interest and of place, from public, private and voluntary sectors and research
- When – If the plan is to design tailored policies then early in the process of preparation of policy or initiative, but can also be ex-post

The GRANULAR approach is in 4 steps (Figure 1) -

1. Select a policy or initiative of interest (local, regional, national, EU)
2. Summarise its key components
3. Assess the type, direction and magnitude of potential impacts (direct or indirect)
4. Identify (and use) indicators and data to inform assessments and interpretation of potential impacts

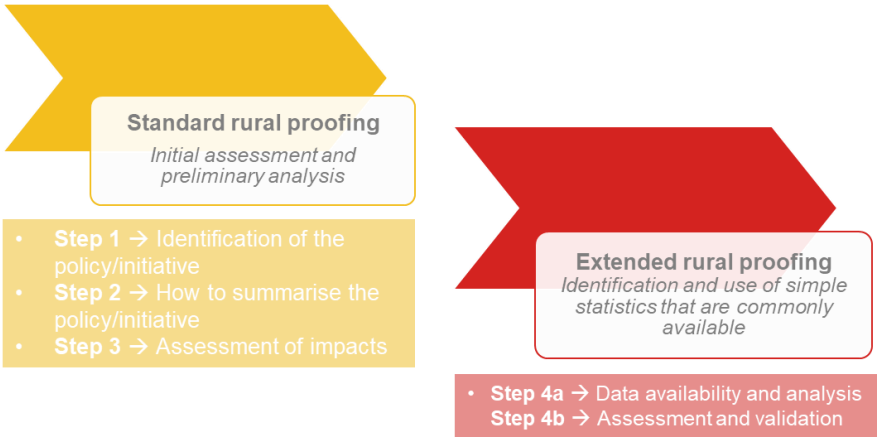
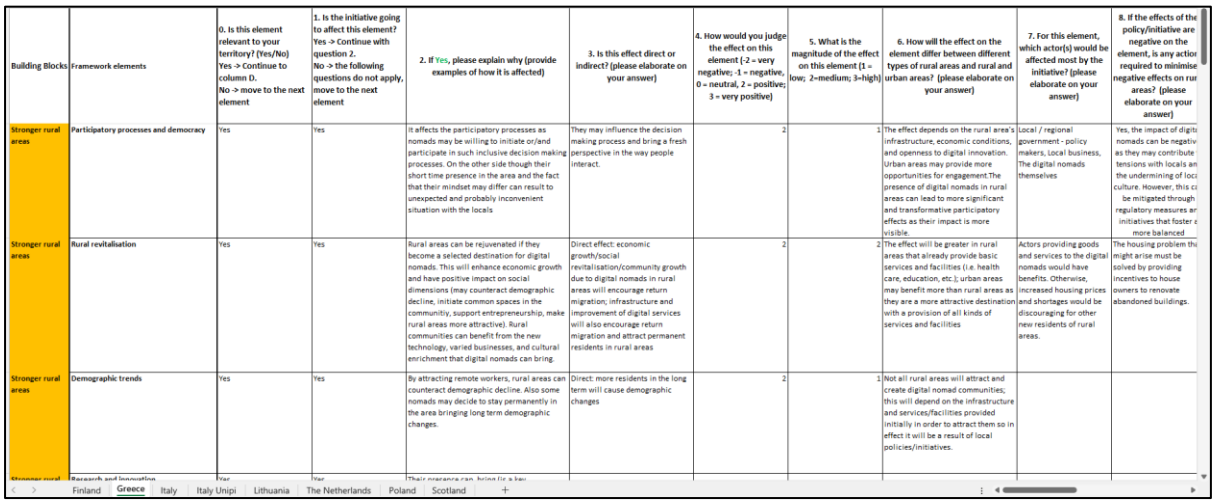


Figure 1. Overview of the GRANULAR rural proof methodology.

Assessment documentation –

The rural proofing assessments are compiled into knowledge accounts in the form of MS Excel spreadsheets (Figure 2). These are accompanied by narratives of the rural proofing assessments with respect to each action area of the LTVRA.



Building Blocks	Framework elements	0. Is this element relevant to your territory? (Yes/No) Yes -> Continue to column D. No -> move to the next element	1. Is the initiative going to affect this element? Yes -> Continue with question 2. No -> the following questions do not apply, move to the next element	2. If Yes, please explain why (provide examples of how it is affected)	3. Is this effect direct or indirect? (please elaborate on your answer)	4. How would you judge the effect on this element (-2 = very negative; -1 = negative, 0 = neutral, 2 = positive; 3 = very positive)	5. What is the magnitude of the effect on this element (1 = low; 2=medium; 3=high)	6. How will the effect on the element differ between different types of rural areas and rural and urban areas? (please elaborate on your answer)	7. For this element, which actor(s) would be affected most by the initiative? (please elaborate on your answer)	8. If the effects of the policy/initiative are negative on the element, is any action required to minimise negative effects on rur areas? (please elaborate on your answer)
Stronger rural areas	Participatory processes and democracy	Yes	Yes	It affects the participatory processes as nomads may be willing to initiate or/and participate in such inclusive decision making processes. On the other side though their short time presence in the area and the fact that their mindset may differ can result to unexpected and probably inconvenient situation with the locals	They may influence the decision making process and bring a fresh perspective in the way people interact.	2	1	The effect depends on the rural area's infrastructure, economic conditions, and openness to digital innovation. Urban areas may provide more opportunities for engagement.The presence of digital nomads in rural areas can lead to more significant and transformative participatory effects as their impact is more visible.	Local / regional government - policy makers, Local business, The digital nomads themselves	Yes, the impact of digiti nomads can be negativ as they may contribute tensions with locals an the undermining of loc culture. However, this c be mitigated through regulatory measures ar initiatives that foster a more balanced
Stronger rural areas	Rural revitalisation	Yes	Yes	Rural areas can be rejuvenated if they become a selected destination for digital nomads. This will enhance economic growth and have positive impact on social dimensions (may counteract demographic decline, initiate common spaces in the communitiy, support entrepreneurship, make rural areas more attractive). Rural communities can benefit from the new technology, varied businesses, and cultural enrichment that digital nomads can bring.	Direct effect: economic growth/social revitalisation/community growth due to digital nomads in rural areas will encourage return migration; infrastructure and improvement of digital services will also encourage return migration and attract permanent residents in rural areas	2	2	The effect will be greater in rural areas that already provide basic services and facilities (i.e. health care, education, etc.); urban areas may benefit more than rural areas as they are a more attractive destination with a provision of all kinds of services and facilities	Actors providing goods and services to the digital nomads would have benefits. Otherwise, increased housing prices and shortages would be discouraging for other new residents of rural areas.	The housing problem th might arise must be solved by providing incentives to house owners to renovate abandoned buildings.
Stronger rural areas	Demographic trends	Yes	Yes	By attracting remote workers, rural areas can counteract demographic decline. Also some nomads may decide to stay permanently in the area bringing long term demographic changes.	Direct: more residents in the long term will cause demographic changes	2	1	Not all rural areas will attract and create digital nomad communities; this will depend on the infrastructure and services/facilities provided initially in order to attract them so in effect it will be a result of local policies/initiatives.		

Finland | Greece | Italy | Italy Unipi | Lithuania | The Netherlands | Poland | Scotland

Figure 2. Example of a rural proofing knowledge account.

Reporting –

The narratives are presented in fiches as a summary of the findings for dissemination and exploitation (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Fiche of rural proofing of a selected policy, summarised by the four action areas of the European Long Term Vision for Rural Areas.