



# Building inclusive territories: refugee and migrant integration for rural revitalisation

April 2022

In this Share policy brief, we explore integration and inclusion for newcomers in rural communities across the EU.

We propose a vision for an **Inclusive Territories approach** to guide the participation of rural territories and communities as integration actors and make recommendations for the implementation of EU policy regarding refugee and migrant integration, rural development, and revitalisation.

This Share policy brief:

- Reflects the discussions, reflections, tools, and resources shared at the *2021 Share SIRA Expert Group on Orientation and Integration in Rural Areas* on “Inclusive rural territories for integration: Building back better for refugee & migrant integration in rural areas across the EU”;
- Incorporates the insights gained via additional Share research and exchange during 2021-2022;
- Builds on the momentum of new policy developments during 2021, notably the [Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas](#) and [EU Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion](#).

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## What is the Share Network?

At [Share](#), we focus on connecting and engaging with local European actors and communities working or interested in refugee and migrant inclusion, refugee resettlement, complementary pathways of admission, refugee sponsorship and relocation.

Established in March 2012 by ICMC Europe, Share supports regions, cities, towns, and rural communities interested in welcoming refugees and migrants. We collaborate with these communities, offering training and capacity-building focused on smaller communities and rural territories.

Over the years, our work has expanded to include approaches that benefit all newcomers, including refugees, asylum seekers, labour migrants, unaccompanied minors, and victims of trafficking.

We also engage with a wide range of stakeholders at the European, national, and local levels, including refugee and migrants and their associations, to coordinate best practice exchange, conduct research, and amplify the voices of local actors and communities. Our work thus provides a solid evidence base for integration practice and outcomes at a local level.

## Inclusive territories in action

The EU's rural and smaller communities have in recent years emerged as important partners and actors in the integration and resettlement of refugees and migrants. Rural communities and territories have become testing grounds for new practices and approaches for refugee and migrant integration and inclusion.

At local and territorial (provincial, regional, sub-regional) level in the EU, there are many examples of effective rural cooperation and partnership for integration, often involving actors with little or no experience of receiving and supporting refugees and migrants.

They demonstrate how many EU rural communities are mobilising resources and capacities in support of **an inclusive territories approach** for early settlement and integration, developing place-based solutions and multistakeholder partnerships for integration that best suit their specific territories. Their actions are actively contributing to the overall EU policy aim of rural revitalisation, or the long-term positive transformation of rural areas and communities across sectors and outcomes.

At the same time, both integration and the future development of rural territories are the focus of several major new EU policy initiatives launched in 2020-2021 and supported by the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027.

Although much of this new policy context is positive, it does not in our view fully explore the potentially positive synergies between the inclusion of newcomers and rural revitalisation.

It is now crucial that implementation builds on the political momentum for integration and rural revitalisation and supports actions that address shared challenges and opportunities.

**At Share, we look forward to contributing the experience and expertise of our network to the implementation of EU policies for integration and rural revitalisation at all levels in the coming years. We offer this policy brief as 'food for thought' at the start of this process.**

## Rural areas in the EU

The EU's rural areas cover over 80% of its territory and are home to 137 million people (30% of the total EU population)<sup>1</sup>.

They are very diverse, and include inland regions, mountain areas, islands, and coastal areas more than half of which are classified as "remote"<sup>2</sup>. Agricultural land, forests, and natural areas account for 90% of the territory of rural areas. While agriculture is the dominant land use in rural areas close to a city (52.5%), most territory in remote rural areas remains made up of forest and natural areas (53.6%)<sup>3</sup>.

By contrast, some smaller towns and rural territories are integrated into wider urban and metropolitan fabrics. These places are located close to urban centres and are linked to them in several important ways, for example as suburban places of residence for those working in urban centres or as partners in regional development actions and initiatives, then benefiting from the resources and expertise present in urban centres<sup>4</sup>. Rural-urban cooperations offer important opportunities for collaboration and partnership in areas such as mainstream service provision (education, social

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration & Demography (2021) [Atlas of Demography online tool](#).

<sup>2</sup> European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration & Demography (2021), *ibid*.

Remote' rural areas and regions are those in which the majority of the population live more than a 45-minute drive by car from the nearest city (European Commission (2020) [Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#)).

<sup>3</sup> ESPON 2020 Programme (2021) [Shrinking rural regions in Europe: Towards smart and innovative approaches to regional development challenges in depopulating rural regions](#).

<sup>4</sup> Tardis, M (2019) [Another Story from the Refugee Crisis: Resettlement in Small Towns and Urban Areas in France](#).

services), public transport, environmental and climate-related measures and joint access and management of EU and other funding streams<sup>5</sup>.

Despite this diversity, rural territories across the EU share a number of common challenges, including:

- Declining and ageing populations;
- Limited opportunities for stable employment, in particular for young people;
- Lack of digital connectivity;
- Poor transport connections;
- Challenges for rural populations to access services (such as education, healthcare, leisure, banking, and deliveries)<sup>6</sup>.

The extent and nature of these challenges differ across rural regions and territories depending on their specific context and circumstances. Some are impacted more severely than others.

Demographic change in Europe is increasingly becoming a major policy challenge and a major driver shaping the future development of rural territories. By 2050, the population of predominantly rural regions is projected to fall by 7.9 million (against an increase of 24.1 million persons living in urban centres)<sup>7</sup>. Declining populations have become the normal trajectory for many rural territories, driven by the restructuring of agricultural industries and concentration of employment opportunities in urban centres<sup>8</sup>. The impact is most keenly felt in more remote and sparsely populated rural territories, where rapid population decline has immediate and tangible present-day consequences.

At the same time COVID-19 has vastly expanded online and remote working and created a renewed interest in rural areas as places of wellbeing, security, and sustainable living<sup>9</sup>. This interest is likely to grow as these new ways of working become normalised and institutionalised in many EU employment sectors. COVID-19 has also prompted new interest in sustainable tourism<sup>10</sup>, providing opportunities for economic diversification in rural areas going forward. Sustainable tourism could be a particularly important driver of economic revival in more remote rural areas, especially those with territories consisting mainly of areas of natural interest such as forests, mountains, or wetlands.

The reflections and priorities of EU rural populations show some differences for communities in remote rural territories. While EU rural populations in general report feeling close to others in the place where they live, the share of people in more remote rural areas who feel “a sense of belonging” has sharply decreased in recent years (from 36% in 2011 to 27% in 2016)<sup>11</sup>. While 29% of people living across all EU rural territories in 2020 reported feeling “left behind by society”, this share rose to 58% for remote rural territories<sup>12</sup>.

EU rural populations share several common priorities for the future development of their communities and territories. These include expanded measures to empower community involvement in policymaking, improved local access to EU funding, and better targeting of policies to the specific needs of individual territories. Their priorities for boosting the attractiveness of rural areas in the future show a strong focus on building up sustainable agriculture and environmental protection, resourcing rural social innovation, improving digital connectivity, and developing e-services (particularly for health and education)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Vihinen, Kull & Ovaska (2021) [Governance Arrangements for Rural-Urban Synergies: Synthesis Report 5, ROBUST project](#).

<sup>6</sup> Szabo, M., European Commission Directorate General for Agriculture & Rural Development (2020) Share Expert Group presentation: [EU Vision for Rural Areas](#).

<sup>7</sup> ESPON 2020 Programme (2021) [Shrinking rural regions in Europe: Towards smart and innovative approaches to regional development challenges in depopulating rural regions](#).

<sup>8</sup> ESPON 2020 Programme (2021), *ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission (2021) [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040](#).

<sup>10</sup> Joint Research Centre (2020) [Behavioural changes in tourism in times of COVID-19: Employment scenarios and policy options](#).

<sup>11</sup> Joint Research Centre (2021) [Scenarios for EU Rural Areas 2040: Contribution to the European Commission's Long-Term vision for rural areas](#).

<sup>12</sup> Szabo (2020), *ibid*.

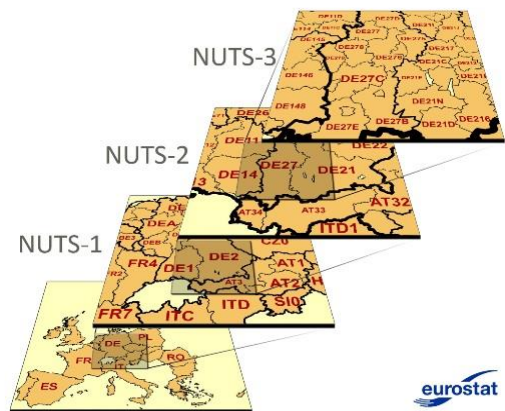
<sup>13</sup> See Szabo (2020) for a presentation of selected results of the European Commission's [2020 public consultation on the future of rural areas](#).

## Understanding EU regions.

### NUT classification

The EU classifies European regions into three types:

- **NUT 1** (major socioeconomic regions, 104 regions)
- **NUT 2** (larger regions, 283 regions.)
- **NUT 3** (provinces of 3-4m population, 1,166 regions)



Source: Eurostat (2020), *Statistical regions in the EU and Partner Countries in 2021*.

The NUTS system for classifying EU regions provides a framework for analysis and policymaking at EU level: EU cohesion policy, for example, is designed at NUTS 2 level.

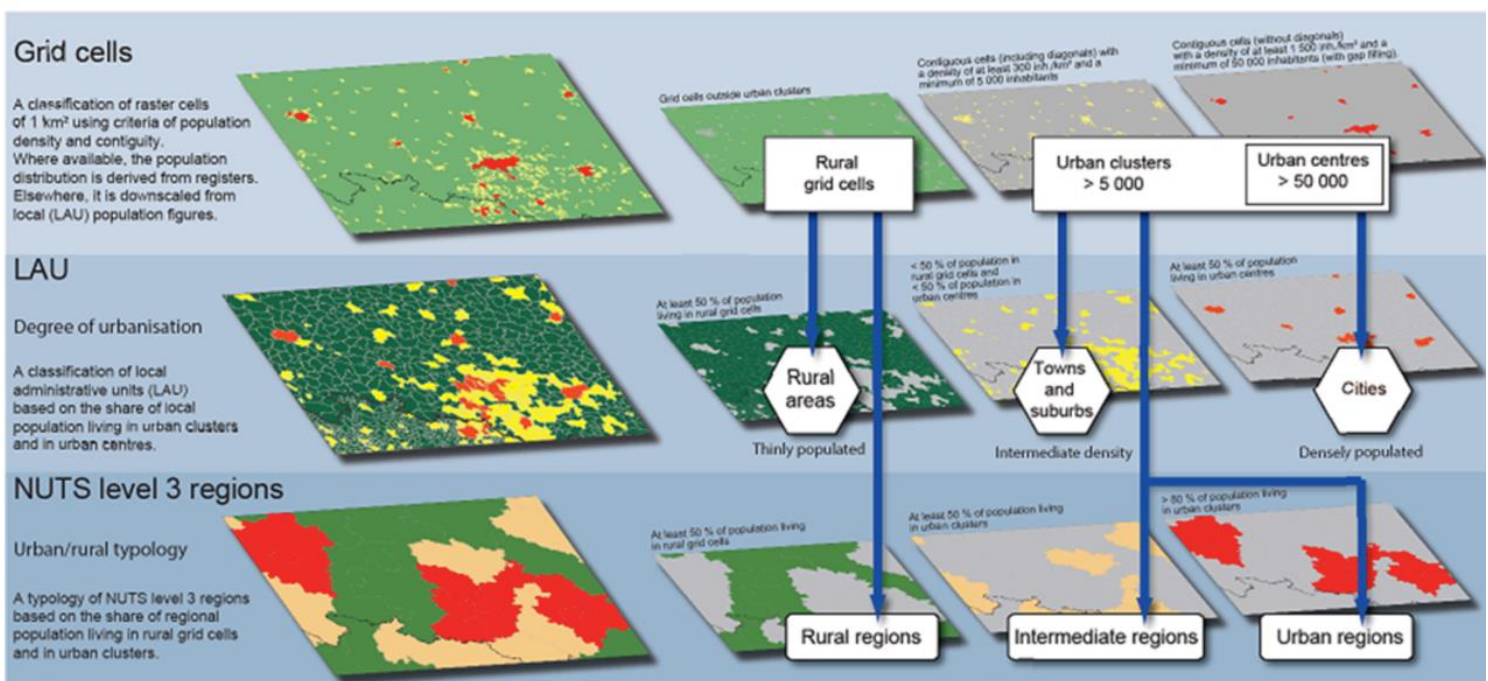
In many European countries, data to support policymaking at the regional and local (municipal) level is limited, especially in remote areas. The [NUTS urban-rural typology](#) aims to provide a better basis for policymaking in relation to rural territories and communities. It uses population density data to identify three types of NUTS 3 region:

- **Predominantly rural regions** (more than 50% of the region's population living in rural areas);
- **Intermediate regions** (20-50% living in rural areas);
- **Predominantly urban regions** (less than 20% living in rural areas).

In a third step to further classify rural territories, the **size of the urban centres** in each region is also considered (the 'presence of a city' measure):

- A 'predominantly rural' region which contains an urban centre of more than 200 000 inhabitants making up at least 25% of the regional population becomes intermediate.
- An intermediate region which contains an urban centre of more than 500 000 inhabitants making up at least 25% of the regional population becomes predominantly urban.

### Schematic overview of defining urban-rural typologies



Source: European Commission, Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy, based on data from Eurostat, JRC, national statistical authorities, EFGS

## Rural and smaller communities as integration actors: a growing phenomenon...

Europe's rural and smaller communities have in recent years emerged as important partners and actors in the integration and resettlement of refugees and migrants, for several reasons:

- **Increased migrant and refugee arrivals into the EU from 2015** necessitating policy responses that expand the involvement of rural and smaller communities.
- **National policies to distribute refugees and migrants more evenly across territories**, meaning rural areas are increasingly receiving and supporting newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Resettlement and relocation** in which rural areas made important contributions to joint EU initiatives of reception and support of refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Community-based sponsorship programmes** engaging local residents as volunteers and broadening the involvement of rural communities in supporting orientation and integration.
- **Ongoing demand for migrant workers** to meet the labour needs of the agricultural industry and other rural employment sectors.

Rural communities have long hosted migrant populations working in sectors like agriculture or construction. The temporary, seasonal and often irregular nature of much of this employment makes it difficult to access these communities and develop integration interventions.

The care industry in rural areas also has become an increasingly significant employer for migrant workers, in particular migrant women. Evidence for this new pattern of migrant employment is still somewhat limited, creating additional challenges for the design and implementation of territorial integration measures.

Some public authorities can be reluctant to invest often limited resources in addressing the integration needs of migrant workers specifically. They can also struggle to develop adequate policy responses to issues affecting migrants working in rural agriculture, such as labour exploitation and precarious housing or living conditions. For many rural communities, participation in formal policies and programmes to receive refugees since 2015 therefore represents a first involvement in direct support for integration.

A general lack of integration experience can be compounded by the sometimes complex policy and funding frameworks for the reception and integration of refugees and migrants arriving via different routes and programmes. Settlement in rural areas also presents specific integration policy challenges, such as the issue of 'secondary movement' of asylum seekers and resettled refugees from rural to urban areas, post-arrival.

COVID-19 has created new awareness and a momentum for better integration in rural areas. Migrants tend to settle in

### Migrants in EU rural areas<sup>1</sup>

**At EU level, migrants tend to settle in more urban areas.** They make up 14.5% of the total EU population living in cities, against 10.2% living in towns and 5.5% in rural areas.

**Rural-urban patterns of migrant settlement vary widely across Member States.** For example, France and Germany's migrant populations living in rural areas, although large in absolute numbers, represent a low share of the global migrant population. In Italy and Spain on the contrary, high numbers of migrants live in rural areas with just a small difference in the share between rural areas and cities.

**Migrants make up a significant part of the EU's rural agricultural workforce.** Migrant labour increased as a proportion of EU agricultural labour from 2.7% in 2011 to 4% in 2017.

**Migrants in rural areas fare worse across most indicators of integration than their urban counterparts**, thus experiencing a "double disadvantage" in terms of higher rates of poverty, unemployment and overcrowded housing.

*Sources:* European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration & Demography (2021), [Atlas of Demography online tool](#). European Commission (2021), [A long-term vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#).



EU rural areas of intensive agricultural production and high degrees of temporary and irregular employment<sup>14</sup>. They are particularly vulnerable to hardship resulting from the pandemic such as loss of employment, homelessness, and an inability to meet basic needs as they were also excluded from health and assistance measures put in place in response to the pandemic. COVID-19 thus illustrated the crucial contributions of rural migrant labour in areas such as healthcare and food production, whilst also highlighting the severe precarity and lack of integration provision for many of the rural migrant communities on whom European societies rely.

The impact of COVID-19 also demonstrated how many EU rural territories are not “integration proof” and highlighted the need to better engage with hard-to-reach and more transient rural migrant populations via policy and programming.

The experiences of rural and smaller communities as integration actors means there is now a growing evidence base to inform successful and effective approaches and practice in this area. At the same time, those from smaller communities are less likely than their urban colleagues to have the capacity or resources to participate in EU networks and platforms for integration. Much work remains to be done to ensure they can contribute to and benefit from the collection and dissemination of best practice and successful approaches for refugee and migrant integration in EU rural territories.

## Refugee and migrant integration in rural territories: shared challenges, shared opportunities...

Migration is a contentious and polarising issue. It exerts a strong influence on European electoral politics at all levels of governance and as a result has not always been coherently considered within policymaking.

In remote rural areas, for example, migration is a potential survival tool. It can contribute to policy responses to challenges faced by remote rural areas such as declining populations, sector-specific labour shortages, and the renewal of local economies.

Stronger EU rural areas are better placed to become fully active players in the EU’s green and digital transition programmes, and migration can make important contributions in areas such as sustainable food production, preserving biodiversity, fighting climate deregulation, and rolling out new technologies<sup>15</sup>.

When effectively mainstreamed into rural policymaking across the demographic, social, economic and development sectors, migration can thus be a key driver of **rural revitalisation**, or the long-term positive transformation of rural areas and communities.

Many of the challenges for refugee and migrant integration in rural areas are general challenges for rural territories. Issues such as transport and digital connectivity, access to basic

### Opportunities and challenges for integration in rural areas: the evidence base

SHARE research has demonstrated a number of **common orientation challenges** across different groups of newcomers in rural areas, including:

- Access to basic services;
- Opportunities for formal language learning;
- Finding appropriate housing, in particular for people with reduced mobility;
- Building social and professional networks;
- Familiarisation with the geographical area of their new community;
- Participation in cultural, sports and other community-based activities;
- Access to higher education and vocational training;
- A sense of belonging in their new surroundings.

...and a number of **specific opportunities for migrant and refugee orientation and integration provided by smaller communities**, including:

- A ‘soft landing’ in smaller environments;
- Closer cooperation between authorities, citizens and other stakeholders;
- Stronger engagement of local citizens, networks and communal institutions;
- A diverse and more accessible labour market;
- A wider range of affordable housing options.

*Source:*Tardis (2019), [Another Story from the Refugee Crisis: Resettlement in Small Towns and Urban Areas in France](#).

<sup>14</sup> European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration & Demography (2021) [Atlas of Demography online tool](#).

<sup>15</sup> On the ‘green transition’ see the [European Green Deal](#) and its [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) and [Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#); on the ‘digital transition’ see [Europe’s Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030](#).

services, and limited opportunities for employment affect refugees, migrants, and general populations in rural areas.

Addressing barriers to integration produces positive impacts for wider rural development, just as effective rural development improves the conditions for integration. Despite the political challenges, it is now crucial that migration be incorporated into existing policy frameworks and cooperation initiatives for rural development and revitalisation, and that examples of successful place-based approaches to policymaking are gathered and disseminated across the EU. That said, integration policy and programmes must specifically address the ways in which challenges for rural territories can amplify the common integration barriers faced by refugees and migrants. Limited mobility options and remoteness can compound social isolation, for example, or prevent access to specialist services or mainstream integration activities such as language learning. Isolation also disproportionately affects refugee and migrant women, in particular those leading single parent households. Newcomers also have specific and additional orientation needs during the initial reception period. As vulnerable persons, these groups may require ongoing specialist support.

## EU rural areas & refugees from Ukraine

By March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, [more than 4 million](#) refugees from Ukraine have fled to EU countries seeking protection from the Russian invasion in late February 2022. They are mainly women, children and the elderly. Member States agreed to activate the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, and the Council Implementing Decision of the following day provides a year-long temporary protection (residence) in the EU for:

- Ukrainian nationals who have been displaced on or after February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and their family members (spouse, dependent children, other dependent/co-habiting relatives);
- Stateless persons and refugees previously resident in Ukraine and who have been displaced from Ukraine on or after February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and their family members (other third country nationals who were previously permanent residents of Ukraine can be granted temporary protection only if they are “unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country or region of origin”).

The activation of the TPD entitles Ukrainian nationals and long-term residents to almost immediate international protection and allows them to self-relocate to a Member State of their choice. In the first months of the conflict, people fleeing Ukraine have joined family networks already residing in the EU and mainly settled in larger cities.

However, rural territories can offer a soft and secure landing for those having fled violence, most often women and children. As the crisis continues to unfold and the availability of housing in large cities shrinks, smaller and rural areas have enormous potential to offer for newcomers, in particular labour market opportunities, welcoming host communities, adequate housing, and children’s education. National responses must ensure the participation of smaller and rural communities as key stakeholders and provide the resources and capacity-building support and assistance they need.

In the past years, rural communities have developed many practices in welcoming and integrating arriving refugees under resettlement and community-sponsorship schemes that can be further built upon. Volunteer welcoming and private housing initiatives need to be supported, while encouraging the establishment of minimum standards, safeguarding, and timely state provision of information on accessing rights and legal status and transition to permanent housing. While citizen engagement in hosting and welcoming refugees is warmly encouraged, volunteers must be adequately prepared, supported and properly ‘screened’ to ensure child protection and safeguards to prevent trafficking of women and girls.

Member States must continue and expand their preparations to improve reception capacity and conditions, and work with civil society and local and regional authorities in assessing the immediate and medium-term needs. They must also ensure effective coordination of placement and matching of refugees to local communities, taking into account both individual preferences and key territorial variables, such as places at primary and secondary schools, local transport facilities, access to medical (including psychosocial) services, administration and language learning services, as well as employment opportunities. Such placement and matching mechanisms will significantly contribute to developing timely responses for Ukrainian refugees which allow them to recover and rebuild some of their life in a welcoming community in the insecure period to come.

Not knowing what the future will bring, it is important to be prepared to address longer term integration needs and to mobilise efforts accordingly. At Share, we believe that acting early is key to supporting successful integration, and that promoting inclusive territorial approaches, based on bottom-up solutions and multi-stakeholder partnerships for integration in the territories where refugees will live, is more vital than ever.

## The Share vision for Inclusive Territories

To guide the participation of rural territories and communities as integration actors going forward, we propose the **Share Inclusive Territories approach**:

### An Inclusive Territory...

#### ... is supported by a strong national migration policy framework that:

- Clearly describes national migration priorities.
- Ensures migration is effectively mainstreamed across existing sectors and structures.
- Includes a specific focus on integration and inclusion in rural territories, looking at different demographic and social contexts and emphasising place-based solutions.
- Outlines the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in rural communities as key integration actors.
- Promote synergies and linkages between urban and rural areas.

#### ... is supported by strong multilevel governance (national, regional, local) arrangements which:

- Create dedicated cooperation structures and build sustainable, multilevel partnerships.
- Promote grassroots and bottom-up strategies for developing and implementing migration and integration solutions in rural areas.
- Respond flexibly and positively to offers from rural territories to contribute capacity to asylum reception and refugee protection programmes.
- Ensure financial support for rural multistakeholder partnerships and promote these models across rural territories.
- Ensure actors and stakeholders in rural communities can share and receive expertise and information on successful refugee and migrant integration practices and approaches across all levels of governance.

#### ... has access to resources supporting territorial approaches to refugee & migrant integration specifically:

- National programmes for EU funds earmark resources for integration cooperation and action in rural communities.
- Actors and stakeholders from rural communities are provided with dedicated support and assistance to access EU funds and are meaningfully included in developing, implementing and evaluating national funding programmes.
- EU and national funding for integration supports rural territories to develop bottom-up strategies and solutions for integration.

#### ... implements a multistakeholder approach:

- Rural territories promote community ownership of integration, developing a common vision and objectives for integration for specific territories.
- All relevant rural stakeholders are meaningfully involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating local integration policy and action (including regional and local authorities, mainstream service providers, civil society organisations, the private sector and refugees and migrants themselves).
- Integration in rural territories is characterised by strong local leadership and coordination, including visible political leadership and support.

#### ... takes an evidence-based approach to developing territorial policy and action for integration:

- Rural policymaking and action for integration incorporates relevant data on migration and migrants in rural areas generated at EU and national level.



- Rural policy and action for integration uses local needs and capacity assessments to supplement EU and national data.
- Rural integration policy and programming includes robust mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and the dissemination of lessons learned.
- Rural territories pilot new approaches to supporting and mainstreaming refugee and migrant integration.

**... ensures meaningful participation of those impacted by the rural integration policies & action:**

- Rural integration policymaking includes participatory approaches at the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages.
- Rural integration policymaking promotes non-discrimination and ensures access to rights and services for all residents, including migrants and refugees from both EU and third countries.
- Rural integration policy promotes and resources new grassroots partnerships for integration, in the context of defined bottom-up strategies and approaches.

**... and strengthens social protection for migrant workers:**

- EU and national labour law is effectively enforced as to protect migrant workers' rights and guarantee adequate working conditions in relation to pay, working hours, rest periods and leave, as well as adequate standards of living, in particular for seasonal workers
- Rural development programmes reinforce better integration of migrant/seasonal workers in rural areas.

## Current EU policy: a new momentum for integration and rural revitalization?

2020-21 saw the launch of three new EU policy initiatives setting new long-term visions and priorities for refugee and migrant integration, and rural/territorial development and revitalization:

Refugee & migrant integration	Rural / territorial development & revitalisation	
<p><b>Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.</b></p>	<p><b>A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas: towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.</b></p>	<p><b>Territorial Agenda for 2030: a future for all places.</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched by the EC in November 2020.</li> <li>• Led by Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).</li> <li>• Follows the <i>2016 Commission action plan on the integration of third-country nationals</i>.</li> <li>• Incorporates the 2004 <i>EU Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy</i> (reaffirmed 2011).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched by the EC in June 2021.</li> <li>• Led by Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI).</li> <li>• Implemented by the rolling Rural Action Plan and Rural Pact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewed version adopted on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Territorial Cohesion and Development.</li> <li>• Led by the European Council (EU Presidency and meetings of Directors General on Territorial Cohesion).</li> </ul>

## ***EU policy and funding for refugee and migrant integration 2021-2027***

The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 was launched by the European Commission in November 2020. It aims to support Member States and other stakeholders to design better integration and inclusion policies.

The plan is broad in scope, targeting all migrants and nationals with a migratory background, and all stages of the integration process from pre-departure to inclusive and cohesive societies. It sets out key principles to guide the development of integration and inclusion policies and suggests actions to promote integration in four sectoral areas (education and training, employment and skills, health, and housing).

Key objectives of the plan include the need to develop strong partnerships across levels of governance (including in rural areas), create better synergies across EU funds supporting integration and inclusion, and expand the evidence base for integration and inclusion policymaking and actions. The plan includes a commitment to pursue partnerships with rural regions within the framework of the EU Long-term Vision for Rural Areas.

In the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, integration has been mainstreamed across EU funds:

- The Asylum Migration & Integration Fund (AMIF) 2021-2027 supports:
  - Early integration measures (initial reception and orientation); and
  - Cross-cutting ('horizontal') actions to improve integration conditions (such as awareness-raising).
- EU structural and investment funds support longer term integration, notably:
  - The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) supports labour market integration and social inclusion; and
  - The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) supports infrastructure and equipment to improve access to services and assistance.

To support better use of EU funds for integration and inclusion and encourage synergies between funding instruments, the European Commission published the 2021 [Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background](#).

### **The Share view...**

At Share, we welcome the Integration Action Plan particularly for its:

- Acknowledgement that integration happens at the local level, and that local actors and communities play a key role in welcoming and guiding newcomers when they first arrive;
- Focus on multistakeholder partnerships and multilevel governance cooperation for integration;
- Inclusion of local and regional authorities and actors as key stakeholders in integration policymaking, programme implementation and evaluation, and multilevel governance arrangements;
- Analysis of integration in rural areas, and specific commitments for partnerships and cooperation with rural areas and EU institutions going forward;
- Recognition that local authorities often lack sufficient resources to set up integration measures, and recommendations for Member States to promote better access by local authorities to EU funds that support integration;
- Focus on the participation of migrants and refugees in integration policymaking.

We also welcome the mainstreaming of integration across multiple EU funding instruments, and associated measures to improve synergies between EU funds.

Nonetheless, we remain concerned that the Integration Action Plan does not pay sufficient attention to reception and settlement measures for newcomers and urge that its implementation promote specific measures<sup>16</sup> for those arriving via protection programmes and for more vulnerable migrant groups such as unaccompanied children and victims of torture and/or trafficking.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, read the Share response to the 2020 consultation on the integration action plan [Building welcome from the Ground Up](#).

## EU policy and funding rural development and revitalisation 2021-2027

[A Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas: Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040](#) was launched by the European Commission in June 2021. It aims to revitalise the EU's rural areas by reducing regional disparities and creating new opportunities for rural areas. It sets out the drivers shaping the future of rural territories and identifies complementary actions under four 'strands' (stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities).

The rolling **EU Rural Action Plan** launched in June 2021 sets out the European Commission's commitments for action to:

- Support a more coherent use of EU funding that can support actions for rural development.
- Implement flagship projects in the four thematic strands of action.
- Coordinate action across different EU policy areas.

The **Rural Pact** launched in December 2021 aims to trigger voluntary commitments by stakeholders and to:

- Provide a framework for cooperation among local authorities and stakeholders at the European, national, regional and local level.
- Mobilise stakeholders at all levels in support of the Vision's goals.
- Create a framework to engage and cooperate at EU, national, regional, and local level.

The content of the Rural Pact will be defined by a cross-institutional group involving the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee alongside representative of the European Rural Parliament (stakeholder organisations) and by the Rural Pact community that has been created in December 2021.

As in the Integration Action Plan, the Long-Term Vision highlights effective multistakeholder and multilevel governance cooperation as central to realising the aims of EU rural development and revitalisation policy. Implementation of the Long-Term Vision will therefore be monitored by an inter-service steering group at the European Commission. Stakeholders are [invited to join](#) the Rural Pact and outline how they plan to contribute to the Long-Term Vision, including at a Rural Pact conference planned for 2022. The Vision also plans a rural proofing mechanism to assess the anticipated impact of major EU legislative initiatives on rural areas, and ensure relevant policies reflect rural needs and realities. The mechanism will draw on sources such as territorial impact assessments, improved monitoring of rural areas, and evaluations of policy implementation. The Long-Term Visions also calls for Member States to consider implementing the rural proofing principle at national, regional, and local levels. The European Network for Rural Development's

### The Committee of the Regions & the Long-Term Vision

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) represents local and regional authorities across the EU and advises on new laws that have an impact on regions and cities. Share is a contributing partner to the CoR's EU-wide **Cities and Regions for Integration** initiative.

The CoR has welcomed the Long-term Vision, noting that it responds to the CoR's major demands of:

- Creating a comprehensive EU rural agenda and accompanying rural action plan.
- Mainstreaming rural issues into all EU policies.
- Introducing a rural proofing approach.

*"Local and regional actors are essential to implementing the Rural Pact"* stated Moreno Bonilla, CoR rapporteur for the Long-Term Vision. *"Agriculture, mobility, digital connectivity and renewable energy are the strategic areas that must support rural development, given their potential to provide practical solutions and means of support to curb depopulation, facilitate generational renewal, and generate social and economic opportunities"*. Published in January 2022, the **CoR opinion on the Long-Term Vision** notes the significant role of migrant workers in the EU's agricultural and food sector. It urges the strengthening of the social agenda to respond to the high levels of vulnerability and precarity amongst this population, specifically measures to achieve higher minimum wages, good working conditions and social integration.

[Thematic Group on Rural Proofing](#) was established in late 2020 to support Member States to design and implement these rural proofing mechanisms.

### The LEADER approach: A model for community-led development

In use for more than 30 years, **LEADER** is a development method to engage local actors in decision-making, resource allocation, and the design and delivery of strategies for rural areas.

In 2018, LEADER was implemented by just under 3 000 Local Action Groups (LAGs), bringing together public, private, and civil society stakeholders from specific communities. In the context of rural development, LEADER was implemented under the national and regional [Rural Development Programmes](#) of each EU Member State, co-financed by the [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development](#) (EAFRD).

The LEADER method is now known as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), and has been extended to three additional EU funds (European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, European Regional Development Fund and the ESF+). While LEADER remains obligatory under the EAFRD, a LEADER action can now be supported under two or more of the four funds at the same time as a multi-funded CLLD.

The **Territorial Agenda 2030: A Future for all Places** was launched in December 2021 by EU ministers responsible for spatial planning, territorial development and/or territorial cohesion. The Territorial Agenda is a long-standing initiative of the European Council in place since 2007, and many of its principles and approaches informed the development of Long-Term Vision.

Territorial Agenda 2030 aims to promote territorial cohesion and balanced territorial development in the EU. It promotes territorial ('place-based') approaches to policymaking across sectors and all levels of governance, highlighting the need to strengthen the territorial dimension of existing policy approaches. It also supports pilot projects to test specific territorial approaches<sup>17</sup>.

In the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, the [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Fund \(EAFRD\)](#) continues to be the key funding instrument under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The EAFRD is a specialized instrument to support rural economies, including agricultural industries and measures to strengthen rural communities. Historically, operations funded by EAFRD have with few exceptions been small-scale and implemented in remote and sparsely populated rural areas. These actions have included [some projects for migrant and refugee integration](#).

Both EAFRD and EU cohesion funds can finance rural cooperation networks at both EU and national level to support

policy design and implementation. The ERDF prioritises disadvantaged regions and areas, selected according to new allocation criteria for 2021-17 that include youth unemployment, lower levels of education attainment and migrant reception and integration.

### The Share view...

At Share, we welcome that the Long-Term Vision and Territorial Agenda:

- Acknowledge the diversity of rural territories and communities across the EU, and the contribution they can make to the EU's social green and digital transition initiatives.
- Promote participatory and place-based (territorial) approaches to policymaking across sectors.
- Focus on strong multistakeholder partnerships and multilevel governance cooperation for rural and territorial development and revitalisation.
- Promote the creation of inclusive and fair communities.

We specifically welcome the Long-Term Vision's:

- Commitment to creating inclusive rural societies that are open to newcomers.
- Planned rural proofing mechanism to assess the impact of major EU legislation on rural areas.
- Inclusion of migrant integration measures in actions for demographic and social resilience.

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<sup>17</sup> Six pilot projects were launched alongside the Territorial Agenda in December 2021, one of which ([Small Places Matter](#)) focuses on the role of small towns and villages in developing integrated territorial development processes, particularly in relation to demographic change.

- Planned toolkit publication on combining EU funds to support the revitalisation of rural areas.
- Measures to improve and refine EC data and statistics on rural areas, including a new Rural Observatory.
- Planned rural partnerships to promote inclusion and integration (as part of the implementation Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027).
- Recommendation for Member States to implement the commitments of the Youth Guarantee<sup>18</sup> for youth in rural and remote areas.

We nonetheless remain concerned that neither the Long-Term Vision nor the Territorial Agenda adequately identify potential synergies between refugee and migrant integration and rural revitalization; neither envisage refugees and migrants themselves as actors contributing to wider rural development and revitalisation despite a strong focus on participation for policymaking. Indeed, refugees in the Territorial Agenda are referred to solely as an example of problematic demographic change for remote rural communities (setting the movement of refugees to EU rural territories against the “outmigration of young and talented people”). To be effective refugee and migrant integration and rural revitalisation policy must interact to the fullest extent possible, including via EU funding.

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<sup>18</sup> All young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship (cf. [reinforced Youth Guarantee](#)).



## **Complementary, but still compartmentalised: Share recommendations for implementing EU policy for integration and rural revitalisation.**

### **Recognise integration and rural revitalisation as complementary policy priorities...**

Migrants and refugees are an integral part of rural communities and play a central role in shaping the future of the EU. Rural revitalisation policy must consider their needs, promote welcoming communities, and recognise the benefits that successful integration can leverage for rural development.

### **Resource local stakeholders and communities to pilot new approaches...**

Rural communities have become testing grounds for new and innovative practice for refugee and migrant integration and inclusion, contributing to a growing evidence base for successful approaches and best practice in this area. It is crucial that rural actors and stakeholders can access resources to adapt documented best practice for implementation in their specific territories, as well as pilot new approaches.

### **Prioritise the development of strong national integration policy frameworks...**

The extent to which stakeholders in rural communities have a role as integration actors depends on strong cooperation across all levels of governance. Multilevel cooperation for integration is less effective where national integration policy frameworks are absent or not yet developed. In these contexts, EU funds and national actions should prioritise both the development of sustainable policy and cooperation frameworks for integration, and the mainstreaming of migration and integration priorities across policy sectors.

### **Make good on the partnership commitments of new EU policy...**

At Share, we welcome the mainstreaming of integration as a priority across multiple policy areas and EU funding instruments, and urge that it is supported by effective cooperation and partnership across sectoral areas and levels of governance.

New EU policy initiatives for integration and rural revitalisation include various commitments for such cooperation. Rural partnerships are planned as part of the implementation of the Integration Action Plan, for example, and outlined in the Long-Term Vision. The European Commission must ensure these partnerships are created at European, national, regional and local level, that they complement existing rural cooperation networks and initiatives, and are implemented as a priority.

Partnership has also played an important role in promoting grassroots ownership of the implementation of EU funds in rural areas. Local Action Groups can play a very relevant role as agents with good knowledge of the territory within the framework of possible multi-fund local development strategies. We welcome the extension of the well-established LEADER (now Community-Led Local Development) approach to three additional EU funds and recommend that it is also considered for the ERDF. We urge Member States to consider piloting the LEADER/CLLD approach in the implementation of the AMIF in rural areas. Moreover, better integration of migrant/seasonal workers in rural areas could be reinforced through the Rural Development Programme financed by the second pillar of the CAP, always in synergy and coordinated with other funds, especially the ESF.

### **Pilot new mechanisms for mainstreaming integration in EU rural revitalisation policy...**

The Long-Term Vision must contribute to EU integration priorities by laying the foundations for inclusive rural territories. It must accordingly set verifiable targets for integration and inclusion and adequately resource measures to achieve them.

While the Share Network welcomes the planned 'rural-proofing' approach for EU policy (consisting of analysing policies from a rural perspective), we also consider that a 'migration-proofing' mechanism is crucial. Comparative data on outcomes for migrant and non-migrant populations supports effective integration policymaking at all levels. It guides

choices in terms of targeted or universal/mainstreamed interventions and enables evaluations of their impact. To effectively design and evaluate integration interventions, comparative data should be collected at the level at which they are implemented. Providing accurate and accessible data on migrant communities and their impact can help shape local narratives and attitudes on migration. To demonstrate migrant contributions over time and present migration as an investment in the wider community, data for this purpose should be drawn from a broad range of areas relevant to local community wellbeing.

We urge that integration and migration actors at all levels to ensure an evidence-based approach to policymaking, communication and action for migration and integration, including by establishing baseline data and collection mechanisms where there are data gaps.

### **Ensure mechanisms to share best practice and enable mutual support...**

EU policy should support networks, resources and institutional partnerships to share best practice on integration in rural areas, and ensure the participation of a wide range of local and community-based stakeholders in knowledge exchange and mutual support activities. At Share, we welcome the recent initiative of the Committee of the Regions to launch the [Ukraine Info-Support Hub for Regions and Cities](#), an information platform for regions and cities willing to welcome displaced people from Ukraine, which will facilitate assistance through the matching of needs and offers of support.

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### **Implement the SHARE Inclusive Rural Territories approach...**

At Share, we believe that place-based approaches are the most effective way of producing integration solutions that best suit the needs and capacities rural territories in the EU. We propose the Share Inclusive Territories approach as a guiding framework for the participation of rural territories and communities as integration actors going forward.

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- Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development:  
[OECD Regional Database](#) & [Database on Migrants in OECD Regions](#)
- Committee of the Regions: [Info-Support hub for Regions and Cities](#)

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## The Share Network

The Share network is an inclusive network of local communities and actors engaged in the welcoming and inclusion of newcomers in Europe. Share promotes and fosters safe pathways to Europe for migrants and refugees as well as their integration. We support and connect local initiatives, share best practice, and raise the voice to communities to inspire action and policy change.



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