

**Rural Youth  
Indicators:**

**Open Source  
Indicators  
for Evaluating  
Youth Goals  
Implementation**

**Ondřej  
Bárta**

## Disclaimer

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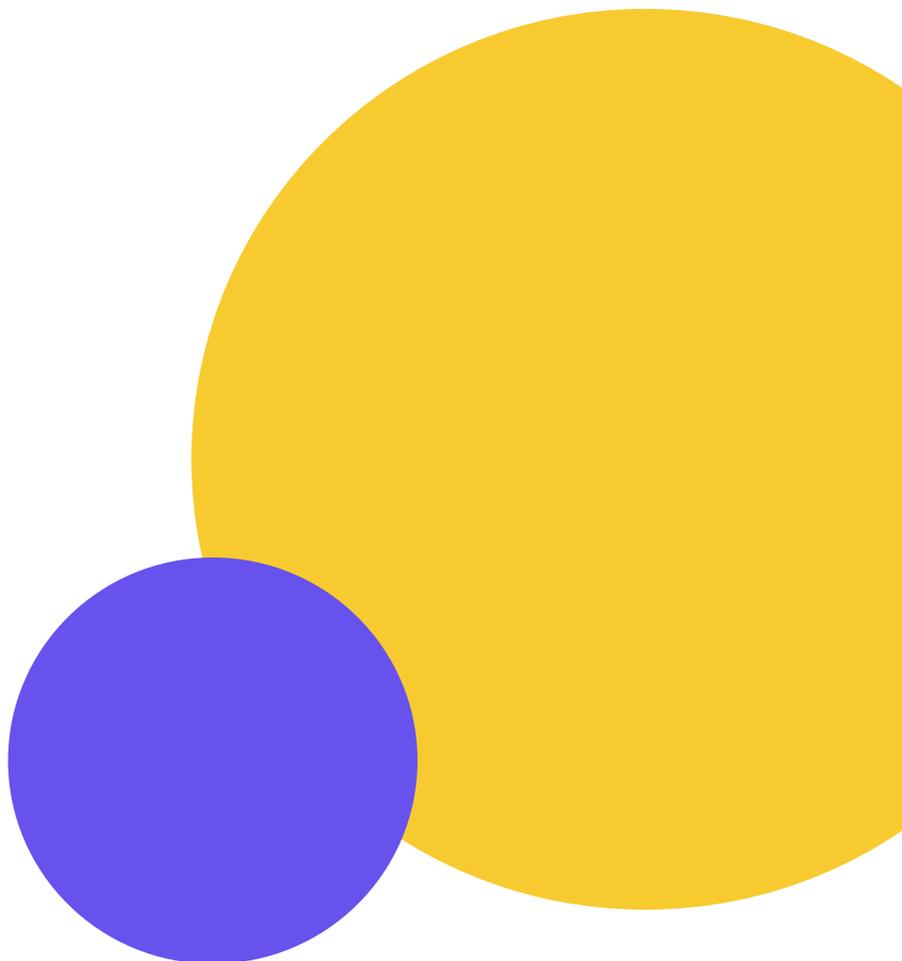


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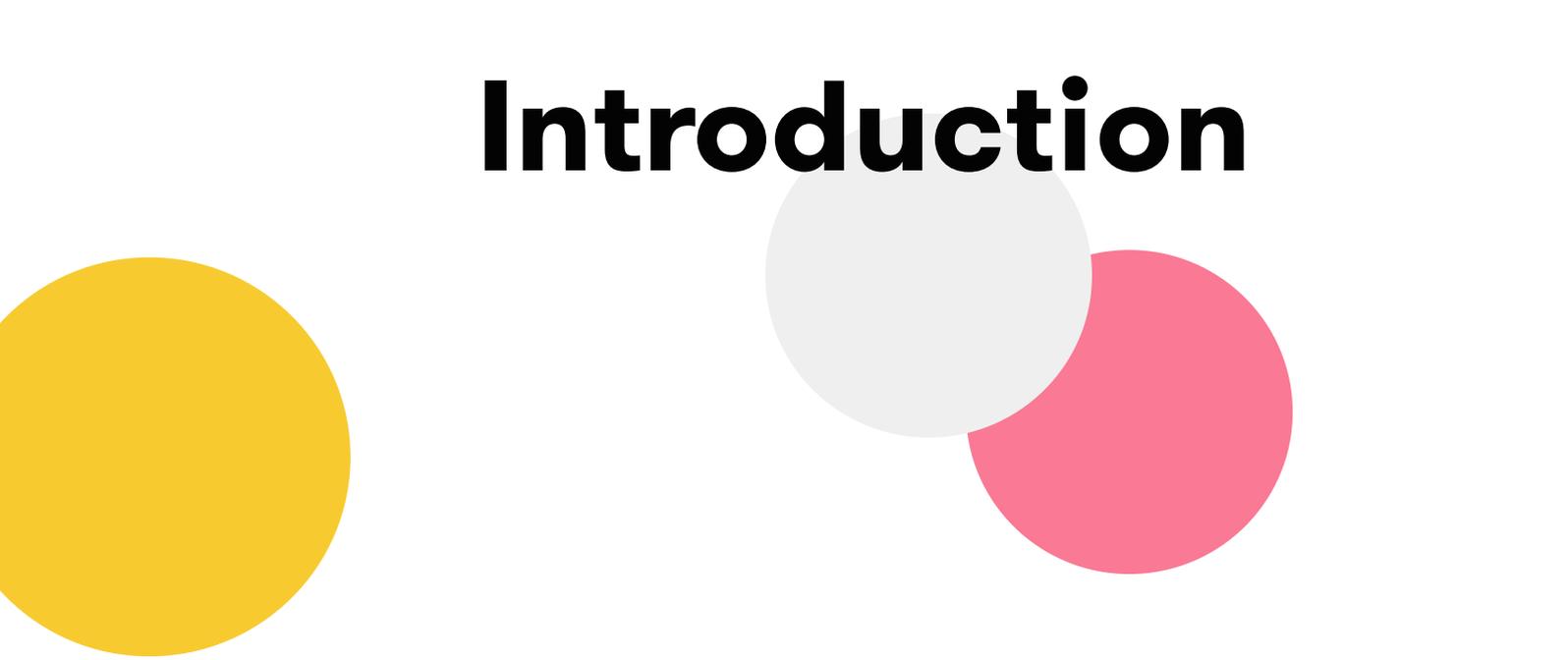
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# Introduction



Indicators are widely used across different sectors to enable policymakers as well as various other stakeholders to explore and track changes in observed phenomena. As such, it is also one of the tools of evidence-based policymaking, and potentially a source of data for evaluation processes, and also for informed debates on varied topics. This publication further elaborates on a discussion started in my previous work focusing on evaluation in the youth field<sup>1</sup>. While the previous publication aimed at providing the reader with an overview of various components of the evaluation process, this one focuses on demonstrating potential significance of indicators in implementing and fulfilling the European Youth Goals<sup>2</sup>. In particular, the publication strives to point out concrete indicators existent on international and national levels, which can be potentially useful in assessing the state of affairs in the youth field. Moreover, by analysing these indicators, the publication provides the reader with a basic insight into strong and weak suits to look out for when using indicators further.

<sup>1</sup> Bárta 2019.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission 2020a.

Providing an overview of the indicators concerning the whole youth field would be a gargantuan task, and therefore a decision to limit the scope of this publication to one particular European Youth Goal has been taken. In 2020, the European Youth Goal no.6 “*Moving Rural Youth Forward*” was chosen to be a focus of various youth-related initiatives, such as the EU Youth Dialogue consultations with youth<sup>3</sup>, the European Union Youth Conference held in Zagreb, Croatia<sup>4</sup>, leading to official Conclusions of the Council<sup>5</sup>. In line with the interest generated in the topic and aiming to support the existent and future initiatives in the rural areas, this publication is dealing with indicators focusing on rural youth.

<sup>3</sup> Bárta 2020; Moxon & Bárta 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia 2020.

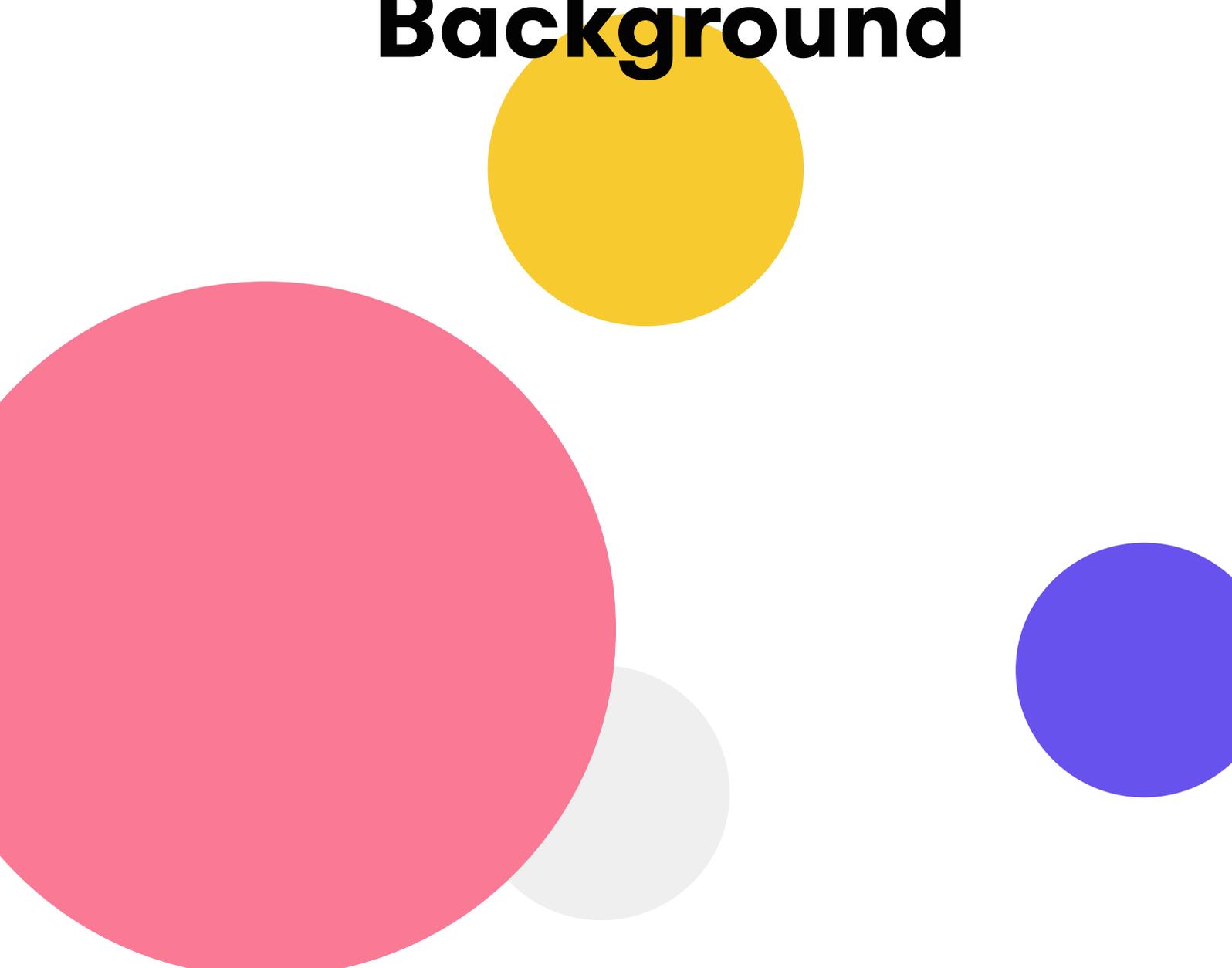
<sup>5</sup> Council of the European Union 2020.

The publication itself follows a clear structure from the theoretical overview (focusing on the European Youth Goals, rural areas, rural youth, and rural youth policies on the EU level), to the exploratory study presenting and analysing rural youth indicators existent in the contemporary European context. Each of the chapters includes a short summary and guiding questions to support readers in further thinking on the given subject. All of the rural youth indicators found in course of this study are listed in the Appendix to this publication together with their last known online position and a short description. Readers of this publication are encouraged to browse through and explore data on rural youth in their own local or national contexts!

Insights gathered in this publication can, nevertheless, be also applied to other European Youth Goals. Building on the structure of this publication, it is important to define theoretical concepts related to the given European Youth Goal, look into their practical definitions, follow up by localizing indicator sources, and subsequently identify the concrete indicators. Exploring other European Youth Goals via information available in existent indicators can only be recommended as it contributes to knowledge-based debates and policymaking.

The intended audience of this publication consists of all main stakeholders in the youth field and youth-related policymaking. First and foremost, the publication aims at bringing food for thought to the young people, youth workers, and policymakers, showcasing what indicators are readily available when determining the state of affairs of the European rural youth. Secondly, researchers and analysts are welcome to read through to see which areas of interest concerning the rural youth are well-covered by existent indicators, where additional indicators might be helpful, and what to avoid when designing brand new indicators.

# 1. Theoretical Background



It is vital to establish theoretical foundations of thinking about indicators related to rural youth. This helps in understanding forces which come to play and influence the rural areas and youth living in them. First and foremost, the European Youth Goals are introduced, and the European Youth Goal no.6 is described in detail in order to clearly state what change is desired by the young people in the EU. Subsequently, rural areas as such are defined in order to show what locations are to be targeted if the European Youth Goal no.6 is to be successfully achieved. In order to be even more precise, the rural youth as a specific population within the EU is described using available information sources. And lastly, a brief overview of the current policies tackling rural areas in the EU is presented in order to complete the full picture.

## 1.1 The European Youth Goals

<sup>6</sup> Watchful readers notice different names for the same process of dialogue between the EU and the young people. Originally, the process was called Structural Dialogue until 2018 when the name was changed to the EU Youth Dialogue as the current EU Youth Strategy 2019 to 2027 and new guidelines on the governance of the EU Youth Dialogue came to force (Council of the European Union 2019).

<sup>7</sup> European Commission 2020a.

<sup>8</sup> Council of the European Union 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Moxon & Bárta 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Council of the European Union 2018.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission 2020a.

<sup>12</sup> Council of the European Union 2018.

The 6<sup>th</sup> cycle of the Youth Dialogue<sup>6</sup> aimed at collecting ideas of young people across the European Union<sup>7</sup> in order to support creation of the, then upcoming, EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027<sup>8</sup>. Based on consultations with almost 50 000 young people across Europe<sup>9</sup>, 11 Youth Goals were created and subsequently adopted to become a full text Annex 3 of the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027<sup>10</sup>. These are the European Youth Goals<sup>11</sup>:

1. Connecting EU with Youth
2. Equality of All Genders
3. Inclusive Societies
4. Information & Constructive Dialogue
5. Mental Health & Wellbeing
6. Moving Rural Youth Forward
7. Quality Employment for All
8. Quality Learning
9. Space and Participation for All
10. Sustainable Green Europe
11. Youth Organisations & European Programmes

As mentioned above, it is the European Youth Goal no.6 “Moving Rural Youth Forward” which is forming the focus of this publication and to which all indicators in this publication are connected. The official definition of the European Youth Goal no.6 is as follows<sup>12</sup>:

**“Background:** Despite the EU-wide commitment to rural development and given the fact that by 2015 almost one third of the EU population were living in rural areas, prevailing differences exist between living in urban and in rural areas. Therefore, it is important to ensure equality for young people in urban and rural settings.

**Goal:** Create conditions which enable young people to fulfil their potential in rural areas.

**Targets:**

- Ensure appropriate infrastructure in rural areas in order to provide equitable delivery of public services, data connectivity and housing opportunities for young people.
- Ensure that sustainable, high quality jobs, accessible to young people are created in rural areas.
- Ensure the decentralisation of different activities by, for and with young people in order to support their inclusion and to benefit local communities.
- Ensure that young people in rural areas are actively participating in decision-making processes.
- Ensure equal access to high quality education for young people in rural areas.
- Establish a positive image of rural areas.
- Ensure the protection of rural traditions.”

It is apparent that the European Youth Goal no.6 aims at supporting lives of young people in rural areas across a variety of contexts, from the infrastructure, through employment domain, participation sphere, educational area, and the rural traditions. As such, it is a transversal and cross-sectoral goal containing many different areas of economic, civic, and cultural activities, making it a wide and complex European Youth Goal.

### **SUMMARY**

- The European Youth Goals are an outcome of youth participatory processes connecting the local and European levels.
- The European Youth Goals are an integral part of the current EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027.
- The European Youth Goal no.6 focuses on rural youth.
- The European Youth Goal no.6 is a cross-sectoral and transversal goal spanning many different areas of human activities from cultural, through youth work, health, and many other.

### **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS**

- How do the European Youth Goals link to your local, regional, or national youth policy?
- Which of the European Youth Goals are crucial for your local, regional, or national reality at the moment and which are emerging topics for the future?
- Which of the elements named in the description of the European Youth Goal no.6 are most connected to your own local, regional, or national reality and how can you tell?

## 1.2 Discovering Rural Areas in the EU

Identification of the target group of young people living in rural areas requires to understand what areas are designated as “rural areas” in the EU context. As this publication deals with indicators, and hence focuses on such an understanding of reality which is based on statistical data, it also builds the understanding of the rural areas in line with Eurostat, as an official source of statistical data within the EU.

Determining the nature of a given spatial area is done on three different levels, as shown in Figure 1. Firstly, *grid cells* of 1 km<sup>2</sup> are classified in order to determine whether they can be considered as *rural grid cells*, *urban clusters*, or *urban centres*. Subsequently, *degree of urbanisation* can be determined on the level of *local administrative units (LAU)*<sup>13</sup>, based on share of population living in rural or urban conditions, resulting in *thinly populated rural areas*, *towns and suburbs with intermediate density of population*, and *densely populated cities*.

Lastly, NUTS level 3 (regions) are used to determine whether the region can be considered *rural*, *intermediate*, or *urban*, based on the results of the *grid cells*, hence using, again, the original distinction of *rural grid cells*, *urban clusters*, and *urban centres*, as follows<sup>14</sup>:

- “**predominantly urban regions**, NUTS15 level 3 regions where more than 80% of the population live in urban clusters;
- **intermediate regions**, NUTS level 3 regions where more than 50% and up to 80% of the population live in urban clusters;
- **predominantly rural regions**, NUTS level 3 regions where at least 50% of the population live in rural grid cells.”

Since LAU can be of different sizes in different Member States, determining the urban or rural nature of the NUTS level 3 (regions) directly from the *grid cells* which all have the same size, avoids distortion as well as supports representativity of the results<sup>16</sup>. All in all, the difference between the rural and urban areas is usually referred to as “**urban-rural typology**” and lies in a combination of two key factors: *density* and *total population* of the given area. In order to better visualize this somewhat abstract process, Figure 2 shows *urban-rural typology* applied on the level of *grid cells*, while Figure 3 shows *degrees of urbanisation* in local administrative units (LAU), and Figure 4 depicts *urban-rural typology* on NUTS 3 (regional) level. All of those maps were exported from Statistical Atlas by Eurostat and well illustrate the differences between the given levels of measurement, from the most detailed (*grid cells*), to the most general (NUTS 3).

<sup>13</sup> “To meet the demand for statistics at a local level, Eurostat maintains a system of Local Administrative Units (LAUs) compatible with NUTS. These LAUs are the building blocks of the NUTS and comprise the municipalities and communes of the European Union. Until 2016, two levels of Local Administrative Units (LAU) existed: The upper LAU level (LAU level 1, formerly NUTS level 4) were defined for most, but not all of the countries. The lower LAU level (LAU level 2, formerly NUTS level 5) consisted of municipalities or equivalent units in the 28 EU Member States. Since 2017, only one level of LAU has been kept.” (Eurostat 2020a)

<sup>14</sup> Eurostat 2018b.

<sup>15</sup> “The Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics, abbreviated NUTS (from the French version Nomenclature des Unités territoriales statistiques) is a geographical nomenclature subdividing the economic territory of the European Union (EU) into regions at three different levels (NUTS 1, 2 and 3 respectively, moving from larger to smaller territorial units). Above NUTS 1, there is the ‘national’ level of the Member States. The NUTS is based on Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS), which is regularly updated.” (Eurostat 2016)

<sup>16</sup> Eurostat 2019a.

Figure 1: Schematic overview defining urban-rural typologies.

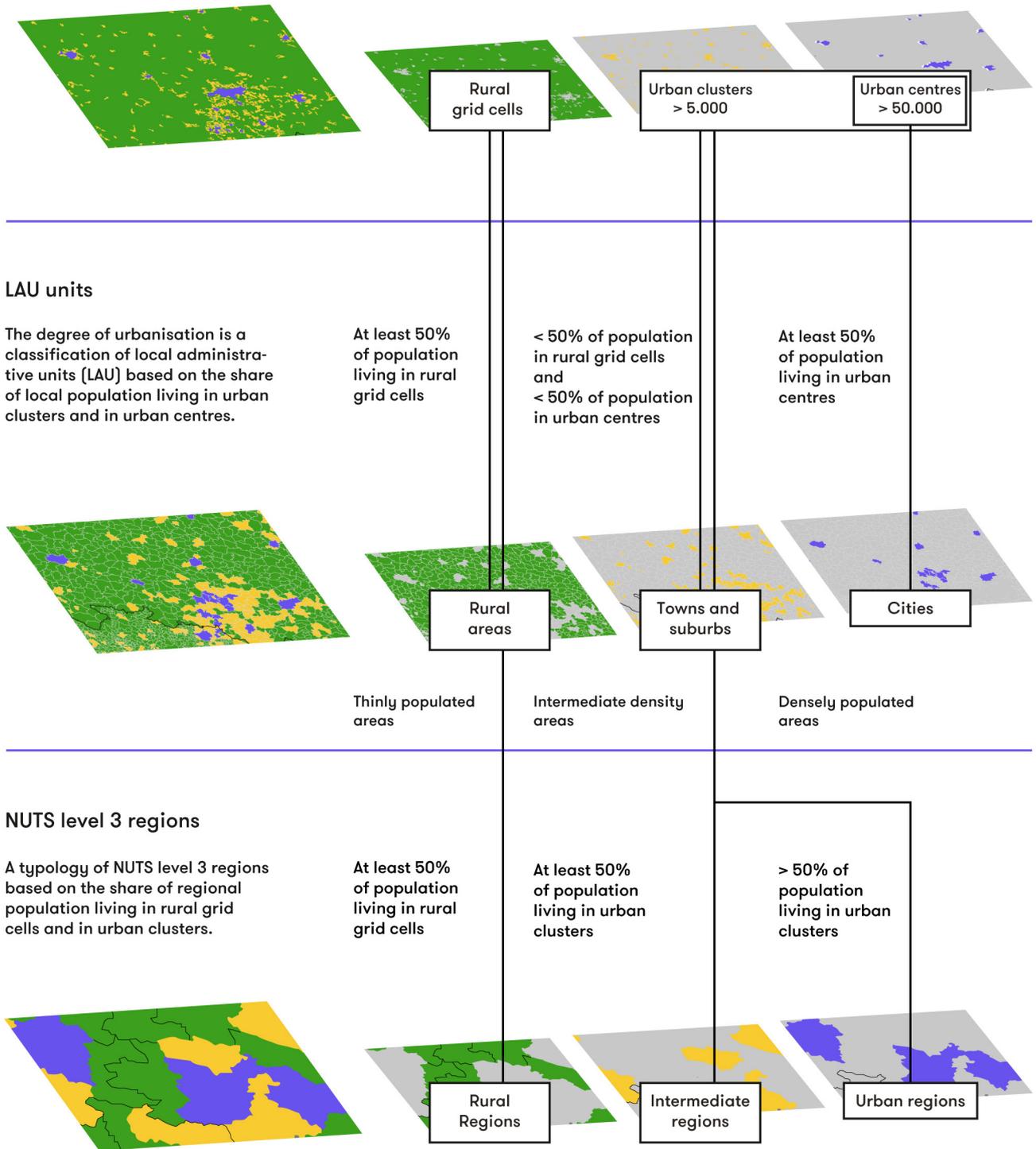
**Grid Cells**

Raster cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> are classified using criteria of population density and contiguity. Where available, the population distribution is derived from registers. Elsewhere, it is downscaled from local (LAU) population figures.

Grid cells outside urban clusters

Contiguous cells (including diagonals) with a density of at least 300 inh./km<sup>2</sup> and a minimum of 5000 inhabitants

Contiguous cells (without diagonals and with gap filling) with a density of at least 1.500 inh./km<sup>2</sup> and a minimum of 50.000 inhabitants



Source: European Commission, Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy, based on data from Eurostat, JRC, national statistical authorities, EFGS Eurostat 2020b.

<sup>17</sup> European Union 2018: 3.

<sup>18</sup> Methodology of the data processing is of the essence and differing methodologies are reasons for different figures available in other official sources. The Joint Research Centre states, that the rural areas covered in 2015 as much as 75% “of the EU populated mainland”. (Perpiña Castillo et al. 2018: 8.) Further information on methodologies of mapping and modelling spatial data can be found in a publication by Jacobs-Crisioni et al. (2017).

<sup>19</sup> European Commission 2018.

When it comes to determining how much of the EU land can be considered rural areas and how much of it falls into other areas, such as the intermediate or urban, the DG Agriculture and Rural Development<sup>17</sup> states that in 2018, 44% of the EU28 territory fell under the rural areas<sup>18</sup>, with another 44% in intermediate regions, and 12% representing urban areas, in line with information available in *Common context indicators for rural development programs 2014–2020*<sup>19</sup>. Rural areas, therefore, cover vast landscapes in the EU, and development of rural areas means further supporting almost half of the EU lands. To further stress the importance of the rural areas, Figure 5 shows a map of the EU in which regions (NUTS 3) are described with regard to their respective proportion of rural areas: the darker the colour, the higher the percentage of rural areas is in the given region. As shown in all abovementioned figures and demonstrated by the calculated proportions of the rural areas in the EU, the rural regions are widespread throughout the EU Member States. Bearing this in mind, it is important to have a look at the amount of people living in these areas in terms of both the general population and the youth population.

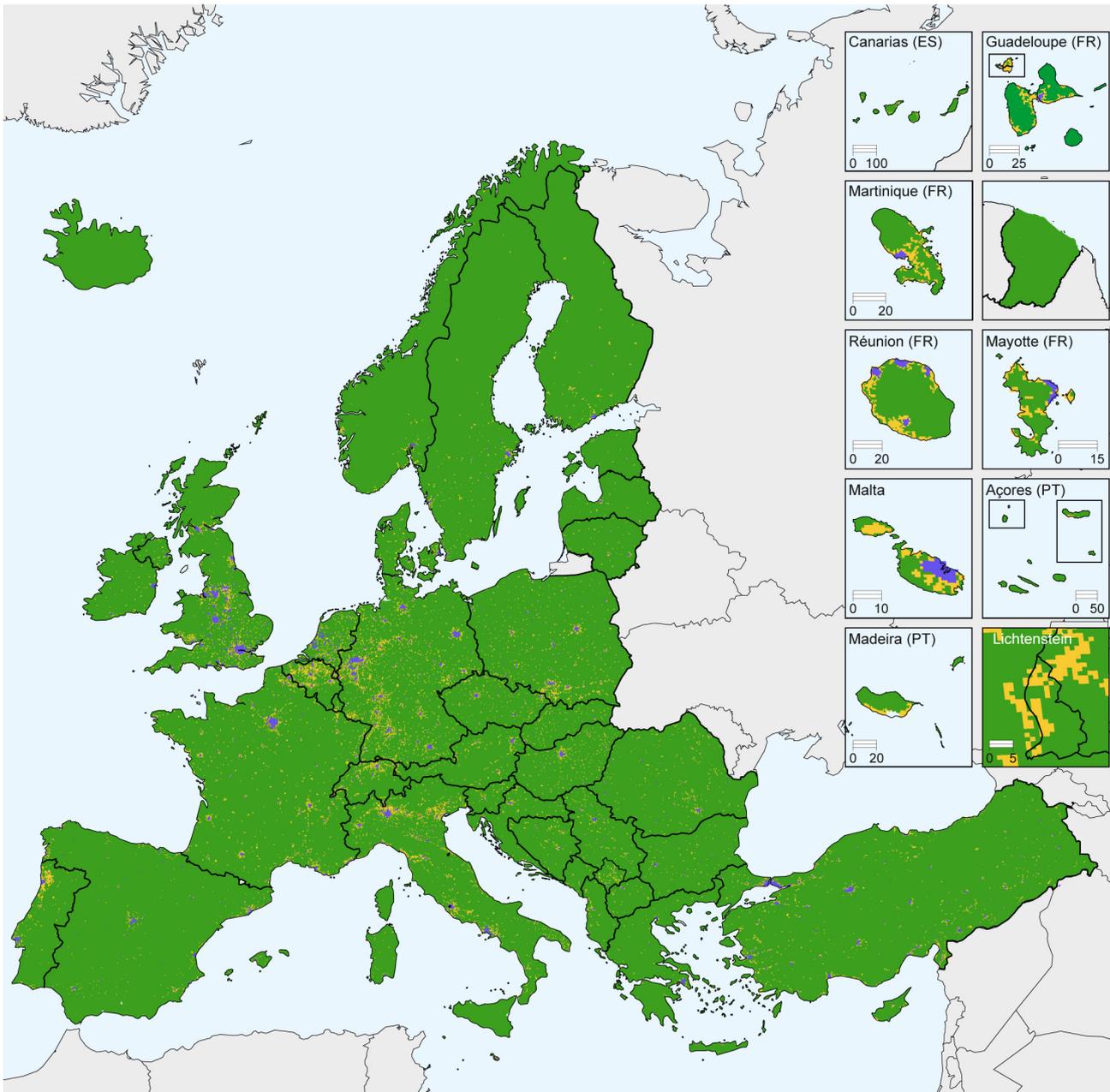
### SUMMARY

- Rural areas can be defined at different levels, from the small-scale areas (grid cells or LAU) to rather large regions (NUTS 3).
- Applying different methodologies leads to differing definitions and resulting measurements.
- This publication uses the Eurostat understanding of the urban-rural typology defining NUTS 3 regions as:
  - Predominantly urban regions,
  - Intermediate regions,
  - Predominantly rural regions.
- As of 2018, 44% of the EU28 territory consisted of rural areas, 44% of intermediate regions, and 12% of urban areas.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What understanding of urban-rural distinction is applied in your local, regional, or national context?
- If the Eurostat definitions were to apply, and using the detailed Eurostat databases, what types of regions are predominantly found in your local, regional, or national setting?
- How well do the Eurostat cartograms (see Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4) generally fit your own perceptions of local, regional or national reality when it comes to localizing rural and urban areas?

Figure 2: Urban-rural typology based on grid cells.  
Cluster types based on 1 km<sup>2</sup> grid cells



- Rural grid cells:  
grid cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> outside of urban centres and urban clusters
- Urban clusters (moderate-density clusters):  
a cluster of contiguous grid cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> with a density of at least 300 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and a minimum population of 5.000
- Urban centres (high-density clusters):  
a cluster of contiguous grid cells of 1 km<sup>2</sup> with a density of at least 1.500 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and a minimum population of 50.000 after gap-filling

Note: based on GEOSTAT population grid from 2011, additional data from Columbia University, Center for International Earth Science Information Network - CIESIN (2015): GHS population grid.

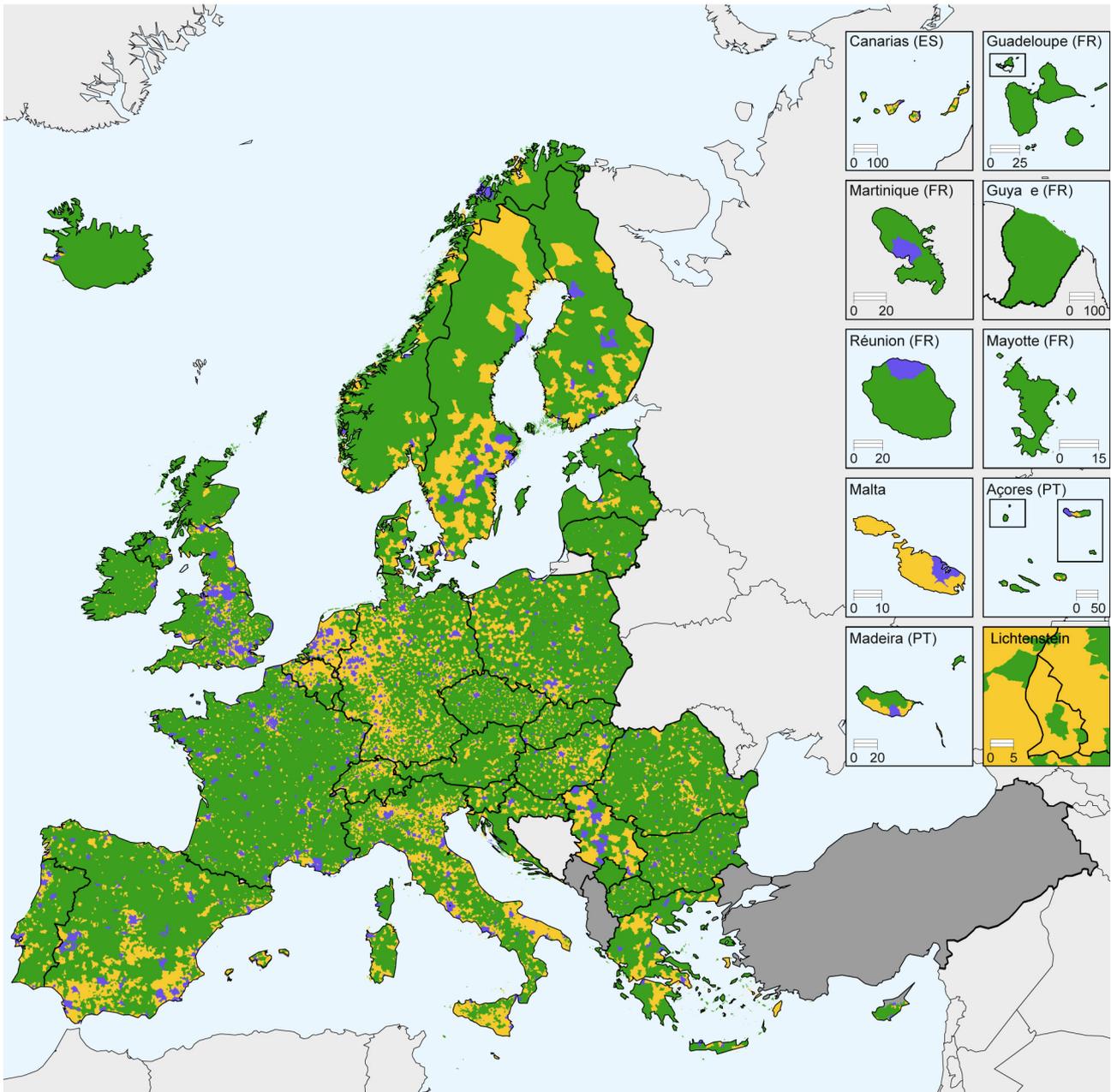
Source: Eurostat, JRC and European Commission, Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy and Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Development Eurostat 2019b.

Administrative boundaries:  
© EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat  
Cartography: Eurostat - GISCO, 09/2018

eurostat

0 200 400 600 800 km

Figure 3: Urban-rural typology based on local administrative units (LAU).  
Degree of urbanisation for local administrative units (LAU)



- Rural areas**  
(Thinly populated areas:  
more than 50% of the population  
lives in rural grid cells)
  
- Towns and suburbs**  
(Intermediate density areas:  
less than 50% of the population  
lives in rural grid cells and less  
than 50% of the population lives  
in urban centres)
  
- Cities**  
(Densely populated areas:  
at least 50% of the population  
lives in urban centres)
  
- Data not available**

Note: based on GEOSTAT population grid from 2011, additional data from Columbia University, Center for International Earth Science Information Network - CIESIN (2015): GHS population grid, and NUTS 2016.

Source: Eurostat, JRC and European Commission, Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy and Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Development Eurostat 2019c.

Administrative boundaries:  
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Cartography: Eurostat - GISCO, 09/2018v

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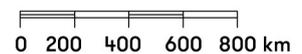
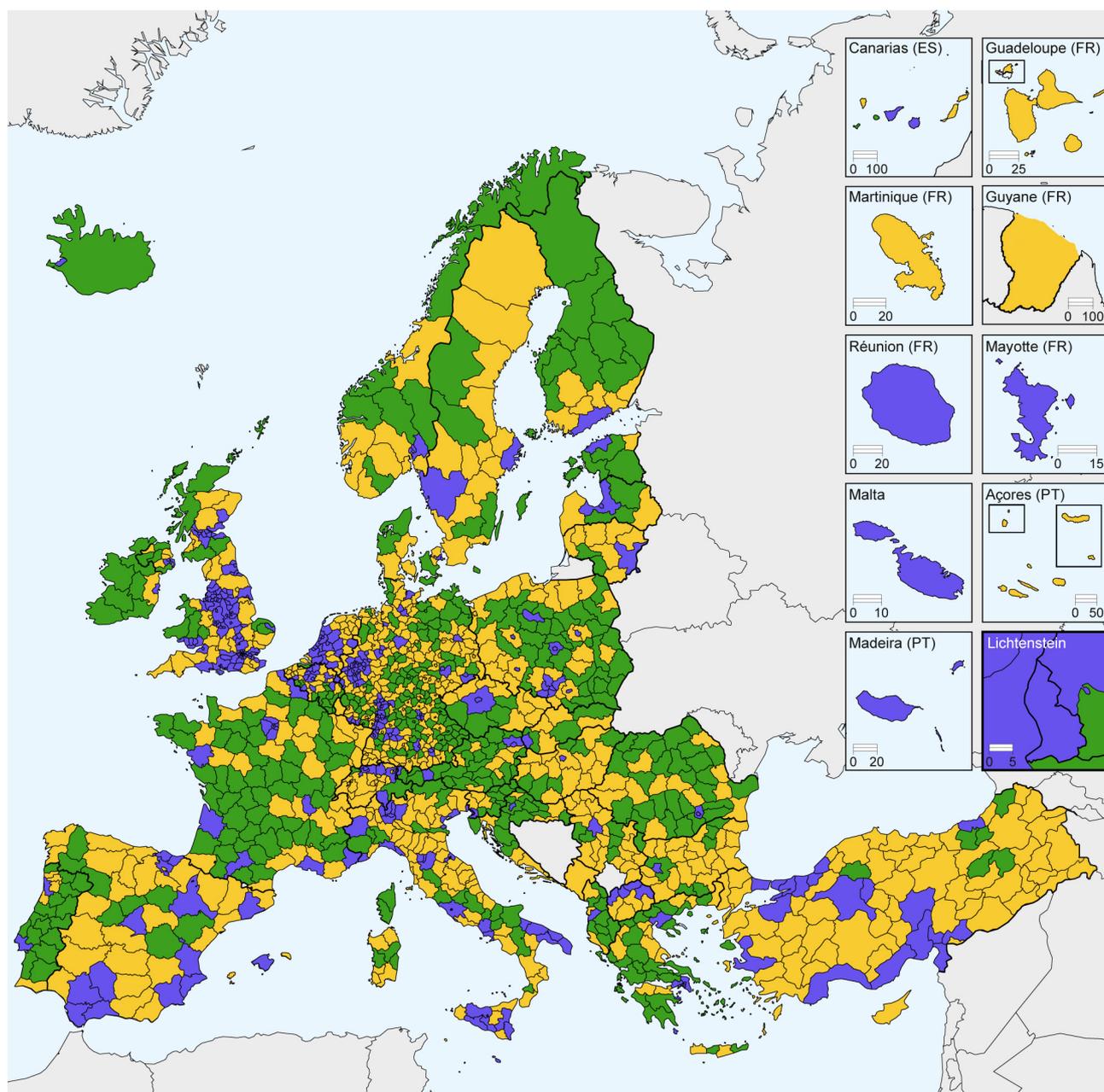


Figure 4: Urban-rural typology on the level of regions (NUTS 3).



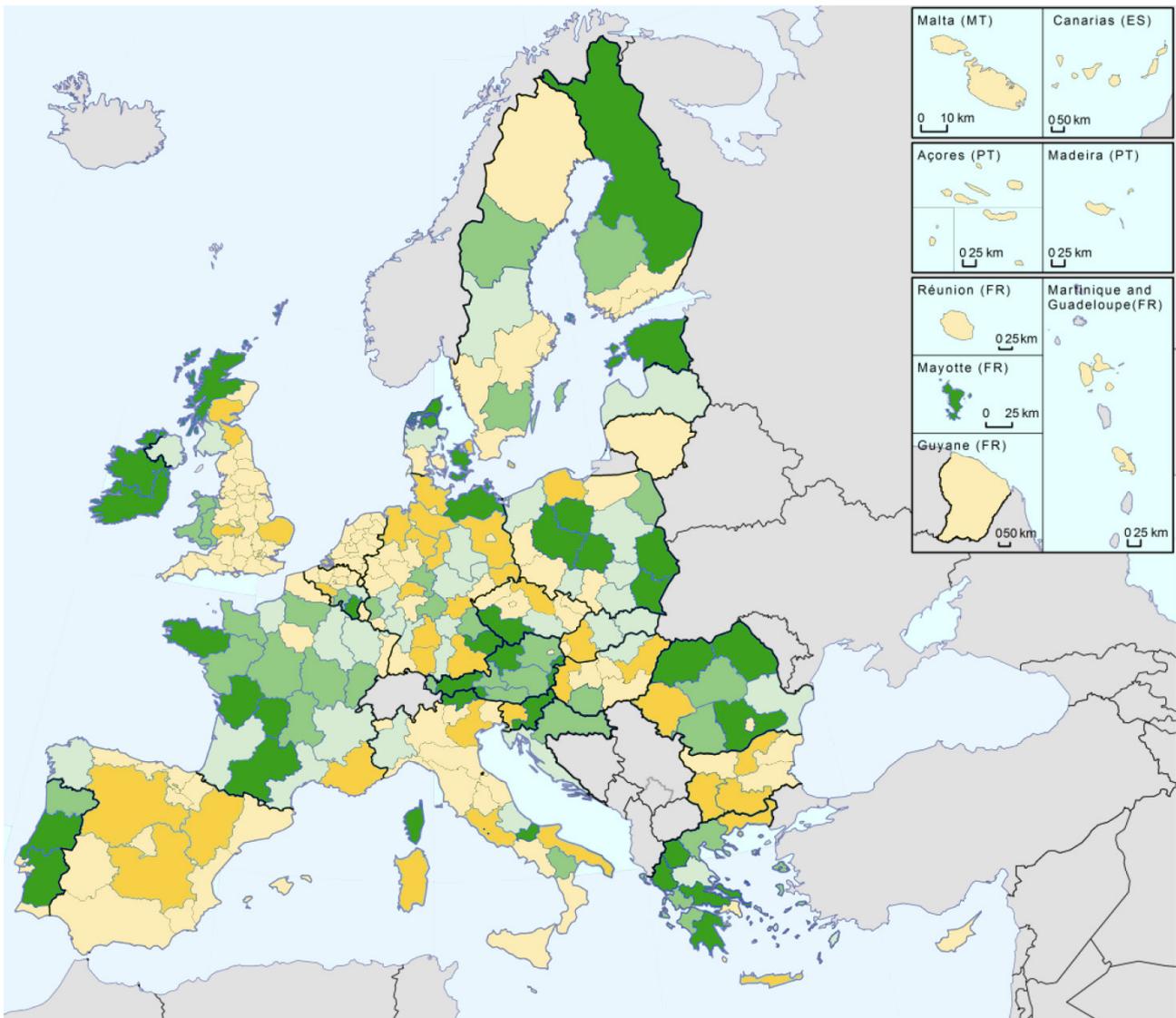
- Predominantly rural regions
- Intermediate regions
- Predominantly urban regions

Note: based on GEOSTAT population grid from 2011, additional data from Columbia University, Center for International Earth Science Information Network - CIESIN (2015): GHS population grid, and NUTS 2016.

Source: Eurostat, JRC and European Commission, Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy and Directorate-General Agriculture and Regional Development Eurostat 2019d.

Administrative boundaries:  
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 Cartography: Eurostat - GISCO, 09/2018

Figure 5: Importance of rural areas calculated as percentage of rural areas out of the total territory, NUTS 3, year 2015.



**Importance of rural territory  
(as % of total territory)**

- ≤ 20
- 20–40
- 40–60
- 60–80
- > 80

Note: Context indicator, C.03 – Territory, 2015; NUTS level: NUTS 2;  
 Source: Eurostat – Population Statistics; Year: 2015; Calculations:  
 DG AGRI; Cartography: DG AGRI GIS TEAM 12/2018;  
 European Commission 2018: 13.

©EuroGeographics for the administrative boundaries



0 125 250 500 750 km

### 1.3. Discovering Rural Youth in the EU

Youth is a concept describing a group of people sharing certain common qualities, and as such has been under continuous construction for several hundred years now, gradually shifting its definition. From purely developmental, often psychologizing, perspectives defining youth as a certain stage of development with given biological and cognitive qualities<sup>20</sup>, through more sociological definitions of youth as people in transition from childhood to adulthood<sup>21</sup>, to a standalone and independent group of people with a specific position in society<sup>22</sup>. All of these views can be debated and compared with respect to their contributions to the development of the concept of youth and various attempts can be made (and, of course, have been made) to reconcile the different positions and come up with one universal definition of youth. Every such universal definition can be, with all likelihood, only a very temporary definition. Youth as a concept describing a particular group of people is changing as is changing the societal role of youth, its culture, connections to other stages of life, and meaning society and young people themselves attribute to the youth.

Despite this ambiguity, there are definitions which, despite not being universally valid worldwide across all contexts, are able to provide guidance in a given geographical and social context: legal definitions and policy frameworks. First and foremost, it needs noticing that biological age is the basic determinant of youth in legal and policy documents in absolute majority of cases<sup>23</sup>, setting legal and policy definitions of youth aside from the abovementioned thinking traditions. This, apparently, is a consequence of the necessity to rather strictly define young people in such a way that they are clearly and as easily as possible identifiable for the purposes of laws and policy frameworks.

An overview of the European situation in legal and policy frameworks<sup>24</sup> suggests that six types of youth definitions could be found in the European legal and policy context in 2016 (Table 1). Apart from a handful of countries who merge either totally (*Children and youth merging model*) or partially (*Youth age model comprising also of childhood age*) young people and children into one larger category, most European countries use lower and upper age limit to define the young people in their legal and policy documents. In the European context, youth is usually defined as people in ages 14 to 30, with concrete definitions varying in the lower or upper age limits across the countries. This ambiguity in defining youth within the European legal and policy context is an important reason for utmost caution when comparing data on young people originating in different EU Member States. Information from one country can refer to different age groups than data from a neighbouring state. Last but not least, the national frameworks for defining youth will likely continually change in the future, as they are a subject of an ongoing discussion<sup>25</sup>.

The situation on the level of European countries is largely in line with the approach of the EU which defines youth for the purposes of its youth policies as young people aged 15 to 29<sup>26</sup>. Subsequently also the Eurostat<sup>27</sup> is using the same general<sup>28</sup> youth definition. It is noteworthy, however, that concrete EU policy measures, such as the EU youth programmes<sup>29</sup>, define young people (in some cases) as wide as 13 to 30-year olds<sup>30</sup>. Situation on the international level further complicates, if other transnational organizations are taken into account. As an example, the UN is defining youth as an age group of 15 to 24-year olds<sup>31</sup>, with an extra category of adolescents aged 10 to 19 taken into account as well and constituting a wide age group of 10 to 24-year olds<sup>32</sup>. Apparently, comparing statistics across the international organizations as well as across policy fields within the EU demands caution, since differing definitions of youth can be used.

<sup>20</sup> Covered extensively by developmental psychologists, such as Freud or Piaget. (Cf. Harlan 2016: 3; Henze 2015)

<sup>21</sup> Adding to the biological, emotional, and intellectual dimension also the social aspects, such as “*changing relationships with social institutions, in particular those concerned with family, work and leisure. These institutions must be successfully navigated by the individual in order to achieve the full and responsible adult maturity which is associated with citizenship in a democratic society.*” (Spence 2005: 48. Cf. Henze 2015)

<sup>22</sup> “*Modern youth adopts an own status and captures an own social room with claims, such as to live their newly acclaimed energies and possibilities, and test different social roles without immediately being confronted with the heavy weight of adult life and regulations.*” (Henze 2015: 6; Cf. Smolík 2014)

<sup>23</sup> There are exceptions, such as the case of “young farmers” who are defined not only with respect to age, but also in relation to the agricultural industry: “2. For the purposes of this Chapter, ‘young farmers’, means natural persons:

(a) who are setting up for the first time an agricultural holding as head of the holding, or who have already set up such a holding during the five years preceding the first submission of an application under the basic payment scheme or the single area payment scheme referred to in Article 72(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013; and

(b) who are no more than 40 years of age in the year of submission of the application referred to in point (a).” (European Parliament and Council of the EU 2013)

<sup>24</sup> Perovic 2016.

<sup>25</sup> As an example of such adjustments in the legal definitions and perceptions of young people, changes in legal voting age in Europe can be shown. At the beginning of the 20th century, the usual voting age was 21, with continuous changes resulting in legal voting age in most of the European countries dropping to 18 (Blais, Massicotte, Yoshinaka 2001; Ansala 2015: 6). At the same time, debate is already under way to consider young people eligible to vote since their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday (McAllister 2014; Wall 2014; Gershon 2018; Astor 2019), with some countries, like Malta and Austria in the European context, leading the suit by already lowering the legal voting age to 16 (Wagner, Johann, Kritzinger, 2012; Azelton, Barrowman, Reppell Not Dated: 37).

<sup>26</sup> European Commission 2020b; European Commission 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Eurostat 2020c; Eurostat 2015: 1.

<sup>28</sup> There are specific areas in which other age limits may apply to the youth, as mentioned above in the case of young farmers, or as is the case in young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) where the age limit of 15 to 24 applies (Eurostat 2017: 84).

<sup>29</sup> In particular, the Youth in Action programme (2007–2013) and the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme (2014–2020).

<sup>30</sup> European Commission 2011: 2; SALTO-YOUTH SEE RC 2018: 11.

<sup>31</sup> UN Not Dated: 2.

<sup>32</sup> UNFPA Not Dated: 1.

Table 1: Overview of national youth age definitions

<b>Youth age definition model</b>	<b>Lower age limit in years</b>	<b>Upper age limit in years</b>	<b>Countries using the given model</b>
<b>Predominant European model</b>	14 to 16	29 to 30	Andorra, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Georgia, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Moldova, Germany, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Serbia, Turkey, Croatia, Montenegro, Czech Republic and Spain
<b>Shortened youth age model</b>	13 to 16	24 to 25	Ireland, Latvia, Republic of North Macedonia, Switzerland and Sweden
<b>Start earlier and end later youth age model</b>	12 to 13	30	United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway and Portugal
<b>Prolonged youth age model</b>	12 to 16	32 to 35	Greece, Cyprus, Romania, San Marino and Ukraine
<b>Youth age model comprising also of childhood age</b>	3 to 7	25 to 30	France, Estonia and Iceland
<b>Children and youth merging model</b>	0	25 to 30	Austria, Belgium, Liechtenstein, Slovak Republic, Finland and the Netherlands

Source: Table created based on the original typology by Perovic (2016: 3). “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” changed to “Republic of North Macedonia” in line with the 2019 official development.

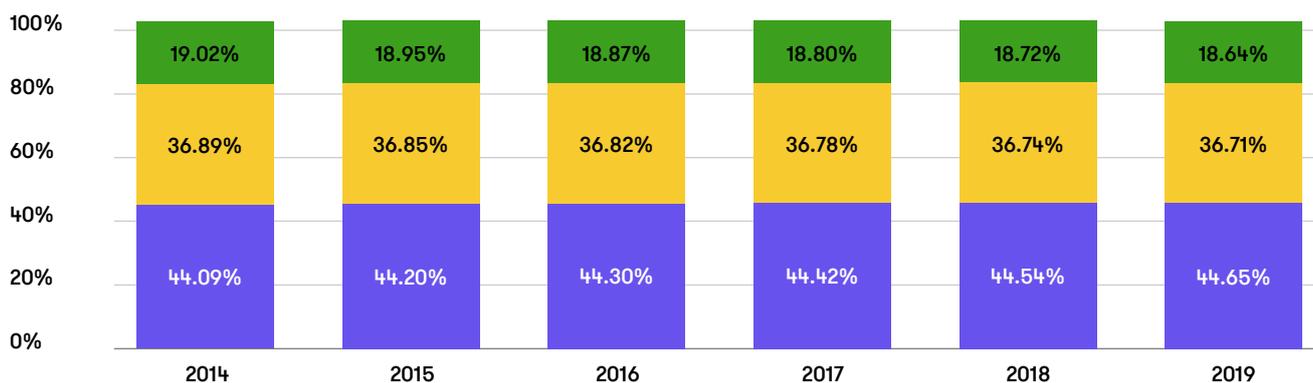
<sup>33</sup> These calculations are based on data from Eurostat (2020d) and are in line with information provided by the European Commission (2018:3). Again, conflicting information can be found in other official sources as other methodologies of data processing may apply. According to Eurostat (2018c), “28% of the EU’s population lived in rural area in 2015, with a somewhat higher share living in towns and suburbs (31.6%), while the biggest share of the EU-28 population lived in cities (40.4%)”. And according to the Joint Research Centre, the rural areas “hosted only about a quarter of EU’s population” (Perpiña Castillo et al. 2018: 8.).

<sup>34</sup> This is largely in line with the findings of the European Commission (2018:5) which state that between 2012 and 2017, rural areas (NUTS 3) lost about 0.5% of its total

In conclusion of this discussion, it needs to be noted that there is no universal definition of youth in use across the European countries or in the European international environment. **Given the focus of this publication on the European Youth Goals and on statistical indicators, the EU general definition of youth as encompassing young people 15 to 29 years old is used.** Therefore, the rural youth in the EU are defined as all young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are living in rural areas as defined by the Eurostat *urban-rural typology* described above. This definition, however, cannot be considered to be an ultimate solution to defining rural youth, since there may be particular policies aimed at young people in rural areas which define youth in a different way, as is the case in young farmers mentioned above. It provides, however, a general rule based on which rural youth can be identified, while taking into account the specificities of the sectors in question.

When it comes to the general population of the EU residing in different settings, data show that only about 19% of the EU total population lived in rural areas between 2014 and 2019, while about 37% lived in the intermediate regions, and 44% to 45% resided in urban areas<sup>33</sup> (Figure 6). In order to better picture the number of people in question, it is useful to also show absolute numbers of different EU28 populations as shown in Figure 7. From more than 500 million people living in the EU28 between 2014 and 2019, 220 to 230 million lived in urban regions, another almost 190 million in intermediate regions, and approximately 95 million in rural regions.

Figure 6: Total population of the EU28 by regions of residence. Percentages and time series 2014–2019.



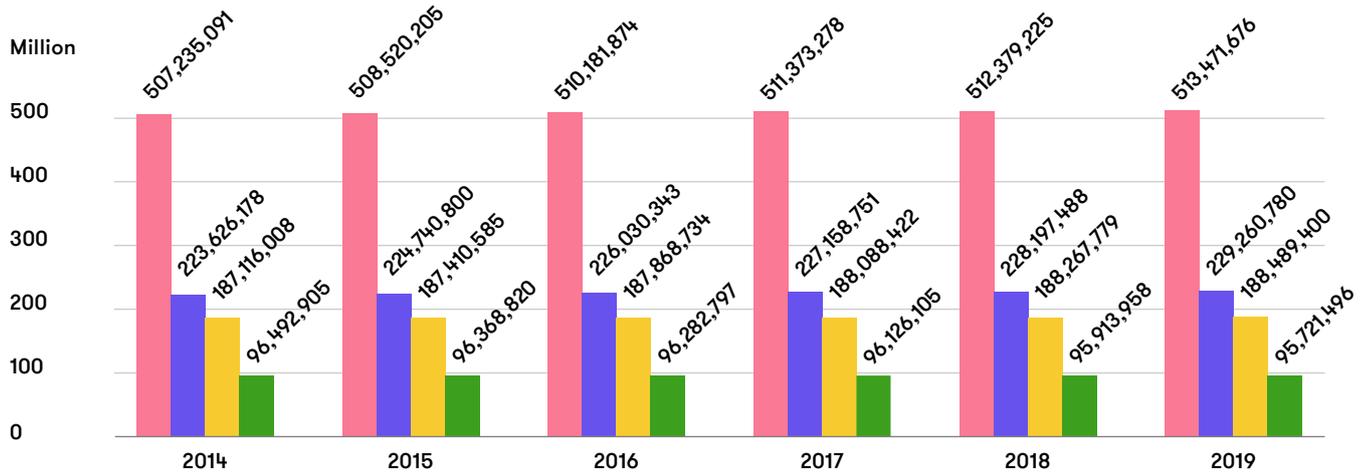
Source: Calculations based on data from Eurostat (2020d).

■ Total Population of Rural Regions in the EU28  
 ■ Total Population of Intermediate Regions in the EU28  
 ■ Total Population of Urban Regions in the EU28

population. Slightly different results were reported on the urban areas which, according to the European Commission (2018:5) grew in population by 1.6% and intermediate areas gained 0.9% of population. These differences can be caused by a different methodology as well as simply by different results for 2012–2017 comparison conducted by the European Commission (2018) and for 2014–2019 comparison conducted in this publication.

Both the percentage and the absolute number-based overview show that in total population including all age groups, decrease can be detected mostly in the rural regions. As shown in Figure 8, the total urban population grew by approximately 0.6% between 2014 and 2019, and the population of intermediate regions slightly decreased by about 0.2%, while the rural regions lost about 0.4% of its population<sup>34</sup>.

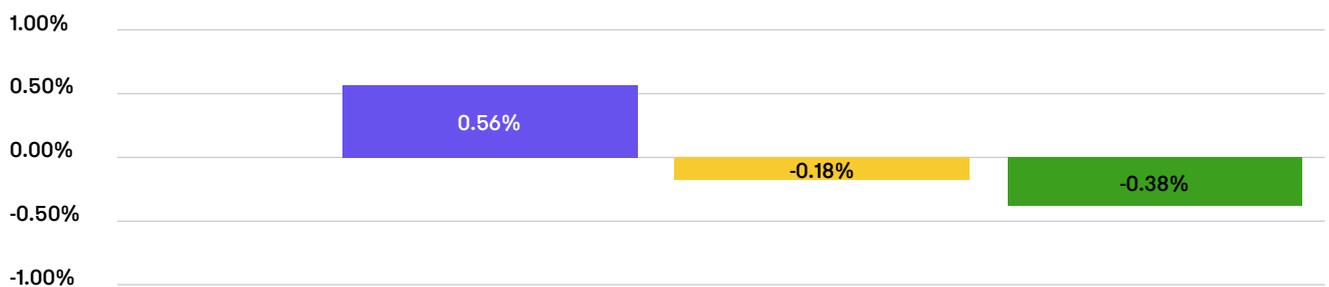
Figure 7: Total population of the EU28 and total populations of the EU28 by region of residence. Absolute numbers and time series 2014–2020.



Source: Calculations based on data from Eurostat (2020d).

- Total Population of the EU 28
- Total Population of Urban Regions in the EU28
- Total Population of Intermediate Regions in the EU28
- Total Population of Rural Regions in the EU28

Figure 8: Change in total population of the EU28 between 2014 and 2019 by regions of residence in percentages.



Source: Calculations based on data from Eurostat (2020d).

- Change in Total Population of Urban Regions between 2014 and 2019
- Change in Total Population of Intermediate Regions between 2014 and 2019
- Change in Total Population of Rural Regions between 2014 and 2019

<sup>35</sup> European Commission

A substantially more difficult task is to find information on young people living in rural areas in the EU, as age groups which can be found in various indicators, widely vary. The CAP (Common Agricultural Policy<sup>35</sup>) indicators only distinguish between three age groups: 14 and younger, 15 to 64 years of age, and 65 and older. According to this distinction, the EU population in all three types of areas (rural, intermediate and urban) consists of roughly the same proportion of people of different ages. There were between 15% and 16% of young people aged 14 or less, between 64% to 67% of population aged 15 to 64, and between 17% and 20% of older people aged 65 and over in all area types between 2012 and 2017<sup>36</sup>. This suggests that, as far as the very young people of 14 or younger are concerned, there is no apparent difference in their distribution among the rural, intermediate, and urban areas. At the same time, it seems their ratio is rather consistent in all types of areas over time with no increases or decreases between 2012 and 2017. This age distinction, however, proves to be rather difficult when referring to the rural youth as defined above.

<sup>36</sup> European Commission 2018: 6.

<sup>37</sup> When referring to the EU Member States in this publication, the EU28, hence also including the UK, is covered by the term, unless otherwise stated. This is due to the fact that the UK had been part of the EU in the periods in question (i.e. pre-2020).

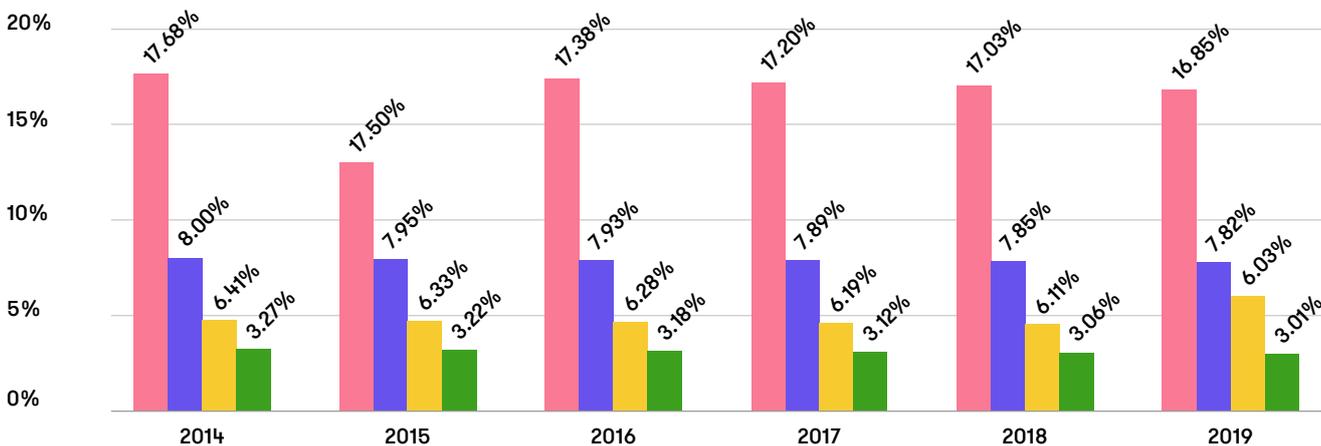
The Eurostat provides absolute numbers describing total population of the EU Member States<sup>37</sup> divided by age groups and types of regions. When it comes to age groups, the Eurostat provides several different age group divisions. In order to capture the young people as defined above (15 to 29-year olds), the following division needs to be used:

- 15 to 19-year olds,
- 20 to 24-year olds,
- 25 to 29-year olds<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Eurostat 2020d.

In these age groups which, if tackled together, record the young people between the ages of 15 to 29, there is between, roughly, 17% and 18% of the total EU28 population, as shown in Figure 9. Out of these 17–18%, there are about 8% of young people living in urban regions, about 6% living in intermediate regions, and about 3% living in rural regions.

Figure 9: Total population of young people in the EU28 by regions of residence. Percentages based on total EU28 population and time series 2014–2019.

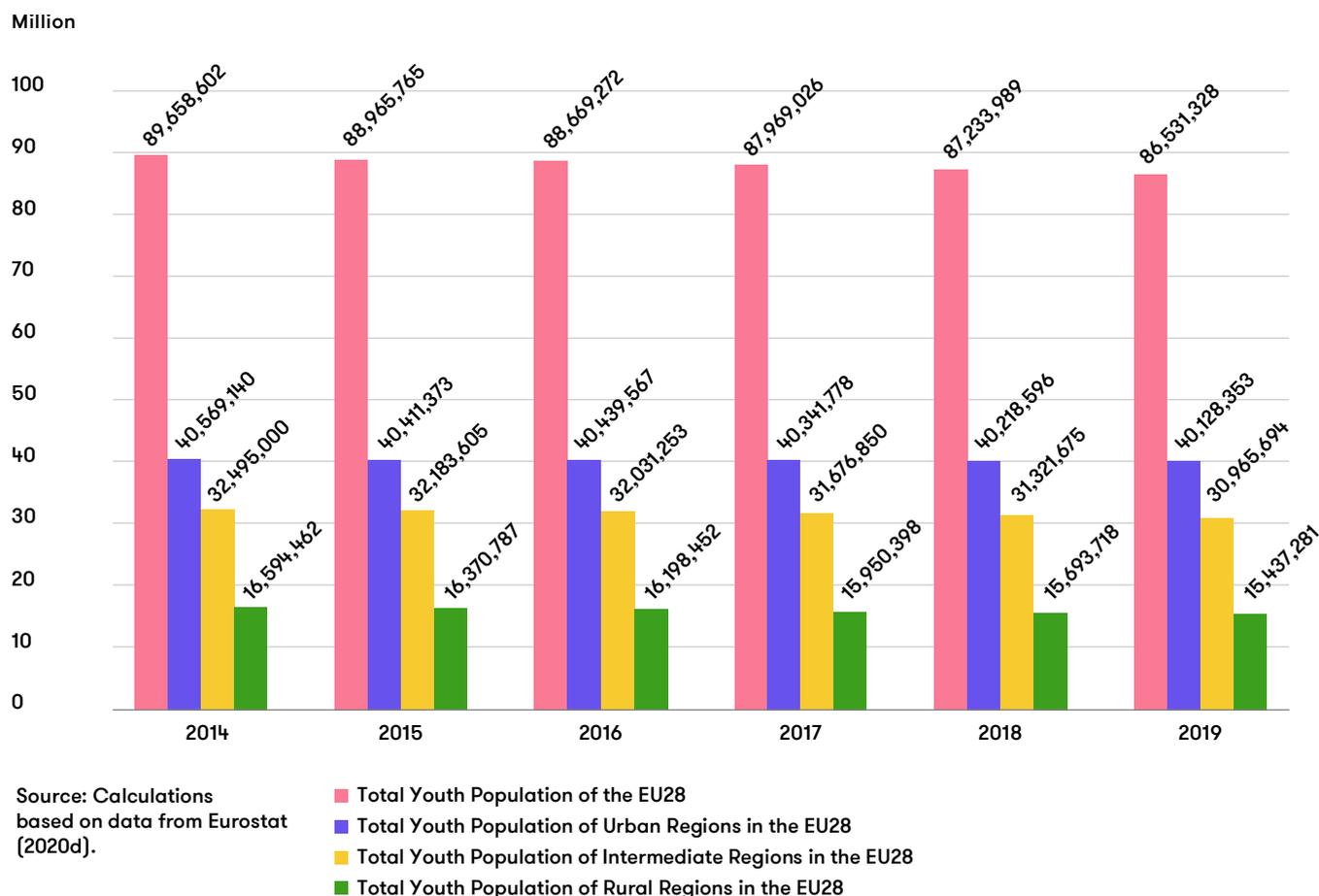


Source: Calculations based on data from Eurostat (2020d).

- Total Youth Population of the EU28
- Total Youth Population of Urban Regions in the EU28
- Total Youth Population of Intermediate Regions in the EU28
- Total Youth Population of Rural Regions in the EU28

This, again, is well illustrated using absolute numbers as shown in Figure 10. There were, in total, between 86 and 90 million of young people in the EU28. About 40 million of them lived in urban regions, about 30 million in intermediate regions, and only about 16 million resided in rural areas.

Figure 10: Total population of young people in the EU28 by regions of residence. Absolute numbers and time series 2014–2019.

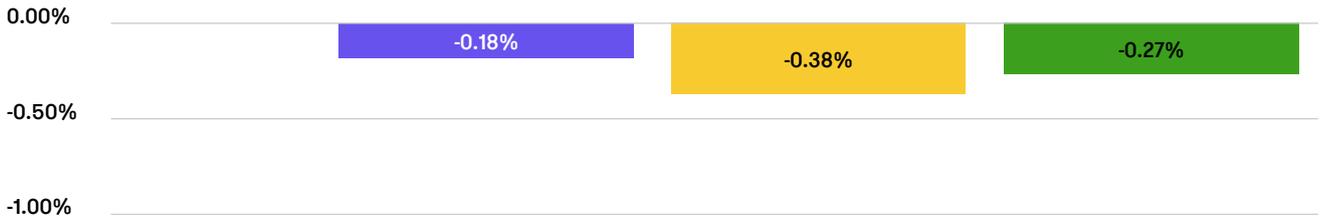


An apparent decrease in numbers of young people across all regions can be noted and is shown in Figure 11. This result is not surprising, given the overall long-term decrease in youth population in the EU28. This trend is called population aging and is well-documented. Changes caused by population aging can be clearly seen in the population pyramid comparing EU28 populations in 2001 and 2017 in Figure 12. Young people aged 15 to 29 are among the most rapidly decreasing age cohorts, with gradually increasing numbers in population of 45 years old and older. This phenomenon is caused by two main factors. First and foremost, the fertility rate drops, causing decrease in numbers of children and young people; and secondly, life expectancy increases, leading to more people living longer lives<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Eatock 2019: I.

What is, nevertheless, interesting, is the rate of decline in different types of regions. While the decline is rather low in case of urban regions, much faster decrease in population levels can be seen in intermediate and rural areas. This suggests that while the overall trend of decreasing youth populations is present in the EU28 context, it is happening at different paces in different types of regions. This may imply that youth populations are not only decreasing due to the overall trend of population aging, but that some other influences (e.g. migrations across regions, different fertility rates, etc.) may also be contributing to speeding up the decrease of youth populations in intermediate and rural regions.

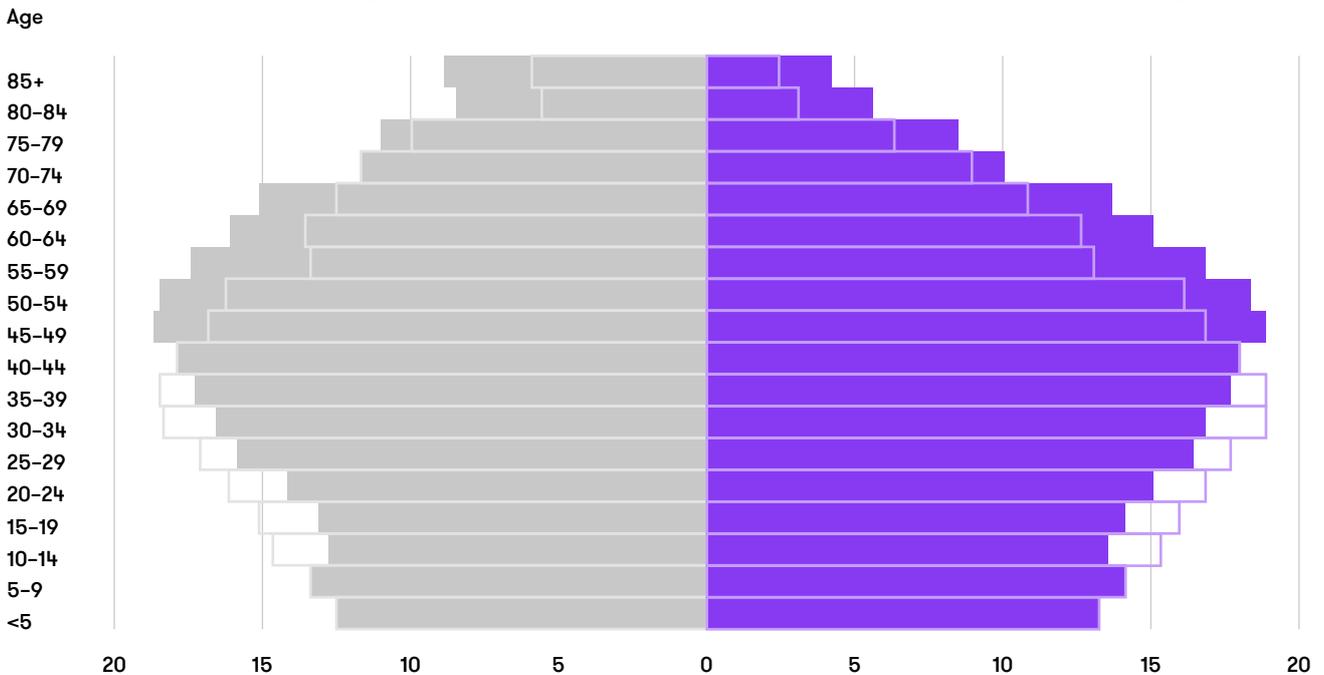
Figure 11: Change in youth population of the EU28 between 2014 and 2019 by regions of residence in percentages based on total EU28 population.



Source: Calculations based on data from Eurostat (2020d).

- Change in Youth Population of Urban Regions between 2014 and 2019
- Change in Youth Population of Intermediate Regions between 2014 and 2019
- Change in Youth Population of Rural Regions between 2014 and 2019

Figure 12: Population pyramids of EU28 in 2001 and 2017 divided by gender.



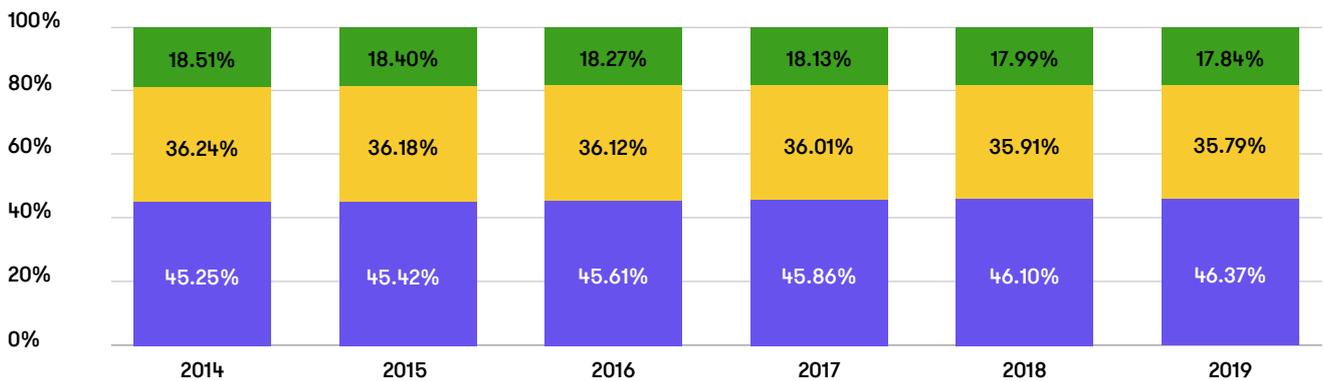
Source: Eatock (2019: 4).

- Female 2001
- Female 2017
- Male 2001
- Male 2017

Population in Million

In order to further explore the distribution of youth populations in different types of regions, ratios of the young people differentiated by place of residence is calculated in Figure 13. These percentages are based on the total youth population only (see Figure 10 for details on absolute numbers), and hence the total (100%) are all young people living in the EU28 in the given year (yellow bar in Figure 10). This figure is, therefore, compensating for the decrease in total youth population as the ratios always combine into 100% in total. As shown in Figure 13, the overall distribution of the young people across different settings is very similar to the one for the total EU28 population (compare Figure 13 with Figure 6). Young people are living slightly less in rural areas (long-term by roughly 0.5%) and in intermediate regions (long-term by almost 1.0%) and more in urban regions (long-term by about 1.5%).

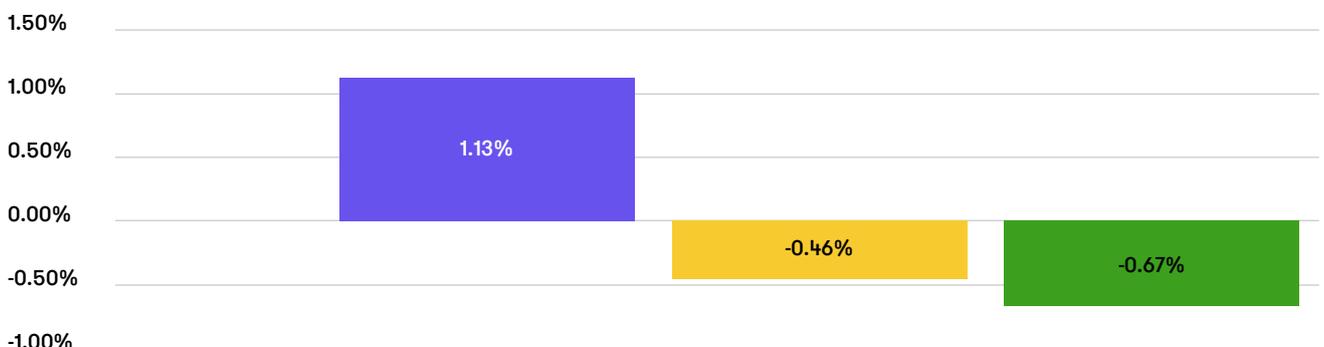
Figure 13: Total population of young people in the EU28 by regions of residence. Percentages based on the youth population only and time series 2014–2019.



Source: Calculations based on data from Eurostat (2020d).

■ Total Youth Population of Rural Regions in the EU28  
■ Total Youth Population of Intermediate Regions in the EU28  
■ Total Youth Population of Urban Regions in the EU28

Figure 14: Change in the distribution of youth population of the EU28 between 2014 and 2019 by regions of residence in percentages based on youth EU28 population



Source: Calculations based on data from Eurostat (2020d).

■ Change in Youth Population of Urban Regions between 2014 and 2019  
■ Change in Youth Population of Intermediate Regions between 2014 and 2019  
■ Change in Youth Population of Rural Regions between 2014 and 2019

Exploring the distribution of youth population per se across different types of regions, as presented in Figure 13, also provides a basis to see what change there is in the long term when it comes to the place of residence of young people in the EU28. Figure 14 shows that there is a long-term increase in youth populations of urban areas (by over 1.0% between 2014 and 2019), while intermediate and rural youth populations shrank (by roughly 0.5% and 0.7% respectively). These figures are providing an insight into the distribution of youth across different settings without the necessity to take into account the overall trend of population ageing as was the case in Figure 11. As a result, it is apparent that the distribution of young people in the EU28 differs across region types: young people in the EU28 are increasingly inhabiting urban areas and leaving areas with rural or intermediate nature. This trend is stronger in the youth population than the one detected in the total EU28 population.

### SUMMARY

- Youth is a concept without a universally applicable definition.
- Definition of youth as a group of young people 15 to 29 years old is used in this publication in line with a commonly used youth definition in the EU policy context.
- Rural youth is defined as all young people aged 15 to 29 who live in rural areas as defined in the previous chapter.
- Between 2014 and 2019, approximately 19% (about 95 million) of the EU28 population lived in rural regions, while about 37% (about 188 million) of the EU28 population resided in intermediate areas, and 44% to 45% (223 to 229 million) of the EU28 population lived in urban areas.
- Between 2014 and 2019, total population of the EU28 urban areas increased by 0.6% while the total population of the rural areas decreased by 0.4%.
- Between 2014 and 2019, approximately 18% (15 to 16 million) of the young people in the EU28 lived in rural areas, about 36% (30 to 32 million) lived in intermediate regions, and 45% to 46% (about 40 million) lived in urban settings.
- Between 2014 and 2019, youth population of the EU28 urban areas increased by 1.1%, while the youth population of the rural areas decreased by 0.7%.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How many people in total live in rural and urban regions in your local, regional, or national context?
- In case time series of data are available or using the detailed Eurostat databases, what trends can be identified in your local, regional, or national context?
- How do you define youth in your local, regional, or national context?
- Using your definition or using the definition from this publication, how many young people live in rural and urban regions in your local, regional, or national context?
- In case time series of data are available or using the detailed Eurostat databases, what trends can be identified in your local, regional, or national context?
- How do trends from the general population and from the youth population compare?

## 1.4. Discovering Rural Youth Policies in the EU

<sup>40</sup> 2018.

Rural policies as well as youth policies are in themselves domains of today's EU policymaking. Identifying rural youth policies is, therefore, a task which demands knowledge of both aforementioned original policy sources: rural and youth areas. European Network for Rural Development<sup>40</sup> (ENRD) compiled an overview of policy instruments focusing on young people in rural areas and highlighting the main overarching EU policies targeting rural youth:

- The EU Youth Strategy (EUYS),
- The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP),
- The European Employment Strategy (EES).

<sup>41</sup> Council of the European Union 2009.

<sup>42</sup> 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Council of the European Union 2018, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Council of the European Union 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Council of the European Union 2018.

While the EUYS 2010–2018<sup>41</sup> mentioned by the ENRD<sup>42</sup> aimed generally at young people in the EU in a number of areas, hence also implicitly covering the rural youth, the current EUYS 2019–2027<sup>43</sup> features the European Youth Goals (described in chapter 1.1) which also include rural youth as one of the explicit target groups. While the main topical areas of the EUYS 2019–2027<sup>44</sup> are covered by the European Youth Goals, the main transversal areas are youth engagement, participation, and empowerment, as well as connecting youth across borders and settings. The EUYS 2019–2027 is, apparently, broad in its aims and virtually all of the objectives are applicable also to the rural youth, making all of the concrete measures and instruments of the EUYS 2019–2027 available to support rural youth. These instruments contain for example<sup>45</sup>:

- The EU youth mobility programmes (e.g. Erasmus+: Youth in Action, the European Solidarity Corps),
- The participation frameworks (e.g. the EU Youth Dialogue, the EU Youth Strategy Platform),
- The information provision mechanisms (e.g. the European Youth Portal, the Youth Wiki),
- The knowledge-building mechanisms (e.g. Expert Groups, grant schemes supporting youth research).

<sup>46</sup> European Commission 2020c.

The CAP<sup>46</sup> is in general focusing on supporting and safeguarding farmers, on sustainable management and maintenance of natural resources and rural areas, and on supporting rural economy. Apparently, rural youth is only partially constituting the target group of the CAP, nevertheless, there are specific measures which aim at targeting young people in rural areas directly, mostly aiming at young people in agricultural domain:

- Young farmers scheme,
- Start-up aid for young farmers,
- Support to young people in rural areas, including non-farmers.

<sup>47</sup> European Commission 2020d.

The EES<sup>47</sup> aims at creating more and better jobs throughout the EU, and as such consists of a wide variety of instruments, with some measures targeting directly young people. Despite not aiming at rural areas explicitly, all of these measures are aiming at young people in general and covering all contexts, be it urban or rural<sup>48</sup>:

<sup>48</sup> European Commission 2020e.

- The Youth Guarantee (supported by the Youth Employment Initiative),
- The Quality Framework for Traineeships,
- The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.

All of the aforementioned policy domains well demonstrate the cross-sectoral nature of the rural youth policy: young people living in rural areas are explicitly targeted by certain policies, but at the same time covered implicitly by other policy areas, ranging from education and health-care to transportation and culture. With this finding in mind, it is possible to compile a definition of the rural youth policy. **Rural youth policy is any public policy targeting either explicitly or implicitly young people (15 to 29 years of age) in rural areas (as defined by Eurostat).** Such policies can be identified on all levels, from the local, through the regional and national, to the international.

This is an important aspect affecting the nature of indicators in the rural youth policy area. The link between an indicator and a given policy is apparent in case rural youth is mentioned as an explicit target group (e.g. in the EUYS and CAP) but can be blurry in case of more general policies, such as the ESS. Rural youth, however, should not be omitted from any policy indicator, as it constitutes, explicitly or implicitly, the target group for policy delivery across all policy domains<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> In view of the concluding remarks above, it needs to be noted that the list of policies targeting rural youth quoted in this chapter is not complete or exhaustive, but rather serves as examples of both explicit and implicit rural youth policies.

### SUMMARY

- Rural youth can become an explicit target group of a policy, such as in the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 through the European Youth Goal no.6.
- Rural youth can become an implicit target group of a policy, such as in the European Employment Strategy where all of the EU youth population is targeted.
- Rural youth policy is therefore any public policy targeting either explicitly or implicitly young people in rural areas on any policy level: local, regional, national, and international.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Do the abovementioned EU policies manifest in your local, regional, or national context?
- What other explicit rural youth policies exist in your local, regional, or national context?
- What other policies targeting rural youth implicitly exist in your local, regional, or national context?

# 2.

# Description and Analysis

First part of this paper clarified understanding of the basic concepts such as rural areas, youth and rural youth, and rural youth policy. This section builds on the outlined understanding of these concepts and dives into the area of indicators connected to the rural youth. **The ultimate aim of this section is to provide the reader with an overview of existent indicators on international and national levels within the EU context, to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the current indicators, and to outline threats and opportunities for the future development of these indicators.** All of this information may help not only to widen the use of existent indicators, but also to facilitate, if need be, creation of new indicators on all levels.

First, a short note on methodology is presented, summarizing sampling, the data collection, and analytical processes. Second, detailed findings are presented in line with the framework of the SWOT analysis method. Lastly, main findings are summarized, and recommendations stressed.

## 2.1. Notes on Methodology

Presented study aims at (a) outlining existent indicators focusing on rural youth in the EU context and (b) analyse the quality of these indicators while pointing out recommendations for improvements where possible. This enables the reader not only to glimpse what ready-to-use indicators exist as of the first half of 2020, but also to spot their strong and weak suits, be aware of them when using the existent indicators as well as when creating ones in other contexts.

<sup>50</sup> Stratified convenience sampling stands for a combination of two sampling strategies. The sampling is stratified as it produces analytical sample (set of indicators to be analysed) in two steps. First, indicator sources are identified, hence the strata out of which indicators can be found are named. In these sources (strata), the indicators are located, ignoring all other indicator sources (other strata) in existence. The sampling is also convenient in nature, since conditions used in identifying the indicator sources (strata) were based mostly on availability.

<sup>51</sup> For more details please see here: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/statistics-a-z/abc>

<sup>52</sup> European Commission 2018.

<sup>53</sup> For more details please see here: <https://data.oecd.org/searchresults/?r=+f/type/datasets>

<sup>54</sup> For more details please see here: <http://www.vyzkummladez.cz/en/registr>

<sup>55</sup> For more details please see here: <https://www.noorteseire.ee/en/indicators>

<sup>56</sup> For more details please see here: <https://nuorisobarometri.tietoanorista.fi/>

<sup>57</sup> For more details please see here, translated using web-based tools: <https://indikaattorit.tietoanorista.fi/>

<sup>58</sup> For more details please see here: <https://nuorisotilastot.fi/#1/en/frontpage///null/null/null////////%22%22//%22%22///null////////e30=>

<sup>59</sup> For more details please see here, translated using web-based tools: <http://www.ungidag.se/>

In order to achieve these goals, stratified convenience sampling<sup>50</sup> was used to limit the scope of this study as well as to identify a sample suitable for analyses. Firstly, a sum of indicator sources (strata) was identified. Out of all potential sources of indicators in existence (basically all sources of statistical data in the world), only a limited number of indicator sources were included in this study, in line with conditions described below:

- Relevance of the indicator sources for the European Union on international and national levels.
- Availability of the indicator sources in the form of standalone youth-focused indicator sets.
- Availability of the indicator sources online.
- Availability of the indicator sources in English language.

When applying these conditions, the following indicator sources (strata) were identified:

- International level indicator sources:
  - European Union – Eurostat<sup>51</sup>, including CAP indicators<sup>52</sup>
  - OECD – OECD Data<sup>53</sup>
- National level indicator sources:
  - Czech Republic – The Youth in Numbers<sup>54</sup>
  - Estonia – Youth Monitor<sup>55</sup>
  - Finland – Youth Barometer<sup>56</sup>, Well-being Indicators<sup>57</sup>, and Youth Work Statistics<sup>58</sup>
  - Sweden – Ung idag (Young Today)<sup>59</sup>

All of the aforementioned indicator sources (strata) were explored in the first half of 2020 in search of the rural youth indicators. In order to be recognized as rural youth indicators, the following conditions needed to be fulfilled:

- Enabling differentiation of geographical locations either as:
  - Urban-rural distinctions, or
  - Geographical locations identifiable as urban or rural (e.g. as cartogram or names of regions, etc.).
- And at the same time, enabling differentiation of young people in line with the definition used in this study either as:
  - 15 to 29-year olds as a standalone age cohort, or
  - A set of age cohorts enabling differentiation of the 15 to 29-year olds or at least some subgroup (e.g. 15 to 18-year olds, etc.).

Once the indicator was identified as consistent with the conditions above and thus considered to be a rural youth indicator for the purposes of this study, it was catalogued together with its last known online position (as of the time of extraction, i.e. in the first half of 2020), and its short description. All in all, 145 relevant indicators were found and are listed in the Appendix to this publication. Out of the 145 relevant indicators which constituted the analytical sample for this study:

- 52% (75 indicators) were found in Eurostat sources,
- 26% (38 indicators) were found in Finnish sources,
- 11% (16 indicators) were found in Swedish sources,
- 10% (14 indicators) were found in Estonian sources,
- 1% (2 indicators) were found in OECD sources,
- 0% (0 indicators) were found in the Czech sources.

All of these rural youth indicators (the whole analytical sample of this study) were processed using SWOT analysis approach. The aim of this process was to discover strengths and weaknesses one should be aware of when using the indicators, and to explore opportunities and threats present when further developing the existent indicators or when attempting to establish completely new ones. Outcomes of the SWOT analysis are detailed in the next chapter.

As for the limitations of this study, the stratified convenience sampling constitutes the most profound one. Notably, it excludes sources from many EU Member States as well as from many international organizations, but also all national statistical offices as well as any other sources which, despite being potentially relevant, are not available in English or translatable easily via web-based engines. Reasons for these limitations are partly stemming from the resources available to conduct this study and partly from the intentional focus on the youth field as such. This study is, therefore, deliberately giving priority to such online sources which are primarily aiming at youth as such over those which cover youth only as one of many other groups, as is often the case in national statistical offices. This is not entirely true in case of the Eurostat, but as it is the main source of the data on the EU level, it could not have been omitted. Lastly, the study focuses on the EU environment and this, again, can be seen as a limitation in applicability across contexts.

All of these limitations are to some extent mitigated by (a) explicitly acknowledging this publication to be a result of an *exploratory study in one given context*, not of a representative or exhaustive research; and by (b) using the SWOT analysis to process the data, an approach rather qualitative in nature underlining specificities of the indicators identified within this particular study.

## 2.2. SWOT Analysis of the Rural Youth Indicators

The analytical sample of rural youth indicators identified in this study was processed using the SWOT analysis guidelines. Firstly, the main properties of the analytical sample of rural youth indicators is described using two basic categories: strengths and weaknesses. Each of these categories is described with relation to the content of the indicators, i.e. to the ideas the indicators depict, and with relation to the form of the indicators, i.e. to the way they are presented in their respective online locations. Secondly, opportunities and threats are explored, providing insights into possible future developments of the rural youth indicators.

### 2.2.1. Strengths

When considering strengths of the rural youth indicators in the domain of **content**, it must be noted that **basic data are available in basic domains**, such as:

- democratic participation<sup>60</sup>,
- demography,
- education,
- employment,
- health, including mental health,
- lifestyle,
- social welfare<sup>61</sup>,
- youth work<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Indicators available at national level only.

<sup>61</sup> Indicators available at national level only.

<sup>62</sup> Indicators available at national level only.

Despite not all of these universally available in all contexts, with some only present in Eurostat data and some only found in indicators used at national levels, these are generally areas in which rural youth indicators can be found. Basic information on youth in rural areas are, therefore, available.

As for the **form** of presentation of these indicators, **basic formats are available** in vast majority of cases: figures in tables or visualized in charts. In most of the rural youth indicators, **basic interactivity is ensured** by enabling the user to show subgroups (e.g. gender categories), limit time series, or distinguish between geographical locations. In some cases, cartograms are available, either as static ones showing one particular layout, or as basic interactive ones which offer the same basic options described above.

### 2.2.2. Weaknesses

In terms of **content**, besides basic areas, **many gaps can be identified in the domains covered by rural youth indicators**. Among others, these are examples of areas which are not covered by the rural youth indicators:

- access to information, including data on disinformation,
- data connectivity,
- equality and inclusion,
- environment and sustainability, including climate emergency,
- housing,
- infrastructure, including access to public services,
- internationalisation, including hosting and sending international activities as well as individual mobility engagements,
- leisure time,
- out-of-school learning,
- transportation, including public transport,
- youth organizations, including NGOs.

Covering these and other domains is crucial to ensure detailed understanding of the rural youth beyond the basic policy areas.

Moreover, **definitions of key concepts are not consistent** not only across indicator sources (e.g. between the rural youth indicators found at Eurostat and the ones found at the national levels), but in some cases also within one indicator source (e.g. across Eurostat indicators). This leads to indicators in which age groups are defined in different fashion, making them not only incomparable to other indicators, but also potentially obscuring youth in some areas at all.

When assessing **form** of presentation of the rural youth indicators, several weaknesses were identified. Firstly, **time series are a problematic aspect**, with indicators which contain data with either incomplete (e.g. 2010–2012 only), interrupted (e.g. 2010–2012 and 2015–2018), or missing time series (e.g. data available for 2011 only). Such indicators provide a fragmented picture with a limited or missing chance to analyse trends in the given domains. It can be recommended to collect data in time series in all possible cases. If such data collection is demanding in terms of logistics or resources, time series can be adjusted to contain data for every two, three or four years, hence providing at least some potential for trend analysis.

Secondly, **presentation of indicators online is very often unintuitive and cumbersome**, making rural youth indicators hard to locate as well as hard to browse through. Indicators are often found in different locations, even for indicators covering the same policy domain. Once the indicators are located, exploring the data can be difficult due to lack of tutorials, especially in case of more complex visualisations. Bookmarking can also be difficult, especially in case of interactive indicators, as these often return to default, if bookmarked and reloaded. In this case, it can be recommended to look to the national level for examples of good practice, as there are some well-done online indicator sets to get inspired by (e.g. the Swedish indicator source).

Another weakness of the rural youth indicators is a **limited presentation of data types**, as the user is often offered either ratios (percentages) or absolute numbers (total figures), but rarely both. This does not only present a problem in reading the data (e.g. 3% of the total EU28 population being young people living in rural areas can sound modest until we learn that these account for about 15 million young people, see Figure 9 and Figure 10), but also creates room for error as users need to calculate the other data type on their own. It can be recommended to include different data types into interactive presentations of the data in order to make these easily available, therefore strengthening the understanding of the data and limiting space for errors.

As mentioned above, currently **the rural youth indicators are rarely presented using advanced static or interactive data presentation options**. Despite this general trend, examples of good practice can be identified on both the international (e.g. Eurostat Statistical Atlas<sup>63</sup>) and national (e.g. Swedish or Finnish interactive presentations) levels. It can be recommended not only to enable such features across further indicators, but also to allow for additional combinations of indicators in the visualisations and to allow for exports of such custom-made visualisations. That way, users could find more precise answers to their questions, for example creating a cartogram depicting data only for female youth in rural regions who do not participate in regular youth work activities. Moreover, such cartogram could include an interactive button showing progress across the time series, hence clearly showcasing which regions are improving and where the situation is worsening over time. These are mere examples of how interactivity of the data presentation could be increased, therefore making the rural youth indicators more accessible to wider audiences.

<sup>63</sup> Eurostat 2019b, 2019c, 2019d.

### 2.2.3. Opportunities

Several opportunities were identified in rural youth indicators in terms of **content**. Firstly, **new or renewed policy frameworks should be used to revise, update, widen and upscale the existent rural youth indicators**. Revisions should aim at unifying definitions and indicators used across different policies or policy fields. In case of age groups, data collection should be done on the individual level so that different age groups can be calculated directly by the interactive presentation online tool, making them flexible and fitting to any stakeholder's immediate need. Urban-rural differentiations can be, again, included from the smallest grids to the large NUTS 3 regions in order to be applicable across a wide variety of contexts. Updating indicators should focus on including urban-rural distinctions as well as detailed age categories across all indicators. Widening rural youth indicators could help capture areas which are currently not covered (see subchapter 2.2.2 on weaknesses for details). And upscaling should better connect the indicators to the existent policies. In all of these steps, existent national level indicators can serve as examples of good practice, as some areas (e.g. youth work) are well covered by some Member States and not present in other indicator sources.

**Rural youth indicators should also be well integrated into one-time surveys and in-depth studies** in order to create a well-founded knowledge basis, rather than parallel data sources. Such one-time surveys or studies include, of course, all evaluative efforts linked to policies in place, but also other pieces of research focusing on rural youth. Indicators are therefore complemented with further information and the studies are provided with reasonable baseline data to build on. Linking studies and indicators should also be made explicit when presenting the data from both the study and the indicator in order to support spreading the results among interested stakeholders.

And last but not least, **indicators uniquely found in different contexts can serve as an inspiration for setting up new indicators on all levels.** This can work just as well between Member States which inspire each other as between the Member States and Eurostat where good practices can also be shared. Apart from using know-how already present in other contexts, using indicators already existent elsewhere contributes to enhancing comparability between the Member States and between the national and international level in case of Eurostat.

**Form** of the data presentation of rural youth indicators can also be improved in the future. **New types of data visualisation should be employed**, featuring various cartograms, time series visualisations, interactive maps allowing for different layouts and zooming functions, as well as instinctive switching between ratios and absolute figures whenever needed. Download and bookmarking options should be improved as well, enabling the users to save and share any custom-made visualisations, as is now the case in Eurostat bookmarking and download options.

#### 2.2.4. Threats

**Content** of the rural youth indicators can be also influenced negatively in the future. **Omitting urban-rural and age distinctions in indicators linked to policies which cover rural youth implicitly** can lead to data which are not providing enough detail to follow developments in rural youth. Rural youth can, in that case, become an invisible group in population. It can be recommended to revise such indicators and enable rural youth to be identified as one of the target groups across all public policies.

Another threat may come from **further diverging definitions of youth and rural areas across policy contexts and indicator sets.** For example, if different definition of youth is applied in the agricultural area, then indicators in this area are providing information on different age groups than other indicators focused on youth in general. Similarly, different definitions on the EU level and on the level of Member States can present obstacles, such as legal voting age differs from country to country. Mitigation strategies in case of this threat were already described above and consist of either striving for unified definitions or for providing such data which are dynamically applicable across various definitions, as they simply offer possibilities of setting custom age limits and choosing from numerous geographical distinctions.

When it comes to the **form** of presentation, indicators can be negatively influenced by **negligence in areas of searchability and structuring.** Creating a wide data corpus across different indicators also requires high online searchability (good visibility) and a well-thought structure (easy navigation). National level indicators provide good practice examples, presenting youth indicators as standalone webpages with its own structure and logic. Spreading indicators across numerous webpages or presenting indicator data in a fashion which is hard to navigate rapidly limit both searchability and usefulness. This may lead to a decrease in usage of indicators, therefore severely limiting their potential added value or rendering them completely meaningless.

## STRENGTHS

### Content

- Basic data are available in basic domains.

### Form

- Basic formats are available.
- Basic interactivity is ensured.

## WEAKNESSES

### Content

- Not all domains are covered.
- Definitions of key concepts are not consistent.

### Form

- Time series are a problematic aspect.
- Presentation is often unintuitive and cumbersome.
- Presentation of data types is limited.
- Advanced interactivity in data presentation is not available.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Content

- New or renewed policy frameworks should be used to revise, update, widen and upscale the existent rural youth indicators.
- Rural youth indicators should also be well integrated into one-time surveys and in-depth studies.
- Indicators uniquely found in different contexts can serve as an inspiration for setting up new indicators on all levels and across contexts.

### Form

- New types of data visualisation should be employed.

## THREATS

### Content

- Omitting urban-rural and age distinctions in indicators linked to policies which cover rural youth implicitly leads to obscuring rural youth as a distinct policy target group.
- Further diverging definitions of youth and rural areas across indicators can decrease comparability and usefulness of the indicators.

### Form

- Negligence in areas of structuring and searchability can lead to invisible and meaningless indicators.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Content

- Keep and build on basic indicators and add advanced ones from more policy fields.
- Get inspired by indicators used by various Member States or other bodies.
- Link indicators to the policy goals, if possible, and use renewals of the policy frameworks as opportunities to upgrade existent indicator sets.
- Include indicators for rural youth into policy fields where young people in rural areas are also implicitly covered.
- Define basic concepts in line with existent definitions or provide for various options in data visualisations (e.g. dynamic age group calculations, etc.).
- Use indicators as baselines for in-depth studies and link the indicators well to one-off surveys.

### Form

- Ensure high searchability by collecting indicators in one central hub.
- Present data in a clear structure and intuitive user interface, offer tutorials if needed.
- Keep and build on basic presentation formats while adding more advanced ones, including interactive dynamic visualisations and cartograms.
- Collect indicator data in time series and make the period of data collection appropriate to available resources (e.g. every two or three years).
- Offer indicator data in both absolute and relative numbers (total figures and percentages).



# Conclusions

All in all, 145 indicators were identified in course of this exploratory study and are listed in the Appendix to this publication together with their online location, ready to be used. This, in itself, is a positive result as it shows there are data on rural youth which are readily available to stakeholders all across Europe. Despite downsides such as basic presentation techniques or cumbersome user interface, these should be utilized as much as possible in connection to rural youth policies in place on local, regional, and national levels, as well as towards international evaluation efforts or comparative studies. Browsing through the Appendix gives an opportunity to get a grasp of what indicators are potentially useful in getting a better insight into policies in place: What does the healthcare situation look like in rural regions of Portugal or Ireland? How does it differ from those in Austria or Finland? What policies are in place at the location which brings the best results in the healthcare area? How can these policies be adjusted and implemented in the context of rural areas which struggle in that particular aspect? All of the aforementioned questions are the prime reason for the existence of this publication: To ignite thinking of the rural youth in terms of knowledge-based insights.

What next steps can be taken in order to fully utilize this newly gained knowledge? Most importantly, mind the initial chapters of this publication as they outline complexity of approaches in both identifying the rural areas and defining young people. As such, these chapters should serve as reminders of careful data reading and interpretation as not always all indicators tell the same story, despite being called by the same (or very similar) titles. Secondly, see what available indicators are directly applicable and look for others in the context of specific topics or geographical locations. Places to explore further are statistical offices on national or regional levels as well as local administrations which may also collect information highly useful in determining the state of rural youth in the particular area. Lastly, if necessary and possible, create indicators fitting specific needs and contexts, keeping in mind recommendations above. If new indicators are created, sharing the data with wide public increases usefulness and value of the energy invested in indicator creation by giving as wide an audience as possible a chance to use the data in their own work.

As shown in this publication, it is also important to stress that the rural youth policy is a very wide and cross-sectoral domain. The cross-sectoral nature leads to a rather wide applicability of all indicators found in the course of this study and presented in the Appendix. It is just as possible to utilize these indicators to probe situation of young people living in rural areas as it is to explore those living in urban spaces or to combine the results and see the overall picture for all young people in a given region or on a given national level. Using indicators collected in this study to explore various policy domains not limited to the rural youth policy is not only possible, but highly recommendable. How does political participation of young people differ across Member States? How does it differ between the urban and rural settings? How does it compare to other age groups? There are many more questions to be asked and answers to be found.

Existence of the rural youth indicators and data stemming from them in itself does not improve lives of the young people in the European countryside. Using these data in connection to concrete policies in place or in connection to policies currently debated, gives the indicators and the data its purpose and value. And vice versa, the indicators and data can give legitimacy to the policies based on them as they demonstrate the reasons behind the given policy measures. Igniting a meaningful use of the rural youth indicators in support of young people is the utmost goal of this publication.

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