

# Territories and demographic change

## Regional patterns and policy approaches

Testori, G., Franklin, R., Saraceno, P. P., Pertoldi, M.,  
Perea Milla Fernandez, D., Stut, M. and Dijkstra, L.

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#### Contact information

Name: Giulia Testori

Email: giulia.TESTORI@ec.europa.eu

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# Abstract

The EU is experiencing significant demographic transformations, including population decline, ageing, and uneven migration trends, with rural and remote regions facing the greatest challenges. This report provides policymakers, regional stakeholders, and EU-level representatives with a comprehensive resource to navigate these shifts. It offers in-depth data, a taxonomy and policy fiches to categorize demographic challenges and options to align policy responses with regional characteristics and demographic trends. This contribution highlights potential policies approaches in the fields of economics, infrastructure, environment and energy, housing, education, services and health, emphasizing the need for evidence-based, place-sensitive and targeted interventions. A novel thematic analysis of cohesion policy funds allocation contributing to address demographic change highlighting its critical role in addressing disparities ensuring that they do not deepen regional inequalities is proposed. 'Territories and demographic change' moreover highlights how strategic planning, administrative capacity and peer learning are key to foster cross-regional collaboration and innovative solutions. A key message is that by integrating demographic considerations into territorial policies, the EU can transform demographic challenges into opportunities, promoting sustainable growth, resilience, and social cohesion across all regions.

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## Authors

- Giulia Testori, European Commission, JRC, Seville, Spain.
- Rachel Franklin, Center for Geographic Analysis, Harvard University, United States of America.
- Pier Paolo Saraceno, European Commission, JRC, Seville, Spain.
- Martina Pertoldi, external expert.
- Daniel Perea Milla Fernandez<sup>(1)</sup>, European Commission, JRC, Ispra, Italy.
- Martijn Stut<sup>(2)</sup>, European Commission, JRC, Ispra, Italy.
- Lewis Dijkstra, European Commission, JRC, Ispra, Italy.

## Chapter contributors

- **Chapter 1:** Giulia Testori and Rachel Franklin.
- **Chapter 2:** Lewis Dijkstra, Daniel Perea Milla Fernandez and Martijn Stut.
- **Chapter 3:** Rachel Franklin and Giulia Testori.
- **Chapter 4:** Rachel Franklin and Giulia Testori.
- **Chapter 5:** Giulia Testori and Rachel Franklin.
- **Chapter 6:** Pier Paolo Saraceno, Martina Pertoldi and Giulia Testori.
- **Chapter 7:** Giulia Testori.

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<sup>(1)</sup> JRC intern.

<sup>(2)</sup> JRC intern.

# Executive summary

This report, titled *Territories and demographic change. Regional patterns and policy approaches*, explores the complex demographic changes occurring across the EU and their implications for regional development. It focuses on predominantly urban, intermediate and predominantly rural regions. It shows that some regions experience population growth driven by migration and/or natural increases, while others face significant declines due to ageing populations, low fertility rates and/or outmigration. The uneven nature of these demographic changes calls for a nuanced approach, integrating regional characteristics and tailored policy responses to ensure sustainable development and cohesion across all EU territories.

The report is primarily designed for policymakers, EU Member State authorities, regional stakeholders and EU-level representatives. It is a comprehensive resource that offers potential approaches that can be taken to address many of the complexities of demographic change in EU regions. It may be of interest to researchers, but the main purpose of this report is to serve as a practical reference that frames concepts, such as integration, place-based approaches, cohesion and networking, through the lens of policy vis-à-vis the demographic challenge. By focusing on the practical application of these concepts, the report ensures that its content is accessible, directly relevant and tailored to the needs of those shaping territorial regional strategies.

A key innovation of the report lies in its integration of demographic data, practical policy approaches and inspiring examples into a coherent framework. The report offers a clear overview of demographic trends across EU regions, clarifying the diverse factors influencing these dynamics. It guides readers through the challenges posed by demographic shifts and outlines practical policy approaches that can align with regional realities. Central to this approach is the inclusion of tools like a taxonomy and fiches, which align demographic trends with regional types. These tools provide a systematic way to screen population dynamics and contribute to identifying potential common challenges. Moreover, they identify potential policy responses, coming from an extensive literature review, that are suitable for different contexts, whether predominantly urban, intermediate or predominantly rural. The report additionally highlights the critical role of cohesion policy in addressing demographic challenges and provides practical insights from territorial strategies implementing effective, context-specific interventions aligned with broader cohesion goals.

More specifically, **Chapter 2** examines the uneven nature of demographic changes across EU regions, offering historical and projected insights in the form of maps, charts and explanations. **Chapter 3** introduces a taxonomy, which is an extensive table setting out recurrent policy approaches coming from a literature review and case studies, categorised by cluster and policy domain. **Chapter 4** outlines key place-based policy principles to align interventions with regional characteristics through the specific lens of demographic change. **Chapter 5** delves into practical applications, presenting fiches of policies tailored to different demographic trends and territorial types. **Chapter 6** explores the relationship between cohesion policy and demographic change, focusing on how territorial development strategies can integrate region-specific demographic considerations. It also reflects on the role of networking and peer learning as fundamental tools for knowledge exchange and capacity building.

This report is designed as a resource and provides an overview of various policies that deal with demographic change. Responses informed by local and regional demographic data and taking into account local needs can promote more sustainable and equitable development. In highlighting the interdependence of regions and the shared responsibility of policymakers, researchers and citizens, the report fosters a deeper understanding of how regions can thrive and offers a pathway to shaping a resilient future across the EU.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Why this report

This report comes from the cooperation between Joint Research Centre (JRC) Unit B.3, Territorial Development, and Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) Unit 03, Cities, Communities, People, the latter of which is promoting this study.

While demography is a cross-cutting issue handled by multiple European Commission departments, the focus of DG REGIO's focus is on the territorial dimension of these changes. The work of DG REGIO's work on demography is about helping regions adapt to and mitigate the negative impacts of demographic shifts (shrinking workforces, skills and labour mismatches, depopulation and ageing), while also capitalising on potential opportunities. It promotes cohesion policy as the EU's key tool for supporting regions in becoming more resilient and competitive in the face of these challenges. Furthermore, it coordinates the Talent Booster Mechanism and promotes the demography toolbox as initiatives to further help EU Member States and regions address demographic challenges and prevent new and growing territorial disparities these challenges may cause.

The core mission of the JRC is to support EU policies with independent, evidence-based scientific and technical advice throughout the whole policy cycle. Unit B.3 of the JRC has a long history of cooperation with DG Regional and Urban Policy Unit REGIO 03, mainly on urban and territorial development in relation to cohesion policy. With this report, it aims to provide an accessible and comprehensive resource that offers potential approaches for territorial policies that can be taken to address many of the complexities of demographic change in EU regions. The authors of this contribution thank their colleagues from JRC Unit E.5, responsible for Demography and Migration, for their thorough revision of the report.

## 1.2. The reality of demographic change

The facts of demographic change across the countries and regions of the EU are, by now, well known. As will be seen in detail in [Chapter 2](#), although population growth still holds at the EU level, the future is most likely one of stability or loss, and this is true at every spatial scale.

There is less certainty about how to confront these undeniable demographic trends. The possibility of widespread population loss not only feels historical, presenting a collective psychological barrier to overcome, but also is interconnected with the entire span of EU policy, operating at the EU, national, regional and local scales. What is certain is that, regardless of individual regional projections, the oncoming demographic changes will affect *all* EU places and residents in one way or another and that creative and strategic policies and priorities have a key role to play.

Before moving on to what the data reveal and exploring the policy options available, there are five overarching considerations to keep in mind.

**Demographic cohesion.** EU cohesion policy has long recognised the importance of leveraging regional policy to mitigate and remediate regional socioeconomic inequalities. Reducing regional inequalities can benefit all regions, rich and poor, partly by emphasising the interdependencies and links that join all regions together. Demographic matters are similar in that national- and EU-level demographic outcomes, such as overall population change, result from exchanges of residents that reflect region-level age structures and migration propensities. If someone moves from one EU region to another, one region gains a resident while the other loses one. This is important for understanding how regional ‘demographic destinies’ are interlinked, but it also emphasises the role that cohesion policy can play in promoting balanced territorial development, offering the viable opportunities necessary for people to stay in all territories.

**Beyond growth and decline.** Summary statistics of population loss or growth tell an incomplete story of regional demographic change. To really understand how a region is changing demographically, what the effects are likely to be and which policy responses might be most suitable, it is important to consider the sources of demographic change. That is, is a region growing (or shrinking) mainly through migration? If so, this will have implications for future growth: as the populations of other regions increase more slowly and begin to age, the number of potential in-migrants is likely to decline. If a region is experiencing a natural decrease (more deaths than births), to what extent is this due to an age structure with fewer young people of childbearing age?

**Less maybe meaning more.** From a policy standpoint, it is tempting to assume that fewer people will mean less demand for infrastructure, services and housing. However, for a variety of reasons, population loss may entail increased (or at least different) needs. For example, in the current demographic context, fewer people does not mean less demand for housing. Instead, as the population ages and families with children become a smaller share of the population, the number of households is likely to increase (European Union, 2021). This may lead to a need for more housing, not less, and is also likely to require different types of housing in terms of size and location. As population density decreases, new ways of thinking about service provision are also required; for example, fewer households may need their waste collected, but those households may continue to be distributed over the original land area. Similarly, as regional populations age, there may be increased demand for new investment in transport (both within and between regions) and, in more remote regions, the importance of maintaining or establishing connections may increase demand for investment in transportation and communications infrastructure. By contrast, underused spaces can have great potential for what is described in the literature as ‘shrinking smartly’, meaning reimagining processes of maximisation to prioritise well-being (Aurambout et al., 2021; OECD, 2023). For example, adapting places to new uses, such as for the creative industries, collaborative workspaces or affordable housing, can be a viable option.

**The need to rethink demographic ‘challenges’.** Although population loss has concrete impacts on local places (e.g. labour shortages and a shrinking tax base), framing population change and its localised effects purely as problems to be reversed can sometimes lead to an inefficient use of resources. This perspective often pushes for expensive policies that aim to boost population growth, a goal that may be unattainable given current trends. Instead, the true demographic challenge is to ensure a high quality of life for all residents. As outlined in this report, the EU exhibits diverse set range of regional differences. Some regions are becoming increasingly older, characterised by an ageing population and low fertility rates, while others are experiencing positive population changes due to new migrants. For all regions, the goal should be the social and economic development of their communities, to promote long and happy lives. Again, this points to the valuable role of cohesion policy. Demographic policies that explicitly aim to increase fertility (e.g. childcare support, cash transfers or parental leave) may be only partially effective or may have only delayed effects (McDonald, 2006; Bergsvik et al., 2021; Gietel-Basten et al., 2022; Gauthier et al., 2024), whereas

integrated regional social, economic and transport policies that support health, work and career goals and work–life balance improve the well-being of the population already in an area and may have the ancillary benefit of encouraging those who want children to have them. As will be seen in the fiches of [Chapter 5](#), it is essential that policies be integrated, for example the provision of services and economic opportunities. In the long run, one cannot work without the other.

**A global phenomenon.** The EU is far from the only world region confronting these demographic changes. Slow or negative total population change, ageing, below-replacement-level fertility and an increasing reliance on migration are common phenomena in countries and regions around the world (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2024). In addition, just as EU regions and countries are interconnected, so too are global countries and regions. The wider context of slower population growth suggests that the EU experience is not an anomaly but forms part of a global transition from higher fertility to low fertility, and increasingly ageing societies. The global nature of the phenomenon has two implications. First, the space for policy experimentation and learning from others’ experiences is global and not continental. Going forward, it will be useful to look outward for policy alternatives and regional demographic experiences. Second, even in current EU regional demographic outlooks, it is apparent that immigration is already filling an important demographic gap: without it, many more areas would be experiencing population loss. Population projections suggest that low fertility will become more widespread, populations will age and working-age populations will shrink. As a result, more countries may be looking for migrants to strengthen their labour forces. Migration from outside the EU is unlikely to be sufficient to avoid population reductions in the EU, as it would require much larger inflows, which would be likely to spark political resistance.

Despite the clarity of the demographic transition theory, the outlook for the medium- to long-term recovery from the current low fertility levels in the EU and other parts of the world remains uncertain. The possibility of a widespread and sustained recovery of fertility to replacement level is uncharted territory, and it is unclear whether policies aiming to increase fertility will be sufficient to reverse current trends. As the EU and other regions navigate these demographic changes, it is essential to acknowledge the uncertainty surrounding fertility recovery and to prioritise policies that promote social and economic development, well-being and quality of life for all residents, regardless of population growth or decline. By focusing on integrated regional policies that support health, work and career goals and work–life balance, the EU can move towards creating an environment that is conducive to the well-being of its population, even in the face of uncertainty about future fertility trends.

### 1.3. Concise overview of relevant literature

*Territories and demographic change. Regional patterns and policy approaches* builds upon a rich foundation of prior studies and publications at the EU level. This section provides a summary of some key publications produced by EU institutions.

Article 174<sup>(3)</sup> of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union recognises that certain regions are more susceptible to the negative effects of demographic change and acknowledges the necessity for targeted policies. The European Commission’s recognition of the importance of demography is further underscored by the mission letter to the Commissioner for Democracy and Demography and the nomination of a vice-president with a specific portfolio on demography in the 2019–2024 mandate. These developments demonstrate the EU’s commitment to addressing

<sup>(3)</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/tfeu\\_2008/art\\_174/oj](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/tfeu_2008/art_174/oj).

the challenges and opportunities arising from demographic change, and highlight the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to demographic policy at the EU level.

In June 2020, the Commission published a report (European Commission, 2020b) on the impact of demographic change and the need for Member States to address related issues. Soon after, the **green paper on ageing – fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations** (European Commission, 2021) was launched to encourage a broad debate on ageing and how to anticipate and respond to the challenges and opportunities it brings. The Commission also published the **Atlas of Demography**<sup>(4)</sup>, an interactive tool for dealing with the demographic transition that maps the national demographic challenges and the corresponding policy responses. Other notable reports, all from 2024, include the **EU Ageing Report** (European Commission, 2024a), the **Employment and Social Developments in Europe** (ESDE) review (European Commission, 2024b), the **Draghi report** (European Commission, 2022c) and the **Letta report** (Letta, 2022), which have all contributed to the ongoing discussion on demographic change in the EU. In June 2021, after an extensive consultation, the Commission set out a **long-term vision for the EU's rural areas up to 2040**<sup>(5)</sup>. The long-term vision identified 10 shared goals and 4 areas of action for moving towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040. In March 2024, the Commission published a report outlining the progress made so far (European Commission, 2024c).

In its June 2023 conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2023a), the European Council invited the Commission to present a toolbox of existing EU instruments to address demographic challenges and, notably, their impact on Europe's competitive edge. Then, in the **Granada declaration** of 6 October 2023 (Council of the European Union, 2023b), EU leaders affirmed the need to address demographic challenges within efforts to build a stronger Europe in a changing world.

The Commission responded on 11 October 2023 with a communication on **Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action** (European Commission, 2023a), which assembles a set of existing EU regulatory, policy and funding tools. Recognising that demographic change is determined by life choices made by individuals and families, the Commission encouraged Member States to use these tools, combined with national and regional policies, to respond to demographic change and to reflect demographic concerns in all policy areas. The EU regulatory and policy instruments assembled in the toolbox are structured into four pillars: parents, young people, older people and migration.

The Commission's report ***The impact of demographic change in a changing environment*** (European Commission: Secretariat-General, 2023) of January 2023 also emphasises the differences in demographic trends between regions and inside regions. It notes rural areas as being more likely to be affected by population decline; in addition, it states that some towns and cities in former industrial heartlands will be affected by population decline because of the emigration of young people to more thriving regions.

The Commission's **ninth cohesion report** (European Commission, 2022a), from March 2024, notes how rural regions are affected by migration patterns, which show that people aged 20–39 are more likely to move from rural to urban regions, while among those aged 40–64 and 65+ the opposite may be expected. The report promotes the role of small and medium-sized cities as 'bridges'

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<sup>(4)</sup> <https://migration-demography-tools.jrc.ec.europa.eu/atlas-demography>.

<sup>(5)</sup> [https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en).

between urban agglomerations and rural areas, especially for the provision of essential public and private services and related employment opportunities in the surrounding areas.

To reverse the negative trends in regions that are in a talent development trap or at risk of falling into one, the Commission published a communication (European Commission, 2023b), on **harnessing talent in Europe's regions**, adopted on 17 January 2023, in which it outlined targeted measures to promote, retain and attract talent to transform all regions into dynamic talent-driven locations. The communication introduced the **Talent Booster Mechanism**<sup>(6)</sup> as the first key deliverable of the European Year of Skills. The mechanism is composed of eight pillars, based on which EU regions can escape the talent development trap.

Throughout this report, readers will encounter numerous other references to European Commission publications, including those produced by JRC Unit E.5, dedicated to Demography and Migration, that have made significant contributions to the understanding of demographic change in the EU. Recent works include **Demographic Outlook on 'Right to Stay'** (Alessandrini et al., 2025) and **Demography and Climate Change** (Deuster et al., 2023). These studies provide valuable insights into the demographic trends and challenges facing the EU and contribute to highlighting the need for evidence-based policy responses. JRC Unit B.3, Territorial Development, has also contributed to the topic with recent works analysing trends and projections, such as **Outlook and demographic perspectives for EU's rural regions – A modelling-based exercise** (Curtale et al., 2025), and an analysis as part of the cohesion report **Challenges and Opportunities for Territorial Cohesion in Europe** (Batista e Silva et al., 2024).

Aside from the European Commission publications, other relevant reflections coming from different institutions dealing with the topic have been fundamental, such as the work done by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and ESPON – European Territorial Observation Network is particularly relevant to the present study. For example, the OECD paper **Demographic change in cities – Trends, challenges and insights from G7 economies** (Burgalassi et al., 2024) depicts how cities in advanced economies are navigating the complexities of ageing populations, declining household sizes and spatial segregation. The OECD publication **Delivering quality education and health care to all – Preparing regions for demographic change** (OECD, 2021) examines service delivery, emphasising digital solutions and governance and fiscal strategies to address distance, demographic shifts and budget pressures, and offering recommendations on adapting services to current and future challenges.

From ESPON, the European shrinking rural areas: challenges, actions and perspectives for territorial governance (**ESCAPE**) project (ESPON, 2020)<sup>(7)</sup> analysed the dynamics of demographic decline in Europe's rural regions, focusing on understanding and mapping the diversity of shrinking processes, from economic restructuring to locational disadvantages. There was also the more recent ESPON project delivery of essential services in lagging regions: transferable experiences from across Europe (**Desire**), presented at the European Week of Regions and Cities in 2024; this provided data analysis and in-depth cases studies to build a better understanding of the interplay of technological infrastructure, community engagement, legal frameworks and local capacity in service accessibility.

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<sup>(6)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform/talent-booster-mechanism\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform/talent-booster-mechanism_en).

<sup>(7)</sup> <https://archive.espon.eu/escape>.

## 1.4. Aims and structure of the report

The key aim of this report is to provide a comprehensive and practical resource to help policymakers, regional stakeholders and EU-level representatives address the complex and uneven demographic changes occurring across the EU. The report seeks to clarify the multifaceted dynamics of population growth, population decline, ageing, fertility rates and migration in urban, intermediate and rural regions, and to offer tailored policy approaches and examples to foster more sustainable and equitable development. The report emphasises the critical role of cohesion policy in mitigating inequalities arising from demographic shifts and promoting regional resilience, and equips readers with tools such as taxonomies, fiches and frameworks to align policies with regional characteristics and demographic realities. Furthermore, it suggests that networking and peer learning can help to address shared demographic challenges and enhance mutual understanding across regions. Ultimately, the report serves as a toolkit for transforming demographic challenges into opportunities and fostering sustainable development, equity and resilience across EU territories through targeted, data-driven and place-sensitive interventions.

More specifically, [Chapter 2](#) examines the uneven nature of demographic changes across EU regions, offering historical and projected insights in the form of maps, charts and explanations. [Chapter 3](#) introduces a taxonomy, which is an extensive table setting out recurrent policy approaches coming from a literature review and case studies, categorised by cluster and policy domain. [Chapter 4](#) outlines key place-based policy principles to align interventions with regional characteristics through the specific lens of demographic change. [Chapter 5](#) delves into practical applications, presenting fiches of policies tailored to different demographic trends and territorial types. [Chapter 6](#) explores the relationship between cohesion policy and demographic change, focusing on how territorial development strategies can integrate region-specific demographic considerations. It also reflects on the role of networking and peer learning as fundamental tools for knowledge exchange and capacity building.

## 2. Different shades of demographic change: the uneven nature of population loss in Europe

Population decline has become a key concern within the EU as more and more Member States and regions are starting to shrink. This is not a new phenomenon: quite a few regions have experienced periods of population decline since the 1960. Existing narratives explain population decline through a focus on rural and remote regions. However, this dynamic does not hold for all rural regions. The process of population decline is influenced by natural change (NC) and net migration (NM), with positive NM often compensating for negative NC. Therefore, this chapter explores the current and, through projections, potential future state of population decline across the EU, with a careful consideration of the interaction of immigration, emigration, population ageing and fertility in shaping population dynamics, and the current population projections and their implications for the EU in the coming decade. This chapter employs data from Eurostat and the Annual Regional Database of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (ARDECO) to illustrate existing population dynamics across the EU.

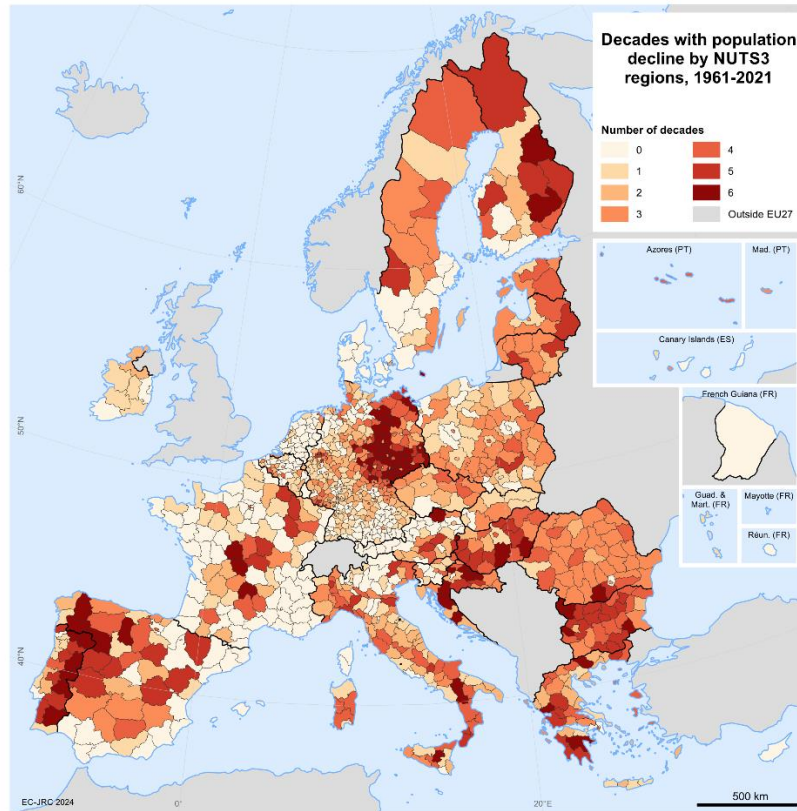
Overall, the population of the EU has steadily increased since 1960. On 1 January 2024, the total population of the EU was estimated to be 449 million. Despite this general growth, population change is projected to become negative in the coming decade. Population growth has also not been uniform across the EU. While some Member States and regions have experienced steady growth, many have experienced periods of population decline since 1960.

### 2.1. Long-lasting population decline

Many NUTS (nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) 3 regions experienced population decline for at least one decade between 1961 and 2021 (Figure 1). Some regions experienced declines for multiple decades (red) or even all six decades (dark red). A minority of regions did not have any population decline (light red). NUTS 3 regions in eastern Member States experienced more decades with population declines than regions in north-western Europe, as most regions of Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Romania experienced at least three or four decades of decline since 1961. In contrast, most regions in north-western Member States such as Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, France and the Netherlands experienced one decade of population decline or no decades of decline. Continued population decline is prevalent in many regions of southern Member States and in some more remote regions in the Nordic Member States. Germany illustrates the eastern-western dichotomy of population decline in Europe very clearly, as most regions in former East Germany had more decades with decline than regions in western Germany. The process of population decline has been present across Europe for many decades, and it has been driven by time-specific historical events, policies or structural shocks, such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union or the COVID-19 pandemic, and by wider economic processes such as industrialisation, deindustrialisation and the rise of the knowledge economy. More specifically, these historical events

and processes produce differential and fluctuating patterns of population decline across the EU by altering the drivers of migration and fertility at the national and regional scales.

**Figure 1.** Number of decades with population decline by NUTS 3 region, 1961–2021

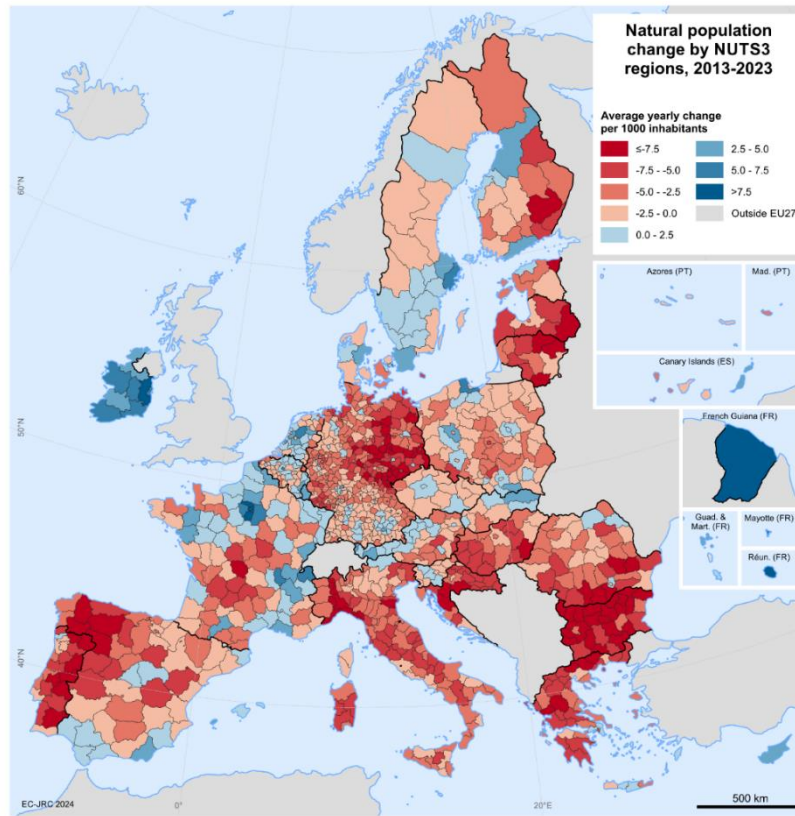


Source: Authors' calculation based on the 2021 population grid and the historical Local Administrative Unit (LAU) population data from 1961 to 2011 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/local-administrative-units>).

Natural population change (births minus deaths) in the EU was negative between 2013 and 2023. As a result, most EU regions also had negative natural population changes during that period. NC was very negative (dark red in Figure 2) in most regions of the southern and eastern Member States. NC is projected to become more negative in the coming decades due to the ageing population, which reduces the share of women of childbearing age, and persistent low fertility rates.

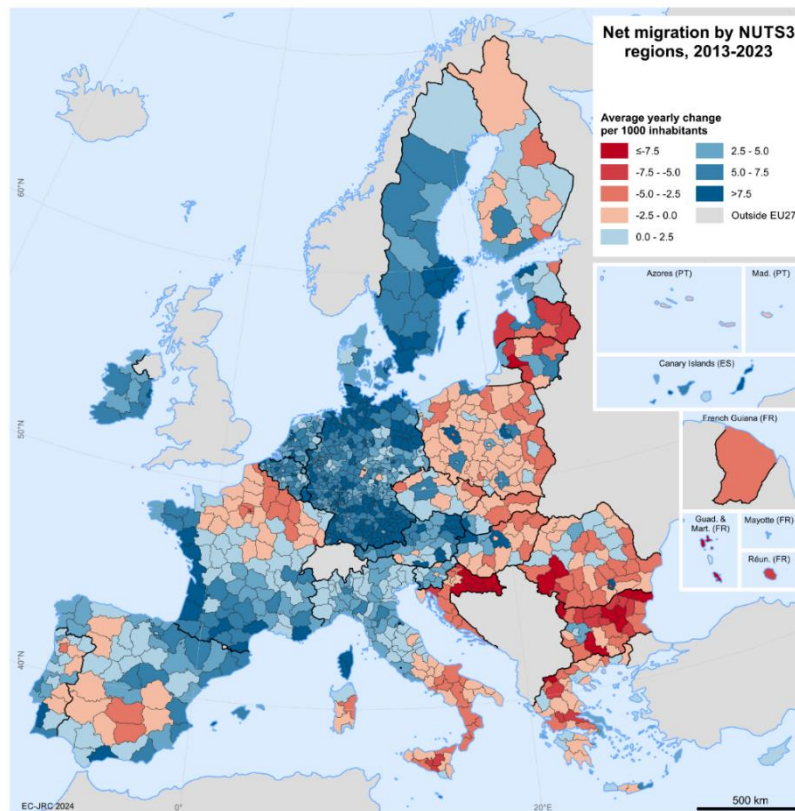
NM is the difference between people moving in and people moving out of a region. This includes people moving from another region in the same country, from another Member State and from outside the EU. As a result, positive NM can occur purely through movements within a country or within the EU. Positive NM can compensate for negative NC, as seen in many regions in north-western Member States (Figure 2 and Figure 3). In eastern Member States, however, NM is typically negative, further exacerbating natural decline.

**Figure 2.** Natural change by NUTS3 region, 2013–2023



Source: JRC ARDECO.

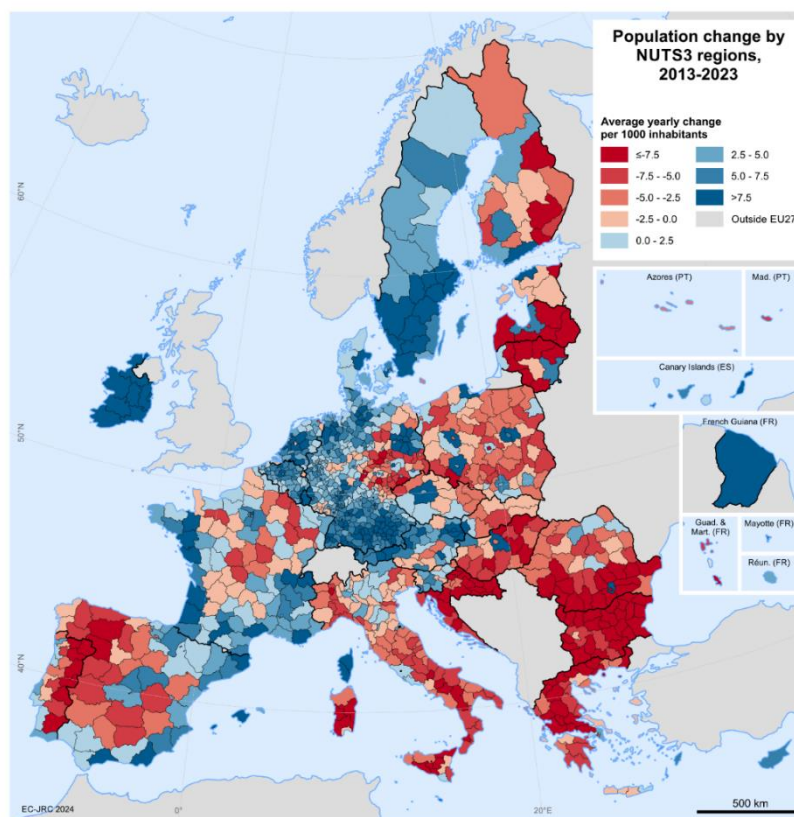
**Figure 3.** Net migration by NUTS3 region, 2013–2023



Source: JRC ARDECO.

Migration follows different patterns depending on age group. Young adults tend to move to an urban region to get a higher education, meet new people and find their first job. Many of the EU's NUTS 3 regions containing large urban and metropolitan areas (e.g. Madrid, Barcelona, Dublin, Paris, Berlin and Stockholm) experience very positive NM and, consequently, positive TC. Instead, as estimated by Ghio et al. (2022) and Aurambout et al. (2021), middle-aged adults tend to move to the suburbs or smaller cities in intermediate regions, especially when they have small children, since houses are larger and cheaper than in the big cities in urban regions. For example, this suburbanisation can be seen clearly in the regions surrounding the larger Polish cities. Adults aged 65+ tend to move to rural regions, as they no longer need to travel to work and they appreciate the amenities offered by the countryside and the lower housing costs. As a result, rural regions in the EU, on average, have a positive NM rate<sup>(8)</sup>.

**Figure 4.** Population change by NUTS3 regions, 2013–2023.



Source: JRC ARDECO.

Overall, migration from outside the EU is the only reason that the EU's population has not yet started shrinking. For most EU regions, the population grows only if NM is positive, as natural population growth tends to be negative (Table 1). Predominantly urban regions are the exception, with positive but very low NC (0.3 per 1 000 inhabitants per year); they also have the highest NM rate (3.8 per 1 000 inhabitants per year). In contrast, NM is positive for rural regions only when they are close to cities; it is negligible in remote rural regions. As a result, immigrants tend to make up a higher share of the total population in predominantly urban regions than in intermediate or rural regions (Table 2). Unsurprisingly, remote rural regions have the highest share of their total population born in the same Member State, with a relatively small immigrant population when compared with other typologies. In each regional typology, the share of residents born outside

<sup>(8)</sup> The specific ARDECO dataset on NM is available here: <https://territorial.ec.europa.eu/ardeco/viewer/SNMTN>.

the EU is larger than the share of those born in another Member State, despite free movement within the EU being guaranteed and migration from outside being difficult and limited.

**Table 1.** Average yearly change per 1 000 inhabitants by regional typology, 2013–2023

Average yearly change (per 1000 inhabitants), 2013–2023	Total population change	Natural change	Net migration
Predominantly urban	4.1	0.3	3.8
Intermediate	0.9	-1.8	2.7
Predominantly rural, close to a city	-1.3	-2.5	1.2
Predominantly rural, remote	-4.1	-4.1	0.0
<b>EU27</b>	1.6	-1.2	2.8

Source: JRC ARDECO.

**Table 2.** Country of birth for the 2021 EU population by regional typology

Share of 2021 population in %	Born in the same country	Born in another EU Member State	Born outside the EU	Total
Predominantly urban	83.0	5.0	12.0	100
Intermediate	88.2	4.3	7.5	100
Predominantly rural, close to a city	90.5	4.0	5.5	100
Predominantly rural, remote	91.4	3.1	5.5	100
<b>EU27</b>	86.6	4.5	8.9	100

Source: Authors' elaboration of the Eurostat population grid.

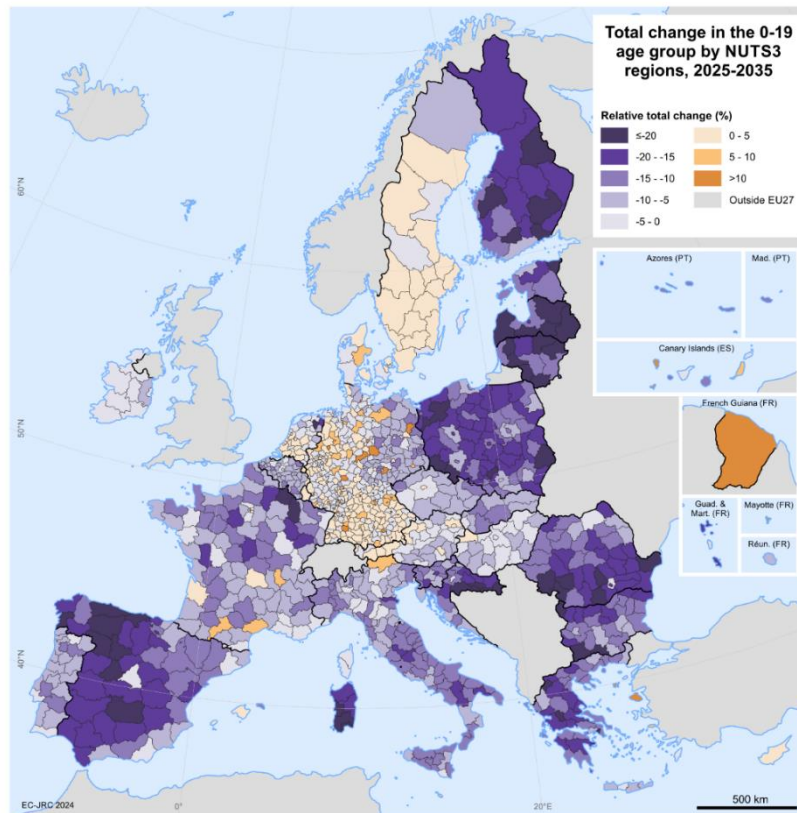
## 2.2. Population projections highlighting further ageing

Population projections are important, as they help show the change in the structure of EU populations assuming that current trends in fertility, mortality and migration are maintained. First, populations of young people across the EU are projected to decrease in proportion to the size of the total population for most Member States (Figure 5). The only exceptions seem to be Denmark, Germany and Sweden, where most NUTS 3 regions are projected to experience a small increase in the proportion of young people. This projection is a direct result of low fertility rates across the EU in recent decades, with the fertility rates of the previous and current cohorts of women of reproductive age being below the replacement level across the EU. The fertility rate across all Member States in 2023 was 1.38 (live births per woman), far below the replacement-level fertility rate of 2.1 that is necessary to maintain the population size, assuming the absence of migration (Eurostat, 2024c). Furthermore, a proportional decrease in the proportion of young people in selected regions may be driven by existing patterns of movement within the EU. Adult individuals immigrating to countries such as Denmark, Germany and Sweden from other Member States may be relocating with their young dependants. Hence, current patterns of fertility and migration will influence future cohorts of young people across the EU.

Second, projections based on a strong assumption of convergence show a proportional decrease in the share of the population aged 20–64 for most NUTS 3 regions of the EU (Figure 6). Consecutive decades of shrinkage in the proportion of young people in most Member States (due to low fertility rates) will result in fewer individuals entering the working-age group over time. In other words, the

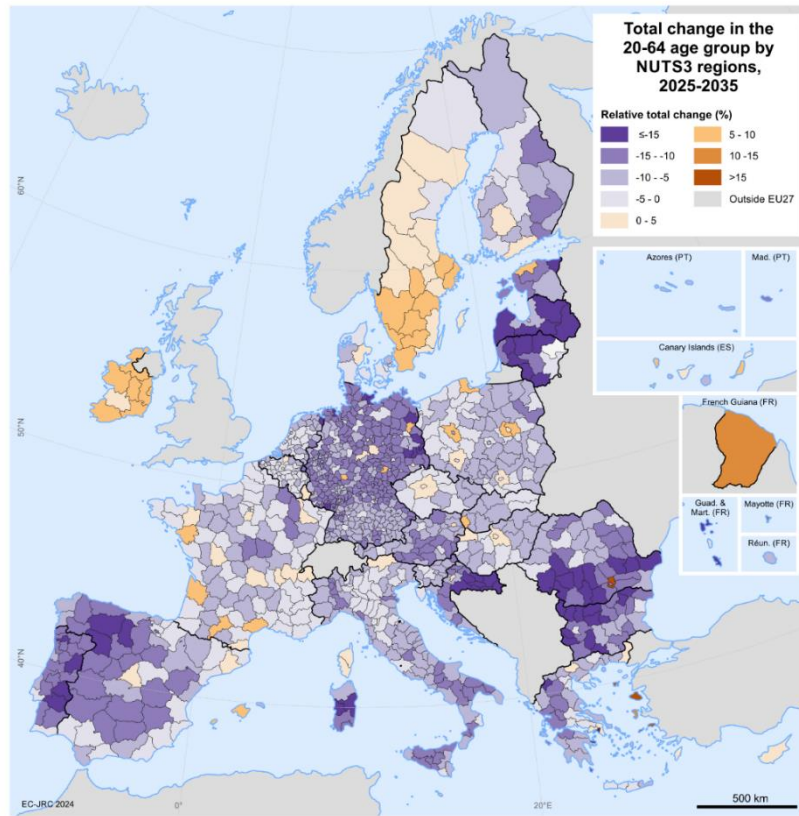
momentum of the current population of the EU will reinforce the shrinkage of the working-age group in the coming decades. This dynamic is especially relevant to Member States and regions that have negative NM rates. Additionally, given improvements in life expectancy, the share of the population aged 65+ will continue to grow in the coming decades. Projections show that the 65+ age group will expand in almost every NUTS 3 region of the EU (Figure 7). This is especially true in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Austria, where a 20 % increase in the proportion of the population aged 65+ is projected in most NUTS 3 regions.

**Figure 5.** Projected Total change in the 0–19 age group by NUTS3 region, 2025–2035



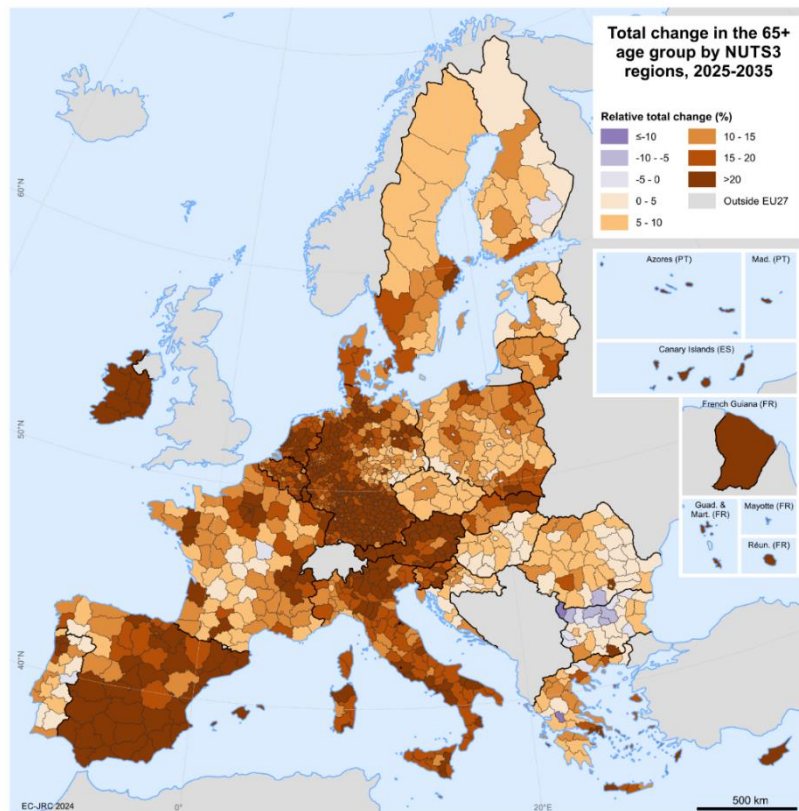
Source: Authors' calculations based on Eurostat regional population projections (EUROPOP2019).

**Figure 6.** Projected Total change in the 20–64 age group by NUTS3 region, 2025–2035



Source: Authors' calculations based on Eurostat regional population projections (EUROPOP2019).

**Figure 7.** Projected Total change in the 65+ age group by NUTS3 region, 2025–2035



Source: Authors' calculations based on Eurostat regional population projections (EUROPOP2019).

Overall, population projections show clear changes in the age structure of EU populations for all regional typologies (Table 3). The 0–19 and 20–64 age groups are projected to decrease in size for all typologies, especially rural regions (close to cities and remote). This reduction is smallest in urban regions, but the increase in the size of the 65+ age group in urban areas is projected to exceed the EU average. In rural regions, it is expected that older age groups will continue to drive total population growth through urban-to-rural migration. Hence, the 65+ age group is projected to grow in size despite shrinking younger age groups. The population projections presented here are a continuation of past and current patterns of population change across the EU and are a result of low fertility rates and population ageing for most Member States.

**Table 3.** Total population change projections by age group and regional typology, 2025–2035

Total change 2025-2035, in %	Age groups			TOTAL
	0-19	20-64	65+	
Predominantly urban	-3.8	-2.8	19.8	1.7
Intermediate	-6.8	-5.5	16.1	-0.8
Predominantly rural, close to a city	-9.6	-7.2	13.5	-2.8
Predominantly rural, remote	-11.0	-7.9	9.8	-4.0
<b>EU27</b>	-6.2	-4.8	16.7	-0.3

*Source:* Based on Eurostat's regional population projection EUROPOP19. It relies on the baseline scenario, which includes a strong assumption of convergence.

## 2.3. Conclusions

Projected population patterns are a result of current key statistics and migration patterns across the EU. In essence, increasing life expectancy and low fertility rates will result in populations ageing without a natural replacement among incoming cohorts. Current trends suggest that the EU population will plateau and start to slowly decline. While this could be labelled as alarming, many regions of the EU have already experienced population decline for multiple decades since 1960, and the structure of the EU population has experienced extensive changes and shocks throughout the past few decades. Existing narratives on demographic change could rethink how rural regions are portrayed, as not all rural regions are shrinking. Demographic change is not uniform in direction or magnitude across the EU. Although rural regions, on average, have experienced positive NM, some have experienced net outflows. In most rural regions, populations have been shrinking, but in some rural regions closer to cities they have grown. As seen above, this is because adults aged 65+ tend to move to rural regions, as they no longer need to travel to work and they appreciate the amenities offered by the countryside and the lower housing costs. Instead of concentrating on demographic change within one region, the policy focus should be on the dependencies created between regions through migration patterns. As migration within the EU inevitably leads to increases in the sending regions and reductions in the receiving regions. In this sense, existing flows of migration result in regions becoming interconnected and interdependent. Hence, policies and interventions could take into account the broader macro-regional context when considering migration dynamics. The population projections highlight the significant upcoming changes in age structure, with growing populations among older age groups and shrinking populations among younger ones.

As will be seen in the following chapters, different regions may require different approaches. Moreover, as many policies have a direct or indirect impact on population dynamics, whether through economic development, housing, healthcare or education, such policies may want to take into account not only demographic trends, but also whether a region is predominantly urban, intermediate or predominantly rural.

## 3. A taxonomy of challenges and policy approaches related to demographic change

### 3.1. Demographic change and the many related policy domains

Population change, as outlined previously, is fundamentally determined by the balance of births, deaths and net migration. However, it also reflects the cumulative impact of various interrelated social, economic and environmental factors. These include economic growth, the availability and nature of job opportunities, the alignment between workforce skills and labour market needs, and quality of life. This report aims to support regional and local policymakers with insights on territorial policies that could help address demographic change in an integrated manner. It recognises that different demographic trends (i.e. ageing, low fertility, migration) require different and integrated policy responses. As will be seen in [Section 4.1](#), different challenges need to be addressed at different scales, whether local, regional or national. It is not the objective of this report to tackle challenges and policies that do have strictly territorial repercussions or those at the broad EU and national levels. However, they are mentioned in this report because demographic change has a strong multi-scalar dimension<sup>(9)</sup>.

In areas where the population grows, policies are rarely thought of as demographic – for example, planning and housing to accommodate new residents, increased transportation capacity and expanded services, including health and education. When population growth slows or turns negative, the causes are complex; the change is obviously due to demographic factors such as age structure, migration and fertility, but it is also strongly related to geographical location and economic structures. This makes the policy response to population loss complicated, burdened with addressing demographic outcomes such as youth outmigration, outmigration in general, population ageing, lack of in-migration and low birth rates, as well as contextual economic, spatial or infrastructural factors that might affect demographic outcomes.

The many dependencies involved in implementing policies in accordance with demographic priorities may appear to be a threat to the success of such policies, but they are perhaps better viewed as opportunities: demographic policy outcomes may be potentially achievable through concerted and integrated implementation of existing policy priorities. In other words, trying to ‘fix’ population issues appears a hard task because it involves many different endeavours. However, this has great potential: population goals can be reached by making sure current policies—like housing, jobs, and healthcare—are working together toward the same end.

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<sup>(9)</sup> To better explore demographic changes at the EU and national scale and their policy implications, please consult the Atlas of Demography of the Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (KCMD) ([https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/atlas-demography\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/atlas-demography_en)).

Moreover, it may be more helpful to think of demographic outcomes as incidental to or co-benefits of other policies. In addition, there are many ways in which existing territorial or cohesion policy can contribute to improved well-being and quality of life, which, in turn, may promote the desired demographic outcomes.

## 3.2. The choice of building a taxonomy, what is it

In order to support policymakers and researchers in organising and analysing multiple challenges and assessing potentially impactful policy approaches related to demographic change, a vast set of information has been systematised in a taxonomic diagram. The taxonomy is here interpreted as a systematic classification framework that organises complex topics into categories and subcategories based on shared characteristics or themes. Used to simplify and structure knowledge, such taxonomies in public policy work can make it easier to analyse and understand a complex subject. In this taxonomy, challenges and policy approaches are showcased to potentially help different territories adapt to, mitigate and ameliorate different territories affected by diverse demographic tendencies (see [Section 4.2](#)).

## 3.3. Methodology: where all the information comes from

The information gathered in this taxonomy comes with the awareness that, in recent years, a substantial body of literature has accumulated addressing Europe's demographic challenges from multiple perspectives and acknowledging the significant implications of ageing populations, urban-rural divides and regional disparities. It is essential to highlight that the selection of policy approaches that attempt to tackle such challenges is not the outcome of a policy evaluation<sup>(10)</sup> but a collection and combination of different sources that offer potential policy solutions to common challenges. Such rich literature, as mentioned in this report's introduction (see [Section 1.2](#)), comes from EU institutions' reports, the work of international organisations such as the OECD and European-funded programmes such as ESPON and an academic literature review.

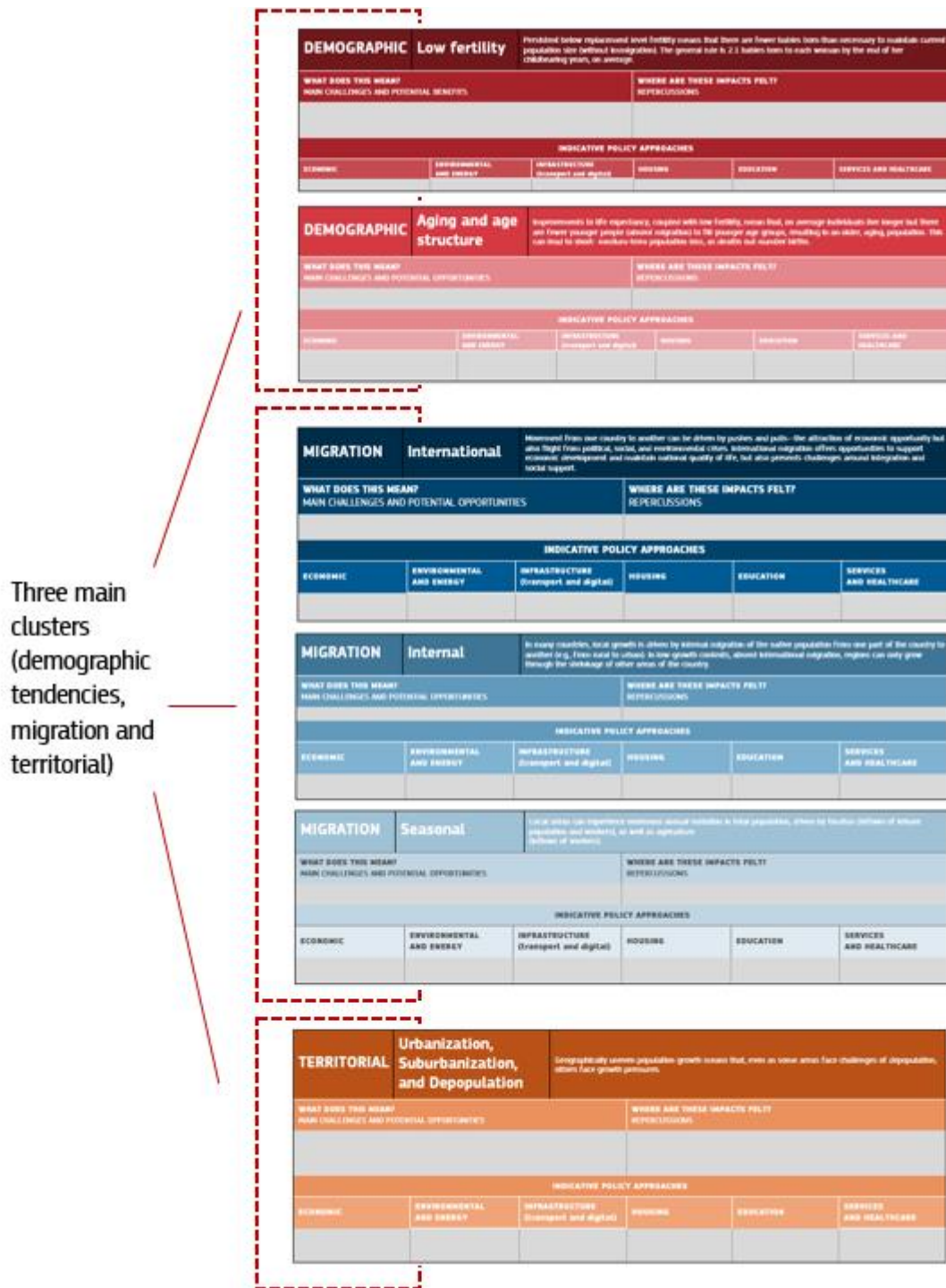
## 3.4. How it is structured and the main characteristics of the taxonomy

Structuring demographic change information in a way that combines both challenges and policy approaches is not a simple task. This taxonomy is neither exhaustive nor the only possible structure, as there are potentially infinite combinations. As discussed, the complex demographic phenomena are triggered by and have impacts on various levels, which often manifest simultaneously. [Figure 8](#) showcases the structure of the taxonomy, which is filled out extensively and available for closer inspection in [Annex 1](#). The objective of this image is to quickly demonstrate how the information is structured.

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<sup>(10)</sup> As set out in the EU's better regulation framework in relation to *ex ante*, midterm assessment and *ex post* evaluations.

Figure 8. Structure of the taxonomy on demographic change



Source: Authors' own production.

The taxonomy is structured into three main **clusters**: demographic (referred to tendencies), migration and territorial.

The first cluster is the **demographic tendencies** characterising the EU, which are divided into two subclusters.

- **Low fertility.** The general rule is 2.1 babies born on average to each woman by the end of her childbearing years. Persistent below-replacement-level fertility means that there are fewer babies born than necessary to maintain current population size (without immigration).
- **Ageing and age structure.** Improvements to life expectancy, coupled with low fertility, mean that, on average, individuals are living longer, but there are fewer people (without migration) in younger age groups, resulting in an older, ageing population. This can lead to short- and medium-term population loss, as deaths outnumber births.

The second cluster is **migration**, which can be split into three subclusters.

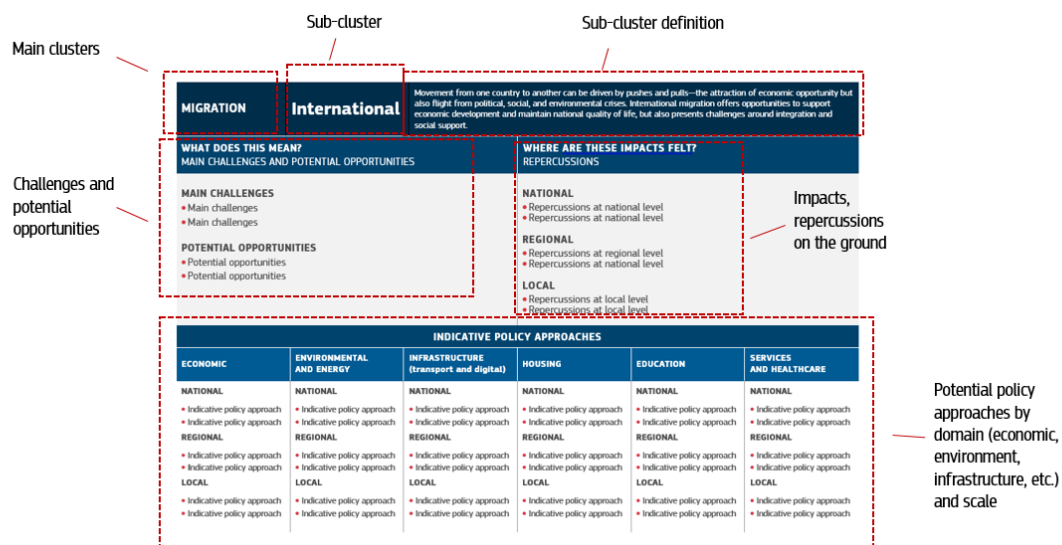
- **International.** Movement from one country to another can be driven by pushes and pulls: the attraction of economic opportunity but also flight from political, social and environmental crises. International migration offers opportunities to support economic development and maintain national quality of life, but also presents challenges around integration and social support.
- **Internal.** In many Member States, local growth is driven by the internal migration of the native population from one part of the Member State to another (e.g. from rural to urban). In low-growth contexts, when international migration is absent, regions can grow only through the shrinkage of other areas of the Member State.
- **Seasonal.** Local areas can experience enormous annual variation in total population, driven by tourism (inflows of leisure population and workers) and agriculture (inflows of workers).

The third cluster is **territorial**. It mirrors geographically uneven population growth, meaning that, as some areas face challenges of depopulation, others face growth pressures; this has physical repercussions on the ground. In this cluster, three spatial processes are merged.

- **Urbanisation, suburbanisation and shrinking.** Urbanisation refers to the concentration of populations into cities, driven by economic opportunities and modernisation. Suburbanisation is the expansion of residential and commercial areas into the outskirts of cities, often fuelled by improved transportation and a desire for lower-density living. Shrinking describes a decline in population, economic activity or infrastructure in urban or suburban areas, typically resulting from deindustrialisation, demographic shifts or economic downturns, leading to challenges like abandoned properties and reduced services.

The taxonomy, despite this ‘territorial’ category, does not display alternative tendencies or approaches adapted to different geographical scopes – for example, which policy approaches would be more suitable in predominantly urban, intermediate and predominantly rural regions – but it does use the territorial category to highlight challenges and policy approaches that have a physical–territorial aspect. As all these challenges and approaches can vary considerably depending on where the changes take place (e.g. planning policy responses to low fertility in an urban area can differ greatly from doing so in a remote area), [Chapter 5](#) presents, in the form of fiches, a further systematisation of dynamics and approaches based on demographic trends and territorial types.

**Figure 9.** Structure of one exemplary cluster of the taxonomy on demographic change



Source: Authors' own production.

Going into more detail and observing how each subcluster is composed, the main elements are as follows (see Figure 9).

- A short definition of the subcluster.
- A selection of some of the main **challenges and potential opportunities** of the subcluster. For example, in the case of low fertility, a general challenge is a smaller total labour force, while, for the subcluster of ageing population, one challenge is the need for greater access to healthcare services. Looking at opportunities, international migrants, for example, can fill emerging labour market shortages and seasonal migration can boost the local economy in specific sectors.
- A set of potential **repercussions on the ground** (impacts) of the previously mentioned main challenges and potential benefits. Such impacts can be multidimensional, depending on the scale being considered, whether national, regional or local. For example, the impacts of low fertility, an ageing population, migration and suburbanisation may differ significantly, depending on the geographical scale under consideration. The taxonomy, for example, identifies that, at the national level, low fertility and an ageing population may bring pension pressures due to a shrinking workforce, while, at the more local level, a decrease in the number of children and a rise in the number of older people could result in the need to change the type of housing supply.
- The indicative **policy approaches** that may help in tackling the previously identified issues at stake. Six main policy domains have been identified, and the suggested policy actions are also divided by level, with policies that may be better implemented at the national (e.g. manage and ease processes for legal migration), regional (e.g. encourage telemedicine) or local level (e.g. promote time banks for older adults). The subsequent sections provide a description of the **domains** and how each may be directly or indirectly related to demography.

### 3.4.1. Economic

Economic development is the metric by which many national, regional and local policies are evaluated, as it provides a picture of how economic factors contribute to general well-being. Economic policy may be geared towards regenerating the local economic base through investment

in entrepreneurship, smart specialisation or training to create new or better jobs. Policy may also focus on the regulation of employment, including hybrid or remote work, parental leave and other flexible working options. In this way, economic policy can be thought of as the most basic type of demographic policy. For many people, an adequate wage, confidence about future earnings and career potential and sufficient income to balance the needs and wants of life are the natural prerequisites to household formation and having children. Employment regulation improves work-life balance for all workers, but, by addressing the challenges that parents (and women in particular) may face in balancing career and family, it also eases the burdens of parenthood.

If successful, regional economic development policies also provide opportunities for workers. These may be working-age individuals who would otherwise have left the region in search of work (or, simply, better work), but they may also be older residents who are able to extend their working lives or younger residents just starting their careers. Economic initiatives that help regions identify and reinforce areas of potential economic strength, such as sustainable tourism and heritage, but also growing sectors, such as precision farming, ICT and renewable energy, may not only anchor the local population, allowing stayers to stay (Franklin, 2020), but also facilitate return migration and, possibly, new in-migration.

### **3.4.2. Environment and energy**

Sustainability has taken on increasing importance as a policy objective within the EU and globally. Environmental and sustainability objectives span a range of goals, from the clean energy transition to conservation and habitat protection, land use planning and the maximisation of ecosystem and environmental amenities and services. Under this broad umbrella, the key aim is to ensure that future generations are not further harmed by environmental degradation and that current residents are able to maintain (and improve) their quality of life. It is hoped that this can be achieved by transitioning to cleaner energy sources, focusing on energy efficiency and encouraging climate-friendly behaviours (e.g. travel mode choice or housing efficiency).

In the sense that regional sustainability policies highlight care for future generations, these activities can be thought of as inherently demographic, seeking cohesion across generations. There are more direct ways that environmental policy intersects with demographic matters, however (Karcagi-Kováts et al., 2012). For example, there are unanswered questions about the effects of depopulation on the environment. Population loss is a spatial process by which, over time, fewer people inhabit a given amount of territory, impacting population density, land use and even the amount of human and financial resources available for investing in local environmental matters. Although it is possible that population loss might ‘naturally’ lead to a rewilding process and the densification of remaining settlements, this is by no means assured. It is also possible that decreased population density might lead to an increase in travel times and energy consumption and a local natural environment that lacks upkeep (Jacobs-Crisioni et al., 2024).

Appropriate environmental and ecological policies may provide an economic lifeline to regions, especially in relation to agricultural or tourism sectors. Environmental policy that encourages new enterprise or industry may have positive effects on migration and fertility, not by directly encouraging staying, in-migration or births, but by rendering these more feasible for those who desire them. These policies may also improve regional quality of life, improving the availability of and access to environmental amenities (e.g. green space, mountains or water), which help make a place more attractive to existing and potential residents. Sustainability policy, especially related to energy, sustainable food systems or resilience to climate extremes, also improves quality of life for residents and may mitigate cost-of-living issues, making local life more affordable and, by extension, facilitating staying, new residents and family formation.

### 3.4.3. Infrastructure (transport and digital)

Infrastructure is a wide policy category that includes basic public services such as clean water, sewage networks and energy grids, as well as mobility and transportation infrastructure and communications. Each of these categories has a useful role to play in contributing to demographic cohesion. Core infrastructure, such as energy (e.g. electricity), water and roads, can be thought of as foundational: everything else that occurs in a region depends on this infrastructure in order to function. Weakness in this type of infrastructure is associated with outmigration (Karcagi-Kováts et al., 2012).

Transportation infrastructure, which includes roads, rail, air, public transport and active travel (e.g. bicycle lanes), fulfils a fundamental cohesion role, fostering connectivity and movement both within and between regions. Transportation infrastructure is the backbone of many other regional policy domains, as it is intrinsic to economic development, land use and service provision (Kompil et al., 2022; Grimm et al., 2023). As a mobility enabler, it is also especially important for demographic cohesion. Within regions, transportation promotes social and economic inclusion, which is important for 'active ageing' and for families with children. Reliable and efficient transportation routes also facilitate mobility within and between regions, including in- and outmigration and also commuting for school, education, leisure and healthcare. This sort of accessibility can be the key to regional resilience, by allowing young people, workers and others to remain in their home regions without the loss of other benefits or amenities they may desire.

Like transportation, communications infrastructure (or, more broadly, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) enables digital and virtual connectivity, enabling new ways of working, social engagement and inclusion and, potentially, health and service provision (Sulis et al., 2022). Much like transportation, ICT may offer an alternative to outmigration. In addition, good communications infrastructure provides an assurance to potential in-migrants that they will be able to maintain existing connections when in their destination region. Digital technology makes location less important for collaboration and breakthrough ideas. Emerging opportunities for rural areas include sustainable transitions to green growth, new industries like the bioeconomy, flexible employment and new recognition of underutilised potential, such as women's entrepreneurship and the 'silver economy' (Goodwin-Hawkins et al., 2023). ICT is important for hybrid and flexible working, which can help workers remain within a region, but can also help encourage female labour force participation and make children a more realistic and desirable choice. For an ageing population, investment in communications infrastructure could help maintain social connections and also promote social and economic activity. In this context, rural areas can turn vulnerabilities into geographies of opportunity (OECD, 2020).

### 3.4.4. Housing

The relationship between housing and population is complex. In growth situations, it is clear that housing supply should increase, albeit often with a lag, to keep pace with demand. When a regional population is stable or shrinking, housing policy may appear less relevant, on the assumption that there will be ample vacancies to provide for the resident population. The reality is more complicated.

Housing stock (the amount, cost and characteristics of what is available) influences decisions to move in or out of a region and, especially where affordability is concerned, may play a role in decisions about childbearing. Particularly for urban regions that have experienced growth in recent years, a lag in housing development (of the right size, cost and location) can make moving more difficult for new residents or those seeking larger homes. Existing housing may become more expensive and there may be fewer vacancies to choose from (Van Heerden et al., 2020). Regional housing policy that ensures adequate supply, especially when integrated with other regional policy components such as infrastructure and services, can relieve housing market pressure, thereby facilitating mobility (and potentially fertility). More generally, housing affordability and quality is an important element of regional attractiveness and well-being (Kelly et al., 2024).

As regional populations age, with or without accompanying population loss, the average household size typically decreases and there may be more single-person households. The changing regional age structure has several housing-related implications. First, in the short term, there may be a need for more housing, not less, given the smaller household sizes. Second, the housing needs of older residents may change: instead of larger family-sized dwellings, there may be a preference for smaller, more manageably sized apartments or houses. Older residents being able to downsize is important to them but also to younger age cohorts, many with children, who may be waiting for larger homes to become available. Moreover, houses for older people must meet specific standards, such as the installation of elevators or ramps, to be accessible and enable independent living. Aside from supply, regional housing policy can also help guide the type and location of housing aimed at an ageing population. This includes housing that enables ageing in place and housing in locations that promote active ageing, including access to public transport, healthcare and non-segregated mainstream services in the community.

There may be a mismatch between the housing stock that is available and the remaining population, particularly in regions already experiencing population loss. This could be due to ageing of the population, changing housing preferences or undesirable or outdated structures. In this area, there is a strong role for regional housing policy that seeks, first and foremost, to tackle existing housing challenges for current residents, especially in terms of quality, affordability and desirability. Retrofitting existing housing aligns with sustainability priorities and those of the green transition and can also contribute in the medium and longer terms to lower energy costs, all helping to improve regional quality of life. Like good infrastructure provision, careful housing policy can contribute directly to regional well-being and, potentially, indirectly to migration and fertility.

### 3.4.5. Education

Education fills a ‘deal-breaker’ role, but it can be especially difficult to manage from a policy perspective in a shrinking population context, where schools are becoming progressively emptier, often triggering a vicious circle of school closures and outmigration of families with children (European Commission, 2023b). A lack of schools and childcare, however, will limit the capacity of current residents to remain in a region and may discourage new migrants. Various studies have established that access to public education services can shape where people choose to live. Consequently, policies that aim to ‘streamline’ service delivery by reducing the number of smaller schools in the public education network may inadvertently contribute to population decline (Marré et al., 2020; Di Cataldo et al., 2024).

At the same time, as highlighted by the *Harnessing talent in Europe’s regions* (European Commission, 2023b), access to quality education services, whether primary, secondary or lifelong learning, plays a significant role in determining residential choices. The presence of schools and childcare facilities is vital not only for retaining current residents but also for attracting new migrants. At the very least, a flexible plan for increasing equal access to quality and inclusive school education and childcare is an important consideration. A flexible and inclusive approach to education infrastructure planning is therefore essential. Education services such as training and upskilling, usually aligned with economic development policy, can also serve a demographic objective by providing additional mechanisms for the local population to stay and engage in economic activity, whether they are young, old or of working age.

Investment in educational infrastructure should focus not only on new facilities but also on the optimisation and modernisation of existing ones, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity and adaptability to future demographic shifts. Moreover, smart education planning involves predictive modelling and strategic investment based on medium- to long-term demographic trends. Such adaptive strategies can help mitigate the risks associated with declining student populations by ensuring that educational facilities remain relevant and responsive to changing needs (European Commission, 2023b).

### 3.4.6. Services and healthcare

Services, both public and private, are indispensable to regional liveability, socioeconomic development and demographic cohesion. Private services, such as food shopping, banking, culture and entertainment, can be some of the more difficult services for regional policy to influence, as there are few mechanisms to encourage or force a private firm to operate in a particular location. However, without access to fresh food or healthcare, life in a region can be considered untenable (Kompil et al., 2022); that is, few will want to remain and those who do will lack access to basic services. One way regional policy can play a role is in encouraging innovation in service delivery, which can help to lower costs to providers while still guaranteeing coverage for residents and customers: ‘Innovative, community-based, sometimes mobile service solutions can help to fill the gaps, maintaining access to services in low populated areas’ (European Commission, 2021a, p. 19). Similar challenges exist for public services such as post offices, emergency services and waste disposal, although the public mandate may be clearer and the challenge more about cost-efficiency. When concerning public services, regional policy could also encourage co-design and participatory approaches to ensure that the services provided address the identified needs of residents.

Healthcare is a type of core demographic policy, contributing to the overall health of residents but also providing important care for ageing cohorts and new residents, whether in-migrants or babies. Crucially, healthcare can be thought of as a decisive element of regional demographic policy. Without access to routine services, such as prenatal, maternal and geriatric care, or emergency

services, not only will the existing resident population suffer, but also many will probably feel obliged to leave and potential in-migrants may be put off, no matter how desirable the region is in other respects. Healthcare is especially important for older residents hoping to age in place. These regions often lack doctors, nurses, hospitals, pharmacies and other medical infrastructure necessary for providing adequate care, especially urgent or specialised care. The issue of access to medical services is particularly concerning in rural parts of Member States like Bulgaria, France, Italy and Romania, but it can also be seen in areas across the EU due to ageing healthcare workforces, low investment in rural infrastructure and younger healthcare professionals favouring urban centres (European Commission: Secretariat-General, 2023).

## 4. Place-based policies and pathways to territorial development

### 4.1. Key principles for policy adoption

As noted previously, the taxonomy presented in [Chapter 3](#) is not exhaustive but has been designed to be a useful tool for decision-makers to gain an overview of some of the many complexities related to demographic change at different scales and explore potential policy approaches. It is essential to acknowledge that addressing demographic change requires understanding its long-term impacts, as these shifts often unfold over extended periods. Policymakers must approach these phenomena with strategies that account for the time and complexity involved, ensuring sustainable outcomes in addressing regional disparities and demographic transformations. There is no ‘silver bullet’ or one-size-fits-all policy portfolio that will work for all regions. This section brings to light four key well-established principles (Barca et al., 2012; Iammarino et al., 2019; Fioretti et al., 2020; Pertoldi et al., 2022) to guide policymakers when addressing these challenges and to enable them to seize the opportunities of territories and regions to the benefit of the people who inhabit them (European Commission, 2023b).

Coordinated responses across sectors, evidence-based and person-centred policies, place-based approaches and ‘building on networks’ will be explained in the subsequent sections in terms of how they can be applied when dealing with policies related to demographic change.

#### 4.1.1. Coordinated responses across sectors

As already discussed, regional populations grow, shrink and change in myriad ways in terms of demographic characteristics. Sources of demographic change, whether through in- or outmigration, international migration or births and deaths, are at least as important as the type and extent of total change. As stated in the demography toolbox, ‘policy solutions that mutually benefit several or all generations are being implemented and should be supported across various policy areas such as education and training (e.g. intergenerational learning fostering knowledge and jointly build skills), housing and care (e.g. intergenerational living and community-based care, including adult day services) and in the workplace (e.g. multigenerational workforces which accommodate diverse needs and invest in two-way knowledge and skills transfers between generations)’ (European Commission, 2023a, p. 20). Aligning and coordinating policies across different areas and levels of government, local, regional and national, is key to developing a cohesive and efficient approach to addressing complex challenges such as the ones posed by demographic change. Such an integrated approach allows for coherent strategies that minimise contradictions, reinforce shared goals and improve overall policy effectiveness. For instance, an ageing population increases the need for healthcare and social support, while also reducing the workforce. Integrated policy would require collaboration between healthcare, social services, labour and economic planning sectors to ensure adequate support systems and labour market adjustments. Cultivating regional expertise in the fundamentals of demographic change and its relationship to various policy domains can help local officials and stakeholders think more carefully about integrated policy investments and what demographic (or social and economic) goal they are meant to attain. A coordinated response across the different

planning scale is also essential. This requires an integration of thematic sectors at the local, regional and national levels, so that policy approaches are not just place-based and designed to implement actions at the local level, but are legitimised and supported by a clear vision at the national level.

### **4.1.2. Evidence-based and person-centred policies**

Policies addressing demographic opportunities and challenges can be strengthened by being evidence-based and person-centred (European Parliament, 2021). The choice to adopt one policy over another must precisely rely on thorough data, research and analysis. This approach ensures that interventions are based on factual information rather than assumptions or political motives. Evidence-based policies in demography might draw on statistics related to birth rates, migration patterns, age distribution and socioeconomic indicators. This allows for targeted actions, such as planning healthcare resources for ageing populations, supporting youth employment in areas with high youth migration or tailoring education systems to match the future workforce.

By contrast, person-centred policies require the prioritisation of the needs, experiences and perspectives of individuals and communities affected by demographic changes. This means moving beyond broad, one-size-fits-all approaches to create policies that reflect the unique situations of people at different life stages and with different backgrounds. For example, policies that address housing might consider family size, accessibility needs for older adults and affordability for young people. A person-centred approach would foster inclusive planning, aiming to enhance quality of life for all demographic groups.

Together, these approaches ensure that demographic policies are grounded in reliable evidence, shaped around the needs and preferences of people and committed to equity and fairness. This combined focus helps create policies that are both responsive to actual demographic trends and equitable in their impact.

### **4.1.3. Place-based approaches**

After consulting the taxonomy, the next step is selecting policy approaches that are adapted to the specific territory. This must be supported by evidence-based factual information and tailored to the specific place. As already recognised in existing cohesion policy, geography matters. As seen in [Chapter 2](#), this must include an analysis of the demographic tendency of the region, for example considering the decades and causes of a specific trend and also the region's geographical characteristics, be it a territory characterised by urban, intermediate or rural settlements. For example, regions located near large metropolitan labour markets will have a different set of realistic policy options to work with, which may include more investment in transportation and housing and less in local entrepreneurship or other economic development policies. More remote regions require a wider basket of policy options that emphasise connectivity but also local quality of life and economic opportunity. Moreover, data will show whether the place under consideration has positive or negative natural change, population change and net migration.

A fundamental aspect of this is choosing the most appropriate scale of intervention, considering that the place-based approach is particularly effective when applied at the local level. It encourages local authorities to involve community organisations, the private sector and citizens in actively participating in identifying issues and shaping policy responses. Local insights help ensure that policies are effective and responsive to a community's specific needs.

#### 4.1.4. Context matters: all for one and one for all

Valuable context is often missing from regional population change statistics, inadvertently giving the impression that regional population change is the result only of demographic factors within individual regions. However, as this chapter has argued, regional population change is occurring within a much wider context, geographically, temporally and from a policy perspective.

Population change may be reported for different levels of regions (e.g. NUTS 2 or NUTS 3) or for countries, but these statistics are merely aggregations of changes occurring at much more local scales. This matters internally for regions, as the population change reported for a region is unlikely to be true of all subparts of the area. Growth, for example, may be driven by increases in one village or town, while everywhere else has remained stable or decreased in population. The quality of population change, whether growth or loss, is mediated by what is happening in neighbouring regions. If a region is gaining population but surrounded by shrinking regions, this presents a different policy quandary than a growing region surrounded by other growing regions. Regional policy, especially demographic, must account for a multilevel approach that is supported by the analysis of the various scales: global, national, regional and local.

As seen in [Chapter 2](#), specifically in [Figure 1](#). Highlighting the decades with population decline by NUTS3 regions, 1961–2021 population change reports the difference in the number of inhabitants between two periods of time (e.g. yearly or decadal). These statistics hide a well-known truth, which is that some regions have had a declining population for a long time. Historical or temporal experience of population change provides important information about the depth of exposure to population loss: 1 year of depopulation is different from 30 years of depopulation. Temporal experience also matters demographically: long-term experience of population loss is likely to be reflected in regional age structures, and this is useful information from a policy perspective.

Regional population change is sometimes treated as a diagnosis, when, perhaps, it is better viewed as a symptom of wider social, economic, demographic and political contexts. Where demographic behaviours are concerned (e.g. migration, mortality and fertility), in a democratic context there is little that can (or should) be done to make people move, stay, have babies or die at a particular time. Instead, demographic outcomes are governed to a large extent by preferences and the wider milieu in which individuals live. This is where regional policy can make a difference, focusing on the economic, infrastructural, environmental and local factors that make individual expectations possible.

Ultimately, it must be considered that, for some regions, growth is likely to continue unabated. These regions attract a range of migrants who are often young and of childbearing age. It is important to recognise that these regions benefit from other regions' population losses. Similarly, for regions with declining populations, finding ways to attract in-migrants, both economic and social, may be an ideal goal. There being only a few routes to demographic growth does not mean that there is no point in demographic cohesion policies. On the contrary, demographic cohesion policy can emphasise the importance of quality of life for those already residing in a region.

## 4.2. Adaptation, mitigation and amelioration: key concepts for different regional demography policies

The concepts of adaptation, mitigation and amelioration are versatile frameworks that can be applied across a wide range of policy areas. They offer different ‘strategies’ for addressing challenges and optimising outcomes in different contexts. As seen so far, at the regional level, there is a great variety of demographic situations and each can be tackled depending on its history, tendency and objectives for the future. For example, for growing regions, successful policy is not generally aiming to halt growth. Rather, the focus is on the management, accommodation and integration of new residents, whether in-migrants or babies. That is, demographic-related policy in growing regions is usually adaptive. For shrinking regions, the policy options may encourage adaptation but may also be geared at mitigation, or reversing current demographic trends. In both cases, territorial policy may be explicitly demographic, for example emphasising attracting migrants or ‘talent’. However, policies may also be non-demographic in nature, aiming to indirectly influence demographic change through the encouragement of innovations in economic development, services and educational provision, or improved infrastructure, for example.

**Adaptation** means acknowledging the changes occurring and looking for adjustments that accept and accommodate the new and anticipated demographic changes (Sysner, 2020), minimising negative impacts and capitalising on potential opportunities. Also referred to as ‘coping with decline’ (ESPON, 2017), adaptation policies are often related to planning. Rightsizing planning approaches assess the growing mismatch between the residential population and the built environment and seek to bring the two into better balance. Other planning approaches may include the demolition of unused buildings and housing to protect property values and improve visual appearances. Adaptation highlights the importance of confronting challenges that come with decreased population density, an ageing population and a smaller workforce. Looking for new opportunities, such as the emerging ‘silver economy’, is also a characteristic of adaptation policies. Through a decoupling of population growth from economic development, adaptation seeks to promote well-being independently of economic growth (ESPON, 2017). By encouraging a transition to a new demographic normal, adaptation policies can help uncover areas where creative and innovative ideas will be necessary in order to maintain and increase local quality of life.

**Mitigation**, or ‘going for growth’ (ESPON, 2017), refers to efforts to reduce or prevent undesirable demographic trends or their potential negative effects. This is often couched as return to growth or, at a minimum, a slowdown in the factors contributing to ongoing or incipient population loss. Mitigation policies may directly address demographic factors by, for example, working to retain populations, such as young people (Sonzogno et al., 2022), or attract migrants, for example at the national level through visa schemes, at the regional level by attracting talent<sup>(11)</sup> or at the local level by offering cheap housing. Given that regions often lose population due to a relative lack of opportunities or regional attractiveness, it is not surprising that mitigation policies are often non-demographic and targeted at increasing local economic opportunities, improving infrastructure or otherwise making the area a more desirable place to move or stay. As a demographic strategy, mitigation (going for growth) may work best in a wider complementary policy framework, considering EU and global demographic contexts. As slow and negative population change extends across larger numbers of regions, competition for a limited (and possibly dwindling) pool of migrants increases, highlighting the importance of interregional cooperation and strategy.

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<sup>(11)</sup> See the Talent Booster Mechanism promoted by DG Regional and Urban Policy: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform/talent-booster-mechanism\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform/talent-booster-mechanism_en).

This concept is probably the most related to the ‘right to stay’ concept advocated by Enrico Letta, as it envisages addressing the root causes of outmigration and improving the conditions that compel people to leave their home countries (Letta, 2022).

A third potential way of conceptualising policies is **‘amelioration’**. Amelioration (improving or making better) offers a different perspective on the role of demographic policy, which is less about managing numbers, characteristics or changes and more focused on improvements in well-being and quality of life for existing and future regional residents. This framing of demographic policy offers several advantages. First, it is well recognised that many residents would prefer to stay if possible and many might prefer to have children if possible. Amelioration policy addresses the ‘if possible’ without limiting the preferences of others. Second, framing policy as ‘ameliorative’ communicates its overall value and purpose and, at the same time, serves to remove barriers to demographic fulfilment. Third, amelioration policy dovetails seamlessly with other policies, including environmental sustainability, economic development and healthy living.

Territorial and national demographic policies rarely fall into such neat categories as adaptation, mitigation and amelioration. Approaching policy from this categorical perspective, however, helps to elucidate a policy’s purpose, which, in turn, facilitates evaluation and discussion. The definition of demographic policy success will vary considerably across regions. Although for many shrinking regions the obvious goal may be growth, and for many growing regions it may be continued growth, framing policy options as adaptive, mitigating or ameliorative provides additional nuance, and defining policy success where population is concerned becomes a vehicle for regional- and EU-scale level discussion about collective aims, how those aims impact individual regions and how to ensure that burdens and benefits are evenly acknowledged.

# 5. Fiches and policy approaches related to demographic trends and territorial types

## 5.1. Different trends and different territorial types

Can the same policy approaches be applied to places that have similar demographic trends but different regional types? They can, but they might not work for all!

**Chapter 3** presented the taxonomy: a systematic classification, based on a literature review, that organises clusters, challenges, potential opportunities, repercussions on the ground and indicative policy approaches, divided by policy domains related to demographic change. Such information allows the reader to have a broad overview. However, the same policies may not be effective if applied to places that have similar demographic trends but different regional types, because the policies would not be place-based and supported by evidence-based data.

In order to support local and regional stakeholders to take this into consideration, two variables need to be taken into account. One is the region's demographic trend, for example observing in a specific period of time the trends in the TC, the NC and NM<sup>(12)</sup>. The other is the type of region it is: predominantly urban, intermediate or predominantly rural.

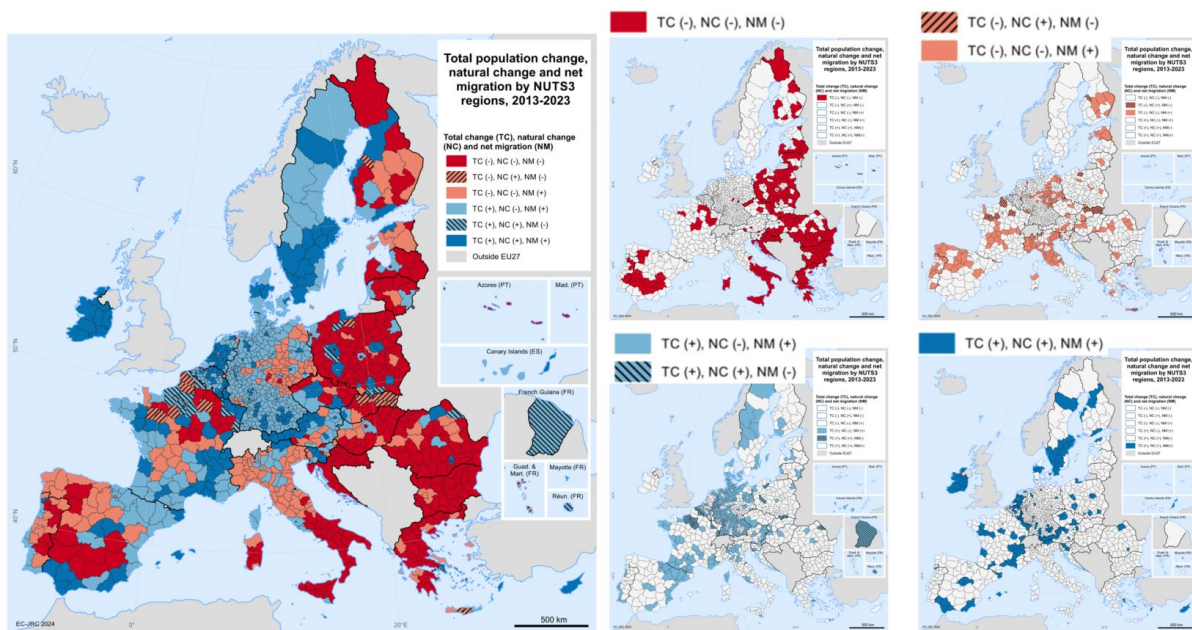
The demographic trend can be taken into account by observing both past trends and future projections. **Figure 10** shows the trend between 2013 and 2023 in the EU, and its delayering by tendency.

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<sup>(12)</sup> The demographic tendencies comprise the following:

- TC (Total Change) is the overall change in a population over a specific time period, accounting for both natural change (births minus deaths) and net migration (inflows minus outflows).
- NC (Natural Change) is the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths in a population during a given period, indicating population growth or decline without migration effects;
- NM (Net Migration) is the balance between the number of people moving into a region and the number moving out of a region, reflecting migration's contribution to population change.

**Figure 10.** Total population change, natural change and net migration by NUTS 3 region, 2013–2023, divided by layers



Source: JRC ARDECO.

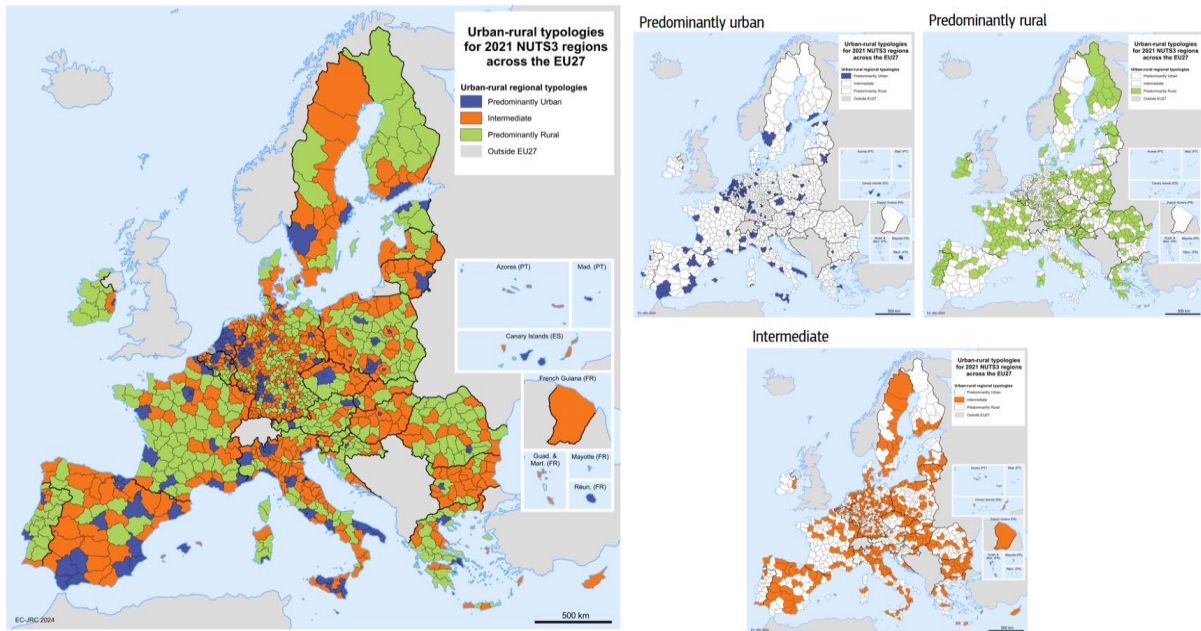
Observing these maps reveals diverse situations, characterised by different trends across the EU.

- There are cases of TC<sup>-</sup>, NC<sup>-</sup> and NM<sup>-</sup>; these are the NUTS 3 regions represented in red. In this sort of case, the total population is shrinking due to a combination of negative NC (i.e. there are more deaths than births) and negative NM. The regional population is becoming smaller and the demographic outlook is such that a return to growth is unlikely, as often the outmigrants are young, economically active and of childbearing age.
- Orange represents the regions characterised by TC<sup>-</sup>, NC<sup>-</sup> and NM<sup>+</sup>, meaning that the total population is shrinking due to negative NC, even though NM is positive. In this case, although the current demographic outlook is such that the total population is shrinking, positive NM may indicate regional attractiveness and a potential eventual return to demographic stability or growth.
- In light blue are the cases of TC<sup>+</sup>, NC<sup>-</sup> and NM<sup>+</sup>, where the total population is growing, but NC is negative, meaning there are currently more deaths than births. All growth is due to positive NM. This indicates that either the age structure is older or fertility is quite low, and that the region is sufficiently attractive to migrants that NM alone can fuel population stability or growth.
- Finally, the dark-blue regions, with TC<sup>+</sup>, NC<sup>+</sup> and NM<sup>+</sup>, represent cases where the total population is growing due to both positive NC and positive NM. This may indicate that the region is attractive to migrants or that, even if few migrants are arriving, even fewer are departing. Positive NC may result from a younger structure or from a combination of age structure and fertility.

Remembering that demographic change is a slow process, it is important to look at the greatest span possible of past trends and future projections. It can be useful to review the NUTS 3 projections for 2025–2035, presented in [Chapter 2](#), in [Figure 5](#), [Figure 6](#) and [Figure 7](#).

It is also crucial to take into account the type of region, meaning whether it is mostly characterised by cities, is considered intermediate or is mainly composed of rural territories (Figure 11)<sup>(13)</sup>.

**Figure 11.** The three types of regions, divided by layer



Source: Eurostat, 2024 (<https://link.europa.eu/fw3dnH>).

From a solely region-size perspective, this urban–rural typology classification, recently updated by Eurostat, shows that, currently, 22.6 % of EU regions are classified as urban, 44.5 % as intermediate and 32.8 % as rural. The highest share of urban regions (besides Malta and Liechtenstein, where the shares are 100 %) is found in the Netherlands (57.5 %), and the lowest shares are in Slovenia (no urban regions), Bulgaria (3.6 %), Croatia and Romania (4.8 - 2.4%, respectively) (Eurostat, 2024). As will be seen in the next section, when observing the number of people living in these regions, the counts are quite different.

The overlapping of demographic trends and region type (predominantly rural and TC–, NC– and NM–; predominantly rural and TC–, NC– and NM+; predominantly rural and TC+, NC– and NM+, etc.) yields a nuanced framework for understanding how different types of regions experience population changes. Annex 2 contains a set of these maps overlapping regional types and pattern of population change. Doing so also reveals whether a specific combination is common in the EU and if it is concentrated in specific areas or spread uniformly across the EU. It highlights places that may run into similar challenges and opportunities. Guiding how policies may best target specific challenges

<sup>(13)</sup> The EUROSTAT urban–rural typology is a classification based on the following three categories:

- predominantly urban regions, which are NUTS level 3 regions where at least 80 % of the population lives in urban clusters;
- intermediate regions, which are NUTS level 3 regions where more than 50 % but less than 80 % of the population lives in urban clusters;
- predominantly rural regions, which are NUTS level 3 regions where at least 50 % of the population lives in rural grid cells.

For more resources, consult the related Eurostat web page: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Territorial typologies manual - urban-rural typology](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Territorial_typologies_manual_-_urban-rural_typology).

through particular place-based interventions; this is what the fiches presented in the next section attempt to do.

## 5.2. Fiches on policy approaches based on demographic trends and territorial type

To further support policymakers and stakeholders in territorial development, the report offers a set of fiches that combine demographic trends and regional types to help screen potential policy approaches suited to specific regional contexts.

While the previously explained taxonomy showcased challenges, benefits, impacts and indicative policy approaches divided by demographic, migration and territorial clusters, these fiches add a different classification shaped in a way whereby policy approaches are more extensively articulated and territorially bounded.

The eight fiches developed (available in [Annex 2](#)) considered the three regional types (predominantly urban, intermediate and predominantly rural) and the four main demographic trends mixing TC, NC and NM. As shown in [Table 4](#), when looking at the share of the population present in each of the 12 cases, there are some cases (in red) showing a share of the population of below 5 % (e.g. rural regions where the population is growing because of both newborns and positive NM); because these cases are rare, such fiches have not been created.

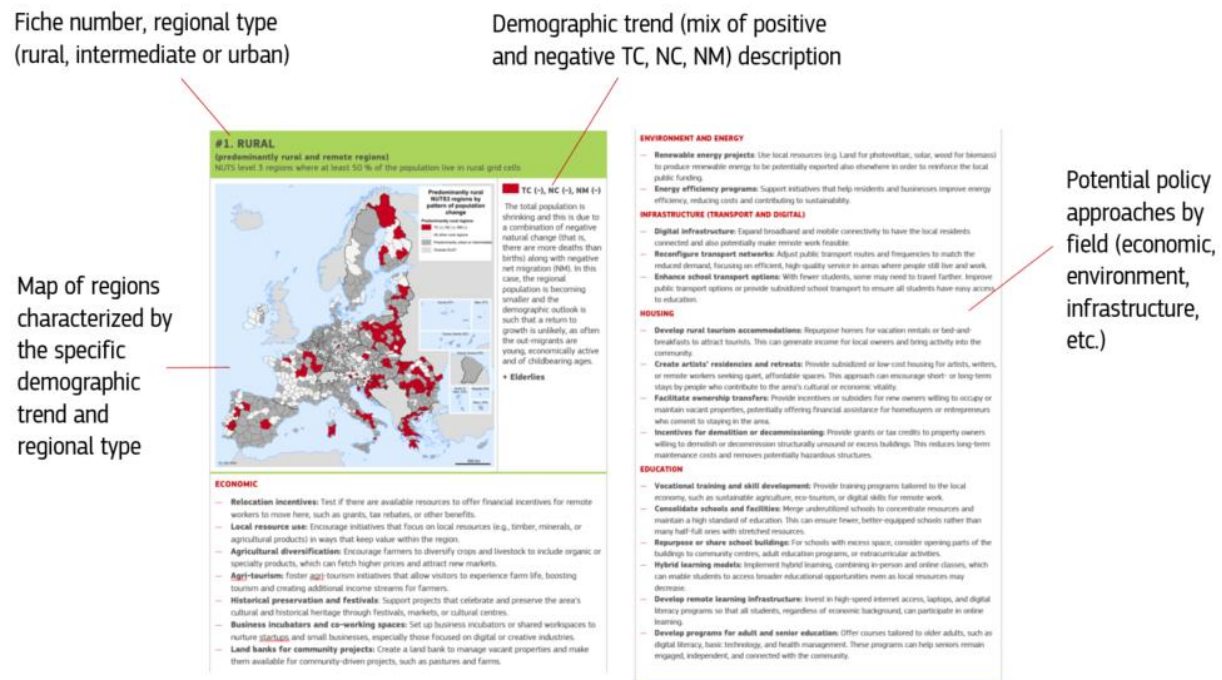
**Table 4.** Share of population by demographic tendency and regional type, 2023 (%)

Demographic trends	Regional type			
	Urban	Intermediate	Rural	Total
TC (-), NC (-), NM (-)	4.8	8.6	7.5	20.9
TC (-), NC (-), NM (+)	3.1	6.7	4.3	14.1
TC (+), NC (-), NM (+)	13.5	12.3	5.6	31.3
TC (+), NC (+), NM (+)	16.0	8.8	2.1	26.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>40.6</b>	<b>38.6</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: JRC ARDECO.

As can be seen in [Figure 12](#), at the top of each fiche is the fiche number and the specific regional type. Each contains a map, showcasing in colour the regions where that specific mix of regional type and demographic trends is happening. To the right of the map is a short description of what happens in that particular mix of demographic trends. Underneath are presented the specific potential policy approaches that could be implemented, divided by the policy domains described in [Section 3.4](#).

**Figure 12.** Diagram of the fiche's structure



Source: Authors' own production.

The first case, fiche #1, refers to rural regions that have a negative demographic trend, where the total population is shrinking (TC-) due to a combination of negative NC (NC-) and negative NM (NM-). The regional population is becoming smaller and the demographic outlook is such that a return to growth is unlikely, as often the outmigrants are young, economically active and of childbearing age. For all policy domains (economic, environment and energy, infrastructure, etc.), the approaches in this case are oriented through an adaptation perspective. They showcase planning actions that consider both rightsizing and growing mismatches between the residential population and the built environment, and they also seek to bring these last two into better balance while improving the local quality of life.

Another example is predominantly urban regions that are undergoing a positive demographic trend (fiche #8) – that is, with a growing total population (TC+) due to both positive NC (NC+) and positive NM (NM+). This may indicate that the region is attractive to migrants or that, even if few migrants are arriving, even fewer are departing. Positive NC may result from a younger structure or from a combination of age structure and fertility. In this case, the indicative policy approaches are adapted to a trend that shows a gain in inhabitants; therefore, policies tend to focus on managing growth sustainably, integrating new residents and building a diversified economy that can support a larger and more varied population.

When consulting the fiches, keep in mind that the policy approaches indicated under each trend are not prescriptive but rather sets of indicative approaches that may be more effective in specific regional situations.

# 6. Demographic change and cohesion policy

## 6.1. Demographic change and cohesion policy: a multifaceted relationship

As shown in previous chapters, the demographic fabric of the EU is undergoing profound transformations. This shift is not just a backdrop but a central driver of public policy adaptation across various sectors, including pensions, fiscal policy, education, labour and healthcare. It is in this context, however, that the role of regional policy is particularly significant. Its unique contribution lies in its capacity to tailor these broad strategies to the nuanced realities of specific territories.

The relationship between EU cohesion policy and demographic change is both significant and complex. Cohesion policy serves as the EU's strategic response to uneven development and disparities among its regions, directly addressing the challenges posed by demographic changes. This policy extends beyond simple financial redistribution, aiming instead to foster sustainable development that prioritises holistic growth, quality of life, social infrastructure and environmental sustainability. Demographic shifts, such as ageing populations, migration and urbanisation, significantly influence the economic outputs and long-term development trajectories of different regions. In response, cohesion policy employs a territorial approach, tailoring interventions to the specific demographic and geographical characteristics of each region, whether addressing the needs of rural areas with ageing populations or those of urban centres experiencing migration inflow. This place-based approach ensures that the policy is adeptly designed to align regional development efforts with the changing demographic landscape, effectively preparing each area to meet its unique needs and opportunities.

The relationship between demographic change and cohesion policy is explicitly addressed in the regulatory framework supporting the policy. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060<sup>(14)</sup>, known as the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), emphasises the integration of demographic considerations into the Member States' partnership agreements<sup>(15)</sup>. Article 11 of the CPR calls for Member States to, where relevant, specifically address demographic challenges within their partnership agreements by incorporating a distinct chapter defining an 'integrated approach' to addressing the demographic challenges of their regions comprehensively, promoting tailored responses to issues like ageing populations and migration within these agreements. This requires specific action at the programme level: Article 22 of the CPR, 'Content of programmes', invites Member States to set out in the programmes 'an integrated approach to address demographic challenges, where relevant'.

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<sup>(14)</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1060>.

<sup>(15)</sup> Partnership agreements are documents guiding the use of the European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Social Fund Plus, Just Transition Fund and European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund during 2021–2027.

Along the same lines, Regulation (EU) 2021/1058<sup>(16)</sup>, which oversees the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, specifically mandates the consideration of demographic trends such as migration, ageing and depopulation, alongside geographical specifics, in regional programme planning and execution. The regulation in its recital 45 calls for special attention to be paid to areas at NUTS level 3 and other specific regions like sparsely populated areas or those experiencing significant population declines<sup>(17)</sup>, encouraging Member States to develop local action plans to address these population challenges. In addition, Article 10 of the regulation focuses on regions experiencing significant demographic shifts and emphasises the need for support for disadvantaged areas, including rural regions and those facing severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.

Furthermore, the Commission's communication on harnessing talent in Europe's regions introduced the Talent Booster Mechanism<sup>(18)</sup>, a dedicated eight-pillar initiative aiming to support regions in using existing cohesion policy funds more effectively in order to address the consequences of demographic change and brain drain, helping both programming during midterm review and implementation on the ground.

In addition, in 2025, the Commission offers Member States the option of a midterm review of cohesion policy programmes to adjust, where necessary, the programmes to the needs generated by, among other things, demographic challenges. This process is supported by the European semester country-specific recommendations<sup>(19)</sup> and country reports<sup>(20)</sup>.

### 6.1.1. Overview of the 27 partnership agreements

A review of the 27 partnership agreements shows a range of approaches to the topic of demographic change. An ageing population is the most common demographic challenge, mentioned by 14 Member States including Bulgaria, Spain and Cyprus. Czechia, Estonia and Italy specifically highlight increased demands on healthcare and social services due to ageing demographics. Additionally, ageing effects are more pronounced in remote and rural areas in Greece, Spain, Italy and Lithuania, exacerbating socioeconomic hurdles and infrastructure needs. The challenge of a shrinking working-age population is recognised across Member States such as Bulgaria, Austria and Poland. This demographic shift strains labour markets and poses long-term economic growth challenges. Hungary and Sweden view this as a structural challenge, with Sweden emphasising rural business continuity threats due to an ageing workforce. Migration is seen as a significant challenge in eastern European Member States, with Bulgaria, Poland and Romania reporting concerns over high emigration rates. Croatia and Romania identify migration as a critical factor in systemic population loss, affecting local economic stability and development. Depopulation is another critical issue faced by Member States like Greece, Italy and Cyprus. For instance, Greece uniquely faces urban depopulation despite migrant influxes, illustrating complex demographic dynamics. Spain and Poland note depopulation extending beyond rural areas, affecting intermediate regions as well. Most Member States have included specific details on demographic challenges and integrated approaches in their partnership agreements (i.e. Chapter 10), but a few, for example Belgium,

<sup>(16)</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1058/oj/eng>.

<sup>(17)</sup> As referred to in Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council, that are sparsely populated, according to the criteria set out in point 161 of the guidelines on regional State aid for 2014–2020, namely those that have a population density of less than 12.5 inhabitants per square kilometre or areas that have suffered from an average annual population decrease of at least 1 % of inhabitants over 2007–2017.

<sup>(18)</sup> <https://link.europa.eu/g3pqmD>.

<sup>(19)</sup> <https://link.europa.eu/NDHyqg>.

<sup>(20)</sup> <https://link.europa.eu/dhPQ6P>.

Germany and Austria, do not have a dedicated section in their partnership agreements that covers a specific territorial integrated approach to address these challenges.

Partnership agreements, while setting the strategic orientations that guide cohesion policy implementation, often acknowledge demographic challenges in relation to the diverse territories covered by the agreement. However, due to the complex multilevel implementation framework of cohesion policy, these high-level directions must be translated into strategic programming on the ground. This is essential to ensure that investments meaningfully address demographic dynamics in line with the policy's place-based approach.

At the subregional level, this translation takes shape through the development of integrated territorial development strategies. Promoted by the EU, these strategies aim to coordinate investments at the local level across sectors, governance levels and spatial scales. Grounded in a place-based rationale, the 2021–2027 cohesion policy (Article 28 of the CPR) requires local authorities to develop such programming tools, particularly through integrated territorial investments (ITIs), community-led local development and other territorial tools. These strategies must include a territorial analysis, a coherent intervention logic, a governance framework and a results-oriented operational plan. Such provisions ensure that investments are not fragmented or ad hoc, but embedded within territorially grounded and strategically integrated frameworks.

Designing and implementing integrated territorial strategies, particularly in non-urban areas facing significant demographic change, is not without its challenges. Beyond the need for alignment and coordination across the local, regional and national levels, as detailed in [Chapter 4](#), and the policy tools set out in the regulations, this chapter focuses on the strategy-making process itself. In particular, it examines key policy challenges that emerged during a peer-review workshop on integrated territorial strategies, organised by the JRC in September 2024.

## 6.2. Voices from the territories: the JRC territorial peer review on demographic change

### 6.2.1. JRC tools for the 2021–2027 integrated territorial strategies

Since 2017, the JRC has developed several activities to augment knowledge on the integrated approach to territorial development promoted through the cohesion policy, and more specifically to enhance the capacity of local authorities to implement integrated territorial development strategies. The main methodological outputs are *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies* (Fioretti et al., 2020), *Handbook of Territorial and Local Development Strategies* (Pertoldi et al., 2022) and the related self-assessment tool for sustainable urban development strategies (SAT4SUD)<sup>(21)</sup> and self-assessment tool for territorial and local development strategies (SAT4TER)<sup>(22)</sup>. These tools are developed around six building blocks identified as the main pillars of an integrated approach to territorial development: strategic dimension, territorial focus, governance, cross-sectoral integration, funding and finance, and monitoring. Their relevance is explicitly acknowledged by the recent resolution of the European Parliament on the implementation of territorial development (CPR, Title III, Chapter II) and its application in the European Territorial Agenda 2030 (2023/2048(INI)) (European Parliament, 2024). The resolution also stresses the need

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<sup>(21)</sup> SAT4SUD – Self-Assessment Tool for Sustainable Urban Development strategies, <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strategies/sat4sud/?lng=en>.

<sup>(22)</sup> SAT4TER – Self-Assessment Tool for Territorial and Local Development strategies, <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strategies/sat4ter/>.

for further dissemination of good practices and more guidance on the implementation of policy objective 5 ‘Europe closer to citizens’ (point 4).

In full alignment with the view of the European Parliament, since 2023, the JRC and DG Regional and Urban Policy have organised peer reviews for territorial development strategies to be implemented in 2021–2027. Peer reviews allow local policymakers to discuss what they consider challenging policy questions with other local authorities (peers) and managing authorities, and European Commission representatives and experts, and to identify possible solutions based on the advice received. Peer reviews complement the methodological offer of the JRC with hands-on activities that have the twofold aim of delivering policy-oriented capacity building across EU territories and collecting first-hand information to continue feeding back to build better knowledge and create evidence-based policy.

### **6.2.2. Peer review dedicated to territorial strategies in areas confronted with demographic change**

The peer review organised in Crete in 2024 focused on non-urban areas experiencing challenges related to demographic change – that is, territories hit by sharp population loss (more than 1 % per year) due to a combination of structural decline, an ageing population and young people moving to cities or abroad for work. It also focused on areas affected by a less significant but still progressive thinning-out of the population (less than 1 % per year), with concerns about this process being an indicator of an economic and social crisis.

The aims of the peer review were to explore how current territorial strategies take into account and reflect the demographic transition, the main challenges identified by policymakers and the key approaches currently being tested that aim towards adaptation, mitigation or amelioration (see [Chapter 4](#)).

The uncertainty and intensity of the demographic change necessitated the addition of an extra session based on scenario construction. Decades of such methodology experimentation overall in urban design have proved that acting and operating to reply to a ‘what-if’ question serve to fuel the debate, raising the bar of possible horizons and transformation (Magnaghi, 2007; Brenner, 2017). Participants in working groups were asked to reflect on the given challenges and jointly agreed policy objectives of three fictional territories, to identify which policy approaches could be more apt at the local level, and how and in what conditions the different actions could be bundled together to have a greater impact. The exercise helped participants increase their awareness of the linkages between different policy approaches and the relevance of the implementation level for choosing one option instead of another. Moreover, it demonstrated the benefit of scenario construction to working collectively, understanding different ideas or ways of thinking and exploring new solutions.

#### **6.2.2.1. Territorial strategies under review**

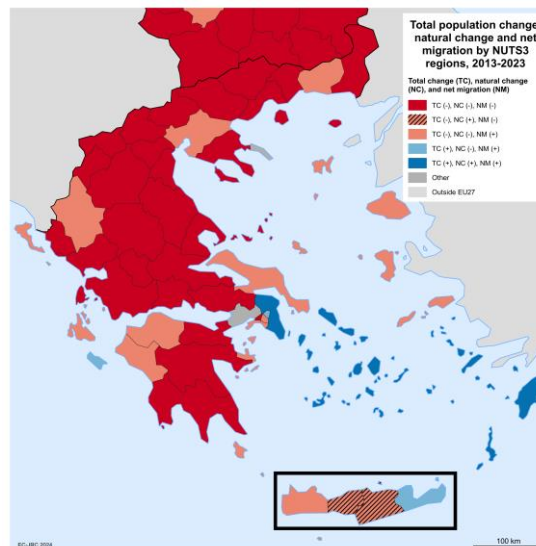
The territorial strategies under review were the regional ITI strategy of emblematic environmental and cultural routes of Crete (Greece), the inner-area strategy of Monti Dauni (Italy) and the ITI strategy for the Țara Făgărașului micro-region (Romania).

Besides addressing similar constraints (e.g. remote and affected by demographic issues), the three strategies are not homogeneous, as they deal with different geographies and socioeconomic processes. Moreover, they are developed under different national policy orientations towards population decline, from the national strategy for inner areas (Barca et al., 2014) in Italy, created with the explicit aim of reverting depopulation and ageing trends in remote areas of the country,

to the situations in Greece, where a dedicated ministry for tackling the demographic challenge was established in 2023, and Romania, which addresses loss of population mainly at the national level and through place-blind approaches that have little consideration for measures at the local level (Brad et al., 2019; Muntele et al., 2021).

The **ITI strategy of Crete** extends spatially across the entire island and is built around a network of natural and cultural assets, including UNESCO sites, to promote more sustainable tourism beyond the sun-and-beach model (Figure 13). The strategy aims to reverse demographic shrinkage by making the area more attractive for new residents through, for example, new tourism infrastructure and new opportunities for local business development, and by improving the well-being of residents, for example ensuring access to high-quality social and education services or promoting community engagement, which also benefits older people. The peer-review study visit allowed for a better understanding of how United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization geoparks contribute to the local economy, by offering qualified jobs, providing technical support to local businesses and hosting students (e.g. Erasmus students, Master of Science (MSc) students, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidates) within each geopark area. These investments, together with other initiatives of geo-tourism and eco-tourism, especially those targeting local young people, are complemented by investments in basic education, health and welfare facilities and a structure to host and train young immigrants. More challenging topics for the Cretan strategy are the enhancement of capacity within local authorities, the strengthening of rural–urban linkages and the development of a common vision across the whole strategy area, while keeping stakeholders actively engaged during the process to ensure ownership and support of the strategy over time.

**Figure 13.** Localisation of the ITI strategy of Crete within the EU population trends, 2013–2023



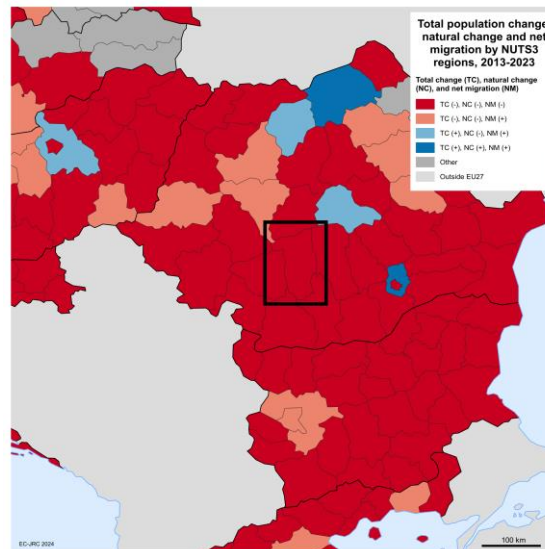
Note: For legend clarity, see Figure 10.

Source: JRC ARDECO.

The **Monti Dauni integrated territorial development strategy** orchestrates a diverse portfolio of funding directed to the diversification of the rural economy of a mountain area in the Italian Apennines through the development and marketing of non-agricultural products and services based on the area's unique natural, environmental and historical assets (Figure 14). The strategy aims to mitigate depopulation through a set of economic development measures supporting micro-entrepreneurship and small businesses, coupled with investments in service provision and urban regeneration projects promoting better living conditions. The strategy also emphasises the inclusion of migrants, who are seen as having the potential to renew the local workforce and communities.

The critical aspects of deploying the Monti Dauni strategy are the need to ensure additional financial sources beyond EU funding, the full integration of migrants into local communities, the promotion of community-led initiatives to ensure alignment between interventions and local needs and the stronger financial sustainability of service provision.

**Figure 14.** Localisation of the Monti Dauni integrated territorial development strategy within the EU population trends, 2013–2023



Note: For legend clarity, see Figure 10.

Source: JRC ARDECO.

The **ITI strategy for the Țara Făgărașului micro-region** addresses a partially mountainous area in central Romania that has been facing an acute socioeconomic decline for over two decades due to the closing of a major local chemical industrial plant in 1989 and several waves of outward migration (Figure 15). The territorial strategy aims to address the present situation by focusing, on the one hand, on actions for economic transformation, with the main investments envisaged for the creation of a bioeconomy hub, the development of eco-tourism and the establishment of an agri-food cluster, and, on the other hand, on actions targeting decent living conditions and the provision of services for residents, particularly disadvantaged children and older people, with measures for healthcare, education, professional training, etc. Human capital retention and attraction are core issues for the micro-region; recourse to additional sources of financial support, participation in EU projects and networking with other territories outside Romania are also important.

**Figure 15.** Localisation of the ITI strategy for the Țara Făgărașului micro-region within the EU population trends, 2013–2023



Note: For legend clarity, see Figure 10.

Source: JRC ARDECO.

### 6.2.2.2. Learning from practice

Collective discussions on the solutions tested by the strategies under review, together with examples and recommendations suggested by the peers, provide relevant insights on how territorial strategies under cohesion policy address the demographic challenge and the critical points to be faced, and resonate with the findings of the *Handbook of Territorial and Local Development Strategies* (Pertoldi et al., 2022).

#### Strategic dimension

Limited local **strategic capacity** is a common challenge, particularly in territories that have suffered from human capital depletion for many decades and where no supportive strategic framework exists at the national level. A lack of national approaches can, in turn, be explained by a poor understanding and framing of the demographic transition, leading to weak strategic orientation. Existing European Commission networks like the Rural Pact Community Platform<sup>(23)</sup> (particularly its rural revitalisation subplatform) and the Harnessing Talent Platform<sup>(24)</sup> can help knowledge building and experience exchange to address demographic change and associated challenges. Reinforcing **administrative capacity** is essential in territories under stress, and this also underlines the relevance of entities funded by EU policy, like local action groups and local development agencies active in all the territories under review. Apart from strategic capacity, adequate administrative capacity at all levels of governance is essential for designing and implementing effective integrated territorial development strategies. Managing authorities and intermediate bodies must coordinate policies across departments, delegate tasks to those at the subregional and local levels and design delivery systems tailored to diverse territories and instruments. Meanwhile, local and subregional administrations need strategic thinking, stakeholder mobilisation and collaboration skills to design and implement strategies while fostering high-quality projects. At both levels, additional capacity is required for efficient public funding management,

(23) (<https://link.europa.eu/p4Gj8p>).

(24) (<https://link.europa.eu/rrhBVD>).

seamless administrative procedures and effective strategy monitoring and evaluation. A national example of a strategic approach to reinforcing administrative capacity at the local level is the German Small Town Academy<sup>(25)</sup>, launched in 2019, which is a platform for networking, the exchange of experiences and advanced training that targets over 2 100 towns across Germany, mostly those in peripheral areas and facing demographic, economic and social challenges.

**Building a common vision** can be challenging in the face of uncertainty and possible conflicting goals between adjacent territories, for example when shrinking areas fight with growing or accumulating areas over limited financial resources. Intensified dialogue and collaboration emerge as the way forward. These can be fostered through, for example, regional conferences that gather local authorities, regional and national agencies, relevant institutions and stakeholders to discuss common topics. Peers representing Castilla-La Mancha brought to light that, in their case, a common vision for the whole region to fight depopulation was built starting from the concepts of identity and rurality, which helped avoid focusing too narrowly on local problems and favoured collaboration with different entities, from universities to LEADER local action groups. In other cases, like for the Italian inner-area strategy for the Apennines area of Emilia-Romagna, consensus on the vision was reached through thematic and focused working groups that were able to overcome localism.

### ***Territorial focus***

The functional area approach in strategic spatial planning involves coordinating development efforts across interconnected territories that function as a cohesive unit, transcending traditional administrative boundaries. This method acknowledges that challenges such as mobility, suburbanisation, land use, climate change, economic development and demographic shifts often extend beyond individual jurisdictions and are better addressed through collaborative strategies. By fostering cooperation among various administrative units, the functional area approach aims to create integrated strategies that reflect the unique needs and dynamics of the entire area, promoting sustainable development and reducing regional disparities (European Commission et al., 2024). All the strategies under review apply a **functional area approach**. While the Greek strategy is a multisite strategy focusing on non-contiguous natural areas and cultural sites, the Monti Dauni and Țara Făgărașului micro-region strategies are multi-municipal strategies. The supra-municipal scale, usually based on administrative units, was a common feature of territorial strategies under the 2014–2020 cohesion policy (Pertoldi et al., 2022). Functional relations in large low-density areas are usually based on multiple networks that may vary considerably, going beyond administrative boundaries, and require high granularity and a variety of data.

The JRC has initiated a scientific attempt to delimit functional rural areas (Dijkstra et al., 2023). Functional rural areas can contribute to a better understanding of spatial patterns and dynamics when analysing demographic change, also in the view of post-2027 developments.

The approach of the ITI strategy of emblematic environmental and cultural routes of Crete is rather innovative, with there being very few territorial strategies that connect territories **outside physical proximity**. Some examples are heritage-led tourism strategies implemented in Portugal, aiming for the science-based valorisation of non-contiguous Roman sites across the country, and the Greek ITI strategy developed along the ancient Egnatia road during the 2014–2020 programming period<sup>(26)</sup>.

<sup>(25)</sup> (<https://www.kleinstadtakademie.de/>).

<sup>(26)</sup> See the European Commission web page ‘Handbook of territorial and local development strategies’: (<https://link.europa.eu/JxYfQ4>).

This approach can be very relevant for territories affected by demographic change, helping to overcome a lack of critical mass and connect with external knowledge and actors.

### **Governance**

Given the complexity of demographic change, one of the main challenges is **multilevel governance**, as the collaboration across levels is crucial to ensure policy coherence and coordinated implementation. Conflicts can arise at the local level, between municipalities, but also at the regional and national levels with relevant sectoral agencies and EU managing authorities, especially when funding resources are scarce. Collaborative strategic frameworks, like the national strategy for inner areas <sup>(27)</sup> in Italy, initiated in the 2014–2021 programming period and continued in the current one with an increased number of local strategies, or the Spanish strategy established in 2019 that addresses the demographic challenge <sup>(28)</sup>, have been key in supporting regional and local authorities.

Another key issue for strategies in depopulation areas is **engaging residents**. Given the low population numbers, this is particularly challenging and, at the same time, crucial. The experience of the region of Castilla-La Mancha shows that there is a need to cater for the local community: when local authorities put in place measures to attract people before prioritising projects that benefited the locals, their efforts fell short. Open listening spaces, which can be either an online platform or a physical space in a town hall covered by the strategy, can be useful tools to collect ideas from locals. Furthermore, online platforms for participatory budgeting can enhance community involvement by giving citizens a direct say in deciding which projects receive funding, ensuring that local needs are addressed.

### **Cross-sectoral integration**

The examples shared during the peer discussions focused on **some recurrent topics**: service provision (healthcare, education, transport, etc.); the attraction, integration and retention of newcomers; young people; and economic diversification.

**Inter-municipal and multi-actor cooperation** was highlighted as crucial, particularly for reaching the critical mass needed to provide essential services. For example, a declining rural population presents significant challenges to sustaining convenient public transport. Many EU regions have successfully tested on-demand transport solutions, where a platform mobilises transport providers (taxis, individuals) to meet local demand. One point shared by participants is that these measures do not aim only to optimise costs, but also to improve the efficiency of those services that are most needed by the local community.

**Innovative approaches** were shared. Interesting measures for attracting talent are the visiting students' programmes put into practice by geoparks in Crete <sup>(29)</sup> and the Spanish rural campus <sup>(30)</sup> scheme that supports students to complete an internship in a company or public administration located in a rural area. These measures highlight the importance of collaboration between education centres, companies and public administration.

<sup>(27)</sup> See the department for Cohesion Policy and the South web page 'Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne – SNAI': (<https://politichecoesione.governo.it/it/politica-di-coesione/strategie-tematiche-e-territoriali/strategie-territoriali/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne-snai/>).

<sup>(28)</sup> 130 Medidas ante el Reto Demográfico (<https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/reto-demografico/temas/medidas-reto-demografico.html>).

<sup>(29)</sup> Psiloritis Geopark: (<https://www.unesco.org/en/igpp/psiloritis-unesco-global-geopark>).

<sup>(30)</sup> See the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge web page 'Programa Campus Rural: Prácticas universitarias en entornos rurales': ([https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/reto-demografico/campus\\_rural.html](https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/reto-demografico/campus_rural.html)).

Cooperation between primary, secondary and tertiary sectors can support economic diversification in rural areas by creating networks of farmers and tourism businesses, as in Crete and Monti Dauni. Moreover, a mix of land use policy and tax policy can be effective in promoting small-scale businesses and local entrepreneurship, as trialled in Romania.

### **Funding and finance**

Ageing and an outflow of young people can hinder a territory's access to funding, potentially leading to discontinued support, a decrease in public spending or shifts in targeted investments.

A strong **bottom-up approach** in funding allocation is key. In the Czech region of Moravian Silesia<sup>(31)</sup>, a permanent regional/national conference allows the regional government to act as a key advocate for local stakeholders, ensuring that national calls are aligned with local needs. Similarly, looking for direct EU funding would benefit from services that lobby EU bodies and agencies, which should also be supported by national associations of municipalities. Moreover, future support for strategy funding can be secured by, for example, articulating the value and results of past investments implemented by territorial strategies.

Funding sources can be increased through **new local partnerships**, as in the case of the alliance for ecosystem services<sup>(32)</sup> developed in Castilla-La Mancha. The mechanism results from an agreement between the regional government and the main cities in the region to provide voluntary funding to the regional government for environmental protection in rural areas. This model ensures a steady flow of resources and enhances cooperation between urban and rural communities, focusing on shared environmental goals.

**Financial schemes that go beyond traditional monetary models**, like public-private partnerships, cooperatives and community-led initiatives that are not solely dependent on external funding, can be viable ways to overcome resource limitations in small municipalities.

### **Monitoring**

For strategies confronting demographic change, monitoring systems would benefit from the definition of **specific and realistic objectives related to depopulation adaptation, mitigation or amelioration goals**, especially for long-term results. Strategy-level monitoring is needed to generate data on the effectiveness and added value of these territorial instruments (Pertoldi et al., 2022).

Involving communities in monitoring could include an explicit component to build the **capacity** needed to analyse, reflect and take action. Capacity-building actions and instruments such as training, toolkits, peer-to-peer exchanges and focus groups have been considered in the ITI strategy of Crete to facilitate the engagement of target stakeholders and beneficiaries in monitoring activities.

Often, monitoring is instrumental in maintaining **interest in and engagement with the strategy**. In such a case, a few indicators should be selected that are understood by all relevant stakeholders

<sup>(31)</sup> See the Urbact report *Ostrava Talents in Focus!!!*: ([https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2024-10/in\\_focus\\_ostrava\\_talents\\_in\\_focus\\_iap\\_en.pdf](https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/2024-10/in_focus_ostrava_talents_in_focus_iap_en.pdf)).

<sup>(32)</sup> See the Castilla-La Mancha web page 'Alianza por los servicios de ecosistemas de Castilla-La Mancha': (<https://www.castillalamancha.es/gobierno/desarrollosostenible/estructura/dgapfyen/actuaciones/alianza-por-los-servicios-de-los-ecosistemas-de-castilla-la-mancha>).

and can capture change, both quantitative and qualitative. Co-monitoring tools like those developed by the EU's Horizon 2020 RURITAGE<sup>(33)</sup> project would be useful.

### 6.2.2.3. Summarising remarks

Demographic change will heavily affect all EU territories, and much is still to be understood regarding its consequences and how to address them in terms of policy action. This uncertainty requires new data, new analytical approaches, intensified policy dialogue and policy engagement.

**Peer reviews are relevant tools** in this regard as they offer a safe and trusted environment that facilitates a better understanding of issues as they are experienced on the ground (better knowledge) and mutual learning on policy approaches implemented to overcome them, including learning from failures (better policy). Moreover, they can help territories confronted with such a complex challenge to network and partner with each other. The Rural Pact Community Platform and the Harnessing Talent Platform already exist and are well recognised. However, it should be noted that the former does not focus on cohesion policy, while the latter focuses on regions. Synergies with JRC peer reviews seem to be worth exploring within the functioning of these networks, as they could help fill these gaps by providing a clear focus on cohesion policy and the subregional level.

Territories confronted with depopulation show specific features, diverse patterns of shrinking and unique combinations of assets to be activated. **Place-based approaches that support integrated and locally tailored strategies are required**, reflecting the processes and pathways that lie behind demographic trends. However, their design and implementation can be especially challenging for several reasons. In the first instance, demographic trends such as ageing populations, low birth levels and migration, as analysed in this report, vary significantly across regions and are influenced by local economic, social and cultural factors. Understanding and addressing these nuanced, localised drivers require detailed data, analysis and a deep understanding of local contexts. These approaches often demand coordination across multiple levels of governance (local, regional and national) and across sectors. Aligning policies, priorities and resources in such a multilayered framework can be difficult and time-consuming. Additionally, local and regional administrations may lack the capacity, expertise or resources needed to effectively design and implement tailored strategies, especially when dealing with complex and interconnected issues like demographic change. Another aspect is stakeholder engagement, which is fundamental to successfully implementing place-based strategies. This requires the meaningful involvement of local actors, including residents, businesses and civil society, while also building consensus and fostering collaboration among diverse groups with sometimes diverging interests, which can be particularly challenging. Last but not least, assessing the effectiveness of these strategies is difficult because the impacts of place-based interventions can take time to materialise and are influenced by a range of external factors, making attribution and measurement more complex.

Despite such complexities, it is important to underline that the place-based approach allows authorities to take into account the needs of the territories and set out long-term strategies validated by the main actors involved, and thus not dependent on political changes that could undermine the strategic goals previously set. Such strategies, with their functional approach, are hence particularly well suited to tackling the multifaceted challenge of local population decline by addressing development opportunities and bottlenecks at the right territorial level, with an appropriate mix of complementary and locally tailored interventions (European Committee of the Regions – Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget, 2024).

<sup>(33)</sup> <https://www.ruritage.eu/>.

Current policy approaches at the EU and national levels do not seem to reflect differences between regions and places that can overcome the depopulation challenge and those that will have to adapt to it. **A more explicit and evidence-based reflection around adaptation, mitigation and amelioration as policy options** would enrich the post-2027 debate.

## 7. Conclusions: navigating Europe's demographic transformation

During the coming decade, Europe's population is projected to start shrinking slowly. Many regions and Member States have already experienced declining populations over the last decade, and more will do so in the future. The population of Europe is ageing due to increasing life expectancy and several decades of low fertility rates. This changing demographic landscape, with its uneven distribution and varied implications across regions, may require nuanced and context-sensitive responses.

This report shows that the demographic trajectories of Europe's regions are as diverse as their histories. Some areas face persistent population decline, while others experience growth driven by migration. **Fertility** rates across the EU remain consistently below replacement level, contributing to an overall **ageing** population. This phenomenon is compounded by negative natural growth, which cannot be compensated for by **migration** in all regions. The shrinking proportion of **young people** further intensifies the challenges of sustaining a productive workforce and ensuring the economic vitality of communities.

These trends may call for adaptable and localised policy approaches. Moreover, it may be more helpful to think of demographic outcomes as incidental to or co-benefits of other policies. The taxonomy presented in [Chapter 3](#) and [Annex 1](#) provides an overview of policies from the literature and case studies. It provides a systematic way to screen population dynamics and contributes to identifying potential common challenges and possible policy responses. While regions with similar demographic patterns may benefit from comparable strategies, the effectiveness of these measures also depends on the characteristics of each place. The fiches of [Chapter 5](#) and [Annex 2](#) discuss demographic trends (positive or negative TC, NC and NM) and territorial types (predominantly urban, intermediate or predominantly rural). These factors shape the dynamics of demographic change, alongside socioeconomic context and historical influences. Given this diversity, a **place-based approach** that leverages local data and fosters active community participation may be more suitable. Moreover, policies addressing demographic shifts may want to consider **multiple levels** to ensure alignment at the national, regional and local levels.

As the EU's population starts to shrink, more and more regions will need to adjust to population declines. For example, 36 % of the EU population lived in a shrinking region in 2023; projections suggest that this will increase to 50 % by 2035. Demographic challenges are not confined to individual regions; they reverberate across local, national and global networks. Policies may want to consider these interconnections and the broader implications for cohesion and development. Moreover, addressing the complexity of demographic issues may benefit from a **multidisciplinary approach**. For example, policies could consider the impact of demographic change on the economy, the environment, infrastructure, healthcare and the education system.

This report identifies three strategies to manage demographic change: adaptation, mitigation and amelioration. **Adaptation** involves aligning services and infrastructure with the realities of a declining and/or ageing population. **Mitigation** focuses on enhancing regional attractiveness with the hope of stabilising its population. **Amelioration** prioritises improving the quality of life for all

residents, fostering environments that support those who choose to stay, those who move in or back and those who wish to start families.

At the heart of these efforts lies the principle of cohesion. A shrinking population **does not mean reduced needs**; instead, it often demands more innovative and targeted investments. Smaller households and an ageing demographic profile require reimagined housing, transportation and education systems. Lifelong learning and skills development can help mitigate the effects of workforce shrinkage while fostering resilience in local economies. **EU cohesion policy** offers a framework for addressing these demographic challenges. The analysis presented in [Chapter 6](#) shows the flexibility and responsiveness of cohesion policy concerning the specific demographic nuances of various regions. It exposes the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach and underscores the need to establish place-based strategies, grounded in territories, that balance demographic-specific interventions with more comprehensive, holistic actions designed to address the multifaceted and structural nature of demographic change.

The overall demographic trends suggest that policies should focus not on fighting demographic change, but rather on creating vibrant communities and prioritising quality of life. Building inclusive, resilient and dynamic societies is the recommended way to respond to these ongoing demographic changes. By prioritising quality of life, fostering cohesion and embracing regional interdependence, the EU can craft a future where all regions thrive, even amid profound change.

The many dependencies involved in implementing policies in accordance with demographic priorities may appear to be a threat to the success of such policies, but they are perhaps better viewed as opportunities: demographic policy outcomes may be potentially achievable through concerted and integrated implementation of existing policies. Additionally, demographic outcomes may be better seen as incidental to or co-benefits of other policies.

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# List of abbreviations

<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>DEFINITIONS</b>
<b>ARDECO</b>	Annual Regional Database of the European Commission
<b>CLLD</b>	Community-Led Local Development
<b>CPR</b>	Common Provisions Regulation
<b>DG</b>	Directorate-General
<b>DG REGIO</b>	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (European Commission)
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament
<b>ESPON</b>	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
<b>ESDE</b>	Employment and Social Developments in Europe
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FRA</b>	Functional Rural Areas
<b>G7</b>	Group of Seven
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>ITI</b>	Integrated Territorial Investment
<b>JRC</b>	Joint Research Centre
<b>MS</b>	Member States
<b>NC</b>	natural change
<b>NM</b>	net migration
<b>NUTS</b>	nomenclature of territorial units for statistics
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>TC</b>	total change (in population)

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# Annexes

## Annex 1. The taxonomy

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC</b>	<b>Low fertility</b>	Persistent below replacement level fertility means that there are fewer babies born than necessary to maintain current population size (without immigration). The general rule is 2.1 babies born to each woman by the end of her childbearing years, on average.
<b>WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?</b> MAIN CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES		<b>WHERE ARE THESE IMPACTS FELT?</b> REPERCUSSIONS
<p><b>MAIN CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller total labour force (i.e. population of working age)</li> <li>• Smaller tax base to fund all services</li> </ul> <p><b>POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded opportunities for women and families to achieve desired fertility levels</li> <li>• Higher female labour force participation</li> </ul>		<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiscal limitations due to shrinking population</li> <li>• Longer work-life and delayed retirement</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and other service closures that affect desirability and viability of area</li> <li>• Decreased demand for maternal and child healthcare, leading to reduced service provision and decline in attractiveness of area for stayers and new residents</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour shortages meaning fewer working-age individuals lead to economic stagnation and difficulties in sustaining the local economy</li> <li>• Business and service closure</li> <li>• Changes in housing and service demand and to local community character</li> <li>• Change in housing type demand and, potentially, location preferences</li> <li>• Changes to character or lived experience of place (e.g. fewer children on the street)</li> </ul>

## INDICATIVE POLICY APPROACHES

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY	INFRASTRUCTURE (transport and digital)	HOUSING	EDUCATION	SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE
<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen capacity to incorporate demographic projections into medium-term fiscal frameworks and debt sustainability analyses.</li> <li>Attractive fiscal policies for business investment through reduced tax rates for families and fiscal incentives for employers and self-employed people</li> <li>Subsidise families with children</li> <li>Support SMEs and small family businesses</li> <li>Take measures to make it easier for women of all generations to be employed in agriculture</li> <li>Make labour markets more inclusive of vulnerable groups</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create flexible working policies, including remote and hybrid working, job-sharing and part-time professional work</li> <li>Guarantee adequate leave rights, in particular paternity leave and non-transferable, well-compensated parental leave</li> <li>Encourage regions to capitalise on their competitive advantages as established in the smart specialisation strategies</li> <li>Consider the investment in high-technology industries and universities fostering the knowledge-based development</li> <li>Recognise the great potential of the circular economy and bioeconomy in achieving a more efficient agri-food sector and greater employment of younger generations</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer subsidies to adopt more sustainable energy solutions (e.g. solar panels, heat pumps, wind power, etc.)</li> <li>Offer subsidies to foster the use of sustainable public transport and the acquisition of electric cars</li> <li>Regenerate and decontaminate brownfield sites, reduce air pollution and promote noise-reduction measures</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use local resources (e.g. land for photovoltaic, solar, wood for biomass) to produce renewable energy, which could also be exported elsewhere in order to reinforce local public funding</li> <li>Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on local and regional transportation that facilitates the mobility of workers and students</li> <li>Where not yet in place, adapt public transport to provide baby-friendly solutions</li> <li>Implement demand-responsive transport in low-density regions</li> <li>Increase the availability of high-speed internet to support remote working, to help facilitate a work-life balance that may make it easier for those wanting children to realise that goal</li> <li>Offer accessible and affordable opportunities to acquire digital skills</li> <li>On top of digitalisation, explore the potentials of robotisation and artificial intelligence</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on housing affordability, which may make it easier for those wanting children to realise that goal</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop housing solutions for single parents, single-person households and smaller households</li> <li>Design new buildings with flexible structures to allow for changes in function across time</li> <li>Incentivise landlords to rent out or sell vacant properties, perhaps by offering grants for refurbishing old buildings or imposing higher taxes on vacant properties</li> <li>Consider the promotion of community land trusts</li> <li>Avoid gentrification and allow all family income to live in city centres</li> <li>Favour densification rather than city expansion</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address teacher shortages and increase the attractiveness, diversity and prestige of the teaching profession</li> <li>Strengthen the link between education and the labour market</li> <li>Give an ample offering of vocational studies (including online)</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the availability of affordable, accessible and good-quality childcare</li> <li>Allow for a more flexible approach to class and school size regulation</li> <li>Merge or repurpose facilities like community centres, libraries and healthcare services to avoid redundancy</li> <li>Increase access to distance learning</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In border regions, consider cross-border healthcare options</li> <li>Intensify the 'primary care model' and implement a consistent 'emergency network' in all territories</li> <li>Upgrade accessibility to services (e.g. online shopping) to encourage work-life balance and to maximise access to services regardless of residential location</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guarantee the existence of proximity shops</li> <li>Adapt service provision to lower population levels and population change (i.e. fewer children, more older people), for example through senior-friendly public spaces and home-care assistance to meet their needs</li> <li>Test mobile social service units</li> <li>Develop strategies to improve and facilitate access to maternal and child healthcare</li> <li>Support nursing homes in all territories</li> <li>Promote the presence of local health clinics with basic services and ultrasonography</li> <li>Establish programmes that support mental health, reduce isolation and promote well-being, helping to support a resilient community</li> </ul>

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC</b>	<b>Ageing and age structure</b>	Improvements to life expectancy, coupled with low fertility, mean that, on average, individuals are living longer, but there are fewer people (without migration) in younger age groups, resulting in an older, ageing population. This can lead to short- and medium-term population loss, as deaths outnumber births.
<b>WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?</b> MAIN CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES		<b>WHERE ARE THESE IMPACTS FELT?</b> REPERCUSSIONS
<p><b>MAIN CHALLENGES</b></p> <p>Greater population characterised by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller total labour force (i.e. population of working age)</li> <li>• Smaller tax base to fund <i>all</i> services</li> </ul> <p>More people subject to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ageism and a lost sense of purpose</li> <li>• Financial insecurity</li> <li>• Difficulty with everyday tasks and mobility</li> <li>• Finding the right care provision</li> <li>• Access to healthcare services</li> <li>• End of life preparations</li> <li>• Imbalances between those paying into social system and those drawing from in (e.g. pensions)</li> </ul> <p><b>POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential for longer, healthier lives than ever before in history</li> <li>• Extended and more flexible approaches to employment</li> </ul>		<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiscal/budget pressures from shrinking workforce and growing retired population</li> <li>• Identity crisis as possibility of population decline increases (perceived sense of intergenerational injustice, as younger age cohorts perceive that they will not benefit from a range of services comparable to those older generations receive)</li> <li>• Longer working life and delayed retirement</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased and changing requirements (demand/need) for healthcare provision</li> <li>• Increased need to reduce car dependency to maintain activity and access for older residents and public transport infrastructure</li> <li>• Over time, downward pressure on housing prices</li> <li>• Decreased average household size</li> <li>• Changed preferences for amenities</li> <li>• Increased number of older workers in the workplace</li> <li>• Shortage of workers</li> <li>• Business and service closure</li> <li>• Mismatched skills between workers and employers</li> <li>• Increased emphasis on local accessibility to healthcare, shopping and community centres</li> <li>• Over-reliance on declining sectors</li> <li>• Declined agricultural employment as younger cohorts seek different types of work</li> <li>• Smaller youth cohorts entering the workforce and engaging in innovation and entrepreneurship, and limited economic diversification</li> <li>• Lower performance in innovation</li> <li>• Reinforcement of social attitudes and behaviours associated with particular age cohorts</li> <li>• Lack of leisure opportunities</li> <li>• Less trust in democratic institutions</li> <li>• Political attitude and discontent</li> <li>• Isolation</li> </ul>

## INDICATIVE POLICY APPROACHES

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY	INFRASTRUCTURE (transport and digital)	HOUSING	EDUCATION	SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE
<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure adequate pensions</li> <li>• Provide financial life-cycle planning for older groups</li> <li>• Invest in skills (upskilling/reskilling) for all age groups</li> <li>• Explore the advantages of automation of work</li> <li>• Encourage telework</li> <li>• Develop economic policy that considers diversification, encouragement of entrepreneurship and start-ups, and public-private partnerships</li> <li>• Encourage female labour force participation</li> <li>• Encourage post-retirement employment</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tackle labour shortages and skills mismatches, countering the brain drain phenomenon</li> <li>• Optimise the use of identified economic development potential</li> <li>• Invest in tourism and cultural heritage as local economic anchors</li> <li>• Reinforce local entrepreneurship of young people</li> <li>• Promote time banks for older adults, which are recognised as a way to leverage untapped community capacity to fulfil the unmet service needs of its members</li> <li>• Invest in the silver economy</li> <li>• Encourage new jobs in the care sector</li> <li>• Promote and value endogenous resources to create conditions for the development of private investments and generate additional employment opportunities</li> <li>• Facilitate the transfer of holdings by cutting down on bureaucracy and ensure decent terms for those retiring</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer subsidies to adopt more sustainable energy solutions (solar panels, heat pumps, etc.)</li> <li>• Review safety measures for housing heating in old buildings</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop cooling strategies for warmer weather, including housing retrofits and local cooling stations</li> <li>• Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push transport innovations, including electric buses and cars, that maintain or expand mobility opportunities without imposing further environmental costs</li> <li>• Assess suitability of transport options for older populations, including frequency of service, destinations, number of stops and shaded/protected stops</li> <li>• Promote digital inclusion programmes, emphasising early technology education in schools and free training for all age groups</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make use of digital skills programmes to favour opportunities for intergenerational exchange</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a national strategy for more accessible, affordable and adaptive housing</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new and/or retrofit existing housing to meet the needs of older and smaller households</li> <li>• Ensure housing is connected to public transport, to enable mobility and minimise car dependency</li> <li>• Provide housing to young people in exchange for social and care activities as part of rental contracts</li> <li>• Support (by grants or subsidies) senior residents to adapt their houses with accessibility features like elevators, ramps and emergency assistance systems</li> <li>• Explore co-housing for older people</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide alternative training and education options to facilitate mid- and late-career changes</li> <li>• Offer continuing education opportunities to improve well-being and quality of life (lifelong learning)</li> <li>• Offer targeted reskilling training programmes for sectors that match local needs</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in social security systems</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upgrade physical and digital accessibility to services</li> <li>• Encourage innovation in distance shopping</li> <li>• Offer telemedicine</li> <li>• Intensify primary care to prevent hospital admissions</li> <li>• Invest in physical and mental health services</li> <li>• Offer courses for caregivers so they can act as medical staff</li> <li>• Foster public/private mechanisms for home assistance for older people</li> <li>• Invest in mental health care for lonely older people</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster cultural activities for well-being</li> <li>• Promote age-diverse communities and enhance cross-generational interaction</li> <li>• Develop outdoor recreation opportunities for all ages</li> </ul>

<b>MIGRATION</b>	<b>International</b>	Movement from one country to another can be driven by pushes and pulls—the attraction of economic opportunity but also flight from political, social, and environmental crises. International migration offers opportunities to support economic development and maintain national quality of life, but also presents challenges around integration and social support.	
<b>WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?</b> MAIN CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES		<b>WHERE ARE THESE IMPACTS FELT?</b> REPERCUSSIONS	
<p><b>MAIN CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived competition for resources (jobs, housing, etc.) between immigrants and native-born population</li> <li>• Perceived erosion of cultural norms and identity</li> <li>• Unpredictable inflows potentially posing short- and medium-term integration challenges</li> </ul> <p><b>POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential to fill emerging labour market shortages</li> <li>• Immigrants generally paying taxes</li> <li>• Short-term fertility bump from younger immigrants starting families</li> <li>• Services (e.g. schools) potentially being in sufficient demand to remain open for all residents</li> </ul>		<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing national policies/goals with principles of free movement and needs for labour and human capital</li> <li>• Macro-level impacts for countries that are primarily sending and not receiving migrants</li> <li>• Benefits potentially accruing at the national level, with challenges mainly felt locally</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of settlement schemes and integration</li> <li>• Management of integration: housing, training, and employment</li> <li>• Required resources and attention on political and social sensitivities</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance of community cohesion and communication of the benefits of immigration</li> <li>• Need for second-language instruction in schools and community centres</li> <li>• Provision of suitable housing</li> <li>• Integration of newcomers</li> </ul>	

## INDICATIVE POLICY APPROACHES

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY	INFRASTRUCTURE (transport and digital)	HOUSING	EDUCATION	SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE
<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage and ease the process of legal migration</li> <li>• Provide swift recognition of foreign qualifications</li> <li>• Facilitate the effective integration of nationals of non-EU countries legally residing in the EU</li> <li>• Allow new residence permits for highly skilled nationals of non-EU countries</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop programmes to pair employers and workers</li> <li>• Provide advice services that help new residents navigate employment rules and practices</li> <li>• Provide on-the-job training</li> <li>• Offer support to strengthen ‘silver migrants’ as economic resources</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that transitional accommodation is robust to weather extremes</li> <li>• Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure public transport options and clear navigation instructions for non-drivers new to the system</li> <li>• Provide clear pathways to driver training</li> <li>• Enhance high-speed internet and mobile coverage to support and attract remote workers and new businesses, especially in digital or technology-related fields</li> <li>• Consider expanding the road networks and public transportation so that they can handle a growing population (upgrades may include expanding water and sewage systems and waste management facilities)</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide suitable transitional housing in locations connected to public transport and accessible to jobs and services</li> <li>• Facilitate entry into formal housing market, with clear communication of standards and rules</li> <li>• Create affordable housing options to support and attract young families or professionals willing to relocate, thinking also of single professionals and retirees</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop digital language and cultural resources for children and adults</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer language and upskilling courses to ease integration</li> <li>• Develop language and culture classes in schools to ease transitions for children</li> <li>• Equip teachers with resources to manage diverse classrooms effectively and foster inclusion</li> <li>• Develop extracurricular programmes for children, combining academic support with cultural and sports activities to encourage interaction between local and migrant young people</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address local and regional discrepancies in access to social protection, including social assistance benefits and labour market activation support</li> <li>• Provide ‘introduction to country’ guidance on banking, housing, healthcare and education</li> <li>• Facilitate access to primary healthcare</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund programmes that foster interaction between long-time residents and newcomers, such as festivals, local markets and cultural events.</li> <li>• Create mentorship or ‘buddy’ systems pairing local residents with migrants to foster relationships and reduce social isolation</li> </ul>

<b>MIGRATION</b>	<b>Internal</b>	In many Member States, local growth is driven by the internal migration of the native population from one part of the Member State to another (e.g. from rural to urban). In low-growth contexts, when international migration is absent regions can grow only through the shrinkage of other areas of the Member State.
<b>WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?</b> MAIN CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES		<b>WHERE ARE THESE IMPACTS FELT?</b> REPERCUSSIONS
<b>MAIN CHALLENGES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often those most able (based on youth, skills or education level) who leave</li> <li>• Growth-driven housing and service pressures in destination locations</li> <li>• Hollowing out of rural regions, as migration is typically rural to urban</li> <li>• Outmigration potentially reinforcing the ageing process, rendering demographic and economic recovery even more challenging</li> </ul> <b>POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can fill emerging labour market shortages</li> <li>• Skills match between employers in and workers</li> <li>• Offers route to training, education and employment not available in origin locations</li> </ul>		<b>NATIONAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing population distribution, with implications for infrastructure development, political districting and disbursement of national-level funding allocations</li> </ul> <b>REGIONAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived competition to attract migrants</li> <li>• In low-growth/no-growth contexts, zero-sum game (i.e. all gains in migrants are the result of a population loss elsewhere)</li> </ul> <b>LOCAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing scarcity in destination neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Empty or low-occupancy housing stock in origin areas</li> </ul>

## INDICATIVE POLICY APPROACHES

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY	INFRASTRUCTURE (transport and digital)	HOUSING	EDUCATION	SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE
<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain high-quality statistics to track migration flows</li> <li>• Promote national-level discussion of challenges faced by both origin and destination regions</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with local industry and government to promote skilled labour migration (i.e. talent)</li> <li>• Explore mechanisms for maintaining ties to outmigrants</li> <li>• Offer incentives like grants or low-interest loans for entrepreneurs and local businesses in diverse sectors to broaden the economic base</li> <li>• Create grants or microloans for migrants and locals to start small businesses, focusing on sectors like hospitality, retail and digital services</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/ REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrofit housing where possible instead of building new houses</li> <li>• Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/ REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce interregional and local transportation links to facilitate connections and movement between places</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance high-speed internet and mobile coverage to support and attract remote workers and new businesses, especially in digital or technology-related fields</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage national coordination of housing policy that acknowledges imbalances between regions sending and regions receiving migrants (different needs for different places)</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage coordinated planning for new housing, linked with services, transport and schools</li> <li>• Adapt and reuse vacant housing in outmigration areas to suit remaining population and any smaller in-migrant flows</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for flexible increases and decreases in school class sizes</li> <li>• Provide advice services that help new residents navigate employment rules and practices, including on-the-job training</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore flexible service and healthcare deployments that redistribute resources where needed</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage telemedicine to ease pressures in both in- and outmigration areas</li> <li>• Expand affordable childcare options to support working parents, including migrant families, enabling better labour market participation</li> </ul>

<b>MIGRATION</b>	<b>Seasonal</b>	Local areas can experience enormous annual variation in total population, driven by tourism (inflows of leisure population and workers) and agriculture (inflows of workers).	
<b>WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?</b> MAIN CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES		<b>WHERE ARE THESE IMPACTS FELT?</b> REPERCUSSIONS	
<p><b>MAIN CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Feast or famine’ where employment, revenue and infrastructure and service demand are concerned</li> <li>• Increased demand for affordable housing for both permanent and temporary residents</li> <li>• Increased demand for infrastructure and services that may benefit year-round residents, but may also impose increased costs for funding those services</li> </ul> <p><b>POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can generate local employment and provide valuable revenue streams</li> <li>• Can be a source of employment for seasonal migrants</li> </ul>		<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure on statistical and infrastructure systems to maintain up-to-date data on temporal variations in population distribution</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodic overcrowding leading to uneven service and infrastructure provision, access and financial support</li> <li>• Affordable housing provision</li> </ul>	

## INDICATIVE POLICY APPROACHES

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY	INFRASTRUCTURE (transport and digital)	HOUSING	EDUCATION	SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE
<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulate short-term employment contracts and working protections</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop strategies for the off-season repurposing of infrastructure</li> <li>• Promote a tourism sector focusing on inland territories and reduced seasonality</li> <li>• Encourage public-private partnerships to mitigate risks and promote local ownership of amenities, services, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/ REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the development of net-zero industry to strengthen year-round industry</li> <li>• For tourism-driven areas, encourage the transition to electric power for housing and infrastructure to minimise the impacts of tourism</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain good public transport connections to facilitate mobility and minimise car dependency</li> <li>• Strengthen Wi-Fi and internet to assist with off-season economic opportunities and connections</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/ REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulate secondary and vacation housing to promote housing affordability and adequate markets for services</li> <li>• Explore absentee owner taxes and other mechanisms to support local areas in off-season periods</li> <li>• Ensure affordable housing provision to year-round residents and seasonal workers alike</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate short-term educational offerings for children of seasonal workers</li> <li>• Expand short-term childcare offerings that meet the needs of seasonal workers</li> <li>• Develop training to reinforce local employment opportunities for year-round residents</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deploy additional healthcare workers in peak seasons</li> <li>• Plan for service and healthcare demands in busy periods, while ensuring ongoing provision in the off-season</li> </ul>

<b>TERRITORIAL</b>	<b>Urbanisation, suburbanisation and shrinking</b>	Geographically uneven population growth means that, even as some areas face challenges of depopulation, others face growth pressures.
<p><b>MAIN CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High demand for proximity to urban centres</li> <li>• Pressure on green belts</li> <li>• Increased demand for housing</li> <li>• Additional commuting times (and demand for transport infrastructure)</li> <li>• Abandonment of towns / rural areas / neighbourhoods / buildings</li> <li>• Political and social challenges as local experiences diverge between growth and decline extremes</li> <li>• Need for diverse policies owing to diverse trends</li> </ul> <p><b>POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many individuals able to ‘vote with their feet’, living in places that suit their skills and preferences</li> <li>• Links and bonds between places, especially sending and receiving, reinforced</li> </ul>		<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disparate subnational experiences potentially creating challenges in building national-level consensus</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth pressures on housing affordability and availability</li> <li>• Growth pressures on transport systems and service provision</li> <li>• Decline pressures on housing vacancies, affordability and value</li> <li>• Decline pressures on size and skills of workforce</li> <li>• Decline pressures on size of youth population</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased turnover and ‘churn’ in rapidly growing areas</li> <li>• Competition for housing, transport and services in growing areas</li> <li>• Sprawl that impacts public transport availability, service and usage</li> <li>• Decreasing population density in shrinking areas, making service provision and public transportation more challenging to deliver</li> <li>• Increased housing vacancies that affect the housing market, local well-being and safety</li> <li>• Smaller populations that lead to decreased demand for goods and services and retail closures</li> <li>• Oversized housing</li> </ul>

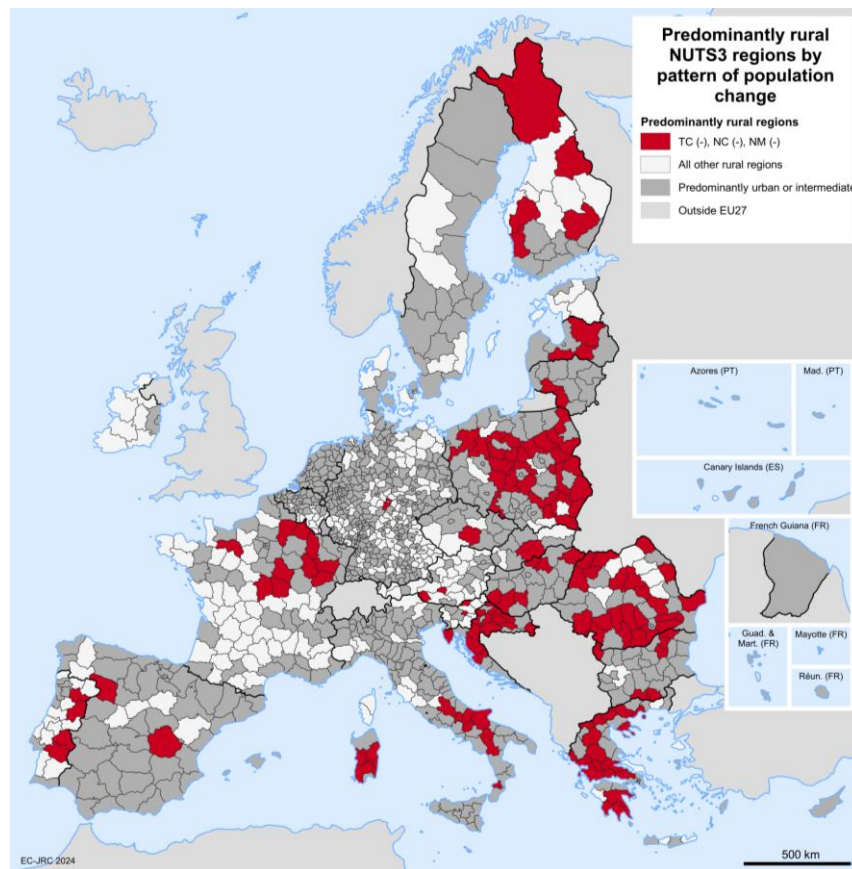
## INDICATIVE POLICY APPROACHES

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY	INFRASTRUCTURE (transport and digital)	HOUSING	EDUCATION	SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE
<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide funding mechanisms that acknowledge dual challenges of growing and shrinking areas</li> <li>• Provide taxation and resource distribution tailored to diverse regional experiences (i.e. cohesion)</li> <li>• Encourage remote work</li> <li>• Promote cross-border cooperation</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasise local industry, entrepreneurship, and innovation to provide an economic anchor for local areas</li> <li>• Implement a tax on vacant properties or land to encourage owners to utilise or sell unused spaces, which can reduce blight and support economic revitalisation</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in seismic proofing</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovate or reconvert vacant buildings and brownfields</li> <li>• Strengthen access to nature</li> <li>• Encourage use of biomass for heating and energy production</li> <li>• Encourage land grouping in rural areas</li> <li>• Make use of local resources (e.g. land for photovoltaic, solar, wood for biomass) to produce renewable energy</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop selective transport infrastructure</li> <li>• Encourage the use of electric cars and public transport</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust public transport routes and frequencies to match demand, focusing on efficient, high-quality services in areas where people live and work</li> <li>• Develop integrated land use and transport planning</li> <li>• Foster shared mobility solutions</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce national homogeneous data on housing trends at different levels</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repurpose vacant/unused properties as social housing</li> <li>• Promote community land trusts with the twofold aim of upgrading spaces and avoiding land use consumption</li> <li>• Enhance access to affordable housing</li> <li>• Renew and/or rightsize the built environment and urban spaces</li> <li>• Focus on using existing urban spaces for housing before expanding outward, helping protect rural landscapes and reduce sprawl</li> </ul>	<p><b>REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map educational facilities to gain a clear overview of their accessibility, physical condition and upgrade or downgrade needs</li> <li>• Provide for new flexible educational facilities that are poly-functional</li> </ul>	<p><b>NATIONAL/REGIONAL/LOCAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where services are lacking, build new or convert existing buildings into local primary care services in all territories</li> <li>• Facilitate digital access to retail, services and healthcare</li> <li>• Encourage local innovation in service delivery</li> <li>• Promote civic initiatives that are place-bound and maintain community and quality of life</li> </ul>

## Annex 2. The eight fiches

### #1. RURAL (predominantly rural and remote regions)

NUTS level 3 regions where at least 50 % of the population live in rural grid cells



**TC (-), NC (-), NM (-)**

The total population is shrinking due to a combination of negative NC (i.e. there are more deaths than births) and negative NM. The regional population is becoming smaller and the demographic outlook is such that a return to growth is unlikely, as often the outmigrants are young, economically active and of childbearing age.

**+ Older people**

#### ECONOMIC

- **Relocation incentives.** Test if there are available resources to offer financial incentives for remote workers to move here, such as grants, tax rebates or other benefits.
- **Local resource use.** Encourage initiatives that focus on local resources (e.g. timber, minerals or agricultural products) in ways that keep value within the region.
- **Agricultural diversification.** Encourage farmers to diversify crops and livestock to include organic or speciality products, which can fetch higher prices and attract new markets.
- **Agritourism.** Foster agritourism initiatives that allow visitors to experience farm life, boosting tourism and creating additional income streams for farmers.
- **Historical preservation and festivals.** Support projects that celebrate and preserve the area's cultural and historical heritage through festivals, markets or cultural centres.
- **Business incubators and co-working spaces.** Set up business incubators or shared workspaces to nurture start-ups and small businesses, especially those focused on digital or creative industries.
- **Land banks for community projects.** Create a land bank to manage vacant properties and make them available for community-driven projects, such as pastures and farms.

#### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Renewable energy projects.** Use local resources (e.g. land for photovoltaic, solar, wood for biomass) to produce renewable energy, which could also be exported elsewhere in order to reinforce local public funding.

- **Energy-efficiency programmes.** Support initiatives that help residents and businesses improve energy efficiency, reducing costs and contributing to sustainability.
- **Energy communities.** Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion

### INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Digital infrastructure.** Expand broadband and mobile connectivity to have the local residents connected and also potentially make remote work feasible.
- **Reconfiguration of transport networks.** Adjust public transport routes and frequencies to match the reduced demand, focusing on efficient, high-quality services in areas where people live and work.
- **Demand-responsive transport.** Mostly in low-density regions, introduce flexible, on-demand transportation services instead of fixed-route public transport.
- **Enhanced school transport options.** With fewer students, some of whom may need to travel farther, improve public transport options or provide subsidised school transport to ensure that all students have easy access to education.

### HOUSING

- **Development of rural tourism accommodation.** Repurpose homes for vacation rentals or bed and breakfasts to attract tourists. This can generate income for local owners and bring activity into the community.
- **Creation of artists' residencies and retreats.** Provide subsidised or low-cost housing for artists, writers or remote workers seeking quiet, affordable spaces. This approach can encourage short- or long-term stays by people who contribute to the area's cultural or economic vitality.
- **Facilitation of ownership transfers.** Provide incentives or subsidies for new owners willing to occupy or maintain vacant properties, potentially offering financial assistance for homebuyers or entrepreneurs who commit to staying in the area.
- **Incentives for demolition or decommissioning.** Provide grants or tax credits to property owners willing to demolish or decommission structurally unsound or excess buildings. This reduces long-term maintenance costs and removes potentially hazardous structures.
- **Cooperative housing programmes and shared living.** Encourage community-housing models where seniors can live together while sharing services and social activities.

### EDUCATION

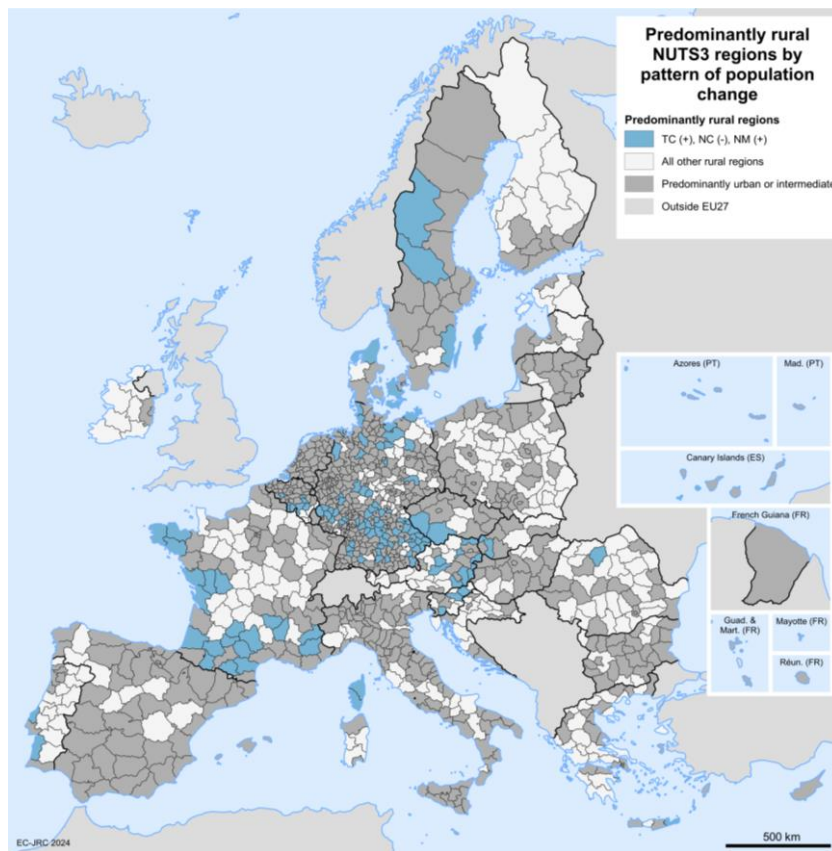
- **Vocational training and skills development.** Provide training programmes tailored to the local economy, such as sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism or digital skills for remote work.
- **Consolidated schools and facilities.** Merge underutilised schools to concentrate resources and maintain a high standard of education. This can ensure fewer, better-equipped schools rather than many half-full ones with stretched resources.
- **Repurposed or shared school buildings.** For schools with excess space, consider opening parts of the buildings to community centres, adult education programmes or extracurricular activities.
- **Hybrid learning models.** Implement hybrid learning, combining in-person and online classes, which can enable students to access broader educational opportunities even as local resources decrease.
- **Development of remote learning infrastructure.** Invest in high-speed internet access, laptops and digital literacy programmes so that all students, regardless of economic background, can participate in online learning.
- **Development of programmes for adult and senior education.** Offer courses tailored to older adults, such as digital literacy, basic technology and health management. These programmes can help older adults remain engaged, independent and connected with the community.

## SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Selective downsizing of services.** Gradually scale down underused infrastructure, such as schools or public buildings, while ensuring that essential services remain accessible. This can reduce maintenance costs and free up funds for more targeted investments.
- **Appropriate services.** Provide services that are appropriate for the population structure, in this case mostly older people (i.e. day centres and primary care facilities).
- **Social services and community programmes.** Invest in social programmes that foster community cohesion, such as sports clubs, community events and cultural initiatives.
- **Mental health and community wellness programmes.** Establish programmes that support mental health, reduce isolation and promote well-being, helping to support a resilient community.
- **Home assistance programmes.** Offer subsidised in-home care for daily activities like cleaning, cooking and personal care to allow older people to remain independent.

## #2. RURAL (predominantly rural and remote regions)

NUTS level 3 regions where at least 50 % of the population live in rural grid cells



### TC (+), NC (-), NM (+)

The total population is growing, but NC is negative, meaning that there are currently more deaths than births. All growth is due to positive NM. This indicates that either the age structure is older or fertility is quite low, and that the region is sufficiently attractive to migrants that NM alone can fuel population stability or growth.

- + Babies
- + Older people
- + Migrants

### ECONOMIC

- **Small business grants and loans:** Provide incentives, such as grants or low-interest loans, for local businesses to start and expand. Support for new enterprises in tourism, crafts and local food production can diversify the economy.
- **Agricultural activities.** Test if incoming migrants can contribute to labour-intensive agricultural activities and food processing. If they can, provide investments in the sector.
- **Agriculture and agribusiness.** Support traditional agricultural businesses while also promoting agribusiness ventures, such as food processing and local branding, to create more jobs and economic activity.
- **Attraction of key industries.** Encourage businesses in sectors that are well suited to the area (e.g. eco-tourism, local manufacturing, renewable energy or the silver economy) by providing tax breaks or reduced fees to employers setting up operations.
- **Business incubators and co-working spaces.** Set up business incubators or shared workspaces to nurture start-ups and small businesses, especially those focused on digital or creative industries.
- **Youth retention programmes.** To keep young residents from moving away, establish programmes that connect them to local career opportunities and offer incentives for them to settle locally after completing education or training.
- **Partnerships with private companies.** Invest in projects that support regional economic goals, such as technology hubs, renewable energy farms or tourism ventures.
- **Eco-tourism and heritage tourism.** Invest in the region's natural beauty, historical sites or unique cultural heritage to attract tourists. Support local businesses in developing eco-friendly tourism options, such as guided tours or outdoor adventure services, and host seasonal events or festivals bolstering local business activity and increasing regional visibility.

- **Remote worker hubs.** Create co-working spaces or shared office facilities for remote workers who need a professional workspace. This can also facilitate networking and create business synergies.

#### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Energy-efficiency programmes.** Support initiatives that help residents and businesses improve energy efficiency, reducing costs and contributing to sustainability.
- **Energy communities.** Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Transportation.** Improve road and rail connectivity to urban centres to reduce isolation and make commuting to other regions easier for those travelling for education, training and employment, but also for those visiting the area.
- **Expanded physical infrastructure.** If not sufficient, consider expanding the road networks and public transportation so that they can handle a growing population. Upgrades may include expanding water and sewage systems and waste management facilities.
- **Digital connectivity.** Enhance high-speed internet and mobile coverage to support and attract remote workers and new businesses, especially in digital or technology-related fields.

#### HOUSING

- **Affordable housing initiatives.** Create affordable housing options to support and attract young families or professionals willing to relocate, thinking also of single professionals and retirees. Before building new buildings, rehabilitate older homes to improve liveability without high costs.
- **Promotion of community-led housing initiatives.** Work with local groups to establish cooperatives or affordable housing initiatives that make use of vacant homes for young families, artists or social enterprises.
- **Sustainable building practices.** If new buildings are needed, promote sustainable building techniques and materials to ensure that new housing developments are energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

#### EDUCATION

- **Educational services.** Calculate the needs of new residents of different ages, as they may require specific education and skills training, boosting demand for educational services.
- **Vocational programmes.** Offer vocational programmes tailored to local industries that help integrate migrants into the workforce.
- **Language and integration services.** If migrants are coming from different cultural backgrounds, offer language classes, job integration programmes and cultural orientation to ease their transition and foster social cohesion.
- **Partnerships with universities and research centres.** Collaborate with educational institutions to establish satellite campuses or training programmes in areas relevant to the local economy (e.g. agriculture, forestry, tourism management).

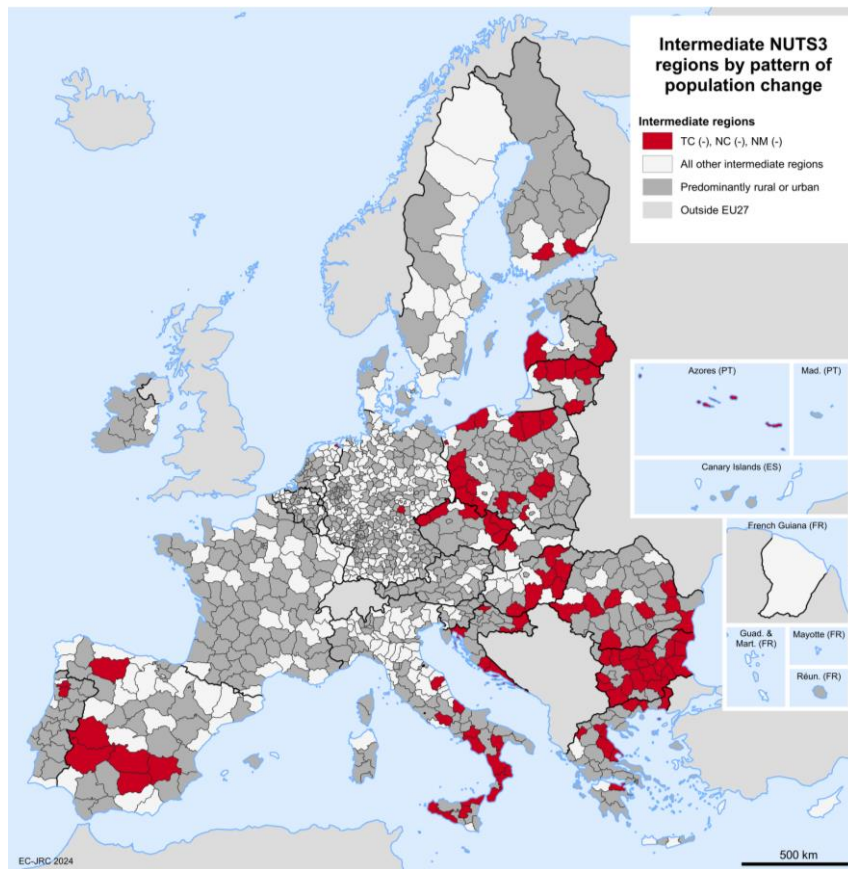
#### SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Capacity of public services.** Increase the capacity of essential services, such as healthcare and childcare facilities, to meet the needs of a growing population and attract families.
- **Community programmes and cultural initiatives.** Fund programmes that foster interaction between long-time residents and newcomers, such as festivals, local markets and cultural events.
- **Resident engagement and participation.** Encourage new residents to become involved in local government or community organisations to enhance social investment and civic pride.
- **Healthcare services expansion.** Ensure that healthcare facilities and services grow in line with the population. This may include recruiting healthcare professionals, expanding clinics and setting up telemedicine services.

- **Employment possibility in healthcare sectors.** Support employment in these sectors, as this can address the needs of both new residents and an ageing local population.

### #3. INTERMEDIATE

NUTS level 3 regions where more than 50 % but less than 80 % of the population live in urban clusters



#### TC (-), NC (-), NM (-)

The total population is shrinking due to a combination of negative NC (i.e. there are more deaths than births) and negative NM. The regional population is becoming smaller and the demographic outlook is such that a return to growth is unlikely, as often the outmigrants are young, economically active and of childbearing age.

#### + Older people

#### ECONOMIC

- **Support for local revenue generation.** To compensate for the shrinking tax base, diversify revenue sources.
- **Relocation incentives.** Offer grants, tax rebates or housing subsidies to attract remote workers or entrepreneurs. Focus on revitalising commercial zones and underused spaces in urban areas.
- **Business incubators and co-working spaces.** Establish innovation hubs in unused commercial buildings to support technology start-ups, small businesses and creative industries.
- **Public-private partnerships for local projects.** Engage local businesses in public-private partnerships to fund community projects and urban improvements that benefit both residents and businesses.
- **Leverage of tourism and cultural heritage.** Invest in cultural tourism by highlighting the town's/city's unique history, architecture or natural beauty. This can be done through festivals, arts programmes and public events that increase tourism and foster local pride.
- **Silver economy.** Invest in industries, services and innovations that cater to the needs of an ageing population (i.e. healthcare, assistive technology, lifelong learning, financial services).

#### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Green spaces and public amenities.** Transform vacant lots or abandoned areas into parks, gardens or recreational spaces, creating a more attractive urban environment.
- **Energy-efficiency programmes.** Provide grants for retrofitting buildings to make them energy efficient and environmentally friendly.
- **Energy communities.** Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion.

## INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Ageing population transport programmes.** As the population ages, provide transport services to meet their needs.
- **Public transport optimisation.** Reorganise urban transport routes to serve changing population clusters efficiently, focusing on sustainable options like electric buses or bike sharing.
- **School and public transport.** Enhance public transport for education hubs, ensuring easy student access and reducing car dependency.
- **Expanded high-speed internet access.** Upgrade internet infrastructure to support remote work and attract digital workers who are looking for more affordable settings.

## HOUSING

- **Flexible zoning laws:** Introduce flexible zoning laws that allow vacant commercial or industrial spaces to be repurposed for housing, arts, or small businesses. This adaptability can encourage more efficient use of the town's/city's existing buildings.
- **Reduced vacancy rates.** Incentivise landlords to rent out or sell vacant properties, perhaps by offering grants for refurbishing old buildings or imposing higher taxes on vacant properties.
- **Mixed-use developments.** Promote mixed-use projects where housing, retail and services are integrated into single developments, reducing the need for transportation and creating vibrant neighbourhoods.
- **Encouragement of property utilisation.** Implement a tax on vacant properties or land to encourage owners to utilise or sell unused spaces, which can reduce urban blight and support economic revitalisation.
- **Facilitated ownership transfers.** Introduce programmes for new homeowners to purchase and rehabilitate derelict urban properties, encouraging long-term occupancy.
- **Artists' residencies and cultural housing.** Convert vacant buildings into affordable spaces for artists and remote professionals to revitalise urban culture.
- **Support for the adaptation of housing for senior residents.** Support (by grants or subsidies) senior residents to adapt their houses with accessibility features, like elevators, ramps and emergency assistance systems.

## EDUCATION

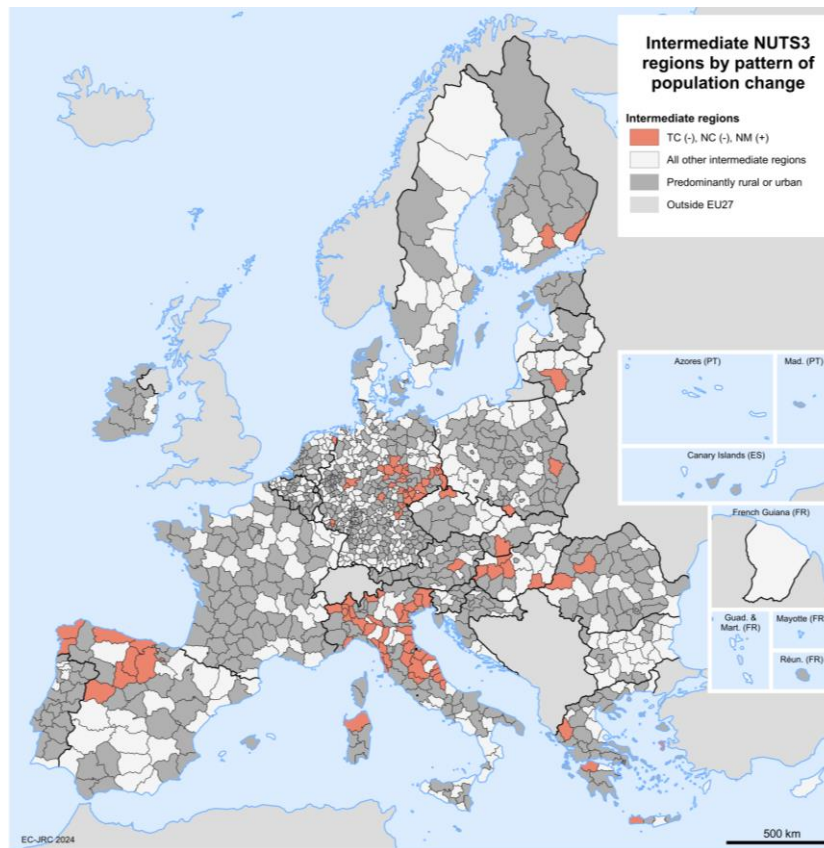
- **Consolidated public facilities.** Merge or repurpose facilities like community centres, libraries and healthcare services to avoid redundancy. Vacant buildings can be converted for new uses, such as community hubs or co-working spaces.
- **Vocational training and reskilling programmes:** Offer targeted training programmes for sectors that match the town's/city's needs and economic strategy, such as healthcare, renewable energy or digital skills.

## SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Selective downsizing of services.** Gradually scale down underused infrastructure, such as schools or public buildings, while ensuring that essential services remain accessible. This can reduce maintenance costs and free up funds for more targeted investments.
- **Consolidated public facilities.** Merge or repurpose facilities like community centres, libraries and healthcare services to avoid redundancy. Vacant buildings can be converted for new uses, such as community hubs or co-working spaces.
- **Enhanced cultural and community activities.** Invest in cultural initiatives, local events and community programmes that foster social connections, boosting morale and community pride.
- **Ageing population health programmes.** As the population ages, provide targeted services such as senior-friendly public spaces and home-care assistance to meet their needs.

## #4. INTERMEDIATE

NUTS level 3 regions where more than 50 % but less than 80 % of the population live in urban clusters



### TC (-), NC (-), NM (+)

The total population is shrinking due to negative NC, even though NM is positive. In this case, although the current demographic outlook is such that the total population is shrinking, positive NM may indicate regional attractiveness and a potential eventual return to demographic stability or growth.

**+ Babies**  
**+ Migrants**

### ECONOMIC

- **Local business development and entrepreneurship.** Continue to offer incentives for entrepreneurs, with a focus on sectors that can attract younger workers and families, such as technology, healthcare and sustainable agriculture, to help stabilise the population.
- **Migrant entrepreneurship support.** Enhance grants or microloans for migrant entrepreneurs, encouraging them to start businesses that integrate into key local industries and contribute to economic resilience.
- **Cultural and creative industries.** Encourage the development of industries that can attract and retain young, skilled migrants, promoting a vibrant community atmosphere through crafts, design and cultural activities.
- **Circular economy initiatives.** Strengthen sustainable practices in both rural and urban areas, involving migrants in recycling programmes and local resource use to create green jobs and foster environmental stewardship.
- **Skills-matching programmes.** Expand programmes to better match migrants' skills with local labour market needs, particularly in sectors experiencing labour shortages due to population decline.

### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Greening projects.** Focus on developing community gardens, green roofs and urban parks that enhance quality of life, making the region more attractive to young families and migrants.
- **Energy-efficiency grants.** Continue supporting retrofitting projects, emphasising community involvement and benefits for both existing residents and newcomers.
- **Small-scale renewable energy.** Encourage solar and photovoltaic panel installations and energy cooperatives that include migrants, promoting shared benefits and responsibilities.

- **Sustainable waste management.** Introduce localised waste reduction programmes that engage communities, fostering environmental responsibility among diverse populations.
- **Energy communities.** Develop energy communities that offer cost savings and enhance social cohesion, making the region more appealing to a diverse demographic.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Public transport accessibility.** Reinforce public transport services to better connect rural and urban areas, facilitating the movement of workers and residents, including migrants.
- **Smart mobility solutions.** Where not already in place, introduce affordable and accessible mobility solutions, like bike-sharing systems, that cater to the diverse needs of the population.
- **Digital inclusion programmes.** Expand digital infrastructure and literacy programmes to ensure that all residents, particularly migrants, can access digital opportunities and resources.

#### HOUSING

- **Reuse of vacant properties.** Intensify efforts to convert vacant properties into affordable housing for migrants and young families, addressing both housing needs and population decline.
- **Mixed-income housing projects.** Develop housing units that combine affordable and market-rate options to foster social cohesion and provide diverse housing choices.
- **Community-led housing.** Support cooperative housing projects that engage both locals and migrants in decision-making, fostering community integration.
- **Transitional housing for new arrivals.** Expand transitional housing programmes with integrated services for migrants, aiding their smooth transition into the community.
- **Adaptable housing solutions.** Focus on housing that meets diverse needs, including those of smaller households and migrants, to provide flexible living arrangements.

#### EDUCATION

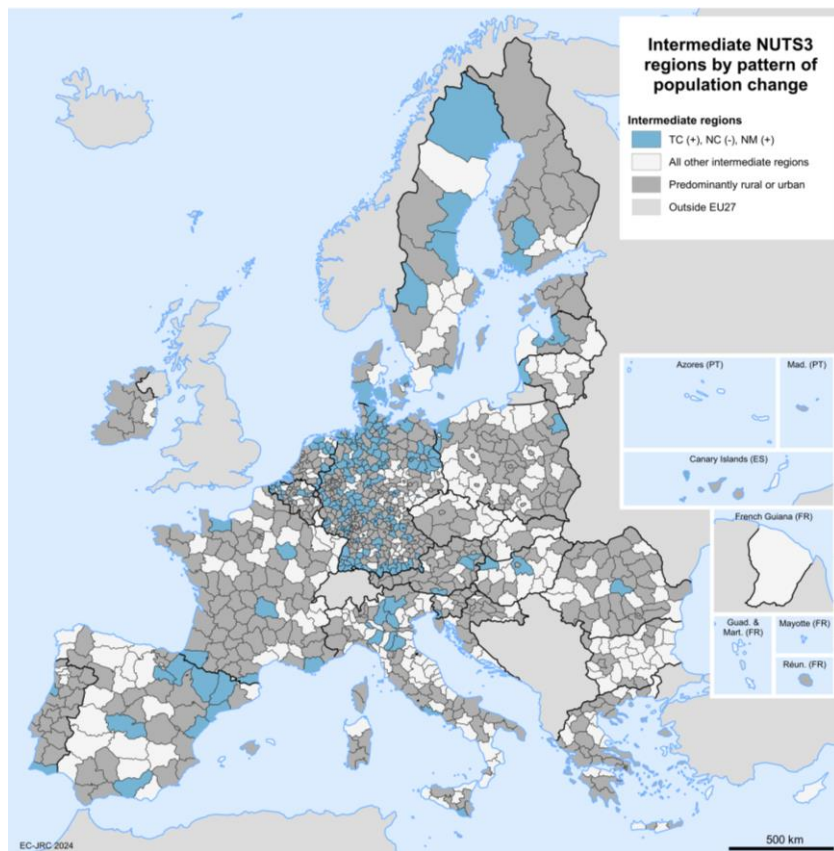
- **Training and upskilling courses.** Prioritise programmes that prepare both locals and migrants for available jobs, enhancing employability and integration into the local economy.
- **Language and integration courses.** Continue offering these courses to facilitate the rapid integration of migrants into local schools and communities.
- **After-school programmes.** Develop programmes that encourage interaction between local and migrants.
- **Teacher training for diversity.** Ensure educators are equipped to manage diverse classrooms effectively, fostering an inclusive learning environment.

#### SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Community centres.** Establish or revive community centres that address the needs of both existing residents and newcomers, promoting cultural activities and health.
- **Integration and mentorship programmes.** Develop mentorship systems that pair locals with migrants, fostering social connections and reducing isolation.
- **Accessible childcare services.** Expand childcare options to support working parents, including migrants, enabling better labour market participation.
- **Culturally competent healthcare.** Continue to train healthcare providers to meet the needs of a diverse population, ensuring equitable access to health services.

## #5. INTERMEDIATE

NUTS level 3 regions where at least 50 % of the population live in rural grid cells



### TC (+), NC (-), NM (+)

The total population is growing, but NC is negative, meaning there are currently more deaths than births. All growth is due to positive NM. This indicates that either the age structure is older or fertility is quite low, and that the region is sufficiently attractive to migrants that NM alone can fuel population stability or growth.

- + Babies
- + Older people
- + Migrants

### ECONOMIC

- **Local business development and entrepreneurship.** Offer incentives like grants or low-interest loans for entrepreneurs and local businesses in diverse sectors (e.g. hospitality, retail, creative industries) to broaden the economic base.
- **Entrepreneurship support for migrants.** Create grants or microloans for migrants and locals to start small businesses, focusing on sectors like hospitality, retail and digital services.
- **Cultural and creative industries.** Encourage the development of industries like crafts, design and art to integrate migrant talents and enhance the local economy.
- **Circular economy initiatives.** Promote sustainable practices in urban industries, such as recycling programmes or local resource use, to create green jobs.
- **Skills-matching programmes.** Implement programmes to match migrants' skills with local labour market needs to boost economic productivity.
- **Silver economy.** Invest in industries, services and innovations that cater to the needs of an ageing population (i.e. healthcare, assistive technology, lifelong learning, financial services).

### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Greening projects.** Develop community gardens, green roofs and urban parks to improve environmental quality and provide shared spaces for integration.
- **Energy-efficiency grants.** Support the retrofitting of homes and public buildings to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions.
- **Small-scale renewable energy.** Encourage solar panel installations on residential and public buildings, potentially creating energy cooperatives involving migrants and residents.
- **Sustainable waste management.** Introduce localised waste reduction programmes with a focus on recycling and composting.

- **Energy communities.** Settle the bases for the creation of energy communities to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion

#### INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Public transport accessibility.** Enhance transport services with inclusive and affordable options for older people, and to better connect workers to job centres and community hubs and foster interregional connections.
- **Smart mobility solutions.** Introduce bike-sharing systems or electric scooters to complement public transport.
- **Innovative transport.** Push transport innovations, including electric buses and cars, that maintain or expand mobility opportunities without imposing further environmental costs.
- **Digital inclusion programmes.** Provide free Wi-Fi zones and digital literacy courses on acquiring digital skills, favouring opportunities for intercultural and intergenerational exchange

#### HOUSING

- **Re-use of vacant properties.** Work with local groups to establish cooperatives or affordable housing initiatives that make use of vacant homes for young families, low-income residents and newcomers.
- **Mixed-income housing projects.** Develop housing units combining affordable and market-rate options to foster social cohesion.
- **Community-led housing.** Support cooperative housing projects where residents participate in management decisions.
- **Transitional housing for new arrivals.** Create transitional housing programmes with integrated services like language training and job assistance.
- **Consideration of size needs.** Develop new and/or retrofit existing housing to meet accessibility requirements and adapted dimensions for older and smaller households.
- **Formal housing market.** Facilitate entry to the housing market with clear communication of standards and rules.

#### EDUCATION

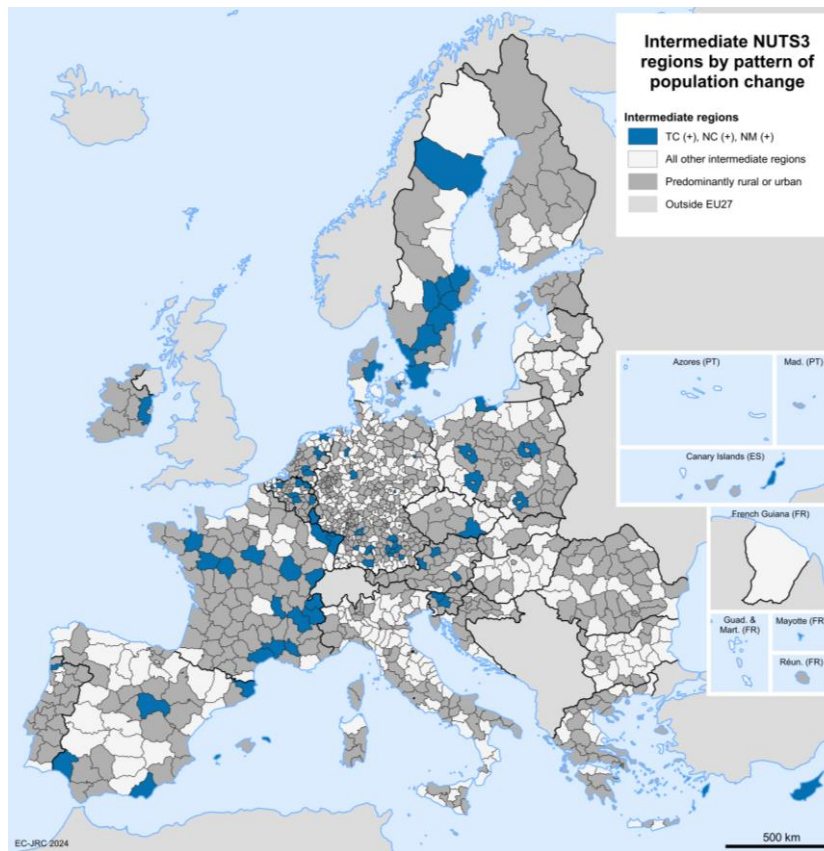
- **Training and upskilling courses.** Provide advice services that help new residents navigate employment rules and practices, including on-the-job training.
- **Language and integration courses.** Offer free or low-cost language classes to help migrants integrate into local schools and communities.
- **After-school programmes.** Develop extracurricular programmes for children, combining academic support with cultural and sports activities to encourage interaction between local and migrant young people.
- **Teacher training for diversity.** Equip teachers with resources to manage diverse classrooms effectively and foster inclusion.

#### SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Community wellness centres.** Establish multipurpose centres that combine basic health services, mental health support and community activities.
- **Integration programmes.** Create mentorship or 'buddy' systems pairing local residents with migrants to foster relationships and reduce social isolation.
- **Accessible childcare services.** Expand affordable childcare options to support working parents, including migrant families, enabling better labour market participation.
- **Culturally sensitive healthcare.** Train healthcare providers in cultural competence and offer interpretation services to improve accessibility for migrants.

## #6. INTERMEDIATE

NUTS level 3 regions where at least 50 % of the population live in rural grid cells



### TC (+), NC (+), NM (+)

The total population is growing due to both positive NC and positive NM. This may indicate that the region is attractive to migrants or that, even if few migrants are arriving, even fewer are departing. Positive NC may result from a younger structure or from a combination of age structure and fertility.

- + Babies
- + Older people
- + Migrants

### ECONOMIC

- **Business expansion support.** Provide financial incentives for businesses to scale up, ensuring that job opportunities keep pace with population growth.
- **Entrepreneurship hubs.** Establish co-working spaces and incubators for start-ups, including programmes supporting young entrepreneurs and migrant-owned businesses.
- **Diverse employment pathways.** Expand job training programmes tailored for young professionals, parents returning to work and newly arrived migrants to enhance employability.
- **Sustainable urban industries.** Promote the development of sustainable industries such as renewable energy, technology and local production to create future-proof jobs.
- **Workforce retention programmes.** Offer incentives to local businesses to retain skilled workers through upskilling programmes, career progression plans and childcare-friendly workplaces.
- **Silver economy.** Invest in industries, services and innovations that cater to the needs of an ageing population (i.e. healthcare, assistive technology, lifelong learning, financial services).

### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Greening initiatives.** Expand urban forests, vertical gardens and green infrastructure to maintain air quality and improve urban liveability.
- **Energy efficiency at scale.** Launch citywide energy-efficiency incentives, prioritising large residential and commercial buildings.
- **Renewable energy expansion.** Increase investment in solar and wind energy to power new developments and promote energy self-sufficiency.
- **Smart waste management.** Implement smart waste sorting and incentive-based recycling programmes to accommodate growing waste production.

- **Energy communities / community-led energy networks.** Establish energy communities that include shared solar grids, battery storage and local energy trading among residents.

### INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Expanded public transport networks.** Develop new routes and enhance existing services to connect emerging residential areas with employment hubs.
- **Integrated mobility solutions.** Introduce multimodal transit hubs integrating buses, trams, bike sharing and electric mobility options.
- **Sustainable transport innovation.** Invest in electric vehicle infrastructure and carpooling incentives to manage urban congestion.
- **Expanded high-speed internet access.** Upgrade internet infrastructure to support remote work and attract digital workers who are looking for affordable, quieter living environments outside major cities.
- **Digital literacy for all.** Scale digital inclusion programmes, emphasising early technology education in schools and free training for all age groups.

### HOUSING

- **Mixed housing.** Develop multifamily residential complexes with integrated services such as childcare and co-working spaces.
- **Affordable housing expansion.** Implement public-private partnerships to build more affordable housing and prevent housing shortages.
- **Family-oriented housing.** Design homes with flexible layouts to accommodate growing families, including more childcare-friendly spaces.
- **Adaptation of housing to senior residents.** Support (by grants or subsidies) senior residents to adapt their houses with accessibility features, like elevators, ramps and emergency assistance systems.
- **Regulated rental market.** Implement policies to prevent rent inflation and ensure that housing remains accessible to all income groups.

### EDUCATION

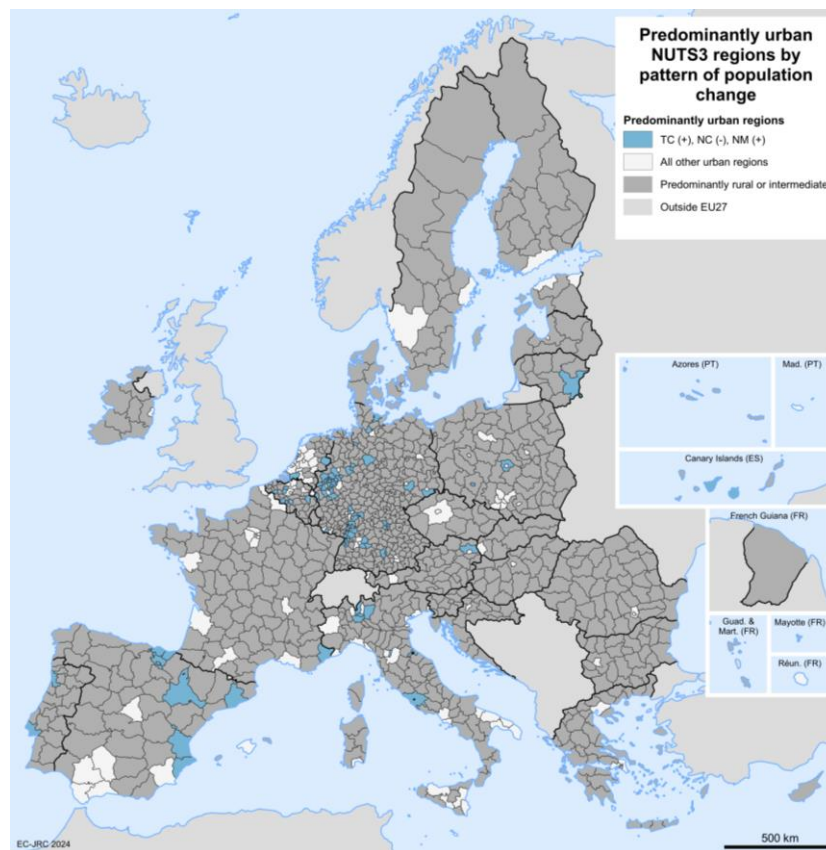
- **Expanded school capacity.** If the numbers necessitate it, build new schools and extend existing facilities to accommodate rising student numbers.
- **Early childhood development.** Increase access to nurseries and preschools to support working parents and enhance childhood education.
- **Bilingual and multicultural education.** Integrate multilingual curricula to support both native and migrant children, fostering inclusion.
- **Lifelong learning opportunities.** Offer continuous education programmes, including technical training, language courses and digital skills development.
- **Teacher workforce growth.** Increase teacher recruitment and training to handle larger, more diverse classrooms effectively.

### SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Expanded healthcare infrastructure.** Develop new healthcare facilities and expand existing ones to meet rising demand.
- **Integrated family healthcare.** Provide comprehensive family health services, including prenatal care, paediatric services and mental health support.
- **Childcare expansion.** Scale up affordable childcare centres, ensuring availability aligns with growing demand.
- **Community well-being programmes.** Launch initiatives that promote mental health, physical activity and social integration to enhance overall quality of life.

## #7. URBAN (predominantly urban)

NUTS level 3 regions where at least 80 % of the population live in urban clusters



### TC (+), NC (-), NM (+)

The total population is growing, but NC is negative, meaning there are currently more deaths than births. All growth is due to positive NM. This indicates that either the age structure is older or fertility is quite low, and that the region is sufficiently attractive to migrants that NM alone can fuel population stability or growth.

- + Older people
- + Migrants

### ECONOMIC

- **Business incubators and co-working spaces.** Set up business incubators or shared workspaces to nurture start-ups, especially those focused on digital or creative industries.
- **Inclusive workforce development.** Develop sector-specific job training programmes for young professionals, parents re-entering the workforce and newly arrived migrants.
- **Migrant-focused business development.** Offer incentives for businesses that actively engage and employ migrants, creating pathways for economic integration and leveraging diverse talents to spur growth.
- **Silver economy initiatives.** Invest in services and industries that cater to older demographics, such as healthcare, leisure and financial services, while facilitating intergenerational collaboration and employment.
- **Innovation and start-up support.** Maintain support for innovation hubs, targeting sectors that attract young migrants, such as technology and creative industries, to foster entrepreneurship and career mobility.
- **Sustainable urban economy.** Promote the growth of green and technology-driven industries, ensuring that they provide employment opportunities that appeal to both migrants and older residents.
- **Cultural integration in the economy.** Support cultural and creative industries that celebrate diversity and engage migrant communities, enhancing both economic vitality and social cohesion.

### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Community-driven green projects.** Expand community gardens and nature-based solutions that are accessible and engaging for all age groups, fostering intergenerational and cultural integration.

- **Energy efficiency for all.** Implement retrofitting projects that enhance energy efficiency in residential and public buildings, prioritising cost-effectiveness and accessibility for all residents.
- **Localised renewable initiatives.** Encourage small-scale renewable energy projects that involve community participation, ensuring benefits for both older people and migrants.
- **Inclusive waste management.** Develop waste management programmes that engage diverse community groups, promoting environmental responsibility and participation.
- **Neighbourhood energy communities.** Foster the creation of energy communities that include older people and migrants, promoting shared benefits and social cohesion.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Inclusive public transit expansion.** Enhance transit networks to ensure accessibility for older adults and connectivity for all residents, including migrants, facilitating mobility and integration.
- **Universal digital access.** Expand digital infrastructure to provide universal access and support digital literacy programmes that cater to both migrants and older people, promoting digital inclusion.
- **Sustainable urban mobility.** Invest in low-emission transport options that are accessible and cater to a diverse urban population, supporting environmental goals and community connectivity.

#### HOUSING

- **Affordable multigenerational housing.** Develop housing options that support multigenerational living, accommodating the needs of young families and older people and promoting social cohesion.
- **Adaptive housing solutions.** Promote adaptive housing designs that accommodate accessibility needs for older residents and affordability for migrants, ensuring diverse housing options.
- **Infill development and affordability regulation.** Focus on using existing urban spaces for housing to prevent sprawl, while regulating affordability to ensure diverse income groups have stable housing options.

#### EDUCATION

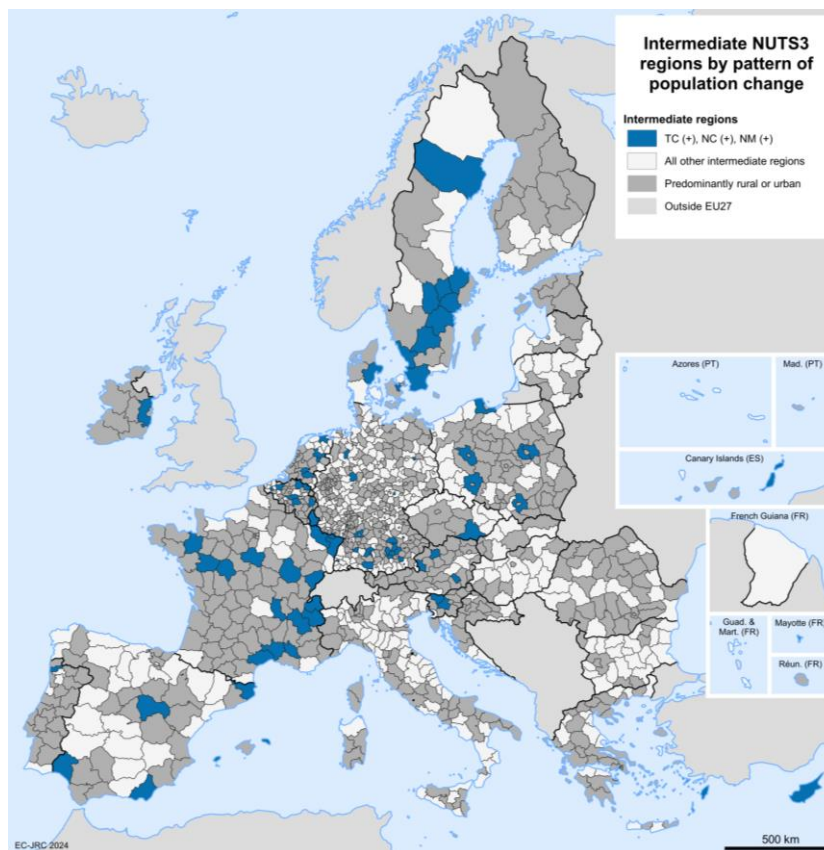
- **Lifelong learning opportunities.** Develop education programmes that support continuous learning for all age groups, including digital literacy and vocational training for migrants and older residents.
- **Multicultural and inclusive education.** Enhance culturally inclusive education systems to support both native and migrant children, fostering an inclusive learning environment.
- **Workforce readiness programmes.** Expand adult education and workforce readiness programmes to prepare migrants for employment opportunities and support career transitions for older people.

#### SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Expanded healthcare access.** Modernise healthcare facilities to ensure they meet the needs of an ageing population and are accessible to migrants, providing comprehensive care.
- **Integrated care for older people and migrants.** Develop healthcare services that provide comprehensive care, including mental health support and culturally competent services, ensuring equitable access.
- **Social cohesion and integration initiatives.** Establish programmes that promote social connectivity and cultural exchange, thereby reducing isolation among older people, fostering integration for migrants and enhancing community well-being.

## #8. URBAN (predominantly urban)

NUTS level 3 regions where at least 80 % of the population live in urban clusters



### TC (+), NC (+), NM (+)

The total population is growing due to both positive NC and positive NM. This may indicate that the region is attractive to migrants or that, even if few migrants are arriving, even fewer are departing. Positive NC may result from a younger structure or from a combination of age structure and fertility.

- + Babies
- + Older people
- + Migrants

### ECONOMIC

- **Scaling of business opportunities.** Provide large-scale financial incentives for businesses to expand, ensuring that job opportunities match population growth.
- **Innovation districts and start-up hubs.** Establish co-working spaces and incubators for start-ups, including targeted programmes supporting young entrepreneurs and migrant-owned businesses.
- **Inclusive workforce development.** Develop sector-specific job training programmes for young professionals, parents re-entering the workforce and newly arrived migrants.
- **Green and technology-driven industries.** Promote large-scale sustainable industries such as green energy, smart technology and local manufacturing.
- **Talent retention and career mobility.** Introduce wage subsidies, skills development initiatives and corporate partnerships to ensure long-term employment stability.
- **Cultural economy and heritage promotion.** Invest in preserving and promoting urban heritage sites, traditional arts and historic districts, taking care not to promote gentrification.
- **New culture.** Promote the creation of more museums and exposition centres and support citywide arts festivals to attract tourism and boost local businesses.

### ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- **Expanded urban green networks.** Invest in the care and expansion of urban parks, green corridors, vertical gardens and nature-based solutions to improve air quality and liveability.
- **Comprehensive energy transition.** Implement large-scale retrofitting projects for residential, commercial and public buildings to enhance energy performance.
- **Renewable energy integration.** Accelerate investment in solar and wind farms, integrating them into the city's power grid for sustainability.

- **Next-generation waste and recycling.** Deploy smart waste-sorting systems and citywide recycling incentives to address increasing waste production.
- **Energy communities.** Promote the creation of energy communities at the neighbourhood level to lower energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and enhance the sharing of responsibilities and social cohesion.

### INFRASTRUCTURE (TRANSPORT AND DIGITAL)

- **Expanded public transit and mobility networks.** Increase metro, tram and bus networks to connect expanding residential areas with key economic and social hubs.
- **City and bike.** Introduce an interconnected mobility system, expanded cycling lanes and a public bike-renting systems.
- **Low-emission urban transport.** Invest in electric and hydrogen-powered public transit fleets to reduce emissions and support sustainability.
- **Citywide digital infrastructure.** Ensure universal high-speed internet access, expanding connectivity to support digital education and remote work.
- **Bridging the digital divide.** Implement large-scale digital literacy programmes, ensuring equitable access to technology and online services.

### HOUSING

- **Affordable and diverse housing options.** Encourage the construction of affordable housing units and diverse housing types to accommodate different demographics, such as families, single professionals and retirees, considering also multigenerational living incentives.
- **Incentivised infill development.** Focus on using existing urban spaces for housing before expanding outward, helping protect rural landscapes and reduce sprawl.
- **Sustainable building practices.** Promote sustainable building techniques and materials to ensure that new housing developments are energy efficient and environmentally friendly.
- **Family-centric residential planning.** Design neighbourhoods with childcare centres, parks and pedestrian-friendly spaces to support growing families.
- **Fighting of gentrification and regulation of affordability.** Introduce policies to prevent excessive rent hikes and ensure diverse income groups have stable housing options.

### EDUCATION

- **Universal early childhood education access.** Scale up preschools and day-care services to assist working parents and foster early learning.
- **Expanded and upgraded schools.** Modernise existing educational facilities and, if necessary, build additional schools to meet increasing student enrolment.
- **Multilingual and inclusive learning systems.** Integrate bilingual education programmes to support both native and migrant children.
- **Continued education and workforce readiness.** Expand vocational training, digital literacy courses and adult education programmes.
- **Investment in educators and teaching quality.** Enhance teacher recruitment and training programmes to manage larger, more diverse classrooms.

### SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE

- **Expanded and modernised healthcare facilities.** Modernise (and, if necessary, build new) hospitals, clinics and healthcare centres to meet rising demand.
- **Integrated family and paediatric care.** Provide comprehensive maternal, paediatric and mental health services for a rapidly growing population.
- **Citywide social cohesion initiatives.** Establish large-scale integration programmes to promote social connectivity, mental well-being and cultural exchange.

- **Multicultural and accessible healthcare.** Train medical staff in culturally competent care and ensure language accessibility in healthcare facilities.
- **Geriatric and home-based care expansion.** Develop specialised geriatric clinics and home-care services to provide personalised medical and social support for older adults.
- **Senior community centres.** Establish dedicated centres for recreational, educational and wellness activities to combat isolation.

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