



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

D3.3

**RAPID APPRAISAL OF THE CAP
STRATEGIC PLANS' OBJECTIVES
RELATED TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC
FABRIC OF RURAL AREAS AND THEIR
ALIGNMENT WITH THE LONG-TERM
VISION FOR RURAL AREAS**

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RAPID APPRAISAL OF THE CAP STRATEGIC PLANS' OBJECTIVES RELATED TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FABRIC OF RURAL AREAS AND THEIR ALIGNMENT WITH THE LONG-TERM VISION FOR RURAL AREAS

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Background

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the first policy framework intervening in rural areas, pursuing various objectives and related specific objectives accordingly (Pagnon et al., 2023). A more strategic approach to the implementation of CAP specific objectives is unfolded into pluriannual national plans, which are overseeing by a performance framework bound by target value and indicators to be reach (EC, 2021).

When designing their CAP strategic plans (CSPs), Member States have been formally asked by the European Commission (EC) to observe extra requirements regarding ambitions and strategies related to the EU Green Deal (EUGD) objectives and targets, i.e. through the Farm-to-Fork strategy and the biodiversity strategy (COM, 2020). In parallel to the process of CSPs design undertaken by Member States, a new strategy for rural areas has been issued by the EC: *'A long-term vision for rural areas (LTVRA): towards stronger, connected, prosperous and resilient rural areas by 2040'* (EC, 2021).

Following an appraisal on definitions, typologies and review of EU strategies dealing with rural In the D3.2 (Féret et al., 2020), the present deliverable intends to capitalize on these two latest policy developments: the 28 CAP strategic plans and the LTVRA communication. On this basis, SHERPA project seeked to continue a review of key policies and strategies regarding rural areas in the EU.

In that respect, we present hereafter a rapid appraisal of the 28 CAP strategic plans submitted by Member states under a rural areas' lens, in order to unfold their specific objectives related to the socio-economic fabric of rural areas and to discuss their alignment with the LTVRA.



1. Unfolding the Long-Term vision for Rural Areas through the CAP strategic plans

1.1. The CAP strategic plan regulation

Alongside with the cohesion policy, the CAP is the main policy framework aiming at supporting rural areas (Pagnon et al., 2023). The cohesion policy is part of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), while the rural development component of the CAP is not anymore from the new 2021-2027 programming period.

From 1999 to 2022, the EU has ruled and continually reinitiated a rural development policy based on a rural development regulation laying down a dedicated fund (EAFRD) for national and pluriannual rural development programmes. From 2021, former sectoral, direct payment and rural development regulations have merged into a strategic plan regulation (OFEU, 2021) while keeping distinctive EAGF and EAFRD envelopes. To date, though there's no rural development regulation anymore, the EAFRD is still running for cofinancing 'Pillar2' interventions.

From 2020, Member states were asked to design their national strategic plan to address the ten CAP' specific objectives, including two referring explicitly to the socio-economic fabric of rural areas : i) Generational renewal (specific objective G) and ii) Vibrant rural areas (specific objective H) (see figure 2 above). Under each specific objectives, Member States had to unfold a logic intervention strategy, from specific needs and interventions to result and impact indicators, including targets and specific funding.

As part of the Common Evaluation and Monitoring Framework, main impact indicators for assessing the delivery of the policy against the socio-economic fabric of rural areas general objective are: number of new and young farmers by gender, GDP/capita, poverty rate, employment rate by gender and internet broadband coverage (EC, 2022).

Figure 1. The Ten Specific Objectives of the CAP



Source: European Commission

The EC did also [recommendations](#) to Member States so to secure the achievement of the ten CAP specific objectives, as well as ensuring the alignment of CAP strategic plans with the EU Green Deal, and particularly with the Farm-to-Fork strategy and the Biodiversity strategy.



1.2. The Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)

The EC Communication 'A strong social Europe for just transitions' (2020) indicated drivers that paved the way rural should be considered in the new decade. First, demographic trends, that see population of many rural areas declining. Secondly as a corollary, ageing of the EU population, especially in rural areas since the demographic natural balance is in average more negative than in the cities.

This Communication stated that *"Acknowledging that the green, digital and demographic transitions affect different people in different ways, the [Report on the impact of demographic change] will also be followed by a long-term vision for rural areas in 2021. This long-term vision will aim at supporting rural areas to address their own unique set of issues, from ageing and depopulation to connectivity, the risk of poverty and limited access to services, social protection and healthcare"*. (EC, 2020)

A third driver came later with the lessons learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic, with the aim to identify *"Means to improve rural quality of life, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth in rural areas"* (EC, 2021).

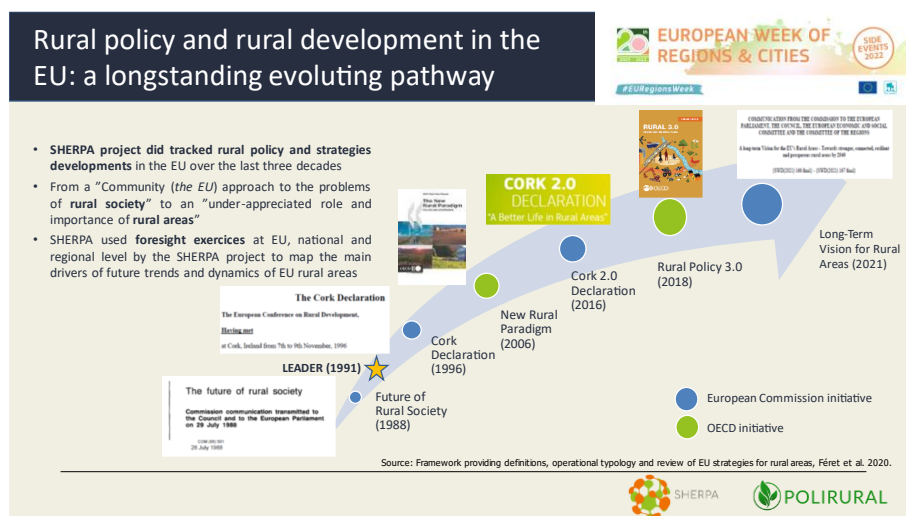
Thus, the LTVRA communication issued in June 2021 aims at addressing ageing, depopulation, access and improvement of basic services, risk of poverty and digital solutions for better connectivity in rural areas.

Taking into consideration the EU Green Deal commitments, demographic changes and multi-faceted challenges affecting rural areas and rural communities, the LTVRA is the roadmap to ensure a just transition in rural areas towards 2040 as indicated by its statement:

"The European Commission, in line with its strong commitment to democracy and equality, and mindful of the impact of demographic change, is committed to leave no one and no place behind and to bring the EU closer to its citizens." (EC, 2021)

The LTVRA released in 2021 provides also a new framework for rural development [Pertoldi et al., Handbook of territorial and local development strategies, 2022]. This new rural policy narrative takes place within a longstanding evolving policy pathway in the EU, starting in 1988 with the EC communication "Future of Rural society", following the Cork declarations (1996, 2016) and taking inspiration from OECD new rural paradigm (2006) and Rural Policy 3.0 framework (2018) that put emphasize on well-being of rural communities (see figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Rural Policy Developments Timeline 1988-2021, Féret S., presentation for a SHERPA-POLIRURAL webinar on Effective mechanisms to address governance challenges in EU rural areas, 2022



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The LTVRA highlights four areas for action towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 (see figure 1 below). The Vision highlights four specific strands under which action will be taken, supported by flagship initiatives (Miller et al., 2022):

- **Stronger:** Rural areas should be home to empowered and vibrant local communities, involving a broad range of stakeholders and networks as well as all levels of governance, is key to developing tailor-made, place-based and integrated policy solutions and investments;
- **Connected:** Maintaining or improving public transport services and connections, as well as deepening digital infrastructures, are essential to ensure better-connected EU rural areas;
- **Resilient:** Preserving natural resources, restoration of landscapes (including cultural), greening of farming activities and shortening supply chains to make rural areas more resilient to climate change, natural hazards and economic crises;
- **Prosperous:** Diversifying economic activities to new sectors with positive effects on employment, and improving the value added of farming and agri-food activities.

Whether the LTVRA recognizes that the CAP through the EAFRD, "is one of the key sources of EU funding for rural areas, by fostering a smart, resilient and diversified agricultural sector, bolstering environmental care and climate action and by strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas", there is a need for mechanisms that ensure that rural matters are addressed in a coordinated and coherent manner in all areas of policy (Miller et al., 2022).

Figure 3. The four areas for action of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas communication

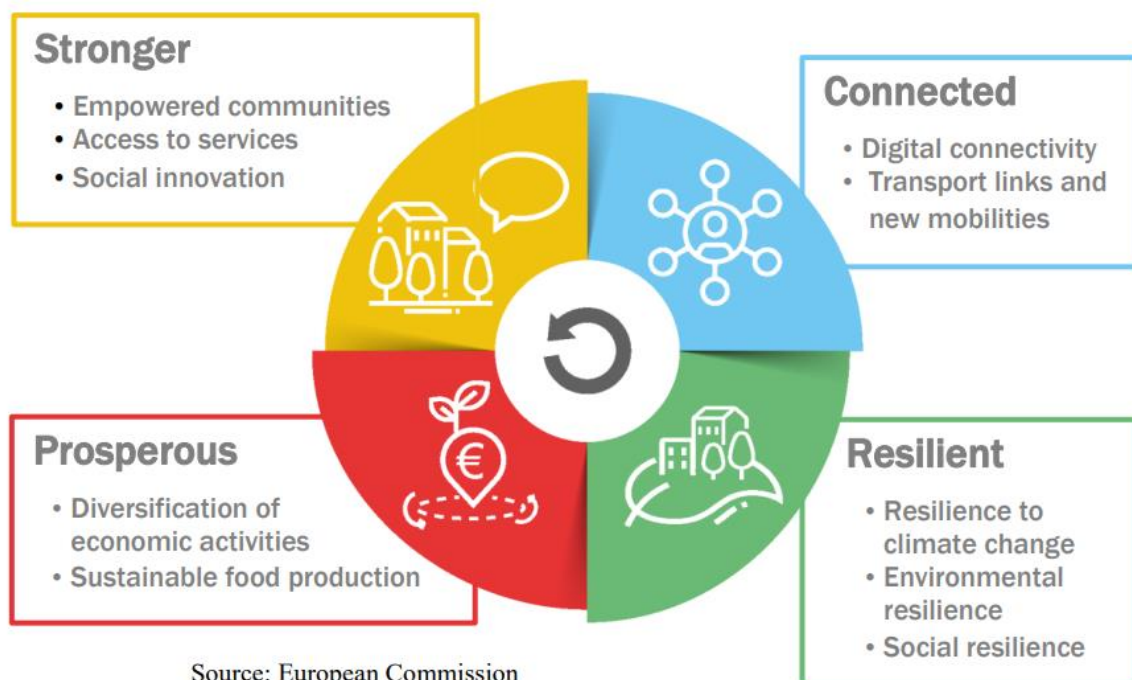


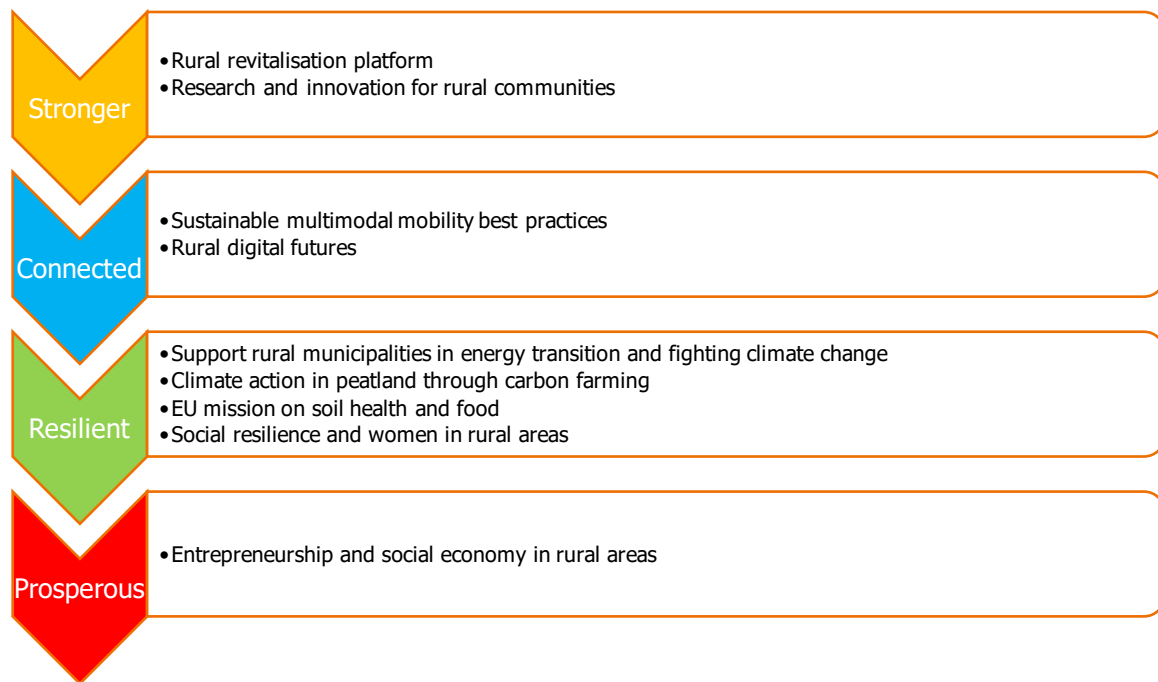
Figure 4. Proposed share goals for endorsement for a long-term vision for EU's rural areas, EC, 2021

- i. **Attractive** spaces, developed in **harmonious territorial development**, unlocking their specific potential, making them places of **opportunity** and providing local solutions to help tackle the local effects of global challenges.
 - ii. Engaged in multi-level and place-based **governance**, developing integrated strategies using collaborative and participatory approaches, benefitting from tailor-made policy mixes and interdependencies between urban and rural areas.
 - iii. Providers of **food security**, economic opportunities, **goods and services** for wider society, such as bio-based materials and energy but also local, community-based high-quality products, renewable energy, retaining a fair share of the value generated.
 - iv. **Dynamic** communities focusing on **well-being**, including livelihoods, fairness, **prosperity** and quality of life, where all people live and work well together, with adequate capacity for mutual support.
 - v. **Inclusive** communities of **inter-generational solidarity fairness and renewal**, open to **newcomers** and fostering equal opportunities for all.
 - vi. Flourishing sources of **nature**, enhanced by and contributing to the objectives of the Green Deal, including **climate neutrality**, as well as sustainable management of natural resources.
 - vii. Fully benefiting from **digital innovation** with equal **access** to emerging technologies, widespread digital literacy and opportunities to acquire more advanced skills.
 - viii. **Entrepreneurial, innovative and skilled** people, co-creating technological, ecological and social progress.
 - ix. Lively places equipped with **efficient, accessible and affordable public and private services, including cross border services**, providing tailored solutions (such as transport, education, training, health and care, including long-term care, social life and retail business).
 - x. **Places of diversity**, making the most out of their unique assets, talents and potential.
- Beyond the diversity of rural areas, which is an asset for successful adaptation, these aspirations reflect common ground and possible EU added value and are therefore proposed as **shared goals** for endorsement for a **long term Vision for EU's rural areas**.

This new overarching strategy framework for rural areas designed by the EC is being implementing from 2022 through a Rural Pact to engage stakeholders and through a Rural Action Plan detailing nine flagship initiatives as indicated below.

The process for the **Rural Pact was launched on 20th December 2021**, after which there has been an invitation for submission of ideas. The rural action plan aims to stimulate sustainable, cohesive and integrated rural development via various EU policies (e.g. the CAP that will jointly support turning the Vision into a reality. The rural pact aims to engage actors from multiple governance levels to support the goals of the Vision, facilitate cohesion in the area of the economy, society, and territory, and participate in the common aspirations of rural communities (Miller et al., 2022).

Figure 5. Rural Action Plan Flagship initiatives, EC, 2021



1.3. Aligning CAP objectives with the LTVRA areas for action

The LTVRA has been accompanied by an action plan and a rural pact. Their reach has a broader coverage than the CAP scope given their cross-cutting, territorial and spatial approaches, dimensions and scope.

Reversely, the CAP has historical and longstanding objectives set in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, and is now asked to address performance objectives through strategic plans designed by Member States.

The LTVRA expresses a political will of the EC to renew the rural policy framework of the EU, while the CAP strategic plans express 28 national strategies to address some rural areas needs in compliance with the strategic plans regulation.

In the table below, we aligned CAP specific objectives with the LTVRA areas for action in order to identify their common features as well as potential synergies.

Table 1. Aligning CAP specific objectives with the LTVRA areas for action

	Stronger			Connected		Prosperous		Resilient		
CAP Specific Objectives	Empowered communities	Access to services	Social innovation	Digital connectivity	Transport links and new mobilities	Diversification of economic activities	Sustainable food production	Resilience to climate change	Environmental resilience	Social resilience
Fair income						x	x			
Competitiveness						x				



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Food value chain							x			
Climate chain							x	x		
Environmental care							x		x	
Landscapes								x	x	
Generation renewal	x					x	x			x
Rural areas	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Food & health							x	x	x	
Knowledge and innovation	x		x	x		x				

At least one area for action identified the LTVRA is ticked by one of the ten CAP specific objectives. Regarding the objective of strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, the CAP is aligned with the LTVRA areas through its two specific objectives on generational renewal (four LTVRA strands) and for vibrant rural areas (all LTVRA strands).

Only one LTVRA strand fits with almost all CAP specific objectives: sustainable food production, while this item is abundantly covered under another specific EU Green Deal development: the Farm-to-Fork strategy.

Finally, it's worth noting the cross-cutting CAP specific objective for knowledge and innovation, which matches also directly with four LTVRA areas.

2. Rapid appraisal of the 28 CAP strategic plans

2.1. Methodology

The methodology we used for this rapid appraisal of the CAP strategic plans took from a simplified intervention logic approach to evaluate EU public policies such as rural development programmes. Beforehand, we consulted the key evaluation elements and recommended factors of success of CAP strategic plans laid down in the EC implementing regulation for the evaluation of the CAP strategic plans (EC, 2022). Under this framework, **the strengthening of the socio-economic fabric of rural areas' specific objective is unfolded in three main dimensions: i) rural sustainable economy; ii) local development and iii) gender equality and social inclusion.** Rural sustainable economy refers to growth, to a decreased urban-rural gap, to employment rate improvement and bio-economy businesses and sustainable forestry increase. Local development refers mainly to improved provision of local services and infrastructures. Finally, gender equality and social inclusion refer to an improved women employment and participation in farming, to a fairer distribution of CAP supports and to a decrease of rural poverty.

Through a specific rural lens, the rapid appraisal we did complements the summary overview of the 28 approved CAP strategic plans released by the European Commission in 2023 (EC, 2023). Though this exercise follows the intervention logic requested to Member States when designing their strategic plans, we recognize some methodologic limitations.

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First, aligning SO7 and SO8 with the objectives for the LTVRA is a simplified focus as both specific objectives belong to the socio-economic fabric or rural areas' objective but might miss parts of a broader picture, as almost all interventions of the CAP can in one way or another contribute to rural areas. Thus, we do not cover the contributions from SO4-5-6, and the horizontal specific objectives (AKIS). In addition, and specifically to SO7, it's worth precising we do not cover the complementary income support to young farmers -under Pillar 1- which is a contribution to SO7, but first of all relates to SO1 (fair income).

Secondly, this core exercise has been undertaken from the submitted versions by Member States to the European Commission and not from the approved versions in a very short time period. As written before, this exercise is a rapid appraisal and not a comprehensive assessment. Nonetheless, we screened all the approved versions to explore references to the LTVRA.

This rapid appraisal of the 28 CSPs resulted into various cross-reporting [spreadsheets](#) (see Annex 1) corresponding to each strategic plan. For each of the 28 CAP strategic plans, we looked in particular at the sections related to the specific objectives 7 and 8. We identified the key interventions for SO7 and SO8 through the strategic plan regulation as well as the 28 CAP strategic plans (Table 1) and aggregated all relevant information in a simplified intervention logic matrix (Figure 7). Precisely, we looked at the description of needs and intervention strategies to achieve specific goals under SO7 and SO8. For some countries, we looked also in detail at their rural ambitions expressed through their result indicators' target values.

The final category called "EC observations" relates to [observations letters](#) sent by the European Commission to Member states after analysis of the submitted version, which might have called for clarification and/or improvements.

Figure 6. Simplified intervention logic matrix

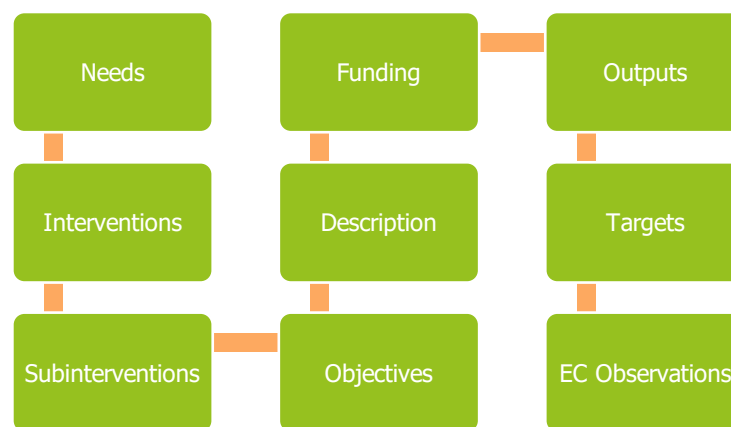


Table 2. Main interventions for SO7 and SO8 in the CAP strategic plans

	SO7: Generational renewal	SO8: Vibrant rural areas
Interventions	Investments (art. 73)	Investments (art. 73)
	Setting-up young farmers (art. 75)	Setting-up of rural business start-up (art. 75)
	Setting-up of rural business start-up (art. 75)	LEADER (art. 77)
	Setting-up new farmers (art. 75)	Other cooperation projects (art. 77)



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Cooperation for generational renewal (art. 77)	<i>Outside the CAP: national policies and strategies</i>
<i>Outside the CAP: access to land, training through national, regional and local supports</i>	

As written in the needs section of the CAP strategic plans (i.e. setting up new rural enterprises, supporting employment in rural areas, closing the gender gap in rural areas...), we checked if the following topics were addressed through the 28 intervention strategies: ageing, agroecology, biodiversity, bioeconomy, broadband, depopulation, gender, poverty, quality of life, rural inclusion, short supply chains, smart villages, transports, vulnerable groups, youngs and water (Figure 9). We also screened eventual references to the LTVRA and to national strategies related to rural areas. Finally, we sought any specific reference to rural areas that could have emerged from the mandatory national public debate.

Finally, we did a rapid screening of all the 28 approved versions of strategic plans. This allowed to check to what extent Member states made changes in order to address observations from the EC related to the specific objectives 7 and 8. In addition, we checked if and how the plans were referencing the LTVRA and the rural action plan.

2.2. Results of the rapid appraisal of CAP strategic plans

2.2.1. Overview of EAFRD financial provisions under SO7 and SO8

According to the amounts reported in the approved versions, a total of EUR 264 billion of European resources are foreseen to be channeled through 28 CAP strategic plans to mainly support farmers' income and transition to sustainability. **Out of this amount, EUR 7.23 billion will be targeted to the generational renewal objective through the setting up of young farmers and EUR 5.06 billion for vibrant rural areas through the LEADER programme.** As the former EAFRD regulation did, the CSP regulation asks Member States to earmark at least 5% of EAFRD for the LEADER programme (art. 92; see detail per country in Table 2).

In proportion, SO7 and SO8 intervention strategies and interventions foresee to spend EUR 11.85 billion between 2023 and 2027, equaling to 4.49 % of all interventions under all specific objectives expressed in the 28 CSPs.

Table 3. Financial provision 2023-2027 of the 28 CSPs for young farmers and LEADER under EAFRD

	Generational Renewal (SO-7)	Vibrant Rural Areas (SO-8)	
Strategic Plan	YOUNG FARMERS (EAFRD) ¹	% EAFRD for LEADER	LEADER
Belgium (Flanders)	49 291 775,00	7.44	25 278 700,00 €
Belgium (Wallonia)	51 494 000,00	5.02	9 937 440,00 €
Bulgaria	127 593 295,00	8.07	113 865 060,00 €

¹ Complementary income support for young farmers is not countered as it relates first of all to SO-1.

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Czechia	136 082 097,00	5.00	70 532 348,00 €
Denmark	129 360 000,00	7.09	46 262 400,00 €
Germany	761 129 891,00	15.12	1 246 106 364,47 €
Estonia	35 158 587,00	10.81	47 589 703,20 €
Ireland	177 942 300,00	5.00	77 940 000,00 €
Greece	730 000 000,00	5.50	200 000 000,00 €
Spain	887 233 201,00	10.03	542 154 229,09 €
France	1 102 218 802,00	5.00	502 089 706,20 €
Croatia	98 653 495,00	5.65	82 338 579,00 €
Italy	672 734 347,00	5.70	413 611 479,83 €
Cyprus	7 230 000,00	8.08	9 600 000,00 €
Latvia	53 757 114,00	7.24	49 724 133,00 €
Lithuania	142 579 625,00	6.44	62 912 950,00 €
Luxembourg	5 263 000,00	5.22	3 175 000,00 €
Hungary	186 892 301,00	5.00	81 757 330,30 €
Malta	4 983 840,00	5.29	4 196 124,00 €
The Netherlands	107 654 800,00	5.00	54 150 012,00 €
Austria	103 407 083,00	5.01	130 200 000,00 €
Poland	500 424 381,00	8.29	389 680 000,00 €
Portugal	131 578 125,00	6.16	140 240 181,90 €
Romania	309 621 824,00	8.44	424 750 000,00 €
Slovenia	25 895 588,00	6.45	35 542 556,00 €
Slovakia	67 198 142,00	8.00	105 291 866,00 €
Finland	88 720 000,00	6.61	99 459 000,00 €
Sweden	103 357 244,00	8.70	92 204 301,00 €
Total	6 797 454 857,00 €		5 060 589 463,99 €

Source: European Commission; own calculation.

Among the two specific objectives covering the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, SO-7 on generation renewal is those receiving most attention and provisions by almost CSPs with a total EUR 6,79 billion (EAFRD), while SO8 on vibrant rural areas foresees EUR 5,06 billion (EAFRD).

Through SO7 and the young farmers intervention, the CAP' contribution to socio-economic fabric of rural areas relies to a very large extent to rejuvenation of farm holders, in order to address severe ageing within the farming population.

Top-three countries mobilizing most EAFRD money for young farmers and for LEADER interventions are Germany, France and Spain. All three countries foresee to spend 42% of the EU-28 for both EAFRD interventions. Top-five countries dedicating most EAFRD money for generation renewal are: France (EUR 1,1



billion), Spain (EUR 887 million), Germany (EUR 761 million), Italy (EUR 672 million) and Poland (EUR 500 million). All five countries foresee to spend 57 % of the EU-28 EAFRD towards young farmers related-interventions to support generational renewal.

Despite a 5% minimal spending within the EAFRD envelope (art. 92), almost all CSPs make LEADER programme the cornerstone of SO8 delivery, with an EU 7.7 % average. Under the socio-economic fabric of rural areas general objective, nine CSPs foresee to dedicate more EAFRD money to LEADER programme than for young farmers (D, EE, CY, AT, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI).

German CSP foresees 16,8 % of the EU total EAFRD dedicated to young farmers and to LEADER, ahead of the French one (13,5 %) and the Spanish one (11,9 %). Nearly ¼ of the total EU EAFRD money dedicated to LEADER is concentrated for the German CSP (24,62%). German CSP gives details about current regional strategies for rural areas under SO8, i.e. for entrepreneurship, SMEs, innovation, tourism, digitalization, capacity building...

Finally, among the needs to be addressed by CAP intervention strategies, gender equality, social inclusion, rural youth (except young farmers), elderly, minority groups are rarely identified as priority topics under SO7 and SO8.

2.2.2. Ambition and target values for SO7-SO8 top-spending CSPs under EAFRD

Germany, France and Spain are the three top countries dedicating the highest percentage of their EAFRD budget to interventions under SO7 and SO8. We broke down the target values set by each CSP through result indicators to unfold their rural ambitions expressed through target values, respectively for SO7 and SO8. In doing so, we sought to identify territorial and/or regional specific strategies for rural areas and for rural communities highlighted in their respective CSPs. As shown in Table 3, we reported the target values set by the three CSPs with their respective result indicators.

Table 4. Target value of rural intervention strategies of the top-three CSPs contributing (SO7 and SO8 EAFRD funding)

SO	Result indicators	Target value France	Target value Germany	Target value Spain
7-8	Advisory, training and knowledge exchange – Number of beneficiaries receiving CAP support for advisory, training, knowledge exchange or EIP-related cooperation project (R01)	131,457	-	-
8	Less favoured areas- % of additional support per hectare in areas having upper needs compared to the average (R07)	112,24%	-	-
7	On-farm investments - % of young farmers receiving CAP support for on-farm investments (R09)	16,18%	-	-
8	Better organization of the supply chain - % of farms participating in producer groups, producer organizations, local markets, short distribution circuits and quality schemes supported by the CAP (R10)	-	-	13,61%
8	Renewable energy from agriculture and forestry and other renewable sources - Investments in renewable energy production capacity, including those of biological origin supported by the CAP in MW (R15)	-	-	251MW



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8	Investment support in forest sector – Total investments to increase forest sector performance (R18)	M€476	M€140	M€283
8	Results linked to the environment or climate thanks to knowledge - Number of people receiving advisory, training and knowledge exchange or EIP-related cooperation project in relation to agri-environmental and climate results (R28)	-	-	208,518
7	Generational renewal - Number of young farmers who set-up with CAP support (R36)	27,235	20,100	16,639
7-8	Growth and employment in rural areas – New jobs in supported CAP projects (R37)	30,544	20,800	17,347
8	LEADER coverage - % of rural population covered by a local development strategy (R38)	57,58%	59.97 %	55,21%
7-8	Rural development economy – Number of rural businesses, incl. bioeconomy businesses, developed with CAP support (R39)	5,445	40,000	58,699
8	Smart transition of the rural economy – Number of smart villages strategies supported by the CAP (R40)	-	-	16
8	Rural connectivity in Europe - % of rural population having better access to services and infrastructure as a result of CAP support (R41)	2,07%	11.07%	8,25
7-8	Promote social inclusion – Number of people covered by social inclusion projects supported by the CAP (R42)	-	-	0,00

As highlighted in table 2 and in table 3, unfolding provisions and target values under SO7 et SO8 for the top-three countries foreseeing the most important EAFRD amounts allowed us to detect some nuances and to highlight specificities according to the needs expressed earlier in their respective CSPs.

Under SO7, France indicates to use target values that mobilise also Pillar 1 interventions for young farmers (complementary payment to young farmers) and put target values for on-farm investments (R09) while Germany and Spain did not. Number of young farmers to be set-up in the 2023-2027 period in all three countries seems to be relevant.

Under SO8, the percentage of rural population covered by a local development strategy in the three countries oscillates between 55 and almost 60%. Target values for the number of rural businesses developed with CAP support are separated, between France with 5,445 on one side, and Germany (40,000) and Spain (58,699) on the other side. Same divide for the percentage of rural population having better access to services and infrastructures as a result of CAP support: 2,07% in France against 11,07% in Germany and 8,25% in Spain. Only Spain mentions a target value for implementing 16 smart villages strategies by the CAP. Under this specific objective, France justifies the appeal to less-favoured area payments so the reduce the farm income gap among regions and towards the most vulnerable agricultural territories.

2.2.3. References to the LTVRA in CSPs

After having aligned CAP specific objectives with the LTVRA strands above, we looked at the 28 CSPs, so to triangulate with Member States perspectives following a topic-driven approach. In table 4 below, we reported the items to which the LTVRA refers in CSPs. We found 9 approved CSPs referring to the LTVRA, while we found only one prior to their approval. Observation letters sent to the EC had an effect in that respect.



Nine out of the 28 CSPs refer to the LTVRA (CZ, FR, GR, HR, IE, IT, SI, SP). LTVRA is named explicitly in reference to various items (see table 4 below). Reasons behind references to the LTVRA in the 9 CSPs are barely and scarcely explained. Furthermore, these reasons are not explicitly connected to SO7 and SO8 and rather express a general will to comply with the LTVRA and a reference to a national cross-cutting strategy for rural areas beyond sectoral approaches (FR).

However, demographic decline, quality of life and smart villages are common references in 3 CSPs. One CSP triangulate properly with the common features we mentioned above between the CAP specific objectives and the LTVRA strands on sustainable food production, about healthy food (GR).

Overall, these CSPs referring to the LTVRA do not refer to it as an overarching strategic framework for rural development or rural areas as interventions' choice and financial provisions are not necessarily plugged into this new integrated rural policy narrative.

Table 5. Items to which the LTVRA refers in the CSPs

CSP	About which issue CSPs refer to the LTVRA?
AT	Social services
CZ	Basic services
FR	Rural agenda / Quality of life
GR	Healthy food
HR	Demographic decline
IE	Smart villages
IT	Coherence of the CSP with the LTVRA
SI	Employment / Quality of life / Smart villages
SP	Demographic decline

2.3. Discussion - Interviews with national experts

In order to grasp the rationale of the national intervention strategies underlying SO7 and SO8, we conducted bilateral interviews with national experts so to deepen the understanding of the rural component of strategic plans from a qualitative and national perspective. Following a call for experts to the 41 SHERPA MAPs, we received proposals for experts from Finland, France, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Portugal. These experts have been interviewed almost by calls and through written questions for one on their respective CSPs and on the LTVRA integration. We report the results on these interviews below.

• Poor embeddedness of the LTVRA in CSPs

From a national managing authority perspective, it is sometimes difficult to understand who is in charge of what between DG Agri and DG Regio. Some experts recalled that Initially, the rural would be considered through the democratic and demography lens, including issues such as ageing and the geography of discontent. But in the end, it's the CAP which retrieves most of the LTVRA strands. This might have been confusing while EAFRD has been withdrawn from the partnership agreements, thus the multi-funds local development strategies have been lost (France, Portugal).

For many public administrations in Member states, the LTVRA is still too much linked to agriculture. There's a feeling where the EC did not popularize the LTVRA enough at country level. Anyway, many experts agreed that the LTVRA came too late for the 2023-2027 programming. The positive vision of rural areas promoted

by the LTVRA is not shared by management authorities, for whom rural areas are perceived as agricultural areas and/or underdeveloped areas (Portugal).

This comes to the point that where some CSPs have focuses mainly on the farming sector and might suffer from a rural policy deficit, the cohesion policy could intervene in complementarity for rural areas especially in low-density areas, moreover because these countries get much funds from the cohesion policy than from the CAP. Regarding SO8, total financial provision sounds low compared to SO7. However, many countries will support rural areas from other EU funds, especially from the Cohesion policy and from the Recovery and resilience fund (Poland, Slovenia).

The LTVRA was perceived as an invitation to prepare more territorial policies with EU funds and to integrate the regional level. However, such vision is not present in a majority of CSPs. However, reversely, designing integrated rural policies is a strong challenge as it requires more capacity building at managing authority level (Italy).

- **The farming economy still perceived as the backbone of vibrant rural areas in many CSPs**

In many CSPs, there's a general assumption considering that supporting the farming economy will contribute to reinforce local development in rural areas. This is particularly the case under the two specific objectives covering the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, one of the three dimensions of the CAP. Indeed, SO7 ambitions and funds are far beyond SO8 ones despite much less interventions and less result target values. Ambitioning a generational renewal through a strong leverage of the young farmers intervention is a general trend in almost all CSPs (all). Financial provision for rural start-ups is not so significant under SO7.

Additional funding from the RFF would allow Member states to support the agrifood industries, remote and inner areas that left behind the other ones in terms of infrastructures. Though the RFF is not specific to rural areas, it will make the standard living in rural areas comparable with the cities through investment in mobility infrastructures and internet broadband. The RRF will strengthen also the research for the agricultural sector. The smart village intervention works with LEADER. Rural municipalities can also get a support for sewage system under the smart village intervention. When designing the strategic plan, all the concerns were on agriculture and the energy crisis. Developing the food sector has very positive effects on rural areas (Poland).

Many CSPs assume the assumption that the EAFRD' young farmers intervention is not enough for supporting generational renewal. Generational renewal is also supported by other interventions: cooperation, advisory services, knowledge transfer and LEADER, but also by triggering Pillar 1 intervention with the complementary payment for young farmers (France, Finland).

Agriculture is a very important part of the economy. The economic situation of the agricultural sector is part of the background of the strategic plan and the farmers income is on top of the hierarchy for strategic goals. The general idea for designing the CSP was to maintain the support for farmers as they got previously and to introduce new instruments to support this objective (Poland)

- **LEADER and Smart villages perceived as main interventions to operationalize the LTVRA in CSPs**

Although the LTVRA directions and objectives have not been translated into programmatic requirements for CSPs, LEADER programme might have been perceived as the clear ordinary path to operationalize it in CSPs, especially through SO8. In saying that, it shows that LEADER represents the LTVRA approach within the CAP: although implemented for more than 30 years, it has not been expanded at EU level beyond the mandatory 5% earmark in EAFRD (France).

There are interactions between LEADER and smart villages but smart villages are more than LEADER. Regional authorities can use this instrument to foster small cooperation among municipalities with public and private partnerships. For such novelty, 10 regions will activate the smart village intervention outside LEADER (Italy).



Many of the CAP interventions under SO7 and SO8 would contribute to the implementation of the EU rural action plan. Especially funding for broadband, smart villages, generational renewal, aid for rural businesses, knowledge transfer and information, co-operation and investment of improvement of rural socio-economic structure. However, these interventions would have been implemented even without the LTVRA (Finland).

3. Conclusion

This rapid appraisal of the 28 CAP strategic plans under a rural areas' lens intended to explore references to the LTVRA issued by the European Commission in June 2021. The LTVRA strategy has been perceived positively by national experts we interviewed, including representatives from public research and regional authorities' representatives having participated to the drafting of CSPs.

However, because of an asynchronous policy agenda with a CAP reform process launched during the former European Commission mandate, the LTVRA came too late in the policy process at EU level, so it could not influence the design of the CSPs through specific directions and/or requirements.

Indeed, whether the LTVRA did not set any mandatory targets as the Farm-to-Fork and the Biodiversity strategies did under the EU Green Deal, it did not underpin any innovative approach for designing the CSPs through a more integrated rural policy approach. In the end, we noticed a poor alignment between the expected contribution of the CAP aiming at supporting the LTVRA areas for action and the very modest financial weight of the 28 CSPs for the socio-economic fabric of rural areas as set in the specific objectives 7 and 8.

In the post-Covid-19 period, the Recovery and Resilience Fund might have brought an important impetus to development of rural areas, encompassing various policy interventions in rural areas: agrifood chains, infrastructures, irrigation, cultural heritage, landscape, water treatment...

Through the CSPs and interviews, we got the point that the LTVRA has a very positive potential to influence future policy developments though its impact remains uncertain. In particular, the lack of articulation of the LTVRA with existing EU policy design and implementation, which might be partly explained by the deficit of information and awareness on LTVRA towards Member States, managing authorities and rural policies' stakeholders.



Links to CAP strategic plans

- Austria: <https://bit.ly/444JbZS>
- Belgium (Flanders): <https://bit.ly/3Hc6w22>
- Belgium (Wallonia): <https://bit.ly/3LtHM7T>
- Bulgaria: <https://bit.ly/3Lu7w4c>
- Croatia: <https://bit.ly/3NfihZC>
- Cyprus: <https://bit.ly/3owWXUT>
- Czechia: <https://bit.ly/3Avebok>
- Denmark: <https://bit.ly/3oHZSu8>
- Estonia: <https://bit.ly/40T41ZL>
- Finland: <https://bit.ly/3H8UUq7>
- France: <https://bit.ly/3LuTbEC>
- Germany: <https://bit.ly/3Hdtoyq>
- Greece: <https://bit.ly/3n6raKf>
- Hungary: <https://bit.ly/41EwOIG>
- Ireland: <https://bit.ly/3n5TLiE>
- Italy: <https://bit.ly/3L5NBXV>
- Latvia: <https://bit.ly/3mWA0KB>
- Lithuania: <https://bit.ly/40Fyf1U>
- Luxembourg: <https://bit.ly/40C7USn>
- Malta: <https://bit.ly/3LvtbsA>
- The Netherlands: <https://bit.ly/3L6hwzq>
- Poland: <https://bit.ly/3oJcBNf>
- Portugal: <https://bit.ly/3N8ypfi>
- Romania: <https://bit.ly/3AqktWv>
- Slovenia: <https://bit.ly/3HdsIZU>
- Slovakia: <https://bit.ly/3L4OO1O>
- Spain: <https://bit.ly/41XQVet>
- Sweden: <https://bit.ly/3N8Rcap>



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Annex 1

- Austria spreadsheet:
https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Austria.xlsx
- Belgium (Flanders) spreadsheet:
https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Belgium-Flanders.xlsx
- Belgium (Wallonia) spreadsheet:
https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Belgium-Wallonia.xlsx
- Bulgaria spreadsheet:
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- Croatia spreadsheet:
https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Croatia.xlsx
- Cyprus spreadsheet:
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- Czechia spreadsheet:
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- Denmark spreadsheet:
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- Italy spreadsheet:
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- Latvia spreadsheet:
https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Latvia.xlsx
- Lithuania spreadsheet:



D3.3 | Rapid appraisal of the CAP strategic plans' objectives related to the socio-economic fabric of rural areas and their alignment with the long-term vision for rural areas

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Lithuania.xlsx

- Luxembourg spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Luxembourg.xlsx

- Malta spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Malta.xlsx

- The Netherlands spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Netherlands.xlsx

- Poland spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Poland.xlsx

- Portugal spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Portugal.xlsx

- Romania spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Romania.xlsx

- Slovenia spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Slovenia.xlsx

- Slovakia spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Slovakia.xlsx

- Spain spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Spain.xlsx

- Sweden spreadsheet:

https://rural-interfaces.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/T3.3_Sweden.xlsx





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