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# Countryside renewing with the times – Rural policy programme 2021–2027

# Countryside renewing with the times

## Rural policy programme 2021–2027

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## Countryside renewing with the times

### Rural policy programme 2021–2027

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#### Abstract

The Rural Policy Programme for the years 2021–2027 is the working programme for the National Rural Policy. It is implemented under the leadership of the Rural Policy Council and in broad cooperation with different stakeholders.

In the Rural Policy Programme diverse rural areas are distinguished as a national success factor. Rural areas offer a base, resources and solutions for good life, innovation, entrepreneurship and a sustainable society. The programme highlights that rural areas offer solutions to the sustainability crisis. The goal for rural policy is for Finland to be developed as a whole by strengthening place based possibilities.

The strategic focal points of the programme are interdependence, environmental justice and a new knowledge-based economy, which cut across the different themes in the programme.

The five themes in the Rural Policy Programme are:

- Increased added value through sustainable use of natural resources
- Rural actors – a part of the solution that is sustainable transition
- Strengthening competitiveness and vitality
- Ensuring a smooth everyday life
- Strengthening inclusion and a sense of community in rural areas

The programme consists of 73 measures associated to the themes above.

The implementation of the programme and its measures is evaluated every two years.

**Keywords** Rural policy, countryside, rural development, rural livelihoods, place based policy, sustainable development, know-how

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## Ajassa uudistuva maaseutu Maaseutupoliittinen kokonaisuohjelma 2021–2027

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### Tiivistelmä

Maaseutupoliittinen kokonaisuohjelma vuosille 2021–2027 on kansallisen maaseutupoliitiikan toimintaohjelma. Sitä toteutetaan maaseutupoliitiikan neuvoston johdolla sekä laajassa yhteistyössä eri sidosryhmien kanssa.

Maaseutupoliittisessa kokonaisuohjelmassa monimuotoinen maaseutu nähdään kansallisena menestystekijänä. Maaseutu tarjoaa alustan, resursseja ja ratkaisuja hyvälle elämälle, innovatiivisuudelle, yrittäjyydelle ja kestäväälle yhteiskunnalle. Ohjelmassa korostetaan, että maaseudulla on tarjota ratkaisuja kestävyyskriisiin. Maaseutupoliittisena tavoitteena on, että Suomea kehitetään kokonaisuutena vahvistaen paikallislähtöisiä mahdollisuuksia.

Ohjelman strategisina kiintopisteinä ovat keskinäisriippuvuus, ympäristöoikeudenmukaisuus ja uusi tietotalous, jotka läpileikkaavat ohjelman teemoja.

Kokonaisuohjelman viisi teemaa ovat:

- Luonnonvarojen kestävästä käytöstä enemmän lisäarvoa
- Maaseudun toimijat osana kestäväsiirtymän ratkaisua
- Kilpailukyvyyn ja elinvoiman vahvistaminen
- Sujuvan arjen varmistaminen
- Osallisuuden ja yhteisöllisyyden vahvistaminen

Ohjelmassa on kaikkiaan 73 teemoihin liittyvää konkreettista toimenpidettä.

Kokonaisuohjelman toimeenpanoa ja tavoitteiden saavuttamista seurataan ja arvioidaan kahden vuoden välein.

**Asiasanat** maaseutupoliittikka, maaseutu, maaseudun kehittäminen, maaseudun elinkeinot, paikkaperustaisuus, kestävä kehitys, osaaminen

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#### Referat

Landsbygdspolitiska helhetsprogrammet för åren 2021–2027 är nationella landsbygdspolitikens verksamhetsprogram. Det förverkligas under ledning av landsbygdspolitiska rådet och i brett samarbete med berörda parter.

I det landsbygdspolitiska helhetsprogrammet ses den mångsidiga landsbygden som en nationell framgångsfaktor. Landsbygden erbjuder en plattform, resurser och lösningar för ett gott liv, innovativitet, företagande och ett hållbart samhälle. I programmet framhävs att landsbygden har att erbjuda lösningar till hållbarhetskrisen. Landsbygdspolitikens målsättning är att Finland utvecklas som enhet och genom att förstärka platsbaserade möjligheter.

Programmets strategiska fixpunkter är ömsesidigt beroende, miljörättvisa och ny kunskapsintensiv ekonomi. Dessa är genomgående i programmets teman.

Helhetsprogrammets fem teman är:

- Högre mervärde genom hållbar användning av naturresurser
- Landsbygdens aktörer som en del av lösningen på en hållbar övergång
- Stärkande av konkurrenskraft och livskraft
- Tryggande av en fungerande vardag
- Stärkande av delaktigheten och gemenskapen

Programmet omfattar 73 konkreta åtgärder förknippade till ovannämnda teman.

Helhetsprogrammets implementering och förverkligande av målsättningarna följs och utvärderas med två års mellanrum.

**Nyckelord** landsbygdspolitik, landsbygd, landsbygdsutveckling, landsbygdens näringar, platsbaserad politik, hållbar utveckling, kunnande

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## FOREWORD

Dear reader,

I encourage you to take a moment and immerse yourself in the opportunities provided by Finland's diverse rural areas. Finland's rural areas provide the keys to a better future for all of us, and we must make use of them all to achieve a fair transition to a sustainable society.

"Countryside renewing with the times" is the seventh rural policy programme. It has been drawn up for the period 2021–2027. The policy programme is the working programme for the Rural Policy Council set up by the Government. The programme provides information about what kind of national rural policy is required due to ongoing developments, particularly the sustainability crisis, the ageing and declining population, digitalisation, location-independent work, increasing multilocality of people and also the changing preferences associated with housing. It also brings perspective to drafting local and regional policies.

Finland is a country with vast rural areas. Nearly every municipality in Finland include rural areas. 20 per cent of Finns consider themselves rural residents, while 37 per cent perceive themselves as both rural and urban. Rural areas are subject to great expectations. According to the Rural Barometer 2020 study commissioned by the Rural Policy Council and produced by the Natural Resources Institute Finland, 68 per cent of Finnish citizens expect that the role of rural areas will be emphasised in the future. 68 per cent of the citizens also believe that rural areas provide a good operating environment for innovative entrepreneurship. More than 80 per cent want rural areas to be accessible to everyone, and 61 per cent perceive the countryside as a place for a good life. One in three citizens consider rural areas as an important environment for their self-expression in the future. An important question is how decision-makers and local government officials respond to citizens' expectations of rural areas and strengthen rural areas as an environment for a good life.

Citizens want there to be population in different areas and also for different areas to be treated equally. The equality of opportunities must be visible in different regions. However, the Rural Barometer shows that 62 per cent find that the policy measures related to climate change do not treat rural areas and cities equally. Only 14 per cent believe

that the policy measures are fair from a rural perspective. Citizens strongly believe that everyone should have the right to live where they want (85 per cent) and that rural areas should be developed as a resource for the whole of Finland (81 per cent). Only 22 per cent of the citizens are in favour of limiting access to public services in remote areas, while 63 per cent are against it. Similarly, restricting construction in sparsely populated areas does not gain the citizens' support (61 per cent). Instead, they find that life in rural areas must be developed to be increasingly environmentally friendly (60 per cent).

The vision of the policy programme notes that diverse rural areas are a national success factor and that they offer a base, resources and solutions for a good life, innovation, entrepreneurship and a sustainable society. The vision emphasises that the practical implementation of a good rural policy requires recognising the diversity of rural areas in politics and in preparation of matters. How can national success be achieved? The answer lies in cooperation and in solutions that take local needs, resources and opportunities into account. The transition to a carbon-neutral society requires extensive discussion that highlights the perspectives of day-to-day life and entrepreneurship in rural areas and the impacts of decisions in different regions.

Rural policy is based on a place-based approach. Place-based policy means that the different conditions, needs and resources of different places are identified and taken into consideration in the preparation and implementation of policy and development measures. The need for place-based policy and solutions will be emphasised in the future, especially due to changes in the operational environments of municipalities and regions. This requires a change in the way we think and act, and in the policy instruments we set forth and use. Rural policy promotes change especially through guidance by information, such as research-based policy recommendations.

Finland does not consist of a single rural area; instead, the country has different areas and places where people, families and communities spend their daily lives in a variety of operational environments. Rural areas have diverse livelihoods and actors – people of different ages and backgrounds as well as various sets of skills. The transition to sustainability cannot be achieved without them.

Rural policy has taken an active role in involving people of different ages and backgrounds in constructive discussion on rural areas and also between rural and urban areas. Increasing shared understanding enables us to make a smoother transition towards more sustainable solutions. Indeed, the policy programme has been prepared in extensive cooperation between the actors involved in rural policy and the development of rural areas – from villages to the central government. Young builders of our future have also participated in the preparation of the Rural Policy Programme.

How we develop, strengthen and safeguard the conditions related to operational environments and competence, and how we empower the people of rural areas is central in order to ensure that the countryside can lead the way toward a sustainability transition.

Thank you very much to everyone involved in preparing this programme! The programme is now complete and the time has come for its implementation. I hope everyone is enthusiastic and committed to implementing the programme's objectives and measures – let's do it together!

Jari Leppä  
Minister of Agriculture and Forestry,  
Chairperson of the Rural Policy Council  
June 2021

# 1 Premises of the policy programme

The Earth is incapable of producing renewable natural resources or handling greenhouse gas emissions at the pace set by humankind and the economic system. This is a worldwide phenomenon that has led to a global sustainability crisis. Finding a way to manage this crisis is one of the key political and economic issues of our time. Rural areas can provide solutions for this. Rural areas offer a platform, space, resources and alternative models for a good life, innovation, sustainable entrepreneurship and society.

Managing the sustainability crisis requires continuous guided and societal change based on sustainable development. This is also the case in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which politically binds Finland. The objective of the agenda is to safeguard the conditions for a good life for current and future generations. The environment, people and the economy must be taken into account equally in all societal decision-making and economic activities. This change requires courage from decision-makers and those involved in preparing measures.

Finnish rural areas have plenty of resources that are scarce from a global perspective: renewable natural resources, clean air, water, productive land and environments that support health and well-being. We must cherish them. The overall sustainability of the use of resources located in rural areas must be ensured.

The OECD<sup>1</sup> emphasises that future rural policy must acknowledge key sustainable development objectives, such as preventing and mitigating the negative impacts of climate change (adaptation), poverty reduction and gender equality. The OECD stresses that pursuing and achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) requires a holistic approach as well as participation and action at the local level.

The seventh rural policy programme provides information about what is required by the ongoing developments in Finland's national rural policy. The societal development paths that direct rural policy include particularly the management of the sustainability crisis, the changing socio-economic structure, digitalisation and location-independent

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1 OECD Regional Development Ministerial (2019). *Principles on Urban Policy and on Rural Policy. Megatrends: Building Better Futures for Regions, Cities and Rural Areas*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

work, increasing multilocality, and changing preferences for living and increasing interest in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic will also have a long-term impact on rural development, accelerating particularly the above-mentioned development paths.

## 1.1 Phenomena directing future rural policy

**The management of the sustainability crisis** is, first and foremost, a matter of change towards sustainable low-carbon economy and activities. We must aim at conditions where the use of natural resources does not exceed biocapacity and where we safeguard biodiversity. This requires a fundamental change in the prevailing societal structures and functions. We must reduce the use of non-renewable natural resources and replace it with the sustainable use of renewable natural resources. The transition to a sustainable society requires abandoning old ways of doing things and learning new ones, both in decision-making and in day-to-day life. Solutions suitable for rural areas must be sought and introduced in sustainable housing, mobility, service production and food and energy production.

**The socio-economic structure of rural areas** is affected by not only demographic developments, but also by issues related to the level of education and employment structure. In many rural municipalities, the population is shrinking and ageing as a result of a declining birth rate, migration loss and an increase in people's life expectancy. The population development of rural municipalities is particularly affected by young people and women moving away from the areas, difficulties in finding employment in a rural areas as well as the focusing of immigrant integration efforts and related services into urban areas. Changes in the permanent population structure are reflected in the available jobs, education and services and, ultimately, the unequal development of regions. Natural demographic development is also visible as a labour shortage in rural areas, which will affect industries such as the social welfare and healthcare sector in the next ten years.

**Digitalisation and location-independence** are closely linked to the ongoing transformation of work and to new ways of arranging, producing and using services. Digitalisation provides new ways to study, work and engage in entrepreneurship independent of location. People will have more opportunities for choosing their place of residence and work based on their personal preferences. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the increase in location-independent work: during the outbreak, an estimated 1.2 million Finns worked remotely.

**Increasing multilocality** is visible in the daily lives and future prospects of more and more people. Living in multiple locations related to the transformation of work and seasonal work as well as preferences related to leisure time particularly increase the

versatile use of rural areas. New types of actors and activities emerge in rural areas as they gain increasingly diverse meanings. Multi-locality also affects the vitality of municipalities and areas. Identifying its effects on the demand for both public and private services and the use of infrastructure gains increasing significance in the context of policy preparation. There is a need for further research related to multi-locality and for the development of statistics on the monitoring of multi-locality as well as for better consideration of these data in decision-making.

More and more Finns, including young people, are interested in **rural living**. The trends and value basis of young people show changes that are closely related to rural areas and the opportunities they offer. Research<sup>2</sup> indicates that many young people have dreams related to sparsely populated rural areas in particular. It is important to respond to the demand concerning rural areas and to promote the mainstreaming of these trends. Many perceive rural areas as a place for a good life. It is valued as a safe and spacious living environment close to nature where people can express themselves and be part of a community. Although more and more people are interested in opportunities for ecological living, the poor availability of housing creates concrete challenges for those interested in relocating to a rural area.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has affected the activities of people and businesses. The tourism and restaurant sectors have particularly struggled. On the other hand, there is for instance a new-found interest in rural tourism. While the pandemic will eventually pass, the approaches used to manage it (e.g. restrictions on mobility and recommendations and regulations related to remote work and studying) are highly likely to continue to have an impact on society in the long term. These have already influenced the operating approaches and culture related to remote work. Assessing the impacts on a longer-term requires societal and location-aware monitoring and research.

## 1.2 Finland's diverse countryside

Good rural policy requires recognising the diversity of rural areas. The Finnish countryside is a mosaic of different areas, places, environments, communities and people. Rural areas account for 95 per cent of Finland's surface area.

The Rural Barometer regularly examines Finns' views on ruralities. Nature, traditions, communality and diligence are characteristics strongly associated with rural areas. Rural areas are also increasingly perceived as a resource for the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Rural Barometer 2020 (in Finnish), Ruralization research and innovation project (2019–2023)

### *Finland's diverse rural areas*

Statistically speaking, rural areas are described and classified in rural policy using national urban–rural classification based on geospatial data (Finnish Environment Institute 2020<sup>3</sup>), which is independent of the administrative boundaries of the regions (Figure 1).

The classification divides areas based on population, labour, commuting and construction data as well as road network and land use data into three urban and four rural categories: local centres in rural areas, rural areas close to urban areas, rural heartland areas, and sparsely populated rural areas. It is important to recognise that the conditions in each rural area are different. It is also important to note that the rural areas within these categories are also diverse.

*Local centres in rural areas* refer to small towns, municipal centres and village centres located outside larger urban areas. Around 6 per cent of Finland's population, approx. 310,100 people, live permanently in these centres.

*Rural areas close to urban areas* are close to urban regions in terms of both their physical location as well as their functions. These rural areas are connected to the functional commuting area of a city or town. Around 7 per cent of Finland's population, approx. 400,000 people, live permanently in these rural areas.

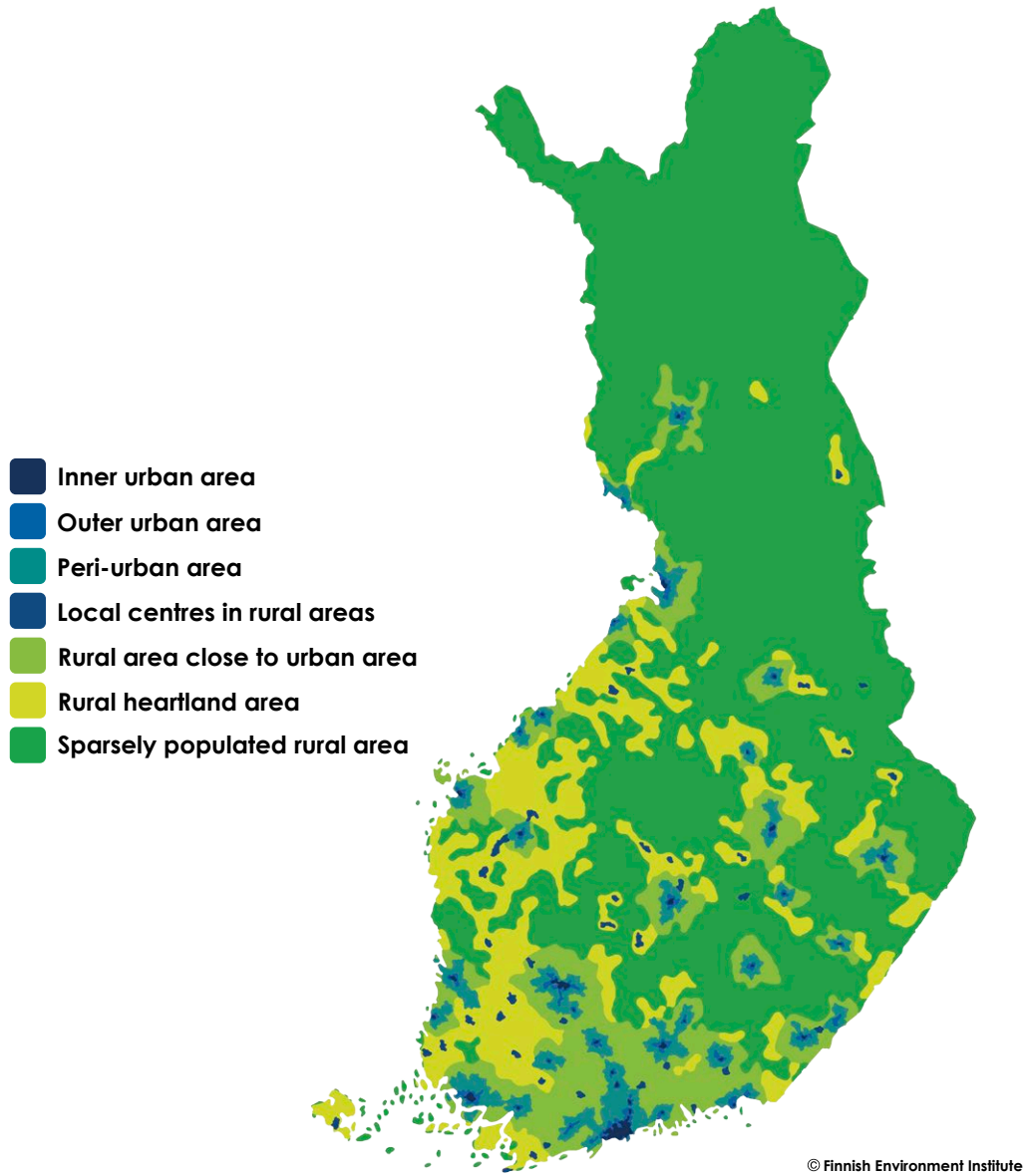
*Rural heartland areas* are characterised by intensive land use and/or a versatile economic and relatively densely populated structure at the local level. Around 10 per cent of Finland's population, approx. 530,000 people, live permanently in rural heartland areas.

*Sparsely populated rural areas* are regions where diverse activities have not focused on specific areas or these are small and located far away from one another. Most of these land areas are forested. Around 5 per cent of Finland's population, approx. 280,000 people, live permanently in sparsely populated areas.

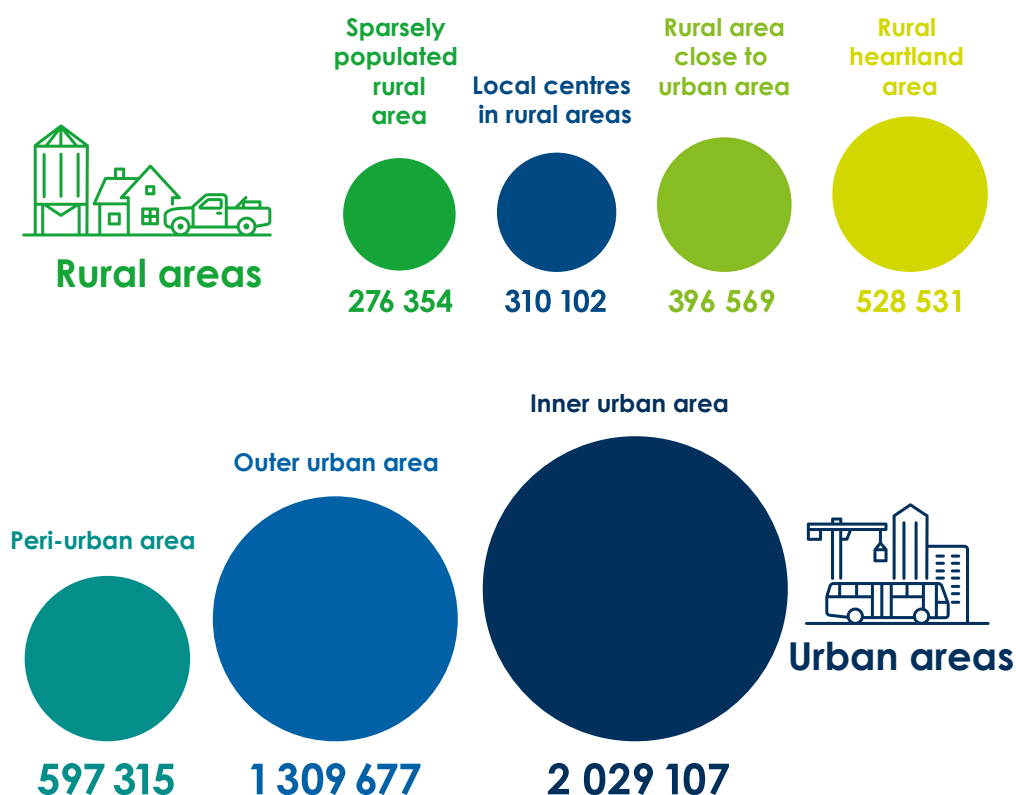
The population numbers are presented by category of region in Figure 2, which also shows the peri-urban area (approx. 600,000 people), the outer urban area (approx. 1.3 million people) and the inner urban area (approx. 2 million people).

3 Helminen, Ville, Kimmo Nurmio & Sampo Vesänen (2020). Kaupunki-maaseutu-alueuokitus 2018 -paikkatietopohjaisen alueuokituksen päivitys (in Finnish). Finnish Environment Institute reports 21/2020.

Figure 1. Urban–rural classification (source: Finnish Environment Institute 2018)





**Figure 2.** Population by area (source: Statistics Finland 2018)

### 1.3 Rural policy in the political sphere

Rural policy is part of national regional development, which also includes urban policy and island policy.

Rural policy can be divided into broad and narrow rural policy (Figure 3). It is implemented at all regional levels (international, national, regional, local) and is manifested in the everyday lives of citizens living in different areas. Anyone who makes decisions and carries out measures that affect the opportunities of living, engaging in entrepreneurship and operating in different rural areas carries out and practices rural policy (see information box on page 15).

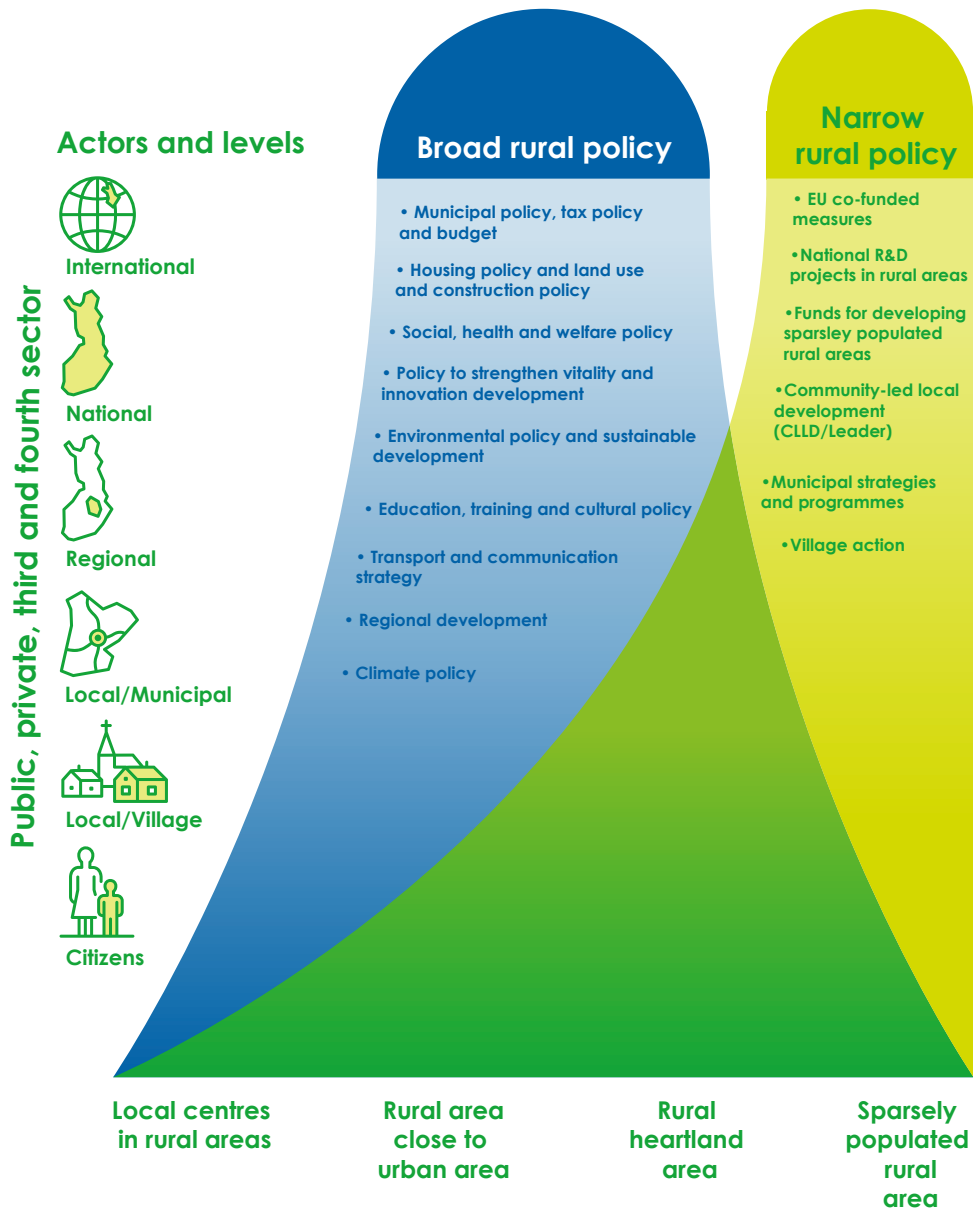
Broad rural policy refers to a way of thinking and operating in which rural areas, residents, communities, entrepreneurs and operational environments are made visible in the preparative work within different administrative branches and in the decision-making at different regional levels (national, regional, municipal). It covers national policy programmes and policies representing the various administrative branches of different

ministries, including the State budget. Coordination is an important part of broad rural policy. Stakeholders work together to achieve societal goals with relevance to rural policy.

Narrow rural policy includes instruments and measures with the precise purpose of developing rural areas. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development is the main single instrument. It is used to fund the measures carried out under the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland. In the future, similar measures will be included in the national strategic plan of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Village action supported by State aid is also a key instrument within narrow rural policy.

The Rural Policy Council (MANE) set up by the Government is responsible for coordinating the development measures of broad and narrow rural policy. The focus is on broad rural policy. The aim is to direct and enhance the policy measures targeting rural areas and related resource use.

Figure 3. Broad and narrow rural policy - rural policy in the political sphere



## 1.4 Place-based policy and development

A place-based approach is the starting point for rural development and rural policy both internationally (OECD) and nationally. Place-based policy and development mean that the different conditions, needs and resources of different places are identified and taken into consideration in the preparation and implementation of policy and development measures.

Traditional policy measures fail to respond adequately to the different and rapidly changing needs of regions. A place-based approach<sup>4</sup> makes it possible to respond to increasingly differentiated regional development through targeted and tailored actions. This improves the relevance and effectiveness of policy and development work and gives people and businesses in different regions equal opportunities to participate in wider social and economic networks and systems.

Place-based development is based on extensive cooperation between different actors and levels. The approach emphasises networking activities, a cross-administrative method and cross-sectoral cooperation. It integrates new actors and resources in the development efforts and enables making use of the whole potential of the region, such as a municipality and/or a region.

The need for place-based policy and solutions will be emphasised in the future, especially due to changes in the operational environments of municipalities and regions. However, this requires a change in the way we think and act, and in the policy instruments we use. Rural policy promotes change, especially through information guidance such as research-based policy recommendations.

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4 Luoto, Ilkka, Mari Kattilakoski & Peter Backa (2016). Näkökulmana paikkaperustainen yhteiskunta. Publications of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy 25/2016 (in Finnish).

## 2 Vision, focal points and objectives of the rural policy

The Rural policy programme (hereinafter referred to as the programme) is the working programme of the national rural policy. The programme is implemented under the leadership of the Rural Policy Council, particularly through the secretariat, thematic networks and research and development projects, but also in extensive cooperation with rural policy stakeholders.

The programme sets objectives and determines theme-based measures for their achievement in an aim to develop rural areas changing with the times. At the same time a balanced development of the entire country is promoted. The objectives and measures are guided by the vision for rural policy, presented in the information box below. The time span of the programme (2021–2027) extends beyond a single government term and is consistent with the funding cycle of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU). Where applicable, the objectives set in the programme will also be promoted through international cooperation.

### *Vision for rural policy*

Diverse rural areas are a national success factor. They provide a platform and solutions for a good life, innovation, entrepreneurship and a sustainable society. Finland is developed as a whole by strengthening place based opportunities.

The programme and the vision that guides it are based on a strategy prepared by an extensive group of researchers, "Maaseutu kestävyysmurroksen tuulenhalkojaksi" ("Rural areas as forerunners in the sustainability transition"; in Finnish)<sup>5</sup>. Interdependence,

<sup>5</sup> Maaseutu kestävyysmurroksen tuulenhalkojaksi. Maaseutupolitiikan strategia 2021–2027. (maaseutupolitiikka.fi, in Finnish)

environmental justice and the new information economy serve as strategic focal areas. Strategic focal points lead the way towards the vision of the programme.

## 2.1 Interdependence

Interdependence refers to a way of thinking and an approach that involves examining issues comprehensively in an effort to understand connections between them. In this programme, interdependence is particularly considered from three perspectives: the link between our well-being and nature, interdependencies between different regions and cross-sectoral cooperation.

The starting point is an understanding of how our well-being is closely connected to nature and biodiversity. Ecosystem services maintained by nature are essential for life on Earth. Human activity and maintaining well-being must be adapted to the limits posed by ecological sustainability. This must be reflected in all social and economic activities and decision-making.

It is also important to understand that there are interdependencies between the development of different areas. Finland's large rural areas, extensive archipelago, municipal centres of various sizes and urban areas are all parts of a symbiosis, in which they both need and complement each other. Sub-regional centres and the development of them play for example an important role as service centres for the surrounding rural areas. The inter-regional interdependencies become stronger as multilocality and location-independent work become increasingly common. The immaterial and material resources located in rural areas are increasingly connected not only to regional but also to national and global networks of expertise, production and cooperation.

Maintaining and developing societal functions and services requires closer cooperation between sectors and different actors. In addition to the public sector, the private sector and civil society play an important role in promoting livelihoods and employment and also in the provision of services in rural areas. A sustainable democratic society needs a strong civil society, while a strong civil society needs a public sector that supports and enables inclusion, activity and partnership.

***Rural policy objective for 2027***

Finland is developed as a whole, taking into account the interdependencies between humans and nature and between different regions and sectors. The aim is to build a holistically sustainable society based on the consideration of local needs and conditions, and strengthening of local resources.

**2.2 Environmental justice**

In the programme, environmental justice represents an extensive perspective on the transition to sustainability. At its core lies fairness between different actors, places and generations. Environmental justice is centred around the preservation of natural ecosystems and the social and regional distribution of the benefits and potential disadvantages arising from the use of natural resources. In this programme, environmental justice is also linked to a broader perspective of fairness, according to which the rights and opportunities of rural residents concerning housing, basic services, income opportunities as well as mobility must be secured.

Most of Finland's natural resources are located in rural areas. The use of natural resources must be based not only on the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, but also on the consideration of local conditions, different actors and livelihoods in the rural areas. The perspective of environmental justice emphasises socially sustainable processes in the utilisation of natural resources. Different actors must have sufficient opportunities to participate in and influence decision-making concerning their own living environment.

***Rural policy objective for 2027***

Finland is developed as a whole. The use of natural resources located in rural areas is responsible and fair, and takes into account local environments, conditions, actors and livelihoods. The preconditions for a good life, entrepreneurship and smooth day-to-day life are secured in all parts of the country.

## 2.3 A new knowledge economy

The knowledge economy of rural areas is strongly linked to natural environments and the ability to combine different types of information: high-tech expertise, research data, and practical and local knowledge. A knowledge economy based on rural material and immaterial resources, and diverse knowledge must be lifted to the forefront of global value chains.

Knowledge economy is based on a population with a high level of education, high skill professions, research and development as well as economic activities at the higher level of global value chains. Traditionally, high tech and industries such as marketing, finance and insurance, and consulting have been linked to the knowledge economy. It will increasingly be linked to the resource-efficient use of natural resources and technological innovations and associated services related to it. Innovations and a growth of the degree of processing are in rural areas dependent on available social and human capital.

Finland's knowledge economy has been developed through public investments with a strong focus on university cities. As a result, these public funds have produced region specific competitive advantages and created elements of regional inequality. The transition to a sustainable society requires that national policies also connect rural areas and actors to the knowledge economy and innovation activities as well as funding linked to it. This is important, because private investments follow public ones, and these are increasingly needed in rural areas. Decision makers must create prospects for investing in the knowledge economy of rural areas as part of the policies designed to bring about sustainable economy.

### ***Rural policy objective for 2027***

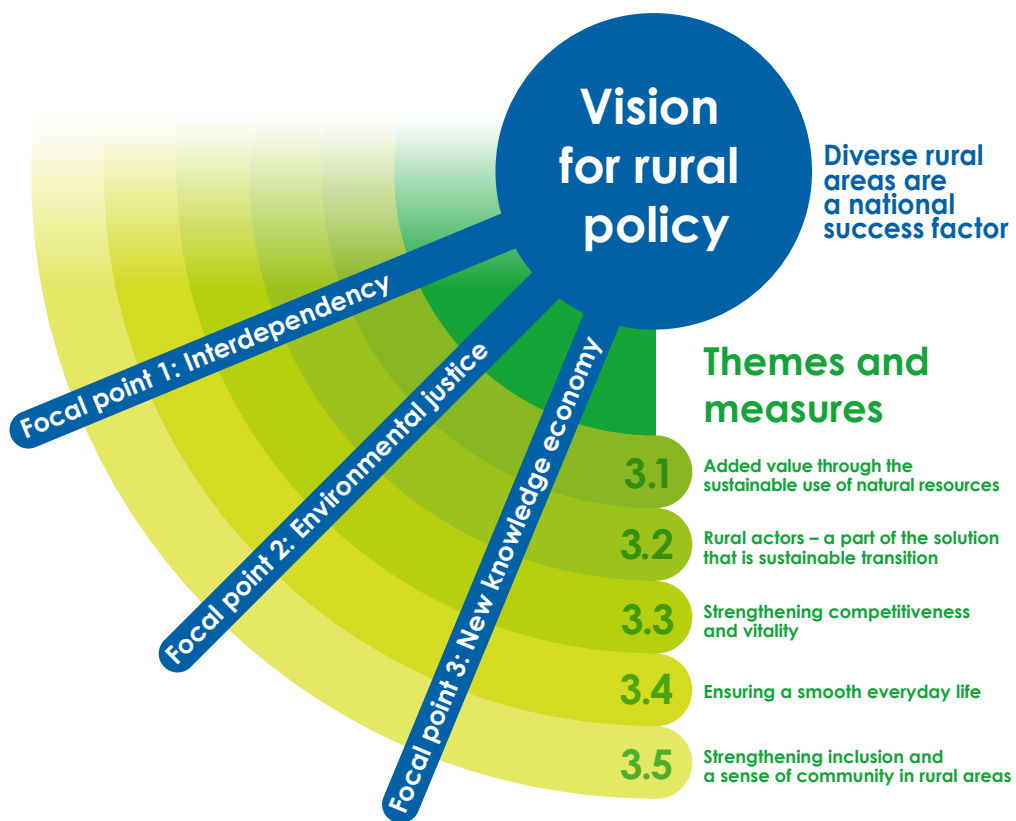
Finland is developed as a whole. Material and immaterial resources located in rural areas are combined with diverse knowledge and skills. The new knowledge economy of rural areas is brought to the forefront of global value chains. People, communities and entrepreneurs in rural areas and new professionals relocating there produce solutions for a sustainable economy.



### 3 Themes and measures

The vision and strategic focal points set out in section 2 guide the themes and measures presented in this section. The strategic focal points (see sections 2.1 to 2.3) cut across the themes and measures of the programme with different emphases (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Vision, focal points and themes of the Rural policy programme



## 3.1 Added value through the sustainable use of natural resources

Everyone benefits from thriving natural and cultural environments. We can continue to create opportunities for a good life in the future by adapting people's activities and consumption to the limits set by ecological sustainability, by fostering biodiversity, and by managing and using nature sustainably. Thriving natural and cultural environments increase interest in rural living. They also provide opportunities for business activities in rural areas. It is important that independent research data is available to support the development of operating models and business activities.

The Sustainable Growth Programme for Finland<sup>6</sup> supports ecologically, socially and economically sustainable growth. The programme aims to accelerate the green transition, i.e. the structural change in the economy towards a carbon-neutral welfare society. The productivity and sustainable growth is strengthened through increasing the employment rate and competence level.

The task of the rural policy is to promote the sustainable and socially and regionally fair use of natural resources. Its task is also to highlight the perspectives of rural residents, communities and entrepreneurs, especially in matters concerning livelihoods and land use.

### 3.1.1 Managing and using nature and the environment sustainably

#### 3.1.1.1 Forest use and agriculture

Our relationship with forests is complex. Everything we do for, in and of forests or based on the influence of forests reflects our sense of forests. Sense of the forest opens up opportunities for sustainable and versatile use of forests and for also producing added value at the local level. Strengthening people's relationship with forests is one of the keys to diversifying rural business and the benefits gained from forests. Investments in a broader sustainable use of forests are needed at the national, regional and local levels. This requires an increase in the knowledge and understanding of the sustainable use of forests. Furthermore it is important to reconcile the interests of different actors and promote dialogue between generations on the subject.

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<sup>6</sup> Sustainable Growth Programme for Finland: Preliminary Recovery and Resilience Plan. Publications of the Finnish Government 2021:22.

Forest policy aims to guide forest use, forest and nature management, felling and harvesting. Forest policy also aims to reconcile the conflicting climate and industrial policy objectives regarding use of forests. In addition to wood production, the statutory regional forest programmes also contain targets for wood construction, natural products, nature tourism as well as climate change mitigation. Regional forest programmes implement the EU Forest Strategy and the objectives of the national forest strategy. These include increasing biodiversity, climate change mitigation and rural development. Creating added value both locally and nationally through resource efficient utilisation of forests is important.

Finns hold domestically produced food in high regard. Ensuring the prerequisites for national agriculture lays the foundation for a sustainable food system and national security of supply. The agricultural policy is based on the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which focuses on strengthening the competitiveness of agriculture, improving the state of the environment, preserving biodiversity, animal welfare as well as increasing the vitality of rural areas - that is, rural development. Rural policy is strongly connected to the last-mentioned. National agricultural policy aims to accelerate sustainable solutions within agriculture. These include nutrient recycling, utilisation of side streams and food production based on agroecological symbiosis, in which farms, processors of food products and energy producers collaborate locally. Sustainable solutions also include organic production and the development of smart agriculture, the latter requiring extensive high-speed telecommunications networks.

Agriculture and forestry are interlinked. Preserving biodiversity must be a key objective both in the use of forests and in agriculture. In order to safeguard biodiversity, traditional nature conservation efforts must be accompanied by operating models that work on a voluntary basis. Market-based models such as natural values trading can provide one solution to this. There is also a need to develop service models concerning ecosystem services (e.g. recreational values trading and carbon sink trading) to support the profitability of agriculture and forestry.

Peatlands and entrepreneurship related to peat have offered a significant economic base in rural areas. Phasing out the use of peat as an energy source faster than expected will affect national security of supply, at least during the transition period, and will have long-term effects on the economy of and entrepreneurship and employment in many rural municipalities. Methods for reducing emissions caused by the use of peatlands must be further developed and introduced in order to ensure that preconditions for sustainable production remain in different regions. Supporting the security of energy supply and business activities in small municipalities requires innovative measures. Market-based operating models to compensate for carbon dioxide emissions can also offer new opportunities for rural operators.

The interface between national rural policy and the forest and agricultural policies is linked to improving the operating environment of rural areas and the perspective of environmental justice. In practice, this means developing land use, infrastructure, the natural and cultural environment, and new types of services to meet societal needs and demand.

Rural policy measures:

1. Promote the consideration of the perspectives of environmental justice and local rural communities and aim to reconcile the interests of various actors in policy issues concerning agriculture and forestry.
2. Promote fair and place-based solutions to mitigate socio-economic problems caused by the energy transition and the change in the use of peatlands. Contribute to the adaptation and change of the economic structure as part of the sustainability transition and to promote new employment and income opportunities.

### **3.1.1.2 The built environment and cultural environment**

Creating and preserving comfortable housing and living environments in rural areas should be set as a goal for land use planning and the steering of construction as well as in regional and local architectural policy programmes. Planning and construction must meet the needs of both rural people and communities as well as the increasing remote work and multilocality. Constructing new buildings must be possible in rural areas, as well as safeguarding traditional construction techniques and cultural heritage. The existing building stock must be maintained. This enables strengthening the attractiveness of rural areas as an environment for housing, entrepreneurship and services alike.

From a rural policy perspective, it is important to pay more attention to the local perspective in land use planning and in the steering of construction. Planning must be based on taking into account different housing preferences, the needs of rural businesses, environmental values and the opportunities provided by different operational environments. Flexible and predictable planning and permit practices must also be used to respond to the housing preferences concerning sparsely populated areas.

More and more Finns, including young urban people, are interested in rural living. This increasing interest in the countryside increases the demand for rental housing and properties sold in rural areas. The availability of housing can be improved by marketing and utilising empty properties and by restoring buildings in a manner promoting the preservation of cultural heritage.

Rural areas have unique cultural environments that, when properly managed, create pleasant living environments and increase the attractiveness of the area. A balance must be found between protecting and exploiting the environment. Housing, agriculture and forestry and other business activities contribute to the cultural landscape and the management of the environment. Various projects, village planning and private investments can also be used to take care of the built and natural environments.

Rural policy measures:

3. Highlight experiences and practical models of smooth permit practices concerning rural areas.
4. Highlight measures for managing the cultural environment and for making versatile use of cultural heritage to strengthen local and regional vitality.

### 3.1.1.3 Water bodies and waterways

The state of Finland's water bodies affects everyone's well-being. Water bodies are a significant national resource. We make use of water bodies in our day-to-day lives, primary production, industrial production, electricity production, tourism, and recreational activities. The condition of the water bodies and the sustainability of their use affect everything from individual well-being to the national economy.

In terms of rural policy, it is important that water systems are taken care of and measures are taken in rural areas to improve the status of water systems. Projects aiming to restore water bodies both improve their ecological status and enhance the environment and economic opportunities linked to it. Water bodies can also be used and developed as waterways and serve tourism and logistics based on them. Operating models that work well should be communicated, benchmarked and their wider implementation promoted, for example, through EU co-funded activities.

## 3.1.2 Increasing local added value in the use of natural resources

Finland's business and export industries rely largely on the utilisation of natural resources located in rural areas. The utilisation of natural resources in industry and mining must be based on minimising the potential harm caused by the use of natural resources, and on allocating gained benefits to the local economies. The needs and values of local communities must be taken into account in activities that significantly change the environment. The guiding principle of economic activity should instead of relative cost-benefits of production, be, relative sustainability-benefit rate of production. This would

enable examining the direct and indirect environmental, social and cultural impacts in addition to production costs.

From a rural policy perspective, it is important that the degree of local processing of raw materials is increased. Carrying out further processing at the local level brings entrepreneurship, jobs and livelihoods to rural areas. It is also important that the development of local further processing complies with the principles of resource efficiency and the circular economy and promotes closed loop production cycles. The utilisation of research knowledge in the development of further processing is also important.

In order to minimise and compensate for potential harm and to distribute the benefits in a just way information is needed that support these actions. Also new operating models, legislative and economic steering and a change in attitudes is required. The principles of environmental justice must be more strongly integrated into legislation and the distribution of budget resources.

Rural policy measures:

5. Highlight issues on environmental justice and the impacts of the sustainable use of natural resources on the local and regional economy. Highlight the perspective of rural communities.
6. Follow and influence the preparation and implementation of the Mining Act by highlighting the perspective of sustainability and rural communities.
7. Produce knowledge about the opportunities to increase local further processing of natural raw materials.

### 3.1.3 Promoting well-being from nature

People spend more and more time and engage in increasingly versatile activities in nature. Nature is strongly associated with rural areas. Hiking, berry picking and gathering mushrooms, hunting, fishing, and other activities carried out in the wilderness all contribute to our relationship with nature, which supports our well-being. Everyman's rights enables everyone to move freely in nature, and to engage in nature activities and entrepreneurship respectful to nature.

An estimated 96 per cent of Finns spend time outdoors and the most popular recreational activities include walking, swimming, cycling, berry picking, fishing and boating<sup>7</sup>. A significant share of outdoor activities occurs in people's day-to-day lives and close to people's homes. Municipalities play a significant role in providing opportunities for outdoor activities. Hiking trails are a concrete example of the urban–rural continuum. It is important that solutions that facilitate outdoor activities, such as pedestrian walkways and nature trails, are also developed between the urban areas and rural villages in municipalities. As the number of people spending time in nature increases, it is also important to provide more information and training on nature conservation and on how to act in nature.

Finland's exceptionally extensive opportunities for hunting and fishing support people's well-being and serve as a source of income in rural areas. The number of hunting and fishing enthusiasts is high; In 2018, there were some 0.3 million hunters and some 1.5 million fishing enthusiasts. On the other hand, the members of hunting clubs are ageing. Safeguarding the prerequisites for wilderness activities promotes attracting new enthusiasts, including young people, to the hobby. This also creates conditions for sustainable service businesses based on recreational activities in the wilderness. Improving the efficiency of the permit process for less sought-after areas can also be used to promote the development of service businesses.

According to visitor surveys carried out by Metsähallitus in the period 2015–2019, 87 per cent of the visitors to nature sites feel that spending time in nature has had quite a lot or very significant impacts on their health and well-being. The number of visitors to national parks is increasing steadily. In 2020, a total of 9.2 million visits were made to state-owned areas managed by Metsähallitus. On an average each euro spent on hiking services and nature centres brings 10 euros to the local area through the money spent by the visitors. It is vital to ensure the development and maintenance of service structures and infrastructure in national parks.

To an increasing extent, the impact of nature and animal-assisted methods has been recognised and proven through research, in contexts such as rehabilitation and social support. Green care activities, which highlight the benefits brought by nature to well-being and include nature and animal-assisted services, should be taken into account more extensively in both preventive activities and in social welfare and healthcare services. Therapeutic horse riding, social pedagogical equine-assisted activities, social and

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<sup>7</sup> [National outdoor recreation demand inventory 3 pilot study](#), Natural Resources Institute Finland. (luke.fi, in Finnish)

therapeutic gardening activities and other activities such as rehabilitative work on a farm also provide opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Rural policy measures:

8. Provide more opportunities for entrepreneurship by supporting the development of service business activities based on nature and recreational activities related to nature.
9. Promote the wider adoption of natural and animal-assisted methods both in the promotion of welfare and health and in social welfare and healthcare services.

### 3.2 Rural actors – a part of the solution that is sustainable transition

A sustainable society requires a transition from a fossil economy to a sustainable bio- and circular economy. What is crucial is how we all – citizens, communities, entrepreneurs and organisations - fare at adopting sustainable solutions in our daily lives and activities. The development of solutions requires a place-based policy and development as well as extensive research and development efforts. The sustainable transition requires partnerships between different sectors and agents.

The introduction and development of sustainable bioeconomy and circular economy models will open new doors to businesses in rural areas. Utilising the side streams of industrial manufacturing processes requires both new innovations and new kinds of partnerships between various actors SMEs and microbusinesses can play a key role in introducing as well as creating models. Sustainable solutions can be developed in contexts such as the food system, energy production and tourism. The sustainable transition emphasises decentralised and hybrid models that also support security of supply.

Rural policy measures:

10. Prepare an overall view and plan of how the rural perspective will be integrated into the implementation and monitoring of sustainable development and climate policy.
11. Produce indicators that can be used to more closely monitor the progress of sustainable development in rural areas and to serve as a basis for decision-making.



### ***The bioeconomy and circular economy***

A bioeconomy refers to an economy that relies on renewable natural resources to produce food, energy, products and services. Finnish forests, fields and water bodies produce raw materials and also intangible resources that can be made use of in travel and tourism. Bioeconomy includes forestry, forest industry, chemical industry, fisheries, agriculture, food industry, pharmaceutical industry and nature tourism.

Bioeconomy involves developing and utilising innovations and technologies related to renewable natural resources. It is also perceived as a strategy for solving challenges related to climate change and structural changes.

According to a definition by the Strategic programme to promote a circular economy<sup>8</sup>, a circular economy makes efficient and sustainable use of materials, and these will remain in circulation for long and safely. Products are also shared, leased, repaired and recycled. Servicification is part of the circular economy.

The circular economy is a new operating method for the economy that generates economic well-being within the limits of the planet's carrying capacity. It utilises digitalisation efficiently and will renew the structures and operating models of society. The circular economy is a means for reducing the use of natural resources.

### **3.2.1 Building a sustainable food system**

The well-being of everyone is widely affected by a functioning food system. A sustainable food system means environmentally friendly primary production, food processing in closed loop cycles, and local food purchases that support local entrepreneurship. It also means socially acceptable distribution of income in the food chain and climate-wise logistics. It furthermore includes a diet in line with nutrition recommendations, for which everyone must be guaranteed equal opportunities. In Finland, a sustainable food system is developed as part of agricultural and food policy. Rural policy supports the objectives of the Finnish Food Policy Report 2030, the Government's Climate-friendly Food Programme, Local Food Programme, the Government programme for the Finnish organic product

<sup>8</sup> New directions: The strategic programme to promote a circular economy. Publications of the Finnish Government 2021:1 (in Finnish).

sector and the Promotion programme on domestic fish. It is important that the objectives and measures of the various programmes are consistent.

Rural policy emphasises the importance of place and retaining added value in the region. In Finland's day-care centres, schools, hospitals, nursing homes and other public cafeterias 100 meals are eaten per person every year. Within public procurement approximately 350 million euro is spent on food; of this, the share of local food ranges from one per cent (Uusimaa) to just under 50 per cent (Satakunta). In decision-making regarding public food procurement, the multiplier effects on the region's economy must be taken into account. The removal of barriers to local procurement and the promotion of dialogue between different operators can contribute to retaining added value in the region.

Local food production, processing and the utilisation of side streams support local entrepreneurship, employment, communality, and contribute to improving security of supply. In recent years, local networks of farms, food processors and bioenergy producers operating in so-called agroecological symbiosis have emerged to support the development of a sustainable food system. There is good reason for developing closed loop cycle production models, and promoting them in a manner adopted to local conditions.

Increasing interest in food, its cultivation and origin will bring consumers closer to food producers and strengthen interaction between cities and rural areas. For example, direct sales (e.g. REKO local food rings) have improved consumers' opportunities for making an impact on their environment and society through their own choices. It is important that consumers have access to the right information to support their choices and opportunities for influence. Through their choices, consumers can support local entrepreneurship and strengthen a sense of community in their local area. A constructive dialogue between consumers of different ages and backgrounds and agents in the food chain is important.

Rural policy measures:

12. Highlight the multiplier effects of public food procurement on the regional economy and strive to identify and remove barriers to local procurement, for instance, by promoting dialogue between different actors.
13. Support dialogue between consumers of different ages and the operators in the food chain, and promote models of interaction that create increased added value at the local level.

### 3.2.2 Promoting decentralised bioenergy production

It is important to utilise the side streams and closed cycles of primary production and processing in bioenergy production. Rural policy encourages open-minded development of new solutions at the pace that emerging technology allows. The current smart grid systems facilitate, for example, the self-production and sales of solar power and bioenergy, which should be promoted.

Waste and side streams such as manure and plant waste should be utilised as the primary raw material for biogas and biofuel production. Increasing bioenergy production may require expanding the area of land used for cultivation. In this case, requirements set by the sustainability criteria, the waste hierarchy and the implementation of the nutrient cycle must be taken into account. There is need to examine and assess biofuel production and opportunities for collaboration between various operators comprehensively from different perspectives. From a rural policy perspective, it is important to provide small operators with opportunities in the implementation of the national biogas programme.

Investments must be made in research and increasing competence. There is a need for promoting innovations and ensuring that the latest research findings can be utilised and translated into practical applications through experimentation. Legislative steering and resource allocation must be developed to ensure that this improves the preconditions for small-scale bioenergy production. EU legislation plays an important regulatory role in this context. Local energy communities, electricity production based on cooperatives, agroecological symbioses, bioproduct and circular economy companies as well as energy-self-sufficient farms and villages are part of the solution to a sustainable transition. The wider adoption of models must be supported to ensure that their use becomes customary. More decentralised renewable energy production supports energy self-sufficiency and security of supply while increasing competition in the sector.

Rural policy measures:

14. Examine the challenges and opportunities of decentralised energy production legislation.
15. Encourage open-mindedness towards new, decentralised energy production solutions as soon as these are facilitated by scalable technology. Encourage the development of decentralised renewable energy production and local and property-specific experiments.
16. Promote the creation of a production and distribution network for transport biogas covering the entire country and in this context ensure opportunities for small operators. Emphasise cooperation between different authorities and financiers to ensure that no operator falls between different measures.

### 3.2.3 Developing sustainable tourism

Tourism strengthens a balanced regional structure and plays a particularly important role at the local level in rural areas and archipelagos. This importance is emphasised by the dependence on location of the tourism industry: most of the jobs and locally carried out development work cannot be transferred to another country or locality. Tourism is part of rural entrepreneurship, and many rural entrepreneurs operate in a number of industries, including the tourism sector during peak seasons. The sector employs a lot of young people, representing 30 per cent of the workers. Tourism also produces diverse multiplier effects for other industries, such as the construction, food, textile and financial services industries. One euro spent by a tourist will bring an estimated 61 cent added value to other sectors.

Tourism is the only export sector in which consumption occurs in Finland and which pays value-added tax for its activities. Developing inbound tourism to Finland is an effective way of increasing income from the perspective of the national economy and the vitality of regions.

Additionally, tourism creates a wider range of more high-quality services for the local population and helps maintain the basic infrastructure which, in turn, enables the development of other businesses. Tourism that supports culture and the preservation and development of cultural heritage and environments also strengthens the cultural identity of the regions. Cultural events have positive economic, image-related and tourism impacts, which support the vitality of municipalities.

In developing the sector, special attention must be paid to competence, quality, sustainability, competitiveness, accessibility and digitalisation, and ensuring that the activities can be carried out year-round. For example, culinary tourism promotes the development of year-round tourism in rural areas. Cooperation between local residents, companies and communities, and building wider networks, is important.

The potential for environmentally sustainable tourism in rural areas is exceptionally good, as the necessary energy can be produced locally and with renewable sources. Food comes from the local area and sustainable solutions based on, for instance, the sharing economy can also be utilised in transportation. The development of sustainable tourism is closely linked to productisation and increasing knowledge and awareness.

Metsähallitus is a key central government agency operating in the counties, and the services it maintains can be utilised by nature tourism companies. National parks and their growing number of visitors and hiking trails offer companies many opportunities. Developing partnership activities enables rural companies to get more visibility and new markets for their services and products.

### ***Sustainable tourism***

Sustainable tourism refers to tourism that comprehensively takes into account current and future economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts as well as the needs of tourists, tourism companies and local communities. Taking sustainability into account increases the profitability of the sector, qualitative growth, and the positive impact of the sector on society, and guides the sector to avoid the negative impacts of tourism. In addition to environmental issues, sustainable tourism refers to socio-cultural and economic responsibility.

Rural policy measures:

17. Encourage entrepreneurs operating in rural areas to actively participate in the implementation of the visions and measures of Finland's tourism strategy and culinary tourism strategy.
18. Encourage rural enterprises to cooperate across sectoral boundaries and to commit to the principles of sustainable tourism in their own activities. Encourage companies and tourism regions to work towards attaining the Sustainable Travel Finland badge.

### **3.2.4 Strengthening national security of supply**

Rural areas can only contribute to securing Finland's security of supply if the vitality of rural areas is ensured. This requires making sure that infrastructure, access to affordable energy, critical services, business profitability and skilled labour is secured at the local level. In the context of developing security of supply, it is crucial to pay attention to the smooth flow and reliability of day-to-day life and business activities in rural areas both under normal conditions, in an incident under normal conditions, and during emergency conditions.

In Finland, security of supply is based on cooperation between the public and private sector. This cooperation involves the central government, sectoral organisations and companies critical to the functioning of society. From the perspective of rural policy, it is essential to take into account food production, energy supply, water services, health care, roads and logistics, and telecommunications.

Food supply consists of primary production, the food industry and the trade and distribution of food. In rural areas, the security of food supply can be increased by ensuring the degree of self-sufficiency in food production, the food industry and expertise in the sector. Security of supply is also supported by a sufficiently decentralised food system.

Finland's energy supply is based on decentralised energy production, versatile energy sources and a reliable transmission and distribution system. The reliability of electricity during incidents and under emergency conditions must be ensured in rural areas.

A well-functioning water supply, good quality domestic water and proper treatment of wastewater are part of the security of supply. Clean water is Finland's strength, especially in the food sector, and its availability must be safeguarded under normal conditions as well as during crises.

The health care sector is responsible for the planning and material preparedness of health care in our society. As far as health care is concerned the service network must be regionally comprehensive and personnel, equipment and materials must be available in all parts of the country.

A well-operating infrastructure, cooperation between businesses and the authorities, and transport and logistics services all contribute to safeguarding the functions of society under normal conditions, during serious incidents, and under emergency conditions. A functioning road and transport network with refuelling stations must be ensured throughout the country. Improving security of supply requires decentralised production of biofuels and a comprehensive distribution network, also in rural areas.

The threats to critical infrastructure in society increasingly concern cyber threats against information systems, including malware, data breaches, distributed denial-of-service attacks, spam, and related phenomena. Throughout the country, well-functioning and fast telecommunications networks, expertise, information security and the reliability of communications are a prerequisite for the smooth functioning and security of society.

Rural policy measures:

19. Monitor and ensure that critical rural infrastructure (roads, transport connections and logistics, electricity production and network, water services, telecommunications), food production and health care in rural areas are in good shape and that these promote Finland's security of supply. Measures aimed at strengthening security of supply are presented in sections 3.1 through 3.5.

### 3.3 Strengthening competitiveness and vitality

It is important that each region recognises the strengths of its operational environment and translates these into factors promoting vitality. For example, infrastructure, competence, operating culture and services supporting entrepreneurship, and public procurement have the potential to strengthen the vitality of the regions. Rural areas are seen as a place for a good life that will also provide opportunities for business in the future. It is important to engage in dialogue with people of different ages and backgrounds on how the interest in entrepreneurship can be realized.

Increasing the degree of processing, product development and innovation activities require educational and training services that increase competence in rural areas and improve the availability of skilled labour. Promoting the availability of competence and workforce requires the development and implementation of new platforms and operating methods. Infrastructure and structures are also important. There is a need for an ability to maintain, improve and also modify the existing infrastructure and structures for new purposes, such as a closed cycle system.

#### 3.3.1 Promoting competitiveness and vitality through effective connections

Well-functioning transport and telecommunications connections lay the foundation for interactions and cooperation between different actors and regions. Comprehensive high-speed telecommunications networks ensure equal opportunities for citizens and businesses to participate in the digital economy independent of place. In particular, fibre-optic networks have a positive effect on both the location and development of businesses as well as the demographic development of regions.

##### 3.3.1.1 Developing a transport system that serves rural areas

A functioning transport system is essential for the accessibility of different areas, for the land use planning and the regional development. The competitiveness of businesses, the development of the bioeconomy, and climate change mitigation and adaptation require developing the transport system.

The national transport system plan prepared for the first time in Finland covers all modes of transport: passenger transport and flow of goods, transport networks, services and the support functions for the transport system. It is prepared for a 12-year period (2021–2032) and updated for each government term. From the perspective of rural policy, it is important that the different conditions in rural areas and the needs of various actors in

rural areas, such as businesses, are taken into account in the implementation of the plan. For example, the bioeconomy requires well-functioning roads and functional logistics and travel chains. From a rural policy perspective, it is important to make sure that sufficiently detailed information is available on the transport needs of rural business life.

It is important to ensure the interoperability of spatial data developed in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the data environments concerning the built environment that fall under the remit of the Ministry of the Environment (development of transport and transport areas).

Rural policy measures:

20. Ensure that rural conditions and needs are taken into account in the implementation of the national transport system plan.
21. Influence the reform of the transport tax model by highlighting the needs and special features of rural areas. Produce an more detailed situation picture and knowledge base on the needs for transport in rural areas to serve as a basis for decision-making.

### **3.3.1.2 Ensuring comprehensive telecommunications networks in rural areas**

High-speed and reliable telecommunication connections significantly reduce the disadvantages caused by geographical distances activities, education and training, and the provision of services. Telecommunications networks enable place-independent work, entrepreneurship and studies, and service production. Fibre-optic network has a positive impact on local demographic development as well as business development. High-speed broadband connections with consistent quality are an investment in vitality, especially in rural areas.

The construction of fibre-optic networks has progressed more slowly than expected in Finland. As a result, the policy targets set at the national and EU level for the construction have not been achieved. The availability of optical fibre remains poor in large parts of the country and the construction of fibre optic networks has been fragmented. A comparison of high-speed fixed internet connections reveal that Finland has on of the biggest disparities in EU when it comes to connectivity in rural areas and in the country as a whole.

Improving the availability of high-speed broadband connections in areas where connections are not built on market terms still requires public support and better national coordination. The joint construction of infrastructure must also be further promoted.



Rural policy measures:

22. Ensure that the EU objectives for a Gigabit Society are achieved in Finnish rural areas.
23. Support the national coordination of the construction of high-speed broadband networks by providing relevant information.
24. Assess the socio-economic and regional economic impacts of available broadband connections from the perspective of municipalities and rural businesses. The examination concerns social welfare and health care services, education and cultural services as well as economic development and public costs vs. investments/productivity.

### 3.3.2 Responding to the transformation of work by developing competence and approaches

As part of the transformation of work, it is important to find flexible and diverse ways to anticipate competence needs. The labour needs of increasingly diverse rural businesses must be met by providing training and employment services. Dialogue between different operators is important.

Shortage of skilled labour is a key challenge in rural areas. Educational policy decisions are strongly reflected in educational opportunities and the availability of skilled labour. The concentration of education deepens disparities both within and between regions. The negative effect of this is apparent at the business and industries levels, reducing businesses' willingness to invest in and develop their operations. This reduces the vitality of the regions. Meeting the demand for workforce requires a comprehensive set of education and training, tailored training aimed at specific groups and situations, employment services oriented towards rural areas, and well-functioning labour immigration. Information on the anticipated need for skilled labour in rural areas must be provided more actively to education providers and higher education institutions.

Digital opportunities to higher education and continuous learning are developing strongly and are changing the way people think about the centralisation of education to specific regions and about the accessibility to education. Opportunities offered by digital solutions to education and learning should be made full use of in order to improve the accessibility to higher education and vocational education and training especially in sparsely populated areas.

Rural policy measures:

25. Ensure the availability of employment and business services in rural areas and especially in sparsely populated areas. Investigate and provide information about employment service and business advisory service models suitable for the operational environments of rural areas.
26. Safeguard the availability of vocational education and training and higher education in sparsely populated areas, taking into account the extensive opportunities brought to education by digital services. Investigate models that encourage cooperation between education providers. Anticipate the needs for competence and workforce in the Finnish and Swedish language in the increasingly diverse industries operating in rural areas as part of a regional process for anticipating education and competence needs.
27. Promote cooperation between vocational education and training institutes and companies. Seek and develop flexible and diverse solutions to meet different needs for competence and to foster continuous learning, making use of the opportunities brought by digitalisation.

### 3.3.3 Creating preconditions for location-independent work

Technological development and changing lifestyles and attitudes affect the work tasks and operating methods within different industries. As work is becoming increasingly independent of place, more and more people will have the opportunity to live and work in rural areas. For example, working as a specialist won't determine where one has to live in the same way as it did before. This change particularly affects the opportunities for young people, people with tertiary education and women to live and work in rural areas. The central government must be a pioneer that provides its employees with more opportunities to work remotely.

Well-functioning telecommunications free people to work wherever they want, help them in reconciling work and leisure time, and reduce emissions caused by commuting. The attractiveness of work independent of place and well-being at work can be improved with communal (remote) local workspaces, which can also serve as places for other activities, such as studies, cultural activities and business counselling.

Rural policy measures:

28. Initiate preparations of a national strategy for place-independent work and accelerating the promotion of location-independent work and recruitment.
29. Launch pilots and development activities related to work independent of place in collaboration between the public, private and third sector. Promote research related to work independent of place.
30. Promote the means of taxation to support work independent of place, including necessary facilities and procurement.

### 3.3.4 Promoting the creation of higher added value at the local level

Innovation and financial services must be able to identify the potential in rural areas in the sustainable transition and creation of vitality in all parts of Finland. Increasing the level of processing of raw materials at the local level in rural areas requires cooperation and networking, particularly with regard to product development based on scientific and practical innovations. There must be dialogue between local value chains (e.g. food, bioenergy and industrial production) and further cooperation must be developed.

Cooperation between the research and education organisations operating in the regions and rural businesses. Regional innovation systems and operational environments should also be developed based on the strengths of rural areas (smart specialisation). Innovation and learning environments can better serve both educational institutions and companies by offering facilities, machines, equipment and services to meet the needs they both have. As most vocational education and training institutions in Finland are maintained by municipalities or joint municipal authorities, municipalities can contribute to expanding and deepening this cooperation.

Increasing the degree of processing and developing new innovations requires business advise, consulting, financing and internationalisation services that recognise the special features of business activities in rural areas. The development of services can be implemented using a multi-producer model. It is important to have easy access to advisory services, and financing services and application of different forms of financing that seamlessly respond to different needs. These must be easily available at both the start-up and expansion stage of businesses. The services that support entrepreneurship must be available in both Finnish and Swedish.

Crowdfunding provides one opportunity for start-ups and growth businesses in rural areas. The growth of the SME sector in rural areas is limited by the lack of risk financing elements. More private sector risk financing must be attracted to rural areas, which

requires awakening the interest of investors. The public authorities must lead the way information about sustainable business opportunities in rural areas must be widely provided to potential investors. In addition to the economic added value, the wider aspects of the transition to a sustainable society, biodiversity and work related to climate must also be highlighted.

The platform economy is one manifestation of a connected world. There is reason to increase the use of the business models and forms of the platform economy as part of increasing the degree of processing, product development and innovation activities in rural areas. New models must boldly be tested and developed

An operating culture and open networks that encourage economic activity increase the vitality of places and regions. They attract new actors. The interest in rural businesses and reorganisation and generational handovers concerning them can be increased through an encouraging operating culture. It is important to recognise young people's dreams of entrepreneurship and to take measures in order for them to be achieved.

Rural areas have a large number of ageing entrepreneurs representing a variety of sectors. Generational successions and changes in ownership provide opportunities for both young people and others interested in entrepreneurship in rural areas. Opportunities must be widely provided and marketed. To support entrepreneurship, there is a need for the aforementioned services to function properly. A change of ownership can be a tool for growth and internationalisation for a well-functioning business. It may also provide one alternative for establishing a new business.

Rural policy measures:

31. Explore the possibility of creating a compensation system for regional and local competitive advantages, i.e. a region-specific and location-specific investment programme for public funds that supports equality of opportunity in different regions. The investment programme must promote the creation of new activities (instead of maintaining existing ones, as is the case with the system of central government transfers to local government). The aim is that in the future, the regions will have structurally, economically and operationally equal opportunities for creating innovations, increasing the degree of processing, and creating a sustainable knowledge economy and higher added value.
32. Bring the rural perspective and the viewpoints of businesses located in rural areas to the implementation of the road map drawn up based on the national Entrepreneurship Strategy.

33. Make efforts to ensure that business and innovation services and funding can better reach businesses operating in rural areas. Examine the possibilities of accessing risk funding.
34. Influence the development of services and different operating models that promote changes in ownership in rural businesses together with stakeholders.
35. Encourage education providers to develop entrepreneurship education strategies at different levels of education to ensure that these promote increasing entrepreneurship-related content in curricula and education in diverse ways and taking the special features of rural areas into account.

### 3.3.5 Strengthening sustainability and the regional economy through public procurement

Public procurement plays a key role in promoting entrepreneurship and employment and in strengthening vitality and regional economies. It can also be used to support sustainable development goals. [The National Public Procurement Strategy](#)<sup>9</sup> is used to promote the social impact of public funds and the sustainability of public finances.

The recent trend of creating larger procurement organisations brings both challenges and opportunities to suppliers and local businesses. Selection criteria or conditions that support choices that are sustainable to the environment and climate, and take responsible production and operating methods into account may be used in procurements. From the perspective of rural actors, it is important that joint public procurements or large procurement pools can be carried out by area or product group. A prerequisite for successful procurement is that the contracting entity knows the market and engages in dialogue with local market operators.

Carrying out responsible procurement requires, first and foremost, developing procurement competence in both procurement units and businesses. Developing procurement competence results in more courage to use different procurement methods and participate in competitive tendering processes. It is also important to build a culture of open innovation between the private and public sectors. Close interaction between the parties encourages healthy risk-taking and learning by trial and error. This will promote creating small and local new, innovative procurement as well as sharing good practices. In this work, everyone involved (entrepreneurial organisations, municipal business and development companies, public contracting entities, municipal decision-makers) plays an important role.

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<sup>9</sup> [National Public Procurement Strategy 2020](#) (valtioneuvosto.fi, in Finnish)

### ***Influencing vitality through public procurement***

Public procurement is carried out by the central government, municipalities and joint municipal authorities, unincorporated state enterprises and other contracting entities specified in the procurement legislation. Procurement covers supplies, services and construction projects that are procured outside the organisation. Public procurement in Finland amounts to around EUR 35 billion each year.

Rural policy measures:

36. Produce information about the socio-economic, regional and local economic impacts of public procurement, as well as information to support competence related to procurement in SMEs (participation in competitive tendering). Examine the actual possibilities of SMEs in rural areas to participate in quality assurance systems.
37. Make efforts to strengthen and increase short supply chains, participation of rural SMEs in competitive tendering and local employment.

### **3.3.6 Smart adaptation as an alternative strategy for diminishing regions**

The future prospects for rural areas are diverse. Developing them requires different strategies. It would be unrealistic to think that all regions will continuously keep growing. An approach known as Smart adaptation (or Smart Shrinking) challenges us to think in an alternative way. It offers a perspective on looking at vitality more broadly compared to traditional thinking models.

Smart adaptation is based on learning to manage change in areas with a declining population. Adaptation measures and new innovative solutions and development measures are used to respond to the change. The examination of vitality also takes into account people's perceived well-being and experience of good life. Change is managed by understanding and taking into consideration the fact that all dimensions of sustainable development - social, economic, ecological and cultural - are interrelated.

To support different strategies, there is a need for a resourceful way of thinking and acting. We need a broader knowledge base that takes into account aspects such as increasing

multilocality, location-independent work, and the development of a digital society as well as the local residents' views of what a good life entails. As a concept and a set of practices, smart adaptation provides approaches that enable promoting the transition to a sustainable society. Smart adaptation must be applied at different regional levels, from the national to the local level.

Rural policy measures:

38. Create a model and a regionally applicable road map for smart shrinking.
39. Enhance the compilation of statistics concerning different types of rural areas and the utilisation of spatial data in municipal and regional development.

### 3.4 Ensuring a smooth everyday life

In a fair society equal opportunities are created in order for people to live good lives, regardless of where they live. Housing, work and entrepreneurship in rural areas can only be successful if the infrastructure works, and public and private services are available and accessible. This also requires acknowledging linguistic rights when developing services. In prioritising public services<sup>10</sup>, it is important to ensure that residents in rural areas actually have the access to use digital services. Telecommunications networks and systems that work reliably are required.

Changes in service structures and population development in rural areas require new approaches in the development of service production. Civil society actors play in addition to public and private actors an important role in the provision of local services as well as in preventive health care and promotion of well-being.

It is crucial to ensure that bilingual regions and the Åland Islands have enough personnel with adequate Swedish language skills and services provided in Swedish. This is particularly the case concerning social welfare and healthcare services, education services and security services.

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10 [Act on the Provision of Digital Services 306/2019 \(finlex.fi, in Finnish and in Swedish\)](#)

### ***Services that ensure smooth everyday life***

Infrastructure and transport, social welfare and healthcare are at the core of basic services as well as early childhood education and care, education and training and libraries. Cultural, youth and sports services and security services are also vital for a smooth everyday life. Security services comprise the police, rescue services, emergency services and the Border Guard. Other important services include grocery shops, pharmacies, postal and banking services.

#### **3.4.1 Safeguarding services with new operating models and through cooperation**

Service provision must be based on the needs of different population groups. New solutions and community-led models must be sought in order to ensure the provision of services needed on a daily basis in rural areas. Digital services expand the possibilities of organising and producing services and promotes accessibility in rural areas.

The services available in rural areas should be developed as part of the broader development of service systems at the municipal, regional and national level. This requires a transition to a comprehensive examination of the service network, in which service needs and skill requirements of the personnel as well as language minorities' perspectives are taken into account. When the process of designing a service network is realised as an inclusive and collaborative project for the municipality or a wider cooperation area it creates opportunities for developing new operating models and partnerships. At the same time, the process will self-assess and evolve.

Significant national reforms concerning rural services include the health and social services reform as well as the reform of the transport system. Issues concerning the school network are also crucial from the perspective of a smoothly running everyday life and the well-being of families and children in rural areas.

Place-based service models, partnerships and different pilotes must be enabled and promoted through policy and by public authorities. Services must be ensured and developed by utilising different means of service provision, such as technology and the models for mobile services as well as by developing multi-service centres. Multilocality is increasing and the seasonal variation in the number of rural residents and their impacts on service needs must be taken into account when developing services.



Attention must be paid to ensuring and developing the availability and accessibility of services in rural areas. The public responsibility for organising services such as healthcare and social services can be realised through cooperation between the public, private and third sector, taking into account the constraints set by legislation, can be produced in cooperation with the public sector, companies and organisations, taking into account the constraints set by<sup>11</sup>, for example through outsourcing or the use of service vouchers<sup>12</sup>. A multi-producer model is particularly needed to ensure social welfare and healthcare services in rural areas. Availability and accessibility of early childhood education and care services is important in order to ensure regional and gender equality and to safeguard the best interest of children living in rural areas. Place-based solutions can be implemented within the framework of legislation<sup>13</sup> and local entrepreneurship and communal service production can be utilised. Research into the use of a multi-producer model in providing various services in rural areas can support decision making.

Possibilities for introducing the Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI)<sup>14</sup> must be explored in cases where necessary basic services are not provided for by the public sector nor the private sector. This would ensure the service by commissioning companies to produce tailored services and paying for these from public funds. So far, general SGEI regulation has been used very little in Finland, in practice only at the central government level based on special legislation. However, SGEI regulation can be used at local, regional and national levels.

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11 [Act on Service Vouchers in Social Welfare and Health Care Services 569/2009](https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2009/20090569) [https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2009/20090569], [Local Government Act 410/2015](https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2015/20150410?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=kuntalaki) [https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2015/20150410?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=kuntalaki] and [Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018](https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2018/20180540?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=540%2F2018) (finlex.fi, in Finnish and Swedish) [https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2018/20180540?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=540%2F2018]

12 [Act on Service Vouchers in Social Welfare and Health Care Services 569/2009](https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2009/20090569) (finlex.fi, in Finnish and Swedish) [https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2009/20090569]

13 Under the [Act on Early Childhood Education and Care n \(540/2018\)](https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2018/20180540), municipalities are obligated to organise early childhood education and care. The centre-based early education activities and family-based day-care referred to in the Act may be organised by and produced for the organising party by a municipality, joint municipal authority or a private service provider. Early childhood education and care may be organised and produced as the municipality's own activities, outsourced service, service voucher activities and under a private day-care allowance. When procuring services from another service provider, the procuring municipality or joint municipal authority shall ensure the services being procured meet the standards required for an equivalent municipally organised activity.

14 [Palveluvelvoite maaseudulla– SGEI palvelujen järjestämisen työkaluna](https://www.tem.fi/) (tem.fi, in Finnish).

Rural policy measures:

40. Examine and promote the introduction of the SGEI procedure for those essential services (e.g. a broadband network) that are not provided on market terms.
41. Produce rural data for a comprehensive examination of the services network. Promote the introduction of service network planning and support the implementation of the planning process as a joint inclusive and partnership project.
42. Develop indicators that take multilocality into account and promote the use of them within the process of designing service structures.

#### 3.4.1.1 Developing multi-service centres

Local services in rural areas can be ensured by developing multi-service centres in villages and rural centres. These may operate in connection with village shops, village houses, local schools or other shared facilities. Multi-service centres enable public, private and third sector services to be brought closer to people in rural areas, as well as the development of communal entrepreneurship and remote work. Coworking spaces and service concepts related to them can be part of multi-service centre activities.

As a result of cuts to the service network, retail, postal and pharmacy services have deteriorated in rural areas. On the other hand, as e-commerce has increased in recent years, the availability of online services has been improved and commercial activities independent of place have been enabled in rural areas. More versatile village shop services have also made up for the reduced service network.

The number of grocery stores has decreased, especially in sparsely populated rural areas. Some village shops have developed into versatile service centres. In addition to daily goods, the service centres also offer the aforementioned services as well as hardware and agricultural products, and tourism and restaurant services. It is also important to develop shops-on-wheels and other mobile shop services in rural areas.

A village shop subsidy experiment aimed at safeguarding and improving the versatility of services introduced in Finland in 2019 has promoted the availability and vitality of services available in sparsely populated rural areas. The subsidy is subject to the condition that in addition to groceries, shops must be committed to offer at least one of the following services: postal service, cash withdrawal service, pharmacy service or fuel distribution service.

Rural policy measures:

43. Develop activities and funding models for multi-service centres.
44. Carry out local and regional pilots in order to develop rural services and multi-service centres that answer to the place-based needs of permanent residents of different ages, part-time residents, and needs related to multilocality and remote work.
45. Promote the introduction and dissemination of service innovations in rural areas, such as self-service shops and mobile shop services.

### 3.4.1.2 Promoting the availability and accessibility of health and social services

The reform of the social welfare and healthcare service system (hereinafter referred to as the health and social services system) has had a multifaceted impact on social welfare and health services in rural areas. At best, the transfer of responsibility for the provision of health and social services from municipalities to wider wellbeing services counties has diversified the range of services and the competence of staff. It has also reduced the challenges related to staff availability. The complexity and continuous changes in the health and social services and the fact that service units are located further away have, on the other hand, reduced the accessibility to services. This has also been partly influenced by a decline of public transport connections as well as by inadequate telecommunication networks at the regional and local levels.

The aim of the health and social services reform is to reduce health and well-being inequalities, and to ensure equal and high-quality health and social services for all Finns<sup>15</sup>. In the context of the health and social services reform, it is important to assess the impact of the changes made on the availability and accessibility of services in rural areas. The evaluation of impacts concerning the service network in rural areas gains particular emphasis in the context of legislative drafting and decision-making. The evaluation process must involve different population groups in rural areas and acknowledge place-based conditions.

The opportunities provided by digitalisation play a key role in the development of health and social services. In the context of e-health and social services, it is vital to ensure that the people of rural areas have a genuine opportunity to use consistent and safe Internet connections.

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15 [Health and social services reform \(soteuudistus.fi\)](#)

Models for the provision of health and social services suitable for rural areas should be accelerated and introduced more extensively than at present. These include mobile services, multi-service points, field work, e-services and solutions based on combining services. In developing services opportunities brought by digitalisation should be utilised more extensively.

The public sector, private businesses and third sector organisations are all needed in order to provide healthcare and social services for residents in rural areas. The development of services must be carried out open-mindedly in cooperation between different actors and across sectoral boundaries. Small businesses in the health and social services sector complement the rural service network. There is a need to develop the opportunities provided by village houses and other communal facilities as hubs for e-services and local companies in healthcare and social services. In rural areas, organisations play an important role both in preventive work and as producers of social services.

The increasing multilocality of people and seasonal variation in local population must be noted when health and social services are developed. As a result of a seasonal spike in part-time residents, the number of people multiplies in some municipalities during peak seasons. This may increase the need for healthcare and social services, especially in municipalities with a lot of summer cottages.

Rural policy measures:

46. Highlight the rural perspective and using the tool for rural proofing in connection with the reforming health and social service structures.
47. Highlight and promote the acknowledgement of the competence and resources found in rural businesses and organisations within rural service production (e.g. promoting the introduction of service vouchers).

### 3.4.1.3 Ensuring contact instruction for children and young people

In Finland, municipalities are responsible for the provision of basic education. The starting point for the provision of basic education is the local school principle, according to which every child of compulsory education age has the right to education located as close to their home as possible. Between 2000 and 2018, 1,676 primary schools have been closed down, amounting to nearly 42 per cent<sup>16</sup>. The reduction of the basic education network has particularly concerned small schools with under 50 pupils, i.e. those mainly located in

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<sup>16</sup> Nyyssölä, Kari & Timo Kumpulainen (2020). Future outlook for basic education and the school network. Reports and studies 2020:25. Finnish National Agency for Education (in Finnish).

rural areas and Finland's archipelagos, therefore especially affecting children living in rural areas. According to calculations by the Natural Resources Institute Finland, the final local school in a rural area will close its doors in 2032 if prompt action isn't taken.

Enabling families with children to live in or move to rural areas requires the provision of early childhood education and care and school services as local services. With regard to school network solutions, it must be ensured that the statutory maximum distance to basic education is not exceeded. The Rural Policy Council (2016–2020) has proposed that school commutes be made more reasonable in that a daily school commute, including waiting periods, would have the maximum duration of 1.5 hours for pre-primary education and primary school pupils (pupils under 13 years of age)<sup>17</sup>. The maximum duration of 2.5 hours allowed by currently valid legislation is considered unreasonable.

The national core curriculum for basic education acknowledges that teaching can be provided utilising remote communications<sup>18</sup>. The school network and education provision can be developed by making use of and promoting available technologies. Rural areas can introduce solutions that utilise remote connections to complement contact instruction in an effort to improve the accessibility of instruction and the availability of provided education. Cooperation between municipalities, versatile use of buildings and digital solutions should be developed, tested and introduced. The expertise found in the Finnish school system concerning rural areas could also be developed into a globally significant export.

In addition to primary education, we must seek ways to safeguard upper secondary education for young people living in rural areas. Measures can include multiform teaching and distance learning solutions that complement contact instruction, and cooperation between schools. In municipalities without any upper secondary education institutions, young people are at a greater risk of completing only primary education. In such municipalities, young people need special support in applying for further education. Young people also need support related to travel and living in a different locality.

Opportunities for general upper secondary and vocational education and training can be promoted through business cooperation and by organising apprenticeship training, which enables young people to complete qualifications in local companies. Good practices of educational cooperation suitable for companies operating in rural areas should be shared. Workplace education and training should be supported by strengthening the

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17 [Maaseutupolitiikan neuvoston kannanotto 8.4.2019: Maaseutukoulut osa lapsiystävällistä kouluverkkoa - opetuksen tila ja tulevaisuus maaseuduilla selvítettävä](#) (maaseutupolitiikka.fi, in Finnish)

18 [Etäopetus uudessa perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelmassa](#) (etaopetus.fi, in Finnish)

resources for guidance and competence and operating approaches of both teachers and representatives of working life.

Rural policy measures:

48. Carry out an evaluation of the impacts of closing down rural schools on children's educational and social rights and the vitality of the areas.
49. Promote pilots that increase opportunities for distance learning/flexible distance learning arrangements by utilising both digital solutions and the multifunctionality of buildings, enabling a more diverse use of them. Aim to achieve a geographically comprehensive school network that recognises regional differences.
50. Promote cooperation related to teaching and facilities between municipalities, companies and different levels of education.

#### **3.4.1.4 Supporting diverse cultural and leisure time activities**

Cultural and leisure services support people's inclusion and well-being. It is important that rural residents have access to cultural, library, sports and youth services. They must also have the opportunity to influence how these are developed. From the perspective of socio-cultural sustainability, it is important that resources are allocated to these activities.

Public libraries are the most popular cultural service used in municipalities. Libraries reach a large proportion of rural people and serve as important meeting places where various services are provided. The library network consists of municipal main libraries, local libraries, mobile libraries and other service points. It is important that library services can also be accessed online independent of place. Adult education centres are important environments for recreation and learning in rural areas. They support the well-being of local residents and complement other available education and training in a versatile manner. For example, it is important to provide rural residents with training on IT use in order to support their digital citizenship.

Rural regions and villages have numerous museums, concert halls, theatres (including summer theatres), village and club houses and other cultural services, all of which contribute to making rural areas more lively. They are also factors that draw tourism to rural areas.

Rural policy measures:

51. Contribute to ensuring that the funding of municipal cultural activities will also cover cultural activities in rural villages and organisations. Promote the development of the compilation of statistics on cultural activities to give visibility to cultural activities by organisations operating in rural areas.
52. Develop the availability of library, cultural, sports and youth services and training available at adult education centres in rural areas, utilising digitalisation and new forms of cooperation.

#### 3.4.1.5 Developing sustainable transport services

In rural areas, especially in sparsely populated ones, distances are long and there is hardly any public transport left. In fact, the efforts to cut the emissions caused by transport must acknowledge the actual opportunities for mobility in rural areas as well as regional and social impacts. It is important that the measures do not cause undue harm to anyone.

In its preparatory work concerning the government resolution on reducing domestic transport-related greenhouse gas emissions (known as the Roadmap for fossil-free transport), the Ministry of Transport and Communications has paid attention to regional and social fairness as part of its impact assessments. This assessment has addressed the possible side effects of the measures and the need to compensate for the harm caused. A key issue to consider in the currently prepared resolution is the fact that the proposed measures have different emphases in cities and rural areas. In urban areas and the transport connecting cities, the focus is on curbing the increase in the use of passenger cars and directing this growth to sustainable modes of transport. In rural areas, driving a car is practically necessary and often the only option for transport. For this reason, achieving the climate objectives set for transport requires replacing cars with lower-emission vehicles and power sources. The measures must acknowledge the solvency of households, the coverage of charging and refuelling stations and the suitability of the vehicles for Finland's various climate conditions and operational environments.

Transport in rural areas must be developed through place-based intelligent transport solutions. The development of multi-service centres may also support the provision of connected travel services. Travel chains combining different modes of transport should be developed to be more practical for rural residents, recreational residents, tourists and companies alike. It is important to promote the development and implementation of mobility services in municipalities through experiments, joint development and digitalisation.

The development and introduction of bus connections that use biogas and electricity to rural transport services is important, as is developing rail transport. There is a need for rail connections and integrated bus connections in rural areas. Public transport connections and multimodal travel chains are essential for both permanent and part-time residents, entrepreneurs and tourists in rural areas. In the future, electrified air traffic will also support sustainable mobility.

The public sector, especially municipalities, plays an important role in a smooth transition to sustainable mobility. As an employer, the public sector can provide employee benefits, such as electric vehicle charging points (including full electric cars and plug-in hybrids) utilising the existing infrastructure. There is also need to develop pedestrian and bicycle routes suitable for rural areas and landscapes, for example between municipal centres and village centres, and in the vicinity of primary schools. These increase sustainable mobility, support residents' well-being and are also important for tourism.

Rural policy measures:

53. Highlight sustainable transport service models that acknowledge the special features of rural areas and the needs of rural residents, and promoting their introduction and increasing the prevalence of vehicles using alternative power sources.

#### **3.4.1.6 Ensuring infrastructure necessary for everyday life**

The basis for smooth day-to-day life and accessibility is a well-functioning road network and telecommunications connections, and affordable electricity, including transfer charges. Clean water and water supply are also an essential part of people's everyday lives. A well-functioning infrastructure also fosters multilocality and remote work. It promotes the capability of a place to attract and hold onto residents.

Finland's road network covers a total of 480,000 km, including 370,000 km of private roads, 80,000 km of state-owned roads and 30,000 km of municipal streets. The repair backlog amounts to EUR 1.4 billion. The accessibility of rural areas is particularly undermined by the deterioration of the secondary road network and related repair backlog as well as the shortcomings in maintaining and servicing private roads. Road network planning, cooperation between different operators and sufficient funding for construction and maintenance ensure a comprehensive road network for rural areas. The secondary road network is significant for the entire society.

Well-functioning telecommunications, including mobile phone connections, are a part of the basic infrastructure comparable to the road network, electricity and water. Building a



digital infrastructure and prerequisites for using it in a manner that covers all regions and areas is necessary for citizens' equality and inclusion. When building digital services, it is essential to recognise the accessibility of the services and the functionality of connections regardless of place.

Water and waste management are part of smoothly running ordinary life for rural residents and entrepreneurs. The special features of water services in rural areas and the need to rebuild the water supply network must be taken into account in the national reform of Finland's water services. The reform must also acknowledge the development needs of rural water cooperative networks and small water utilities, resources and ensuring competence. The activities can be developed through means such as training on infrastructure management.

Necessary infrastructure for day-to-day life includes the building stock and various communal spaces in rural areas. Taking care of the building stock, and maintaining and repairing facilities is important. Communal facilities enable diverse activities and support entrepreneurship, communality and the development of civic activities.

Rural policy measures:

54. Ensure that the broadband infrastructure is identified as part of the basic infrastructure and that the central government takes more responsibility for broadband construction, its coordination and investment costs.
55. Promote the development of training related to environmental services and the maintenance, service and repair of the infrastructure in rural areas.

#### **3.4.1.7 Developing operating models and networks for everyday security**

Well-operating security services are vital in rural and particularly sparsely populated areas. An experience of security and safety in people's day-to-day lives also emerges from measures targeting the root causes of security, which increase people's well-being and the prevention of crimes, disturbances and accidents in daily life. People perceive rural areas as a safe place to live. This is particularly promoted by a strong sense of community and people's personal capabilities for encountering and coping with incidents.

As a result of the concentration of the population, the resources of safety authorities, including the police, have been focused on growth centres and regions with higher

population density<sup>19</sup>. While the national average response times for emergency tasks have remained at the previous level, there are some municipalities, particularly in sparsely populated areas, in which it takes a worrying time for the authorities to arrive at a scene of an incident. However, these municipalities typically have a very low number of such incidents at the annual level. Above all, the centralisation of services is a consequence of a shift in the population, which is reflected as changes in the location of service needs. The situation has been partly corrected by the increase in police resources made during the Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government and their allocation of these resources to sparsely populated areas in particular. In border regions and sparsely populated areas, more emphasis is placed on effective cooperation between the police, rescue services, emergency services, the Border Guard and civil society in ensuring security.

The service network for rescue services is comprehensive at the national level. Well over half of the country's fire stations are used by contract fire brigade crews. The contract fire brigade crews are a significant part of rescue services at the national level, and they play a vital role in organising rescue services in rural areas. Contract fire brigades and volunteer fire departments also play an important role in providing recreational activities and meaningful inclusion for young people. In the future, it will be important to ensure that the contract fire brigade will succeed in obtaining enough members qualified to participate in emergencies to safeguard brigade crew operations.

Both municipalities and organisations play a key role in maintaining and promoting everyday safety in rural areas. Strong personal initiative, caring and a sense of community are strengths that, together with public services, lay the foundation for security and a sense of safety. Rescue teams in villages provide important additional help in emergencies. The capabilities of rescue teams must be developed in cooperation with the authorities and organisational actors. Village houses can be developed into centres for preparedness and security which provide safety information and equipment and which can also serve as evacuation centres for residents if necessary.

In municipalities, welfare and safety plans can be drawn up as comprehensive plans and further into concrete action plans together with a broad collaboration network. It is also important to strengthen people's own capabilities for maintaining their own safety. There is a need for preparedness and security training for rural residents and communities.

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<sup>19</sup> [Safety and security in sparsely populated areas 2020. Report on the situation of safety and security in sparsely populated areas. Ministry of the Interior publications 2020:15 \(in Finnish\).](#)

Rural policy measures:

56. Questions concerning sparsely populated areas are reviewed in the national collaboration network for internal safety. Engage rural civil society actors in the development of national security services.
57. Further develop the regional security networks consisting of the authorities, municipalities and regional village associations and their collaboration in preventive actions, crises and aftercare measures in rural areas. Develop the capabilities of rescue teams in villages as part of this cooperation.
58. Activate residents for independent preparedness and maintaining safety by organising preparedness and safety training in rural areas.

### 3.4.2 Strengthening communal activities that promote well-being

Place- and community-based care and services can be developed in rural areas. Civil society actors, especially organisations, play an important role in preventive efforts and the work to promote well-being in rural areas. They also play an increasing role in the production of local services.

#### 3.4.2.1 Strengthening the role of the rural civic society in promoting welfare

Civil society plays an increasingly central role in society and in creating welfare. In rural areas, this involves the activities of local associations and village communities that aim to support the well-being, social inclusion and health and functional capacity of residents. The role and potential of those contributing to civic society should be recognised and taken into consideration in the work to promote welfare and health in municipalities and wellbeing services counties. In building new partnerships, it is also important to acknowledge that, alongside the healthcare and social services organisation, the key operators in rural areas include many other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as village associations, pensioners' organisations, sports associations and cultural associations.

However, there are regional and local differences in NGO activity, and these should also be acknowledged. Some rural areas have very little active local associations: in many places, the number of members and active participants is dwindling and the people are ageing. Especially in such rural areas, the extensive efforts to promote welfare should also strengthen the field of NGOs.

The activities of civil society are essential for the well-being of residents of all ages in rural areas. Communal civic activities also support a sense of social belonging. Development

measures and resources must be allocated to the activities of civil society. It should also be noted that the activities cannot be based solely on voluntary work.

Rural policy measures:

59. Promote the strengthening and development of NGO work, especially in areas with scant local association activities.
60. Further develop municipal and regional partnership roundtables to promote cooperation between the public and private sector as well as the representatives of NGOs in preventive work and the efforts made to improve well-being in rural areas.

### 3.4.2.2 Promoting social service production and social entrepreneurship

Active village communities and associations are taking on an increasingly significant role in securing and developing local services by means of communal service production. This is achieved for example by intensifying cooperation between villages or by establishing communal social enterprises. Many larger village centres have also established village associations and are looking for new solutions and partnership models to preserve local services and vitality. In the future, a partnership between the public, private and third sectors in the production of services will create new opportunities for rural areas.

Safeguarding services in rural areas will increasingly require approaches that enable operating with low funds and whose primary aim is not to make profits but to provide services and contribute to the public interest. These services can be produced by associations or social enterprises operating as cooperatives. There is a growing interest among young people in value-based business, which aims at making a reasonable living rather than huge profits.

The activities of civil society can integrate voluntary work and paid employment, ideology and professionalism as well as non-profit activities and market competition. Membership in a cooperative can bring together local associations and companies, permanent and recreational residents, and the municipality.

As part of the development of social entrepreneurship, it is important to increase its social status. Legislation and contract practices must be used to clarify the differences between voluntary activities, social entrepreneurship and traditional business activities, drawing on European models. Competition legislation must acknowledge the overall impacts of social entrepreneurship on the regional economy and properties that promote the sustainability transition of our society.

Rural policy measures:

61. Incorporate the rural perspective in the national discussion on social entrepreneurship. Create prerequisites for the development of cooperatives and social enterprises in rural areas.
62. Explore the opportunities for creating a financial instrument for supporting service production by villages in addition to non-governmental and business funding.

### 3.5 Strengthening inclusion and a sense of community in rural areas

The foundation of a socially sustainable society is a well-functioning democracy, active people and decision-making that takes future generations into account. Promoting inclusion is one of the key means to combat poverty, inequality and exclusion. It also has a strong link with people's well-being and health, which contributes to the vitality of the regions.

Inclusion can be perceived as nested circles consisting of a person's inclusion in his or her own life, local community and the processes of exerting social influence<sup>20</sup>. Inclusion in one's own life requires being heard and seen as well as an experience of being part of a community and society.

Inclusion in one's local community is built on encounters and social relationships. Local interactions strengthen the community's social capital and create security in day-to-day life. Inclusion in the processes of societal influence requires opportunities to affect the decision-making concerning one's own living environment, services and society.

#### 3.5.1 Strengthening communality and civic activities

Strengthening the sense of community at the local level, taking different generations into account creates social capital, which generates common good both at the local and societal level. At best, this social capital will also be translated into economic and political capital.

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20 Isola, Anna-Maria, Heidi Kaartinen, Lars Leemann, Raija Lääperi, Taina Schneider, Salla Valtari & Anna Keto-Tokoi (2017) *Mitä on osallisuus? Osallisuuden viitekehystä rakentamassa*. Working paper 33/2017. Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (in Finnish).

Social capital needs structures that support communality and civic activities. In rural areas, the Leader approach is used to introduce development activities, activate and channel resources and build networks between actors. Village activities serve as the foundation of community-led local development. Communal facilities, such as village houses, are important places for encounters and gathering. They also strengthen commitment to the community at the same time. In addition to village associations, other types of associations operating in rural areas, such as hunting clubs, youth clubs, 4-H associations and cultural associations, maintain and develop communality. It is essential to ensure the prerequisites for these activities. Religious communities, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church, also play an important role in maintaining and promoting the resources within local communities.

Strengthening communality and civic activity in rural areas requires providing funding for NGO activities, more flexible bureaucracy and the development of new communal practices. Development measures must be particularly targeted at the younger generation and those who have newly relocated to a rural area, who are often active, to ensure their involvement in civic activities. The activities of NGOs in rural areas can also be strengthened by merging small local associations, which can link existing resources, develop activities and reduce the administrative burden. In addition to organised NGO activities, it is important to recognise people's growing interest in ad hoc activities and social media activism, or so-called fourth sector activities.

In order to strengthen the communal structures of rural areas, it is important to support the inclusion of different population groups, such as older people, young people, people living alone, and immigrants. As the population ages, it is important to strengthen and support the participation and functional capacity of older people. The participation of young people in villages and municipalities must also be supported. Young people should be heard and they should be given the means to create forms of involvement that appeal to themselves. At the regional level, Leader youth divisions and youth projects serve as channels for promoting the inclusion of young people.

As multilocality increases it will be even more important to acknowledge the involvement of multilocal people, for example part-time residents in collective activities.

Rural policy measures:

63. Develop communal structures and NGO activities in rural areas by strengthening networks and expertise in the communities and associations operating in rural areas: work to promote inclusion and partnerships, communication, section work forums.
64. Promote the opportunities for civil society action in rural areas by strengthening existing financial instruments and by exploring new ones. Examine the impacts of public funding for civic activities in rural areas.
65. Promote community-led local development (CLLD) at the national level, with development targets including informal civic activities, i.e. the fourth sector.

### 3.5.2 Ensuring opportunities to participate and impact

People and communities in rural areas need genuine opportunities to participate in and make an impact on the decision-making concerning their living environment, services and society. It is particularly important to hear the voices that are usually left unheard. This requires developing opportunities for participation and exerting influence at the municipal, regional and national levels.

Ongoing administrative and service structure reforms increase the need to strengthen participation in general. New forms of inclusion must be developed alongside the structures of representative democracy. People and communities in rural areas must have the opportunity to participate in the planning, evaluation and development of services concerning them. Permanent and genuine opportunities for participation must be created in municipalities and the forthcoming wellbeing services counties. Methods for promoting the participation of residents and communities in practice include discussion and consultation sessions, partnership roundtables, different population or customer groups, co-creation, service design, participatory budgeting and dialogue. A customer-driven service system approach won't be achieved without regularly collected, up-to-date data about the needs of rural residents and their satisfaction with services. It is important to regularly collect data on perceived well-being in order to support planning, implementation and monitoring of strategies.

The dimensions of regional inclusion must be taken into consideration when promoting inclusion in municipalities, regions and counties, and at the national level. This means ensuring that the people of rural areas are represented in various committees. The location and connections regarding consultation and discussion sessions must enable participation in rural areas. By developing smart solutions, such as interactive and location-independent e-participation models, residents' participation can be advanced in

preparatory work and political decision making processes concerning them. Opportunities for participation must be developed in a manner that ensures that everyone involved knows the goal of their participation. This will make inclusion a goal-oriented process of exerting influence.

Indicators and evaluation tools that measure inclusion must be developed. Inclusion must also be examined per region type. This examination should pay attention to the special issues concerning rural areas related to inclusion and to a sufficient level of detail in the provided information.

Rural policy measures:

66. Develop the structures and operating models that support the inclusion of rural residents and communities in villages, municipalities and counties. Develop the operating models that support inclusion to ensure that the voices of those who are not usually heard will also be taken into account. Take existing structures into account in the development efforts.
67. Promote rural proofing (MVA) and the partnership roundtable model in municipalities and regions to support the processes of inclusion in the drafting of issues and in decision-making.
68. Develop models for smart participation based on digitalisation and, through these, promote rural residents' opportunities for making an impact at the local, regional and national level. Particularly strengthening the inclusion of young people.
69. Produce data for the development of inclusion indicators and assessment tools from a rural perspective.
70. Support constructive and inclusive discussion in municipalities, counties and regions.

### **3.5.3 Supporting the role of rural residents in the sustainability transition**

As part of social sustainability and inclusion, it must be ensured that rural residents and communities are involved in the transition to a sustainable society. Regardless of their place of residence, citizens must be provided with concrete and genuine opportunities for sustainable lifestyles. This requires regionally balanced development of societal structures that support sustainable day-to-day life and activities.

The opportunities for people in rural areas to make sustainable choices on housing, mobility and food must be supported with concrete measures. Developing measures



requires more place-based information, as the sustainable solutions used in day-to-day life may vary in different places and areas. Incentives should also take into account the different operational environments associated with the implementation of sustainable solutions and the actual opportunities and obstacles associated with them.

The transition to a sustainable society requires the development and implementation of new approaches and solutions. Village communities can serve as forerunners at the local and grassroots level in the transition to a sustainable society. Village communities form a national network that can be used to accelerate the sustainability transition. Carbon-smart operating models and good practices developed in villages can be disseminated regionally, nationally and internationally, this requires the deployment of correlated incentives.

Rural policy measures:

71. Promote dialogue and creating channels for wide-ranging discussion on sustainability issues from the perspective of rural areas.
72. Promote the opportunities for people and communities in rural areas to make sustainable solutions in day-to-day life by producing and disseminating information about solutions suitable for rural areas.
73. Ensure funding for civic activities so that organisations operating in rural areas can and NGO work actively contribute to the transition to a sustainable society.

## 4 Implementation and monitoring of the policy programme

The Rural Policy Council outlines the realisation and development of the national rural policy. The Council carries out the tasks assigned to it by the Government and those of the interministerial working group laid down in section 5 a of the Act on Funding for Agriculture and Food Economy and Rural Research and Development Projects (1413/2011). The Council continues the work of the former Rural Policy Committee, which was active since 1995.

The Council's tasks include the implementation of the Rural policy programme 2021–2027 and related development work within separately defined themes. The task involves monitoring the implementation in cooperation with administrative branches and non-government stakeholders. The Rural policy programme serves as the Council's working programme.

### 4.1 Implementation of the policy programme

The programme aims to influence the activities of different sectors to ensure that rural areas are better taken into account in public decision-making and preparatory work. Some of the measures require changes in operating approaches and new ways of thinking and attitudes towards rural development. Information guidance is the key means used to implement the vision, objectives and measures of the programme.

The programme is a tool that brings together all actors involved in rural policy-making. The objectives and measures of the programme will be implemented through a broad rural policy collaboration network under the Council's leadership. Key parties responsible for implementation include the Secretariat appointed by the Council and thematic network projects of rural policy. National research and development projects concerning rural areas play an important role in the implementation of the objectives set in the programme.

The cross-administrative secretariat appointed by the Council with representation from various sectors prepares the issues to be discussed in the Council and carries out the tasks assigned to the Council together with the thematic networks. Representatives from

rural policy organisations, different administrative branches and actors involved in the wider rural policy network are invited to the Secretariat. The Secretary-general assisted by government officials with rural policy tasks and deputy Secretary-generals are in charge of the activities of the Secretariat. The objectives and measures of the programme are key issues to be prepared, promoted and monitored by the Secretariat. Effective rural policy communications play a central role in the implementation of the programme.

The thematic networks are responsible for preparing policy measures related to their respective themes recorded in the policy programme. The Rural Policy Council makes decisions on the thematic emphasis of the networks, which are selected through an open call for projects. The Council can set up new networks, end existing ones and change the thematic emphases of the networks as needed. The network activities are strongly linked to societal research in rural areas and EU co-funded rural development. The contact persons for the thematic networks are members of the Secretariat.

The measures of the programme are implemented within the scope of the resources and spending limits set out in the State budget. Some of the objectives and measures of the policy programme can be covered by EU funding, which is used to finance rural development projects and business development carried out at different levels. The goal achievement can be promoted by linking the measures to key structural reforms within in the administrative branches.

## 4.2 Monitoring the implementation of the policy programme

The implementation of the programme and the achievement of objectives will be monitored and evaluated regularly during the programming period. The measures will be specified if need be.

The implementation is assessed biennially and a comprehensive report on the progress will be produced. The report will include reporting on the thematic networks and the funded national research and development projects concerning rural areas. The implementation of the programme and its impacts are audited once per programming period.

In assessing the implementation of the programme, special attention must be paid to the impacts of the measures on the environment and gender equality.

The members of the Rural Policy council, the members of the Secretariat, those involved in the thematic rural policy networks, and parties operating in the wider rural policy network representing a variety of administrative branches and sectors will be engaged in the monitoring of the programme. Each funded project must produce a final technical report and rural policy recommendations. Digital applications can be used in the monitoring of the programme, which facilitates the participation of rural policy actors in the process.

**Table 1.** Summary of the rural policy vision and objectives

Vision/ focal point	Objectives and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved)			
Vision	Diverse rural areas are a national success factor. They provide a platform and solutions for a good life, innovation, entrepreneurship and a sustainable society. Finland is developed as a whole by strengthening place based opportunities.			
Inter-dependency	Finland is developed as a whole, taking into account the interdependencies between humans and nature and between different regions and sectors. The aim is to build a holistically sustainable society based on the consideration of local needs and conditions, and strengthening of local resources.			
Environmental justice	Finland is developed as a whole. The use of natural resources located in rural areas is responsible and fair, and takes into account local environments, conditions, actors and livelihoods. The preconditions for a good life, entrepreneurship and smooth day-to-day life are secured in all parts of the country.			
A new knowledge economy	Finland is developed as a whole. Material and immaterial resources located in rural areas are combined with diverse knowledge and skills. The new knowledge economy of rural areas is brought to the forefront of global value chains. People, communities and entrepreneurs in rural areas and new professionals relocating there produce solutions for a sustainable economy.			

**Table2.** Summary of the themes and measures of the rural policy programme

**No./ Section**    **Measures and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved):**

<b>3.1 Added value through the sustainable use of natural resources</b>				
1.	Promote the consideration of the perspectives of environmental justice and local rural communities and aim to reconcile the interests of various actors in policy issues concerning agriculture and forestry.			
2.	Promote fair and place-based solutions to mitigate socio-economic problems caused by the energy transition and the change in the use of peatlands. Contribute to the adaptation and change of the economic structure as part of the sustainability transition and to promote new employment and income opportunities.			
3.	Highlight experiences and practical models of smooth permit practices concerning rural areas.			
4.	Highlight measures for managing the cultural environment and for making versatile use of cultural heritage to strengthen local and regional vitality.			
5.	Highlight issues on environmental justice and the impacts of the sustainable use of natural resources on the local and regional economy. Highlight the perspective of rural communities.			
6.	Follow and influence the preparation and implementation of the Mining Act by highlighting the perspective of sustainability and rural communities.			
7.	Produce knowledge about the opportunities to increase local further processing of natural raw materials .			
8.	Provide more opportunities for entrepreneurship by supporting the development of service business activities based on nature and recreational activities related to nature.			
9.	Promote the wider adoption of natural and animal-assisted methods both in the promotion of welfare and health and in social welfare and healthcare services.			
<b>3.2 Rural actors – a part of the solution that is sustainable transition</b>				
10.	Prepare an overall view and plan of how the rural perspective will be integrated into the implementation and monitoring of sustainable development and climate policy.			
11.	Produce indicators that can be used to more closely monitor the progress of sustainable development in rural areas and to serve as a basis for decisionmaking.			
12.	Highlight the multiplier effects of public food procurement on the regional economy and strive to identify and remove barriers to local procurement, for instance, by promoting dialogue between different actors.			

**No./ Section** **Measures and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved):**

13.	Support dialogue between consumers of different ages and the operators in the food chain, and promote models of interaction that create increased added value at the local level.	Green	Yellow	Red
14.	Examine the challenges and opportunities of decentralised energy production legislation.	Green	Yellow	Red
15.	Encourage open-mindedness towards new, decentralised energy production solutions as soon as these are facilitated by scalable technology. Encourage the development of decentralised renewable energy production and local and property-specific experiments.	Green	Yellow	Red
16.	Promote the creation of a production and distribution network for transport biogas covering the entire country and in this context ensure opportunities for small operators. Emphasise cooperation between different authorities and financiers to ensure that no operator falls between different measures.	Green	Yellow	Red
17.	Encourage entrepreneurs operating in rural areas to actively participate in the implementation of the visions and measures of Finland's tourism strategy and culinary tourism strategy.	Green	Yellow	Red
18.	Encourage rural enterprises to cooperate across sectoral boundaries and to commit to the principles of sustainable tourism in their own activities. Encourage companies and tourism regions to work towards attaining the Sustainable Travel Finland badge.	Green	Yellow	Red
19.	Monitor and ensure that critical rural infrastructure (roads, transport connections and logistics, electricity production and network, water services, telecommunications), food production and health care in rural areas are in good shape and that these promote Finland's security of supply. Measures aimed at strengthening security of supply are presented in sections 3.1 through 3.5.	Green	Yellow	Red
<b>3.3 Strengthening competitiveness and vitality</b>				
20.	Ensure that rural conditions and needs are taken into account in the implementation of the national transport system plan.	Green	Yellow	Red
21.	Influence the reform of the transport tax model by highlighting the needs and special features of rural areas. Produce an more detailed situation picture and knowledge base on the needs for transport in rural areas to serve as a basis for decision-making.	Green	Yellow	Red
22.	Ensure that the EU objectives for a Gigabit Society are achieved in Finnish rural areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
23.	Support the national coordination of the construction of high-speed broadband networks by providing relevant information.	Green	Yellow	Red

**No./ Section** **Measures and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved):**

24.	Assess the socio-economic and regional economic impacts of available broadband connections from the perspective of municipalities and rural businesses. The examination concerns social welfare and health care services, education and cultural services as well as economic development and public costs vs. investments/productivity.	Green	Yellow	Red
25.	Ensure the availability of employment and business services in rural areas and especially in sparsely populated areas. Investigate and provide information about employment service and business advisory service models suitable for the operational environments of rural areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
26.	Safeguard the availability of vocational education and training and higher education in sparsely populated areas, taking into account the extensive opportunities brought to education by digital services. Investigate models that encourage cooperation between education providers. Anticipate the needs for competence and workforce in the Finnish and Swedish language in the increasingly diverse industries operating in rural areas as part of a regional process for anticipating education and competence needs.	Green	Yellow	Red
27.	Promote cooperation between vocational education and training institutes and companies. Seek and develop flexible and diverse solutions to meet different needs for competence and to foster continuous learning, making use of the opportunities brought by digitalisation.	Green	Yellow	Red
28.	Initiate preparations of a national strategy for place-independent work and accelerating the promotion of location-independent work and recruitment.	Green	Yellow	Red
29.	Launch pilots and development activities related to work independent of place in collaboration between the public, private and third sector. Promote research related to work independent of place.	Green	Yellow	Red
30.	Promote the means of taxation to support work independent of place, including necessary facilities and procurement.	Green	Yellow	Red
31.	Explore the possibility of creating a compensation system for regional and local competitive advantages, i.e. a region-specific and location-specific investment programme for public funds that supports equality of opportunity in different regions. The investment programme must promote the creation of new activities (instead of maintaining existing ones, as is the case with the system of central government transfers to local government). The aim is that in the future, the regions will have structurally, economically and operationally equal opportunities for creating innovations, increasing the degree of processing, and creating a sustainable knowledge economy and higher added value.	Green	Yellow	Red
32.	Bring the rural perspective and the viewpoints of businesses located in rural areas to the implementation of the road map drawn up based on the national Entrepreneurship Strategy.	Green	Yellow	Red

**No./ Section** **Measures and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved):**

33.	Make efforts to ensure that business and innovation services and funding can better reach businesses operating in rural areas. Examine the possibilities of accessing risk funding.	Green	Yellow	Red
34.	Influence the development of services and different operating models that promote changes in ownership in rural businesses together with stakeholders.	Green	Yellow	Red
35.	Encourage education providers to develop entrepreneurship education strategies at different levels of education to ensure that these promote increasing entrepreneurship-related content in curricula and education in diverse ways and taking the special features of rural areas into account.	Green	Yellow	Red
36.	Produce information about the socio-economic, regional and local economic impacts of public procurement, as well as information to support competence related to procurement in SMEs (participation in competitive tendering). Examine the actual possibilities of SMEs in rural areas to participate in quality assurance systems.	Green	Yellow	Red
37.	Make efforts to strengthen and increase short supply chains, participation of rural SMEs in competitive tendering and local employment.	Green	Yellow	Red
38.	Create a model and a regionally applicable road map for smart shrinking (smart adaptation).	Green	Yellow	Red
39.	Enhance the compilation of statistics concerning different types of rural areas and the utilisation of spatial data in municipal and regional development.	Green	Yellow	Red
<b>3.4 Ensuring a smooth everyday life</b>				
40.	Examine and promote the introduction of the SGEI procedure for those essential services (e.g. a broadband network) that are not provided on market terms.	Green	Yellow	Red
41.	Produce rural data for a comprehensive examination of the services network. Promote the introduction of service network planning and support the implementation of the planning process as a joint inclusive and partnership project.	Green	Yellow	Red
42.	Develop indicators that take multilocality into account and promote the use of them within the process of designing service structures.	Green	Yellow	Red
43.	Develop activities and funding models for multi-service centres.	Green	Yellow	Red
44.	Carry out local and regional pilots in order to develop rural services and multi-service centres that answer to the place-based needs of permanent residents of different ages, part-time residents, and needs related to multilocality and remote work.	Green	Yellow	Red
45.	Promote the introduction and dissemination of service innovations in rural areas, such as selfservice shops and mobile shop services.	Green	Yellow	Red



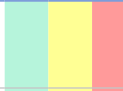
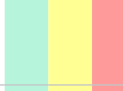

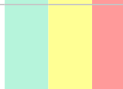
**No./ Section**      **Measures and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved):**

46.	Highlight the rural perspective and using the tool for rural proofing in connection with the reforming health and social service structures.	Green	Yellow	Red
47.	Highlight and promote the acknowledgement of the competence and resources found in rural businesses and organisations within rural service production (e.g. promoting the introduction of service vouchers).	Green	Yellow	Red
48.	Carry out an evaluation of the impacts of closing down rural schools on children's educational and social rights and the vitality of the areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
49.	Promote pilots that increase opportunities for distance learning/flexible distance learning arrangements by utilising both digital solutions and the multifunctionality of buildings, enabling a more diverse use of them. Aim to achieve a geographically comprehensive school network that recognises regional differences.	Green	Yellow	Red
50.	Promote cooperation related to teaching and facilities between municipalities, companies and different levels of education.	Green	Yellow	Red
51.	Contribute to ensuring that the funding of municipal cultural activities will also cover cultural activities in rural villages and organisations. Promote the development of the compilation of statistics on cultural activities to give visibility to cultural activities by organisations operating in rural areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
52.	Develop the availability of library, cultural, sports and youth services and training available at adult education centres in rural areas, utilising digitalisation and new forms of cooperation.	Green	Yellow	Red
53.	Highlight sustainable transport service models that acknowledge the special features of rural areas and the needs of rural residents, and promoting their introduction and increasing the prevalence of vehicles using alternative power sources.	Green	Yellow	Red
54.	Ensure that the broadband infrastructure is identified as part of the basic infrastructure and that the central government takes more responsibility for broadband construction, its coordination and investment costs.	Green	Yellow	Red
55.	Promote the development of training related to environmental services and the maintenance, service and repair of the infrastructure in rural areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
56.	Questions concerning sparsely populated areas are reviewed in the national collaboration network for internal safety. Engage rural civil society actors in the development of national security services.	Green	Yellow	Red
57.	Further develop the regional security networks consisting of the authorities, municipalities and regional village associations and their collaboration in preventive actions, crises and aftercare measures in rural areas. Develop the capabilities of rescue teams in villages as part of this cooperation.	Green	Yellow	Red

**No./ Section**    **Measures and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved):**

58.	Activate residents for independent preparedness and maintaining safety by organising preparedness and safety training in rural areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
59.	Promote the strengthening and development of NGO work, especially in areas with scant local association activities.	Green	Yellow	Red
60.	Further develop municipal and regional partnership roundtables to promote cooperation between the public and private sector as well as the representatives of NGOs in preventive work and the efforts made to improve well-being in rural areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
61.	Incorporate the rural perspective in the national discussion on social entrepreneurship. Create prerequisites for the development of cooperatives and social enterprises in rural areas.	Green	Yellow	Red
62.	Explore the opportunities for creating a financial instrument for supporting service production by villages in addition to non-governmental and business funding.	Green	Yellow	Red
<b>Strengthening inclusion and a sense of community in rural areas</b>				
63.	Develop communal structures and NGO activities in rural areas by strengthening networks and expertise in the communities and associations operating in rural areas: work to promote inclusion and partnerships, communication, section work forums.	Green	Yellow	Red
64.	Promote the opportunities for civil society action in rural areas by strengthening existing financial instruments and by exploring new ones. Examine the impacts of public funding for civic activities in rural areas	Green	Yellow	Red
65.	Promote community-led local development (CLLD) at the national level, with development targets including informal civic activities, i.e. the fourth sector.	Green	Yellow	Red
66.	Develop the structures and operating models that support the inclusion of rural residents and communities in villages, municipalities and counties. Develop the operating models that support inclusion to ensure that the voices of those who are not usually heard will also be taken into account. Take existing structures into account in the development efforts.	Green	Yellow	Red
67.	Promote rural proofing (MVA) and the partnership roundtable model in municipalities and regions to support the processes of inclusion in the drafting of issues and in decision-making.	Green	Yellow	Red
68.	Develop models for smart participation based on digitalisation and, through these, promote rural residents' opportunities for making an impact at the local, regional and national level. Particularly strengthening the inclusion of young people.	Green	Yellow	Red
69.	Produce data for the development of inclusion indicators and assessment tools from a rural perspective.	Green	Yellow	Red

**No./ Section Measures and related monitoring (in accordance with the traffic light model: green has been/will be achieved, yellow is pending, red will not be achieved):**

70.	Support constructive and inclusive discussion in municipalities, counties and regions.	
71.	Promote dialogue and creating channels for wide-ranging discussion on sustainability issues from the perspective of rural areas.	
72.	Promote the opportunities for people and communities in rural areas to make sustainable solutions in day-to-day life by producing and disseminating information about solutions suitable for rural areas.	
73.	Ensure funding for civic activities so that organisations operating in rural areas can and NGO work actively contribute to the transition to a sustainable society.	

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# Appendix 1. Environmental impact assessment of the rural policy programme 2021–2027 (EIA)

The rural policy programme is subject to the general obligation under section 3 of the Act on Environmental Impact Assessment of Plans and Programmes of Public Authorities (200/2005) to assess environmental impacts. The authority responsible for the plan or programme shall ensure that the environmental impacts of the plan or programme are adequately investigated and assessed during the preparation process if the implementation of the plan or programme may have significant environmental impacts.

This environmental impact assessment uses a comprehensive understanding of environmental impact, as defined in the second section of the Act on Environmental Impact Assessment of Plans and Programmes of Public Authorities. In this context, environmental impact refers to the direct and indirect impact of the rural policy programme on 1) human health, living conditions and comfort; 2) soil, water, air, climate, vegetation, living organisms and biodiversity; 3) the community structure, the built environment, landscape, cityscapes and cultural heritage; 4) the exploitation of natural resources, and 5) the interaction between the factors mentioned in items 1–4.

In the preparation of the rural policy programme, environmental perspectives as part of sustainable development were a guiding principle throughout the preparatory process. The preparation of the programme paid attention to the objectives of the Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development, which include: "We will take steps to sustain the vitality of the countryside and cities and ensure that the development of rural and urban areas is mutually supportive and generates new forms of cooperation. Efforts will also be made to support rural living and entrepreneurship." In the Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development, the public administration commits to promoting sustainable development in all its work and activities, together with other operators.

An assessment report on the environmental impacts of the programme was prepared at the final stage of the preparation process based on the measures specified in the programme. The continuous consideration of environmental aspects is a key part of the implementation of the rural policy programme.

The themes and measures of the policy programme are divided into five sections:

- More added value to rural areas through the sustainable use of natural resources
- Rural actors as part of a sustainable transition solution
- Strengthening competitiveness and vitality in rural areas
- Ensuring services and infrastructure in rural areas
- Increasing inclusion and a sense of community in rural areas

The environmental impacts of the measures were assessed through these five areas. Overall, we can note that taking the measures will have a positive impact on the living conditions and comfort of people living, working and spending time in rural areas. Many of the measures increase the opportunities for living and acting in an ecologically sustainable manner in rural areas. Many of these measures focus on developing approaches, cooperation and structures, increasing knowledge and exchanging experiences. This means that while they do not cause direct environmental impacts, they indirectly improve people's living conditions and well-being as well as the growth of human and social capital in rural areas.

## 1. More added value to rural areas through the sustainable use of natural resources

Issues discussed in this section include the management and sustainable use of nature and the environment, including forest use and agriculture, the built environment and cultural environment, and water bodies. Other areas considered include the distribution of the benefits and disadvantages of using natural resources, and producing well-being related benefits based on nature.

Promoting fair and sustainable nature-based solutions and the perspective of local rural communities in agriculture and forestry policy issues has a positive impact on the well-being of both rural residents and environments. A measure related to land use, land use planning and permission practices promotes the creation or preservation of good living environments. These create preconditions for developing villages and other rural areas and strengthening their vitality, taking into account people's housing preferences and the preservation environmental values. These, in turn, have a positive impact on living conditions and comfort and the preservation of cultural heritage. Highlighting environmental justice and the sustainable use of natural resources as well as the preparation of the Mining Act draws attention to the negative impacts on soil, water, climate and biodiversity related to the environment not only from the perspective of

rural communities but also at a more general level. People's opportunities for making a living and engaging in entrepreneurial activities are promoted by strengthening versatile counselling, producing information on the possibilities of increasing the further processing of natural raw materials at the local level and supporting the possibilities of entrepreneurship based on fair nature-based solutions. This will have a positive impact on people's living conditions. Promoting the use of nature-based and animal-assisted methods has a positive impact on people's well-being and health.

## 2. Rural actors as part of the sustainable transition solution

This chapter discusses rural actors as part of the sustainable transition solution. This includes building a sustainable food system, promoting decentralised bioenergy production, developing sustainable tourism and strengthening national security of supply.

Including the rural perspective in the implementation and monitoring of sustainable development and climate policy will improve awareness of sustainable development and climate measures and the possibilities to implement these in rural areas. More resource-efficient use of natural resources and implementation of bioeconomy and circular economy models can reduce the demand for and use of virgin materials. Indicators produced for monitoring sustainable development enable better monitoring from the perspective of rural areas and raise awareness of the situation of rural areas. Accelerating investments related to areas such as the circular economy, energy and resource efficiency and other forms of environmental protection in the companies operating in rural areas will reduce the negative environmental impacts of business activities. The measure aiming at the development of decentralised energy production based on renewable energy sources and local and property-specific experiments will produce primarily positive environmental impacts compared to the use of fossil energy sources. This makes the emissions caused by energy use cleaner and enables a sustainable use of the raw material used for energy production. However, wood burning, for instance, produces fine particles that reduce air quality, and this may have a negative impact on human health and further promote climate change. From an environmental point of view, it is crucial that renewable energy sources are used in a sustainable manner, taking into account biodiversity and the carrying capacity of nature. Decentralised energy production can reduce transport needs and transport-related emissions. The development of a production and distribution network for biogas for road vehicles enables lower-emission transport compared to conventional fuels. Encouraging commitment to the principles of sustainable tourism promotes the reduction of the environmental impacts of tourism and therefore also increases the well-being of people and the environment.



### **3. Strengthening competitiveness and vitality in rural areas**

The issues discussed in this section include promoting vitality and competitiveness through well-functioning connections, including the development of the transport system and telecommunications connections, responding to the transformation of work by developing competence and approaches, and creating prerequisites for place-independent work. The section also discusses the creation of added value locally and regionally, the strengthening of sustainability and the regional economy through public procurement, and smart shrinking as a strategy for declining regions.

Taking rural conditions and needs into account in the implementation of the national transport system plan will have a positive impact on people's living conditions. Road maintenance and restoration have a positive impact on road safety and travel times, and therefore also affect people's living conditions and health. Measures aimed at improving the telecommunications infrastructure increase regional equality and enable a reduction in transport emissions, as more and more services can be used online.

The measure to improve access to education will increase regional equality and enable the growth of human capital. Promoting cooperation between educational institutions and companies, and increasing opportunities for competence and continuous learning expand the opportunities for making a living and engaging in entrepreneurial activities in rural areas. As a result, this has a positive impact on people's living conditions, well-being and opportunities. The same effect is created with measures to promote more place-independent work, which increase flexibility in working life and foster a reduction in traffic congestion and emissions from commuting. The measures targeting companies located in rural areas promote people's opportunities for making a livelihood in the region, and therefore affect people's well-being and living conditions. Public procurement measures promote the opportunities of rural enterprises, which have a positive impact on local employment and the regional economy and, through themes, on people's well-being.

### **4. Ensuring services and infrastructure in rural areas**

The chapter discusses how services can be safeguarded through new operating models and cooperation and by strengthening the role of civil society as a contributor to well-being in rural areas. The issues discussed in this section include the development of multi-service centres, the availability and accessibility of health and social services, securing education for children and young people as a local service, supporting diverse cultural and leisure time activities, developing sustainable transport services, ensuring the infrastructure necessary for everyday life, and developing operating models and

networks for everyday security. This section also includes strengthening the role of third-sector agents of rural areas in health and well-being, and promoting communal service production and societal entrepreneurship in rural areas.

The development of the services in rural areas through new operating models and cooperation between different actors and sectors will positively affect the development of services in rural areas. The proposed measures for the comprehensive examination of the service network and the introduction of the SGEI procedure to ensure the necessary services will also have a positive impact on people's living conditions, comfort and the smooth running of everyday life. The development of multi-service centres will support the preservation of local services in rural areas and serves both permanent and part-time rural residents. The development of multi-service centres also promotes the creation and introduction of service innovations in rural areas. The inclusion of the evaluation of impacts on rural areas in the legislative drafting related to the health and social services reform and regional health and social service organisations supports the goals of the reform concerning narrowing welfare and health inequalities, and ensuring equal and high-quality services for everyone regardless of their place of residence. Promoting a multi-producer model (public and private sector, NGOs) in the provision of health and social services complements the service network and supports the accessibility of services in rural areas. Measures to accelerate and launch different school experiments that utilise digitalisation, diverse use of buildings and mobile solutions can support children's rights to basic education based on the local school principle. Measures promoting cooperation between municipalities, different levels of education and companies will develop the opportunities for upper secondary education in rural areas. Meanwhile, measures promoting the cultural activities of villages and organisations and the availability of cultural and leisure time services support people's well-being and inclusion. The development of rural transport services in cooperation with public, private and third-sector actors supports the development of new solutions for mobility services in rural areas. Measures aimed at safeguarding a broadband infrastructure as part of the basic infrastructure of rural areas will increase regional equality and access to digital services for rural residents. The broadband infrastructure will also support people's opportunities for multi-location work independent of place. The development of operating models and networks concerning the security of everyday life will have a positive impact on the development of rural security services and cooperation networks supporting them.

The measures that support strengthening and developing the third sector in rural areas promotes community-based care and the prerequisites for organisations and associations operating in rural areas to support the well-being, social inclusion and health and functional capacity of rural residents. Measures promoting partnerships between the public, private and the third sector (partnership roundtables) support the development of collaboration that promotes health and supports preventive actions.

Measures to promote social entrepreneurship and communal service production are used to positively influence the preservation and development of local services in rural areas.

## 5. Increasing inclusion and a sense of community in rural areas

This section discusses the strengthening of a sense of community and civic activities, the development of opportunities for participation and making an impact, and the inclusion of rural residents in the sustainability transition.

The measures that aim to strengthen a sense of community and civic activities in rural areas have positive impacts on both the well-being of people and the vitality of regions. Strengthening communal civic activity will increase social capital, which will have a positive impact on people's living conditions, quality of life and safety in everyday life. Promoting village activities and community-led local development will mobilise human, social and economic resources in local development.

Measures related to the development of opportunities for participation and influence have a positive impact on the opportunities of rural residents and communities to influence the decision-making concerning their living environment, services and society. Measures supporting and developing inclusion and democracy promote equality, reduce inequality and support the integrity of society and the legitimacy of the state.

Measures to strengthen the participation of rural residents in the sustainability transition will promote sustainable development objectives, particularly social sustainability. Promoting dialogue between different agents and regions supports taking the rural perspective into account in the transition to a sustainable society. Producing and disseminating information on sustainable choices and opportunities in the daily life of rural areas promotes the development of sustainable well-being and a sustainable economy.

## Appendix 2. Gender impact assessment of the rural policy programme 2021–2027 (GIA)

Gender equality refers to equal rights and opportunities for women and men, and the even distribution of power and resources. In Finland, the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) lays down obligations on the promotion of gender equality. The purpose of the Act is to prevent gender-based discrimination and promote equality between women and men, particularly improving the status of women in working life. The Act obliges the authorities to promote gender equality in all their activities – in a goal-oriented and systematic manner. The authorities are particularly required to change the circumstances which prevent the attainment of gender equality (Section 4, subsection 2).

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that promotes gender equality and the recognition of the gender perspective. Gender impact assessment (GIA) is used to proactively examine the impacts of various measures on the promotion of equality between women and men. The aim is to promote equality and prevent negative unwanted impacts. Measures or proposals may affect women and men differently, and some seemingly neutral measures may actually end up exacerbating inequality. Measures or proposals have typically indirect gender impacts. Addressing these requires analysis as well as building and applying a framework to guide interpretation. The significance of genders should be acknowledged in all activities of an organisation.

The objectives of this rural policy programme 2021–2027 are related to three strategic focal points (interdependency, environmental justice, and a new knowledge economy) and five thematic wholes. The gender impacts of the objectives and measures determined for the latter have been assessed:

- More added value to rural areas through the sustainable use of natural resources
- Rural actors as part of a sustainable transition solution
- Strengthening competitiveness and vitality in rural areas
- Ensuring services and infrastructure in rural areas
- Increasing inclusion and a sense of community in rural areas

As the objectives and measures of the programme have direct or indirect impacts on people's lives and day-to-day activities, they also have gender impacts. However, the

programme and its measures have been formulated as gender neutral. Consequently, potentially different impacts on women and men have not been addressed in the programme. However, in the implementation of the programme and related monitoring, particular attention should be paid to how the measures affect gender equality.

## **1. More added value to rural areas through the sustainable use of natural resources**

Promoting environmental justice in agriculture and forestry policy issues has a positive impact on gender equality. Strengthening Finns' relationship with forests and the versatile use of forests and rural natural environments support the development of diverse business activities and new income opportunities in rural areas. The measures used to promote the development of livelihoods related to fair nature-based solutions (e.g. business based on recreational activities in nature and green care services) support and promote women's opportunities to live in and move to rural areas. Sustainable use of natural resources and the related creation of added value at the local level promote women's opportunities for education and employment in rural areas.

There is still need to promote the education and employment of women in the male-dominated professions in the agriculture and forestry industry. Currently, 25 per cent of forest owners are women (Luke 2020). In agriculture and horticulture, less than 15 per cent of farmers about 30 per cent of hired employees (excluding family members) are women (Luke 2016). Women's perspective must also be increasingly taken into account in the implementation of measures related to agriculture and forestry.

## **2. Rural actors as part of the sustainable transition solution**

Bringing the rural perspective to the implementation and monitoring of sustainable development and climate policy is important. Taking this perspective into account in sustainable development policy supports the social sustainability of the transition. The proposed measures also help rural actors to orient to and develop their activities in a sustainable manner. Interest in sustainability issues is exceptionally high among young women, and their inclusion and agency in the sustainability transition must be supported in rural areas. Rural areas need active and innovative individuals and organisations who wish to lead the way to the transition to a sustainable society. The sustainability shift opens new arenas for the active agency of the women in rural areas. The measures that

aim to promote a sustainable food system, decentralised bioenergy production and sustainable tourism will have a positive impact on the entrepreneurship and employment opportunities of both women and men in rural local communities.

The implementation of environmental justice requires the identification of different actors in rural areas and genuine consideration of their needs. It should be noted that the risks and opportunities associated with different activities may be perceived differently by different genders and generations (children, adults, older people).

### 3. Strengthening competitiveness and vitality in rural areas

Urbanisation and increasingly divergent fields of education and job opportunities move women and men in different ways. Young people, and especially young women, move from sparsely populated areas to cities for education and work. The structures of society play an important role in the construction and renewal of gender divisions in the labour market and related opportunities. Gender divisions in education must be dismantled and the regional accessibility of education secured. Regions must provide comprehensive, socially sustainable educational and work environments for people regardless of gender. Measures to safeguard access to vocational education and training and higher education in sparsely populated areas will have a positive impact on both women's and men's educational opportunities in rural areas.

Currently, the sectors typically employing women in rural areas include public and private services, of which public services are particularly important. Measures used to promote an increase in place-independent work in public administration and a regionally balanced production of health and social services will have a positive impact on the employment opportunities of women in rural areas.

Forms of work and entrepreneurship based on the knowledge economy, such as the exploitation of natural resources and technology, offer more opportunities for both women and men. Work related to tourism is an example of new labour that provides an opportunity for engaging in entrepreneurship in one's own way. Tourism offers indirect and direct jobs for persons of both genders, emphasising aspects such as hospitality and caring, which have traditionally been considered female traits (Veijola et al. 2013). Female entrepreneurship is becoming more common as more and more Finnish and foreign consumers in cities are attracted to the clean nature of rural areas, the silence, the local foods, crafts and various services based on rural traditions and local culture. The new knowledge-intensive economy in rural areas is about producing value, not just

providing services, which also promotes economic gender equality. Measures promoting a new knowledge-intensive economy in rural areas will also promote growing sectors of female entrepreneurship, such as the dog and horse industries, crafts, food processing and horticulture.

From the perspective of female entrepreneurship, it is also important to recognise new and small-scale activities. Room must be made to generating new business ideas, and the concept of innovativeness must be broadened. Promoting female entrepreneurship in rural areas also requires seeing and dismantling dominant and marginal power relationships. The undermining, exclusion and stereotyping faced by female entrepreneurs in rural areas must be curbed by the means of funding. There must also be room for pursuing activities and goals that involve small-scale entrepreneurship and bold creativity. Little-known forms of rural entrepreneurship, such as business activities based on canine activities, must be highlighted in the discourses of rural development. Rural environments also provide opportunities for combining work and hobbies and also for entrepreneurship built around hobbies.

#### **4. Ensuring services and infrastructure in rural areas**

Well-functioning services and infrastructure support social sustainability and smooth everyday life in rural areas. Accessible early childhood education and care services, well-functioning school transport and care services for older people enable rural women to participate actively in working life. The measures used to safeguard and develop the rural service network will have the positive effect that the expectations of providing care in rural areas will no longer be gendered and that rural areas will continue to be an attractive place to live for women.

The development of rural services will have a positive impact on the opportunities for living and working in rural areas for people of different genders and generations. The development of services in rural areas will particularly support the employment opportunities for women. The proposed measures on taking multi-locality into account in the planning of service structures also contribute to the development of the service sectors in rural areas. They also pay attention to the often female-dominated organisations as providers of health and social services.

A well-functioning infrastructure, especially roads and telecommunications, is a prerequisite for the employment and increasing multilocality of both men and women. Measures developing rural services, infrastructure and security networks have a positive impact on the development of rural living environments and the smooth and safe daily life of the permanent and part-time residents of rural areas.

## 5. Increasing inclusion and a sense of community in rural areas

A socially sustainable society is founded on inclusion and a well-functioning democracy. The measures used to strengthen a sense of community and civic activities in rural activities, the opportunities of rural residents for participation and making an impact in municipal and social decision-making, and the inclusion of rural residents in the sustainability transition will promote equality both in society and between genders. Village activities and community-led local development (so-called Leader actions) can promote the inclusion of men and women, and people representing different generations, and the development of local social capital. However, according to a survey by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, participation in civic activities is linked to gender and level of education in that women and more highly educated people are more actively involved in the civic activities of rural areas. Women are more active than men in participating in civic activities in rural areas and peri-urban areas. The differences are most evident in sparsely populated rural areas, where less than 15 per cent of men with a low level of education and almost 40 per cent of women with a high level of education have been found to participate in civic activities. Although there are relatively more men than women in sparsely populated rural areas and rural heartland areas (section 3.1), women dominate the civic activities in these areas.

Women living in rural areas are more active than men in the activities of associations, organisations, clubs and other civic activities at the grassroots level. Participation in civic activities is widespread, particularly among educated women. Women play a visible role in village activities and the Leader Local Action Groups, as 75 per cent of village agents and 70 per cent of the operative directors of the Leader groups are women. While the share of women among the chairs of the group boards has been previously low, this has climbed to 33 per cent. It is important to direct the measures used to promote a sense of community and civic activities in rural areas to ensure that these support the balanced development of civic activities in terms of gender and level of education.

Meanwhile, in municipalities, women less frequently serve in positions of responsibility than men. In municipalities, the critical positions of trust are mainly in the hands of men; the majority of the chairs of councils, boards and local authority committees are men. 28 per cent of the chairs and 23 per cent of the deputy chairs of councils are women. In turn, 26 per cent of the chairs and 36 per cent of the deputy chairs of boards are women. 30 per cent of the chairs of local authority committees are women. It is important to direct measures supporting inclusion and democracy so that they also support gender equality in local decision-making.



Various types of recreational activities, work in NGOs, village activities, voluntary work, volunteers and other forms of participation can strengthen the inclusion and well-being of different groups of people and open up channels for making an impact. High demands at work, a shortage of leisure time and the many responsibilities and obligations related to civic activities may reduce the number of potential volunteers. Voluntary work that promotes a sense of community and citizens' well-being, as well as positions of trust in organisations and associations, may accumulate on the same active persons in small municipalities. Ensuring that the civic activities at the grassroots level will continue to attract a sufficient number of volunteers in the future, especially if young women continue to move away from rural areas, requires the involvement of representatives of different groups, men and women, young people and older people, permanent and part-time residents, and people with different backgrounds and levels of education.

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