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SMART VILLAGE LABS

D2.4 Services and Social Economy Atlas on Rural Empowerment

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Executive Summary

This report presents the structure, content and functions of the Services and Social Economy Atlas on Rural Empowerment (hereinafter: the Atlas) of the Horizon Europe INSPIRE project. After a brief introduction outlining the development of the Atlas and its links to other project tasks, the report describes its internal structure, how users can navigate and interact with it, the functions available to them, and the key technical considerations. The main aim is to provide an overview of the Atlas's overall functionality.

The Atlas aims to create a European Union-wide repository of social services and social economy initiatives, gathering successful cases from across regions in the European Union (EU). Its purpose is to support replication, learning and effective policy design by analysing successful programmes, initiatives and policies that foster social inclusion and empowerment. By bridging territorial needs with relevant and effective solutions, the Atlas serves as a much-needed common platform for sharing good practices and creating fertile ground for interregional social economy (SE) clusters to grow and collaborate.

The Atlas integrates all information collected in Work Package (WP) 2 of the project, including social inclusion services, initiatives and social economy business models. The selected cases are presented in a structured repository, organised by sector, service type, regional typology, and targeted end users.

In terms of format, the Atlas is hosted online on the project website¹. It will form the second component of the Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard (hereinafter: Policy Dashboard) (Task 5.2), alongside the territorial typology (Task 1.5) and the policy recommendations (Task 5.1).

The Atlas is intended to help users identify promising SE initiatives and social services for their area, based on the type of vulnerability and local specificities. INSPIRE's approach for the Atlas is in line with the recommendations by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that services in rural areas need to be localised to match supply and demand². It will also serve as a much-needed common platform for sharing good practices and for expanding local SE and social services. Intended users can identify the type of rural area they belong to, based on social wellbeing risks, trends and challenges, and then explore the most relevant social economy initiatives and social inclusion service programmes (public, private or community-owned) tailored to their context.

The Atlas aims to play a significant role in strengthening rural inclusion by facilitating the exchange of good practices across regions. By showcasing successful social services and social economy initiatives, it provides rural stakeholders, including local authorities, service providers, and social entrepreneurs, with concrete examples that can be replicated, adapted, or transferred to address similar challenges in their own areas. This shared repository of practical knowledge is expected to inspire a gradual rise in social entrepreneurial activity within the pilot sites and beyond. Through easier access to proven solutions and peer-learning opportunities, the Atlas aims to help rural communities

¹ INSPIRE Project, Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/rural-social-inclusion-policy-dashboard/>

² OECD Principles on Rural Policy. Available here: <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/rural-service-delivery/oecd-principles-on-rural-policy.html> & OECD Rural service delivery. Available here: <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/rural-service-delivery.html>

design more effective, inclusive, and sustainable responses to social well-being needs, ultimately promoting greater social inclusion and empowerment.

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List of Terms and Definitions

Abbreviation	Definition
ESN	European Social Network
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RUG	Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (University of Groningen)
SE	Social economy
SEE	Social Economy Europe
SSI	Social Services Index
WP	Work Package

1. Introduction & Background

The INSPIRE Project,³ a Horizon Europe initiative, is dedicated to transforming social inclusion, well-being, and prosperity across rural areas in Europe. Through a multidisciplinary approach combining cutting-edge computational tools and traditional data collection methods, INSPIRE addresses the challenges faced by rural populations, particularly those who are hard to reach. The project aims to identify the key drivers, risks, and trends in social inclusion, fostering rural empowerment and ensuring that no community is left behind. INSPIRE promotes wellbeing and inclusion for people living in European rural areas, through research, policy solutions and pilot interventions.

The development of the Atlas is an outcome of WP2, which focuses on researching and benchmarking social empowerment services and social economy activities in rural Europe. This work aims to map and assess social inclusion services, policies, and initiatives in rural Europe, while also analysing and providing a framework for the social economy and social entrepreneurship within the European context.

The Atlas is designed for all rural actors, including public and private stakeholders, social economy actors, service providers and rural residents. In addition to its overall aim and outreach function, it will also be used throughout the project cycle to support and contribute to specific tasks. In the INSPIRE project, during the second workshop in the pilot areas (Task 3.3), participants will use the shortlisted ideas from the Atlas to discuss potential localised social economy solutions and assess related risks in addressing local services’ needs. Additionally, the Atlas will offer networking opportunities (Task 4.2), enabling participants to connect with existing initiatives across Europe and with other public and private stakeholders.

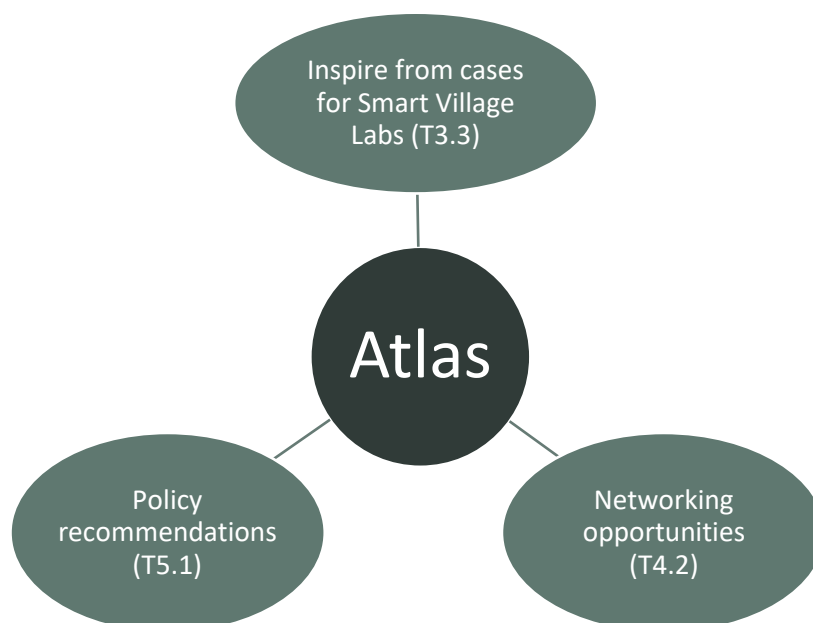


Figure 1: The project tasks that Atlas contributes

³ INSPIRE Project: Supporting the inclusion, well-being, and growth of rural areas through multi-actor Smart Village labs for enhanced governance frameworks. Find more information: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/>

The Atlas will be part of the Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard⁴ (Task 5.2), alongside the territorial typology (Task 1.5) and the policy recommendations (Task 5.1). To effectively communicate information gathered regarding territorial typology, the Atlas, and policy recommendations, a user-friendly dashboard will be developed as a platform connected to the project’s website. End-users can then identify clusters of European rural areas that share similar features regarding social exclusion of groups in vulnerable situation and explore the most suitable models of social economy and social inclusion programmes, supported by policy recommendations, using the filters and closed questionnaires. Ultimately, the Dashboard will lay the groundwork for improving multi-level governance frameworks and economic policy instruments to enhance the empowerment and inclusion of rural, vulnerable groups, in line with the principles of Smart Villages. Therefore, the Policy Dashboard will serve to ensure the sustainability and accessibility of results.

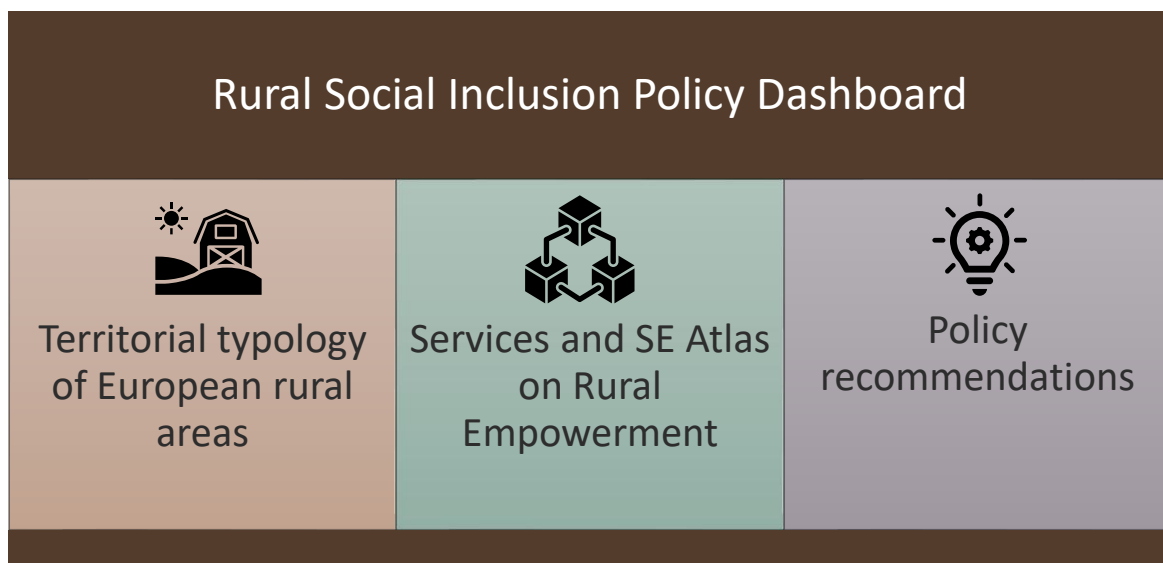


Figure 2: Components of Policy Dashboard

⁴ INSPIRE Project, Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/rural-social-inclusion-policy-dashboard/>

2. Methodology & Findings of the Tasks

In this section, we provide a brief explanation of each task in WP2, which consists of several interconnected tasks that lay the foundation for the Atlas and how they contribute to its development. Each task presented unique findings on social inclusion, social services, and social economy in rural areas. It is crucial to understand the challenges and the existing landscape, and to see how the project envisions the Atlas providing a database of good practices that offer effective solutions and increase exchanges across European rural areas.

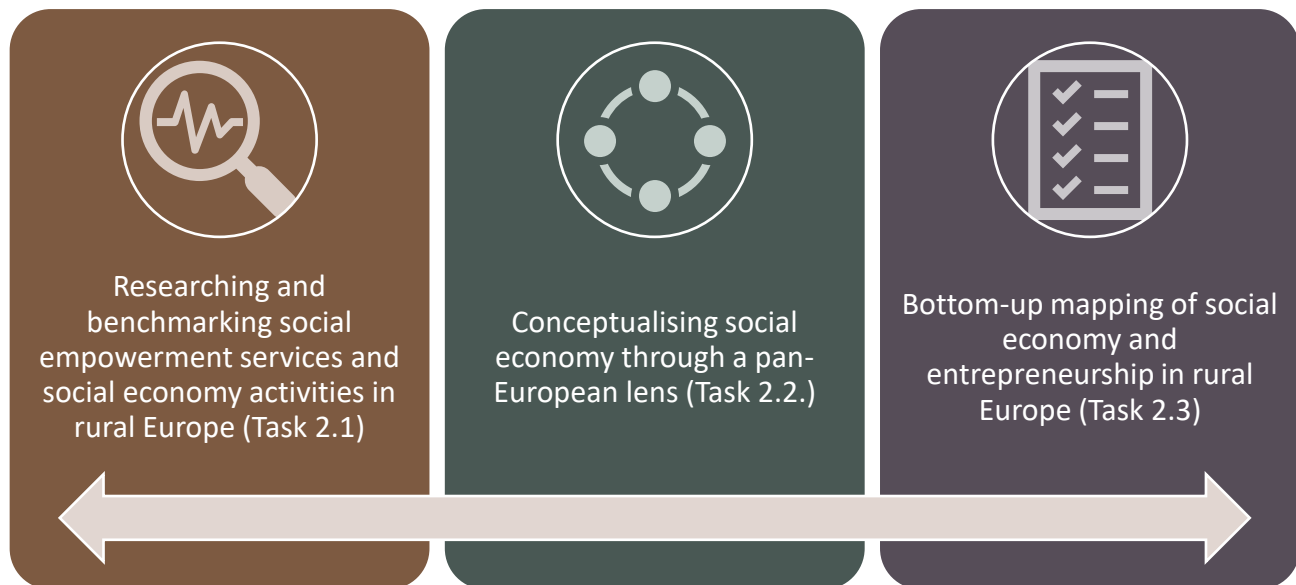


Figure 3: Work package 2 interconnected tasks to create the Atlas

2.1 Researching and benchmarking social empowerment services and social economy activities in rural Europe (T2.1)⁵

The task began with a comprehensive mapping of social inclusion services, policies and initiatives across rural Europe. Through extensive desk research, an initial identification of services in key sectors was conducted, with particular emphasis on the seven pilot areas. This was complemented by 75 structured interviews with local, regional and national stakeholders, which revealed additional practices and rural challenges. 14 focus group discussions with service providers and users were conducted in the seven pilot areas of the project (in Greece, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia, France, and Romania) to assess the strengths, limitations, scalability and impact of the promising cases identified by the pilot partners.

⁵ You can find the findings of Task 2.1. here: ESN (2025). D2.1 An assessment of social inclusion services, policies, and initiatives in rural Europe, INSPIRE Project: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/deliverables/>

The comprehensive research provides key insights into how social services contribute to social inclusion in rural areas, drawing on evidence from seven pilot regions, and is presented in the deliverable of the task as a report.

The analysis shows that, across countries, social services are generally understood as systems that support disadvantaged groups by improving the quality of life, fostering autonomy, preventing exclusion, and ensuring access to basic needs through a combination of financial, care, and institutional support. Although national concepts broadly align with EU-level frameworks, there is no shared definition of social inclusion and related concepts. This conceptual inconsistency risks undermining coordinated policy implementation and evaluation.

Access to social inclusion services in rural areas remains a major challenge. The main problem is the rural-urban divide, with essential services focused on cities, leaving rural populations underserved. This gap worsens due to depopulation and an ageing population in rural areas. Limited budgets in these regions often result in postponed or insufficient investments in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and social services. In addition to these, the most commonly mentioned challenges in the report include limited transportation options, underfunding, a shortage of qualified professionals in health, care, and education sectors, social isolation, lack of leisure and cultural activities for specific groups, limited job opportunities, long distances to hospitals, shortages of social housing and crisis shelters, insufficient early childhood education and care facilities (disproportionate affecting women's access to the labour market), limited inclusion of women's voices in rural policymaking, and a lack of person-centred, inclusive services for vulnerable populations, along with limited outreach to identify their needs. There are many innovative initiatives that aim to deliver rural services digitally. The report shows that digital exclusion remains a challenge in the pilot areas, particularly for vulnerable groups such as older adults, due to limited internet access and low digital literacy.

Nevertheless, emerging initiatives demonstrate how these barriers can be addressed. Successful practices tend to share common features, including holistic, integrated responses, strong partnerships, participatory design, and services tailored to local needs. Good practices were identified through a multi-step research process. First, desk research conducted by project partners identified 122 initiatives focused on rural populations. This was followed by stakeholder interviews, during which 203 practices, initiatives, or projects were mentioned. The identified initiatives varied widely in scale and level of detail. Building on this initial mapping, pilot partners conducted focus group discussions on a selected set of good practices. Detailed information on these practices is presented in the report. Following their evaluation, the selected practices will be integrated into the Atlas. The Atlas will be a crucial tool in expanding and strengthening such practices, which remain essential to addressing gaps in social inclusion in rural areas.

The study also highlights the need for more effective impact measurement systems suited to rural contexts. Stakeholders stress the importance of mixed-method evaluations, structured community feedback, improved data collection, stronger interagency coordination, and enhanced staff capacity for needs assessment and impact evaluation. Partnerships are identified as a critical enabler of social inclusion, with four main types: multi-level governance, interagency collaboration, multi-stakeholder cooperation, and active community involvement.

Finally, stakeholders across regions converge on several cross-cutting recommendations. These include developing integrated, community-based service hubs; improving flexible and inclusive rural transport systems; increasing access to funding for rural initiatives; making rural areas more attractive

to social and healthcare professionals; strengthening outreach and awareness-raising; and addressing demographic decline by attracting younger populations while supporting existing rural communities to ensure long-term sustainability.

The results of this task provided a validated set of social inclusion services and policies that will be fed directly into the Atlas.

2.2 Conceptualising social economy through a pan-European lens (T2.2)⁶

This task established the conceptual and evaluative foundation for the social economy dimension of the Atlas. Through a three-phase desk research, including preliminary research, structured targeted academic and grey literature research, and the last step focusing on identifying impact indicators for Social Economy Services, identified existing impact assessment frameworks and developed a harmonised set of impact indicators. This conceptual framework ensured that the cases included in the Atlas could be interpreted consistently and aligned with EU-wide social economy definition.

The report emphasises that Europe's social economy is underpinned by a strong and shared value base, with social inclusion consistently prioritised across Member States. Core principles such as democratic governance, reinvestment of profits, and a people-over-profit approach provide a solid foundation for a common European vision, and recent years have seen growing attention to SE at both EU and national levels. However, the study identifies significant fragmentation in how the social economy is defined, regulated, and supported across the EU. The report also highlights that, despite EU-level progress, particularly through the 2021 Social Economy Action Plan and the 2023 Council Recommendation, most Member States have yet to adopt the EU's common definition of the social economy. Around two-thirds of Member States lack a formal definition of the social economy, and many lack dedicated legal or policy frameworks. This has resulted in uneven institutional support and a patchwork of national approaches, which in turn hinders cross-border cooperation and policy coherence.

A major gap highlighted is the weak integration of a territorial and rural development perspective. Only a few countries explicitly link the social economy to rural development, despite evidence that SE organisations and enterprises play a crucial role in sustaining services, employment, and social cohesion in rural and remote areas. This suggests that the social economy's contribution to balanced regional development has been undervalued in mainstream policy.

Finally, the study highlights a significant gap in shared data and impact measurement frameworks. Without harmonised indicators, evaluating and comparing the social impact of SE initiatives across Europe remains challenging. The report advocates for creating standardised evaluation metrics that focus on outcomes such as social inclusion, job creation for disadvantaged groups, community engagement, and rural service delivery.

⁶ You can find the framework of the social economy and the impact indicators presented here: SEE, (2025). D2.2 A common conceptual framework on social economy in Europe, INSPIRE Project: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/deliverables/>

2.3 Bottom-up mapping of social economy and entrepreneurship in rural Europe (T2.3)⁷

Building on the foundation of T2.2, this task carried out a bottom-up mapping of social economy activities in the pilot areas. Using both secondary data and primary digital ethnographic research, the task identified rural social enterprises (which are contextually used with the intention to capture a broader range of actors from the social economy ecosystem),⁸ their target groups, and the contributions they make to empowering vulnerable populations. The data informed the development of a typology of rural social-economy business models, detailing their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. These models enriched the Atlas with a comprehensive overview of social economy activities relevant to rural inclusion.

The study develops a typology of business models for social enterprises targeting social inclusion in rural areas across the six countries of the pilot sites. While social economy organisations are typically highly context-specific, the analysis identifies recurring patterns in how successful social enterprises are structured. These actors of the social services tend to fill unmet social inclusion needs within local communities, supported by stable funding streams and/or highly committed individuals, while fostering community cohesion and empowering beneficiaries. The findings are indicative rather than prescriptive, as the study focuses only on successful social enterprises and cannot determine which factors guarantee success more broadly.

The typology is based on a simplified business model canvas and derived thematic clusters from a digital ethnography of rural social enterprises in the pilot regions. By examining the most common combinations of business model elements, the typology outlines the most likely successful models for different target groups and territorial contexts. Although this introduces selection bias, focusing on functioning and established social enterprises strengthens the models' practical relevance.

Importantly, the business model canvas is intended as a flexible analytical and learning tool rather than a fixed blueprint. Combined with agent-based modelling, it allows prospective entrepreneurs and policymakers to explore alternative “what-if” scenarios and assess how different organisational configurations may influence social inclusion outcomes. Overall, the typology provides a structured yet adaptable framework to support the design and development of rural social enterprises that foster social inclusion aligned with local needs and conditions.

⁷ You can find the business model typology for social enterprises presented here: University of Groningen (2025). D2.3 Business models typology of rural social entrepreneurship: facts, strengths, limitations, INSPIRE project: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/deliverables/>

⁸ **Disclaimer:** The term “social enterprises” has been used in D2.3 to ensure consistency with the title included in the Grant Agreement for this deliverable: “*Business models typology of rural social entrepreneurship: facts, strengths, limitations*”. Specifically, in D2.3, it is explained that “[f]ollowing the definition of the European Commission (n.d.), we broadly classify all organisations that serve a social objective via their main value proposition, that reinvest their profits into their cause towards the social objective, or that are organised with a democratic ownership structure, as social enterprises for the purpose of this report. This term then can include, for instance non-profit organisations, co-operatives and organised collectives.” According to the European Commission’s definition of Social Economy, included in D2.2, social enterprises are only one part of the social economy. Nevertheless, in many EU countries, the term “social enterprises” is used indistinctly to refer to the social economy and in D2.3 has been used with the intention to capture a broader range of actors from the social economy ecosystem.

2.4 Clustering

In Tasks T2.1 and T2.2, partners applied criteria relevant to social services and social economy to cluster the EU-27 Member States. These preliminary clusters are being used in the Atlas for initial structuring; however, they will continue to be refined in the Atlas (T2.4) as additional cases and indicators are integrated.

The clustering process in T2.1 begins by grouping countries according to broad geographic and cultural regions commonly used in EU and comparative social policy research. This geographic basis was selected because neighbouring countries often share historical developments, socio-economic characteristics and regional policy challenges that influence their social services and social inclusion outcomes. Once these groups are defined, the analysis examines the service provision characteristics within each cluster, identifying areas where countries demonstrate strong, well-developed frameworks or practices, as well as common gaps where provision remains limited or inconsistent. The process also considers contextual factors specific to each group that shape how services are delivered and how rural inclusion is addressed.

The preliminary clustering in T2.1 is primarily based on the research of six countries (EL, FR, IE, PL, RO, SK) and includes Social Services Index (SSI) country factsheets⁹ for DK, SE, FI, ES, MT, SI, HR, and LV, resulting in an analysis covering 14 countries.

Table 1: Preliminary country clustering by regions in D2.1

Cluster	Countries
<i>Nordic</i>	DK, FI, SE
<i>Mediterranean</i>	ES, EL, MT
<i>Eastern-Central</i>	PL, SK, SI, HR, RO, LV
<i>Western-Central</i>	FR, IE

In T2.2, four key dimensions guide the clustering approach. These include the existence of an official national definition of the social economy, the presence of a dedicated law or comprehensive policy framework recognising social economy entities, the extent to which social inclusion objectives are embedded in policies or practices, and the degree to which national strategies explicitly address rural development or territorial cohesion.

As agreed by the partners, the initial clustering from T2.1 is integrated into the Atlas, considering the clustering proposed in T2.2. As the Atlas is a living tool, the clusters defined in T2.1 and T2.2 should be considered provisional. With the addition of new data and new cases, we generate further insights that lead to updates of the clusters.

2.5 Methodology to create the Atlas

Together, tasks throughout WP2 provided the empirical cases, conceptual frameworks, indicators, and clusters necessary for creating the Services and Social Economy Atlas on Rural Empowerment,

⁹ ESN, Social Services Index, Available at: <https://www.esn-eu.org/social-services-index>

integrating all mapped services, policies, initiatives, and social economy activities into an accessible, structured online platform.

Based on all the above-mentioned tasks, the Atlas is created in an online environment by the European Social Network (ESN), the University of Groningen (RUG), and ARX.NET. In practical terms, ESN led the preparation of the Atlas's structure, including the required content and the method for collecting data from the partners. After preparing the first draft, the partners brainstormed and discussed the functionality, features, structure, content, accessibility, and usability for policymakers, as well as long-term use, during the third in-person consortium meeting in Dublin, Ireland. The feedback, suggestions, and comments gathered during these interactive group discussions helped ESN further develop the Atlas's structure. Supported by Q-PLAN, ARX.NET drew on its technical expertise to integrate the Atlas into ESN's existing website and online platforms and deliver it as a user-friendly online resource.

In addition to the data collected throughout WP2, partners will gather further data regularly throughout the project cycle. A detailed Excel spreadsheet, along with instructions, has been prepared to ensure the same structure is followed by all partners. The partners' inputs will be systematically validated by the core project team before publication in the Atlas to ensure that the data conform to the same structure, are reliable, and align with the project's criteria.

3. Objective of Atlas

The Atlas serves as a digital, searchable, EU-wide repository of social inclusion services and initiatives, collected in Task 2.1 and developed based on the findings of WP2, including Tasks 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. By showcasing good practices and initiatives across the EU, the Atlas aims to support replication, learning, and policy design, bridging territorial needs with relevant solutions to address the challenges outlined in the deliverables. Presenting good practices in a structured, user-friendly format will help translate abstract policy concepts into concrete examples, provide realistic insights into what is required for effective social economy and social services initiatives, support policymakers and communities in assessing the transferability of the solutions in their contexts, and demonstrate the value of the social services and social economy initiatives in rural development, supporting stronger integration of a territorial lens in future strategies.

As a component of the Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard (T5.2), the Atlas aims to showcase good practices and innovative models in rural Europe, connect services, social economy enterprises and organisations, as well as target groups, and enable users, such as policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, to identify the examples best suited to their territory's needs, considering the typology of their regions, target groups, and their needs to be addressed.

4. Content and Structure of Atlas

To achieve the previously mentioned objectives, the Atlas provides comprehensive information to policymakers, practitioners, service providers, researchers and other rural actors, enabling them to draw inspiration from practices implemented in similar localities and addressing comparable needs, ultimately supporting more inclusive rural areas for all.

The platform is an online interactive tool hosted on the INSPIRE website that includes cases of both social services and SE business models¹⁰. It is modelled after the “Territorial Typology on Social Wellbeing, Resilience and Exclusion Tool”¹¹ (Task 1.5), which classifies EU rural regions (at the NUTS2 and NUTS3 levels) into clusters using various social, economic, demographic, environmental and civic indicators that collectively capture and measure degrees and types of social exclusion, to ensure coherence and a consistent user experience across INSPIRE resources. It matches user inputs, such as territorial features and vulnerable groups, with relevant services and SE initiatives.

Relevant keywords, sectors, target groups, innovation tags, and other criteria are selected based on the findings of the previous tasks in WP2 to enable filtering and classification across all case studies, ensuring that the data is standardised and structured for efficient search within the Atlas. ESN, with input from all partners, developed a tool designed to collect structured information on social services and social economy initiatives in rural areas across Europe. Each partner contributes to gathering the cases, and the content also draws on data from Tasks T2.1, T2.2 and T2.3, as well as the pilot activities. The cases included cover social services, social economy initiatives, and variations across different rural typologies.

Each case in the Atlas provides a concise summary of the practice, including its location, type of rural area (traditional rural, pre-urban, coastal/island, mountainous), sector (e.g., health and care, education and training), and target groups. Additionally, social economy practices present the business model, main source of funding and legal form, while social services practices specify the type of organisation implementing them. The description of the practices, their digital presence and the partner organisation that submitted the cases are also documented.

The countries contained in the map are the EU-27 Member States. Additionally, it indicates the region type using the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) classification,¹² NUTS1, NUTS2, and NUTS3. These are EU statistical territorial units ranging from large socio-economic areas (NUTS1) to basic regions for policy implementation (NUTS2) and down to small local areas (NUTS3). Clustering information is automatically provided when users enter a location or country in the filters. The Atlas assigns the corresponding clusters identified in the T2.1 and T2.2 in the background, eliminating the need for users to manually select a cluster and thereby simplifying the search process.

¹⁰ INSPIRE Project, Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/rural-social-inclusion-policy-dashboard/>

¹¹ INSPIRE Project, Regional typology of EU rural areas on social exclusion: <https://inspireprojecteu.eu/inspire-rural-typology-on-social-exclusion/>

¹² Eurostat, Overview: NUTS - Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts>

Table 2: Sectors and Target Groups in the Atlas





 Sector	 Target Groups
Social Services	Children
Health and Care	Youth
Education and Training	Older People
Employment and Labour Market Integration	People with Disabilities
Housing and Homelessness	Migrants and Refugees
Environment and Circular Economy	Women and Girls
Culture and Creative Industries	Families
Agriculture and Food Systems	Unemployed persons
Community Development	People Experiencing Homelessness
Migration and Integration	Persons with Mental Health Conditions
Disability and Independent Living	Persons with Substance Use Disorders
Youth and Child Welfare	Ethnic and Racial Minorities
Elderly Care	LGBTQIA+ Individuals
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	Victims of Violence or Crime
Justice and Victim Support	Low-Income Households
Digital Inclusion	Rural Communities
Financial Inclusion	People in Remote or Isolated Areas
	Other Vulnerable or Marginalised Groups
	General Population

Table 3: Types of Organisations for Social Services in the Atlas

 Types of Organisations
Public Authority
Local Authority
Regional Authority
National Government
Social Service Provider
Social Enterprise
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)
Civil Society Organisation
Research Institution / University
Network or Umbrella Organisation
Healthcare Provide
Education and Training Provider
Community-based Organisation
Private Company
Development Agency
Foundation or Philanthropic Organisation
Cooperative
Other

Table 4: Business Models and Legal Forms for Social Economy in the Atlas

 Business Models Type (by source of funding)	 Legal Forms
Private	Cooperative
Public	Mutual Organisation
Private-Public Partnership	Association/Non-Profit Company
Hybrid Model	Foundation
	Social Enterprise
	For-Profit with Social Purpose
	Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE)
	Other

5. Functions and User Experience

5.1 Functions and User Experience

The Atlas is designed to offer a user-friendly and intuitive experience to a broad range of stakeholders, including policymakers, local authorities, service providers, rural practitioners, social entrepreneurs, and researchers. It enables users to identify relevant social services and social economy initiatives that address rural social inclusion challenges, with particular attention to vulnerable groups and territorial specificities.

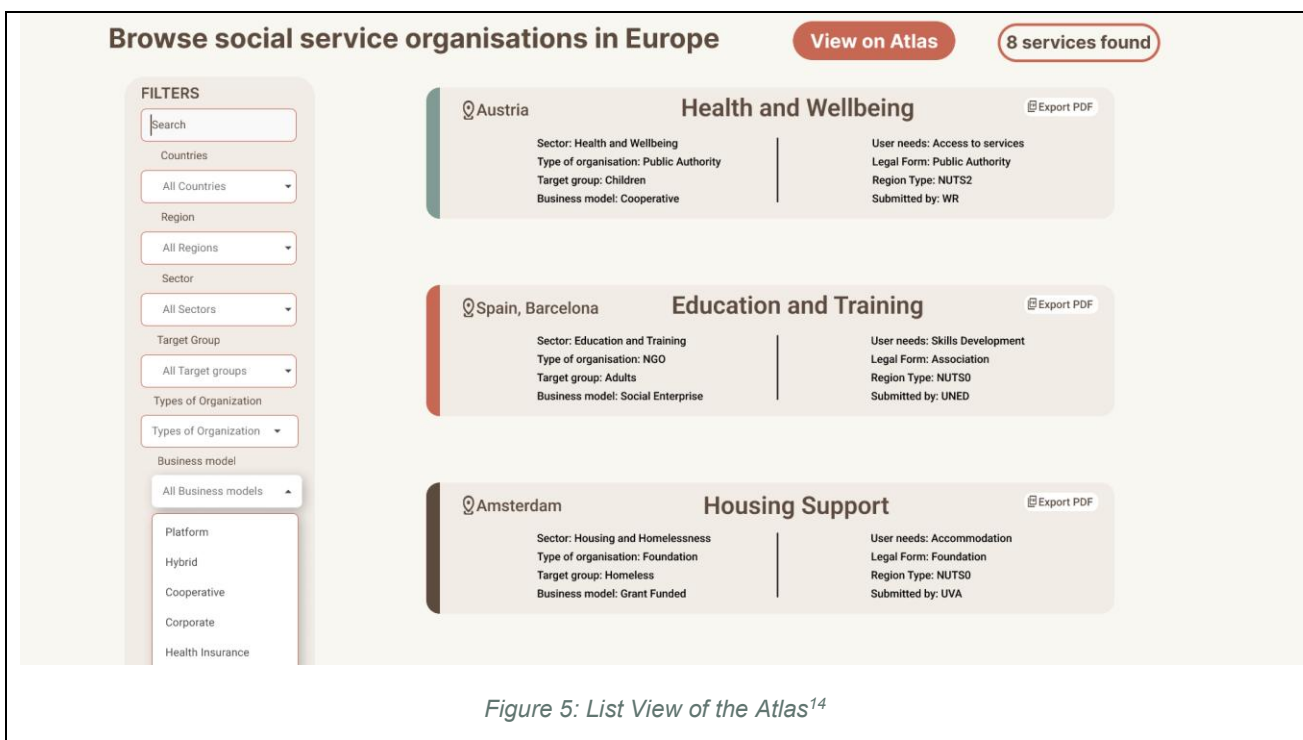
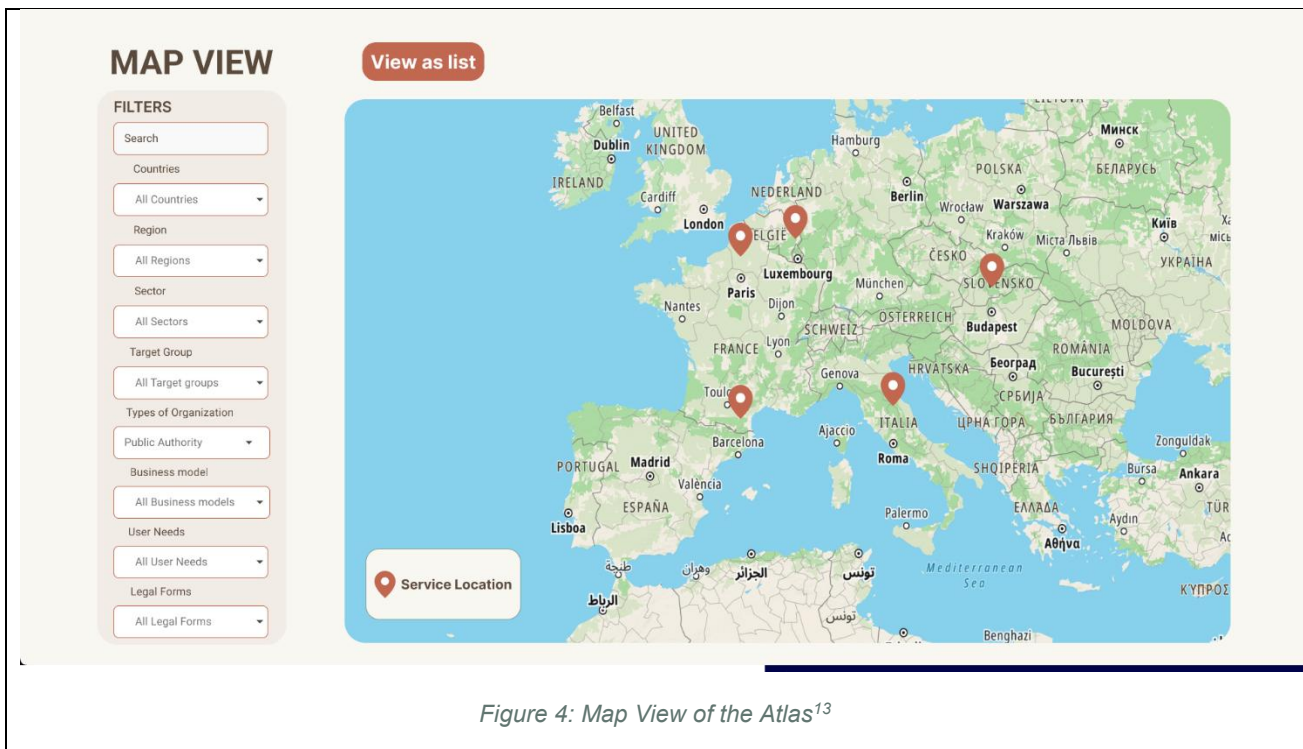
The user experience has been developed to ensure that the Atlas remains accessible, easy to navigate, and aligned with the overall INSPIRE ecosystem. As an online repository of good practices, the Atlas supports learning, replication, and transfer of solutions by allowing users to explore case studies through multiple entry points: thematic, organisational, and target-group-based.

5.2 Navigation and Homepage Layout

The Atlas homepage provides users with two main ways of exploring content:

1. Map view, where cases are displayed geographically through an interactive marker; and
2. List view, where results are presented in a scrollable list format.

The map view offers an immediate territorial overview, allowing users to click on specific regions or cases. The list view supports simple comparison between multiple cases through short summaries and key tags. Users can switch between the two formats depending on their preferred browsing style.



¹³ Figure 4 presents a mock-up of the Atlas Map view. The data displayed are included for illustrative purposes only.

¹⁴ Figure 5 presents a mock-up of the Atlas Map view. The data displayed are included for illustrative purposes only.

5.3 Filtering and Search Options

To ensure users can identify the most relevant practices based on their needs and context, the Atlas offers multi-layer filtering and a keyword search function, enabled using user needs tags and the name of organisations. Filters have been designed based on the categories validated through the findings of WP2 tasks (T2.1-T2.3) and are aligned with the Atlas structure described in Chapter 4.

Users can search and refine results using the following categories:

- Country.
- Territorial level (NUTS classification: NUTS1, NUTS2, NUTS3).
- Rural typology (traditional rural, pre-urban, coastal/island, mountain).
- Sector (e.g., health and care, housing, employment, digital inclusion).
- Target group(s) (e.g., older people, migrants, people with disabilities, rural communities).
- Type of organisation (e.g., local authority, social enterprise, NGO) (for social services cases).
- Business model and legal form (for social economy cases).
- Tags and keywords, including innovation characteristics and thematic priorities.

The users can search by tags and user needs. The combination of multiple filters strengthens the Atlas's capacity to support replication by helping users identify cases implemented in similar conditions.

5.4 Case Profile Pages and Information Display

Each practice or initiative in the Atlas is presented on a dedicated case profile page, providing structured information in a concise yet informative format. Case profiles include:

- Title of the case.
- Short description (approximately 200–300 words), including impact and outcomes (qualitative and/or quantitative, where available).
- Country.
- NUTS level information.
- Rural typology classification.
- Sector(s) and target group(s).
- Organisation type (for social services cases).
- Business model and legal form (for social economy initiatives).
- Link(s) to external resources, where available (website, report, video, etc.).

This structured format ensures consistency across cases and improves usability for end-users who may want to compare initiatives. It also allows the Atlas to serve both as a learning tool and a policy support resource.

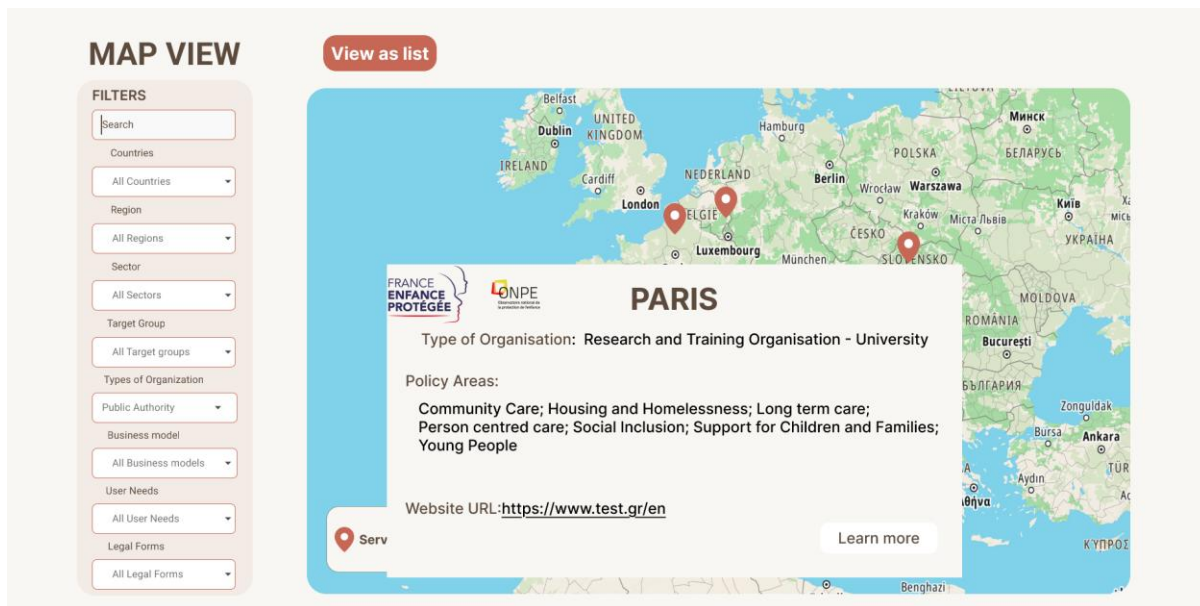


Figure 6: Example of a service¹⁵

5.5 Export, Sharing and Download Functions

To support knowledge exchange and transferability, users can select and export case studies. The platform enables:

- Export/download of selected cases (e.g., PDF export functionality).
- Printing option available through the downloaded PDF for offline use by policymakers or local teams.

These functions aim to strengthen the Atlas’s practical value for stakeholders who may use case studies during local planning processes, workshops, or internal policy work.

5.6 Accessibility and Inclusive Design

Accessibility principles have been integrated into the Atlas design to ensure that it is usable by diverse audiences, including users with disabilities. Key measures include:

- Responsive design for both desktop and mobile devices.
- Clear typography and readable layout.
- Structured navigation and consistent use of icons.
- Compatibility with screen readers (where technically possible).
- Avoidance of overly complex navigation steps and minimisation of user clicks.

The Atlas interface also aims to support users with varying levels of digital literacy by prioritising visual clarity, familiar navigation patterns, and straightforward filtering logic.

¹⁵ Figure 6 is a mock-up created using sample data for illustrative purposes only. In the actual Atlas Map view, clicking on a map pin will open a pop-up displaying all relevant information.

5.7 User Journeys and Use Scenarios

The Atlas supports multiple user journeys, including but not limited to:

- Policymakers exploring solutions for specific rural challenges (e.g., service gaps, social exclusion risks).
- Local authorities identifying transferable initiatives for implementation or adaptation.
- Social entrepreneurs searching for existing initiatives and inspiration for social enterprise development.
- Service providers benchmarking service approaches and identifying innovative delivery models.
- Researchers and networks mapping trends and identifying emerging practices across Europe.

By offering both territorial and thematic entry points, the Atlas ensures relevance across different stakeholder needs while maintaining a shared structure and approach.

6. Integration with the Policy Dashboard

6.1 Integration with the Policy Dashboard

The Atlas constitutes one of the core components of the Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard (T5.2).

It complements two other pillars developed within INSPIRE:

- i. The territorial typology of rural areas (T1.5) and
- ii. The policy recommendations (T5.1).

The integration of these components is intended to guide users from understanding territorial challenges to an overview of relevant practices, and finally to policy recommendations that can support successful replication, adaptation, and implementation.

6.2 Territorial Typology and Suggested Case Matching

The Atlas aligns with INSPIRE's territorial typology and uses territorial classifications to enable more targeted matching between users' contexts and available cases.

When users select a country or region, the system can connect this information to:

- rural typology (e.g., mountainous, coastal/island).
- territorial clusters based on project clustering work.
- common vulnerability patterns in rural contexts.

This connection allows the Atlas to propose cases that reflect similar territorial conditions, supporting transferability and comparability. Users, therefore, do not need expert knowledge of clustering methodologies to access relevant cases, as these are integrated into the filtering and matching process in the background.

6.3 Practical Policy Use Cases

The integration of the Atlas into the Dashboard allows end users, particularly policymakers, to follow a clear pathway:

- Identify territorial challenges through indicators.
- Explore promising cases through the Atlas.
- Access recommendations on enabling conditions, governance and scalability.

This creates a user journey that is not limited to “what works” but also supports reflection on how and why a solution may contextually work, including conditions for adaptation and implementation.

7. Technical considerations

The Atlas has been developed as a web-based platform hosted on the INSPIRE project website. Its technical design prioritises long-term usability, scalability, and alignment with Horizon Europe principles of accessibility, sustainability, and open dissemination.

The development process has been carried out collaboratively between ESN, RUG and ARX.NET, with ARX.NET responsible for the technical implementation and ESN coordinating the structure and data input requirements.

7.1 Web-based and Online-friendly Design

The Atlas is designed as an online, interactive tool accessible through standard web browsers without requiring software installation. Its responsive design ensures compatibility across devices, including desktops, tablets and smartphones. This feature is particularly relevant for rural stakeholders who may rely on mobile devices due to limited infrastructure or connectivity options.

7.2 Data Structure, Validation, and Quality Control

To ensure standardisation across partner submissions, Atlas cases are collected through a structured template based on WP2 findings. Each contribution follows a consistent set of categories and descriptors (sector, target group, type of organisation, territorial scope, etc.). Information on the submitting partner and the source of the submission is also collected for internal purposes, to support an effective validation process if additional data are required.

All inputs are validated prior to publication, including checks for:

- completeness and clarity of content.
- alignment with INSPIRE inclusion and relevance criteria.
- consistency in categorisation and tagging.
- availability of reliable sources/links.
- avoidance of duplication across cases.

This validation process strengthens the reliability and comparability of cases and supports the Atlas' role as an evidence-based and living repository.

7.3 GDPR and Data Protection Considerations

The Atlas is intended as a public, informative platform and does not collect personal data from general users. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) considerations apply primarily to:

- partner login procedures (restricted editing access); and
- any contact details that may be included in case profiles (where applicable); such details have already been publicly available through the original source in which the case was identified.

Where required, a privacy notice and terms of use will be made available through the platform. Cases focus on organisational and programme-level information rather than personal information about beneficiaries.

7.4 Open Access Principles and Licensing

As a Horizon Europe project output, the Atlas is developed in line with open access and dissemination requirements. It is intended to be publicly accessible and reusable as a knowledge resource for stakeholders who promote social inclusion across rural Europe.

To support reuse, the Atlas content can be published under an appropriate open licence (e.g., Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 – CC BY 4.0), enabling external stakeholders to share and build upon the information with proper attribution.

7.5 Language and Translation

The Atlas is intended to serve stakeholders across different European regions. While the interface will prioritise accessibility, the availability of multilingual content will depend on technical implementation choices and resource capacity.

Automatic translation may be considered a means of supporting inclusion across language communities. However, the first version of the Atlas initially relies on English-language content and partner-provided descriptions.

7.6 Sustainability and Scalability

The Atlas is designed as a “living tool” that will be updated throughout the INSPIRE project and is expected to remain accessible beyond the project’s lifetime (such post-grant plan will be crafted and validated in the broader exploitation strategy of the project). To ensure sustainability, key considerations include:

- maintaining clear governance over case inclusion and updates.
- ensuring technical hosting and platform maintenance planning.
- preserving quality assurance mechanisms.
- enabling future expansion of categories and tagging logic.

As more cases are added, the Atlas can expand its analytical and learning value, helping refine territorial clustering and enabling richer comparisons across rural contexts.

8. Conclusions and Next Steps

The Services and Social Economy Atlas on Rural Empowerment is a key INSPIRE output that supports rural inclusion, empowerment, and innovation. By providing an EU-wide repository of validated practices in social services and social economy initiatives, the Atlas contributes to improved learning, replication and transfer of promising approaches across different rural contexts.

The Atlas is designed not only as a dissemination tool but also as a functional resource that supports INSPIRE implementation tasks, including Smart Village Labs and stakeholder engagement throughout the project cycle.

8.1 Main Contribution of the Atlas

The Atlas addresses a critical need identified across WP2: rural stakeholders often face challenges accessing structured, comparable examples of what works in similar territories. By offering a searchable database with filters by sector, vulnerability groups, and territorial typology, the Atlas supports more targeted inspiration and decision-making.

Through its integration into the Rural Social Inclusion Policy Dashboard, the Atlas enables users to move from:

- territorial data on challenges and needs, to
- practical solutions, and finally to
- policy recommendations for solutions implementation.

This structure supports evidence-based policymaking and promotes context-specific and group-sensitive responses rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

8.2 Next Steps for Atlas Development

The Atlas will be further developed throughout the INSPIRE project as new cases are identified through pilot actions, consortium research activities, and stakeholder inputs. Next steps include:

- continuing partner-based collection of cases using the structured template.
- systematically validating and uploading new initiatives.
- refining tagging, filtering logic and search functions based on user feedback.
- expanding content to reflect emerging Smart Village Lab outputs.
- strengthening the connection between Atlas cases, territorial typology insights and policy recommendations.

Additionally, further work will be done to ensure that the Atlas remains relevant to users beyond the project consortium, including broader dissemination and, where appropriate, potential stakeholder contributions. Indicative networks and channels of dissemination of the Atlas include: the project's Network of Interest and Advisory Board; the sister initiatives of the project; and the members of the project's network partners (e.g., SEE, ESN, EASPD, ERDN, ENoMW).

8.3 Role of the Atlas in Supporting Smart Village Labs and Rural Empowerment

The Smart Village Labs will facilitate practical, bottom-up applications of smart solutions that will foster social inclusion of vulnerable communities in the pilot ecosystems. They will provide evidence of how Atlas cases can inspire the co-creation and testing of such new local solutions. By connecting territorial needs with real-world practices, the Atlas supports Smart Village Labs in developing more inclusive, participatory and user-centred approaches to rural service design.

In this way, the Atlas functions as both a knowledge resource and a catalyst for empowerment. It strengthens rural inclusion by facilitating interregional learning and supporting rural stakeholders in designing sustainable solutions adapted to their specific territorial and social contexts.

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