Measuring Social Inclusion and Wellbeing in European Rural Areas

This factsheet presents the rationale, challenges, and approach of the INSPIRE project for measuring and enhancing social inclusion in rural areas across Europe.

Why Measure Social Inclusion/ Exclusion in Rural Areas?

Rural communities across Europe, often face **remoteness, limited services, aging populations, youth outmigration**, and **digital gaps**.

Measuring inclusion in rural contexts helps to:

- **Target investments and policies** more effectively
- **Identify barriers** and collaborate to co-create solutions.
- **Build inclusive and resilient communities**

Social Inclusion VS Social Exclusion

Social Inclusion	Social Exclusion
• A goal and process that enables participation and empowerment • Ensures individuals and groups can participate fully in society • Focus on capabilities, participation, and agency	• A dynamic, relational, and multidimensional process • Denial of access to resources, rights, services, networks • Focus on barriers, deprivation, and disadvantage

Key Challenges in Rural Social Inclusion

Geographic isolation and poor access to basic services

Climate change vulnerability affecting already disadvantaged areas

Key Challenges in Rural Social Inclusion

Poor education access, especially for youth and women

Economic exclusion, including:
- Inadequate housing, overcrowding, and lack of basic amenities
- Youth unemployment and outmigration Gender pay gaps

Digital exclusion, widening social and economic gaps

Low social participation, reflected in reduced civic engagement and cultural isolation

Health disparities, especially in preventive care and mental health

Weak support for small rural businesses

How to measure Inclusion & Exclusion

In the Horizon Europe "INSPIRE" project, we identified **four core dimensions** that reflect how people experience wellbeing or exclusion in rural areas. These dimensions help translate complex social realities into measurable indicators for action, **covering economic security, physical** and **mental health, quality of living conditions**, and **levels of social participation.**

Economic Security & Employment

- Income inequality, AROPE risk, long-term unemployment, NEETs
- Local job creation and rural business support

Living Conditions

- Overcrowded housing, access to utilities, energy poverty
- Infrastructure, transport, housing affordability

Health & Wellbeing

- Life expectancy, self-reported health status, access to services
- Mental health, environmental risk, healthcare gaps

Social Participation & Engagement

- Voting, volunteering, trust in institutions
- Belonging, cultural inclusion, civic engagement

Axes of Social Exclusion — Why They Matter

Age
- Median age: shows if the population is aging.
- Age dependency: how many dependents vs. working-age people

Logistics & Infrastucture
- Transport links: essential for work and services
- Remoteness: limits contact with others. Climate risks: can damage homes, jobs, and access

Ethnicity & Immigration
- Share of foreign-born people over 15: shows diversity and potential barriers (language, legal, cultural)

Gender
- Gender equality, pay gap, and employment gap: women face lower pay, less job access, and unpaid care work

Safety
- Crime rates: affect how safe people feel and how strong communities are
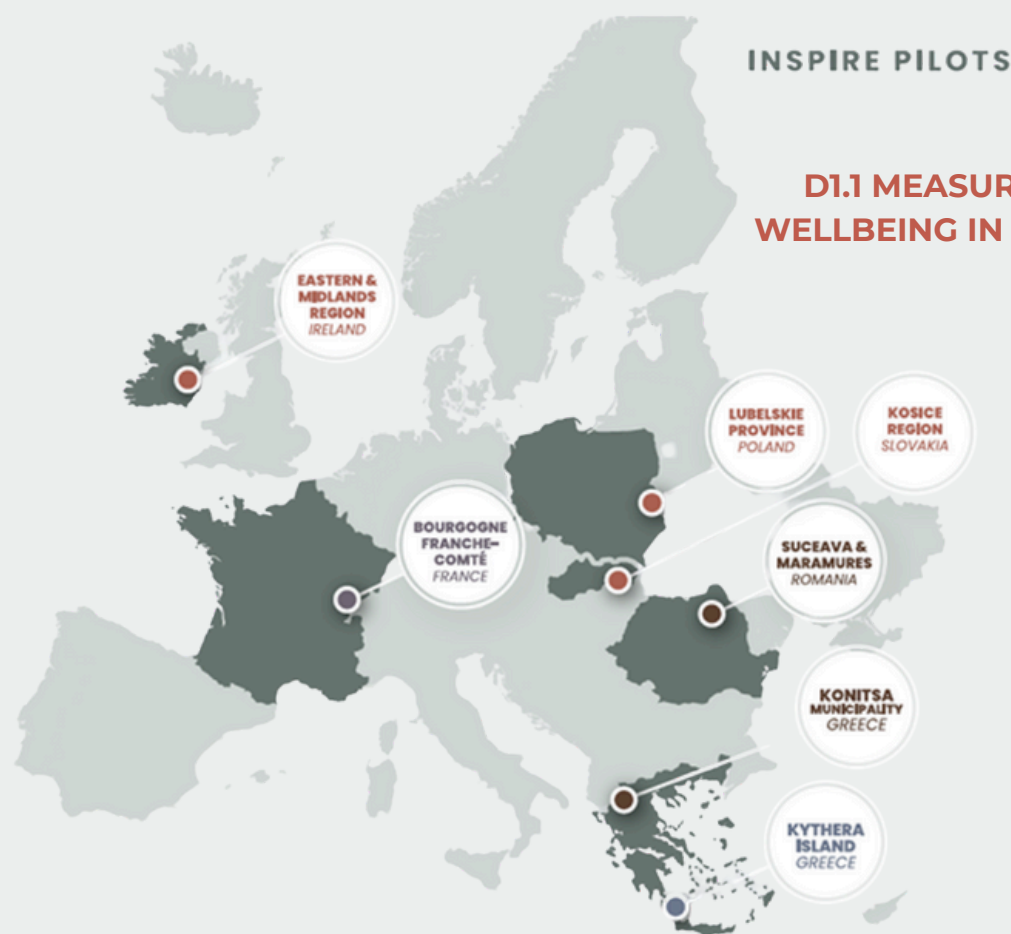
Disability
- People with physical, mental, or intellectual disabilities: face barriers to work, education, and participation — especially in remote areas

Understanding these axes ensures policies are **intersectional** and tailored, recognizing that people face exclusion **in different ways, at different intensities**, depending on their identity and environment.

About INSPIRE

INSPIRE is a Horizon Europe project supporting **inclusion, wellbeing, and growth in rural areas** by establishing **Smart Village Labs***. These Labs promote innovation in governance, empower local communities, and create inclusive strategies tailored to rural needs.

 * Smart Village labs are physical and virtual places that promote social inclusion through user innovation and social entrepreneurship, based on a participatory approach and the use of digital technologies.

INSPIRE PILOTS

Learn more about here:
D1.1 MEASURING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND WELLBEING IN EUROPEAN RURAL AREAS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Intrested in learning more or collaborating with INSPIRE?

E: info@inspireprojecteu.eu

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