

## Supplementary material: Profiles of national strategy documents

**Table S1: Demographic Strategy – A Scotland for the Future**

<b>Title</b>	A Scotland for the Future: The opportunities and challenges of Scotland's Changing Population
<b>Body Responsible</b>	Scottish Government
<b>Publication Date</b>	2021
<b>URL</b>	<a href="https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-future-opportunities-challenges-scotlands-changing-population/">https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-future-opportunities-challenges-scotlands-changing-population/</a>
<b>Geography</b>	Mostly covers <i>Scotland as a whole</i> , but one chapter focuses on territorial “balance”
<b>Perceived simple shrinking process and issues</b>	<i>Long established drift of population</i> (especially young, educated etc) from rural north and west to urban and accessible rural areas in south and east. Population ageing and low rates of natural change in ‘sending’ areas. Most remote rural areas have positive net migration, but it falls short of the natural deficit. Population decline and intensified ageing are forecast for much of the north and west, during the coming decades. Some parts of the south and east are currently experiencing growth, which is forecast to continue. Simple <i>shrinking process thought to be exacerbated</i> by ending of Free Movement with Brexit.
<b>Perceived complex shrinking process and issues</b>	Terminology of ‘balance’ is used. Unbalanced development is the consequence of complex shrinking. ‘Balanced development’ characterised by a match between population requirements and <i>service provision capacity</i> , housing, infrastructure etc. There is also a labour market element – out-migration reduces the <i>availability of skills and innovation capacity</i> . In “receiving’ areas service/housing/infrastructure demand exceeds capacity/provision.
<b>Overall Policy Goal(s)</b>	<p>P6 “The Scottish Government’s aim is to <i>make communities across Scotland attractive places</i> to live, work, bring up families and to move to; so that Scotland’s population profile provides a platform for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and wellbeing”.</p> <p>Diagram (p6) shows “Sustainability” supported by four “thematic building blocks”: Family, Health, Attraction and Balance.</p> <p>In the chapter on ‘Balance’ the following statement (p74) suggests a focus upon mitigation: “<i>Our focus in this programme is less on dealing with the impact of population change but rather focusing on the actions that need to be put in place to shift that change. Ensuring that Scotland’s population is more balanced across the country means exploring the significant structural changes that are needed to support attraction and retention in those areas that are losing people and thereby reduce the pressure on areas dealing with a significant growth in population.</i>” However, a review of the policy actions cited (both existing and planned) shows a <i>complex (hard to disentangle) combination of mitigation and adaptation</i>. Prior to the recent increased interest at a national level, one gets the impression that the most common response was involuntary adaptation at a local level. Local governance (Councils) has <i>limited capacity</i> and ‘mandate’ to engage in mitigation strategies (such as place making and employment creation initiatives to attract migrants, or support for integration). Looking ahead, the Scottish Government hope that COVID recovery measures will align with the locational impacts of pre-existing technological trends, allowing it to “<i>pivot to a more distributed regional model to address economic recovery, ... and support a renewed focus on place-based initiatives</i>” (p77).</p>

<b>Distinctive features, key nomenclature</b>	<p>1. 'Balance' – see above.</p> <p>2. Place-based approach (p8) – this is a strong theme in recent policy statements by the Scottish Government. Early usage of the term was narrow, specific to the need for coherence in terms of service delivery by a range of local and national agencies, public, third sector and private. In the Population Strategy document there is evidence of a <i>broader concept</i> (p66): “<i>Our focus in this programme is on population balance and the sustainable distribution of our population in a way that works with the characteristics of our places and local ambitions for change.</i>” It is perhaps helpful to note that the implementation of the place-based approach to development is envisaged through a <i>planning policy</i> (National Planning Framework 4), rather than regional or rural policy.</p>
<b>Narrative of Intermediate Objectives</b>	<p>As in many policy documents, the ‘intermediate outcomes’ are <i>not explicitly</i> spelled out – they can only be implied from the text. As a consequence, success cannot be easily monitored or evaluated.</p> <p>If we focus upon the fourth building block of the strategy, which concerns the regional distribution of population, the intermediate outcomes seem to be framed in terms of regional ‘balance’, in which demographic trends reach some kind of equilibrium in terms of territorial capacities and potential. If we assume that this does not require demographic stasis (i.e. population in some areas will continue to decline, and some to increase), potential ways to measure this might be found in terms of the housing market, service performance metrics etc.</p>
<b>Instruments and actions</b>	<p>The <i>Population Strategy does not have its own interventions or budget</i>. Rather it presents an orchestration of existing initiatives and policies, together with some goals and aspirations for the future. Context is the Scottish Governments National Performance Framework - “well-being Framework” . However, a coalition of Councils (municipalities) and the regional development agency for the Highlands and Islands are currently piloting a Repopulation Zone scheme. This concentrates resources in areas which have exhibited the strongest shrinking. Specific interventions, which are organised in 5 thematic groups: (i) Housing, (ii) Jobs, (iii) Critical Infrastructure – Transport and Digital, (iv) Access to public services, and (v) Talent Attraction, Retention and Return, are coordinated by dedicated project officers.</p>
<b>Governance – actors, distribution of power, sanctions/incentives etc</b>	<p>The Scottish Population Strategy is (superficially) rather top-down in style. However, <i>closer inspection</i> shows that very close ties which exist, especially at the local level, between the public sector and the third sector – voluntary and charitable organisations – often contracted by the councils for not-for-profit delivery of services. This means that although the Scottish Government is responsible for the overall direction of the strategy, in reality it is the third sector where innovation and local ‘tactical’ planning takes place, albeit within limits set by “arms-length” coordination of national strategy and local public sector commissioning.</p>
<b>Outcome evaluation arrangements?</b>	<p>This will be integrated into the Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework. This has advantages in terms of overall <i>policy coherence</i>, although the effectiveness in the narrower context of demographic policy depends very much upon the choice of indicators, and how they are collected.</p>
<b>Reviewer’s reflections</b>	<p>It is important to be aware of the <i>political context</i> of the Population Strategy – especially the relationship between the Nationalist-led administration in Edinburgh and the UK government in Westminster. Until very recently the “arena” of the discourse about demographic change in remote rural Scotland was community development in the context of <i>land reform</i>, with some opposition from the “<i>rewilding</i>” conservationist lobby. Since Brexit the withdrawal of the benefits of Free Movement has been perceived by the</p>

	nationalist majority in the Scottish Parliament as a threat to demographic sustainability imposed upon Scotland by Westminster. It has thus become a trigger for a shift towards <i>more proactive mitigation</i> , as a vehicle for “fighting back”.
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**Table S2: Demographic Strategy – National Strategy Spain**

<b>Title</b>	National Strategy to the population challenge – “Estrategia Nacional frente al Reto Demográfico, Directrices Generales”
<b>Body Responsible</b>	Government Commissioner and Ministry of Territorial Policy and Public Affairs (Ministerio de Política Territorial y Función Pública)
<b>Publication Date</b>	2017
<b>URL</b>	<a href="https://www.mptfp.gob.es/dam/es/portal/reto_demografico/Estrategia_Nacional/dir ectrices_generales_estrategia.pdf.pdf">https://www.mptfp.gob.es/dam/es/portal/reto_demografico/Estrategia_Nacional/dir ectrices_generales_estrategia.pdf.pdf</a> and <a href="https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2017/01/27/40">https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2017/01/27/40</a>
<b>Geography</b>	Covers whole Spain, with focus on depopulating areas.
<b>Perceived simple shrinking process and issues</b>	<p>The problem of depopulation affects large parts of Spanish municipalities: From 2001 to 2018 of all Spanish municipalities 63% decreased in population numbers, with almost 50% loosing between 10% and 50% of its population in this period. Most importantly, the population decline is relevant for 90% of the small municipalities of less than 1,000 inhabitants. The map reveals that decline is widespread throughout the Spanish territory (p.6).</p> <p>The risk for depopulation is linked to low population density (about half of Spanish municipalities have a density rate of less than 12.5 inh/km<sup>2</sup>; for less than 8 inh/km<sup>2</sup> the share is 38.1%) and very small municipalities (more than 80% with less than 500 inhabitants) (p.7). Moreover, ageing rate is particularly high and increasing (with 120 persons aged more than 65 against young population of less than 16; p.9) which is aggravated by a low fertility rate (1.31 in 2017) and a strong masculinisation in large parts of the territory (p.12).</p>
<b>Perceived complex shrinking process and issues</b>	<p>There is strong spatial concentration of population on the coast and few agglomerations, and also spatial distribution of tourism is following that spatial pattern aggravating the situation for areas in population decline. Awareness of the phenomenon is collected and potential measures are seen in improvements of services, employment measures and digital solutions.</p> <p>The strategy engages in a “preparation process” and “comparative learning” from other countries, with the aim to address various aspects of raising attractiveness of areas, family compliance, life quality for dependent population groups, skills development and weaken seasonality dependency in tourism.</p>
<b>Overall Policy Goal(s)</b>	<p>National Strategy presented on 17 January 2017 to combat demographic challenges, and approved regulation on 27 January 2017, creating a Government Commissioner for Demographic Challenges. It explicitly aims at sustainability pathways and well-being issues, a focus on all territories, integrating urban and rural areas, and a strategy to enhance equality and equal access to opportunities for women and men, persons of all ages and from all places (p.4f.).</p> <p>In chapter 5 (Objectives and Action Lines) the main activities are briefly presented, aiming at <i>“the foundations for guaranteeing equal opportunities and the free exercise of citizenship rights throughout the territory”</i>. Detailed actions should be supported by transversal aspects, including full connectivity, securing access to basic services to all the population, “demographic proofing”, eliminating stereotypes on marginalised areas and providing an effective administrative framework and implementation practice.</p> <p>In Spain the regional dimension in policy implementation has become very important over recent years. For policies combating depopulation, in addition to the national strategy and framework regulation several autonomus regions have created the “Forum of Spanish Regions with demographic Challenges” to address these problems at the regional scale. Regulations for stipulating local action have spread over recent years and were issued by at least six Spanish regions over the last three years (Galicia, Asturias, Aragón, Castilla y León, Castilla-La Mancha, Valencia), with further regions like</p>

	Andalucia preparing regional strategies. In addition the regions are also active in Pan-European networks to tackle problems of demographic change and the Spanish federation of Municipalities and regions (FEMP) suggested a number of respective measures (see EPRS 2020, 3).
<b>Distinctive features, key nomenclature</b>	<p>The “<i>Change agenda</i>” exposed in the strategy document highlights the need and measures to “<i>reduce inequality and to protect the state of well-being</i>” as primary aspects. The document elaborates on almost half of its volume (covering about 40 pages) the list of measures, applied by 16 national Ministries.</p> <p>Key aspects of the strategy are the <i>cooperation and coordination</i> within administration and <i>public-private cooperation</i> to achieve the improvements desired through the strategy.</p>
<b>Narrative of Intermediate Objectives</b>	<p>From the reference to international good practice examples some reference points for the underlying narrative can be concluded. The document includes a final chapter on Monitoring and Evaluation (pp. 92ff.) where the long-term feature of the activity is mentioned (at least “two decades”) and a comprehensive set of indicators and system of policy appraisal, with steps of internal learning process (“self-assessment”), interim assessment and final evaluation (both carried out through CDGAE).</p> <p>General indicators focus on demographic aspects (with many details) and indicators for transversal objectives shall provide an insight to horizontal aspects (connectivity, services, administration, perception and achievements with regard to Sustainable Development Goals).</p>
<b>Instruments and actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Strategy links to numerous actions of the various Ministries and thus provides a general framework to intensifying action against depopulation of large parts of the Spanish territory. These include, in particular: Starting with a two-year participatory process (e.g. Aragon 2020-2022);</li> <li>- Support for remote teleworking hubs (creation of ‘digital innovation hubs’);</li> <li>- High-speed broadband development throughout rural regions</li> <li>- Community-based tourism support (with events organization and local actors’ engagement);</li> <li>- Measures to improve accessibility to education, health and other public services;</li> <li>- Intensive training for young people and students;</li> <li>- Activities to eliminate stereotypes concerning shrinking areas;</li> <li>- Measures to cope with psychological challenges in rural areas.</li> </ul> <p>As implementation is also affected by regions and at local level, actions are dependent on perspectives and increased awareness of local opportunities.</p>
<b>Governance – actors, distribution of power, sanctions/incentives etc</b>	<p>Though this is a National Strategy it is supplemented by many regional regulations and stakeholder activities and local action. With the “Minister for Ecologic Transition and Demographic Challenges” (Teresa Ribera Rodríguez) the government puts high priority to action combating depopulation across all the national territory (<a href="https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/ministerio/funciones-estructura/organigrama/Ministra-MITECO.aspx">https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/ministerio/funciones-estructura/organigrama/Ministra-MITECO.aspx</a>).</p> <p>A great number of other administrative actors and networks are also active and contribute to the wide-spread commitment visible throughout the country. Regional programmes supplement national activities and aim at effective action, e.g. recently through a “pioneer” law against depopulation in Castilla-La Mancha (May 2021), The actions and support covers almost all sectors and public administrations, facilitating various aspects of changing previous defensive narratives towards pro-active approaches and visionary action for young people, women integration, return programmes, self-employment and age-friendly spaces.</p>

<b>Outcome evaluation arrangements?</b>	Despite the many indicators addressed, there are no clear target numbers set in the Strategy. Nevertheless, the ambitious setting of administrative coordination and cooperation is promising. Expectations to “eliminate stereotypes” on marginalized areas are obvious signs to aim at shifts in policy design and increased effectiveness, despite incumbent obstacles.
<b>Reviewer’s reflections</b>	The political context and wide-spread awareness of the urgency of demographic challenges have led to public action to (finally) address the issue through policy, e.g. visible through manifestations by large gatherings of population. As issues of depletion of rural areas were explicitly mentioned in demonstrations this perspective has gained strong support, also among urban people. It seems early to assess the effects of this political shift towards seeing the crucial role of action for rural regions and tackling “marginalization” threats more actively / convincingly than through previous programmes. A lot of information on the intentions and actions is presented at the Ministries website ( <a href="https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/reto-demografico/temas/default.aspx">https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/reto-demografico/temas/default.aspx</a> ) indicating numerous policy instruments, programs throughout the various regions of Spain and at lower level, and references to trans-border cooperation (particularly with Portugal) and other European experiences on population decline. All this provides the impression that a comprehensive view, encompassing a notion of “complex” interrelationships, enabling and fostering a more active role to local and regional spaces is assessed as indispensable to overcome the huge challenges.

**Table S3: Demographic Strategy – National Action to “Repopulate Italy”**

<b>Title</b>	Riabitare l’Italia – Le Aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste; New Life in Italy – the Inner Areas between abandonment and re-emergence
<b>Body Responsible</b>	Group of activists of stakeholders, experts and public actors
<b>Publication Date</b>	2018 (with Manifesto in 2020); book publication, with consecutive elaboration of the “Manifesto” (book, including brief comments on key concepts) two years later; and a third volume (in 2021) on the need to reconsider interrelations of spaces: “Metromontagna”
<b>URL</b>	<a href="https://riabitarelitalia.net/RIABITARE_LITALIA/">https://riabitarelitalia.net/RIABITARE_LITALIA/</a> and <a href="https://riabitarelitalia.net/RIABITARE_LITALIA/il-manifesto-pagina/">https://riabitarelitalia.net/RIABITARE_LITALIA/il-manifesto-pagina/</a> <a href="https://riabitarelitalia.net/RIABITARE_LITALIA/in-libreria-il-terzo-volume-dellassociazione-riabitare-litalia-metromontagna/">https://riabitarelitalia.net/RIABITARE_LITALIA/in-libreria-il-terzo-volume-dellassociazione-riabitare-litalia-metromontagna/</a>
<b>Geography</b>	Covers all Italy, but sheds light particularly on remote regions, called “Inner Areas” in Italy since establishing respective policy program.
<b>Perceived simple shrinking process and issues</b>	Considerations situated between “full” and “empty” areas, i.e. policy attention should be redirected to empty, rural, marginal areas. Building also on the national concept of “Internal Areas” (IA) the first chapters address the dichotomy of spatial development across Italy: Addressing historical periods of depopulation in the South (‘Mezzogiorno’) and mountains, provides maps on persisting population decline in large parts of these IAs. This is presented as a strong concentration process of settlement, great spatial diversity of processes, with internal migration flows further “emptying” almost half of the country (p.36). Indicators include: natural change, migration, educational level, tourism indicators, health aspects and life expectation, and age structure changes (p.48f.).
<b>Perceived complex shrinking process and issues</b>	Based on concept and national approval of “territorial cohesion” a comprehensive assessment of all influences is presented. Analysis takes on the work for IAs, recently carried out, based on a synthetic indicator of deprivation, comprising in particular a measurement of peripheralization, i.e. difficulties to access services (p. 54). Also based on economic “contraction” on agglomerations, weakening of urbanistic base and ecological challenges.
<b>Overall Policy Goal(s)</b>	The national initiative <i>Riabitare l’Italia</i> is based on an emergent group of experts and activists, conscious of the deadlock of current economic mainstream. Their fundamental aim is to alter the perspective from a defensive position of dealing with the tasks of overcoming tremendous challenges in marginal areas towards a vision that speaks about the internal dichotomies and shapes new narratives to harness opportunities of the ‘margins’. Building on rich cultural legacy, a multitude of transformation ideas are sought and presented from different angles: In the first publication, the extensive volume on presenting the new vision and innovatory aspects it argues for potential of new, effective projects and political frameworks that grasp the wealth of territorial resources of these areas (pp. 457ff.), enhancing practices of regeneration (pp. 499ff.), and a repositioning of the “empty” Italy into the centre of socio-economic and cultural concern (pp. 537ff.). This approach needs to take a renewed view, emotions and heterodox instruments serious to achieve the addressed change (pp.551ff.). The second publication presents a “manifesto” for this approach, and declares in the brief outline on keywords what these would mean; while the third publication (in early 2021), called “Metromontagna” refers to the deep changes in spatial structures and interrelations of spaces.
<b>Distinctive features, key nomenclature</b>	1. rescheduling the balance between center and periphery: focus on “National Strategy for Inner Areas”(SNAI), elaborated since about 10 years, selecting 72 local areas for application of Inner Areas “projects”.

	<p>2. As the title suggests it is promoting an empowering and activating approach, indicated through wording throughout the long book volume (and Manifesto publication): “active citizenship and participation” (pp.435ff.), core role of “community actors for transformation” (pp.207ff.), focus on innovative social development (pp. 307ff.), regeneration and “reshaping the empty space”. In summary, it aims at “a (new) heterodox view on remote places and a radical turn” in viewing these areas (F. Barca, p.551), including aspects of diversity, change necessity and political action, multi-level inputs and focus on social development.</p>
<b>Narrative of Intermediate Objectives</b>	<p>The initiative “Riabitare l’Italia” is a particular example assembling a group of highly motivated experts and national stakeholders to change the views towards “peripheral areas” and thus shape a renewed narrative based on the rich diversity of Italian places. The manifesto declares that having altered perspectives and a more comprehensive view on the alternative futures for these areas would be an important achievement. It does not provide indicators and quantifiable interim targets, but a series of local action and trends for emerging activities in remote places would be an indication of positive turn and ‘intermediate outcome’. Measurement could be derived from the “key words” of the Manifesto, including natural resources, procedural and spatial aspects for revaluing these territories.</p>
<b>Instruments and actions</b>	<p>The initiative does not have a set of instruments, but relates to the national strategy for inner areas (SNAI) with a collection of local action. Although it should not be limited to that strategy, those activities provide useful examples of visibility. According to monitoring data (for 2020) about 44% of all measures of SNAI account for infrastructure improvement in these Inner Areas, covering mobility, health and education issues. The majority of funds (the remaining 56%) are used for local development activities. They comprise particularly the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Natural resources, cultural and tourism development;</li> <li>- Agricultural and forestry support;</li> <li>- Energy transformation;</li> <li>- Enhancing access to digital services and vocational training.</li> <li>- And support of local know-how and craftsmanship by enhancing local skills and technological and social innovation, fostering local participation.</li> </ul> <p>Beyond that, there are numerous “anecdotal” examples of rising interest (like young people returning to mountain areas) and new initiatives (attracting people to revitalise houses in all rural regions of Italy).</p>
<b>Governance – actors, distribution of power, sanctions/incentives etc</b>	<p>Governance issues are addressed repeatedly, and in many aspects; yet a clear approach is hardly observable. The clearest action is related to SNAI where a geographical definition and programme structure provides a foundation for local action. Other activities are scattered and split among many diverse actors and supporters. This is a positive feature as it shows the high and widely shared interest among local actors (and newcomers), it also points to the need for incentives and engagement in discourse (like the initiative itself).</p>
<b>Outcome evaluation arrangements?</b>	<p>Not foreseen yet, as it started and is organized as initiative to assemble “interested parties” and nurture ideas towards narrative change. It will be important to show positive examples and outcomes to gain momentum and rising local action.</p>
<b>Reviewer’s reflections</b>	<p>The “initiative” Riabitare l’Italia is an approach that builds on discourse, and new perspectives on valuing local places and new narrative shaping in remote (and particularly mountain) contexts of the country. It juxtaposes the “empty space” characterizing large parts of Italy with the so far economically one-dimensional development of centers/agglomerations, assessing that “marginalization is not inevitable” (Manifesto, pp. 45 ff.) but alternative views and action is possible and have to be harnessed, if the wealth of diverse cultural regions and natural resources should be “cultivated”.</p>

**Table S4: Demographic Strategy – Equal living conditions throughout Germany**

<b>Title</b>	Germany: Our Plan for Germany – Equal living conditions everywhere (‘Unser Plan für Deutschland – Gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse überall’)
<b>Body Responsible</b>	Three Federal Ministers (Internal Affairs and housing; Food and agriculture; and Family, aged persons, women and youth), as presidents of the Commission “Equal living conditions”
<b>Publication Date</b>	2019
<b>URL</b>	<a href="https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/137240/e94cf2ffab8768fd37a1e632db3ee51e/schlussfolgerungen-kommission-gleichwertige-lebensverhaeltnisse-langversion-data.pdf">https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/137240/e94cf2ffab8768fd37a1e632db3ee51e/schlussfolgerungen-kommission-gleichwertige-lebensverhaeltnisse-langversion-data.pdf</a>
<b>Geography</b>	Covers all Germany, and aims at reducing territorial imbalances throughout the country, by presenting territorial “disparities” down to municipality level
<b>Perceived simple shrinking process and issues</b>	<p>Overall population loss due to (increasingly) negative natural balance since the 1970s, exacerbated by unification of Germany in 1990.</p> <p>In particular, strong population loss in Eastern Germany regions, which hardly could be reduced since German “reunification” in 1989. Recent figures on development change 2014-2019 confirm long-established dichotomy in demographic trends.</p> <p>In shrinking rural regions strong trends for ageing population (in recent decades), overall high dependence on immigration and internal movements, leaving regions in the East with cumulative problems of demographic loss of young, skilled workers and exacerbating local development challenges.</p>
<b>Perceived complex shrinking process and issues</b>	<p>Situation considered as “downward spiral” process with few options for turnaround or reversal of negative trends. In particular, facing difficulties for service provision, failures to meet rising “efficiency” requirements due to austerity paradigm, skills shortages and hardly any confidence in innovation renewal, despite strong regional attachment to place of origin.</p> <p>Further reduction of labour market facilities due to closure of industrial basis, and impending further reduction in consequence of withdrawal from coal industry (environmental objectives and climate change adaptation requirements).</p>
<b>Overall Policy Goal(s)</b>	<p>The government’s aim, as summarized in the Plan, is to take stock of adaptation requirements through Working Groups in different policy spheres, and deduce from that analytical work a wide scope of instruments to tackle the situation that “equal living conditions are not in place, at present”.</p> <p>Working Groups cover the following issues: (1) communal finances and indebtedness, (2) Economic support and innovation, (3) Spatial planning and statistics, (4) Technical infrastructure, (5) Social services and labour, and (6) Participation and societal cohesion. Following to the comprehensive analysis that equal living conditions are not present in Germany, the process engages in sorting out a series of recommendations for different policy fields. This starts with a fundamental supporting system for structurally weak regions, activities to enhance rural areas, shape regional labour markets, and foster decentralization activities. But many diverse instruments are proposed for all the themes, like digitalization and mobility, establish powerful municipalities, social care facilities, participation and cohesion.</p>
<b>Distinctive features, key nomenclature</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Integrated approach to achieve “equal living conditions” throughout Germany, implying in particular focus on support for structurally weak which are often also remote regions. Big overlap with “shrinking rural regions” in Eastern Germany.</li> <li>2. Reducing spatial disparities and address all people living in Germany and providing attractive places.</li> <li>3. “Modernization program” for the whole country, involving all spheres of policy, cultural development and social integration activities. Particular focus is (at least rhetorically) on social infrastructures and service provision. The aim of equal living</li> </ol>

		conditions is presented as a long-term task requiring joint efforts from all levels and a time horizon of at least one decade. Indirectly these developments in living conditions should impact on willingness to stay in weak regions or places that are so far affected by out-migration and population decline.
<b>Narrative of Intermediate Objectives</b>	of	<p>In April 2021 an Interim Report has been approved by the German government, summarizing the various policy measures of the country so far and presenting the main future challenges for achieving “equal living conditions” (see: <a href="https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/178222/7d7b9f258c195b5731d90b726bac7883/politik-fuer-gleichwertige-lebensverhaeltnisse-zwischenbilanz-data.pdf">https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/178222/7d7b9f258c195b5731d90b726bac7883/politik-fuer-gleichwertige-lebensverhaeltnisse-zwischenbilanz-data.pdf</a> ).</p> <p>In addition there is also a first (interim) report available on the general support system of Germany for structurally weak regions (<a href="https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Artikel/Wirtschaft/gesamtdeutsches-foerdersystem-fuer-strukturschwache-regionen.html">https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Artikel/Wirtschaft/gesamtdeutsches-foerdersystem-fuer-strukturschwache-regionen.html</a> ).</p> <p>The Interim Report explains the initial activities on the 12 priority action lines, and other policy measures, showing in particular: Establishing a common national policy package out of the former 20 (+) separate programmes of six Federal Ministries; shifting administrative resources and research institutions towards structurally weak regions (plan to shift more than 15,000 work places); reducing the gap in broadband quality between rural and urban areas; train investment and regular interval timetable to raise attractiveness for remote places, and community finance support; Integrated rural support scheme; urban development and social housing; overcome indebtedness of small municipalities; enhance local participation and volunteer engagement; child care facilities; improve physical access (“freedom from barriers”); social cohesion in communities; and principle of “equal living conditions” as general guidance for policy proofing.</p> <p>In addition, support for transitions in coal areas, due to Corona changes, needs of medical care, digital challenges, sustainable spatial development, and ecological and climate change adaptation.</p>
<b>Instruments and actions</b>	and	<p>The German Plan covers all different aspects of policy, and lists the various measures and funds available to improve regional situations and reduce disparities. This list involves 12 “priority measures” and 9 additional federal support areas. A selected list includes the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effectively extend broadband coverage;</li> <li>- Improvements in transport infrastructure and spatial accessibility;</li> <li>- Provide affordable housing facilities in rural areas;</li> <li>- Elaborate a fair solution for communal debts;</li> <li>- Enhance voluntary engagement;</li> <li>- Ensure sufficient and high-quality child care facilities;</li> <li>- Foster social cohesion and integration;</li> <li>- Realize equal living conditions as a national standard by establishing a proofing process;</li> <li>- Addressing stereotypes in development perspectives, through gender and youth activities, as well as measures addressing cultural changes.</li> </ul> <p>It is an ambitious plan that covers a high funded budget, with different types of effectiveness for demographic development (direct/indirect; partial, policy trade-off etc.), but also addressing socio-cultural dimensions and impact.</p>
<b>Governance actors, distribution of power,</b>	– of	Responsibilities for different policy areas are addressed and combined in the overarching Plan. Detailed implementation would have to be scrutinized more carefully by accessing each single sub-programme or instrument to analyse effects, side-effects or unintended effects, or contradictory outcomes.

<b>sanctions/incentives etc</b>	<p>The federal structure of the country and hierarchical distribution of tasks implies involvement at various levels, high interest in inclusion of local people, however with limited resources and “means” to actively change situations.</p> <p>Participation and local engagement are addressed in this plan, and quoted in the title of the press release, but rather taken up at the end of the list of aspects which implies that it is not of such a high priority, even if that list does not pretend to be a priority list (a finding local population in the German CS in ESCAPE complained a lot!).</p>
<b>Outcome evaluation arrangements?</b>	<p>The national activity on this Plan started in 2018 with elaboration of the Working Group “equal living conditions”. It follows earlier engagement on demographic change, entitled “All Ages matter – for higher well-being and life quality for all generations” (Summary report by Ministry of Interior, 2017). This plan is scheduled for “at least a decade”, with outcome considerations being linked to the various policy domains.</p> <p>Implementation is prepared by six thematic Working Groups, with plans for comprehensive financial support and respective evaluation regimes (which are, however, not directly referred to in the summarizing Plan itself). Implementation is dependent on realization through the federal states who have legal competencies on many of these issues, thus the national Plan has a declaration character, with a list of recommendations but no indication of outcome measurement.</p>
<b>Reviewer’s reflections</b>	<p>This Plan has been preceded (and accompanied) by numerous national, regional and local action on demographic change and programmes, ideas and initiatives to cope with persisting challenges for a large share of regions of Germany. The long-term legacy of (shrinking) rural regions prompted the government to conceive this national Plan for “equal living conditions” which includes an important action strand oriented at demographic development and, indirectly, a comprehensive set of policies to raise attractiveness and future economic chances of structurally weak regions.</p> <p>Activities for rural regions are integrated in this Plan and seen as an important contribution to the overall stimulation of socio-economic conditions and strengthening of social life in these areas. Even if it builds on many activities that were in place since long, it indicates a new narrative that disparities should be overcome, and this might be achievable, despite contradictory discourse in economic and “leading” circles of the country. It might become important if the broad platform of policy actors, comprising all Ministries and Federal states of Germany, could achieve momentum and create a shift in the national narrative, finally overcoming the big “divide” between East and West. However, one should be cautious with optimistic views since similar arguments were raised throughout the past three decades.</p>

**Table S5: Demographic Strategy \_ Mission document on equal options for rural areas in France**

<b>Title</b>	Mission document, Orientation et égalité des chances dans la France des zones rurales et des petites villes: Restaurer la promesse républicaine <i>Guidance and Equal Opportunities in rural and small town France: Restoring the Republican Promise</i> (by Salomé Berlioux)
<b>Body Responsible</b>	Association chemin d'avenirs (NGO), commissioned by Ministry of National Education and Youth
<b>Publication Date</b>	2020
<b>URL</b>	<a href="https://www.education.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2020-03/rapport-de-la-mission-orientation-et-galit-des-chances-dans-la-france-des-zones-rurales-et-des-petites-villes-restaurer-la-promesse-r-publicaine-51680.pdf">https://www.education.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2020-03/rapport-de-la-mission-orientation-et-galit-des-chances-dans-la-france-des-zones-rurales-et-des-petites-villes-restaurer-la-promesse-r-publicaine-51680.pdf</a>
<b>Geography</b>	Covers all rural areas of France and role of small towns
<b>Perceived simple shrinking process and issues</b>	<p>Rural Agenda refers to changed spatial dynamics: more territorially balanced and differentiation at large-scale (North-East losing towards South-West of France). Demographic changes are addressed only indirectly in Mission, e.g. through reference to Coquard's (2019) survey on those remaining in "rural declining regions" (Ceux qui restent: faire sa vie dans les campagnes en déclin).</p> <p>Also this mission document is based on a supporting survey among young people: Berlioux et al. 2020, <a href="https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Note20Vfinale.pdf">https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Note20Vfinale.pdf</a> assuming that the lack of young people through increased out-migration is the most pertinent factor in the shrinking process.</p>
<b>Perceived complex shrinking process and issues</b>	<p>Terminology used focuses on young people's constraints and cumulative process leading to "lack of ambition", thus integrating socio-economic factors, spatial comparison and development aspects, policy assessment and psychological implications. Issues addressed include, weak social mobility (of young people) (p.12), Social and geographical gap between young in rural and urban contexts and social milieus widens (p.13), young people of rural regions lag behind (p.14), complexity of challenges, and hardly any targeted policies for remote places (p. 16), missing information (p.17), accumulation of handicaps (p.18). Ensuing effects are lack of ambition, and even tendency of "self-censorship" of young people (p.21); jeopardizing capacity "to act" (p.22), absence of role models (p.24), deferred digitalisation (p.25), and also cultural opportunities reduced (p.26ff.) as well as limited mobility (p.35).</p>
<b>Overall Policy Goal(s)</b>	<p>Mission document is based on general process of "Rural Agenda: Nos campagnes, territoires d'avenir" (2019; our countryside, future spaces), <a href="https://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2019-09/DP_Agenda%20rural.pdf">https://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2019-09/DP_Agenda%20rural.pdf</a></p> <p>The mission is based on a series of more than hundred workshops and participation events across France, a number of supportive studies and surveys, with the aim to support the general framework of strategic orientation of the national "Rural Agenda". It aims to provide a general guideline for action in rural areas, not going into place-specific detail, but asking for specific action for young people, and nurturing their talent and ambition.</p> <p>It elaborates 4 axes of action with 25 detailed recommendations. Axes refer to a better representation of the respective territorial issues; a clear focus on information, orientation and strategic outline; enhanced support to network building; and a programme to cope with challenges of rural mobility.</p>
<b>Distinctive features, key nomenclature</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. addressing spatial dichotomies; e.g. through argument on young people of "three different velocities"</li> <li>2. widely shared obstacles largely hidden from public discourse (so far).</li> </ol>

	<p>3. psychological view on perpetuating challenges and “vicious cycles”: leading to reduced ambition and self-censorship of own potential and future plans.</p> <p>4. Limited participation of young people from rural areas on new cultural trends, international exchange and innovative developments, due to physical obstacles and psychological barriers.</p>
<b>Narrative of Intermediate Objectives</b>	<p>This is an expert report with clear recommendations summarizing the views of many workshops, and submitted to the respective Ministries.</p> <p>Even if for many recommendations the scope of action and envisaged numbers of activities is expressed, there are no explicit objectives (and dates) mentioned.</p>
<b>Instruments and actions</b>	<p>25 detailed recommendations for improving situation and future for youth in rural areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prepare and provide access to dedicated information for young people and families;</li> <li>- Networking and enhancing practical job experiences (internships), with networking and several inspirational examples (p.32)</li> <li>- Support selection of studies when course places are distant from students;</li> <li>- organize future job campus and qualification</li> <li>- Organize internships in rural contexts; Intensification of support for school transport;</li> <li>- Enable access to specific opportunities by linking to cultural, artistic and sports offer;</li> <li>- Sensibilisation measures for enterprises to spatial diversity and uniqueness;</li> <li>- Empowerment approach for young rural women;</li> <li>- Information, orientation and ambition as crucial pedagogical project in rural areas (“Find your path”);</li> <li>- Establish 100 pilot rural colleges (according a model of “mini-enterprises”);</li> <li>- Elaborate a mentorship programme between agglomerations and remote areas;</li> <li>- and many more detailed educational and information measures.</li> </ul>
<b>Governance – actors, distribution of power, sanctions/incentives etc</b>	<p>Implementation aspects are included, but often addressed indirectly, and mechanisms are not described in detail; i.e. current governance seems to be responsible for application of measures.</p> <p>For specific measures a clear indication of involved stakeholders, foundations etc. is provided which results from their integration in the discussion process for the mission. It remains thus a big question and task to “translate” the far-reaching plan with detailed measures into applicable place-based action.</p> <p>Meanwhile, some implementation reports available, e.g. on place-based action in mountain regions (sustainable tourism), Summer Camps for youth, Digital counsellors; etc</p>
<b>Outcome evaluation arrangements?</b>	<p>Hardly addressed in this document (and linked discussion)</p>
<b>Reviewer’s reflections</b>	<p>It is important to reflect the national discussion process, and the focus on impacting attractiveness of rural areas through improving life chances and mitigating obstacles of young people in those places. Following integration of complex cause-effect relationships this enlarged view on rural youth limitations should uncover ambition and potential. However, it is not clear to what extent this altered perspective will be shared by governance at various levels, or find persistent obstacles in achieving the required shifts for the situation of young, with the desired implications for rural regions in general.</p>