RUDI
Rural innovation
to address demographic & climate challenges

HORIZON EUROPE · RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ACTION · 2026–2030

Rural Innovation to Address Demographic and Climate Challenges

Demographic change and climate pressure are reshaping rural Europe. RUDI builds what regions need to meet both.

The challenge

Rural areas are home to 137 million people, almost 30% of the EU population, and cover more than 80% of its territory. Most of them are losing people, services and working-age residents at the same time as they face drought, flooding, heatwaves, wildfire and soil degradation. Demographic decline and climate risk are usually studied, funded and governed separately. RUDI treats them as one interconnected problem, and works on it where it is actually felt: in the regions themselves.

How RUDI works

Rural Innovation Clusters (RIC)

Eight regional platforms, each co-led by a research partner and a practice partner rooted in the area. Municipalities, small businesses, social economy actors, farmers, civil society and residents diagnose their own territory and agree a shared strategy and roadmap.

Rural Living Labs (RLL)

One inside each cluster, where solutions are co-designed, tested and evaluated in real conditions: cooperative care, climate-resilient mobility, circular agri-food chains, inclusive housing, community energy, eco-tourism.

Network for Rural Transformation (NRT)

The European layer that carries what works across regions and into policy, connected to the Rural Pact and the Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas.

The eight regions

AT	Eisenwurzen, Kirchdorf an der Krems and Steyr	**BG**	Apriltsi, Central Balkan area
DE	Kyffhäuserkreis, Thuringia	**IT**	Province of Imperia, Liguria
LV	Kurzeme	**NL**	De Liemers
PL	Małopolska	**PT**	Montemuro, Arada and Gralheira mountains

Together the eight clusters work with more than 300.000 residents.

What RUDI delivers

- A **Demography-Climate Dashboard**: an open tool combining population trajectories, climate hazard overlays, infrastructure and local networks at municipal level, where existing EU tools stop at the regional scale
- Eight territorial baseline studies and eight action-learning roadmaps
- Eight tested innovations, each documented in a replication brief
- A **Policy Support Package** for small municipalities, in at least eight EU languages
- A multilingual Knowledge Hub with open data and publications, live for at least five years after the project ends
- A travelling exhibition, community storytelling and participatory media from the regions
- Nine policy dialogues at national and European level

Who is involved

Each region is run by a tandem: a university or research institute paired with an organisation rooted in the area, with at least one municipality committed alongside them.

AT ZSI (coordinator), University of Graz, ÖBV Via Campesina · **BG** Sofia University, Farm of Mladen · **DE** IfL, Plattform e.V. · **IT** University of Milan, Cooperativa Sociale di Comunità Ture Nirvane · **LV** University of Latvia, Kurzeme Planning Region · **NL** Wageningen Research, Soil Valley Foundation · **PL** University of Agriculture in Krakow, Centrum Kultury i Promocji Gminy Ciężkowice · **PT** Polytechnic of Viseu, Federação Minha Terra. DIESIS Network, Compañia Maximalista and GEN Europe connect the regions to EU networks and policy.

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