



# 1. Agriculture and Rural Development

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## Unit 1. Agriculture and Rural Development

Definition of agriculture: “The science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying degrees the preparation and marketing of the resulting products.”<sup>1</sup>

**Agriculture** is the main sector for food production and has a crucial role in rural employment, landscape preservation, environmental protection and food security. Agricultural Development mainly aims to increase agricultural products such as crops, livestock, fish, etc.

**Rural areas** provide food, raw materials, jobs and a wide range of environmental goods and services such as cultural landscapes, biodiversity, water and soils. In most rural areas of the EU, where about half of the population lives in rural areas, agriculture keeps communities alive and together, and it is a substantial economic activity.

**Rural development** is related to the promotion of countryside vitality and the well-being of rural communities, and it is one of the means of the economic revitalisation of targeted rural areas and active farmers.

Rural development includes agricultural development activities. While Agricultural Development considers human beings, land and capital as production goods and means, on the other hand, Rural Development mainly targets people and institutions.

Thanks to its various climate, fertile soil, the technical skills of its farmers and the quality of its products, the EU is one of the world's leading producers of agricultural products.

### Some specifics of rural areas and statistical data

Rural areas often offer fewer opportunities compared to urban ones.

#### Some of the key features of rural areas:

**Infrastructure** – lack of adequate infrastructural equipment of rural communities and poor traffic connections. Also, in many rural areas, there is a weak or missing mobile/internet signal.

**Education & Culture** – characteristics of rural areas are the lack of educational possibilities, low level of cultural content and the absence of opportunities for sports activities.

**Economy** – rural areas often represent both production and consumer unit (as self-sustainable peasant economy). Returning the use of natural resources to the boundaries of sustainability puts its focus on sustainable (ecological) agriculture.

**Employment** – there are few chances for employment (especially the employment opportunities for people with higher education). The lack of perception of non-agricultural activities is typical, so often the potentials for the development of other activities are not used in rural areas. Rural areas not only offer employment in agricultural activities but, contrary to popular belief, can also have a wider diversity of offers.

**Environment & Health** – proximity to nature and wilderness is one of the biggest advantages of rural areas. This undoubtedly has a positive effect on health. However, there are also negative contemporary trends in many rural areas.

**Participation & Inclusion** – many studies show that women in rural areas have fewer opportunities to participate in social life and local policies. Due to a lack of dedicated organisations, there are no organised ways to include vulnerable groups in many areas.

Meaningful **migrations of the population** from rural to urban areas (most leave due to job search, educational opportunities, etc.

<sup>1</sup>Agriculture – Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2020). Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agriculture>

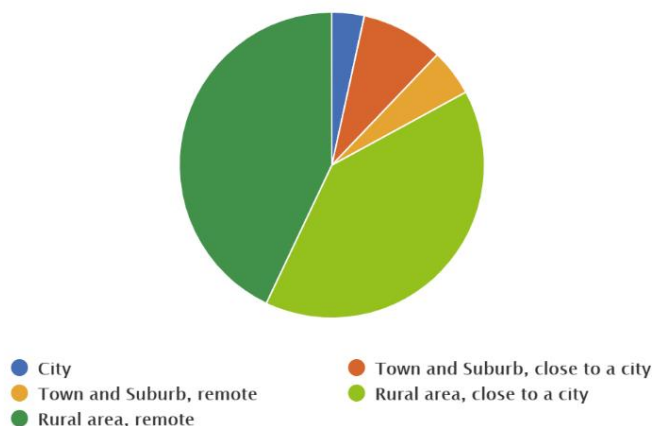
## Vibrant and Picturesque Rural Areas – Facts and statistics in Europe

### Topography

Rural areas cover more than 341 m ha, representing 83% of the total EU area in 2018. Agricultural land, forest and natural areas make up almost 80% of the EU’s area. More than half of the EU’s land area is classified as predominantly rural (51.3% in 2012).

EU land area, 2018 (in million hectares and percentage)

Source: LUISA Base Map 2018 (EC-JRC)



### Demography

It is estimated that in 2019, 40.4% of the population lived in cities, 32.5% lived in towns and suburbs, and 27.1% lived in rural areas (EU-28).

### Employment and education<sup>2</sup>

Employment rate	At an EU level, the employment rate is higher in rural areas than in cities. Since 2012, the employment rate in rural areas for people aged 20-64 has increased across the EU from 68% to 73%. However, the total number of employed persons has not increased, suggesting that the increase in the employment rate is due to the decrease of the rural active population.
Gender employment gap	The EU rural employment rate was 67% for women and 80% for men in 2019, which translates to a gender employment gap of 13 percentage points. In comparison, the employment rate of city residents (for people aged 20-64) was 68% for women and 78% for men, which translates to a gender employment gap of 10 percentage points.
Education and skills	The share of population aged 25-64 in rural areas with a tertiary education has increased over time from 18% in 2012 to 22% in 2019. Despite the general increase in the share of tertiary educated in rural areas, the increase was higher in cities. As a result, the gap between rural areas and cities increased from 17 percentage points in 2012 to 19 percentage points in 2019.
Digital skills	In the EU, the share of rural residents that have at least basic digital skills is 14 pp lower than of city residents (48% vs 62%) in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission: EU rural areas in numbers - Key data for rural areas today, broken down by topic. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas/eu-rural-areas-numbers\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas/eu-rural-areas-numbers_en)

In the EU, agriculture and food-related industries and services provide over 44 million jobs, including regular work for 20 million people within the agricultural sector itself.

**Agricultural policy in the EU**

EU Agricultural policy comprises a broad range of areas, including food quality, traceability, trade and promotion of EU agricultural products.

EU agricultural policy adapts and changes according to current trends. Especially, it has changed significantly in recent decades to help farmers face ongoing challenges and respond to changing peoples' attitudes and expectations.

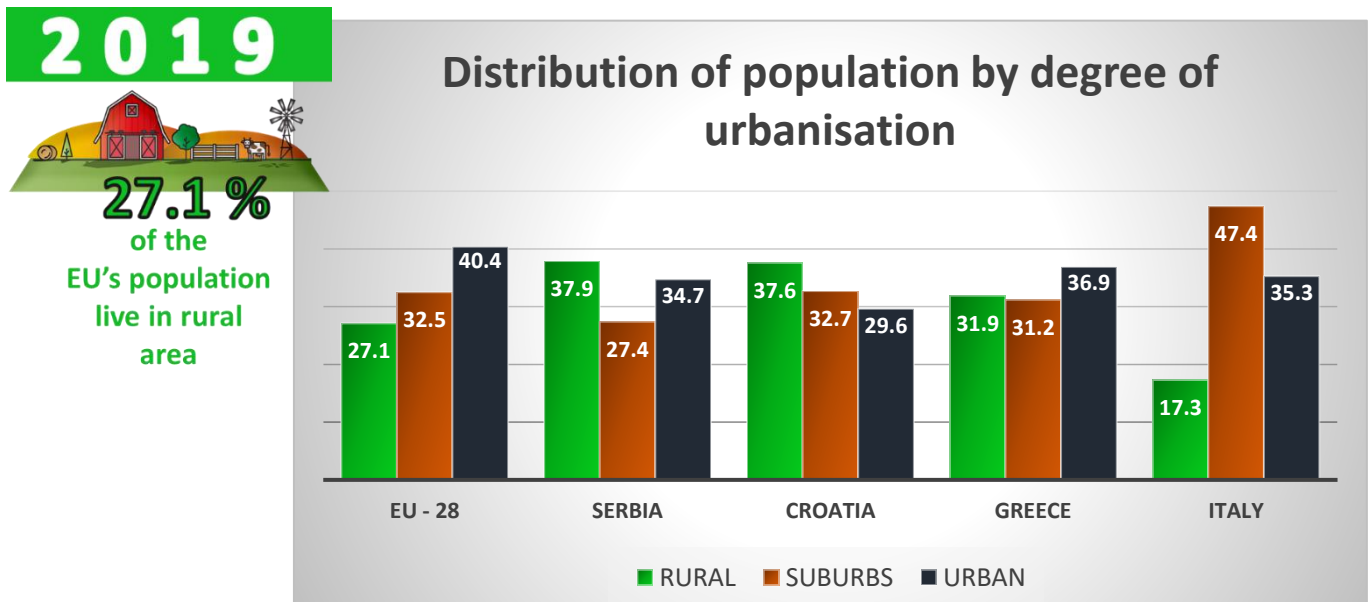
The European Commission, among others, has objectives<sup>3</sup>:

- helping farmers to produce sufficient quantities of safe food, produced respecting EU norms on sustainability, environmental rules, animal welfare, traceability, etc.
- providing farm businesses with support systems to help stabilise their incomes in the face of less predictable production conditions
- facilitating investment in a sustainable, modern farming sector
- maintaining viable rural communities, with diverse economies
- creating and maintaining jobs throughout the food chain

In the **long-term vision for rural areas**, the European Commission sets out to achieve a vibrant future for the EU's rural territories. These territories are defined by a wide range of qualities, from the beauty of their nature to the strength of their communities. They also face many challenges such as demographic changes, a high risk of poverty or lack of access to basic facilities.

**Rural development programmes by country** – EU countries prepare their own rural development programs to meet national and regional needs within the shared EU priorities.

**Facts and statistics in Europe (project partner countries)**



Source: Eurostat (ilc\_lvho01)

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/agriculture\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/agriculture_en)

Neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and degree of urbanisation (NEET rates)

From 18 to 24 years	Males			Females		
2019.	Cities	Smaller towns and suburbs	Rural areas	Cities	Smaller towns and suburbs	Rural areas
EU – 28	12.3	13.2	13.0	12.1	14.6	15.8
Greece	12.7	20.1	27.8	12.5	16.7	34.1
Italy	23.5	22.1	24.2	23.9	22.2	24.4
Serbia	15.7	19.8	21.9	13.7	21.7	27.4
Croatia	17.2*	8.2*	17.2	6.9*	16.7*	21.9*

\*low reliability

From 25 to 29 years	Males			Females		
2019.	Cities	Smaller towns and suburbs	Rural areas	Cities	Smaller towns and suburbs	Rural areas
EU – 28	11.8	12.1	12.4	18.1	23.0	26.0
Greece	22.6	23.4	22.3	28.4	31.9	41.5
Italy	26.3	22.6	23.2	35.9	34.9	37.1
Serbia	20.4	22.9	20.3	24.3	28.0	37.1
Croatia	14.4*	16.3*	11.1*	17.6*	29.0	25.3

\*low reliability

From 30 to 34 years	Males			Females		
2019.	Cities	Smaller towns and suburbs	Rural areas	Cities	Smaller towns and suburbs	Rural areas
EU – 28	9.8	10.3	10.4	21.0	24.8	26.5
Greece	18.1	17.1	20.0	31.0	41.5	46.7
Italy	19.6	17.8	20.4	34.1	38.8	39.3
Serbia	13.6	23.1	13.6	24.0	31.2	32.9
Croatia	13.7*	11.2*	13.0*	9.2*	24.7*	32.5

\*low reliability

Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifse\_29)



### Research task

Search current EU and national policies related to rural development and agriculture. See documents relating to each EU country's rural development programmes, including partnership agreements, programme summaries and factsheets.

Useful links: [Rural development](#)

[Rural development programmes by country](#)

[Food, Farming, Fisheries](#) – How the European Commission ensures the safety and quality of agricultural and food products, supports producers and communities and promotes sustainable practices.