



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

GOVERNANCE IN RURAL AREAS



SOUTHWESTERN BULGARIA MAP

The Southwestern Bulgaria MAP operates in the Southwest regions of Bulgaria, with a particular focus on rural areas within the region.

The regional population is over 2 million with over 80% of the population living in urban areas, however the significant majority of these urban areas can be classified as weak or medium urbanised, with only 5.8% being highly urbanised areas. In the region, the ratio of industrial and agricultural production is 85:15, with good conditions and infrastructure in the region for future economic development. Communities in the region have established Local Action Groups (LAGs) as part of the LEADER approach to develop communities in the region as part of the CAP.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Future rural policy

- Decentralise territorial planning and rural policy implementation to increase engagement of rural stakeholders.
- Digitise administrative services and governance to improve, broaden, and integrate communities and stakeholders throughout rural governance processes.
- Increase the focus on social infrastructures in rural areas to achieve better welfare and well-being.
- Decentralise Pillar II of the agricultural policy into an integrated policy approach for rural areas.

Future rural research

- Assessment of good governance and governing performance in rural areas of the EU.
- Creation of the methodological approach to governance and elaboration of framework to collect data and indicators.
- Establishment of successful and workable models of governing in rural areas.
- Study on the state of the human capital and overcoming regional imbalances.
- Development of integrated strategies based on Smart Cities and Smart Villages conceptions

KEY STRENGTHS

- The rural areas in the Southwestern region of Bulgaria are open-minded to starting and engaging in discussions related to governance.
- Small rural settlements are adopting flexible solutions, outside of the legislative framework, to meet the needs of the communities.
- There is a working infrastructure of community centres in rural areas that serve as common-use, multi-purpose spaces that foster a sense of community.
- There are a multitude of examples of local actors, such as NGOs, municipal government initiatives, and local groups (both in person and online) that are positively transforming villages and rural areas.

KEY NEEDS

- Greater social infrastructure is needed to increase social comfort and promote economic activity, such as increased infrastructure of schools, parks, hospitals, etc.
- Increasing investment in skills, education, training, and social inclusion is important to improve productivity and generating long-term inclusive growth.
- To refocus policies and efforts on limiting regional disparities, mainly through decentralisation.
- Active inclusion and targeted support for vulnerable groups, including Roma, and to improve the access and quality of integrated social and health services, paying due attention to geographical differences.



EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Association of Bulgarian Villages (ABV)

ABV is a Bulgarian NGO that provides opportunities for the development of Bulgarian villages, within Bulgaria and abroad. They carry out activities such as attracting investment in villages, and improving local, decentralised governance, while also working on legislative initiatives concerning agriculture and regional development, supporting the development of rural tourism, and stimulating the process of migration to the villages.

