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Answer given by Ms Ferreira
on behalf of the European Commission
(7.4.2021)

Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) calls for an overall harmonious development of all regions. Cohesion policy, which operates under shared management, provides investments for all territories, (i.e. close to 60% of all support from cohesion policy is provided for projects in rural areas)¹. It assists in unlocking their potential², e.g. by increasing their connectivity, investing in innovation and Small and Medium Enterprises. This support comes on top of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, which benefits exclusively rural areas.

At least EUR 48 billion of ERDF and Cohesion fund have been invested in rural areas during the 2007-2013 programming period. To this amount, one should add the support to sparsely populated areas, mountains, islands and outermost regions, which are accounted separately but which also benefit predominantly rural areas. For the 2014-2020 period, final and complete data is not yet available.

In the 2021-2027 period, cohesion policy will continue to support all regions, with the majority of investment targeting less developed and disadvantaged ones. Cohesion policy will continue to invest in a smarter, greener, more connected, and more social Europe. Further, a new policy objective was introduced, called ‘a Europe closer to citizens’, which will provide support for integrated territorial solutions across Europe, including in urban and rural areas with emphasis on rural-urban linkages. The long-term vision for rural areas to be adopted by the Commission in June will inspire local communities when designing these strategies.

¹ <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2014-2020/Overview-of-Planned-use-of-cohesion-policy-14-20-T/4i22-jwww>
Planned expenditure for areas of intermediate population density and thinly populated compared to overall planned expenditure geographically tagged

² A recent letter by Commissioners Šuica, Ferreira and Wojciechowski sent to Member States set out elements on the Commission’s envisaged initiative on a Long-term Vision for Rural Areas - Ares(2020)3211269 - 19/06/2020.