Urban-rural Europe - demographic developments in rural regions and areas

Statistics Explained

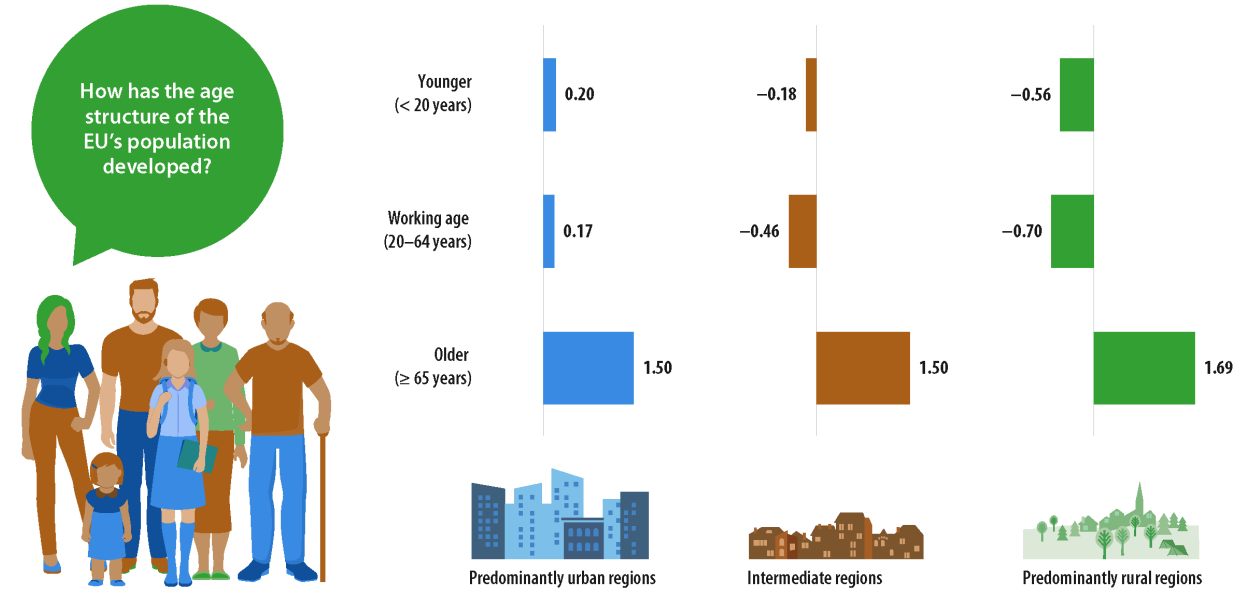
Data extracted: May 2024.
Planned article update: September 2026.

Highlights

There are many advantages that may, potentially, be enjoyed by people living in predominantly rural regions , including (among others), more space, a better quality of life, lower living costs and less pollution. However, these advantages may be outweighed by challenges, such as fewer job opportunities, weaker infrastructure (energy, transport, information and communications networks), poorer access to public services such as healthcare or education, or commercial services (such as retail outlets or entertainment). When the challenges outweigh the benefits, some people – often those who are relatively young – may choose to leave rural regions in search of greater opportunities and/or prosperity. This may reduce birth rates and lower (or turn negative) the rate of natural population change in some predominantly rural regions, which results in an ageing population and fewer people of working age (see the infographic below).

Depopulation isn't exclusive to rural regions, it may also impact other regions of the European Union (EU) that have been 'left behind'. However, many predominantly rural regions – often in the far north, south and east of the EU – have experienced the departure of people moving to cities (or further afield, to other EU countries) in search of economic prosperity.

This article focuses on population developments in rural regions and forms part of Eurostat 's online publication *Rural Europe* . Note that complementary information is presented in an article on demographic developments in cities .



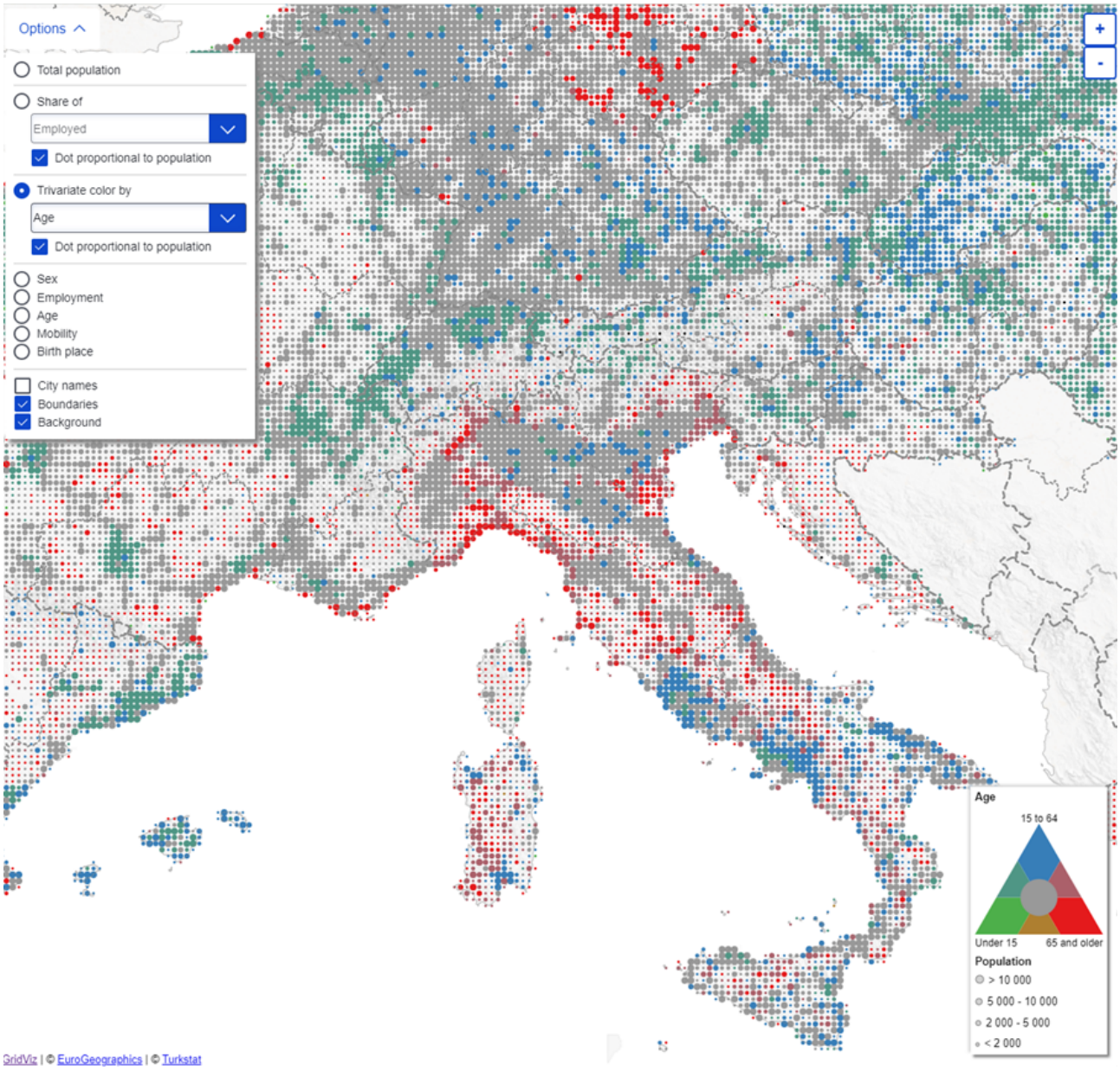
(%, average annual change, 2015–2022)
Note: breaks in series.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: urt_pjangrp3)

eurostat

How has the age structure of the EU's population developed? (%, average annual change, 2015–22) Source: Eurostat (urt_pjangrp3)

Population structure

Map 1 presents a set of gridded data based on the GEOSTAT population grid. The map can be zoomed in/out using the tools in the top right corner. It shows that in 2021 a relatively high share of the population was aged 65 years or older in eastern Germany, predominantly rural areas of France, interior regions of Spain and Portugal and northern regions of Finland and Sweden, as well as most of Bulgaria, Greece and Italy.



Map 1: Age distribution of the population based on the GEOSTAT population grid, 2021 Source: Eurostat (GISCO)

Based on the urban-rural typology , predominantly rural regions account for almost half (44.7%) of the EU's area. However, their share of the total number of inhabitants in the EU was considerably lower, at 20.6% in 2023. Figure 1 presents information on the structure of the EU's population in the form of population pyramids. It is interesting to note that relatively few young people in their twenties were living in predominantly rural regions, suggesting that they left these regions to continue within education or in search of work. Furthermore, up to the age group of 50–54 there were more males than females living in predominantly rural regions; this difference was largest in the age groups 20–24 and 25–29. These differences in younger adult age groups may reflect gender differences in participation rates in post-secondary education, while the differences among working-age adults may reflect the range of employment opportunities available for women in predominantly rural areas.

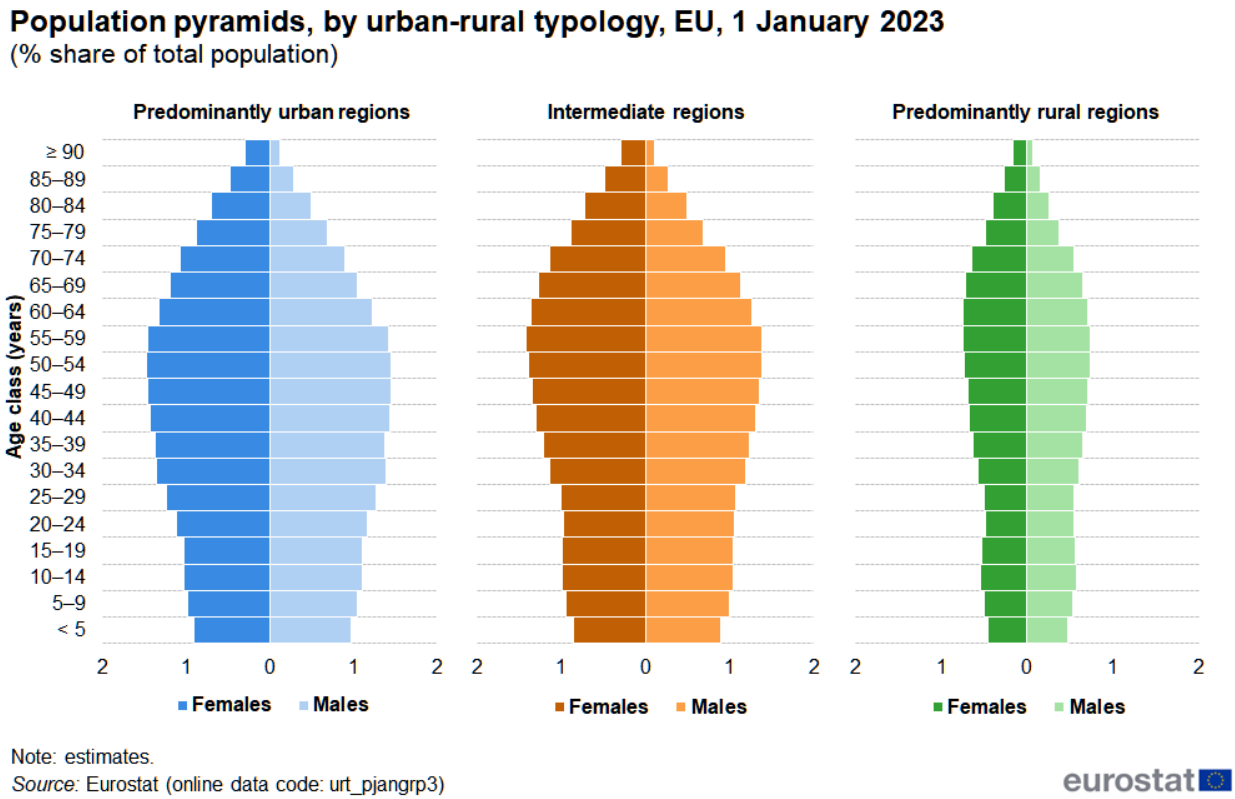


Figure 1: Population pyramids, by urban-rural typology, EU, 1 January 2023 (% share of total population)
Source: Eurostat (urt_pjangrp3)

On 1 January 2023, more than two fifths (40.7%) of the EU's population lived in predominantly urban regions , while more than a third (36.2%) lived in intermediate regions close to a city; see Figure 2. People living in predominantly rural regions close to a city accounted for a relatively large share (15.0%) of the EU's population, while relatively few people lived in remote regions.

The relative weight of working-age people aged 20–64 years in the total number of inhabitants varied across the different categories in the urban-rural typology: on 1 January 2023, working-age people accounted for 55.6% of the total number of inhabitants living in remote predominantly rural regions. By contrast, working-age people accounted for around three fifths (59.9%) of the population living in predominantly urban regions.

Older people aged 65 years or over made up a fifth (20.0%) of the population living in predominantly urban regions of the EU on 1 January 2023; this was the lowest share across the different categories of the urban-rural typology. By contrast, older people accounted for almost a quarter (24.9%) of the total number of inhabitants living in remote predominantly rural regions.

There was less difference in the share of the population under the age of 20. They accounted for approximately a fifth of the total number of inhabitants in population for each category within the urban-rural typology, with their share ranging from a
low of 19.5% in remote predominantly rural regions up to a high of 20.5% in predominantly rural regions close to a city.

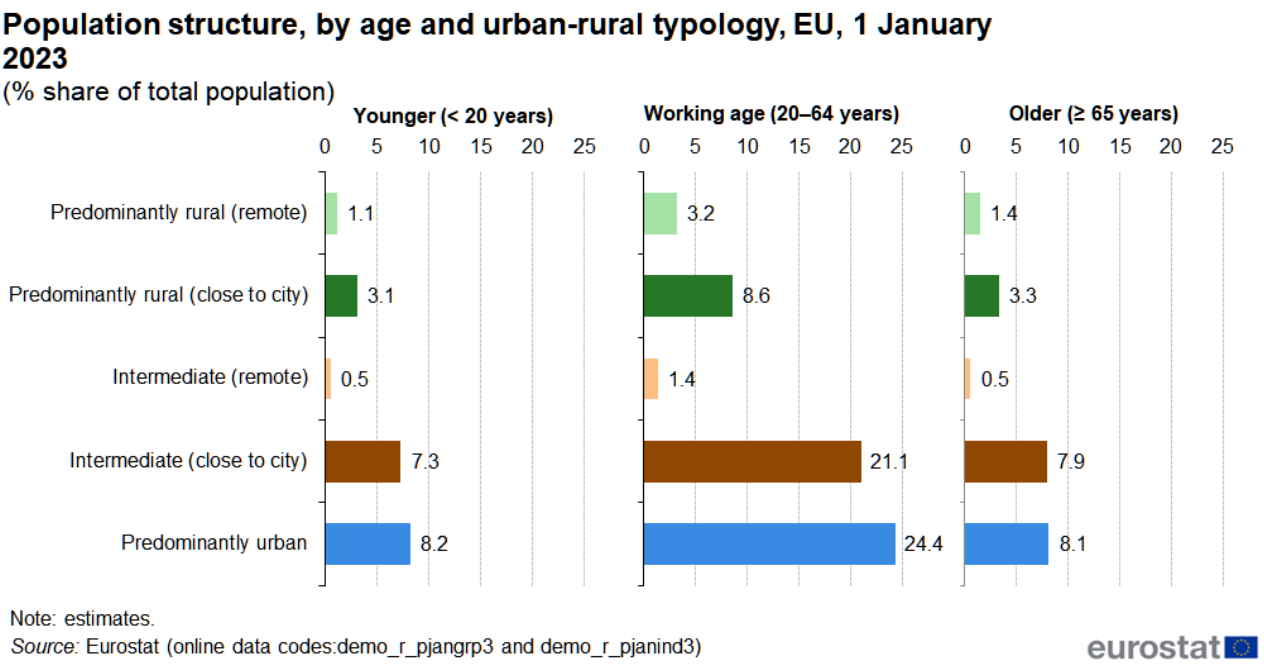


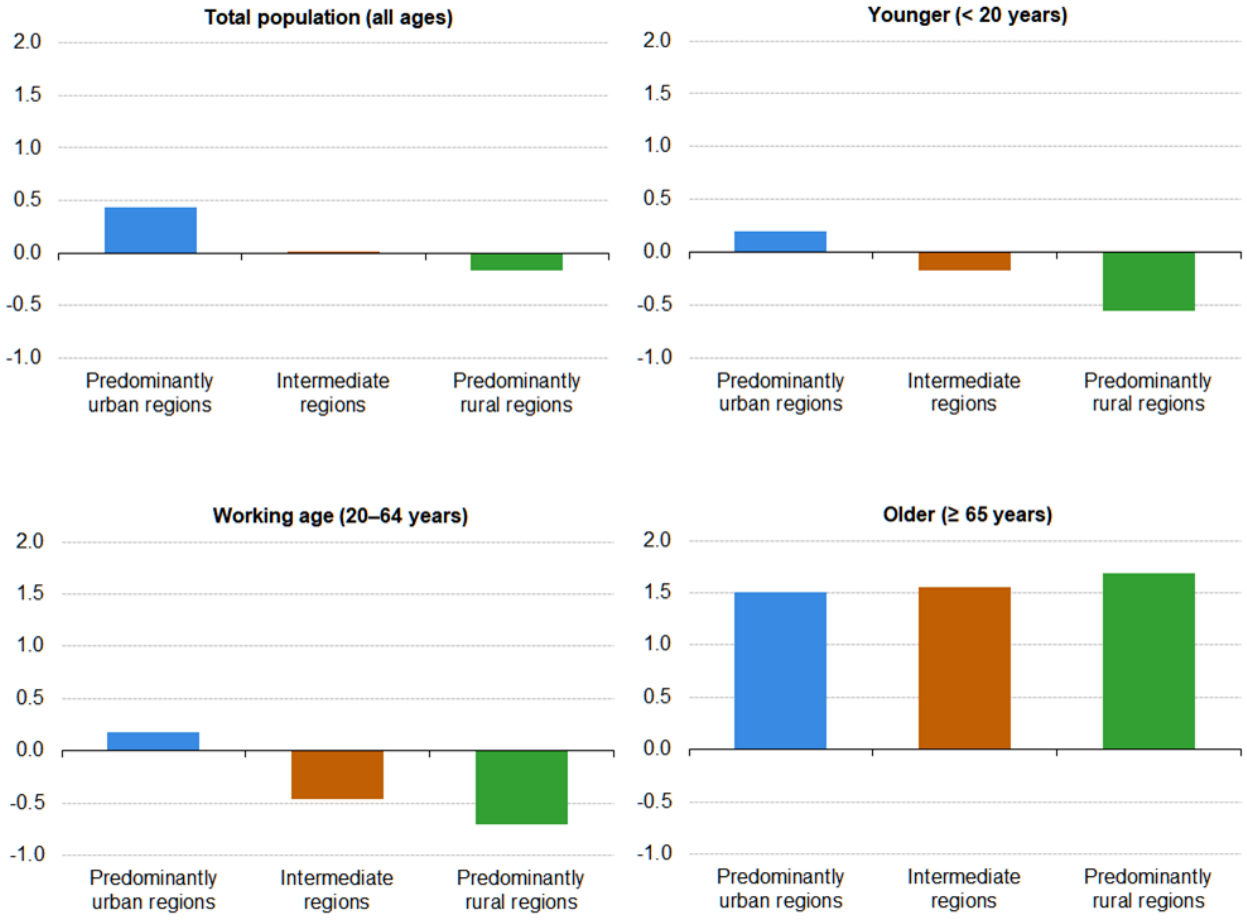
Figure 2: Population structure, by age and urban-rural typology, EU, 1 January 2023 (% share of population)
Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjangrp3) and (demo_r_pjanind3)

Figure 3 provides information on the overall change in population numbers between 2015 and 2022. Overall, the EU's population remained relatively stable during this period, as

- the population of predominantly rural regions fell, on average, 0.2% each year
- there was no significant change in the population of intermediate regions
- the population of predominantly urban regions rose, on average, 0.4% each year.

Figure 3 decomposes these overall figures, disaggregating the EU population into 3 age categories (younger people; working-age people; older people). The most striking aspect of population developments during the period under consideration was the rapid growth in the number of older people. The number of inhabitants aged 65 years or over increased by 1.5% to 1.7% each year, depending on the type of region: the most rapid growth was recorded for older people living in predominantly rural regions and the slightly slower growth was recorded for older people living in predominantly urban regions. By contrast, the number of working-age inhabitants living in predominantly rural regions fell, on average, 0.7% each year and the number of younger people by a slightly smaller margin (down 0.6% each year).

Average annual population change, by age and urban-rural typology, EU, 2015–22
(%)



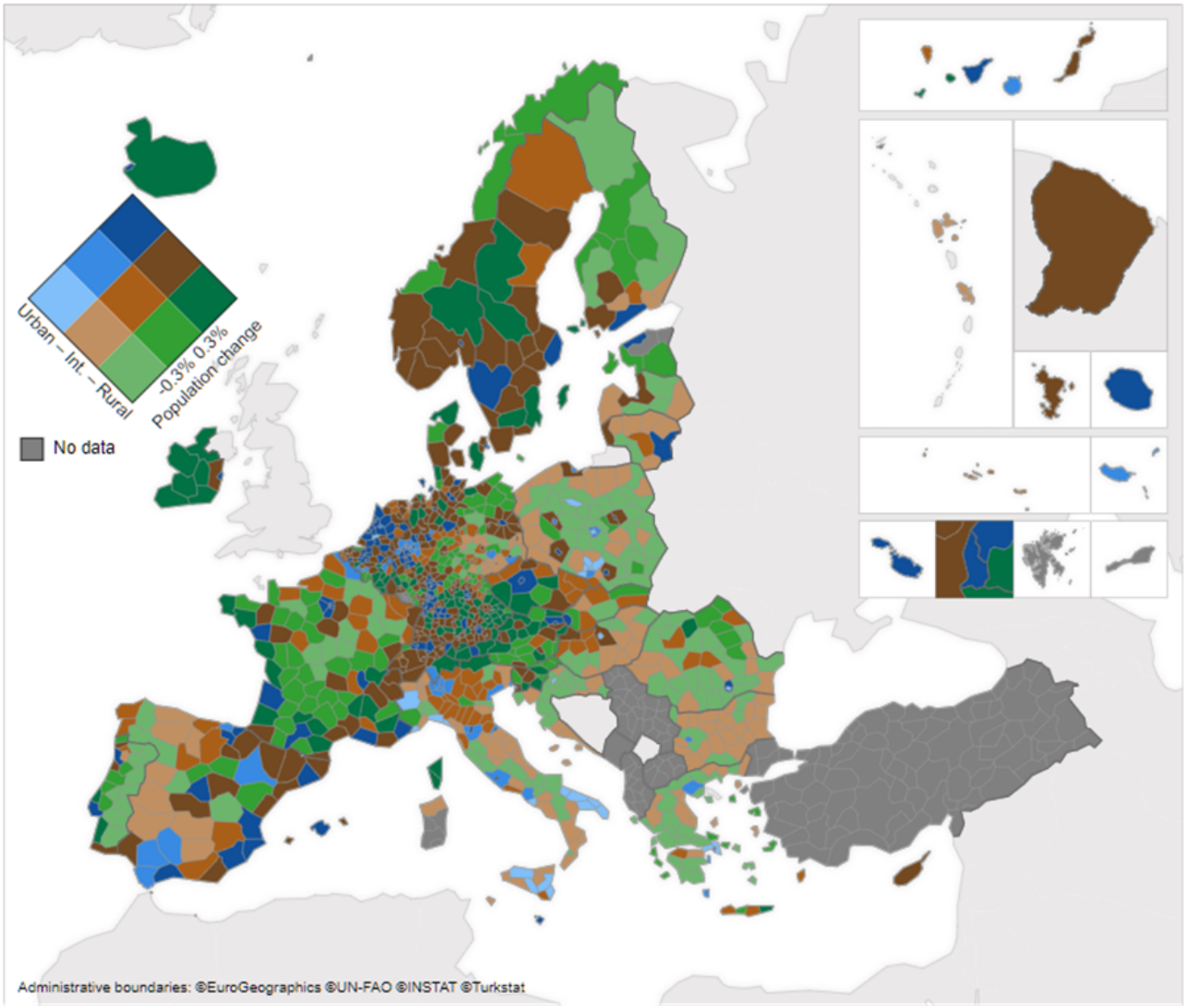
Note: estimates. Breaks in series.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: urt_pjangrp3)

eurostat

Figure 3: Average annual population change, by age and urban-rural typology, EU, 2015–22 (%) Source: Eurostat (urt_pjangrp3)

Map 2 shows average annual population changes based on the urban-rural typology for the period 1 January 2015 to 1 January 2023, in other words, during the years 2015 to 2022. During this period, the total number of inhabitants in predominantly rural regions of the EU fell, on average, 0.2% each year. There were 118 predominantly rural regions in the EU where the number of inhabitants increased by at least 0.3% per year. The highest growth rates among predominantly rural regions were recorded in the Irish regions of West and South-East; the population rose, on average, 1.5% per year in each of these regions. By contrast, there were 161 predominantly rural regions where the total number of inhabitants fell at a relatively fast pace – down, on average, by more than 0.3% per year. Within this group of 161, there were 3 regions characterised by particularly fast rates of depopulation – as their populations fell, on average, by at least 2.5% per year

- the north-western Bulgarian region of Vidin and the southern Bulgarian region of Smolyan
- the easternmost region of Croatia, namely, Vukovarsko-srijemska županija.



Map 2: Average annual population change, by urban-rural typology, 2015–22 (by NUTS 3 regions) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjangrp3)

In 2022, 3.88 million children were born in the EU, corresponding to a crude birth rate – the number of live births per 1 000 inhabitants – of 8.7. For comparison, the EU's crude birth rate was twice as high back in 1968 (17.4).

Predominantly rural regions often recorded the lowest crude birth rates when analysing information based on the urban-rural typology; the highest rates tended to be recorded in predominantly urban regions. This pattern – the lowest rate in predominantly rural regions – was repeated in 13 out of the 21 EU countries for which a complete set of data are available in 2022, while predominantly rural regions and intermediate regions had the joint lowest rates in Poland. Particularly low crude birth rates – less than 7.0 live births per 1 000 inhabitants – were recorded in predominantly rural regions of the southern EU countries of Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal, as well as in Lithuania; see Figure 4.

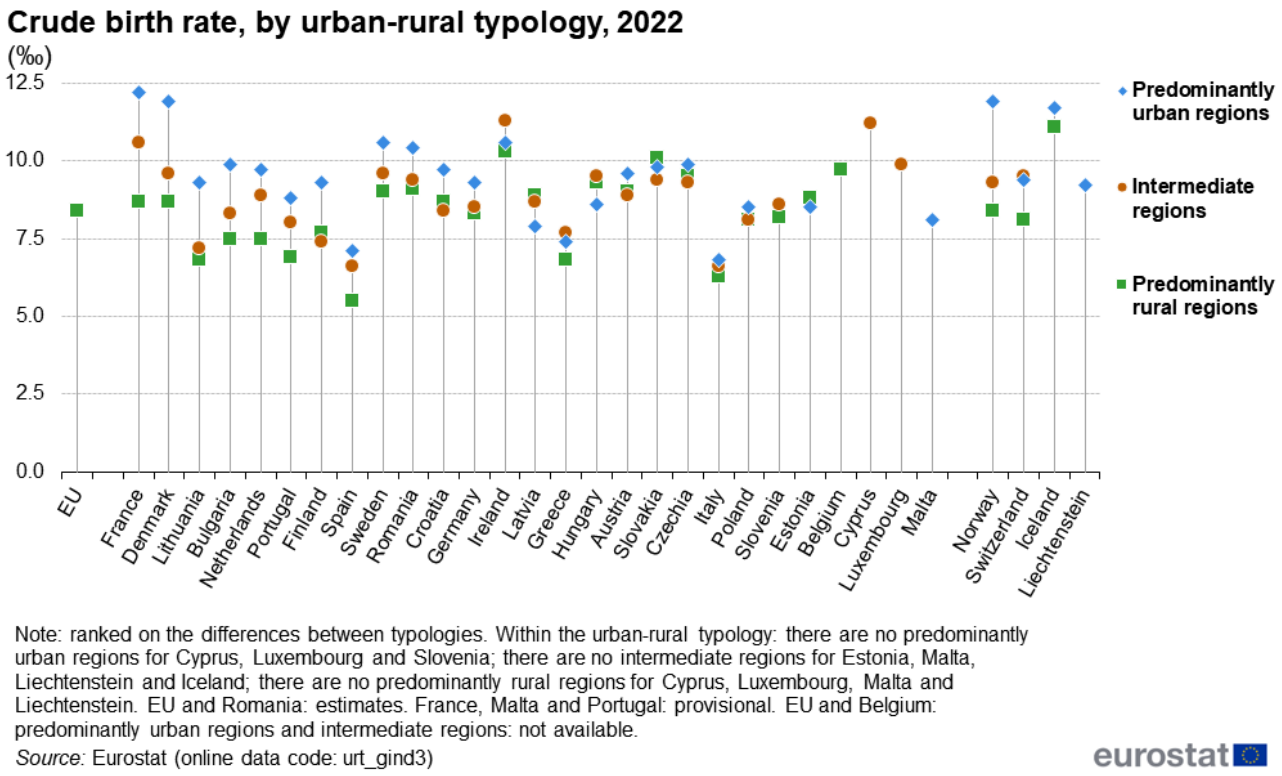


Figure 4: Crude birth rate, by urban-rural typology, 2022 (‰) Source: Eurostat (urt_gind3)

Figure 5 shows information for those predominantly rural regions in the EU that had the highest and lowest crude birth rates (data are shown for NUTS level 3 regions). In 2022, crude birth rates peaked at 12.3 per 1 000 inhabitants in the Romanian region of Suceava. There were 46 predominantly rural regions that had a crude birth rate of at least 10.0 per 1 000 inhabitants; 39 of these regions were concentrated in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, France, Austria and Romania.

At the other end of the range, there were 8 predominantly rural regions in the EU where the crude birth rate was less than 5.0 per 1 000 inhabitants in 2022. All 8 of these regions were located in southern EU countries, often in remote areas where a relatively high share of the population is composed of older people

- Evrytania and Fokida (Greece)
- Zamora, Ourense and La Gomera (Spain)
- Sud Sardegna and Oristano on the island of Sardinia (Italy)
- Alto Tâmega e Barroso (Portugal).

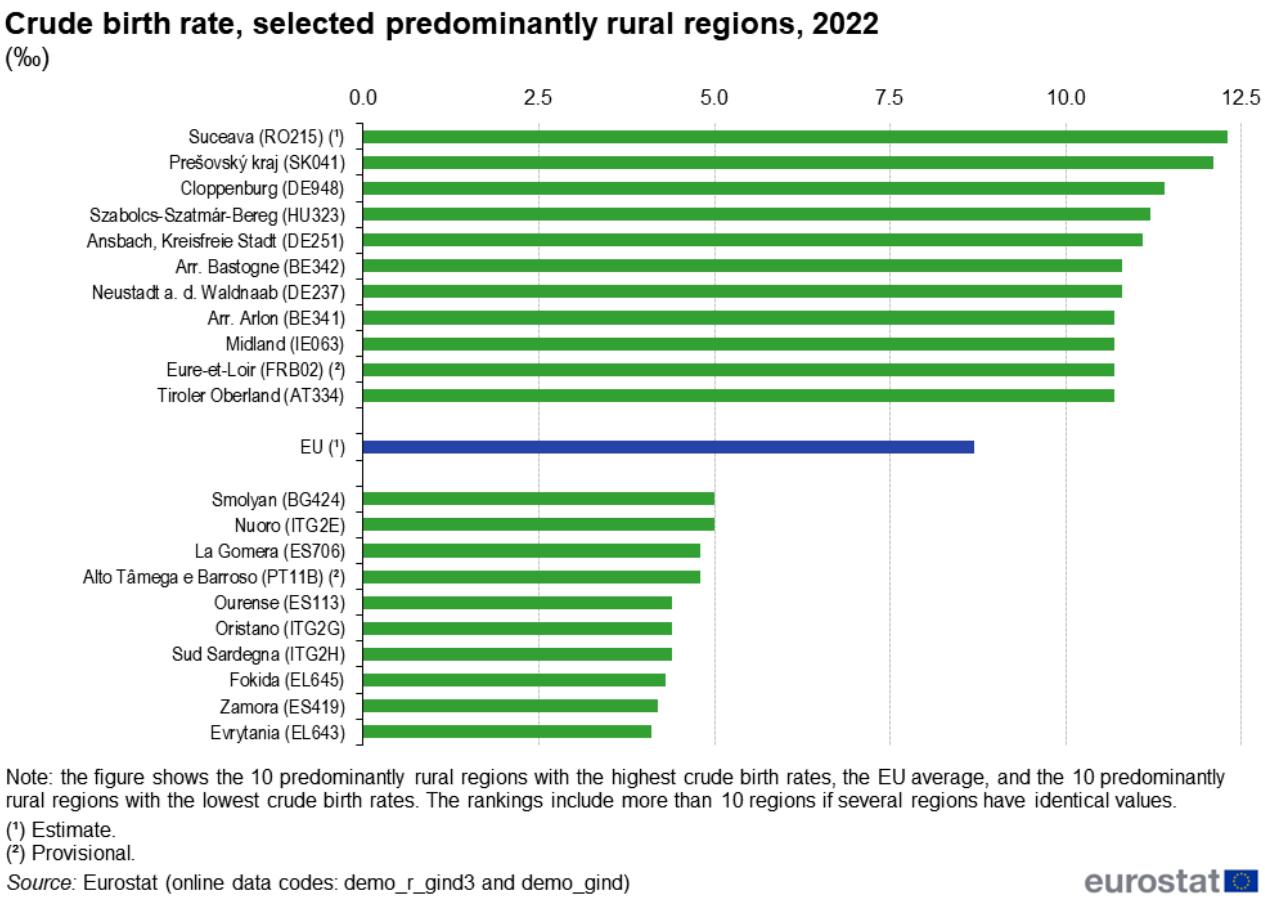


Figure 5: Crude birth rate, selected predominantly rural regions, 2022 (‰) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_gind3) and (demo_gind)

In 2022, there were 5.16 million deaths in the EU; this equated to a crude death rate of 11.5 per 1 000 inhabitants.

Predominantly rural regions are often characterised by relatively high crude death rates, reflecting the high share of relatively old people within their populations. Indeed, predominantly rural regions often recorded the highest crude death rates when analysing information based on the urban-rural typology. This pattern – the highest rate in predominantly rural regions – was repeated in 18 out of the 21 EU countries for which a complete set of data are available in 2022; the only exceptions were Czechia and Slovakia (where the highest rate was recorded in intermediate regions) and Poland (where the highest rate was recorded in predominantly urban regions). Crude death rates above 15.0 deaths per 1 000 inhabitants were recorded in the predominantly rural regions of Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, Greece and Hungary; see Figure 6.

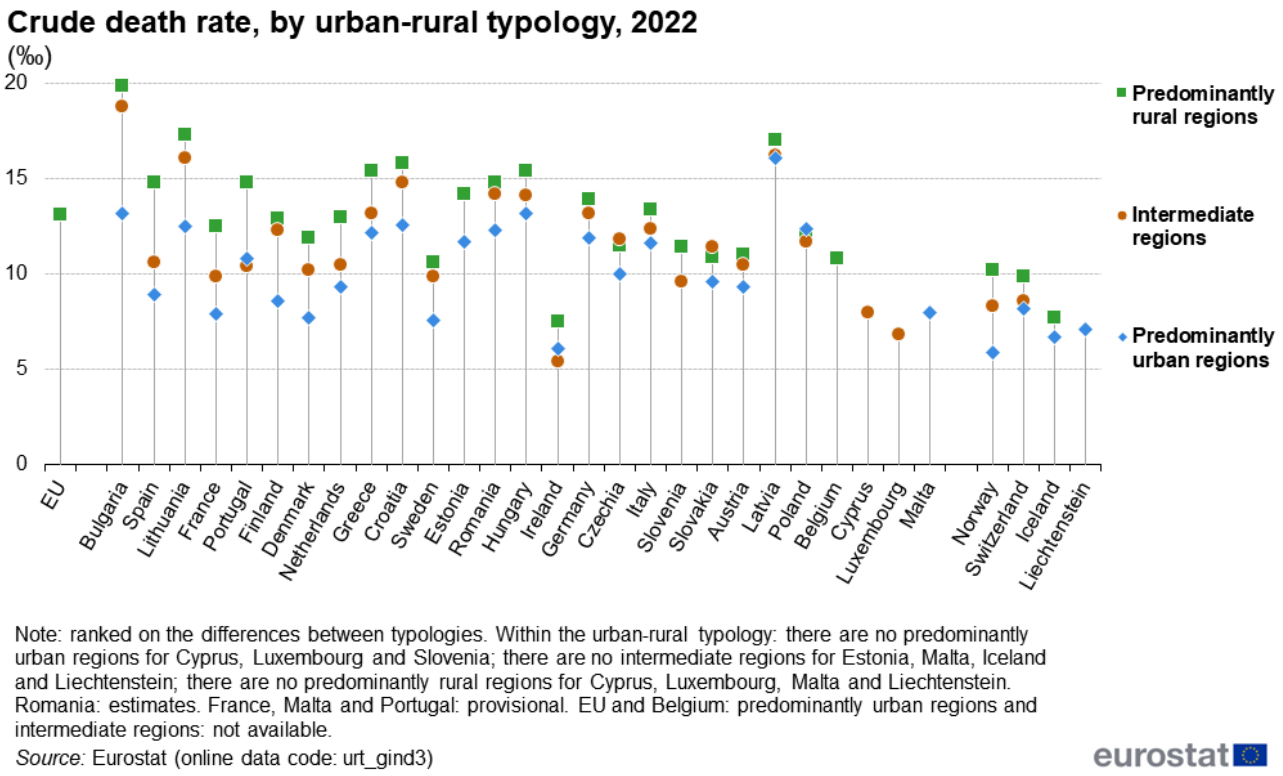
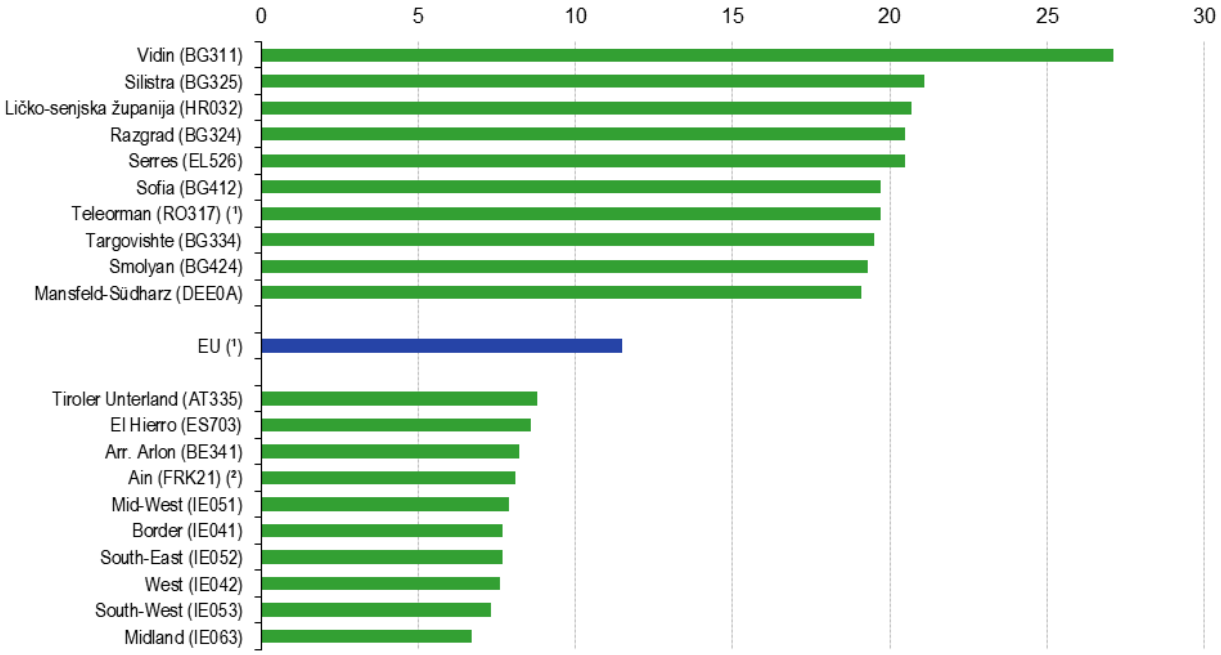


Figure 6: Crude death rate, by urban-rural typology, 2022 (‰) Source: Eurostat (urt_gind3)

Figure 7 shows information for those predominantly rural regions in the EU that had the highest and lowest crude death rates (data are shown for NUTS level 3 regions). In 2022, crude death rates peaked at 27.1 per 1 000 inhabitants in the Bulgarian region of Vidin. There were 31 predominantly rural regions that had a crude death rate of at least 17.5 per 1 000 inhabitants; 27 of these regions were concentrated in Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Croatia and Portugal.

At the other end of the range, there were 24 predominantly rural regions in the EU where the crude death rate in 2022 was less than 10.0 per 1 000 inhabitants. Half of these 24 regions were located in Ireland (6 regions) or Austria (6 regions), with the lowest rate in the Irish region of Midland (6.7 deaths per 1 000 inhabitants).

Crude death rate, selected predominantly rural regions, 2022
(‰)



Note: the figure shows the 10 predominantly rural regions with the highest crude death rates, the EU average, and the 10 predominantly rural regions with the lowest crude death rates.
(1) Estimate.
(2) Provisional.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: demo_r_gind3 and demo_gind)

Figure 7: Crude death rate, selected predominantly rural regions, 2022 (‰) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_gind3) and (demo_gind)

The median age is an average which divides the population into 2 equal groups when ranked by age. Given that predominantly rural regions tend to have a relatively high share of older people, it isn't surprising that the median age of these regions is usually above the average for the whole of the EU population.

On 1 January 2023, the median age of the EU population was 44.5 years. Almost two thirds of predominantly rural regions close to a city (171 out of 265 NUTS level 3 regions for which data are available) had a median age above the EU average. Many of the highest median ages for predominantly rural regions that were close to a city were recorded in eastern regions of Germany (for example, Mansfeld-Südharz and Uckermark) or north-western regions of Spain (for example, Zamora and Ourense).

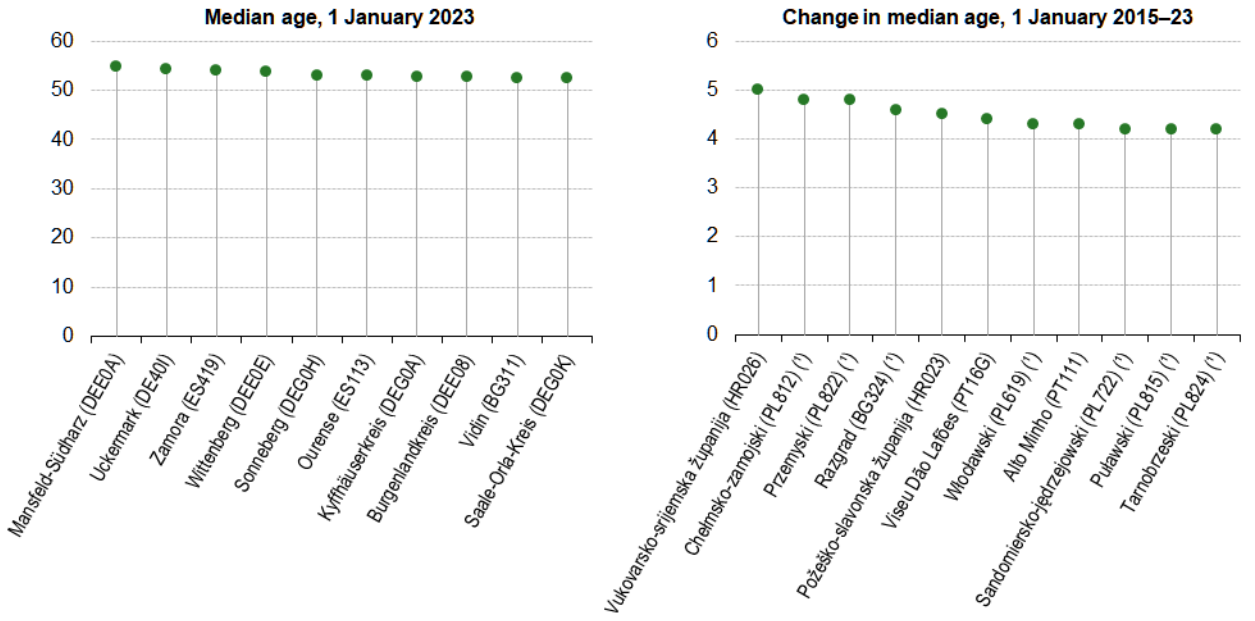
Between 1 January 2015 and 1 January 2023, the median age of the EU population rose by 1.8 years. Approximately half of the predominantly rural regions close to a city (131 out of 265 NUTS level 3 regions for which data are available) recorded a larger increase, indicating that those regions were ageing at a faster pace than the EU average. The most rapid increase in median age among predominantly rural regions close to a city was recorded in the easternmost Croation region of Vukovarsko-srijemska županija (up 5.0 years). There were 16 other predominantly rural regions close to a city where the median age increased 4.0–4.8 years

- 11 of these regions were located in Poland, with the highest increases recorded in the eastern regions of Chełmsko-zamojski and Przemyski (up 4.8 years in both regions)
- 2 were located in Portugal – Viseu Dão Lafões (up 4.4 years) and Alto Minho (up 4.3 years)
- high increases were also recorded in the north-eastern Bulgarian region of Razgrad (up 4.6 years), the eastern Croatian region of Požeško-slavonska županija (up 4.5 years) and the southern Italian region of Potenza (up 4.0 years).

There were 18 predominantly rural regions close to a city where the median age fell between 1 January 2015 and 1 January 2023. These regions were almost exclusively concentrated in Germany; the only exception was the Belgian region of Bezirk Verviers (which is located near to Liège). During the period under consideration, the

largest fall for the median age among predominantly rural
regions close to a city was recorded in the south-eastern German region of Passau, Kreisfreie Stadt (down 2.2 years).

Median age, selected predominantly rural regions (close to a city), 1 January 2023 and 1 January 2015–23
(years)



Note: the figure shows the 10 predominantly rural regions (close to a city) with the highest median age on 1 January 2023 and the 10 regions with the largest increase in their median age for 1 January 2015–23. The rankings include more than 10 regions if several regions have identical values. Different scales used on the y-axes.
(*) Break in series.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_r_pjanind3)

Figure 8: Median age of population, selected predominantly rural regions (close to a city), 1 January 2023 and 1 January 2015–23 (years) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjanind3)

For the purpose of this article, the age dependency ratio is defined as the sum of the number of young people aged less than 20 years and the number of older people aged 65 years or over divided by the number of working-age people aged 20–64 years; the ratio is expressed in percentage terms. On 1 January 2023, the EU's age dependency ratio was 70.8%. An analysis based on the urban-rural typology shows the lowest age dependency ratio was recorded for predominantly urban regions (66.9%), while intermediate regions (72.3%) and predominantly rural regions (76.0%) had ratios above the average.

In 2022, predominantly rural regions recorded the highest age dependency ratios in the vast majority of EU countries; Belgium, Lithuania and Slovakia were the only exceptions among those countries for which a complete set of data are available – intermediate regions had the highest ratio in Belgium and Lithuania, while predominantly urban regions had the highest ratio in Slovakia. The age dependency ratio for predominantly rural regions peaked at the 90.1% in France, while relatively high ratios were also recorded in the predominantly rural regions of Sweden (88.5%) and Finland (87.9%).

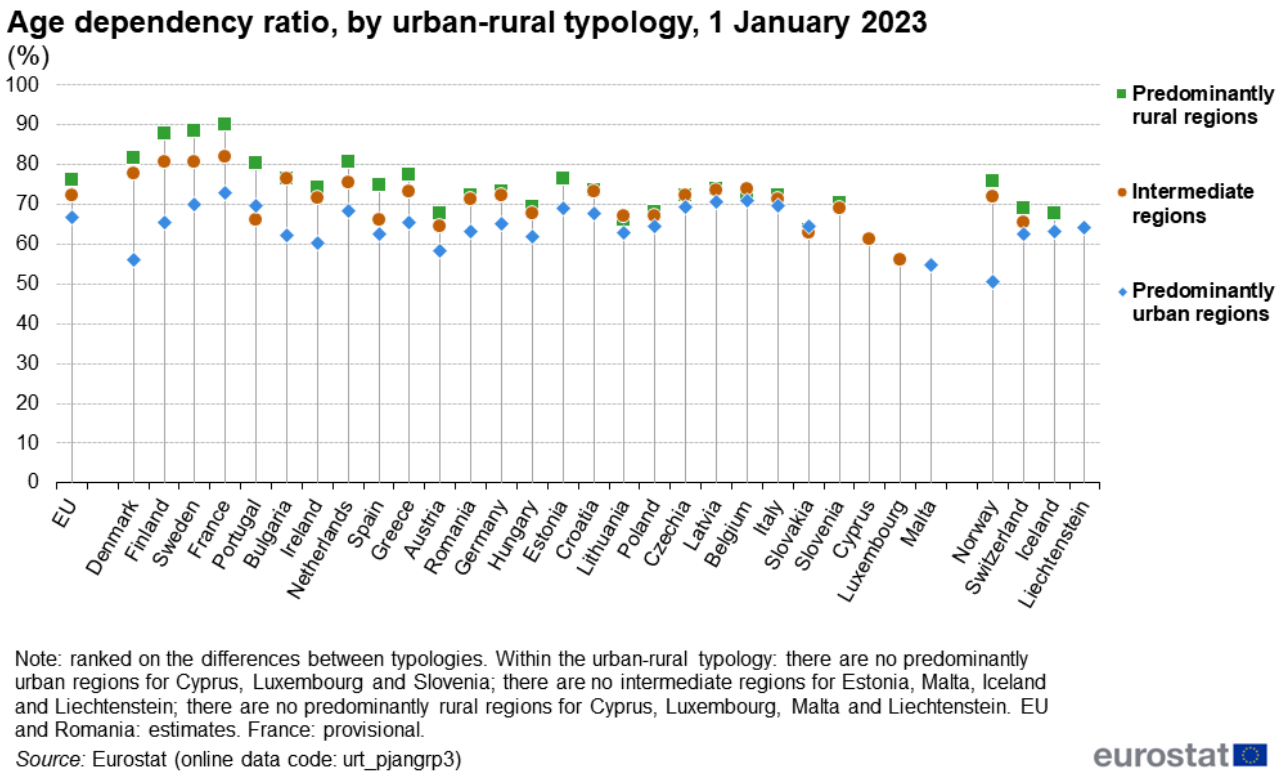


Figure 9: Age dependency ratio, by urban-rural typology, 1 January 2023 (%) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjangrp3)

For the purpose of this article, the young-age dependency ratio is defined as the number of young people at an age when they are generally economically inactive (less than 20 years) compared with the number of people of working age (20–64 years), expressed in percentage terms. At the start of 2023, the EU's young-age dependency ratio was 34.4%.

On 1 January 2023, the young-age dependency ratio in predominantly rural regions of the EU was 35.6%, some 1.2 percentage points above the average for the whole of the EU territory. There were 12 predominantly rural regions in the EU that had young-age dependency ratios above 45.0%. They were located in 4 different EU countries: 5 regions from France, 3 regions from Ireland and 2 regions from each of Romania and Finland. The highest ratio among this group of 12 predominantly rural regions was recorded in the Irish region of Border (49.4%); see Figure 10.

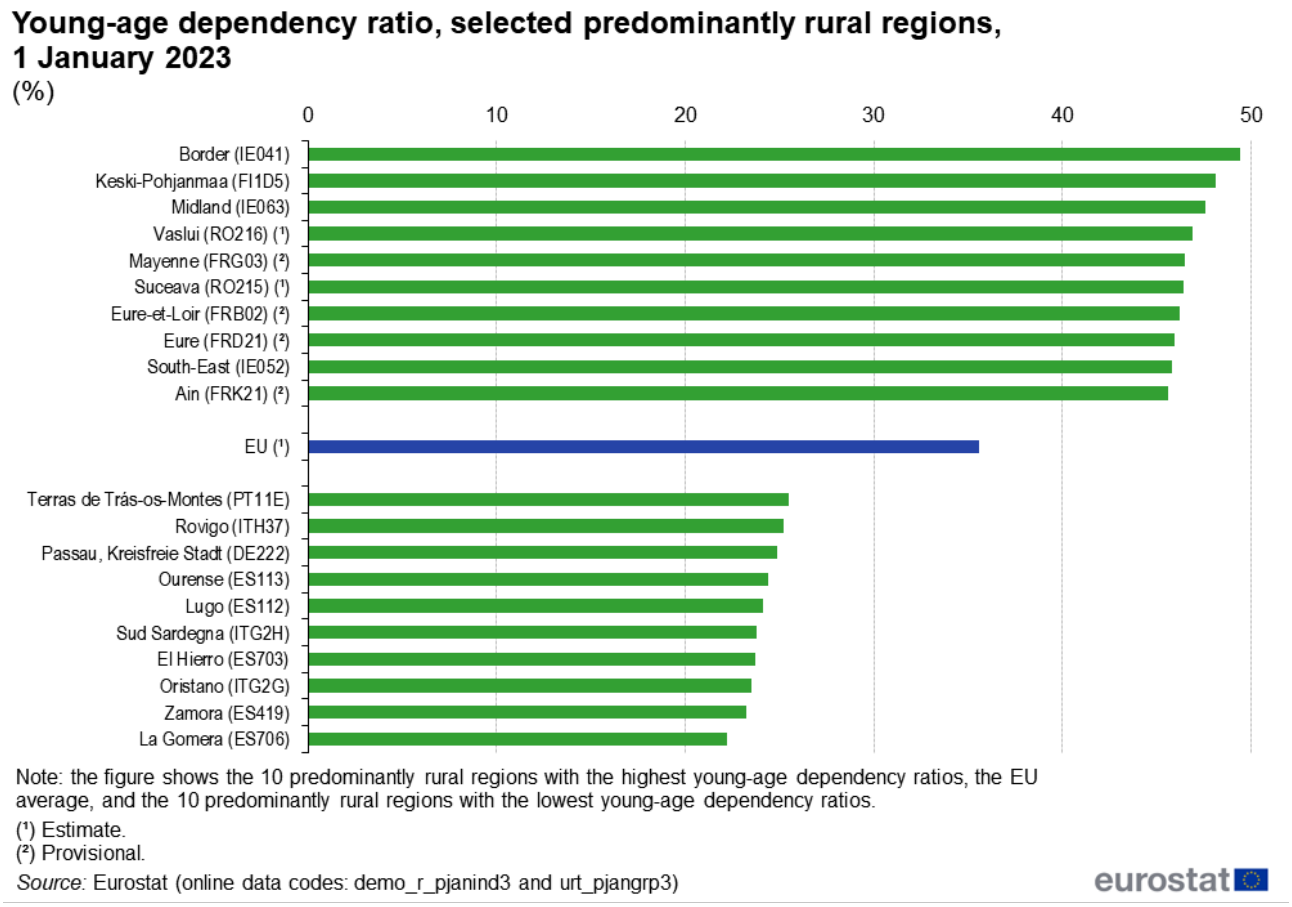
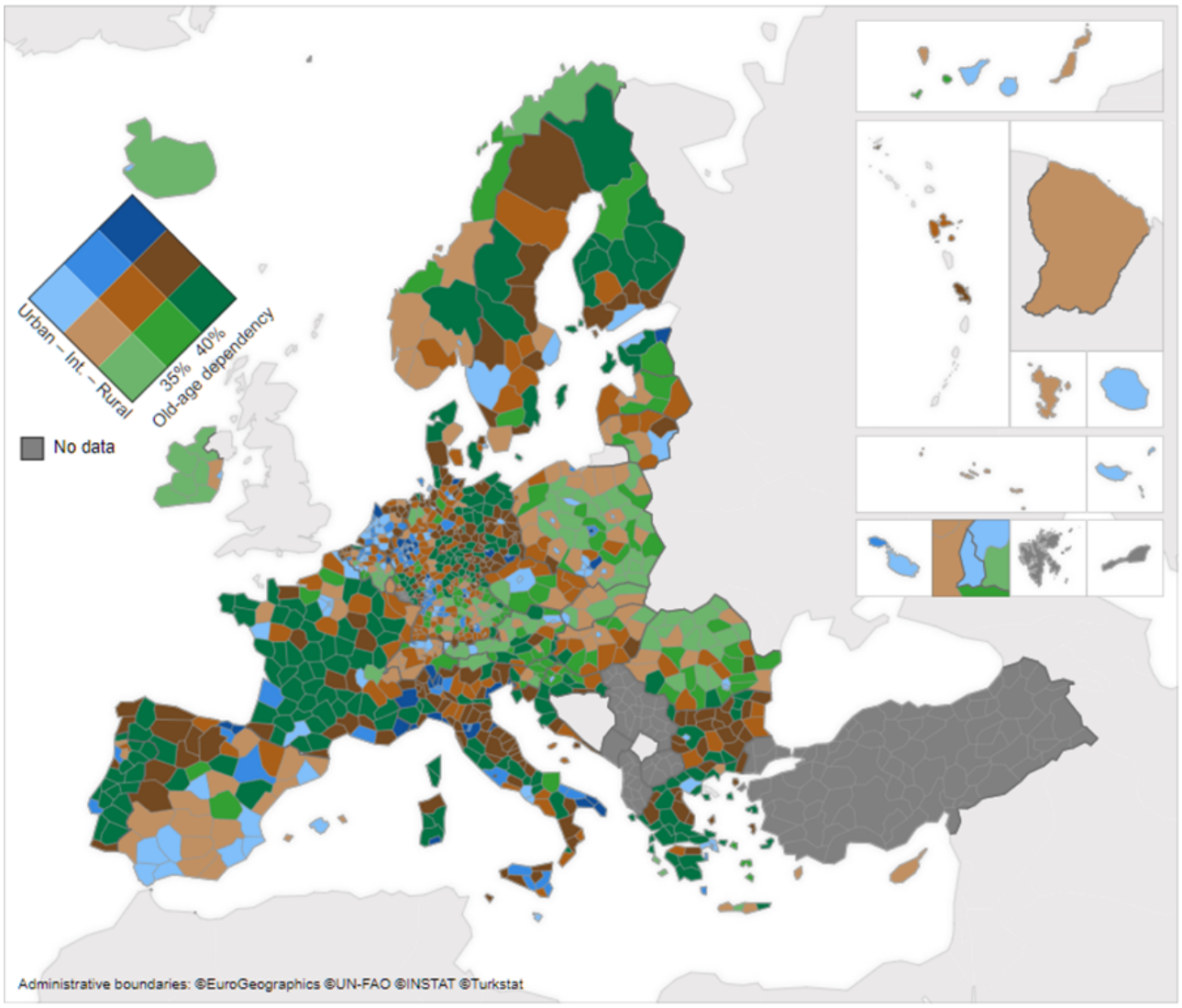


Figure 10: Young-age dependency ratio, selected predominantly rural regions, 1 January 2023 (%) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjanind3) and (urt_pjangrp3)

For the purpose of this article, the old-age dependency ratio is defined as the number of older people at an age when they are generally economically inactive (65 years or over) compared with the number of people of working age (20–64 years), expressed in percentage terms. At the start of 2023, the EU's old-age dependency ratio was 36.4%. An analysis based on the urban-rural typology shows the lowest old-age dependency ratio was recorded for predominantly urban regions (33.3%), while intermediate regions (37.6%) and predominantly rural regions (40.5%) had ratios above the EU average.

Map 3 shows that old-age dependency ratios were particularly high in predominantly rural regions of central and northern Finland, most of Germany, central and southern France, central Italy, as well as the interior regions of Greece and Portugal.



Map 3: Old-age dependency ratio, by urban-rural typology, 1 January 2023 (by NUTS 3 regions) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjanind3)

On 1 January 2023, the old-age dependency ratio in predominantly rural regions of the EU was 40.5%, some 4.1 percentage points above the average for the whole of the EU territory. Almost 7 out of 10 (or 288 out of 412) predominantly rural regions across the EU reported an old-age dependency ratio above the EU average for all types of regions of 36.4%. Looking in more detail, 227 of these 412 regions had an old-age dependency ratio of at least 40.0% (as shown by the darkest shade of green in Map 3), 75 of which had a ratio of at least 50.0%, and 11 of which had a ratio of more than 60.0%. These 11 predominantly rural regions with the highest old-age dependency ratios were

- Dordogne, Nièvre, Creuse and Lot in France, where the old-age dependency ratio was in the range of 60.2–63.6%
- Bornholm in Denmark (60.4%)
- Etelä-Savo in south-east Finland (66.4%)
- Evrytania in central Greece (67.8%)
- Beiras e Serra da Estrela, Beira Baixa, Terras de Trás-os-Montes and Alto Tâmega e Barroso in Portugal, where the old-age dependency ratio was in the range of 63.7–70.7%; Alto Tâmega e Barroso recorded the highest ratio in the EU.

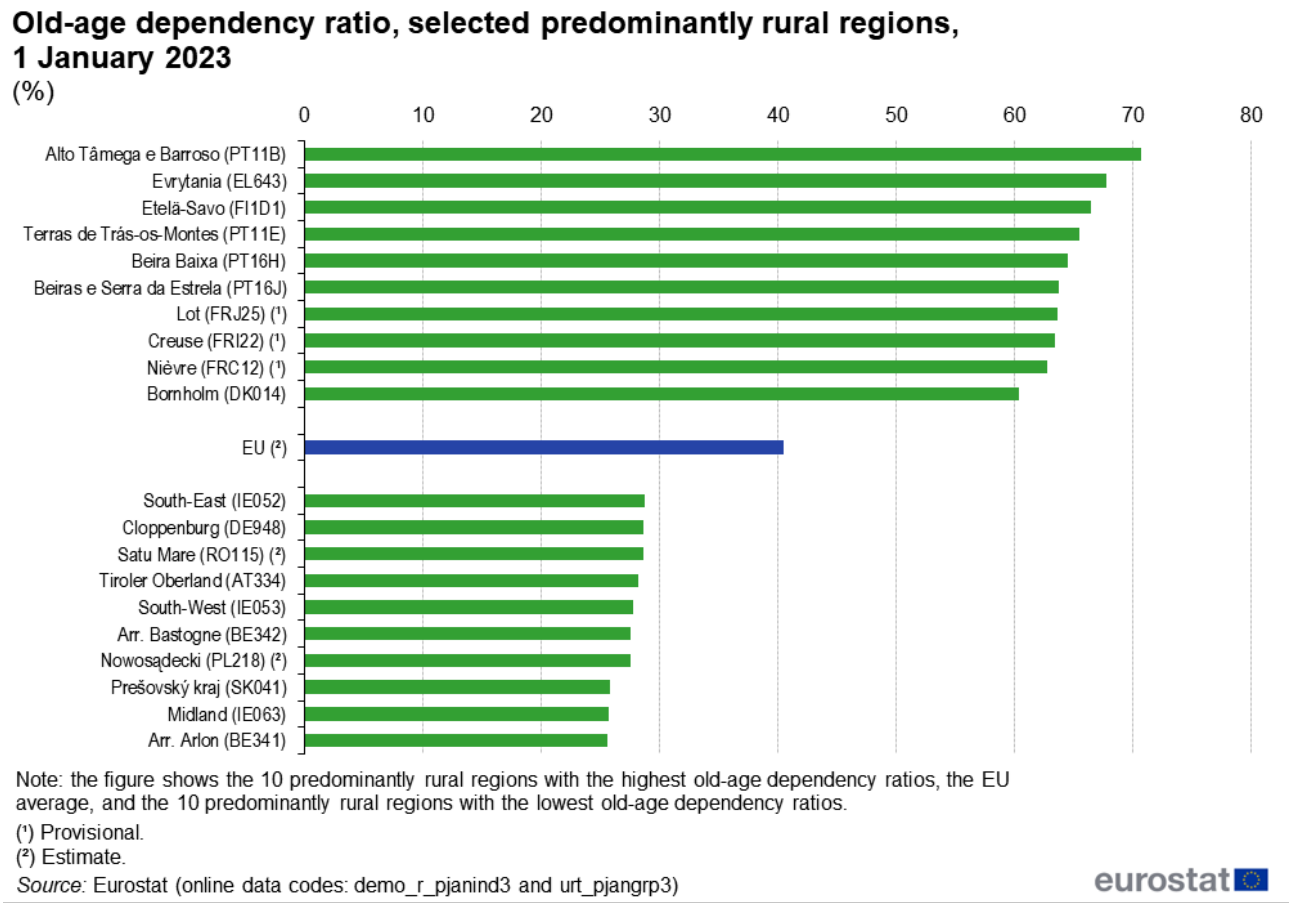


Figure 11: Old-age dependency ratio, selected predominantly rural regions, 1 January 2023 (%) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjanind3) and (urt_pjangrp3)

Depopulation of rural areas/population change due to migration

Population developments are a function of

- natural population change – the difference between births and deaths, and
- net migration plus statistical adjustment – the difference between the number of people coming into and the number of people leaving a region/country.

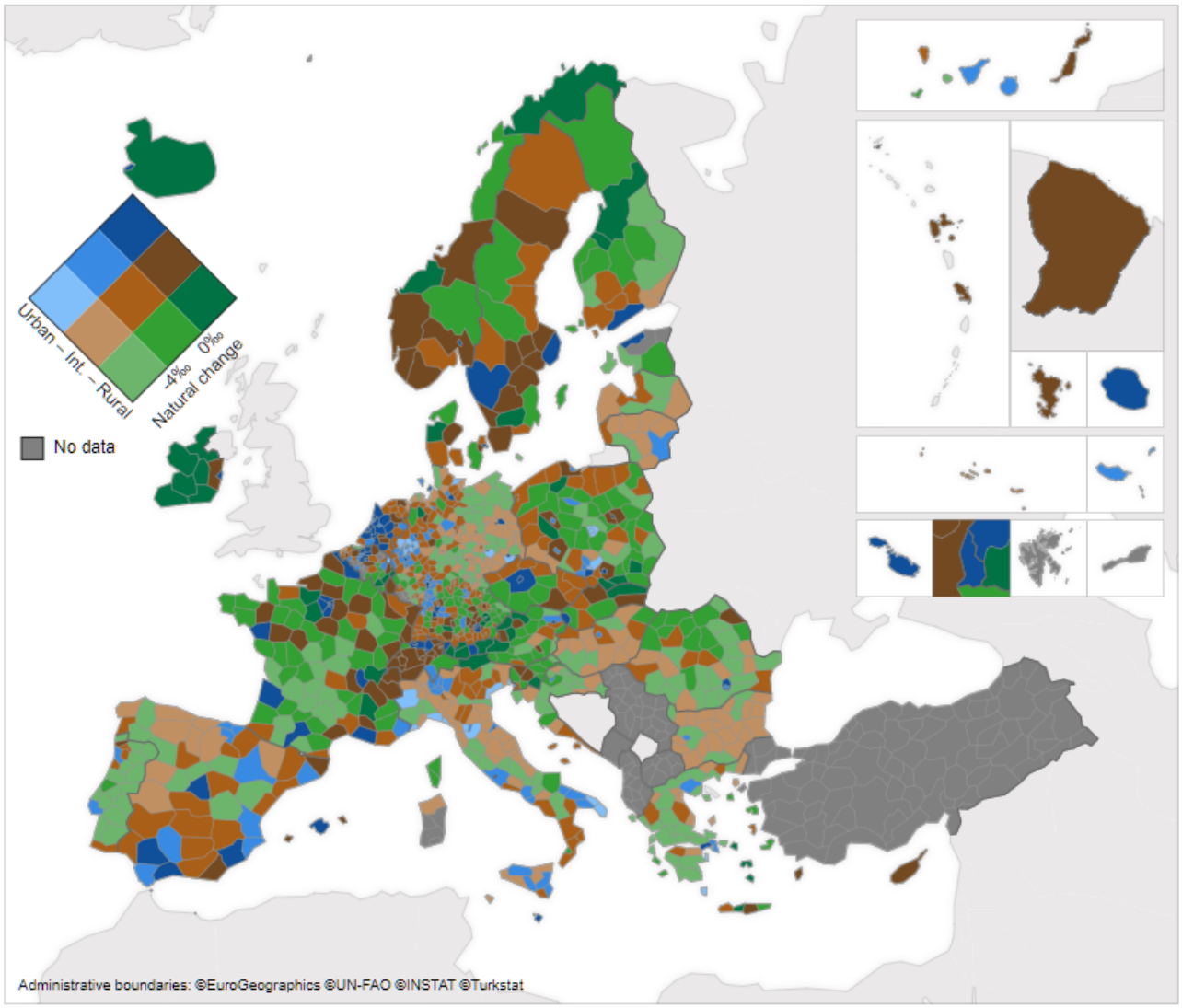
Eurostat produces figures on net migration plus statistical adjustment by calculating the difference between total population change and natural change. In other words, these statistical adjustments cover changes in population between 1 January of 2 consecutive years which can't be attributed to births, deaths, immigration or emigration.

Maps 4 and 5 provide a detailed picture of population developments between 2015 and 2023. Across the EU, the average annual crude rate of natural population change during this period was a fall of 1.5‰ (or 0.15%), while the crude rate of net migration plus statistical adjustment (hereafter referred to simply as net migration) was a rise of 3.1‰ each year (or 0.31%). As such, although there were fewer births than deaths within the EU, its population continued to expand as a result of a higher number of immigrants compared with emigrants.

More than 9 out of 10 predominantly rural regions in the EU (366 out of 406 regions for which data are available) reported negative crude rates of natural population change during the period 2015–22. There were 18 predominantly rural regions where the annual average crude rate of natural change was -10.0‰ or lower

- 6 regions from Bulgaria, including the north-western region of Vidin that had the lowest rate (down, on average, 18.7‰ per year)
- 5 interior regions of Portugal
- 2 north-western Spanish regions

- single regions from each of Germany, Greece, France, Croatia and Romania.



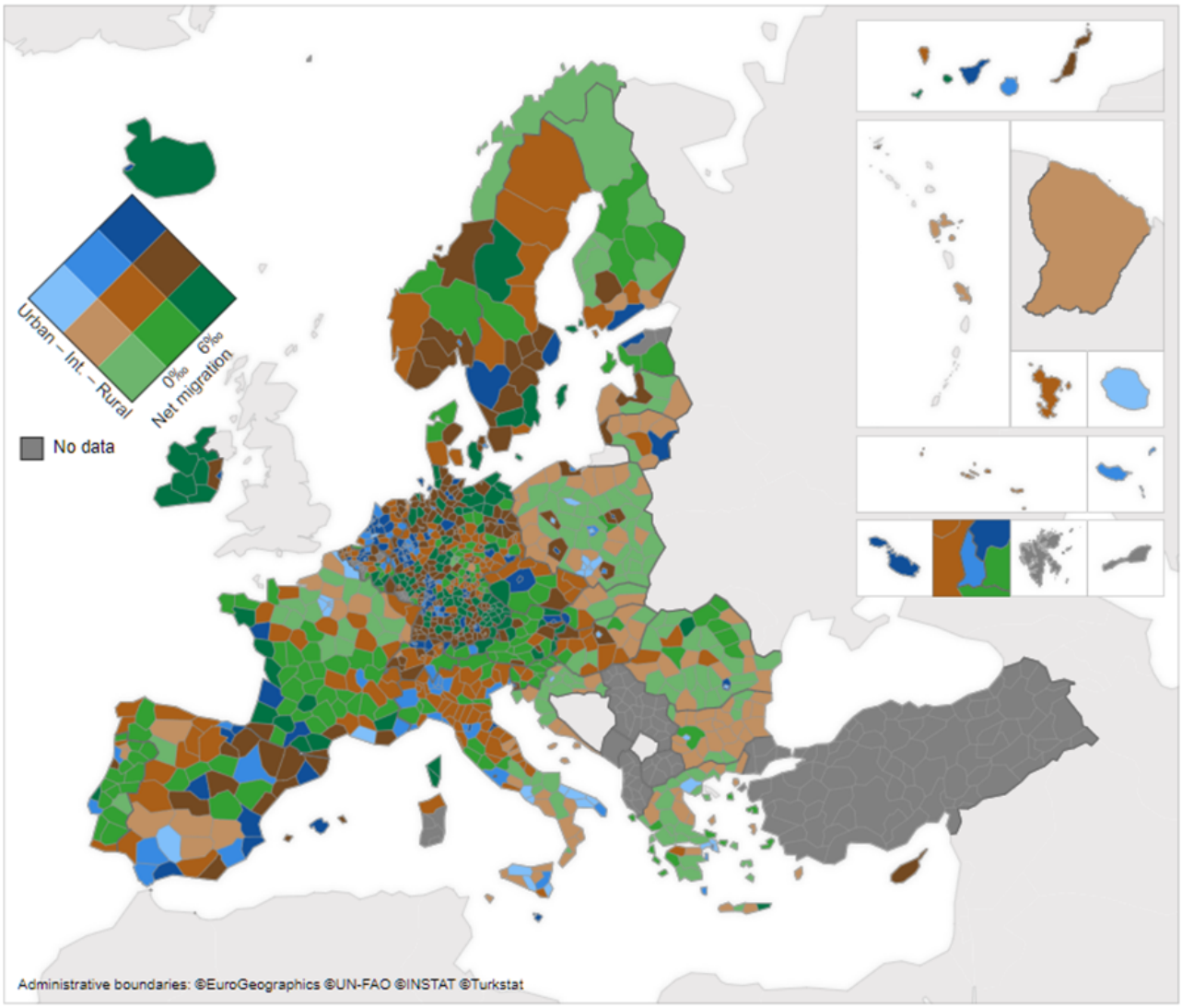
Map 4: Average annual crude rate of natural change, by urban-rural typology, 2015–22 (by NUTS 3 regions)
Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjanind3)

Approximately a third of predominantly rural regions in the EU (133 out of 406 regions for which data are available) reported a negative crude rate of net migration during the period 2015–22. Note that migrant flows between regions may reflect internal flows within a particular EU country (from 1 region to another) or external flows (from other EU countries or from non-EU countries). There were 17 regions where the annual average crude rate of net migration represented a fall of more than 10.0‰; they were eastern and southern EU countries, with 5 regions from Croatia, 4 regions from each of Bulgaria and Greece, three regions from Poland, and a single region from Romania.

There were 22 predominantly rural regions across the EU where the annual average crude rate of net migration was a rise of at least 10.0‰

- more than half of this group (12 of the 22) were concentrated in Germany, with the highest increase in the Bavarian region of Landshut, Kreisfreie Stadt (15.5‰)
- 3 regions from France – the island regions of Haute-Corse and Corse-du-Sud, as well as the south-western region of Landes
- 2 island regions from Spain – El Hierro and La Gomera in Canarias – that receive relatively high numbers of migrants from Africa
- 2 regions from Ireland – South-East and West

- single regions from each of Czechia, Austria and Sweden.



Map 5: Average annual crude rate of net migration plus statistical adjustment, by urban-rural typology, 2015–22 (by NUTS 3 regions) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_pjanind3)

Figure 12 shows that population growth during the period 2015–22 was generally much higher in predominantly urban regions than it was in predominantly rural regions. Aggregated figures for total population change – therefore taking account of natural changes and net migration – were higher in predominantly urban regions in all 22 EU countries for which data are available.

In some cases there were considerable differences in population developments between predominantly rural and urban regions, with the gap primarily explained by differences in net migration rates. There were 6 EU countries where the annual average crude rate of total population change was notably higher for predominantly urban regions than for predominantly rural regions (a difference of at least 10.0‰): Slovakia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Finland and Spain.

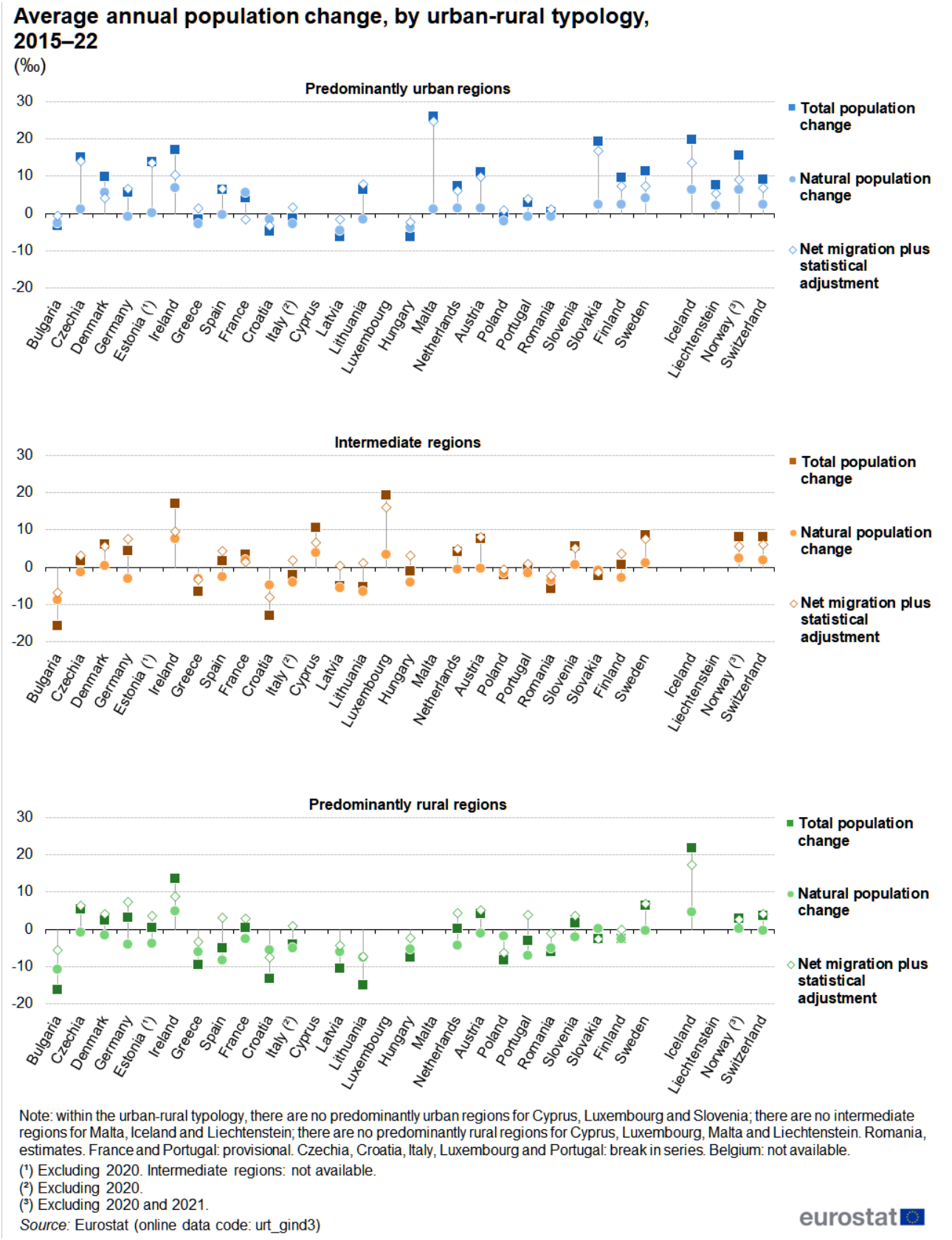
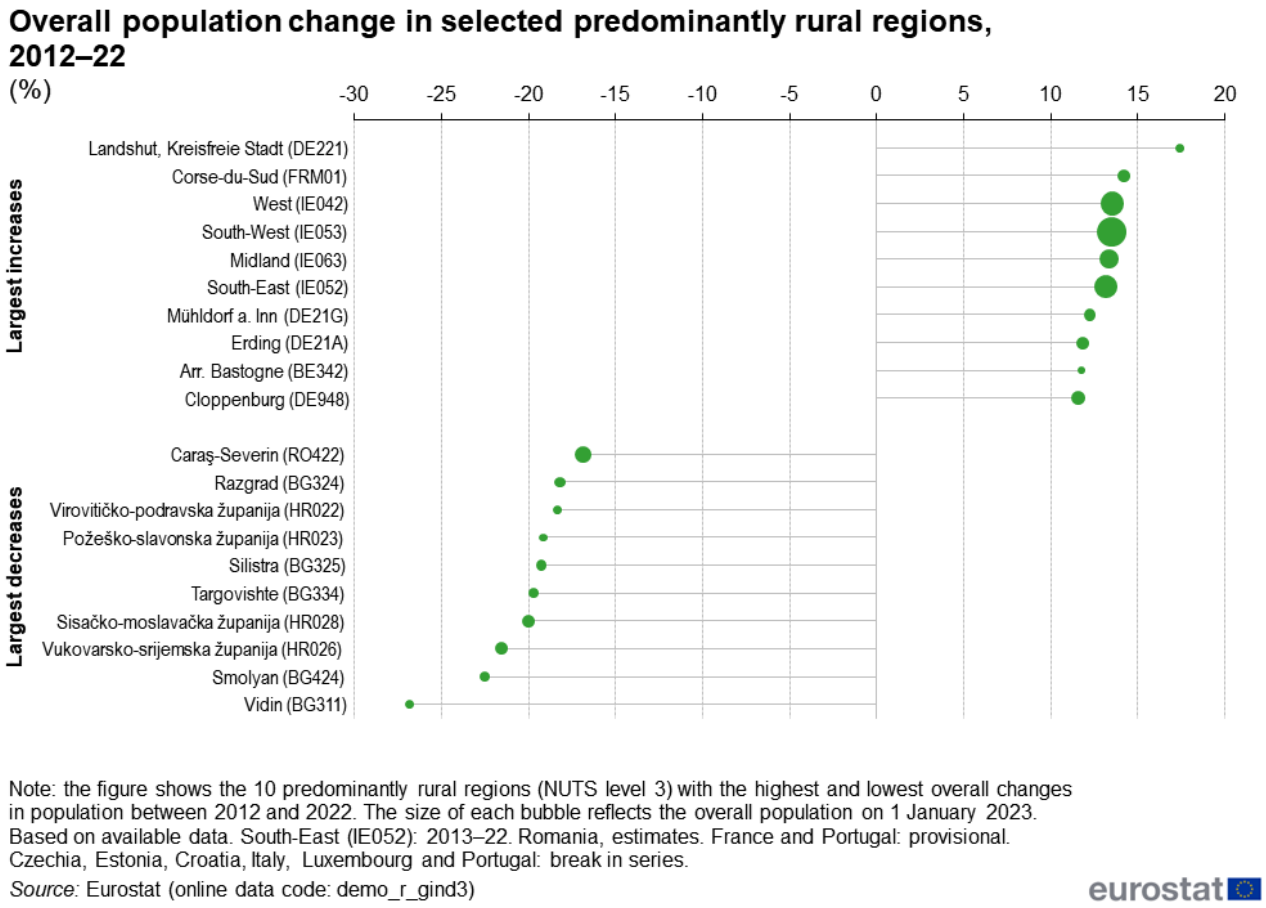


Figure 12: Average annual population change, by urban-rural typology, 2015–22 (‰) Source: Eurostat (urt_gind3)

A more detailed picture is shown in Figure 13. It presents the 10 predominantly rural regions with the highest and lowest overall changes in their total number of inhabitants during the period 2012–22; note that the values here are in percent (%) rather than per thousand (‰) as used in Figure 12. The size of each bubble in Figure 13 is scaled to

reflect the number of inhabitants living in each region as of 1 January 2023. The largest overall fall in population numbers was recorded in the north-western Bulgarian region of Vidin, where the population fell by more than a quarter during the period under consideration (down overall 26.9%). At the other end of the range, the fastest expansion (up 17.4% overall) was recorded in the German region of Landshut, Kreisfreie Stadt.

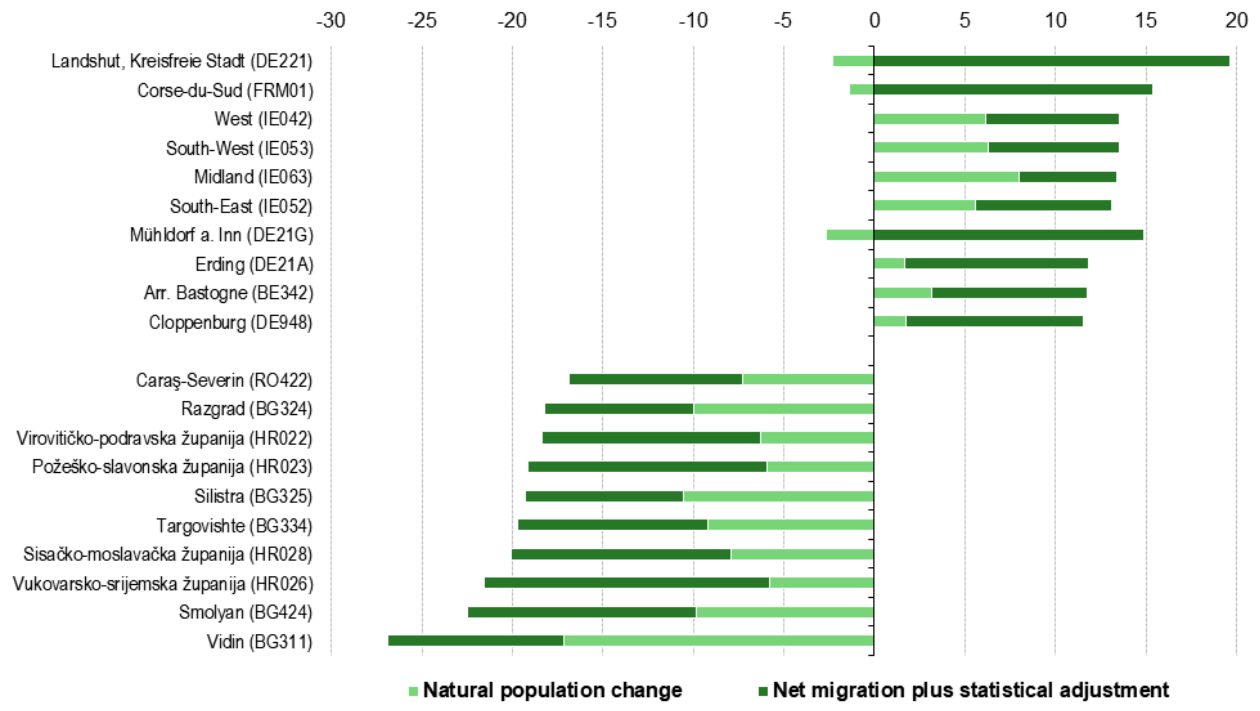


Note: the figure shows the 10 predominantly rural regions (NUTS level 3) with the highest and lowest overall changes in population between 2012 and 2022. The size of each bubble reflects the overall population on 1 January 2023. Based on available data. South-East (IE052): 2013–22. Romania, estimates. France and Portugal: provisional. Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal: break in series.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_r_gind3)

Figure 13: Overall population change in selected predominantly rural regions, 2012–22 (%) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_gind3)

Figure 14 provides a more detailed picture for overall population changes in predominantly rural regions of the EU, insofar as it details the contribution from natural population change and the impact of net migration. In the predominantly rural regions experiencing some of the biggest falls in population numbers, the losses were attributed to a combination of negative natural change (more deaths than births) and negative net migration (more emigrants than immigrants).



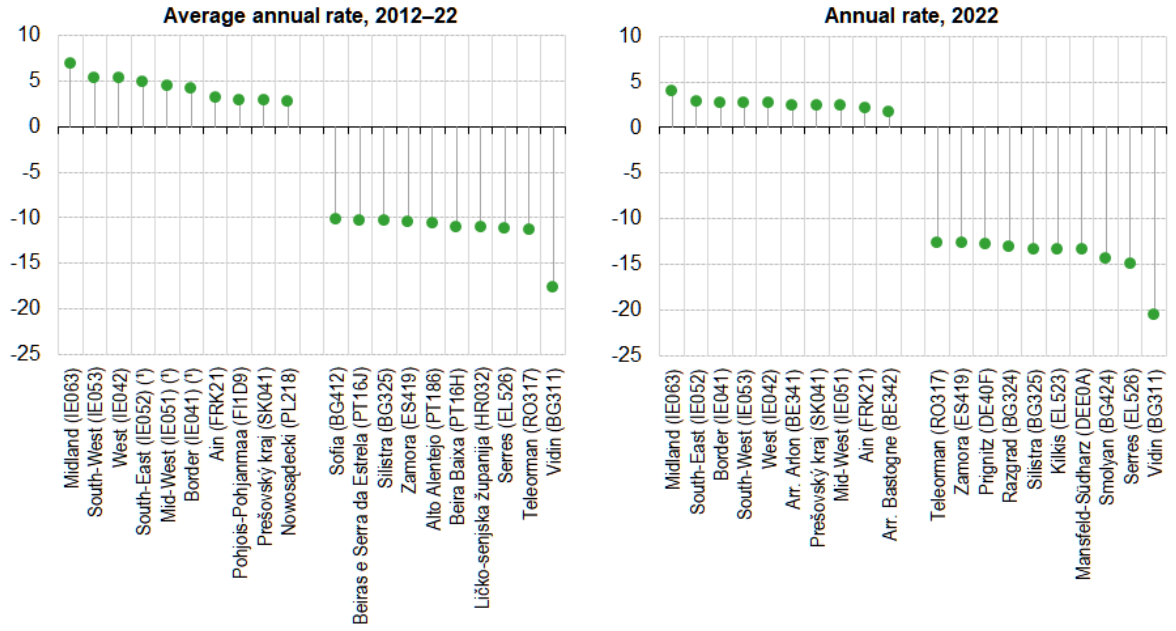
Note: the figure shows the 10 predominantly rural regions (NUTS level 3) with the highest and lowest overall changes in population between 2012 and 2022. Based on available data. South-East (IE052): 2013–22. Romania, estimates. France and Portugal: provisional. Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal: break in series.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_r_gind3)

Figure 14: Population change in selected predominantly rural regions, 2012–22 (%) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_gind3)

This article concludes with information for crude rates of population change. Figure 15 shows the 10 predominantly rural regions with the highest and lowest crude rates of natural population change (for 2012–22 and for the latest annual rate in 2022).

- The lowest crude rate of natural population change – for both periods under consideration – was in the Bulgarian region of Vidin. The latest rate for Vidin was a larger fall than the average recorded for 2012–22, emphasising that its regional population was continuing to decline.
- The other regions that recorded very low crude rates of natural population change – with their populations contracting by an annual average of at least 10.0‰ between 2012 and 2022 – were located either in southern EU countries (Greece, Spain and Portugal) or in eastern EU countries (Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania).
- Comparing the regions with the lowest crude rates of natural population change for both periods, there were 5 regions that appeared towards the bottom of each ranking – Vidin and Silistra in Bulgaria, Serres in Greece, Zamora in Spain and Teleorman in Romania.
- There were 6 regions where the crude rate of natural population change increased, on average, by at least 4.0‰ between 2012 and 2022 – they were all located in Ireland, with a peak of 7.0‰ in the region of Midland.
- The Midland region of Ireland also recorded the highest crude rate of natural population change between 2021 and 2022, while there were 4 other Irish regions that recorded rates of change that were higher than in any other EU region (at NUTS level 3). Leaving aside the Irish regions, the next highest rates of change were recorded in the Belgian region of Arr. Arlon and the Slovak region of Prešovský kraj, as their crude rates of natural population change increased 2.5‰.

Crude rate of natural change of population in predominantly rural regions, 2012–22 and 2022
(‰)



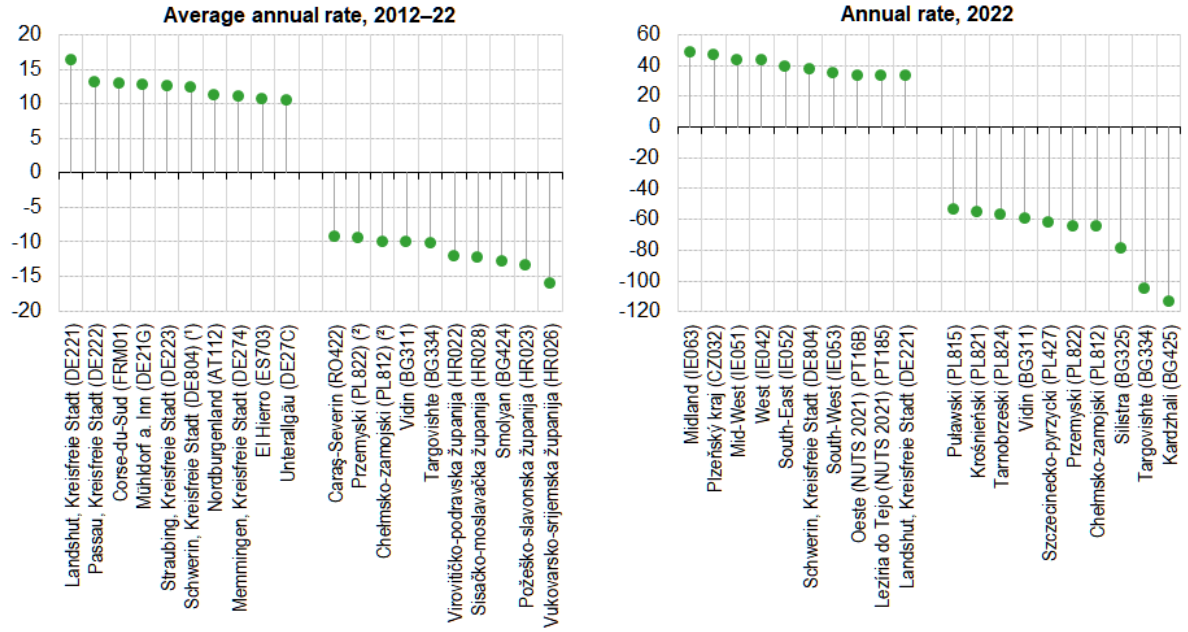
Note: the figure shows the 10 predominantly rural regions (NUTS level 3) with the highest and lowest crude rates of natural change for 2012–22 and for 2022. Based on available data. Romania, estimates. France and Portugal: provisional. Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal: break in series.
(¹) 2013–22 instead of 2012–22.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_r_gind3)

Figure 15: Crude rate of natural change of population in predominantly rural regions, 2012–22 and 2022 (‰)
Source: Eurostat (demo_r_gind3)

Figure 16 shows a similar set of information (as Figure 15) but with the focus on the 10 predominantly rural regions with the highest and lowest crude rates of net migration.

- The lowest average crude rate of net migration for the period 2012–22 was in the easternmost region of Croatia, Vukovarsko-srijemska županija. The lowest rate for 2021–22 was in the southern Bulgarian region of Kardzhali.
- There were 8 predominantly rural regions in the EU where the annual average crude rate of net migration between 2012 and 2022 reflected a fall of at least 10.0‰: they were all in eastern EU countries (4 from Croatia, 3 from Bulgaria and 1 from Poland).
- Comparing the regions with the lowest crude rates of net migration for both periods, there were 4 regions that appeared towards the bottom of each ranking – the Bulgarian regions of Targovishte and Vidin and the Polish regions of Chełmsko-zamojski and Przemyski.
- The highest crude rates of net migration for 2021–22 were recorded in the Irish region of Midland (which also had the highest rate for natural population change) and the Czech region of Plzeňský kraj.

Crude rate of net migration plus statistical adjustment in predominantly rural regions, 2012–22 and 2022
(‰)



Note: the figure shows the 10 predominantly rural regions (NUTS level 3) with the highest and lowest crude rates of net migration plus statistical adjustment for 2012–22 and for 2022. Different scales used on the y-axes. Based on available data. Romania, estimates. France and Portugal: provisional. Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal: break in series.
(1) 2013–22 instead of 2012–22.
(2) 2014–22 instead of 2012–22.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_r_gind3)

Figure 16: Crude rate of net migration plus statistical adjustment in predominantly rural regions, 2012–22 and 2022 (‰) Source: Eurostat (demo_r_gind3)

Source data for tables and graphs

- Demographic developments in rural regions and areas: tables and figures

Context

The President of the European Commission has stated that 'Rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy. They are a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will cherish and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future.'

To ensure that rural areas continue to play an essential role in providing homes, jobs, food, biodiversity, varied ecosystems and more, a European Commission Communication set out *A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040* (COM(2021) 345 final). In shaping this vision, the Commission gathered views of rural communities and businesses via public consultations and stakeholder-led events, to outline a comprehensive plan designed to help rural communities and businesses reach their full potential in the coming decades. It highlights 4 complementary areas of action

- stronger rural areas – home to empowered and vibrant local communities
- connected rural areas – maintaining or improving public transport services and connections, as well as deepening digital infrastructures
- more resilient rural areas – by preserving natural resources, restoring landscapes, greening farming activities and shortening supply chains, rural areas should become more resilient to climate change, natural hazards and economic crises

- prosperous rural areas – by diversifying economic activities into sustainable local economic strategies and improving the value added of farming and agri-food activities.

The EU's Rural Action Plan is a proposal contained within the long-term vision. The plan is based around 5 key areas (supported by a range of flagship initiatives)

- foster territorial cohesion and create new opportunities to attract innovative businesses
- provide access to quality jobs
- promote new and improved skills
- ensure better infrastructure and services
- leverage the role of sustainable agriculture and diversified economic activities.

The Rural Pact provides a framework for European, national, regional and local cooperation. It is designed to facilitate interaction on rural matters between public authorities, civil society, businesses, academia and citizens. It has 3 objectives

- amplify the voice of rural areas and raise them higher on the political agenda
- structure and enable collaboration and mutual learning
- encourage and monitor voluntary commitment for action.

Explore further

Other articles

Online publications

- Eurostat regional yearbook
- Rural Europe
- Urban Europe

Methodological publications

- Methodological manual on territorial typologies

Background articles

- Geographical information system of the Commission (GISCO)

Database

- Demography, population stock and balance (demo)
- Other typologies (urt)
- Regional statistics by NUTS classification (reg)

Thematic section

- NUTS – Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics
- Population and demography
- Regions
- Rural development

Publications

Statistical publications

- Demography report
- Eurostat regional yearbook – 2024 edition

Methodology

- Demography, population stock and balance – methodology
- Statistical regions in the European Union and partner countries: NUTS and statistical regions 2021 – 2022 edition

External links

- Urban Agenda for the EU

European Commission – Directorate-General Agriculture and rural development

- Rural development
- The common agricultural policy: 2023–27

European Commission – Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy

- Cities and urban development
- Ninth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion
- Territorial cohesion
- Urban-rural linkages

European Committee of the Regions

- European Committee of the Regions – political priorities 2020–25

European networks

- European Network for Rural Development

United Nations

- Habitat III – The new Urban Agenda
- Sustainable development – Rural development

Legislation

Statistical legislation

- Demography, population stock and balance – legislation
- Regulation (EU) 2017/2391 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2017 amending Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 as regards the territorial typologies (Tercet)
- Consolidated and amended version of Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS)

Policy legislation

- Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 522/2014 of 11 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to the detailed rules concerning the principles for the selection and management of innovative actions in the area of sustainable urban development to be supported by the European Regional Development Fund
- Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)
- Regulation (EU) No 1310/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down certain transitional provisions on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

Visualisation

- Regions and cities illustrated (RCI) – Urban-rural typology