



SHERPA

Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

MAP Position Paper

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE &
RESILIENT VALUE CHAINS



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<https://rural-interfaces.eu/maps/poland-zielone-sasiedztwo/>

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1. Summary and key messages

The MAP Zielone Sąsiedztwo chose the topic of entrepreneurship and social economy, just transition, including sustainable value chains was chosen for this MAP cycle as the MAP members to be currently the most relevant for rural areas in Mazowieckie assessed it. The MAP members stated that all the elements of the chosen topic are interrelated. The discussions focused on sustainability and resilience of value chains and entrepreneurship given the current macroeconomic and geopolitical conditions challenging the value chains and enterprises in an unprecedented way.

The key message stemming from the discussions is simple – the current policies are not sufficient and must be significantly strengthened and reshaped to offer effective response to the challenges faced by rural areas.

Rural areas need not only rural policy to be tailored to their needs but also other policies that take into account the diverse rural perspectives, as there is not one rurality even at a regional level.

Key elements of future rural policy needed:

- Funds for entrepreneurship and green transition.
- Information transfer, advisory system and long-life education.
- Research into ways of nudging consumers and entrepreneurs to choose green behaviours.

Rural communities must also be empowered to choose themselves the futures of their communities.

2. Introduction

In 2021, MAP Zielone Sąsiedztwo discussed the topic of diversification of rural economy. The choice for the year 2022 was the topic "Entrepreneurship and social economy, just transition, including sustainable value chains" as the MAP members saw it as the topic that could enable in-depth discussions of the issues that were mentioned in the previous year. Moreover, this topic seems to be the most relevant for the geopolitical and economic situation in Europe after the Russian invasion on Ukraine. Currently Poland, as most other European countries suffers from high inflation and problems with the resilience of the value chains in numerous sectors of its economy. The question of making the value chains both resilient and sustainable is key to the welfare of the citizens in both rural and urban areas but the distance from bigger markets makes the issue even more important for rural communities.

The policy interventions already in place are fragmented, small-scale or non-existent. The rural entrepreneurship is mostly tackled by the Leader which is highly limited in scope and scale both in terms of total account available as well as the maximum level of support for a beneficiary. Social economy in the region almost does not exist and these are only cities that it can be found. Also, the knowledge of the phenomenon of the social economy is uncommon among the region's citizens. The Just Transition Fund support is in Poland limited to several regions and Mazowieckie is not among them. There are no other policy instruments to support just transition in Mazowieckie. The measures to support sustainable value chains are limited to CAP 2nd pillar which serves only agri-food sector. There are no other policy instruments to support other sectors of rural and regional economy.

MAP members call for reducing administrative burden, especially at national level. They also call for creating just transition strategy at national and regional levels. There need to be measures that support sustainability and resilience and that are long-term solutions and not quick temporary fixes like reducing VAT or limiting energy prices. At the local level, the communities must be empowered to have a say on how to translate just transition into the context of their local community and economy.

The knowledge gaps relate both to sustainable technologies as well as the society's awareness of the need for transition and the incentives to undergo transition both in case of the entrepreneurs and in case of the

consumers. In the period of crises, these issues become even more complex as the socio-economic actors operate under greater pressure and uncertainty.

3. Current situation based on background research and evidence

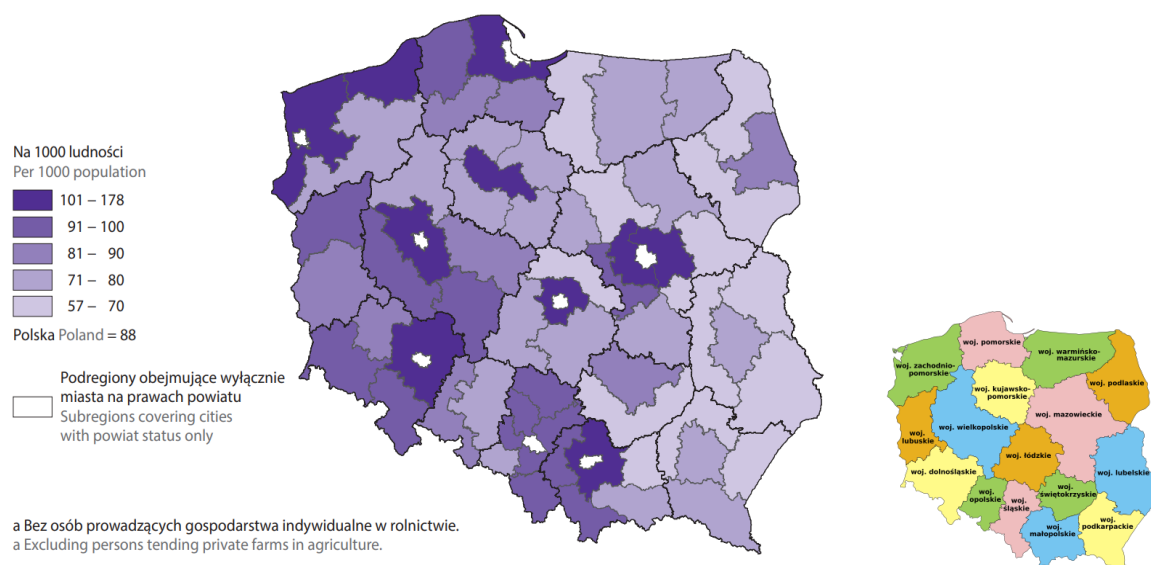
It must be stated that the diversity of the socio-economic situation of the rural areas in Mazowieckie is constantly increasing. It is best visible in the census data on population changes. In the space of a decade, the population of the two municipalities just outside Warsaw has increased by as much as two thirds. On the other hand, there has been a decline in the number of inhabitants on the peripheral areas of the region.

The municipality of Sterdyń is located on the eastern peripheries of Mazowieckie, in the Sokołów County. Arable land accounts for three quarters of the municipality's area, forests for one fifth, and other types of land for 5 per cent. According to the 2021 National Census, 3,552 people lived in this municipality. According to the census a decade earlier, the municipality had 4464 inhabitants. In ten years, 20.4 per cent of the population has been lost. It is the fastest depopulating municipality in the region but 210 of 314 municipalities located in Mazowieckie observed in the last 10 years a population decline (Wojtczuk, 2022).

In 2020, the rural population in Mazowieckie was among the Polish regions with the highest share of active population. It was also the region with one of the lowest share of employed persons in agriculture – only 2%. As many as 36.3% were employed in industry and construction, 32.1% were employed in trade, repair of motor vehicles, transportation and storage, accommodation and catering, and information and communication. The remaining 29.7% were employed in other services (Statistics Poland, 2022).

The scale of the entrepreneurship in the region is highly diversified by sub regions. The more peripheral parts of Mazowieckie. Moreover, the number economic entities per 1000 people is in most sub regions of Mazowieckie is lower than the national average (Fig. 1).

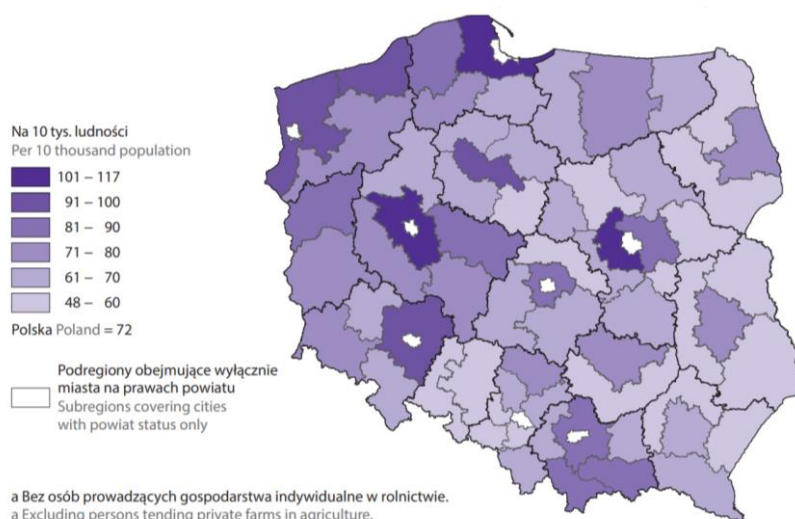
Figure 1. Entities of the national economy recorded in the REGON register in rural areas by subregions in 2020 (as of 31 December)



Source: Statistics Poland (2022), Map 15.

The same pattern applies to newly-registered economic entities which shows that the public policy does not help to improve the situation in the least developed parts of the region (Fig. 2).

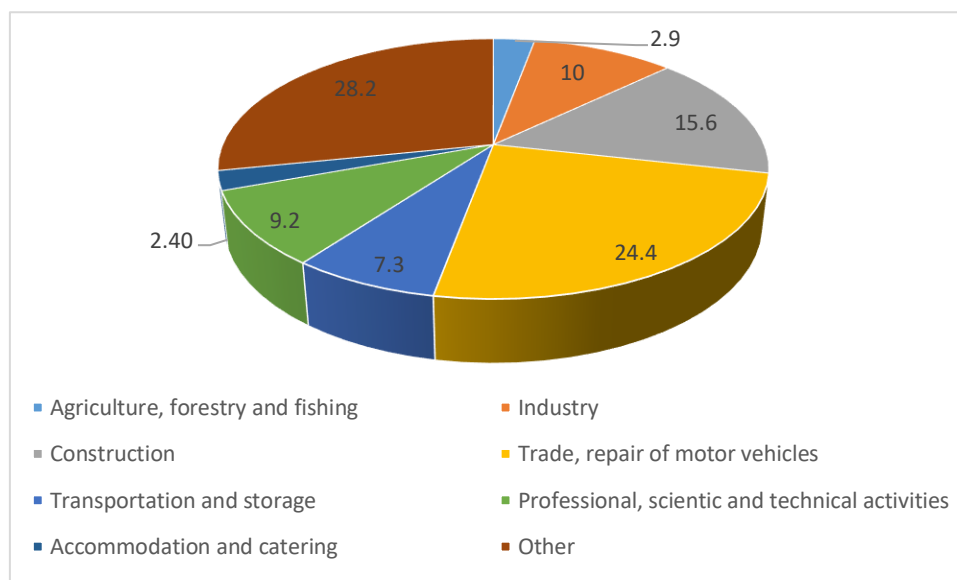
Figure 2. Entities of the national economy newly recorded in the REGON register in rural areas by sub regions in 2020



Source: Statistics Poland (2022), Map 16.

The structure of rural economy in Mazowieckie is diverse as shown by the structure of economic entities registered in rural areas in the region. Almost ¼ of the economic entities specialise in trade or repair of motor vehicles (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Structure of entities of the economy recorded in the REGON register in rural areas in Mazowieckie by sections of the Polish Classification of Activities 2007 in 2020 (as of 31 December)



Source: Own elaboration based on the data in Statistics Poland (2022), Chart 64.

Social economy in Mazowieckie is a marginal part of the region's economy. There is no data showing the situation in rural areas of Mazowieckie and the data for the whole region is patchy. The development strategy

for social economy (SE) in Mazowieckie by 2030 identifies lack of awareness of the concept of SE as one of the problems with its development, which show how fringe is this sector in the region, and as such, it is mostly existent in the capital of the region – Warsaw – capital of Poland. The implementation of the concept of the SE in rural areas could help in the development of these communities but given the result indicators and the aims of policy intervention named in the SE development strategy, it is not possible to make it popular in rural areas of the region (see annex for aims and indicators).

4. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform

4.1. Identified needs

In the opinion of the MAP members, the topic is vast and complex and each of its components was discussed separately. However, the MAP members see some linkages between the topics, like the link between entrepreneurship and issues related to just transition.

Entrepreneurship was the key discussed issue. MAP members stated that the needs in this area are still not met. The first mentioned need is the financial support. The current access to financial support is not sufficient. The amounts offered in LEADER are very small and the number of potential beneficiaries is too limited to stimulate a visible increase in economic activity. The current high inflation rate means that this small-scale support will totally lose its attractiveness and there is a need for a higher maximum level of support. Yet, this will translate into even smaller number of beneficiaries.

The access to other sources of external funds is also limited and with the current interest rates the accessibility of loans and credits will be even lower.

The MAP members stated that there are certain barriers to the development of rural areas in Mazowieckie and especially increasing entrepreneurship and value chains. These include:

- Disruption of supply chains;
- Legal instability;
- Lack of financial resources needed for investment;
- Lack of information;
- Bad governance;
- Climate changes;
- Decreasing real income of the society by the increasing production costs which leads to a slump in the market or high quality products and turning to mass production.

When it comes to sustainability of local food systems the MAP members have a mixed opinion about their sustainability with 43% of questionnaire participants stating that they are neither very sustainable nor unsustainable. None of the participants chose the option “very sustainable”. This shows that the existing local food systems still require transition to greener mode of operation. The elements of sustainability most in need of changes are social and environmental dimensions.

The resilience of the supply chains in the region was assessed to be high, which shows that the MAP members think that the region can successfully cope with the current and coming challenges if the policies support the necessary changes in their functioning.

The MAP members were also asked to assess the level of sustainability of the market participants in the supply chains and make a comparison between the situation in the region and in Poland. The opinions of the

MAP members differ but the majority of the participants stated that suppliers of raw materials (agricultural producers) are the least sustainable component of the supply system both in Poland and in Mazowieckie.

The MAP members stated that at the same time they were in the worst situation having to balance the sustainability dimensions and the market demands of ever-cheaper produce. As one of the members stated: *"Agricultural producers are the most dependent on environment and therefore they undertake conservation efforts. On the other hand commerce is dependent only on market conditions and is focused on current profits"*. Commerce was considered the most sustainable but there were some opinions that it is a source of significant waste and overpacking.

4.2. Existing interventions and actions

To increase the entrepreneurship in the region, especially in the rural areas the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 included support for self-employment and establishing new enterprises especially in white and green economy as part of developing labour market in the region. The measure prioritised, among other criteria, projects to be conducted in rural areas. The financial allocation for this measure clearly favoured rural areas with app. 65% of the budget allocated for rural areas (Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Mazowieckiego w Warszawie, 2021).

Within the Polish CAP strategic plan 2023-2027, shortening supply chains by organising joint sales by farmers will also be able to be supported under the LEADER approach. The experience from the 2014-2020 programming period will be used, including those related to the implementation of the so-called "e-farmers' boxes" projects. In the context of the diagnosed need to support farmers' cooperation, it is worth pointing out that, under the Polish Deal programme, a project entitled "Incentives for agricultural cooperatives" is being implemented. It has been decided that it is necessary to review the provisions regulating the functioning of cooperatives dealing with agricultural production, including the existing burdens for such entities. The aim of this review is to identify barriers to the formation and functioning of cooperatives and to propose possible incentives for their formation and functioning in areas ranging from environmental protection to construction law or tax incentives.

Under the intervention (I.10.6.1) "Development of value chain cooperation - on-farm" PS CAP proposes a list of different types of beneficiaries potentially able to start or continue short chains, i.e. farmers, farmers' spouses, homemakers and micro-entrepreneurs (using their own agricultural products), so that the widest possible range of actors can benefit from public support in this respect (I 10.6.1., I 10.6.2., I 10.7.1., I 10.7.2). In the case of quality production, the functioning of supply chains is also supported through producer support and promotion of quality food (I.13.3, I.13.4).

This support is to be complemented by the provisions of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Investment A 1.4.1. "Investments to diversify and shorten the supply chain of agricultural and food products and build the resilience of actors in the chain". The investment will include support to farmers for processing and marketing/disposal of agricultural, fishery and food products through agricultural retail, direct sales and marginal, local and limited activities, creation of direct sales sites for local food products.

Within the CAP in Poland, there will be still support for creation and development of producer organisations and agricultural producer groups. Complementarily in the fruit and vegetable sector, support for improving the organisation of production and adaptation to demand and the organisation of supply will be implemented (I.7.1. Improving infrastructure for planning and organising production, adapting production to demand in terms of quality and quantity, optimising production costs and return on investment, and stabilising fruit and vegetable producer prices, and I.7.2. Improving technical equipment used for concentrating supply and placing products on the fruit and vegetable market). In addition, support for the search for innovative solutions will be provided (I.7.6. Research and development).

Furthermore, within the Polish Recovery Plan, the Investment A 1.4.1 will be earmarked for the support of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in agri-food processing in the field of processing and marketing of agricultural and fishery products. It will be geared to managing the primary agricultural production at the local level, the diversification of distribution channels through the creation of storage and distribution centres and regional agri-food wholesale markets. This includes cooperatives and entities with the participation of the State Treasury and local government units. They are places of storage of goods in times of supply disruptions and their commingling, which will have a positive impact on the possibilities of exporting domestic agricultural and fishery products.

Within the Polish CAP strategic plan 2023-2027 education and information activities are also planned to improve farmers' cooperation. This includes developing the skills and knowledge necessary to undertake and carry out such cooperation as part of the AKIS system. Intensive training activities will be aimed at raising awareness of the creation of joint structures of farmers, such as producer organisations, including the principles of implementation of support in the form of sectoral interventions. The realisation of the need for cooperation between the scientific and business communities will also be realised in sectoral intervention I.7.6 - Research and development. These trainings will be able to draw on national experience in the implementation of sectoral interventions in the fruit and vegetable sector.

The MAP members were asked to assess which potential intervention measures would be the most useful in increasing the sustainability and resilience of supply chains in the region. Members shared the following list ordering it on the basis of the most to the least needed measures:

- Strengthening the role of producers in supply chains by: increasing their market power through participation in alternative supply chain models.
- Strengthening the position of producers through their education and training.
- Increasing the resilience and adaptive capacity of producers by supporting their ability to respond to disruption and change.
- Enhancing the capacity of producers through better use of social networks.
- Commitments to agreed standards within supply chains or participating in certification and labelling schemes.
- Increasing horizontal coordination.
- Facilitating vertical coordination.

Table 1 – Examples of actions taken by local actors

Entrepreneurial woman in the European Union - new challenges and new opportunities – conference organised by Mazowiecki Farm Advisory Centre

Activation of the rural population associated in Rural Housewives' Circles (RHCs) to undertake initiatives for the development of rural areas by seeking alternative solutions leading to the launch of innovative processing activities, thereby improving the conditions and quality of life in the countryside, and its promotion as an attractive place to live and develop professionally. Participants in the conference were provided with a compendium of knowledge in the field of innovative fruit and vegetable processing, the possibility of obtaining external funds for activities undertaken by RHCs, and their correct accounting.

Source: <https://modr.mazowsze.pl/sir/3292-przedsiębiorcze-kobiety-w-poswietnem>

Educational Business Incubator in Zdziwój Nowy and Zdziwój Stary as a way to revitalise areas displaced by the German occupiers during World War II

The county of Przasnysz has built an Educational Business Incubator on the site of a former primary school in Zdziwój Stary. It is a modern edifice designed to provide substantive support, organise training, conferences and activate local communities. It will be a place conducive to entrepreneurship and learning. Training in the use of computer programmes is already being organised there. Residents are also being targeted with free vocational courses to increase their opportunities in the labour market and encourage them to actively seek their career path. The offer includes, among other things, training in hairdressing, make-up, handicrafts, caring for the elderly or gardening. Residents will also receive support in setting up and running their own business. The Incubator's offer is also aimed at entrepreneurs already active on the local market. The University of Linguistics and Technology in Przasnysz is responsible for running the incubator on behalf of the county of Przasnysz.

Source: <https://www.funduszedlamazowska.eu/aktualnosci/edukacyjny-inkubator-przedsiębiorczosci-w-powiecie-przasnyskim-juz-otwarty/>

Education Project for Rural Housewives' Circles and Agricultural Entrepreneurship Creators

The operation 'Educational project for Rural Housewives' and Rural Entrepreneurship Creators co-financed by the "European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas'. Operation co-financed by the European Union under Scheme II of the Technical Assistance "National Rural Network" Rural Development Programme 2022-2023 Managing Authority of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 - Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Project started in September 2022.

The training is free of charge for participants and is aimed at 200 people who are members of Rural Housewives' Circles. Eligibility is determined by age and order of application. Priority was given to those under 35 years of age.

In the first stage, training courses on 'Strengthening the potential of Rural Housewives' Circles through involvement in intersectoral partnerships' will be held in September 2022, covering the topics: - Module 1: networking and clustering (the topic of this training will be the creation of networks, partnerships and clusters in order to develop socio-economic cooperation of organisations operating in rural areas, mainly KGWs. These issues will be presented in terms of legal, economic, organisational and effective management considerations. The objectives, as well as the benefits and methods of successful partnerships will be presented. Examples of initiatives in this field will be given.), - Module 2: Interpersonal communication, - Module 3: Production and processing, - Module 4: E-commerce.

Source: <https://ozarow-mazowiecki.pl/2022/08/08/projekt-edukacyjny-dla-kgw-oraz-kreatorow-przedsiębiorczosci-wiejskiej-kpw/>

4.3. Recommendations from the MAP

4.3.1. Recommendations for future rural policies

The future rural policies should be more rural needs-oriented. However, as the rural policies are only part of the policies having the impact on rural socio-economic situation it is vital that policies in other areas of socio-economic life see the rural areas and their specific needs. As the diversity of rural areas in Mazowieckie shows, rural areas need tailored policies shaped by a careful analysis of the current situation and future trends. Evidence-based in designing policy interventions is a must, given the complexity and fast changes in the socio-economic situation observed in recent years.

The key recommendation for the policy at national level is to address the macroeconomic situation and to simplify regulations and taxation system as well as to offer legal stability. This recommendation could be seen as not rural-specific but as the rural communities have more limited access to advisory services and

given the fact that the majority of rural enterprises are SMEs the complex regulations and taxation system make the undertaking and conducting economic activity more difficult for rural entrepreneurs.

Less bureaucracy is also needed to support farmers and their cooperation. Short food supply chains need to be simple to implement to make them an attractive solution for the farmers.

Digitalisation and modern technologies – like cooling storage systems - can support shortening food chains. Yes, the farmers must get the necessary capacity and funding to be able to use such solutions.

A vital part of future rural policies should be interventions that provide funding for rural entrepreneurs. These interventions must be designed in such a way that they enable not only creating new enterprises but also support already existing ones that it financial support to expend their economic activity either in scope or in size.

An important element for supporting rural entrepreneurship and rural communities is to improve the information flow, advisory services and education system. Entrepreneurs, potential entrepreneurs and other rural stakeholders need the access to information about the opportunities they can make use of, such as support instruments, advisory services or support groups. The rural communities must also have access to long-life learning services that are professional and in line with current and future market needs to make the rural communities capable of transforming themselves.

The most demanded EU contribution would be strengthening the LEADER approach by making it a more important part of the CAP while restricting the potential of national policymakers to limit the scope of the activities of local actions groups. Local communities know best what their socio-economic needs are. They should be given more trust that they have the capacity to choose and implement the projects that are in the interest of their community and territory. The EU could help empower the rural communities by extending the LEADER approach.

4.3.2. Recommendations for future research agendas

The research is a vital part of the enablers needed for strengthening rural economy, entrepreneurship, social economy, just transition and creating sustainable value chains in Mazowieckie. The key research gaps that need to be tackled include:

- Green technologies for rural households;
- Green technologies for agriculture;
- Green technologies for rural infrastructure;
- Green technologies for rural commerce;
- Social studies on the enablers of just transition – how to encourage rural enterprises and rural communities to turn to green solutions;
- How to empower rural communities?
- How to provide public services in efficiently and sustainably in rural communities facing climate change, aging, and depopulation?

Conclusions

Rural areas need rural policies and other national and regional policies tailored to their specific needs. Therefore, rural proofing should be a part of policy design, monitoring and evaluation processes. Evidence-based policy must be strengthened to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of supporting the development of rural areas. Just transition is a great challenge for each EU Member State, particularly for rural areas lacking resources to implement green solutions in individual households and small enterprises.

Support for entrepreneurship is still necessary but it should take into account the needs related to green transition. Therefore, the support instruments should assess the projects on their viability in all of the dimensions of sustainability. Rural communities also need access to information and education services to make use of the support available and improve the capacity to benefit from opportunities offered by digitalisation and new business models based on green solutions and shorter value chains.

The current economic woes caused by the disruption of value chains resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine pose a serious threat to the feasibility of achieving the green transition goals and climate commitments. This may further alienate the most vulnerable rural communities that have already struggled with the high energy and fuel prices. To prevent the increase in the share of rural population feeling left-behind and abandoned by the politicians, immediate action must be taken as the rural communities and rural areas are vital for achieving environmental goals.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of the MAP Zielone Sąsiedztwo for their contributions and insights.

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Annex 1 Methodology used by the MAP

The members of the MAP remained the same. The differences were only in actual participation at a given meeting. There has been one facilitator all through the process. The participants are informed about the topic in advance but are not sent any materials. The meetings start with a brief introduction into the topic. There was also a paper questionnaire distributed among the participants of the key discussion meeting. The questionnaire (attached in annex 2) focused on the elements of the topic that were chosen as the key elements for the region based both on desk research and discussions with researchers – members of the MAP.

The members enjoyed the topics and their relevance but do not see that the EC vision for rural areas is translated into the Polish rural development policy. This is also related to the fact that both the EU and Polish policy are hardly visible and discussed even among active citizens engaged in the life of their communities.

The vastness of this year's topic made it necessary to conduct much longer and complex discussions than in the previous cycles. Particularly useful was the introduction to the topic offered by the discussion paper and the desk research on the status quo and policies applied in Poland and Mazowieckie region. The MAP members had a common understanding of the need to give environmental issues a priority in the context of climate changes. However, they also considered that this was controversial topic in Poland and in the region because citizens with lower incomes surely prioritises their short-term wellbeing. It was even said that everybody will be able to have poor hygiene this winter given the lack and high prices of coal, individually heated houses. Some will resort to use all kinds of plastics and other materials that can be burnt in their coal burning furnaces. This is the biggest risk as the short-term policy prevails over the long-term needs of the rural areas in Poland and Mazowieckie region.

The take-ups from the debate on entrepreneurship will be used in creating the coming local development strategy of the LAG Zielone Sąsiedztwo. The discussion led to the conclusion that the amount offered for creating an enterprise should be significantly increased to make it more attractive and to take into account high inflation rate.

Annex 2 Additional information

Table 2. Social economy in Mazowieckie by 2030

Aim of the intervention	Result indicators		
	Indicator	Reference level	Aimed level
Increasing the awareness	% of citizens recognising enterprises of SE (ESE)	n.a.	10%
	No. of entities engaged in promoting SE	48	98
Increasing functioning stability of ESE	No. of workplaces in ESE	54	1754
	Increase in median revenue of ESE	n.a.	↑ 5% y-t-y
Improving access to quality integration services	Number of participants of reintegration entities who went through a social reintegration path	n.a.	30 persons more each year
	Number of participants of reintegration entities who found employment	40 in 2019	500 by 2030
Increasing involvement of public institutions and NGOs in the development of SE	Value of the budget of territorial self-government units allocated to ESE for commissioning public social services and implementation of public tasks in the field of local development	n.a.	↑ by 2% by 2030
	Number of ESEs	n.a.	By 50
Empowering SE through cooperation with the actors in its surrounding: public administration, science and business	Conducting cyclical meetings with representatives of public administration at regional and national level	0	10
	Number of ESEs with student trainings	n.a.	20
	Number of ESEs cooperating with business	3	20

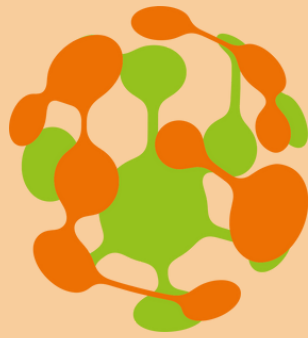
Source: Own elaboration based on data presented in Mazowieckie Centrum Polityki Społecznej (2021).

- A. Strengthening the role of producers in supply chains by: increasing their market power through participation in alternative supply chain models
- B. Strengthening the position of producers through their education and training
- C. Increasing the resilience and adaptive capacity of producers by supporting their ability to respond to disruption and change
- D. Building trust among supply chain stakeholders by:
 - D.1. increasing horizontal coordination
 - D.2. facilitating vertical coordination
 - D.3. enhancing the capacity of producers through better use of social networks
- E. Verifying and communicating sustainable practices through:
 - E.1. commitments to agreed standards within supply chains
 - E.2. participating in certification and labeling schemes

What are the current **needs** to support entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas and locally?

What are the **enablers** of entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas (under current conditions)?

What **barriers** do you identify to opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas in the context of recent crises?



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