

Interreg



Co-funded by
the European Union

Italy – Croatia

 **SFERA**

A decorative graphic consisting of a green and blue swirl on the left, transitioning into a horizontal blue line that spans the width of the page.

INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA PROGRAMME 2021-2027 PROJECT SFERA

D.1.3.1 White paper on rural entrepreneurship

(Version 2.0 – 7th October 2024)

SFERA

Strategic Framework for Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas

D.1.3.1 White paper on rural entrepreneurship

Document information

Project	SFERA - Strategic Framework for Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas
Partnership	National Confederation of Craft and Small and Medium Enterprises - LP Local action group Lika – PP2
Responsible partner	CNA Bari and LAG LIKA
Length	72
Version	2





DISCLAIMER

This project has been funded within Interreg Italy – Croatia 2021-2027 Programme. This document reflects the views only of the author, and the Interreg Italy – Croatia 2021-2027 Programme cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Copyright © SFERA Consortium, 2024



Table of contents

INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.0 OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART	8
1.1 Description of current obstacles in the relevant environment	8
1.2 Analysis of existing policies and initiatives already in place to address these barriers.....	12
2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	19
2.1 Description of methods used for the analysis of existing obstacles and policies in Apulia region.....	19
2.2. Description of methods used for the analysis of existing obstacles and policies in Lika region	20
2.3 Process for developing joint recommendations in Apulia region and in Lika region ...	21
3.0 IDENTIFICATION OF OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES	25
3.1 Detailed analysis of the main obstacles that emerged from the research.....	26
3.2 Identification of opportunities for improvement and priority areas for action	30
4.0. JOINT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	34
4.1 Presentation of the recommendations made to address the identified obstacles.....	34
4.2. Description of each recommendation and expected benefit.....	37
5.0 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	44
5.1 Suggestions on how to implement the joint recommendations in Apulia	44
5.2. Suggestions on how to implement the joint recommendations in Lika.....	47
5.3. Identification of potential actors and resources needed to implement the recommendations in Apulia and Lika	54
6.0 IMPLICATIONS AND BENEFITS.....	58
6.1 Analysis of the expected impacts of the recommendations on SMEs and the business ecosystem in Apulia	58





Italy – Croatia



6.2. Analysis of the expected impacts of the recommendations on SMEs and the business ecosystem in Lika.....	60
6.3. Discussion of the long-term benefits of implementing the recommendations in Apulia.....	62
6.4. Discussion of the long-term benefits of implementing the recommendations in Lika	64
7.0 CONCLUSIONS.....	67
8.0 REFERENCES AND SOURCES.....	70



INTRODUCTION

Enterprises in Apulia's and Lika's rural areas face significant challenges related to the lack of certain policies that are now indispensable for overcoming the obstacles and challenges affecting the current economic landscape.

In Apulia's region these are:

- Adequate digitalisation, currently absent, which limits the competitiveness of companies in the rural area on national and international markets;
- Attention to environmental sustainability, an issue that is now unavoidable in order to reduce environmental impacts;
- Globalisation of markets and competition with large companies on the national and international scene;
- Demographic challenges, linked to the ageing of the population, in line with the national trend in Italia and in Croatia.

In Lika's region these are:

- Improving the competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sector;
- Preservation of the environment and nature;
- Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging rural diversification economy.

This white paper is intended to represent a detailed set of joint recommendations designed to improve policies and strategies aimed at addressing specific obstacles identified in Apulia region and in Lika region. This paper not only provides suggestions and proposals for the



Italy – Croatia



implementation of solutions, but also offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of affairs, including detailed analyses, relevant data and up-to-date research.

The objective of the white paper is to inform and educate stakeholders, policy makers and other interested parties about the topic. Through an in-depth and articulate presentation of the problems and possible solutions, the paper aims to raise awareness of these key players, fostering greater awareness of the existing challenges and opportunities to effectively address them.

Its usefulness lies in its ability to influence decision-making by providing a solid knowledge base and practical recommendations that can be adopted to develop more effective policies in order to improve competitiveness and diversification of the local enterprises and total quality of life in rural areas. In summary, the white paper serves as an advocacy and guidance tool, essential for promoting positive and sustainable changes in current policies.



1.0 OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART

1.1 Description of current obstacles in the relevant environment

The European Union plays a key role in promoting the development of rural areas. EU funds are one of the key instruments for achieving these goals. However, despite the efforts, the financing of EU projects faces several challenges that can hinder implementation and the achievement of objectives.

Current obstacles in the relevant environment in Apulia's rural areas

- **Digitisation and Technology:** Enterprises in Apulia's rural areas are described as inadequately digitised, a problem that limits their ability to compete both nationally and internationally. Lack of digitisation reduces operational efficiency, limits access to digital markets and decreases the ability to innovate. There is great importance of regional support in technological and digital development. The Digital Facilitation Services Network, the Regional Digital Agenda and the promotion of open innovation are mentioned as key initiatives to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Through these initiatives, rural businesses can access new technologies, improve their efficiency, enter new markets and exploit the opportunities offered by digitisation. This support can enable businesses to become more competitive, resilient and innovative.
- **Sustainability and the Environment:** Sustainability is identified as a growing issue for businesses and consumers. It highlights the need for Apulian businesses, including rural ones, to adopt sustainable practices to minimise environmental impact. The



Apulia Region promotes sustainability through information portals, monitoring initiatives and concrete actions for land protection and responsible resource management. By adopting sustainable practices, companies can not only reduce their environmental impact but also become more attractive to sustainability-oriented consumers. This can improve their reputation and open up new market opportunities, thus strengthening their competitiveness.

- **Globalisation and Competition:** Globalisation has intensified competition, a significant challenge for Apulian companies in rural areas. Competition with international companies and the need to adapt to global markets represent significant pressures. The region has adopted digitisation, state aid and open innovation strategies to support economic growth and employment. These policies are geared towards enhancing the capacity of companies to innovate, increase productivity and improve the quality of their products and services. Regional policies can help companies improve their competitive position, enabling them to maintain and increase their presence in global markets, adapting to new competitive dynamics and exploiting opportunities for innovation.
- **Demographic Changes:** Apulia is facing an ageing demographic, characterised by a decrease in births and a migration of young people from rural areas to other regions or countries. The #mareAsinistra project is cited as an initiative to attract and enhance talent, students, digital nomads, startupper, returning Apulians, new investors and innovative professionals. This project aims to reverse the trend of demographic ageing by promoting generational change and encouraging the establishment of new



entrepreneurial activities in rural areas. The presence of new ideas and skills can stimulate innovation and contribute to a more balanced and sustainable development of rural areas.

The points presented here represent an integrated overview of the challenges faced by rural businesses in Apulia and the policy responses needed to address them. Digitisation and technological support are crucial to improve the competitiveness of rural enterprises, while environmental sustainability is essential to meet contemporary market demands. Globalisation requires businesses to adapt quickly to maintain their relevance in global markets, and the #mareAsinistra demographic project aims to counteract the ageing of the rural population by stimulating renewal and growth. The initiatives proposed by the Apulia Region seek to respond to these aspects in an integrated way, aiming at a more prosperous and sustainable future for rural areas.

Current obstacles in the relevant environment in Lika's rural areas

- **Bureaucracy and complex regulations:** One of the most common challenges is excessive bureaucracy and complex regulatory frameworks. The diversity of regulations and procedures can slow down the processes of project approval and implementation, leading to lengthy administrative procedures. This can make it difficult to use funds in a timely manner and reduce the effectiveness of implementation.
- **Lack of financial sustainability:** Some projects face challenges of long-term financial sustainability after the end of EU funding. The lack of clear plans for maintaining the



project after the end of the financial support can lead to problems in further functioning and preservation of the achieved results.

- **Complexity of public procurement:** Public procurement often represents a key challenge in the implementation of EU projects. Public procurement procedures can be complicated, with many steps and requirements. This can result in significant delays in the implementation of the project, and at the same time opens up space for potential irregularities or corrupt practices.
- **Lack of coordination between different levels of government:** Coordination between the European level, national governments and local authorities can be a challenge. Lack of alignment and common approach can lead to fragmentation and underutilization of resources.
- **Risk of non-compliance with objectives:** Sometimes projects financed from EU funds face the risk of not achieving the desired goals. This can be the result of a lack of clear strategies, poor project management or unforeseen changes in the environment.



1.2 Analysis of existing policies and initiatives already in place to address these barriers

This evaluation can be conducted using specific success indicators such as job creation, economic growth and local development. For example, job creation is a crucial indicator to measure the effectiveness of support measures: the 2021 ISTAT report in Italy found that 19% of employees in the non-agricultural private sector used the Cassa Integrazione Guadagni (CIG) in 2021, down from 46.2% in 2020, but about five times the pre-crisis value (2019). Economic growth is another useful indicator to assess the impact of the support measures: the Bank of Italy's 2021 report found that the government's initiatives favoured the growth of financing not only for smaller companies, which are structurally dependent on bank loans, but also for medium-sized companies and mid-caps, i.e. companies listed on a stock market characterised by medium capitalisation. Lastly, local development is an indicator that measures the impact of support measures on local areas: for example, the Tuscany Region's 2011 report assessed the impact of two measures to support SMEs implemented in Tuscany between 2002 and 2004, noting that these measures contributed to local development through aid for pre-competitive development and industrial and pre-competitive research.

In summary, the evaluation of the impact of support measures is an analysis aimed at assessing the effectiveness of implemented measures to determine their success and impact in the areas that received them. This evaluation can be conducted using specific success indicators such as job creation, economic growth and local development, together with the analysis of case studies and testimonies of entrepreneurs who are beneficiaries of support



Italy – Croatia



measures. Although EU projects represent a key instrument for stimulating development, they face a number of challenges that require careful planning, flexibility and cooperation of all stakeholders. Reduction bureaucracy, improving transparency and strengthening cooperation between all levels of government are key steps in solving the problem of financing EU projects and achieving the desired development effects both in the region of Apulia and in the region of Lika.

It is also worth mentioning that the strategic plan of the Joint Agricultural Policy of the Republic of Croatia 2023 - 2027 (SP ZPP) will contribute to the acceleration of the process of structural transformation of the Croatian agricultural and food sector into a modern activity that produces high-quality food at competitive prices, which, along with the sustainable management of natural resources, creates new jobs and contributes to improving the quality of life and work in rural areas. Modernization, digitization and innovative solutions will play a big role in this, both in production and in all segments of life.

SP ZPP is a national document that ensures support from European agricultural funds, and which is harmonized with the Agriculture Strategy until 2030, i.e. the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030. The implementation of SP CAP will ensure a contribution to the goals of the European Green Plan, including the Biodiversity Strategy and the From Field to Table strategy. As part of the SP ZPP programming process, the prepared SWOT analysis identified and prioritizes needs in accordance with the ZPP's specific goals.

In addition to the above, the needs reflect the goals of strategies at the national level, both specific goals related to agriculture and rural development, as well as national development



Italy – Croatia



goals and goals related to the protection of the environment and nature and climate change. The needs are also in line with the recommendations of the European Commission, delivered within the framework of the structured dialogue process, and which also resulted from detailed analyses prepared within the framework of the development of the Agriculture Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030. The prioritization of needs was carried out in three phases, which included stakeholder consultations and interdisciplinary expert discussions. In the first phase, public consultations were carried out with the presentation and subsequent refinement of the SWOT analysis and the presentation of proposals for needs with the aim of reaching a consensus on them, as well as defining potential criteria for their prioritization. Ministry of Regional Development, LAG Lika, Lika-Senj County as well as cities and municipalities from the Lika area by budget possibilities. The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development from 2014 to 2020, by the Law on Small Business Encouragement (Official Gazette 29/02, 63/07, 53/12, 56/13, 121/16) and the Law on State Aid (OG 47/14, 69/17) and taking into account the Treaty on the European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2016) and the Partnership Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the European Commission for the use of EU structural and investment funds for growth and jobs in the period 2014 – 2020, adopted by the European Commission on November 30, 2014, approved grants to small and medium-sized enterprises based on multi-year support programs. The programs were generally implemented up to four years from the announcement of the call for the use of the funds provided by the program or until they are used, and are available through the website of the Ministry of Economy.



Italy – Croatia



In 2023 and 2024, the implementation of several development programs was recorded, such as:

- The cooperative entrepreneurship development program for the year 2024 to increase the competitiveness of cooperative products and services with the application of new technologies and innovations,
- Program "Preservation and development of traditional and artistic crafts" for the year 2023,
- Program "Development of small and medium-sized enterprises and crafts in areas inhabited by members of national minorities for the year 2023"
- Public call for digitization vouchers.

All public invitations and programs are published on the website of the Ministry www.mingo.gov.hr.

Since 2017, the Croatian Tourist Board has been implementing annual programs for awarding de minimis grants for the development of the tourism sector. Based on the aforementioned support programs, HTZ awards grants to entrepreneurs for co-financing the costs foreseen by the Program, and by Commission Regulation (EU) 1407/13 of December 18, 2013, on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis pot-pore. In the implementation of the Program, public calls are announced annually for the approval of grants for the following purposes:

- encouraging tourism initiatives and products in touristic undeveloped areas,
- approval of grants for various events in tourism,
- approval of support for programs of destination management companies.



Italy – Croatia



Through published public calls, the Croatian Tourist Board allocates funds intended for programs of development and introduction to the market of complex tourist products for the market's special interests to activate less used tourist resources and create new motives for tourist arrivals throughout Croatia, enriching the tourist offer, developing innovative products that enable the extension of the tourist season and the reduction of seasonality, and the increase of tourist traffic, especially in the period before and after the season and on the continent, creation of a recognizable image of Croatia as a tourism destination of special interests and the market valorization of complex tourist products as a reason for the arrival of tourists to a particular destination in Croatia. The programs for which support is approved annually are selected in accordance with elaborated criteria, established points and ranking results, and the conditions for receiving support in accordance with the mentioned programs are published on the HTZ website <https://www.htz.hr/hr-HR/projekti-and-support/support-of-the-Croatian-tourist-community>.

The Ministry of Regional Development and European Union Funds grants support to the development of entrepreneurship through various programs, based on the Law on the Institutional Framework for the Use of EU Funds in the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 116/21) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2016) and the Partnership Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the European Commission for the financial period 2021-2027. adopted by the European Commission on December 2, 2022. This is the case in the implementation of several programs adopted for a multi-year period, which are implemented on the basis of annual public calls for entrepreneurs, which are available through the Ministry's website www.razvoj.gov.hr. Granting of non-reimbursable grants to local and



Italy – Croatia



regional self-government units includes grants from counties, cities, and municipalities. Thus, the Lika-Senj County approves support for the development of small and medium-sized businesses based on multi-year programs to encourage the development of entrepreneurship, which are adopted on the basis of the Act on the Encouragement of the Development of Small Businesses (Official Gazette 29/02, 63/07, 53/12, 56/13, 121/16). The Program for encouraging the development of small businesses in the Lika-Senj County from 2022 to 2025 is being implemented ("County Gazette" number 19/2022). Cities (Gospić, Senj, Novalja, Otočac) and municipalities (Brinje, Donji Lapac, Lovinac, Perušić, Karlobag, Plitvička jezera, Vrhovine, Ud-bina) in the Lika-Senj County also introduce support programs for the development of small businesses and implement them in accordance with budgetary possibilities. Thus, in the City of Gospić, the "Program of support in agriculture and rural development of the City of Gospić for the period 2023-2027" is being implemented (Official Gazette of the City of Gospić no. 4/2023). The conditions for using grants from cities and municipalities are available on their websites. It should be noted that some cities and municipalities in Lika-Senj County implemented programs to support the survival of small businesses at the time of the COVID-19 virus epidemic. Thus, the City of Gospić granted grants based on the Decision on the allocation of non-refundable financial resources intended to mitigate the consequences caused by the coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) and granted grants to entrepreneurs who were affected by the work ban (more on: <https://arhiva.gospic.hr/sluzbeni-vjesnik-grada-gospica/sluzbeni-vjesnik-grada-gospica-broj-4-2020/odluka-o-dodjeli-bespovratnih-financijskih-sredstava-namijenjenih-ublazavanju-posljedica-izazvanih-epidemijom-koronavirusa-covid-19A>) similar decision was made and implemented by the Perušić



**Italy – Croatia**



Municipality (https://licko-senjska.hr/images/stories/Glasnik_2020/37-2020.pdf), Municipality of Karlobag (County gazette no 15/2020, 38B/20), Udbina (“County gazette” no 12/20).



2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Description of methods used for the analysis of existing obstacles and policies in Apulia region

Different methods have been used to analyse existing obstacles and policies, each useful in identifying different nuances.

- **SWOT analysis:** SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This method analyses a topic to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- **Policy analysis:** This method involves the evaluation of policies and initiatives to determine their effectiveness and relevance.
- **Comparative analysis:** Compares different aspects of the text to highlight similarities and differences.
- **Implicative analysis:** Examines the potential implications of policies and initiatives.
- **Integrative synthesis:** Integrate individual analyses into a coherent synthesis.

These combined methods made it possible to assess the effectiveness of regional policies and initiatives, understand the interactions between different economic and social factors, and offer recommendations based on a comprehensive analysis of the data provided. Through these approaches, it was possible to provide a holistic view of the context and possible strategies to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of rural enterprises in Apulia.



2.2. Description of methods used for the analysis of existing obstacles and policies in Lika region

In strategic planning of area development, SWOT analysis is a key tool for identifying key factors of strategic development in various aspects of the LAG area, including natural, social, infrastructural, economic, demographic and other characteristics. The SWOT analysis serves as a basis for assessing and further identifying the needs of the area in order to plan interventions that will meet those needs.

To identify these factors, data from official sources and communications with local stakeholders who know the area best are used. These factors can be strengths and opportunities, which represent the advantages of the LAG area and which can be used for further development, and weaknesses and threats which represent limitations that need to be overcome. The area of LAG LIKA is a combination of rich cultural, historical and natural heritage.

The main advantages of the LAG area relate to a favorable geo-traffic location, rich, preserved and attractive natural heritage and resources (agricultural lands, forests and waters), a high degree of diversity of plant and animal species, a rich cultural and traditional heritage, including rich traditional values, numerous tourist destinations in the area of the LAG and in the immediate vicinity of the area, existing protected autochthonous products, electricity production from RES and the construction of entrepreneurial zones. The favorable geo-traffic position of LAG Lika resulted in the construction of transport infrastructure, and the A1 highway, state and many county and local roads pass through its area.

The existing infrastructure enables good connections with the rest of the territory of the Republic of Croatia, and due to the proximity of airports and seaports, this area is also well



connected at the level of the European Union. The area of the LAG is characterized by a rich, preserved and attractive natural heritage, which is recognized as a basis for the initiation and further development of tourist activities, given that there are a large number of protected areas in the immediate vicinity, from national parks (NP Plitvička Jezera, NP Sjeverni Velebit, NP Paklenica), special reserves, nature park to areas under Natura 2000 protection. Also, the LAG area is characterized by rich and preserved natural resources (agricultural lands, forests, water) which are also habitats of diverse plant and animal species. Agricultural production in the area of LAG, especially animal husbandry, has a long tradition, and despite many aggravating natural features of this region (karst, increased slope, short growing season), it is characterized by well-known, autochthonous and protected products. As an area of great potential, LAG LIKA offers many opportunities for development and progress.

2.3 Process for developing joint recommendations in Apulia region and in Lika region

Joint recommendations are developed through a combination of data analysis, benchmarking, policy evaluation and strategic dissemination. These means ensure that the recommendations are evidence-based and are easily implemented to address the challenges of SMEs in rural areas. Let us look at them in detail:

- **Data collection**



- Statistical sources: use of data from statistical institutes (e.g. Istat^{1 2}), economic reports (e.g. Bank of Italy^{3 4}), and specialised agencies (e.g. ENISA for cyber security⁵);
- Academic studies: consultation of scientific articles and publications dealing with best practices and challenges specific to SMEs and rural areas in the *D.1.2.1 Best practice guide*.
- Surveys: collection of feedback from entrepreneurs through a targeted questionnaire, as presented in the dedicated report *D.1.1.3 SMEs needs assessment study*.
- **Benchmarking and comparative analysis⁶**
 - Study of best practices and policy comparison: analysis of other regions or countries that have successfully addressed similar challenges and evaluation of policies adopted in different areas – in Apulia, Lika and Europe Counties in general – to identify the most effective ones.

¹ ISTAT, Rapporto annuale 2023 – La situazione del Paese, <https://www.istat.it/storage/rapporto-annuale/2023/Rapporto-Annuale-2023.pdf>, cfr. *D.1.1.1 Entrepreneurial Framework Study*, p. 36.

² ISTAT, Mercato del lavoro, redditi e misure di sostegno: un'analisi integrata, 2021, <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/281755>, cfr. *D.1.1.2 Report of Entrepreneurship measures*, p. 25.

³ Banca d'Italia, «Economie regionali - L'economia della Puglia, Aggiornamento congiunturale», No. 38, November 2023, p. 7, <https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/economie-regionali/2023/2023-0038/2338-puglia.pdf>, *D.1.1.1 Entrepreneurial Framework Study*, p. 13.

⁴ Banca d'Italia, «Economie regionali - L'economia della Puglia, Rapporto annuale», No. 16, June 2023, p. 5, <https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/economie-regionali/2023/2023-0016/2316-puglia.pdf>, *D.1.1.1 Entrepreneurial Framework Study*, p. 38.

⁵ ENISA – European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/>, cfr. *D.1.2.1 Best Practice Guide*, p. 10.

⁶ Throughout all the *D.1.2.1 Best practice guide*.



- Benchmarking: comparison of Apulia's and Lika's SME performance with that of other regions to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Policy evaluation in Apulia**
 - Review of initiatives: Review of current policies of the Apulia and Lika Regions, such as the Digital Facilitation Services Network⁷ and the Regional Digital Agenda⁸.
 - Monitoring and evaluation: measuring the impact of already implemented policies, illustrated in the *D.1.2.1 Best practice guide*.
- **Policy evaluation in Lika**
 - The needs of the Lika-Senj County were defined through communication with the local population and stakeholders of the public, civil, and economic sectors, their project proposals and the overall analysis of the area carried out through the preparation of the LRS.
 - As the main problem of the area of Lika-Senj County is rapid emigration and the death and aging of the population, the needs of the County place emphasis on improving the quality of everyday life in rural areas. As a primarily rural area, increasing the competitiveness of agricultural production is one of the main goals of this development strategy.

⁷ Digital Facilitation Services Network, <https://www.regione.puglia.it/web/trasformazione-digitale/punti-di-facilitazione-digitale>, cfr. *D.1.1.1 Entrepreneurial Framework Study*, p. 31.

⁸ Apulia Region Digital Agenda, <https://www.regione.puglia.it/web/competitivita-e-innovazione/puglia-digitale/agenda-digitale-della-regione-puglia>, cfr. *D.1.1.1 Entrepreneurial Framework Study*, p. 31.



- There is an increased need for the association of local agricultural producers with the aim of better marketing of local products. Currently, most producers offer their products at the doorstep or in markets, which are also insufficient in the area. It is necessary to find a solution that is easily accessible, but also adapted to producers of all ages, for example by partnering with tourist agencies in the area of the County and by including indigenous agricultural products in the tourist offer. Likewise, there is a need for local stores specializing in the sale of healthy food and ecological products, where producers could offer high-quality products. In this way, the trend present in the rest of the Republic of Croatia, as well as in the world, is followed.



3.0 IDENTIFICATION OF OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The challenges faced by SMEs in rural areas are complex and interconnected, creating a vicious circle that makes it difficult to improve their situation. These difficulties are amplified by a combination of mutually influencing factors. Moreover, regional disparities further aggravate the situation, as some areas are more disadvantaged due to socio-economic and infrastructural factors.

A significant obstacle is the lack of specific disaggregated data on SMEs in rural areas, which makes it difficult to design targeted policies and interventions that can effectively address existing problems. The consequences of these challenges are serious. SMEs in rural areas, hampered in their growth and competitiveness, cannot fully contribute to the local economy, slowing down the development of the entire region. Declining job opportunities, due to labor flight and business closures, fuel depopulation, resulting in demographic decline in rural areas.

Moreover, the difficulties of SMEs in rural areas contribute to accentuating economic and social inequalities between rural and urban areas, increasing the already existing gap. This implies an urgent need for targeted and coordinated interventions to improve conditions for SMEs in rural areas, support equitable economic growth and promote the vitality of rural communities as a whole.



3.1 Detailed analysis of the main obstacles that emerged from the research

Apulia region

SMEs operating in Apulia's rural areas face a number of challenges and obstacles that limit their growth and development. These difficulties are complex and interconnected, creating a vicious circle that hinders the progress of these enterprises.

- **Environmental impacts:** Climate change, with extreme weather events such as droughts and hailstorms, damage crops, increase costs and reduce productivity. Water scarcity, due to poor management and pollution, limits availability for irrigation. Furthermore, unsustainable agricultural practices cause erosion, salinisation and loss of soil fertility.
- **Shortage of human resources:** The outflow of skilled labour to cities leaves rural areas with a reduced and less skilled workforce. SMEs often lack access to adequate training programmes for their employees, limiting their ability to innovate and grow.
- **Limited market access:** Lack of marketing infrastructure and skills hampers access to domestic and foreign markets. SMEs struggle to promote their products and services effectively, and poor competition in some areas can limit innovation and growth.
- **Complex bureaucracy and weak institutional support:** Complex administrative procedures and regulations create a significant bureaucratic burden. Frequent legislative changes without clear communication increase uncertainty and hinder business planning. Lack of funding, tax breaks and advice from institutions limits resources for growth and innovation.



- **Lack of information and limited access to advice:** SMEs often do not receive timely and accurate information on funding opportunities, regulatory changes and markets. Furthermore, they have difficulty accessing specialised advisory services that could provide strategic, technical and operational support.

The challenges faced by SMEs in rural areas are complex and interconnected, creating a vicious circle that makes it difficult to improve their situation. These difficulties are amplified by a combination of mutually influencing factors. Moreover, regional disparities further aggravate the situation, as some areas are more disadvantaged due to socio-economic and infrastructural factors.

A significant obstacle is the lack of specific disaggregated data on SMEs in rural areas, which makes it difficult to design targeted policies and interventions that can effectively address existing problems. The consequences of these challenges are serious. SMEs in rural areas, hampered in their growth and competitiveness, cannot fully contribute to the local economy, slowing down the development of the entire region. Declining job opportunities, due to labour flight and business closures, fuel depopulation, resulting in demographic decline in rural areas.

Moreover, the difficulties of SMEs in rural areas contribute to accentuating economic and social inequalities between rural and urban areas, increasing the already existing gap. This implies an urgent need for targeted and coordinated interventions to improve conditions for SMEs in rural areas, support equitable economic growth and promote the vitality of rural communities as a whole.



Lika-Senj County

The basic diagnosed weaknesses of the area of Lika-Senj County defined by the Local Development Strategy of LAG Lika and the conducted surveys are:

- Large area and low population density, depopulation, and unfavorable demographic picture;
- Small share of production activities in relation to public administration;
- Weak investment in the development of new technologies and innovations;
- High age of farmers;
- Insufficiently developed tourist infrastructure, lack of high-class tourist facilities, lack of coordination in the development of tourism and agriculture, underdeveloped rural tourism;
- Insufficient inclusion of cultural-historical heritage and natural values in the tourist offer;
- Insufficient number of markets, especially for local products;
- Neglected and underutilized agricultural land;
- Unresolved property-legal relations, fragmentation of agricultural plots;
- Underutilized existing natural and climatic resources of the area;
- Underdeveloped system of municipal waste selection and disposal;
- Insufficient and outdated communal infrastructure;
- Insufficient and inadequate accommodation for the elderly and infirm;



Italy – Croatia



- Insufficient number of sports and recreational facilities and insufficient number of children's playgrounds;
- Mismatch between the education system and the needs of the labor market;
- Insufficient support from tourist boards in the promotion of local products;
- Insufficient number of parking spaces - especially in cities;
- Insufficient number of producers of protected products (Potatoes from Lika, lamb from Lika);
- Lack of social services and organizations (the Red Cross operates in the area and helps at home through the "Zaželi" project)
- Insufficiently developed public transport;
- Insufficient advertising of local producers due to insufficient quantities of domestic products;
- The problem of insufficient electricity and internet coverage.

In addition to the identified weaknesses in the Lika region, potential threats to development were defined, such as:

- Global and national economic crisis;
- Climate changes;
- Negative demographic trends (depopulation, natural increase and vitality index);
- Population aging;
- Mismatch between the education system and the needs of the labor market;
- Outflow of quality educated human resources, primarily the young population;
- Insufficient sensitivity of the social community towards socially vulnerable groups;



- Lack of own resources to finance projects.

3.2 Identification of opportunities for improvement and priority areas for action

Apulia region

SMEs in Apulia's rural areas see several development opportunities that could foster growth and innovation. Adopting advanced technologies such as precision agriculture and digital solutions for business management could improve productivity and efficiency of operations, while the use of e-commerce and digital marketing can expand the customer base and reach new markets. Investing in sustainable farming and business practices, such as organic farming and the circular economy, would reduce long-term operating costs and improve the attractiveness of products. Improving market access through participation in trade fairs, industry events and collaborations with sales networks can facilitate access to new national and international markets. By enhancing skills and training, SMEs can develop the technical, management and digital skills of their staff. Facilitating access to credit and advice through ad hoc financial instruments and specialised consultancy services will provide the necessary support for growth.

Promoting collaboration between SMEs, through business networks and supply chain projects, can increase efficiency and competitiveness. Improving digital infrastructure and services, including a fast Internet network and efficient logistics infrastructure, is crucial to foster the use of digital technologies and e-commerce. Promoting rural tourism and agri-tourism by enhancing the cultural and landscape heritage and creating agri-tourism accommodation can attract tourists and create new business opportunities. It is essential to simplify



Italy – Croatia



bureaucratic procedures, reducing red tape and creating one-stop shops for businesses. By enhancing institutional assistance and advisory services, SMEs will have support in fulfilling regulatory obligations and accessing funding.

Finally, improving communication and access to information through an information portal and the organisation of information events can update businesses on sector news and development opportunities, raising awareness of the importance of SMEs in rural areas and promoting local consumption and land development.

Apulia's SMEs in rural areas have enormous potential for growth and development, which can be unlocked through targeted and strategic intervention by all actors involved. The improvement opportunities and priority intervention areas identified in this document represent a starting point for a sustainable and inclusive growth path that can contribute to the economic and social prosperity of Apulia's rural areas.

The joint commitment of public bodies, businesses, universities, research centres and third sector organisations is fundamental to creating a supportive ecosystem for SMEs in rural areas and enhancing their strategic role in territorial development. Investing in the future of Apulia's SMEs in rural areas means investing in the future of Apulia.

Lika-Senj County

SWOT analysis diagnosed the following as the strengths of the Lika area and the basis for future development:

- Favorable geographic location and good connectivity at the national and EU level;
- Rich, preserved and attractive natural heritage (national parks, nature park);
- Wealth and conservation of natural resources (agricultural lands, forests, water);



Italy – Croatia



- A large part of the area under NATURA 2000;
- Rich cultural and traditional heritage;
- Numerous tourist destinations in the area of LAG Lika and in the immediate vicinity of the area;
- High degree of diversity of plant and animal species;
- Rich traditional values;
- Existing protected autochthonous products;
- Production of electricity from RES;
- Development of entrepreneurial zones

At the same time, the following opportunities for success in achieving the economic goals of development were diagnosed using the same method:

- Increase in demand for selective forms of tourism (rural, adventure, health, hunting, cultural, sports, mountain);
- A recognized tourist destination with great potential;
- Small agricultural holdings suitable for the development of agrotourism - especially the development of accommodation at OPGs;
- Developing cooperation between the agricultural, tourist and public sectors;
- Sustainable use of cultural heritage for touristic and educational purposes;
- Possibility of ecological production;
- High-quality and indigenous agricultural products;
- Further development and strengthening of products with the designation of geographical origin;



Italy – Croatia



- "Lika Quality" regional quality label system;
- Increase in demand for ecological, autochthonous and traditional products;
- Integrating agricultural products into the tourist offer;
- Rich natural biodiversity as a basis for environmentally acceptable and sustainable agricultural production;
- Development of agriculture due to global disturbances in the food market;
- The possibility of using grants from EU funds;
- "Explore Lika" – a mobile application intended to promote Indigenous products and contents of Lika.



4.0. JOINT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Presentation of the recommendations made to address the identified obstacles

SMEs in rural areas in both analyzed regions face significant challenges that limit their growth and development. In order to overcome these challenges and seize opportunities for improvement, targeted and strategic intervention is required from all actors involved. The following joint recommendations are formulated to address the identified obstacles and to promote the sustainable and inclusive growth of SMEs in rural areas.

Digitisation and innovation

- Promote the adoption of digital technologies: Encourage the use of digital tools for business management, precision agriculture, e-commerce and digital marketing to improve efficiency, productivity and access to markets.
- Develop digital infrastructure: Invest in a fast and reliable internet network in rural areas to facilitate access to digital technologies.
- Foster innovation: Support research and development of innovative solutions for SMEs in rural areas through funding programmes and collaboration with universities and research centres.

Environmental sustainability

- Promoting sustainable agricultural practices: Promote organic farming, precision agriculture and the circular economy to reduce environmental impact and improve product quality.



Italy – Croatia



- Support efficient water resource management: Invest in irrigation and water management infrastructure to optimise water use and reduce waste.
- Raise awareness on the importance of environmental protection: Promote information campaigns and training to raise awareness on the importance of environmental sustainability among SMEs in rural areas.

Market access and competitiveness

- Facilitate access to national and international markets: Support participation in trade fairs, networking events and trade missions to promote products of SMEs in rural areas.
- Developing effective marketing strategies: Provide assistance to SMEs in rural areas in creating marketing strategies targeted at their target groups.
- Encouraging business cooperation: Promoting the creation of business networks and supply chain projects to increase the competitiveness and efficiency of SMEs in rural areas.

Skills development and human capital

- Invest in training and further education: Offer training programmes targeted at the needs of SMEs in rural areas to develop workers' technical, management and digital skills.
- Fostering lifelong learning: Promote a culture of continuous learning to enable workers to keep abreast of the latest technologies and trends in the sector.



Italy – Croatia



- Attracting and retaining young talent: Create incentives to attract and retain young talent in rural areas by providing employment and professional development opportunities.

Access to credit and advice

- Develop tailor-made financial instruments: Establish subsidised credit lines and micro-credit programmes specifically for SMEs in rural areas.
- Provide specialised advisory services: Offer assistance to SMEs in rural areas on business management, marketing, access to credit and innovation.
- Simplify bureaucratic procedures: Reduce administrative burdens and facilitate access to credit and advice for SMEs in rural areas.

Improving the policy and institutional framework

- Strengthen collaboration between public authorities, businesses and other stakeholders: Set up permanent working tables to foster dialogue and collaboration between different stakeholders in rural SME development.
- Develop policies targeted to the needs of SMEs in rural areas: Carry out specific analyses and studies to understand the needs and challenges of SMEs in rural areas and develop policies targeted to support them.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies: Monitor the impact of implemented policies and evaluate their effectiveness in order to make improvements and adjustments.

Additional recommendations for development of rural entrepreneurship

- P1. Increasing the competitiveness of agricultural production;



Italy – Croatia



- P2. Better use of natural resources and unused agricultural land;
- P3. Better placement and greater competitiveness of agricultural products on the market;
- P4. Greater recognition of autochthonous agricultural products;
- P5. Increasing the competitiveness of the tourist offer on agricultural farms;
- P6. Better connectivity in the rural area;
- P7. Improvement of social infrastructure;
- P8. Keeping the population in rural areas;
- P9. Increasing the use of RES.

The joint recommendations presented in this document represent a starting point for a sustainable and inclusive growth path for SMEs in rural areas. The joint commitment of all actors involved is crucial to create a supportive ecosystem for SMEs in rural areas.

4.2. Description of each recommendation and expected benefit

Apulia region

The recommendations for improving the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in rural areas in Apulia focus on several crucial areas.

First, it is essential to promote digitisation and innovation. The adoption of digital technologies would not only increase business efficiency and productivity, but also improve the quality of products and services. This would reduce operating costs and expand access to national and international markets, stimulating the development of new business models.



Italy – Croatia



Likewise, the development of digital infrastructure would facilitate access to technology in rural areas, reducing the digital divide with urban areas and making the territory more attractive for investment and innovation.

A second critical point is the promotion of environmental sustainability. Adopting sustainable farming practices would not only reduce the environmental impact of agriculture, but also improve soil and water quality, increasing biodiversity and the competitiveness of agricultural products in the markets. Managing water resources efficiently is equally crucial, with benefits that include reducing waste and optimising the use of natural resources, promoting sustainable land management.

To improve market access and increase competitiveness, it is necessary to facilitate rural SMEs' access to national and international markets. This would lead to increased sales and commercial risk diversification, enhancing the overall competitiveness of enterprises and stimulating economic and employment growth in rural areas. The development of effective marketing strategies would further improve the market positioning of SMEs in rural areas, increasing brand awareness and customer loyalty.

A key aspect for the sustainable development of SMEs in rural areas concerns human capital. Investing in training and retraining would improve the technical, managerial and digital skills of workers, increasing productivity and business efficiency. This would also foster innovation and adaptation to change, making SMEs in rural areas more attractive to skilled workers and helping to reduce unemployment rates in rural areas.

Finally, improving the policy and institutional framework is crucial to support SMEs in rural areas. Strengthening collaboration between public authorities, businesses and other



Italy – Croatia



stakeholders would enable the development of more effective policies targeted to the specific needs of SMEs in rural areas, improving the regulatory framework and promoting specific support measures for different production chains. Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of implemented policies would be essential to optimise the use of public resources and strengthen transparency in institutions.

In summary, implementing these recommendations requires a coordinated and synergetic commitment from all the actors involved in order to promote sustainable and inclusive growth of SMEs in rural areas in Apulia, enhancing their strategic role in the economic and social development of the region's rural areas.

Lika-Senj County

The needs and benefits for the Lika LAG area are defined by fulfilling the following development goals:

P1. Increasing the competitiveness of agricultural production - To create prerequisites for a better organization of supply chains, it is necessary to increase the competitiveness of agricultural production by investing in new technologies and generally modernizing agricultural production.

P2. Better use of natural resources and unused agricultural land - It is necessary to encourage the development of ecological food production, especially on arable land and orchards, with the aim of better use of agricultural land and environmental protection. Also, it is necessary to make better use of the natural potential of this area and make better use of large



Italy – Croatia



agricultural areas and natural resources. The development of ecological agriculture would preserve the natural potential of the county and achieve the added value of high-quality agricultural products. Investments in the development of organic agriculture are in line with the growing demand for organic products on the market.

P3. Better placement and greater competitiveness of agricultural products on the market - Investments in (ecological) agricultural production create prerequisites for the further development of high-quality agricultural products that achieve easier (better) placement on the market. By encouraging investment in processing, added value of agricultural products is created, while, by applying innovations and modern technologies, lower production costs and higher incomes are achieved. In order to facilitate placement and distribution, it is necessary to encourage association with other farmers and related sectors. Through association with local tourism communities, a brand of Lika products is created that is easily recognizable to local and foreign visitors.

P4. Greater recognition of autochthonous agricultural products - Another way to better market local products is through the development of agritourism, for which the LAG area has great potential. Through the offer of accommodation on agricultural farms, the local population develops an additional activity and source of income and offers domestic (indigenous) products to its guests. By emphasizing the authenticity of local agricultural products, developing a recognizable (personal) brand and connecting with travel agencies, the basis for attracting tourists is created. Organizing tours of agricultural holdings and providing educational experiences further supports the development of the area through agritourism. At the



Italy – Croatia



same time, encouraging the development of new agricultural products and innovations enriches the tourist offer attracts guests, and creates additional income for the local population.

P5. Increasing the competitiveness of the tourist offer on agricultural farms - Product tastings enrich the tourist experience, and with the help of product certification, the placement of local (indigenous) products through the tourism sector is facilitated. Through these activities, agritourism becomes an increasingly attractive option for tourists, which contributes to its further development and generates additional income for the local population. Since the majority of agricultural producers from this area are elderly and without professional knowledge, it is necessary to organize training for agricultural producers and include experts from various relevant fields who would educate and contribute to the exchange of knowledge in the local community. In addition, it is necessary to bring agriculture closer to young people and make it a desirable activity. This is planned to be achieved through the introduction of new technologies and the modernization of agricultural production, as well as an emphasis on marketing and further investments in the creation of a recognizable personal brand that will better position agricultural products on the market.

P6. Better connectivity of the rural area - One of the more pronounced needs of this area is the construction of new and renovation of existing communal infrastructure, such as ungraded roads that connect more distant parts of the rural area with cities, so that the services provided by the city are more accessible to the local population (but also outdated railways and station) and better organization of public transport through all parts of the county. There



Italy – Croatia



is also the problem of a lack of parking spaces, especially in cities during the summer months, so there is a need to build new ones.

P7. Improvement of social infrastructure - In addition, there is a need for the arrangement of public areas such as squares and parks and green areas, the construction of forest roads and educational trails, as well as the construction of viewpoints that contribute to the quality of daily life of residents, but also expand the tourist offer of this region.

P8. Retention of the population in rural areas - Due to the large number of elderly population and the insufficient offer of social services, there is a great need for greater involvement of social organizations (currently the Red Cross and associations for providing help at home and the "Zaželi" project operate in the area). Homes for the elderly and infirm do not have enough capacity and are not adequately equipped, and a better organization of medical transport is needed so that medical services are available to everyone. Since the goal of developing the area is to retain a younger population, it is necessary to build more kindergartens and playgrounds, as well as modernize existing ones and improve the offer of entertainment (construction of street workout playground, zip line...).

P9. Increasing the use of RES - As the global economic crisis, the consequences of the pandemic and climate change emerge as the main threats to development and progress at the world level, they also emerge in rural areas. In order to protect the natural heritage, which is the greatest value of this area, and to reduce the impact of climate change, further investments in the use of RES are needed, and it needs to be encouraged in all interventions. Although the number of needs in the area of the county is significant, it should be emphasized



**Italy – Croatia**



that the means of public support are limited and it should be taken into account that the number of selected projects will be in accordance with this.



5.0 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

5.1 Suggestions on how to implement the joint recommendations in Apulia

Implementing joint recommendations effectively requires a well-planned strategy involving all stakeholders and using appropriate methods and tools. Here are some suggestions on how to implement these recommendations, specifically in the context of SME support in rural areas of the Apulia Region.

- **Planning and goal setting**⁹

Clear objectives for digitisation, sustainability, competitiveness and demographics need to be defined, based on previous data and research, ensuring that the objectives are in line with existing regional policies and strategic plans. In addition, a plan must be created outlining specific actions to be taken, timelines, roles and responsibilities. Beyond this, it becomes imperative to apply project management methods to monitor progress and adapt the plan as needed.

- **Stakeholder Involvement**¹⁰

Involving stakeholders means implementing collaborations with academic institutions, trade associations and technology partners to obtain resources and knowledge, as well as involving municipalities and local communities to obtain support and active participation. Furthermore, it would be optimal to organise workshops and seminars

⁹ A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – Seventh Edition and The Standard for Project Management.

¹⁰ Emilio D’Orazio, *Verso una teoria degli stakeholder descrittiva: modelli ad uso dei manager di organizzazioni complesse*, Notizie di POLITEIA, XXI, 78, 2005, pp. 11-58, http://www.politeia-centrostudi.org/doc/Selezione/art_d_orazio_np_78.pdf.



to discuss recommendations and obtain feedback from key stakeholders, forming working groups on specific topics such as digitisation, sustainability, and competitiveness to develop practical solutions.

- **Resources and training¹¹**

In the implementation phase, it is essential to determine the necessary resources (financial, human, technological) and allocate them appropriately to support implementation. To do this, it will be useful to make use of available funds such as the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and other grants to finance initiatives. Alongside these activities, training programmes for entrepreneurs and employees of SMEs on new technologies, sustainable practices, and innovation can be created, and technical support and advice can be provided to help SMEs implement new practices and technologies.

- **Monitoring and evaluation¹²**

This is followed by the important phase of monitoring and agreeing on key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor the effectiveness of the recommendations (e.g. digitisation rate, emission reduction, job creation). This is done by using tools such as digital dashboards and management software to monitor progress in real time. The process continues with the collection of continuous feedback from stakeholders and the adaptation of strategies based on achievements and new developments.

¹¹ Parlamento Europeo, Fondi strutturali e di investimento per progetti di sviluppo regionale e urbano, https://commission.europa.eu/eu-regional-and-urban-development/financial-support-projects/structural-and-investment-funds_it.

¹² A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide), *idem*.



Following this feedback, periodic reports must be published to assess progress and make necessary improvements.

- **Communication and dissemination¹³**

Finally, a communication plan must be developed that includes strategies to raise awareness and inform stakeholders and the public about the recommendations and their progress. To do this, it is useful to use various channels such as social media, websites, newsletters and public meetings to disseminate information. Useful for information dissemination is the launch of information campaigns to educate SMEs on the opportunities offered by the recommendations and how to benefit from them, and the organisation of events and conferences to share successes, lessons learned and best practices.

- **Adaptation and innovation¹⁴**

Finally, it is advisable to conduct periodic reviews of recommendations to adapt them to changes in economic and technological contexts. Maintaining a flexible approach is a winning strategy to modify recommendations in response to feedback and monitoring results. One should not forget to create incentives and support for SMEs that adopt innovative technologies or develop new solutions, establish innovation labs or technology hubs to facilitate experimentation and adoption of new ideas.

¹³ Alessandro di Fiore, *Alla frontiera delle idee*, Harvard Business Review Italia, Ponte Formello Vilminore di Scalve (BG), 2022.

¹⁴ Horizon Europe – La guida, aprile 2021, <https://apre.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/guida-Horizon-Europe.pdf>.



5.2. Suggestions on how to implement the joint recommendations in Lika

The mentioned recommendations for the development of the Lika region were formed according to the needs of the area, and were guided by a SWOT analysis and conducted surveys.

The aforementioned recommendations mandate the formation of a support program at the level of local and regional (regional) self-government units, which include measures that will encourage the development of small entrepreneurship with the aim of increasing the competitiveness of production, better utilization of natural resources and unused agricultural land, better placement and greater competitiveness of agricultural products on the market, greater recognition of autochthonous agricultural products, increasing the competitiveness of the tourist offer on agricultural farms, the color of the connectivity of rural areas, improving social infrastructure, retaining the population in rural areas and increasing the use of RES. We find such measures in implementation support programs, and they may include the following measures.

When drawing up their Rural Development Programs (RDP), EU countries can apply for funding from the European Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) through a number of measures. Countries choose from twenty broad measures, which are further broken down into more specific sub-measures. These measures can be directed towards one or more priority areas of the EPFRD. In their RDPs, EU countries must state which measures they used and how they will contribute to the priorities of the EDFRR.

List of measures and sub measures:



1. Transfer of knowledge and information

- vocational training and skills acquisition activities (code: 1.1)
- demonstration activities and informative activities (code: 1.2)
- short-term exchange of farm and forest management as well as visits to farms and forests (code: 1.3)

2. Advisory services, farm management and support services

- benefit from the use of advisory services (code: 2.1)
- establishment of farm management services, farm assistance and farm advisory services, as well as forestry advisory services (code: 2.2)
- counselor training (code: 2.3)

3. Quality schemes for agricultural and food products

- new participation in quality schemes (code: 3.1)
- information and promotion activities carried out by producer groups on the internal market (code: 3.2)

4. Investments in physical assets

- investments in agricultural holdings (code: 4.1)
- investments in processing/marketing and/or development of agricultural products (code: 4.2)
- investments in infrastructure related to the development, modernization or adaptation of agriculture and forestry (code: 4.3)
- non-productive investments related to the achievement of agro-environmental-climatic goals (code: 4.4)

5. Natural disasters: recovery of production potential and separate damage

- investments in preventive actions to reduce the consequences of natural disasters, adverse climatic events and disasters (code: 5.1)
- investments in the restoration of agricultural land and production potential damaged by natural disasters, unfavorable climatic conditions and disasters (code: 5.2)

6. Farm and business development

- business start-up grants for young farmers (code: 6.1)



- grants for starting a business for non-agricultural activities in rural areas (code: 6.2)
- business start-up grants for the development of small farms (code: 6.3)
- investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities (code: 6.4)
- payments for farmers who are eligible for the program for small farmers who permanently transfer their holdings to another farmer (code: 6.5)

7. Basic services and restoration of villages in rural areas

- preparation and updating of development plans for municipalities and villages in rural areas and their basic services, as well as protection and management plans related to Natura 2000 areas and other areas of high natural value (code: 7.1)
- investments in the creation, improvement or expansion of all types of small-scale infrastructure, including investments in renewable energy sources and energy saving (code: 7.2)
- broadband infrastructure, including creation, improvement and expansion, passive infrastructure and access to broadband and public e-government (code: 7.3)
- investments in the establishment, improvement or expansion of local basic services for the rural population including leisure and culture and related infrastructure (code: 7.4)
- investments for public use in recreational infrastructure, tourist information and small tourism infrastructure (code: 7.5)
- studies/investments for the maintenance, restoration and improvement of the cultural and natural heritage of villages, rural landscapes and areas of high natural



value, including related socio-economic aspects and actions to raise environmental awareness (code: 7.6)

- investments aimed at the relocation of activities and conversion of buildings or other facilities located in or near rural settlements, in order to improve the quality of life or increase the ecological efficiency of the settlement (code: 7.7)
- Other (code: 7.8)

8. Investments in the development of the forest area and improvement of forest sustainability

- afforestation/forest creation (code: 8.1)
- establishment and maintenance of agricultural and forestry systems (code: 8.2)
- prevention of damage in forests from forest fires and natural disasters and catastrophic events (code: 8.3)
- repair of damage in forests from forest fires and natural disasters and catastrophic events (code: 8.4)
- investments that improve the resilience and ecological value of forest ecosystems (code: 8.5)
- investments in forestry technologies and in the processing, mobilization and marketing of forest products (code: 8.6)

9. Establishment of producers' groups and organizations

- establishment of producer groups and organizations in the agriculture and forestry sector (code: 9)

10. Agro-environment-climate

- agro-environmental-climatic obligations (code: 10.1)



- preservation and sustainable use and development of genetic resources in agriculture (code: 10.2)

11. Organic farming

- payment for transition to organic farming practices and methods (code: 11.1)
- payment for maintaining practices and methods of organic farming (code: 11.2)

12. Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive payments

- fee for Natura 2000 agricultural areas (code: 12.1)
- payment of fees for Natura 2000 forest areas (code: 12.2)
- payment of compensation for agricultural areas included in river basin management plans (code: 12.3)

13. Payments to areas facing natural or other special restriction

- payment of compensation for other areas that are faced with significant natural restrictions (code: 13.2)
- payment of compensation to other areas affected by special restrictions (code: 13.3)

14. Animal welfare

- payment for animal welfare (code: 14)

15. Forest-environmental and climate services and forest conservation

- payment for forest-environmental and climate commitments (code: 15.1)
- preservation and promotion of forest genetic resources (code: 15.2)

16. Cooperation



- establishment and work of EIP operational groups for agricultural productivity and sustainability (code: 16.1)
- pilot projects and for the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies (code: 16.2)
- cooperation of small entities that organize joint work and share content and resources and develop and market tourism (code: 16.3)
- horizontal and vertical cooperation between participants in the supply chain for the establishment and development of short supply chains and local markets and promotional activities in the local context related to this development (code: 16.4)
- joint action undertaken to mitigate or adapt to climate change and joint approaches to environmental projects and ongoing environmental practices (code: 16.5)
- cooperation between supply chain participants for sustainable supply of biomass for food and energy production and industrial processes (code: 16.6)
- strategies other than CLLD (code: 16.7)
- preparation of forest management plans or equivalent instruments (code: 16.8)
- diversification of agricultural activities into health care, social integration, community-supported agriculture and environmental and food education (code: 16.9)
- Other (code: 16.10)

17. Risk management

- crop, animal and plant insurance premium (code: 17.1)



- mutual funds for adverse climatic conditions, animal and plant diseases, pest infestations and environmental incidents (code: 17.2)
- income stabilization tool (code: 17.3)

18. Supplementary direct payments for Croatia

- financing of complementary national direct payments for Croatia (code: 18)
- support for local LEADER development (CLLD)
- preparatory support (code: 19.1)
- support for the implementation of operations within the CLLD strategy (code: 19.2)
- preparation and implementation of local action group cooperation activities (code: 19.3)
- running costs and animation (code: 19.4)

The mentioned general measures of rural development used by EU countries can be used in the implementation of recommendations at the local level determined by this document as follows:

P1. Increasing the competitiveness of agricultural production: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1

P2. Better use of natural resources and unused agricultural land: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 17.1, 17.3.

P3. Better placement and greater competitiveness of agricultural products on the market 3.1, 3.2, 9

P4. Greater recognition of autochthonous agricultural products: 9, 16.1, 16.2

P5. Increasing the competitiveness of the tourist offer on agricultural farms: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4



Italy – Croatia



P6. Better connectivity of rural areas: 16.3, 16.4, 16.5

P7. Improvement of social infrastructure: 7.2, 7.3, 7.4

P8. Retention of the population in rural areas: 7.1, 7.2, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 13.1, 13.2, 13.3

Q9. Increasing the use of RES: 10.1, 10.2

5.3. Identification of potential actors and resources needed to implement the recommendations in Apulia and Lika

For the implementation of the recommendations on digitisation, sustainability, competitiveness and demography in SMEs in rural areas, it is essential to identify the potential actors involved and the necessary resources. Below is a detailed analysis for each proposed recommendation.

Planning and target setting

Key actors for planning and target setting include the Apulia Region or County of Lika-Senj, which coordinates and aligns activities with regional policies, SMEs as beneficiaries and practical implementers of policies, research institutes and universities that provide data and analysis to set realistic targets, and management consultants and project managers experienced in planning and managing projects. Resources required for this phase include regional funding, Rural Development Programme (RDP) funds and European grants to support implementation; technological tools for project management, such as project management software and monitoring platforms; and human resources such as project management experts, data analysts and coordinators.

Stakeholder engagement



To effectively engage stakeholders, it is crucial to work with academic institutions, trade associations and technology partners to obtain resources and knowledge. Municipalities and local communities must be included to ensure local support and active participation. It is useful to organise workshops and seminars to discuss recommendations and gather feedback from key stakeholders, as well as to form working groups on specific topics such as digitisation, sustainability and competitiveness to develop practical solutions. Resources needed include funds to organise workshops and seminars, industry experts and trainers as human resources, and event venues and online platforms as logistical resources.

Resources and training

The implementation of the recommendations requires the determination of the necessary resources, both financial and human and technological, to support implementation. Funding bodies such as the region, the EU, and local banks play a crucial role in providing funds through grants and rural development programmes. Training centres and consultancy firms are crucial in providing training and advisory programmes on new technologies, sustainable practices and innovation. Resources include training and consultancy grants, expert trainers and consultants, and e-learning platforms and training software.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations is to be coordinated by the Apulia Region or County of Lika-Senj, with the support of SMEs, which are actively involved in providing data and feedback. Research institutes play an important role in analysing the data collected and evaluating progress. Resources required for this phase



include investment in monitoring tools, such as digital dashboards and KPI management software, and human resources such as data analysts and performance evaluation experts.

Communication and dissemination

To develop an effective communication plan, the regions need to coordinate awareness and information campaigns for stakeholders and the public. Local media are crucial for disseminating information, while trade associations can support the dissemination of information among SMEs. Resources needed include funds for information campaigns and events, social platforms, websites, email marketing tools, and communication experts and event organisers.

Adaptation and innovation

Finally, in order to maintain the effectiveness of the recommendations, periodic revisions are necessary to adapt them to changes in the economic and technological contexts. The regions should supervise and update policies, with the support of innovation centres and SMEs that actively participate in the implementation of innovations. Resources needed include funds for innovation incentives and support, innovation labs and technology hubs to facilitate the experimentation and adoption of new ideas, and human resources such as innovators, developers and innovation project coordinators.

To effectively implement these recommendations, it is suggested that a coordination committee be established that includes representatives of all stakeholders, that a detailed work plan be drawn up that identifies specific actions, timeframes, responsibilities, resources needed and indicators of success, and that effective communication channels be established to keep all stakeholders updated. It is also crucial to continuously monitor and adapt



strategies, organise workshops and training events, and promote the active participation of SMEs and local communities through incentives and technical support. These suggestions and methods will provide a solid basis for the effective implementation of the recommendations, helping to overcome challenges and promote development in rural areas of Apulia and County of Lika-Senj.

Financial Resources and Management of the Local Development Strategy (LRS) in Lika

There are various institutions that provide funds to encourage the development of rural entrepreneurship by approving non-reimbursed financial support for the implementation of individual projects. Among others, we highlight the Ministry of Economy, the Croatian Tourist Board, the Ministry of Regional Development, LAG Lika, Lika-Senj County, as well as cities and municipalities from the Lika area that approve grants in accordance with budgetary possibilities. For example, funds for the implementation of the Local Development Strategy (LRS) for the program period 2023 - 2027, LAG Lika will provide with a combination of public and private funds. Public support will be provided from the budgets of the European Union (EU) and the Republic of Croatia (RO), with the EU participating with 80% of the share, while the Republic of Croatia will participate with the remaining 20% of the share. Private funds refer to the funds that project beneficiaries will provide, depending on the intensity of the support, which is determined according to specific rules. Users will provide these funds through their own sources or through credit lines.



6.0 IMPLICATIONS AND BENEFITS

6.1 Analysis of the expected impacts of the recommendations on SMEs and the business ecosystem in Apulia

The proposed recommendations have the potential to generate several positive impacts on SMEs and the business ecosystem in rural areas of Apulia:

Digitisation

1. **Improved competitiveness:** SMEs in rural areas will gain access to wider national and international markets through digitisation, improving their visibility and ability to attract customers.
2. **Operational efficiency:** The adoption of digital technologies will enable SMEs to automate processes, reducing operating costs and improving overall productivity.
3. **New market opportunities:** Digitisation will pave the way for new business opportunities, enabling SMEs to diversify their products and services in response to emerging digital market needs.

Sustainability

1. **Reducing environmental impact:** Adopting sustainable practices will reduce the environmental impact of SMEs, improving their reputation and responding to the growing demand for eco-friendly products and services.
2. **Regulatory compliance:** SMEs that implement sustainable practices will be more compliant with evolving environmental regulations, avoiding potential penalties and improving their corporate reputation.



Competitiveness

1. **Innovation and diversification:** Innovation support strategies will enable SMEs to develop new ideas and products, improving their competitiveness in global and local markets.
2. **Access to finance:** Regional support policies will facilitate SMEs' access to finance, promoting economic growth and business expansion.

Demography

1. **Attracting and retaining talent:** Initiatives such as the #mareAsinistra project will attract new talent and investors to Apulia's rural areas, helping to reverse the trend of demographic ageing and encourage generational change in SMEs.
2. **Local development:** The implementation of demographic strategies will favour the development of new entrepreneurial activities in rural areas, supporting the local economy and reducing dependence on other markets.

Impacts on the business ecosystem

1. **Collaboration and networking:** The involvement of stakeholders and the creation of collaborative networks between SMEs, academic institutions, business associations and technology partners will strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and resources.
2. **Long-term sustainability:** Policies oriented towards digitisation, sustainability, competitiveness and demography will contribute to a more resilient and sustainable



business environment in the long term, adaptable to global economic and technological changes.

In summary, the implementation of the proposed recommendations will not only improve the competitiveness and sustainability of Apulia's SMEs in rural areas, but will also contribute to strengthening the local entrepreneurial ecosystem, supporting economic growth and fostering the social and demographic development of rural communities.

6.2. Analysis of the expected impacts of the recommendations on SMEs and the business ecosystem in Lika

The development priorities of the county contain the elaboration of goals, and they must logically follow from the goals. They should specify and determine all components of the goals. The priorities must be: measurable, achievable, clearly formulated, set by the deadline, mutually compatible (they must not overlap), comprehensive, socially and environmentally acceptable, in accordance with the priorities of the statistical regions established in the Regional Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia as well as with goals in other relevant strategic county and state strategies.

In the information system established to monitor the implementation of development strategies, a standard for the formation of goals and priorities should be organized, which includes the name of the goal or priority, their hierarchical connection and coordination, and connection and coordination with the goals in other strategic documents and programs, the period of their implementation, the framework financial resources and indicators for monitoring their realization. The expected measurable results of the recommendations for the



Italy – Croatia



development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the area of the Lika-Senj County and the Puglia region according to the recommendations could be as follows:

P1. Increasing the competitiveness of agricultural production: the number of newly established OPGs, the amount of funds invested in the improvement of production, the amount of agricultural products produced, etc.;

P2. Better use of natural resources and unused agricultural land: the area of used agricultural land, the number and quantity of eco products that are produced on some agricultural land, etc.

P3. Better placement and greater competitiveness of agricultural products on the market: the number of agricultural products sold, the amount of income from the sale of agricultural products, etc.

P4. Greater recognition of autochthonous agricultural products: increase in the number of types of autochthonous products produced, the number of marketing campaigns carried out, the number of protected agricultural products, the number of events held, fairs, the number of visitors to the agricultural economy, etc.

P5. Increasing the competitiveness of the tourist offer on agricultural farms - the number of OPGs that introduce tourism offers on agricultural farms, the number of visitors who visit OPGs, income from tourists on agricultural farms, the number of educations held for those who have tourist offers on agricultural farms, etc.

P6. Better connectivity of the rural area - number of bus lines, number of railway lines, number of parking spaces, length of renovated roads, etc.



Italy – Croatia



P7. Improvement of social infrastructure - number of newly arranged parks, number and length of arranged educational trails, number of built viewpoints, number of tourist attractions, etc.

P8. Retaining the population in rural areas - number of social organizations operating in an area, number of kindergartens, number of playgrounds, number of newly renovated entertainment facilities (eg street workout playgrounds, zip line...) etc.;

Q9. Increase in the use of RES - the amount of funds invested in RES, the amount of electricity produced from RES, etc.

6.3. Discussion of the long-term benefits of implementing the recommendations in Apulia

The implementation of the recommendations regarding digitisation, sustainability, competitiveness and management of demographic change for SMEs in rural regions promises a number of long-term benefits for both businesses and the entire entrepreneurial and territorial ecosystem.

Firstly, digitisation and technological development improve the competitiveness of SMEs, enabling them to access new markets and compete more effectively at national and international level. The integration of technologies such as e-commerce, ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) management systems and automation improves operational efficiency, reduces costs and increases productivity, providing a significant competitive advantage over less digitised companies. In addition, digitisation improves the customer experience by offering faster, more personalised and accessible services. The use of CRM (Customer Relationship



Italy – Croatia



Management) tools and data analysis enables companies to better understand customer needs and respond more effectively, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. The adoption of digital technologies fosters continuous innovation, enabling SMEs to develop new products and services, improve existing processes and take advantage of emerging opportunities such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain. With regard to sustainability and environmental responsibility, adopting sustainable practices results in significant operational cost savings through energy efficiency and responsible resource management. The use of renewable energy sources and the reduction of waste contribute to lower long-term expenses. SMEs that adopt sustainable practices also benefit from an improved reputation. Consumers, increasingly aware of the environmental responsibility of companies, prefer to buy from companies committed to environmentally friendly practices, increasing customer trust and loyalty and attracting new market segments. Sustainable companies also have easier access to finance and incentives, as government programmes and private funds tend to reward commitment to sustainability, improving opportunities for SMEs to grow and develop.

On the competitiveness and globalisation front, the recommendations allow SMEs to expand their operations beyond local borders, increasing sales potential and risk diversification. This access to global markets offers companies growth opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible. Strategies that encourage open innovation and continuous quality improvement stimulate SMEs to stay at the forefront of their industries by adopting new technologies, processes and innovative business models to quickly respond to changing market needs. Furthermore, collaborations between SMEs, academic institutions and technology



partners facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources, further stimulating innovation and growth and enabling the development of innovative solutions.

In terms of managing demographic change, counteracting demographic ageing and attracting new talent is a key benefit for the sustainability of SMEs. Projects such as #mareAsinistra aim to harness talent, start-uppers and digital nomads, providing new skills and fresh ideas that support business innovation and growth. Strengthening human capital in rural areas also contributes to local economic vitality, fostering new business start-ups, economic diversification and community resilience, thus improving the quality of life in rural areas and reducing migration to urban areas. Implementing the recommendations supports SMEs in becoming more adaptable and resilient in the face of demographic changes and economic challenges, enabling them to attract and retain a diverse and skilled workforce, better preparing them to deal with market fluctuations and future crises.

In summary, the implementation of the joint recommendations offers numerous long-term benefits for SMEs and the entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas. These benefits range from improving competitiveness and innovation to promoting sustainability and effectively managing demographic change. An integrated and well-planned approach enables SMEs not only to survive, but also to thrive in a changing business environment.

6.4. Discussion of the long-term benefits of implementing the recommendations in Lika

As stated earlier, the quantification of expected indicators is an important part of creating regional strategies and can be particularly complex. The successful implementation of the



development strategy will depend on the financial resources that can be secured from various sources and on the successful implementation of the identified development projects. Therefore, the quantification of indicators should be based on the estimated number of activities/programs/projects that can realistically be implemented within each goal, on their maturity and financing possibilities. Adopted methodologies for developing regional strategies suggest defining up to two indicators at the level of all goals and two indicators each at the level of priorities/measures.

The proposed indicators for monitoring the long-term benefits of the implementation of the recommendations according to the established development goals are defined as follows:

1. improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and the economy in general:
 - a. labor productivity,
 - b. GDP per capita
 - c. General unemployment rate
 - d. Coefficient of total demographic dependence
2. improvement of the environment and nature:
 - a. air pollution: PM10
 - b. air pollution: ozone concentration
 - c. soil pollution
3. improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy (rural development):
 - a. Degree of rural poverty
 - b. Part of the population covered by LAGs



Italy – Croatia



- c. Rural employment rate
- d. Age structure of farmers
- e. Area of used agricultural land
- f. the rest

The data required for the calculation of the mentioned development indicators are mostly available from the announcements and publications of the State Statistical Office, EURO-STAT, the Croatian Employment Service and similar institutions, and those that are not available in this way must be collected through field research.



7.0 CONCLUSIONS

This report analysed the challenges and opportunities for SMEs in Apulia's and Lika's rural areas, focusing on four key thematic areas: digitisation, sustainability, competitiveness and managing demographic change.

The analysis on Apulia region highlighted the need for strategic and targeted intervention to support the sustainable development of SMEs in these areas.

Based on this analysis, the report proposes a set of joint recommendations aimed at addressing the identified challenges and exploiting existing opportunities. These recommendations are based on a combination of data analysis, stakeholder consultation, benchmarking, policy evaluation and international best practices.

The successful implementation of these recommendations requires a collaborative effort by all stakeholders, including regional institutions, SMEs, universities, research centres, trade associations and private investors. It is crucial to create synergies and collaborations to make the best use of available resources and ensure a lasting impact.

The proposed recommendations, if implemented effectively, have the potential to generate a significant positive impact on SMEs in rural areas and the entire business ecosystem. By improving competitiveness, sustainability and innovation, these enterprises can contribute to a more balanced and lasting economic and social development in rural areas.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be essential to ensure that recommendations remain relevant and effective over time. Adapting strategies and actions in response to economic, technological and social change is crucial. Ultimately, the success of this effort will



Italy – Croatia



depend on the ability of all stakeholders to work together to create a prosperous and sustainable future for Apulia's SMEs in rural areas. The challenges are considerable, but the opportunities are equally significant. With collective commitment and a forward-looking vision, positive and lasting change can be achieved for the region's rural communities.

Regarding Lika's region it is evident that self-sufficiency in food from its own agricultural and food-processing industry is a strategic interest of each individual state, but also of the community of states. This importance stems not only from the need to ensure enough food, but also from the fact that this economic activity has a significant impact on employment, the development of other economic activities, especially tourism, and that more and more national budgets are allocating funds for it. In addition to all of the above, the Republic of Croatia has a special interest in developing agriculture due to the comparative advantages it possesses in the form of land and natural climatic advantages, but also due to the fact that it represents an important element of Croatian national identity.

Almost from the beginning of the European Union, agriculture and rural development are at the center of the integration process. Common agricultural policy is an area over which competence is shared by the European Union and the member states, and it was created as a result of the common aspiration of the members to ensure sufficient food and a safe supply of quality agricultural food products at acceptable prices based on their own agricultural production. The Republic of Croatia is a full member of the EU, and in the signed contract, it has committed itself to apply and implement the measures of the common agricultural policy, which is of particular importance for it since, in accordance with OECD criteria, it is



Italy – Croatia



defined as a rural country in which rural areas occupy the majority territory (97.5%) where 78.9% of the population lives.

For many years, Croatia and Italy have been facing a serious problem of uneven regional development, and this is precisely one of the basic problems of the overall competitiveness of their economies. It is believed that less developed and underdeveloped regions in the rural area have quality resources and exceptional potential, but this is not adequately recognized and valorized. Solutions to this problem in the future could be provided by a new model of measuring regional development, which aims to encourage less developed regions evenly. In addition, it is very important to implement a comprehensive system of information and education of stakeholders, improve their participation and cooperation, and stimulate productivity and business in less developed and underdeveloped regions. Smart management of resources, more effective connections within regions and with each other, development of communal, business, transport and social infrastructure and related services, and stimulation of the development of the local economy will reduce depopulation processes and stimulate the socio-economic development of supported and mountainous areas. In doing so, an integrated approach to investments and joint development initiatives of several local self-government units, but also several regions, will play a key role, whereby the central role of small towns, which are considered generators of development in areas particularly affected by negative demographic and economic trends, will be maintained.



8.0 REFERENCES AND SOURCES

A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – Seventh Edition and The Standard for Project Management

Alessandro di Fiore, *Alla frontiera delle idee*, Harvard Business Review Italia, Ponte Formello Vilminore di Scalve (BG), 2022

Emilio D’Orazio, *Verso una teoria degli stakeholder descrittiva: modelli ad uso dei manager di organizzazioni complesse*, *Notizie di POLITEIA*, XXI, 78, 2005

http://www.politeia-centrostudi.org/doc/Selezione/art_d_orazio_np_78.pdf

Harvard Business Review Italia

<https://www.hbritalia.it/>

Horizon Europe – La guida, aprile 2021

<https://apre.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/guida-Horizon-Europe.pdf>

Parlamento Europeo, Fondi strutturali e di investimento per progetti di sviluppo regionale e urbano

https://commission.europa.eu/eu-regional-and-urban-development/financial-support-projects/structural-and-investment-funds_it

Rural development program of the Republic of Croatia 2014-2020

https://ruralnirazvoj.hr/files/Programme_2014HR06RDNP001_12_1_hr.pdf



Italy – Croatia



ZPP strategic plan 2023-2027. Year

<https://ruralnirazvoj.hr/sp-zpp/>

<https://ruralnirazvoj.hr/files/Prilog-II.-o-SWOT-analizi.pdf>

<https://lag-lika.hr/lrs-lag-a-lika-2023-2027/>

http://surjonopwkub.lecture.ub.ac.id/files/2019/01/Basic_Methods_of_Policy_Analysis_and_Planing.pdf

https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development_hr

https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development/measures_en?prefLang=hr

<https://razvoj.gov.hr/o-ministarstvu/djelokrug-1939/regionalni-razvoj/razvojne-strategije/smjernice-za-izradu-zupanijskih-razvojnih-strategija/3178>

<https://repositorij.unipu.hr/islandora/object/unipu%3A3189/datastream/PDF/view>

<https://licko-senjska.hr/dokumenti/pregled/plan-razvoja-licko-senjske-zupanije-za-razdoblje-do-2027.-godine>





Italy – Croatia



https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_02_13_230.html

