

# PREMIUM\_EU: Unlocking regional growth through strategic interregional mobility policies

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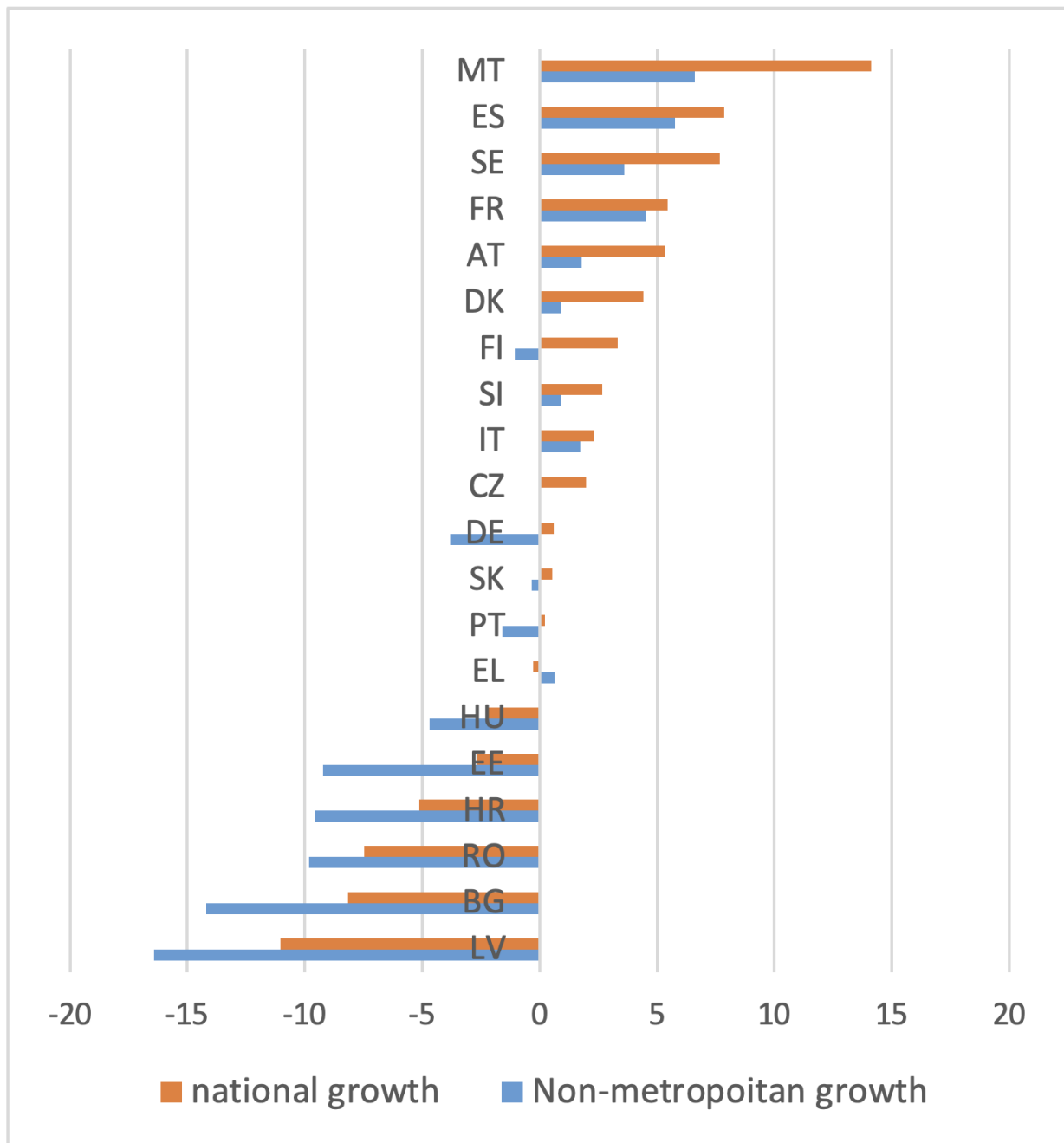
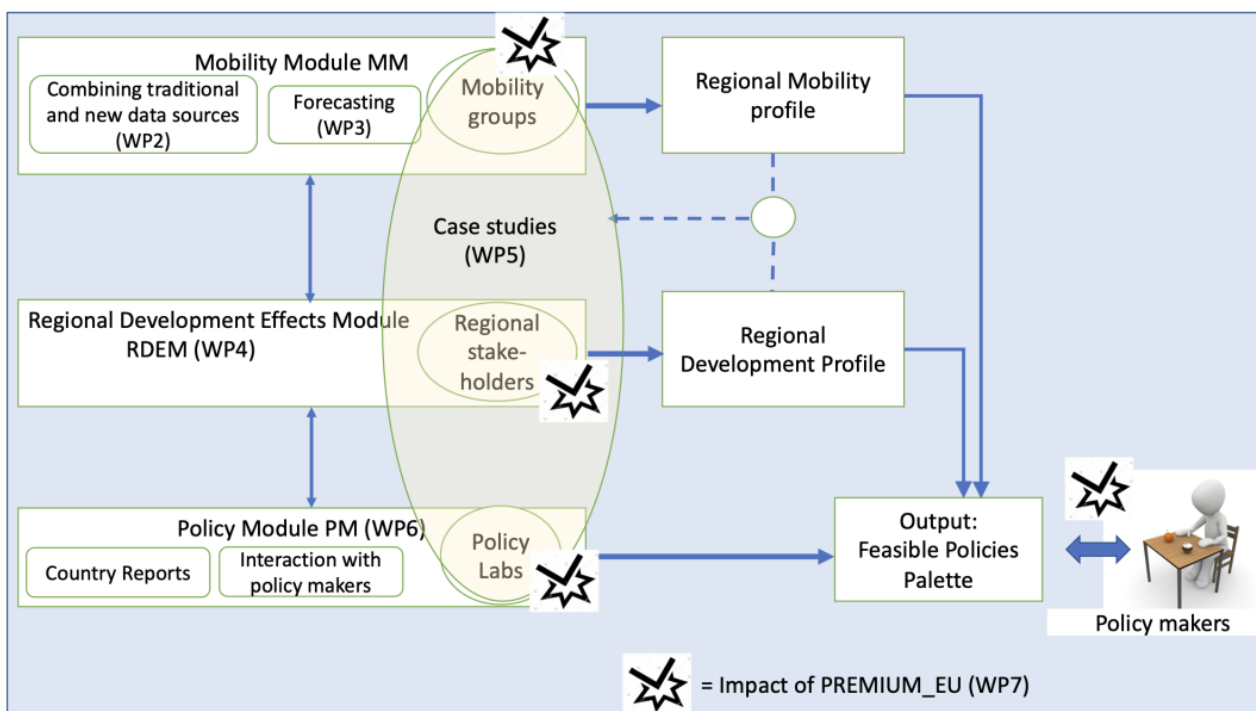


Figure 1: National and non-metropolitan population growth 2000-2020 in EU countries

**Interregional mobility, involving the movement of people between regions, significantly shapes regional economic and social landscapes in Europe. The PREMIUM\_EU project seeks to explore this and provide policy recommendations**

Interregional mobility, the movement of people between regions, is a powerful yet complex force shaping regional economic and social landscapes across Europe. While individual decisions to relocate are often driven by compelling motivations – better jobs, housing, living environments, or escaping negative circumstances – the aggregate consequences for regions are multifaceted and far from consistently positive. Annually, a substantial proportion of Europeans (estimated 5-15%, or 25-65 million) change residence, with most moves occurring within national borders. However, cross-border mobility within the European Union also plays a significant role, amounting to 4.3 million movements between 2005 and 2010, according to Abel and Sander (2014). This highlights the importance of understanding both internal and cross-border migration dynamics in shaping regional development trajectories.

But here is a paradox that underlies the impact of mobility on regional development. While individual benefits are often clear – improved employment opportunities, better quality of life – the collective effects at the regional level are less predictable. The ‘Matthew effect,’ whereby advantages accrue disproportionately to already- prosperous regions, clearly applies here. Young individuals often migrate from less developed regions to urban centers, seeking better job prospects and social opportunities, resulting in a ‘brain drain’ and demographic aging in the areas they leave behind. This depopulation can exacerbate existing challenges, creating a negative feedback loop of declining economic activity and reduced attractiveness for future investment. Conversely, while receiving regions benefit from an influx of skilled workers and increased social and economic dynamism, uncontrolled growth can lead to overcrowding, pressure on infrastructure, and social tensions related to integration. This underscores the need for proactive and well-designed regional policies that harness the potential benefits of mobility while mitigating its downsides.



## The PREMIUM\_EU project

The PREMIUM\_EU project (Policy Recommendations to Maximize the Beneficial Impact of Unexplored Mobilities in and beyond the European Union) directly addresses this complex interplay. Its core ambition is to move beyond simplistic narratives about migration's impact and delve into the nuanced conditions under which mobility can be a boon to less-developed regions. The project seeks to identify the factors that determine whether in-migration translates into sustainable regional development. Equally important is understanding the conditions that can mitigate or reverse the negative consequences of out-migration from struggling regions. PREMIUM\_EU aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to design effective policies that leverage the potential of mobility to drive inclusive and sustainable regional development.

The relationship between sending and receiving regions is not strictly binary. The reality is considerably more diverse. While a general correlation exists between migration patterns and regional development, many regions deviate from this simple model. Less-developed regions can and do contain pockets of attractiveness that attract specific population segments. Conversely, some regions may be less appealing to younger generations but attract middle-aged or older migrants. Understanding this complexity necessitates a multi-faceted approach to regional development, recognizing the interaction between demographic, economic, social, and political dimensions (Pike et al., 2016). PREMIUM\_EU places a special emphasis on less developed regions, analyzing the potential for suitable policy interventions applied in these areas.

Population change and regional development are intrinsically linked. Regional population dynamics are primarily shaped by mobility flows, both internal and external. While natural population increase contributes, net migration frequently exerts a more significant influence on overall population change at the regional level. For instance, in 2018, European regions experienced a natural population increase of approximately 500,000, but net migration exceeded three million. A strong correlation exists between regions with high population growth and above-average income levels per capita, in contrast to those with population decline. The correlation between regional GDP per capita and net migration (0.40 in 2015-2020) further highlights the connection. However, the relationship with GDP per capita growth is more complex, emphasizing the multi-faceted nature of regional development. The urban-rural divide further complicates this picture; non-metropolitan regions consistently lag behind national averages in population growth (Figure 1).

This underscores the critical need for policies that address specific challenges in rural and less-developed areas.

PREMIUM\_EU employs innovative methodologies to gain a comprehensive understanding of regional mobility dynamics. The project leverages existing national migration statistics, which may have shortcomings, and supplements this with data from the European Labour Force Surveys and social media analytics. These various data sources are integrated to generate more accurate and nuanced estimates of international migration flows and regional population projections. These projections explicitly incorporate educational attainment, recognizing that the quality of human capital –

not just the sheer number of people – is pivotal for regional development (Lutz et al., 2018). This sophisticated approach helps to address the long- standing challenge of measuring and modeling migration accurately.

## **PREMIUM\_EU Regional Policy Dashboard**

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The project’s core output is the PREMIUM\_EU Regional Policy Dashboard (RPD), a sophisticated decision-support tool designed for regional policymakers. This interactive tool integrates three crucial modules: mobility, regional development, and regional policies. The interplay between these factors is complex and dynamic, often described as a ‘chicken-and-egg’ problem. Regional characteristics influence migration flows, while mobility, in turn, significantly impacts regional development. The RPD brings these aspects together to provide a comprehensive picture. Further enhancing the RPD’s analytical depth are in-depth qualitative insights gained from interviews with migrants in several European countries. This qualitative data is integrated to provide a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay between mobility, regional development, and policy. The RPD is designed to be user-friendly and intuitive, offering a range of feasible policies to address specific regional challenges and foster sustainable regional growth.

## **References**

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