

Foreword

With OECD countries in the midst of a slowdown in trend productivity growth, coupled with the challenges of a number of megatrends and global shocks, unlocking innovation has become more important than ever. This is especially important in rural places, where innovation creation and uptake lags behind metropolitan areas, weighing down on aggregate productivity, income levels and overall well-being.

Understanding potential barriers to innovation in rural areas as well as the determinants that allow it to flourish is a critical step to fully mobilise their growth potential, and, more generally, also addresses growing gaps between rural and urban places that are contributing to geographies of discontent. Recent global shocks from the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine have further aggravated these gaps heightening the need for action to address them, and in particular actions that go beyond the narrow focus on science and technology. Supporting entrepreneurship, and social innovators, including tackling barriers that hold them back, is critical. These efforts need to go hand in hand with place-based policies.

The OECD, through the Regional Development Policy Committee and its Working Party for Rural Policy, has created a programme of work focusing on fostering innovation in rural regions, building on over 2 decades of policy and economic analytical experience. This publication, *Unlocking Rural Innovation*, elaborated as part of the project on Enhancing Innovation in Rural Regions, focuses on overarching messages derived from desk research, quantitative analysis and case studies in Canada, Japan, Scotland (UK), Switzerland, and the United States. It provides insights on the challenges and drivers of innovators and entrepreneurs in rural places.

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