



COORDINATION GROUP MEETING

Highlights report

First meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group

Summary

The inaugural meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group marked a significant milestone in advancing the goals of the Rural Vision.

The 30 members of the group worked together on which actions to take to support the three objectives of the Rural Pact and discussed how they were willing to work together

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



21 June 2023



Brussels, Belgium



45 participants (European Commission, Rural Pact members)



Presentations ([here](#))



Funded by
the European Union

Opening session: Welcome and agenda of the day

The meeting started with welcoming speeches to highlight the importance of collaboration and to involve all rural stakeholders to achieve the goals of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas ([LTVRA](#)) and the [Rural Pact](#).



Mario Milouchev (Director D DG AGRI) moderated the opening session highlighting the Rural Pact Coordination Group's role (herewith, Coordination Group) in steering the Rural Pact in close collaboration and dialogue with all stakeholders. He explained that one of the priorities of the Rural Pact for the year to come is to foster action at national level. He also underlined that 2023 is an important year to take stock of the progress made in the implementation of the EU Rural Action Plan and of how CAP and Cohesion policy are supporting rural areas. The Commission will present the outcomes of this stocktaking at the High Level Policy Forum [Shaping the future of rural areas](#) that will take place in Sigüenza in Spain on 27-29 September 2023. Mario Milouchev concluded by highlighting that the Commission is keen to launch the Coordination Group and support its facilitation, whilst inviting the Group members to take their full role in steering the Rural Pact.



Toma Šutic (Member of Cabinet of Vice-President Dubravka Šuica) welcomed the creation of the group and recognised the importance of rural areas as the backbone of our societies, requiring joint attention to address the challenges of rapid urbanisation and depopulation. He stressed the LTVRA's commitment to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, as well as the need for creativity, forward thinking, innovation, empowerment and revitalisation in rural areas. With the green & digital transitions, there is a need for more diversified industries and broader job opportunities beyond agriculture, as well as basic services such as quality health care and education, bridging the digital divide as encouraged by the European Year of skills. In addition, Toma Šutic underlined the importance of supporting inter-generational dialogue and services in rural areas to foster social inclusion valorising artificial intelligence. He also highlighted the links between demography and democracy that need to be supported by enhanced governance, transparency and participation of all rural stakeholders and voices.



Wallis Vandebrock-Goëlen (Senior Expert in the Deputy Director-General office of DG REGIO), emphasised the Cohesion Policy objective of leaving no one and no place behind, seeking to reduce territorial disparities through an integrated territorial development approach. She underlined that Cohesion Policy is working to support rural areas, notably through 'a place-based approach' based on investments tailored precisely to the needs of each place. Integrated development strategies are designed for each territory and take a different approach compared to "compensatory policies". This includes the involvement of all levels of governance to address strategic challenges and turn them into opportunities for people-centred achievements, taking into account the extreme diversity of EU rural areas. The intervention also underlined that Cohesion Policy has taken a pioneering approach with Policy Objective 5 (PO5), delivered exclusively through territorial tools (ITI, CLLD and national tools). Wallis Vandebrock-Goëlen concluded highlighting the pivotal role the group will have in steering the design and the implementation of the Rural Pact.

The mandate and governance of the Rural Pact Coordination Group



Alexia Rouby and Silvia Nanni (Unit D1 DG AGRI) provided an overview of the mandate and governance of the Coordination Group, recalling that the Rural Pact was launched in June 2022 and how the idea of the Coordination Group came about. They highlighted the objectives and participants of the Rural Pact and the organisational structure proposed for the Coordination Group. The discussion that followed focused on the frequency of the group meetings and use of Rural Pact events as opportunities for meetings such as the High-level Policy Forum in Sigüenza, the creation of sub-groups on several themes, the possibility of a double chairmanship, technical assistance that the Group might be entitled to e.g. access to data, documents, surveys, etc.

The role of and support provided by the Rural Pact Support Office



Pascale Van Doren (Team Leader of the Rural Pact Support Office) introduced the activities, the role of and support provided by the Rural Pact Support Office.

World Café session

The members engaged in participatory sessions to discuss the strategic priorities and activities aligned with the Vision and the objectives of the Rural Pact. They addressed questions regarding (i) the relevance of the proposed activities by the Rural Pact Support Office (ii) key actions in order to advance on each Rural Pact objective, and (iii) the role of the Coordination Group and its members in contributing to these objectives (including concrete actions the members would take themselves). The session resulted in very valuable contributions and suggestions, which were later reported back and prioritised in the plenary session. These contributions will feed the discussions of the second meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group.



Objective 1: amplifying rural voices and bring them higher on the political agenda

As actions to implement objective 1 of the Rural members of the Coordination Group expressed a desire to make the voices of youth and those making a living in rural areas better heard. Additionally, they emphasised the need for the EU to be heard in rural regions, particularly with the upcoming European elections planned on 9 June 2024 and with the upcoming new cohesion policy after 2027. Suggestions were made to bring the Rural Pact to the local, national and EU levels, prioritising arenas where rural aspects need to be promoted in other domains than rural development such as for example digitalisation, education, health, and infrastructure. The group emphasized the importance of political support at the EU level and of enhancing the visibility of the Pact across Europe, including the idea of appointing Rural Pact ambassadors and mobilising researchers and students to showcase the impact of rural development initiatives. Furthermore, the members discussed the possibility of creating national pages on the Rural Revitalisation Platform to facilitate networking and discovery of initiatives within Member States and establish national Rural Pact networks.



Objective 2: structuring and enabling networking, collaboration & mutual learning

Around the objective 2 of the Rural Pact members discussed how they could contribute to the choice of topics for the good practice webinars and the importance of showcasing good practices. They welcomed the newsletter as a valuable communication and mutual learning tool for providing updates on activities. They suggested that the Rural magazine should feature long case studies to offer in-depth insights into ongoing initiatives as opposed to the shorter items in the newsletter. The group explored ways to connect and collaborate within and beyond existing networks, emphasising the need for synergies and mainstreaming of the Rural Pact.



Target audience identification and listening to the needs of people on the ground were considered crucial. Language accessibility, avoiding political jargon, and working with intermediaries like Local Action Groups (LAGs) and counsellors were highlighted. Participants also stressed the importance of expanding networks beyond the usual circles, reaching out to new rural networks and individuals who may feel marginalised or to non-rural networks working on useful themes. It was also suggested that each Coordination Group member could commit to organise at least one event in their own country or network over the next three years. Lastly, the significance of knowledge sharing, particularly research, data, and indicators, was highlighted, with specific attention given to the involvement of rural youth in networking efforts.

- > Having specific activities for mountains and other regions with handicaps;
- > Finding synergies with Rural Pact Community members' ongoing events;
- > Better communicating on the "commitments", through dedicated dissemination campaign by the Support office;
- > Maybe making space for Rural Pact Community members to share their bad practices (and lessons learnt) and not just good practices.



Objective 3: encouraging and monitoring voluntary commitments to act for the vision

Regarding objective 3 members stressed the importance of identifying and documenting other stakeholders' ongoing initiatives and in particular actions of those who have committed to the Rural Pact. They recommended collecting this information in order to present it effectively, avoiding conducting monitoring in ways that would seem to control their implementation. They thought more efficient to recognise the efforts of organisations and stakeholders in positive terms. They suggested to reward existing completed actions and promote them through different channels, such as the newsletter and the rural pact and revitalisation platform. A dissemination campaign, including short inspirational videos, was proposed to raise awareness. The idea of creating a logo for rural 'shapers' or 'ambassadors' was also mentioned. Synergies between the Support Office and existing networks were explored, and the need to use data, indicators and reports to inform decision-making was emphasised. The involvement of external experts, such as the JRC



colleagues working on the Rural Observatory, was considered valuable. Lastly, the Coordination Group's role in promoting Member States' commitments to their rural visions was emphasised.

Prioritising activities over the next six months

The table below summarises how the Coordination Group prioritised the activities that they have identified, including the actions that the members would take individually.

Objective 1 of the Rural Pact		
Amplifying rural voices and bring them higher on the political agenda		
Priority actions	Level of interest among the members	Individual implication
Support Member States to engage into the Rural Pact and the LTVRA	14	CoR, EESC
Explain better the Rural Pact before the elections of 2024	13	CoR
Analyse where the Member States are in their "rural agenda" and collect information on who does what	7	
Organise awareness-raising activities and debates about the Rural Pact and engage the civil society	5	EESC
Address a message to rural Ministers asking them what they are doing to implement the Rural Pact	3	
Encourage and support national, regional and local Rural Pacts (contacts with candidates and current politicians)	2	
Prepare a short list of arguments for rural areas support (cfr green and transition policies, renewables energies production, telework, ...) on time for the future of the cohesion policy	1	
Analyse the cost of non-rurality support		
Create a brand of "rural shapers"		
Use the network of Coordination Group members as Rural Pact ambassadors		
Present data in Coordination Group members' home countries and networks		
Suggest research implemented by students to see impact of the Rural Pact and implement pilot projects		

Objective 2 of the Rural Pact		
Structuring and enabling networking, collaboration & mutual learning		
Priority actions	Level of interest among the members	
Ask people on the ground what they need and explain benefits of the Rural Pact	4	
Organise one event in home country or in network by end of 2025, engaging authorities and civil society representatives, including the youth	3	
Connect within and outside networks e.g. use the CAP network and national networks to support the Rural Pact or look for synergies with the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform as circular economy provides opportunities for more prosperous rural areas.	2	
Join Good Practices webinars	1	
Map ongoing research and knowledge gathering projects	3	

Objective 3 of the Rural Pact		
Encouraging and monitoring voluntary commitments to act for the vision		
Priority actions	Level of interest among the members	
Develop and disseminate videos of inspirational projects	4	
Make resources available in accessible language to local people	3	
Develop national pages on the Rural Revitalisation Platform e.g. to encourage to deliver commitments	2	
Use data (e.g. overview of EU spent in Member States), indicators, reports, etc	1	
Invite experts e.g. JRC and observers		
Monitor and communicate commitments		

Discussing how to work together as the Rural Pact Coordination Group

As suggested by the Rural Pact Support Office, the second participatory session was moderated by two volunteer members of the Coordination Group. These sessions focused on defining the role of the chair, including how the chair should be selected and on how the members of the Coordination Group would like to work together.



Regarding the **definition of the role of the chair** supported by the vice-chair, besides the fact that all RPCG members should act spokespersons in the limit of their activities, two different visions on its role were proposed by the members:

- > The "convener" taking the role of moderator and facilitator of the Coordination Group meetings;
- > The "convener" + "spokesperson": in addition to the role as 'convener', the Chair represents the voice of the Rural Pact Coordination Group vis-à-vis EU institutions, bodies and the rural Community at large, and acts on behalf of the group. The Chair attends conferences and events and is the main point of contact for stakeholders and media organisations.

In terms of **selection criteria of the chair**, a good level of English and availability were mentioned as key requirements. The creation of subgroups was suggested to help with the coordination of the workstreams, setting the agenda, interacting with the Support Office, etc.

For the process of **identification the chair**, it was proposed to take two steps:

- 1** Reach consensus among the members on the role of the chair by launching a consultation;
- 2** Organise a call for expression of interest to ask all members to nominate either themselves or another member for this function.

(Step 2 would need to happen sufficiently in advance of the second meeting to allow members to reflect.). Concerning the **ways of working** together, the main suggestions are the following ones:

- > map out who is in the group based on a simple tool;
- > create a dedicated group for the Coordination Group on the Rural Pact and Revitalisation Platform;
- > break-down responsibilities into sub-groups on research, communication, policy, emerging topics, etc;
- > organise the Coordination Group on an online platform;
- > organise additional online meetings especially in the first year;
- > the possibility to meet at the occasion of the High-level Policy Forum in Spain;
- > use experiences and good examples of other European initiatives and networks (more participatory & engaging for members), such as the European Circular Economy Stakeholders Platform.
- > use existing communication material elaborated by the Rural Pact Support Office to promote the Rural Pact, etc.

Next steps & end of the meeting



Antonia Gámez Moreno (Head of Unit of DG AGRI D1) concluded the meeting emphasising

the urgency to act and take advantage of the momentum created by the upcoming European elections. She encouraged the Coordination Group to disseminate information, cooperate with other networks, demonstrate the tangible impact of their ideas, and encouraged participants to take ownership of the Rural Pact Coordination Group and organise themselves in an effective way.



The Head of Unit of DG AGRI pointed out that one of the aims of the High-level Policy Forum's meeting in Spain is to engage further Member States in the Rural Pact. In this perspective, she noted that the objective of the Coordination Group is to activate the Rural Pact at all levels of governance. She also emphasised DG REGIO's working paper on the geography of discontent as a very important document to read. She emphasised that it is important for the Coordination Group to take ownership of the objectives of the Rural Pact and of the Coordination Group specifying that RPSO is there to help. A series of key initiatives were mentioned such as the 2023 stock taking exercise on CAP and Cohesion Policy, as well actions that the Coordination Group could carry out e.g. spread communication on the Rural Pact commitments, giving ideas on how to better use funding for rural development, improving networking, encouraging people to commit and to act.

Antonia Gámez Moreno concluded by specifying that the next meeting of the Coordination Group may take place in the week of 23 October (independently of a possible meeting at the High-level Policy Forum in Spain) where the draft policy brief on « Making the Pact happen in Member States » could be discussed, alongside the annual work programme for 2024 among other elements.



Rural Pact Coordination Group

List of the members

With a three-year mandate, the Coordination Group acts as a network of institutions and organisations. They aim to enhance the development of the Rural Pact for rural stakeholders across Europe, identifying activities to be undertaken by the group members and themes to be addressed as well proposing activities for the Rural Pact Support Office. They are responsible for engaging and encouraging stakeholder groups and partners to become members of and commit to the Rural Pact, as well as disseminating information about the EU's rural vision and the activities undertaken by Rural Pact members. The Rural Pact Coordination Group consists of representatives of up to 30 members representing EU institutions and bodies, the organisations composing the European Rural Parliament, civil society and business EU-level organisations, and research and academia in proportionate ways to ensure a good balance of actors, countries of origin, diversity of rural contexts and gender.

Selected organisations are

- > Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- > DIESIS NETWORK
- > ECOLISE - European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability
- > Euromontana
- > European Rural Development Network
- > METREX Network for European Metropolitan regions and Areas
- > Ruralité Environnement Développement/Ruralité Environnement development
- > Ruraltour - European Federation of Rural Tourism
- > Rural NEET Youth Network
- > Rural Youth Europe (RYEurope)
- > Smart Village Network (Services)
- > SMEunited
- > Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE)
- > Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Rural UOC Network)
- > University College Dublin

Nominated organisations are

- > Committee of the Regions - NAT Commission
- > Committee of the Regions - COTER Commission
- > European Economic and Social Committee - NAT Section
- > European Economic and Social Committee - ECO Section
- > European Parliament - COMAGRI
- > European Parliament - COMREGI
- > European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD)
- > European Rural Community Alliance - ERCA
- > Partnership for Rural Europe – PREPARE
- > (future) Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- > Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union
- > Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en



<https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu>