



***COMMISSION SPECIAL GROUP***  
***RURAL PACT COORDINATION GROUP***  
**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

## **1. BACKGROUND**

The Rural Pact is an initiative foreseen in the Communication on the Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas<sup>1</sup> to build cooperation between the various levels of governance and with stakeholders. The Rural Pact initiative is a bottom-up and multi-level governance process in which the European Commission shall act as a facilitator. Organisations involved in the preparation of the Rural Pact identified the need to create an informal group, representative of the participants in the Pact, to further develop it and steer its process. To that end the Rural Pact Coordination Group ('the group') is established as a Commission special group.

The lead Directorate-General is Directorate-General Agriculture and Rural Development ('DG AGRI') and co-lead is Directorate-General for Regional and Urban policy ('DG REGIO').

DG AGRI has contracted out a service provider, the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) to facilitate all activities of the Rural Pact, including some tasks related to the organisation of the meetings of the Rural Pact Coordination Group.

## **2. SUBJECT MATTER**

The Rural Pact Coordination Group is set up.

## **3. TASKS**

The group's tasks shall be:

1. To explore ways to develop the Rural Pact further for its different types of participants, by agreeing on activities to be taken by the group members or Pact participants, and themes to address.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 30 June 2021: A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 (COM (2021) 345 final).

2. To engage and encourage their stakeholder groups or partners to become members of the Rural Pact and disseminate information about the EU rural vision and activities the Rural Pact members are taking.
3. To monitor the commitments to action of Rural Pact members at their level of governance.
4. To evaluate progress towards the objectives of the Rural Pact and, ultimately, the ten shared goals of the rural vision.
5. To suggest events or tasks to be organised under the Rural Pact or subjects to be addressed in communications to the Rural Pact community by the Rural Pact support office (subject to the agreement of the European Commission and conformity with the support office contract).

#### **4. MEMBERSHIP**

1. The group shall be composed of up to 30 members.
2. Members shall include:
  - Elected representatives of European non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, business organisations and public authorities organisations;
  - Representatives of academia and research organisations;
  - Elected representatives of three networks forming the steering group of the European rural parliament– as foreseen in the Long Term vision for EU’s rural areas communication (ELARD, ERCA, PREPARE);
  - The European Parliament (COMAGRI and COMREGI) represented by MEPs, the Committee of the Regions (NAT and COTER) represented by its members (local and regional authorities) and the European Economic and Social committee (NAT and ECO) represented by its members;
  - 3 Member States – representatives of the trio of presidencies of the Council of the European Union - 2 representatives by Member State, one responsible for rural development and one for territorial cohesion.
3. Members appointed to represent a common interest shall not represent an individual stakeholder, but orientations common to a broader community of stakeholders.
4. Member States' authorities, EU institutions and bodies and the three organisations steering the European Rural Parliament shall nominate their representatives and shall be responsible for ensuring that their representatives provide a high level of expertise. DG AGRI and DG REGIO may refuse the nomination by an organisation of a representative if this nomination is not appropriate in the light of the tasks of the Rural Pact Coordination Group.. In such case, the organisation, institution or body concerned shall be asked to appoint another representative.
5. Members who are no longer capable of contributing effectively to the group’s deliberations, who, in the opinion of DG AGRI and DG REGIO, do not comply with the conditions set out in Article 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union or who resign, shall no longer be invited to participate in any meetings of the group and may be replaced for the remainder of their term of office.

## **5. SELECTION PROCESS**

1. The selection of the group's members shall be carried out by nomination for Member States' authorities, EU institutions and bodies and the three organisations steering the European Rural Parliament, whilst via a public call for applications for all other members, to be published on a dedicated website. The call for applications shall clearly outline the membership criteria, including the required expertise in relation to the work to be performed. The minimum deadline for applications shall be two weeks.
2. The members of the group shall be appointed by the Director-Generals of DG AGRI and of DG REGIO among the applicants with competence in the areas referred to in point 3 and who have responded to the call for applications.
3. Members shall be appointed for 3 years. They shall remain in office until their replacement or the end of their term of office.

## **6. CHAIR AND CO-CHAIR**

The group shall be chaired by one of its members, to be elected at the second meeting at the latest. The role of the Chair shall be defined by the Rural Pact Coordination Group. A co-chair shall also be elected following the same procedure, with as role to support the Chair and replace him/her when necessary. The designation of the chair and co-chair will respect the gender balance and the balance between institutional and civil society representatives.

## **7. OPERATION**

1. The group shall act according to the mandate defined by DG AGRI and DG REGIO, in compliance with the present terms of reference and its rules of procedure. Meetings of the group shall, in principle, be held on premises designated by the Commission or virtually, depending on the circumstances. The Rural Pact Support Office contract foresees two meetings per year; one in person and one virtual.
2. DG AGRI and DG REGIO shall provide secretarial services with the support of the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO). Commission officials from other departments with an interest in the proceedings may attend meetings of the group and its sub-groups as defined under point 8.
3. In agreement with DG AGRI and DG REGIO, the group may, by simple majority of its members, decide that deliberations shall be public.
4. The minutes of the meeting shall reflect the content of the discussion and the decisions taken. Minutes shall be drafted by the Rural Pact Support Office and approved by DG AGRI, DG REGIO and the members of the group.
5. As far as possible, the group shall adopt its opinions, recommendations or reports by consensus. In the event of a vote, the outcome of the vote shall be decided by simple majority of the members. Members who have voted against or abstained shall have the right to have a document summarising the reasons for their position annexed to the opinions, recommendations or reports.

## **8. SUB-GROUPS**

1. DG AGRI and DG REGIO may set up sub-groups, at the request of the group, for the purpose of examining specific questions on the basis of terms of reference defined by DG AGRI and DG REGIO in agreement with the group. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with their terms of reference and with the rules of procedure of this group and shall report to the group. They shall be dissolved as soon as their mandate is fulfilled.

## **9. INVITED EXPERTS**

DG AGRI and DG REGIO or the (sub-) group itself may invite experts with specific expertise with respect to a subject matter on the agenda to take part in the work of the group or sub-groups on an *ad hoc* basis.

## **10. OBSERVERS**

1. Individuals, organisations and public entities other than the group members may be granted an observer status, as a result of a direct invitation.
2. Organisations and public entities appointed as observers shall nominate their representatives.
3. Observers and their representatives may be permitted by the Chair to take part in the discussions of the group and sub-groups and provide expertise. However, they shall not have voting rights and shall not participate in the formulation of recommendations or advice of the group and sub-groups.

## **11. RULES OF PROCEDURE**

On a proposal by and in agreement with DG AGRI and DG REGIO the group shall adopt its rules of procedure by simple majority of its members. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the group's rules of procedure.

## **12. PROFESSIONAL SECRECY AND HANDLING OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION**

The members of the group and their representatives, as well as invited experts and observers, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/443<sup>2</sup> and 2015/444<sup>3</sup>. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission may take all appropriate measures.

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<sup>2</sup> Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/443 of 13 March 2015 on Security in the Commission (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 41).

<sup>3</sup> Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

### **13. TRANSPARENCY**

1. As regards the group and sub-groups composition, the following data may be published on a dedicated website:
  - (a) the name of Member States' authorities;
  - (b) the name of other public entities, including EU institutions and bodies;
  - (c) the name of individuals appointed to represent a common interest; the interest represented shall be disclosed;
  - (d) the name of member organisations; the interest represented shall be disclosed;
  - (e) the name of observers.
2. All relevant documents, including the agendas, the minutes and the participants' submissions, shall be made available on a dedicated website, where this information can be found. Access to dedicated websites shall not be submitted to user registration or any other restriction. In particular, DG AGRI and DG REGIO shall publish the agenda and other relevant background documents in due time ahead of the meeting, followed by timely publication of minutes. Exceptions to publication shall only be possible where it is deemed that disclosure of a document would undermine the protection of a public or private interest as defined in Article 4 of Regulation (EC) N° 1049/2001<sup>4</sup>.

### **14. MEETING EXPENSES**

1. Participants in the activities of the group and sub-groups shall not be remunerated for the services they offer.
2. Reimbursement shall be made in accordance with the provisions in force within the Commission and within the limits of the available appropriations allocated to the Commission departments under the annual procedure for the allocation of resources.

Done in Brussels, on 16 June 2023.

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<sup>4</sup> These exceptions are intended to protect public security, military affairs, international relations, financial, monetary or economic policy, privacy and integrity of the individual, commercial interests, court proceedings and legal advice, inspections/investigations/audits and the institution's decision-making process.