



RURAL PACT COORDINATION GROUP MEETING

Highlights report

Second meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group

Summary

The 2nd meeting of Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) brought together 47 participants.

In view of 2024, the group took a significant step in identifying the priority actions for the months to come and discussed the synergies with the Rural Pact Support Office work programme.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



7 November 2023



Brussels, Belgium



47 participants (RPCG members and affiliates, DG AGRI and DG REGIO, RPSO)



[Event webpage](#)

Welcome and introduction to the day



Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) introduced the 2nd meeting of the RPCG as a special opportunity to elect the Chair and Vice-Chair and discuss the way to steer the LTVRA and the Rural Pact (RP). He underlined the big success of the High-level Policy Forum in Sigüenza, with lively debates on the future of rural areas shared by over 240 participants. He also emphasised that the LTVRA and the RP were praised and gained recognition, though requiring concrete implementation on the ground. From the outcomes of the stock-taking exercise, the CAP provides ample opportunities for rural areas, but remains largely focused on agriculture, agri-food sector, environment, and climate. CAP funding alone cannot cover fully all ten specific objectives of the Regulation - therefore many rural needs remain only partially addressed in the CAP Strategic Plans. Other EU, national and regional sources of funding are needed. He outlined that the next key step would be the adoption of the Council conclusions on the long-term vision for rural areas during the AGRIFISH meeting taking place on 20 November 2023 and confirmed later by the GAC. This will contribute to the first trimester 2024 report on the LTVRA that the Commission is preparing in consultations with all stakeholders and EU institutions. Mario invited the RPCG members to make proposals on what can be done to advance RP from their perspective, as well reflections on the future of rural funding.



Wallis Vandebroek-Goelen (DG REGIO) highlighted the close collaboration between DG REGIO and DG AGRI working jointly on the LTVRA. She emphasised that the RPCG has a key role in taking forward the RP and LTVRA – with a collective and individual responsibility. In Sigüenza the rich discussions helped the RP to get momentum, at national, regional and local levels. The Spanish Presidency was extremely helpful in driving the conversation, which fed into the Council conclusions. Wallis outlined the contribution of Cohesion Policy (CP) to all the LTVRA blocks, promoting economic, social, and territorial cohesion, including in rural areas, particularly through policy objective 5 as well the digital and green transitions under policy objectives 1 to 2. Besides, indirect and non-territorially tagged investments widely contribute to rural development in a wide range of sectors as ERDF and ESF+ funding overwhelmingly goes to less developed and transition regions, which include most of the EU's rural areas.



Pascale Van Doren (Rural Pact Support Office) closed this introductory session with a detailed presentation of the agenda of the day.

Opening Session (1): Adoption of the Terms of Reference and the Rules of Procedure



Antonia Gamez Moreno (DG AGRI) announced that over the summer 2023 the Commission has run a consultation process with members on the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Rural Pact Coordination Group. The Commission has received and taken into account comments from 3 member organisations and re-circulated the latest version to all members on 31 October 2023.

The major changes in the [Terms of Reference](#) are:

- > The introduction of the role of the Vice-Chair at point 6;
- > The possibility for members of sub-groups to invite experts with specific expertise on a subject matter at point 9.

Regarding the [Rules of Procedure](#), the main change was to extend from 7 to 10 calendar days the period for sending documents to group members.

Both the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure were adopted by consensus.

Opening Session (2): Election of the Chair and Vice-chair of the RPCG



Antonia Gamez Moreno (DG AGRI) presented the list of confirmed candidates for Chair and Vice-Chair positions. Following the consultation with members, 5 nominations for the role of Chair and 6 for role of Vice-Chair have been received. Candidates were invited to make a pitch to support the selection process, and election was carried out by simple majority. The list of candidates is consolidated in the table below.

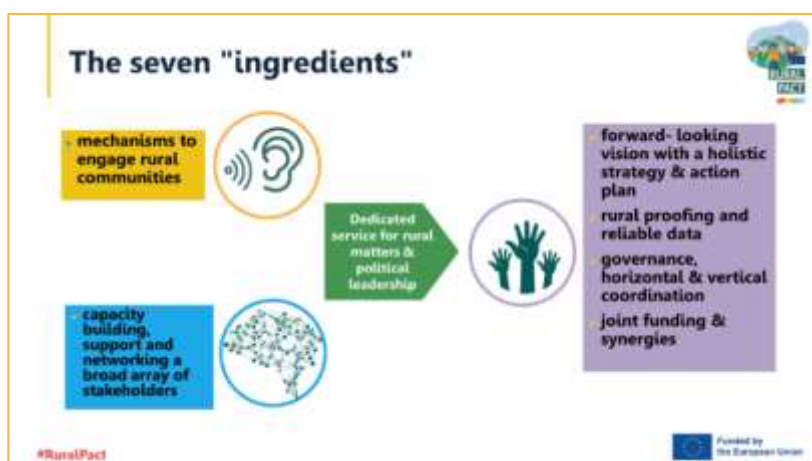
Table: List of candidates for Chair and Vice-Chair positions

Chair	Institution/Organisation
Rafael Amorim	METREX Network for European Metropolitan regions and Areas
Edina Ocsko	Smart Village Network (Services)
Spyros Papadatos	Rural Youth Europe (RYEurope)
Radim Sršeň	Committee of the Regions - NAT Commission
Hilkka Vihinen	Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE)
Vice-chair	Institution/Organisation
Āris Ādlers	Partnership for Rural Europe (PREPARE)
Rafael Amorim	METREX Network for European Metropolitan regions and Areas
Karen Keaveney	University College Dublin
Edina Ocsko	Smart Village Network (Services)
Spyros Papadatos	Rural Youth Europe (RYEurope)
Lidija Pavić-Rogošić	European Economic and Social Committee - NAT Commission

The newly elected Chair is Radim Sršeň and the elected Vice-chair is Edina Ocsko.

Discussion on concrete actions based on the policy briefing “Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States”

Urszula Budzich Tabor (Rural Pact Support Office) introduced the key elements of the Policy briefing and recalled the drafting process that includes integrating the results of the discussions at the High-level Rural Policy Forum in Sigüenza. She explained that the comments collected from the RPCG members and Member State (MS) delegations in Sigüenza were taken on board.



Urszula reminded participants that the main objective of the briefing was to explain how the European Rural Pact can be implemented in practice at the national or regional levels in different Member State contexts, with a view to putting the Rural Pact higher on policy agendas, mobilising action as well providing practical examples and tips.

Questions and feedback from the three groups discussion:

What concrete action can be undertaken to start putting in place the ingredients of the Rural Pact?

- > Identify rural policies that are effective and those that are not, and foster exchange between Member States and regions on the application of the ingredients in each specific context.
- > Use the opportunity of the upcoming European Parliament (EP) elections to mobilise political will for concrete action (write letters to all Member of the European Parliament (MEP) candidates and raise their awareness about rural matters).
- > Implement the Rural vision at regional level (i.e. it was referred to the case of Flanders as a regionalised country) to connect the EU to the local needs.
- > Encourage commitment to the RP from the national governments in the form of a memorandum.
- > Mobilise different funding sources (especially for infrastructure and jobs), using EU funds as seed money. In addition, use financial instruments and cooperation with banks. Incentives for MS to allocate funding to rural areas could be envisaged in EU legislation.
- > Improve access to data on rural areas by type (remote, functional...) or theme (e.g. energy), eventually develop "rural country profiles" of how the RP is addressed at MS level.
- > Avoid any political change with negative impact at national level and ensure that LTVRA will be sustained in next programming periods.

Which ingredients are most urgent/most challenging?

- > All ingredients are important to be in place. To do so, there is a need to develop guidance on how they can be considering the needs of MS.
- > The potentially most challenging but essential ingredients are rural proofing and forward-looking vision.
- > It is urgent to change the negative perception of rural areas, based on new indicators/data that show the added value of rural areas (in connection with the EU Rural Observatory).
- > Focus on functional rural areas, using small towns as drivers of local economies.

How can the Policy Briefing be disseminated in your country/region to make the Rural Pact a reality?

- > Create a positive narrative based on the policy briefing, whilst ensuring that MS benefit from a degree of freedom in the implementation.
- > Make the briefing available in all EU languages.
- > Communication material to be available on RP Platform to support harmonised and coordinated dissemination towards rural stakeholders.
- > Involve/target citizens in the policy briefing dissemination. This would also involve federations of rural NGOs and universities as relays.

Prioritising and organising actions of the Rural Pact Coordination Group

Based on the ideas developed around the Policy Briefing and the outcomes of the first RPCG meeting on 21 June, the participants selected key priorities for concrete actions to be undertaken in the upcoming

year. This was done using the “snowball” method, discussing first in pairs, then in fours, and finally in groups of 8-10 people. A wide range of activities were developed, ranging from writing letters to MEP candidates to organising events, exchanges and study visits (a rural version of the Erasmus programme). These priority activities were organised according to the three Rural Pact objectives. The results of this discussion are integrated below “Activities proposed by the RPCG for 2024” in the following section.

Rural Pact Support Office and Rural Pact Coordination Group Annual Work Programmes for 2024

RPSO draft annual work programme for Year 2



Julie de Galard and Pascale Van Doren (Rural Pact Support Office) presented the key objectives and actions proposed to DG AGRI in the draft Annual Work Programme (AWP) for Year 2 (2024). The priority of the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) will be to work with the existing community - in particular with those who have made commitments - and to widen the participation of other relevant stakeholders, with a twofold focus: to consolidate the Year 1 (2023) priority efforts focused on national authorities and to open up the community to mobilise stakeholders at regional and local levels.



Synergies between RPCG priority actions and RPSO work programme of Year 2

In a discussion facilitated by the newly elected Chair Radim Sršeň and Vice-Chair Edina Ocsko, the participants explored potential linkages between the RPSO tasks envisaged in the draft AWP and the priority actions identified by the Coordination Group. As a result of this discussion, the RPSO has proposed the following table summarising the RPCG priority actions.

Activities proposed by the RPCG for 2024

Objective 1: Amplifying the voice of rural areas and bringing them up in policy agendas

- > Fostering commitment to the Rural Pact from government level (not individual ministries)
- > Understanding, mapping, analysing what is happening in MS
- > Communication strategy – important for all 3 objectives; increase knowledge of LTVRA and the RP at national, regional and local level
- > Translation of the Policy Briefing “Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States” in 27 languages
- > Dissemination of the Policy Briefing “Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States”

- > Awareness activities & debates about the Rural Pact (involving different actors)
- > Supporting national, regional and local Rural Pacts (no one-size-fits-all)
- > Promote the integration of the Rural Pact with post-2027 CAP and CP
- > Letter to all EP candidates about the RP and LTVRA (early 2024) – short, signed by Chair and Vice-Chair
- > Send the same letter to European and national think tanks
- > Continue contacting EP candidates country –by country
- > Approach MS, all EP candidates – ask a commitment from each candidate what they would do

Objective 2. Networking, collaboration and mutual learning

- > Field visits and peer-learning (a "rural Erasmus")
- > Asking people on the ground what they need
- > Strengthening connections within and outside the network, & on the ground (not only among the bubbles in Brussels)
- > Implement more events at local level
- > Dissemination of best practices in rural policies
- > One event per home country presenting engaging authorities and civil society representatives – hybrid or online – by end 2025 (already planned by HU, SI, FI and Diesis)
- > Develop, monitor and disseminate a RPCG members' calendar of events
- > Facilitate networking via the RP Platform & its tools, webinar for all signatories to explain how they can use this (with user cases)

Objective 3. Commitments to act

- > Monitoring of commitments at national, regional & local level – responsibility of each key actor
- > Using data/indicators, link with academia
- > Information about results of policies/actions available in local languages
- > Encouraging LAGs to widen their action, to act as local contact points for the RP. LEADER currently does not allow for all activities, LAGs need to be encouraged and find new sources.
- > Inform LAGs already in the 1st quarter of 2024 about their key role in RP at local level and in the upcoming RP Conference

Concluding remarks and next steps



Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) conveyed that he was delighted that the LTVRA and the RP are gaining momentum. He is confident that the election of Chair and Vice-Chair will inject energy and speed up concrete actions for 2024, which is an important year marked by the report of the Commission on the LTVRA, the European Parliament elections and probably the setting up of the new College. Mario invited the RPCG members to think about how the Group can enrich the debate on the implementation of the vision and propose concrete actions. As key priority drivers, Mario underlined, besides the future EPelections, (i) the importance of attracting other types of funding, not only EU funds but also from private, national, regional & local sources, (ii) an enhanced communication strategy and plan for the Rural Pact, (iii) the availability of data and the need to strengthen the role of Rural Observatory, (iv) the use of LAGs more actively and (v) the support to the implementation of rural pacts and commitments at all levels.



Wallis Vandebrock-Goelen (DG REGIO) highlighted the intensive discussions of the 2nd meeting demonstrating the RPCG is fully up and running and legitimate in moving forward the discussions on the EU policies post-2027. Wallis stressed that for the rural vision to stay alive, it is fundamental to get the MS fully on board. After the Council conclusions, all elements will be in place to move the rural pact beyond, to the national level to the local level. Wallis supported the idea of the one-stop-shop for funding access, where information and support on all resources can be provided. She concluded by saying: "Leave no one and no place behind – you will be supporting the Commission in this respect".



Mario Milouchev (DG AGRI) concluded the event by specifying that the next meeting of the RPCG may take place in March/April 2024, the date and format of which (online or in person) remain to be confirmed. Until then, coordination will be organised with the Chair and Vice -Chair. Attention will also be given to ensuring that documents are distributed sufficiently in advance to allow members to consult their respective organisations.

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

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



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



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