

SUMMARY

The Latvian Rural Forum (LRF) is a national organisation that brings together key rural development civil society stakeholders. Since 2013, the LRF organises the **Latvian Rural Communities Parliament (LRCP) every 2 years**. Hundreds of representatives of rural communities, municipalities, state institutions, researchers, entrepreneurs, politicians, and rural development enthusiasts gather to address sustainability challenges in Latvia's countryside and discuss solutions based on local needs.



CONTEXT

The Latvian Rural Communities Parliament (LRCP) responds to the need for a **unified voice of Latvian rural civil society**. The initiative seeks to facilitate inclusive dialogue and collaboration across different sectors in order to tackle challenges such as economic sustainability, infrastructure development, and social cohesion in rural areas.

These biennial gatherings, held in different rural locations across Latvia, bring together stakeholders from local, national, and EU levels, including experts from outside Europe, to discuss rural and regional development strategies. Through the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, including local authorities, businesses, academia, and grassroots organisations, the LRCP aims to **drive policy reform and community-driven initiatives** for the wellbeing of rural communities in Latvia.

Theme(s): Democracy and participation

Country: Latvia

Organisations: Association 'Latvian Rural Forum', civil society organisation

Start & end date: 06/2013 – Ongoing

Budget: approximately EUR 13 000 for the 2023 edition

Funding sources:

- National CAP Network
- Cities2023 project, Horizon 2020 programme, grant agreement No 101000640
- European Economic Area (EEA) grants
- Norway finance mechanism
- Baltic-American Freedom Foundation
- Society Integration Fund, Latvian Ministry of Culture
- Funding from local municipalities

Website:

<https://laukuforums.lv/en/archives/category/latvian-rural-communities-parliament>

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OBJECTIVES

- > Promote collaboration among different stakeholders to identify rural development challenges, set priorities at local, regional, national, and European levels, and discuss opportunities.



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The first LRCP took place in 2013, and since then, six editions have been held. Each Parliament is a three-day event, with its content determined by current issues in rural development, as well as general trends and context.

In 2023, **the 6th edition of this event brought together more than 350 representatives** of local and regional authorities, businesses, policymakers (including the ministries of agriculture, environmental protection, regional development, and welfare), academics, rural development professionals, and enthusiasts. The main theme was **smart rural shrinking as a strategic approach to rural development**. Within the format of 16 working groups and six panel discussions, LRCP participants analysed specific case studies and reviewed analysis and research results of existing practices in Latvia and other European countries. The goal was to foster positive transformation and identify actions required for a favourable impact in response to challenges facing rural areas, especially the decrease in population, economic stagnation, limited availability of services, and service quality issues.

The working groups covered important themes for Latvian rural development, such as smart development strategies at the regional and local levels, holistic rural approaches, short food chains, smart villages and startup villages, citizen engagement in municipalities, citizen councils, CLLD/LEADER, agroecology, innovations in entrepreneurship, service provision, social innovations, and others. Participants exchanged experiences, and a **Resolution** was developed to **serve as a roadmap** for all decisions on rural areas in the following two years.



RESULTS

- > The LRCP has become a **sustainable platform for dialogue**, gathering participants and experts from Latvia and other countries, fostering collaboration and exchange of ideas.
- > Through various working groups, discussions, and workshops, participants analyse specific case studies, research results, local and international experiences to foster positive transformation and address challenges faced by rural areas.
- > Based on the insights gained from the discussions and analyses, participants developed a **Resolution setting out actions** for the following two years.
- > To evaluate the progress of actions proposed at the Parliaments, the Latvian Rural Forum introduced a **'Rural Barometer'** in 2021. This innovative online tool empowers participants to assess the implementation of proposed actions, drawing upon their knowledge and experience within their local area or community.
- > The Rural Barometer compiles actions for rural development in **nine thematic directions** outlined in the LRCP Resolution: participation; sustainable and diverse communities; educated and competitive society; entrepreneurship; employment; rural landscape and life; infrastructure and services; local resources and support; and financial investments.
- > Participants, including rural residents, communities, representatives of non-governmental organisations, entrepreneurs, youth, and regional experts, provide their assessment of the extent to which each of the actions has been implemented (ratings on a scale from 1 to 10) based on their knowledge and experience of local areas and communities. This **evaluation process** offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of rural development strategies.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > The success of the LRCP can be attributed to its inclusive approach, bringing together diverse stakeholders.
- > The focus on discussing solutions based on local needs and resources allows to set out action-oriented plans in the territories.
- > The selection of the Parliament venue is based on a competition evaluating the capacity of rural territories to host such a significant event. This ensures significant visibility for the particular rural territory, as it celebrates achievements of local communities, entrepreneurs, residents, and municipalities in the development of their area.
- > The importance of inclusive and collaborative approaches to rural development, the value of fostering intersectoral collaboration and exchange of ideas to find practical solutions are among the main lessons learned.

