

GOVERNANCE MEETING



Highlights report

Fourth meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group

Introduction

The fourth meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) discussed:

- > final suggestions for the Group's joint Declaration on the future of EU rural policies;
- > several position papers of RPCG member organisations on the future of rural areas in the EU;
- > actions carried out by RPCG members to promote the LTVRA and the Rural Pact; and
- > Rural Pact Support Office actions planned for 2025.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



8 November 2024



Online



49 participants, including RPCG member representatives, DG AGRI, DG REGIO, and the Rural Pact Support Office



Presentations & background documents available ([here](#))

Main takeaways from the meeting

- > Members of the Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) gave feedback and final suggestions for a **joint declaration on the future of EU rural policies**. A revised document will be shared with members for approval in early December.
- > Several **position papers** of RPCG member organisations were presented on the future of rural areas in the EU. Members agreed that, as a framework, the RPCG supports integrated and unified messaging on rural development while giving organisations a voice at local, regional, national and European levels.
- > The meeting provided an opportunity to take stock of the **actions carried out by RPCG members** to promote the LTVRA and the Rural Pact.
- > Participants also discussed the **Rural Pact Support Office's (RPSO) actions planned for 2025**, including the Rural Pact Conference, scheduled for April 2025.

Welcome and introduction to the day

Radim Sršeň, RPCG Chair, and Edina Ocsko, Vice Chair

The objectives of the meeting were as follows:

- > Consolidate the RPCG members' declaration on the future of EU rural policies, answering the open questions of the 2024 European Commission report, 'The [long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: key achievements and ways forward](#)', and discuss further policy and operational steps to be taken;
- > Present position papers developed by RPCG members on the future of rural areas in the European Union;
- > Take stock of the actions implemented by RPCG members and the Rural Pact Support Office since the last meeting in April 2024, and present an overview of forthcoming actions, including presentation of the next RPSO annual work programme for members' feedback;
- > Discuss possible RPCG member involvement in the [Rural Pact Conference 'From vision to action: Empowering rural areas for the future'](#) to be held in April 2025.

The meeting also gave the opportunity to welcome new members from the European Parliament, as well as from the Council Presidencies of Poland and Denmark (forthcoming).

RPCG actions to be taken in the new European political context

Latest policy developments on rural areas in the new political context – overview by the European Commission

Nicola de Michelis, acting Deputy Director-General at DG REGIO



The European Union is navigating a challenging environment marked by collective efforts to ensure policies are delivering, which is important to prepare for the future. New EU priorities in areas such as defence and future enlargement are expected to create financial pressures. These challenges are compounded by the need for repayments linked to the EU's [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) (RRF) and the critical investments, as also highlighted in Mario Draghi's report, '[The future of European competitiveness](#)'. Key trends that will influence the future debate on cohesion policy will be the lessons learned from the RRF, the evolution of the EU Semester, including

links to EU investments and emphasis on reforms and performance-oriented funding, bolstering the Commission's mandate on declining territories.

Mario Milouchev, Director at DG AGRI



The European Commission has reinforced its commitment to rural areas, building on strong past support from the European Parliament and Council, particularly after the 2023 Council Conclusions on rural issues. The recent presidencies of Spain, Belgium and Hungary have highlighted the strategic importance of rural development.

Rural policy is mentioned in the mission letters of Commissioner Christophe Hansen (Agriculture and Food) and of Executive Vice-President Raffaele Fitto (Cohesion and Reforms). Their work will build on the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) together with cohesion policy. The Commission's new CAP delivery model, performance-based rather than compliance-focused, signals a shift that will likely continue post-2027.

Ricard Ramón i Sumoy, Deputy Head of Unit at DG AGRI



The [Strategic Dialogue report on the future of EU agricultural policy](#) is a key consensus document, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, including those from rural areas, the primary sector, consumers, environmental NGOs, and both the public and private sector. The new Commission will build on this report when developing a strategic vision for agriculture and food policy, grounded in the report's outcomes.

The report highlights the long-term vision for rural areas (LTVRA) as a central framework, emphasising two critical components: rural proofing, to ensure rural needs are reflected in policy decisions, and the Rural Pact, which will shape future rural and agricultural strategies.

The Commissioner for Agriculture and Food is expected to present an actionable vision 100 days after being appointed. The RPCG Declaration will come at an opportune moment, aligning with this strategic vision, and play a crucial role in shaping the new Commission's mandate, providing a foundation for concrete policy initiatives.

Reactions from RPCG members

- > The significant role of local and regional authorities should be maintained or strengthened, and a holistic approach to rural and urban development linkages is needed.
- > Structural challenges in rural areas should be addressed as a priority, enhancing quality of life through equal access to services, subsidies, and rural proofing of all relevant policies.
- > Territorial tools such as Integrated Territorial Investment and community-led local development (CLLD) are of key importance.
- > Simplified funding frameworks in the coming years should prioritise the green and digital transitions with investments targeting rural areas, including place-based methods.
- > Addressing territorial disparities is crucial for democratic inclusion, as many people in remote areas feel disconnected from policy-making. Creating local jobs, especially for youth, and viewing rural areas as pivotal in the green transition is essential.
- > Greater synergy between EU, national and regional funds is necessary to support rural initiatives and monitor funds' effectiveness.
- > The need to strengthen rural-urban links and a special focus on remote rural areas were also highlighted.

Presentation and discussion of the final draft of the RPCG Declaration towards the future of rural policies

Edina Ocsko, RPCG Vice Chair ([PPT](#))

The RPCG Declaration has followed a participatory process involving all group members. This document outlines strategic proposals for EU rural development policy post-2027, addressing the open questions set out in the European Commission's March 2024 [report on the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas](#): key achievements and ways forward. The Declaration recognises rural areas' challenges and the need to address them by EU funding and policies.

The RPCG Declaration calls for:

- > A **cross-sectoral rural development framework** that follows a holistic and intergrated approach prioritising community-led and place-based approaches to policy-making. Guaranteed funding fo rural development must come from a combination of different sources, involving rural stakeholders in policy design.
- > A **mandatory allocation of EU funds targeted to rural development goals beyond agriculture** (e.g. at least 30% of all EU funds), with a percentage of these distributed through CLLD (e.g. at least 10%); if the minimum allocation from all funds proves unfeasible, a dedicated European Rural Development Fund (ERUDF) could be established to ensure targeted use of resources.
- > Turning the LTVRA into **concrete strategies at EU, national and regional level**, with strong institutional frameworks for coordination.
- > Support for capacity building for managing authority and the local level financed from technical assistance; greater flexibility in funding rules for local actors.
- > Data-driven monitoring to ensure that EU funding addresses rural needs effectively, including data on EU funds' sectoral and territorial allocation.

RPCG members will adopt the declaration in a written procedure in early December 2024, a timely endorsement to help shape future policy developments, and its promotion and dissemination will start in early 2025.

Reactions from RPCG members

The debate focused on three elements: overall feedback on the declaration, suggestions for final refinements, and the process for approving the declaration in members' organisations/institutions.

Most participants fully endorsed the declaration, although some expressed the difficulty to vote in favour of the Declaration of behalf of their organisation. The members support the Declaration's focus on funding mechanisms and the call for rural proofing though the whole legislative process.

Refinements suggested included the addition of a preamble explaining the document's status, and highlighting certain aspects such as prioritisation of remote rural areas, security challenges of border regions, stronger youth engagement and structural renewal of rural economies, including the use of AI

To **approve the declaration**, more than half of participants said they would need internal approval from their organisations.

Position papers of RPCG members on the future of the EU's rural areas

RPCG members' contribution to the Strategic Dialogue

Spyros Papadatos, Rural Youth Europe (RYE)

Thibaut Guignard, European Leader Association for Rural Development (ELARD)



The Strategic Dialogue's [final report](#) highlights the importance of the EU's rural vision as a guiding framework for future agricultural policies and the role of the Rural Pact model and rural proofing. These two organisations participated in the Dialogue representing the rural stakeholders.



ELARD noted that the report calls for policies based on territorial approaches and the involvement of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the decision-making process to strengthen rural areas. It also keeps rural development as one of the future CAP's key priorities. RYE stressed that the report places agriculture and rural development at the centre, prioritising sustainability – but not at the expense of agricultural producers – and focusing on generational renewal in agriculture.

RPCG members' contributions on the future of the EU's rural areas

Members of the group presented diverse opinions on the future of rural areas in the EU.

How programming integrating LEADER and participatory local development approaches for post-2027 could contribute to better implementation of the LTVRA

Thibaut Guignard, ELARD



CLLD/LEADER initiatives offer effective bottom-up approaches to address rural challenges, involving stakeholders to create local strategies tailored to community needs. This will be a key element on the upcoming European Committee of the Regions (CoR) opinion on 'How post-27 LEADER and CLLD programming could contribute to better implementation of the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas'. To maximise CLLD/LEADER territorial impact, LAGs must be provided with adequate funding, increased autonomy, trust and visibility. The opinion calls for "place-based policies to be bolstered by boosting the capacity of the CLLD/LEADER programme in order to meet the increasing expectations of rural development and territorial cohesion".

To strengthen CLLD/LEADER tools, it is necessary to simplify funding mechanisms and enhance rural proofing.

Strengthening European rural politics in the CoR's 2028-2034 legislative framework

Michael Schmitz, Council of European Municipalities and Regions ([PPT](#))



A joint position paper by several German members of the CoR calls for strengthened rural development and Structural Funds. "The signatories call for the needs and potential for strong and resilient rural areas to be integrated into the debates on EU policies in a timely manner".

The paper proposes several options based on the depth of change in policy design and the roles of CAP and cohesion policy in rural areas: option 1 – status quo extended by strengthening the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development's (EAFRD) structural policy orientation and the Structural Funds' territorial dimension; option 2 – creation of a Structural Fund for Rural Development, based on Article 174 (3) TFEU; and option 3 – expansion of cohesion policy by adding EAFRD goals beyond the agricultural sector to the Common Provision Regulation.

Towards greater involvement of Member States, regions and civil society actors in the LTVRA's implementation

Lidija Pavić-Rogošić, European Economic and Social Committee ([PPT](#))



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) [opinion](#) calls for enhanced governance frameworks, annual assessments and targeted interventions in implementation of the EU's rural vision. The opinion highlights the need for a post-2027 rural development policy dedicated to the implementation of the rural action plan recognising the importance of the Rural Pact. It also stresses the importance of various stakeholders being involved at all levels to ensure the success of the LTVRA and calls for the multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance approach to be strengthened.

The EESC welcomes the Policy Briefing on "Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States" encouraging rural development approaches such as the rural agendas and pacts to be adopted by EU Member States and regions; it proposes that a European charter of rights and responsibilities be adopted for rural and urban areas based on these approaches.

Open floor: additional contributions and reactions from RPCG members

A Rurality-Environment-Development [position paper](#) was presented, calling for an integrated, global and CLLD territorial approach to the Rural Pact.

The discussion considered links between the different positions presented and the declaration. Overall, the members agreed that the RPCG is a good framework allowing for reinforcement of an integrated, unified message in favour of rural development while giving each organisation or institution the opportunity to express itself at different levels: local, regional, national and European.

Rural Pact Conference 2025: contribution from RPCG members

Overview of the Rural Pact Conference (background information)

Enrique Nieto, Rural Pact Support Office ([PPT](#))

RURAL PACT The [Rural Pact Conference 'From vision to action: Empowering rural areas for the future'](#) (8-9 April 2025, Belgium) aims to empower the Rural Pact community and drive local-level actions to support rural areas in line with the Rural Vision 2040. Hosting 250 participants over 1.5 days, it will include discussions, networking opportunities and participatory sessions to develop the rural action plan.

This session sought to involve RPCG members in the conference's design by collecting ideas and expressions of interest to networking and participatory elements of the conference agenda.

Shaping Rural Pact activities and seeking synergies between the RPCG and RPSO

Overview of recent RPSO actions and presentation of the 2025 AWP

Pascale Van Doren, Rural Pact Support Office ([PPT](#))

RURAL PACT The RPSO outlined an overview of recent actions conducted in 2024 (policy briefing '[Empowering local communities to take action for the rural vision](#)', country pages, needs survey and events) and presented the draft 2025 Annual Work Programme (AWP) for members' comments.

Reactions from RPCG members to the 2025 AWP

- > The discussion emphasised the importance of advancing rural areas through innovation, community engagement and targeted support; the role of AI was highlighted as a tool for innovation and a means of data integration, with a focus on ensuring rural areas can benefit from AI applications;
- > Additional suggestions included analysing the needs of economic and social actors in rural areas and enhancing national and regional media's involvement in promoting rural issues and the Rural Pact.
- > Other suggestions included introducing rural volunteer programmes to strengthen community ties and meet local needs or the integration of rural aspects into broader research agendas.

Overview of RPCG actions implemented and planned in support of the LTVRA and Rural Pact

Pascale Van Doren, Rural Pact Support Office, and RPCG members ([PPT](#))

RURAL PACT RPCG members' actions since the last meeting were presented along with those planned. These actions focus on six main areas: sending letters to candidate MEPs and governments, contributing to the RPCG Declaration, organising events under the Rural Pact, developing policy position papers and opinions, developing the Rural Pact at national/regional level, and disseminating RPSO activities.

Illustration of RPCG actions by panel of members

Ben van Essen (ERCA), Lidija Pavić-Rogošić (EESC) ([PPT](#)), Spyros Papadatos (RYE)



The **European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA)** has developed **initiatives to strengthen local participation in the Rural Pact**. These include a [compass for local empowerment](#) and a participatory lab held during the European Week of Regions and Cities in October 2024, focusing on rural development. Future initiatives include a youth-focused event in December 2024 and a manifesto to bring rural issues to the Dutch national political agenda as part of the Dutch Rural Pact initiative. The Dutch National Rural Parliament, member of ERCA is organising on 9-10 November 2024 a Rural Pact event in the Netherlands with the participation of the OECD and a focus on rural proofing.



The **European Economic and Social Committee** has undertaken **significant actions to support rural areas**. It has adopted key opinions on rural engagement ([just transition to ensure a sustainable future for EU agri-food systems](#)) and [aligning the circular economy and the bioeconomy at EU and national level](#)). The EESC has organised debates on sustainable agri-food systems (5th Rural Pact debate on [the just transition of agri-food systems](#) and 6th Rural Pact debate on [the role of circular economy and bioeconomy in supporting sustainable agri-food systems to promote sustainable rural/urban development in the EU](#)).

All EESC members of the NAT Section have been asked to send the "Rural Pact letter", asking their ministries to commit to the Pact and join the Community Platform. EESC members have also participated in events focused on rural innovation, sustainable forestry and inclusive governance, strengthening Rural Pact objectives across Europe.



Rural Youth Europe is committed to **supporting rural youth** through several **initiatives**. An [event in Estonia engaged](#) young participants, focusing on entrepreneurship and thriving in rural areas. A series of events on [sustainable energy transition](#) in rural areas has taken place in various countries. It has also launched a project to establish national structures for rural youth in southern European countries, where such frameworks do not exist.

Initial ideas for promoting the declaration

Edina Ocsko, RPCG Vice Chair ([PPT](#))

The timing of the declaration's dissemination is critical to maximise its impact. The declaration should be adopted in December 2024 and will influence future policy through various events and policy negotiations.

Communication efforts will include newsletters, direct contacts and social media outreach to engage networks of RPCG members and the public. Dedicated meetings will be organised to present and discuss the declaration. Additional communication could take place through Rural Pact community groups.

RPCG member suggestions for promoting the declaration

- > The declaration's length should remain unchanged, with a concise graphic version created for clarity. A one-page summary of the main points was proposed for better accessibility;
- > Dissemination should include guidelines to promote the declaration and a disclaimer on authorship to facilitate sharing. EU institutions, such as the Council and the European Parliament, should be involved in EU-level dissemination. The declaration could be distributed through the RPCG's member organisations;
- > Peer learning webinars could be organised to promote the declaration within RPCG members' networks;
- > Final approval of the declaration is targeted for early December to align with the next Commission's timeline.

Next steps and end of the meeting

Synthesis of next actions decided and RPCG responsibilities

Radim Sršeň, RPCG Chair, and Edina Ocsko, RPCG Vice Chair

- > **Follow-up actions on the declaration**
 - A short version of the declaration will be circulated to RPCG members for diffusion;
 - A revised version will be shared with RPCG members to consult with their constituencies;
 - Voting will be in writing, with a simple majority required for approval.
- > **RPCG involvement in the conference**
 - RPCG members will be invited to submit written expressions of interest to contribute to the Rural Pact conference sessions;
 - A 'Save the date' or 'Expression of interest' will be sent shortly.

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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