



GOVERNANCE MEETING



Highlights report

Fifth meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group

Introduction

The [fifth meeting](#) of the Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) informed members on the EU policy and inter-institutional landscape for rural areas and communities, and discussed ways of maximising the impact of the RPCG Declaration.

It also exchanged on ways to further strengthening the Rural Pact at national and regional levels, and provided updates on upcoming RPCG member activities, and on the forthcoming Rural Pact Conference.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



4 June 2025



In person



44 participants including RPCG members, DG AGRI, DG REGIO and RPSO



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



Main takeaways from the meeting

Aligning rural priorities across governance levels

- > Furthermore, the members underlined the need for **greater visibility and alignment of rural priorities with funding programmes at European, national, and regional levels** to avoid fragmentation and ensure rural needs are consistently addressed.

Capitalising on the RPCG Declaration

- > Several RPCG members presented **outreach efforts and communication strategies** developed since December 2024, including webinars, media campaigns, and national consultations.
- > Common challenges include the need for additional support to **translate the Declaration into action that is relatable** – especially for local governments and non-expert audiences. What is needed now are practical tools and coordination mechanisms to bring it to life in diverse rural contexts.

National and regional Rural Pact initiatives taking shape

- > Emerging **national and regional Rural Pact models** in Czechia, Spain, Flanders (Belgium) illustrate concrete examples of how the Pact is being established and implemented across Europe.
- > Tailoring the Rural Pact's common framework to fit national realities, requires strong **political commitment** at the national and regional levels.

Welcome and introduction to the day

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

The meeting objectives:

- > Inform about the **latest policy developments** and inter-institutional discussions on the future of rural areas and communities;
- > Discuss RPCG members' dissemination and advocacy actions, including on disseminating the [RPCG Declaration](#) and promoting the Rural Pact commitments;
- > Inform about the latest activities of the **Rural Pact** and exchange on how to further strengthen it;
- > Provide an update on future RPCG relevant activities under the Rural Pact and on the [Rural Pact Conference](#) (16-17 September 2025).



The meeting also gave the opportunity to welcome the representatives of the forthcoming Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the EU as new members.

Policy and interinstitutional landscape for rural areas and communities

Latest EC policy developments and next steps

Nicola de Michelis, Director, DG REGIO (European Commission)



The European Commission's proposal for the **mid-term review of cohesion policy and funding** takes account of the latest global developments and crises – such as the ones on housing and energy – since the adoption of the 2021-2027 programmes. This involves an assessment by managing authorities of whether regional priorities defined at the start of programming can shift towards the **five European Union's (EU) priorities: defence; water management; housing; energy; and competitiveness.**

A potential shift of regional resources towards these priorities can lead to a series of disruptions that could be mitigated by the proposal currently under discussion. These include higher EU co-financing, extended implementation deadlines, and flexibility in the programme implementation. The proposed revision of the EU regulations shall be decided by the end of summer. These proposals are an opportunity to adapt to challenges.

Mario Milouchev, Director, DG AGRI (European Commission) ([PPT](#))



The **Vision for Agriculture and Food**, published in February 2025, sets out four strategic objectives: **strengthening attractiveness; ensuring sustainability; improving competitiveness and resilience; and promoting fairness.** The main aims are to support viable farm incomes, align food systems with ecological limits, and foster inclusive and well-connected rural communities. The Vision represents the European Commission roadmap to guide the future of food and farming in Europe by responding to unprecedented geopolitical and climatic challenges.

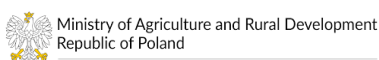


The commitments related to rural areas include: strengthening local action through tools such as LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages; updating the EU Rural Action Plan; strengthening the Rural Pact; implementing rural proofing; developing the definition of functional rural areas; and addressing gender gaps through a dedicated platform for women in agriculture.

Looking ahead, the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should prioritise food security, a simplified and better-targeted common agricultural policy (CAP), and fair income support for farmers.

Overall priorities for rural areas of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU

Magdalena Krawczak-Rybczyk, Head of Unit, Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development ([PPT](#))



The Polish Presidency emphasised several dimensions that align with the ambitions of the Rural Vision and the Rural Pact. The main priorities of the Presidency include: maintaining the current structure of the CAP with sufficient funding; improving synergies between policies having an impact on rural development; recognising the value of the LEADER/CLLD approach; and ensuring adequate infrastructure to advance digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas.

As shown in the exchanges of view in the AGRIFISH Council, the Polish Presidency emphasised the **importance of rural proofing** as an instrument to be applied across all EU policies and funds beyond 2027 to promote sustainable rural development. Rural proofing should remain voluntary for Member States, without increasing administrative burden.

Own-initiative report on strengthening the role of rural areas through cohesion policy

Denis Nesci, Member of the European Parliament, COMREGI



The own-initiative report (INI) sends a strong message on strengthening support to rural areas: "It is time to stop treating rural areas as invisible. For too long, these areas have been neglected and seen as peripheral".

The report is structured around **three strategic priorities**:

- > Cohesion policy must **recognise the peculiarity of rural areas** through flexible tools, dedicated resources and a vision that announces the vocation of those territories;
- > The **central role of infrastructures** needs to be recognised and strengthened: people cannot live and work without roads and efficient mobility, broadband, and modern schools;
- > It is essential to **enable rural youth to develop** sustainably and harmoniously by ensuring adequate support to innovative activities, such as start-ups and craftsmanship.

The report also highlighted that rural policy must involve the grassroots – local communities and Local Action Groups (LAGs) from the start.

Reactions from RPCG members

- > Members called for greater alignment between the CAP and cohesion policy, formal rural proofing mechanisms, and higher political visibility of rural development in the next MFF.
- > Integrated funding mechanisms and coordinated monitoring tools are needed to enhance policy coherence.
- > Harmonising eligibility criteria, monitoring systems, and administrative procedures are necessary to avoid duplication and fragmentation.
- > Further European Commission guidance on implementing integrated funding mechanisms under shared management is needed.
- > Rural priorities must be embedded in EU funding as part of the post-2027 programming period.

Maximising the impact of the RPCG Declaration: past and future actions by RPCG members and RPSO

Moderation: Edina Ocsko, Vice Chair of the RPCG

The session took stock of progress and outlined strategic next steps for translating the Rural Pact Coordination Group's Declaration into tangible actions. This session pursued two key objectives:

- > Review **what has been achieved** so far in terms of dissemination of the Declaration;
- > Discuss how RPCG members can **achieve enhanced impact**, beyond dissemination, to influence ongoing policy discussions at the EU level.

Overview of actions proposed and implemented by RPCG members

Based on the two exercises ([PPT](#)) proposed to RPCG members during the meeting, the participants judged that the RPCG Declaration is a useful tool for them to influence policy and that to a certain extent they could influence policy at different levels (EU, national, regional, local). Besides, most of the actions proposed to disseminate the Declaration after its publication in December 2024 are either completed or on going.

RPCG members representing various stakeholder networks provided an overview of their initiatives:

- > The Smart Village Network (SVN) held awareness-raising events to promote the Declaration targeted at Rural Pact members and wider interested audience ([PPT](#));
- > ERCA held an awareness-raising webinar together with SVN on the Declaration;
- > ECOLISE focuses on sustainability and climate-resilient transitions through community-led actions ([PPT](#));
- > ELARD implemented dissemination actions towards all members in 30 European countries and at national level ([PPT](#));
- > Rural Youth Europe presented the Declaration at the experts' seminar in Romania (April 2024) and during the European Youth Event in Strasbourg (June 2025).

RPSO contribution to the dissemination of the Declaration – past and future actions

Veneta Quoibion, Rural Pact Support Office ([PPT](#))

RURAL PACT A **Declaration dissemination package** includes: translations of the text – full and short versions – to all EU official languages; ready-to-use news texts; Power Point presentation providing an overview of the key points and value of the Declaration; social media posts and visuals.

- > The dissemination package is at the disposal of RPCG members to use as appropriate; the RPSO can provide additional dissemination support as needed.
- > The two main objectives of RPSO communication are:
 - **Informing the broader Rural Pact community** (ongoing dissemination since March 2025 through the full range of the Rural Pact digital media); and
 - **Mobilising multipliers** (involvement of RPSO national experts; highlighting the availability of the Declaration and its key messages at stakeholder events and meetings).

Reactions from RPCG members

- > The Declaration would benefit from **further dissemination and communication** through: user-friendly tools such as multilingual summaries; national press releases; interactive community workshops; storytelling campaigns; youth-focused materials; and school-based engagement programmes.
- > A **wide range of valuable actions** are already in place, but an **open, collaborative, and ambitious approach needs to be maintained** through **coordinated messaging and tailored support** aligned with RPCG member needs.
- > Examples of activities include a collaborative event with local schools to promote the Rural Pact's vision, cross-border forum with stakeholders from neighbouring regions, podcasts, local exhibitions, and thematic panels on digital inclusion, youth participation, and rural innovation.
- > The practical integration of the Declaration into rural policy and funding instruments, involves **RPCG members acting as ambassadors** through:
 - **enhanced outreach to underrepresented rural areas and marginalised groups**, ensuring co-ownership and grassroots' awareness; and
 - **partnership building** to ensure the Declaration becomes a reference point for national and European rural strategies.



Strengthening the Rural Pact at the national and regional level

Moderation: Radim Sršen, Chair of the RPCG

Czech National Rural Pact

Radim Sršen, Chair of the RPCG (PPT)



MINISTRY
OF REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT CZ

The [Czech Ministry of Regional Development](#) launched the [National Rural Pact for Czechia](#) in 2022. Its mission was to involve all rural development practitioners in the country in order to enable structured dialogue and cooperation that can help achieve the country's five rural development goals, as set out in its [Rural Development Concept](#).

The Ministry plays a central role in coordinating [rural issues and regional development policies](#). It oversees the management of EU cohesion policy funds and implements programmes that target rural revitalisation and reduce regional disparities.

Czechia's governance model includes multi-level coordination, stakeholder engagement, and strategic collaboration with Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the National Rural Network. The country advocates for continued support for multi-funded CLLD in the post-2027 period, which it considers a model for EU cohesion policy.

Integrated Action Plans to combat depopulation in Spanish rural areas

Cristian García Alonso, Vice-Deputy Director-General of Coordination and Initiatives against Depopulation, MITECO (PPT)



The [Spanish Integrated Action Plans](#) to combat depopulation are coordinated by the [Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge](#). The Plans address demographic challenges such as low fertility, ageing populations, and extreme territorial imbalance, with over 80% of rural municipalities facing depopulation.

Spain's comprehensive policy framework includes in particular: integrated rural development supported under the 2021-2027 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the '30 Minutes per Country' action plan based on the rule that citizens, wherever they live, especially in rural areas, have all essential services available within less than 30 minutes (health, education, banking, etc). Examples of projects include '[Rural campuses](#)' (student internships), Territorial Innovation Centres, and data tools such as '[SIDAMUN](#)'.

The projects must follow territorial strategies and cross-sectoral mechanisms, and demonstrate regional cooperation. The approach – aimed at inclusive and evidence-based rural regeneration – involves all levels of government and civil society, based on strong coordination and financial support.

The Flemish Rural Pact

Kevin Grauwels, Head of Unit and Stephanie Van Opstal, Policy Officer, Flemish Land Agency, Belgium (PPT)



Flanders' approach to implementing the Rural Pact model includes a multi-level governance model, combining regional coordination with strong local engagement through municipalities, NGOs, and Local Action Groups (LAGs). This ensures translation of real local needs and strong stakeholder ownership in rural development policy. The Flemish model is an example of how locally led strategic initiatives, aligned with EU objectives and supported by cohesive governance, can deliver significant results for rural areas.

The [Flemish Rural Pact](#) is structured around five themes: a multifunctional open space; attractive living environment; welcoming rural community; economic activity and innovation; and strong local

governance. Initiated in March 2025, its development will be rolled out in several phases (definition of scope and themes; forward-looking vision; concrete actions and policy measures; and implementation) and culminate in a concrete action plan, expected in spring 2026.

Overview of RPSO actions aimed at strengthening the Rural Pact

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

Rural Pact Support Office activities include:

- > Promoting Rural Pact commitments by both [stakeholders](#) and [public authorities](#);
- > Developing [country-specific information](#) overviewing actions that contribute to advancing the Rural Pact across EU Member States and structured around the ingredients identified in the Policy Briefing '[Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States](#)';
- > Enhancing the Rural Pact at all levels relying on key multipliers such as RPCG members, EU initiatives and networks, and RPSO national experts.

Reactions from RPCG members

- > Greater involvement of national and regional governments is necessary to formalise commitments and integrate the Rural Pact's objectives into policy frameworks.
- > Local-level workshops, expanding stakeholder engagement to include NGOs, universities, and grassroots rural actors, and using digital tools, such as webinars, are needed to reach out to rural communities.
- > Enhanced support from the Rural Pact Support Office, including user-friendly communication tools, peer-to-peer exchange platforms, and coordination support is necessary to strengthen local advocacy and ensure the success of the Pact at all levels of governance.

Future activities under the Rural Pact

Update on the Rural Pact Conference

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

RURAL PACT The Rural Pact Conference will take place in a rural area in Belgium (Pecq) on 16-17 September 2025, with a clear focus on mobilising and exchanging with the **Rural Pact Community**. The event is intended as both a **policy dialogue and a networking opportunity**, enabling the translation of bottom-up contributions in EU-level strategies.

The Conference will include policy panels, networking corners and thematic working group discussions to advance the Rural Vision 2040, inform the update the Rural Action Plan and guide Rural Pact actions and future policies.

RPCG members' activities and events

- > [European Rural Parliament \(ERP\) opinion paper on the Vision for Agriculture](#) (ERCA);
- > Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and ERP creating an agreement framework for strengthened long-term collaboration;
- > LEADER Congress on 'Generation renewal in rural areas: How LAGs can support local communities in addressing crises' (March 2026, ELARD);
- > New [Rural Pact Community Group on rural tourism](#) (Ruraltour) (PPT);
- > Conference of rural youth leaders (2026, Rural Youth Europe).

Closing of the meeting

The meeting concluded with a series of objectives for the future:

- > Advancing the Rural Pact Declaration's outreach and impact;
- > Supporting the development of national and regional Rural Pacts;
- > Mobilising stakeholders for the Rural Pact Conference;
- > Organising the sixth RPCG meeting in the last quarter of 2025;
- > Synthesising the meeting's outcomes into a consolidated report for members' review.

Members were encouraged to act as ambassadors of the Pact, share good practices, and ensure rural voices are heard at all governance levels.

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform
https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en



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