



RPCG MEETING

Highlights report



Seventh meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group

Introduction

The [seventh meeting](#) of the Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) provided an update on the European Commission's proposals for the post-2027 EU policy framework and budget; sought feedback on Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) activities in 2026 and 2027; and discussed future priorities and approaches to stakeholder engagement on rural matters.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



5 May 2026



In person



43 participants, including RPCG member representatives, DG AGRI and RPSO



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



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Main takeaways from the meeting

Strengthening the rural dimension in the future EU policy framework

- > RPCG members stressed the importance of ensuring a stronger and more visible rural dimension within the post-2027 EU framework through integrated and place-based approaches addressing wider rural challenges beyond agriculture. Rural needs and priorities need to be reflected in the future National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).
- > The European Commission highlighted ongoing work to better reflect rural needs within the European Semester country specific recommendations and the CAP national recommendations, while presenting the 'right to stay' strategy and updated Rural Action Plan as key future policy developments for rural territories.
- > Representatives of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU highlighted Ireland's intention to prioritise integrated national and regional (whole-of government) approaches for the development of rural areas as well as LEADER. Additionally, a High-Level Rural Policy Forum in Ireland –planned for 3-4 November 2026 – will provide an opportunity to continue these discussions at EU level.
- > Interventions from the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and European Economic and Social Committee highlighted broad institutional support for a strong rural dimension in future EU policies, including through integrated territorial approaches, rural proofing, multilevel governance and place-based instruments such as LEADER and Smart Villages.

Maintaining an EU-level governance and dialogue space for rural areas

- > The RPCG was recognised as a unique EU-level space for dialogue between institutions, rural stakeholders and civil society on integrated rural development.
- > Strong support was expressed for maintaining an EU-level governance and stakeholder dialogue structure focused on advancing the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas towards 2040 and ensuring continuity beyond the current RPCG mandate.
- > Members stressed the importance of continued formal involvement with the European Commission and EU institutions, noting that a voluntary or informal structure would weaken rural voices and the value of rural stakeholder engagement at EU level. The European Commission noted that channels for exchange and communication exist at EU and national level, and further reflections are ongoing on the post-2027 context.

Advancing Rural Pact activities in 2026 and 2027

- > Discussions with RPCG members on the 2026 RPSO work programme helped identify synergies with their activities and confirmed that the proposed direction of work broadly aligns with members' priorities and interests.
- > Future activities should continue supporting capacity building and stakeholder engagement in the future NRPPs through Policy Labs, Good Practice Webinars, national Rural Pact events, peer learning and thematic publications, as well as building an understanding of how to support the 'right to stay' strategy.
- > RPCG members highlighted the importance of strengthening stakeholder participation, particularly by involving youth, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and civil society. Additionally, they identified topics such as rural proofing, generational renewal, resilience and digitalisation as relevant for future work.

Welcome and introduction to the day

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

The seventh RPCG meeting is important in the context of the discussions on the post-2027 EU policy framework and the future of stakeholder engagement on rural issues. The main objectives of the meeting are to discuss recent policy developments, reflect on future approaches to rural dialogue and stakeholder engagement at EU level, and present the RPSO's 2026 Annual Work Programme and future planned activities.

Continuation of activities

Mario Milouchev, Director, DG AGRI, European Commission



RPCG members' contribution to rural policy discussions and stakeholder engagement over the last three years are important and appreciated. The publication of the proposals for the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the future NRPPs marks an important new phase in rural policy discussions.

The proposed future framework seeks to strengthen integrated planning across EU policies and funding instruments, while ensuring stronger synergies for rural areas. The proposed minimum 10% rural target under the NRPPs, ongoing work on territorial tracking and definitions of rural areas, and the emphasis on integrated strategies for rural areas are a sign of that.

The RPSO will continue to support Rural Pact activities in 2026 and 2027, including stakeholder engagement, capacity building and support for the preparation of NRPPs. The European Commission reiterates its commitment to maintaining dialogue with rural stakeholders through different mechanisms at EU and national levels, while reflecting on future approaches to stakeholder engagement, beyond the current RPCG mandate.



Radim Sršeň, RPCG Chair



The European Commission's decision to not renew the RPCG mandate in its current format was considered as concerning. While the Commission has the right to review governance arrangements, the RPCG is a unique space that brings together EU institutions, public authorities, civil society organisations and rural stakeholders around a common rural agenda.

The RPCG contribution to developing common positions and strengthening rural voices in EU policy debates, including through the RPCG Declaration and position paper, is evident. Maintaining a structured EU-level governance and dialogue mechanism to support integrated approaches for rural areas and accompany the implementation of the EU rural vision beyond 2027 is key.

RPCG member reactions

Additional reactions echoed the importance of maintaining strong and structured spaces for dialogue and stakeholder engagement on rural issues at EU level. Bringing together diverse rural perspectives is important to ensure that rural voices are represented in future policy discussions.

Post-2027 EU policy framework for rural areas

RPCG position paper

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



The RPCG position paper on the post-2027 EU policy framework for rural areas is the result of extensive collaboration and consensus-building among RPCG members and supporting organisations. Maintaining a strong and visible rural dimension within the future EU policy framework and recognising the opportunities offered by more integrated approaches across EU funds and policies are crucial.

The position paper outlines several key priorities:

- > Ensuring dedicated and visible support for rural areas beyond agriculture;
- > Securing a fair and proportionate share of EU funding for rural territories and communities;
- > Maintaining mandatory support for place-based and community-led approaches such as LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages;
- > Strengthening rural proofing and the partnership principle;
- > Improving territorial definitions, data and monitoring systems to better track investments reaching rural areas.



What are the new policy developments since the last RPCG meeting?

Mario Milouchev, Director, DG AGRI, European Commission



The proposed rural target under the future NRPPs – foreseeing that at least 10% of NRPP resources beyond amounts ring-fenced for CAP and CFP income support are used to invest in rural areas – is one notable development. Additional ones refer to ongoing work on a common definition of rural areas and territorial tracking mechanisms to better monitor investments reaching rural territories, as well as an increased emphasis on integrated approaches across EU policies and funding instruments.

Other noteworthy developments relate to ongoing work on CAP recommendations, the European Semester, the forthcoming 'right to stay' strategy, and the update of the EU Rural Action Plan. Finally, the growing number of political commitments under the Rural Pact by national and regional authorities is encouraging. Stakeholders should remain proactive and engaged in the ongoing legislative discussions and future policy processes concerning rural areas.

Planned actions under the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU

Michelle McKiernan, Ministry of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (Ireland) & Michael Keane, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Ireland) ([PPT](#))



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Preparations for the upcoming Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU include an intention to prioritise rural development and LEADER within discussions on the future EU policy framework. Ireland continues to support a strong and ring-fenced LEADER approach and recognises the importance of integrated approaches under the future NRPPs.

A High-Level Rural Policy Forum during the Irish Presidency – planned in collaboration with the European Commission and the Rural Pact Support Office – will focus on integrated national and regional strategies to the development of rural areas and on the future of LEADER/CLLD within the post-2027 framework.

Reflections from the European Parliament

Rosa Serrano, Member of European Parliament



Maintaining a strong rural dimension within the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and ensuring that rural territories continue to be adequately represented in future EU policy discussions are crucial. A joint letter of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee on Regional development addressed to the Commission's Executive Vice-President Raffaele Fitto and Commissioner Christophe Hansen advocates the continuation of structured stakeholder dialogue on rural issues at EU level.

The European Parliament's position on the future MFF advocates for support for strong cohesion policy resources and expresses concerns regarding the proposed governance model for the NRPPs. Safeguarding cohesion policy objectives, ensuring dedicated support for rural development and LEADER/CLLD, and promoting investments supporting rural services, connectivity, young people and women in rural areas are key.



CoR opinion: The future of rural development 2028+

Radim Sršeň, Member of the Committee of the Regions, CoR



The Committee of the Regions' [opinion on the future of rural development post-2027](#) calls for maintaining a strong cohesion policy based on multi-level governance, partnership and place-based approaches while preserving a strong territorial dimension within the future EU framework.

The opinion emphasises the need for dedicated support for rural areas beyond agriculture, stronger territorial approaches and integrated instruments such as LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages, alongside improved monitoring of investments reaching rural territories.

EESC opinion on rural proofing

Lidija Pavić-Rogošić, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, EESC (PPT)



The forthcoming EESC opinion – expected in autumn 2026 – will highlight that rural proofing should be understood as a process and a governance tool to ensure that EU policies adequately take into account the needs of and impacts on rural territories.

Developing clearer methodologies, indicators and monitoring systems for rural proofing, alongside stronger territorial impact assessments and capacity-building efforts is crucial. It is important to integrate rural proofing into future EU policies and the next Multiannual Financial Framework.



Open discussion: what are the elements of the position paper that RPCG members are going to promote to maximise its impact

It is important to promote the position paper's call for dedicated funding for rural areas beyond agriculture and ensure it contributes more effectively to all needs in rural areas, including basic services. Safeguarding ring-fenced support for LEADER/CLLD within the future framework is another key point.

Concrete actions proposed by participants to maximise the impact of the RPCG position paper include:

- > Promoting the paper through the European Rural Parliament network and upcoming stakeholder events; also link up with the work of social economy organisations;
- > Using the position paper to support advocacy and discussions at national and regional levels, including within emerging national Rural Pact initiatives;
- > Disseminating the paper through EU-level policy discussions and exchanges with the European Parliament, Member States and EU institutions;
- > Linking the messages of the position paper to the forthcoming 'right to stay' consultation and related policy processes;
- > Translating and further disseminating the paper to support outreach and advocacy activities across Member States and stakeholder networks.

The future of dialogue and stakeholder engagement on rural issues

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

RURAL PACT

Following the conclusion of the mandate of the RPCG in its current format, strong reactions were expressed by RPCG members, including disappointment and uncertainty regarding the future of the group. The RPCG has demonstrated its value through its collective work over the past three years, including the development of the position paper and coordinated advocacy efforts.

There is already a broad mobilisation taking place in support of the group, with letters and outreach from stakeholder organisations, as well as EU institutions such as the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and European Economic and Social Committee.

Open discussion: what are the key features/characteristics necessary for a space to facilitate dialogue and stakeholder engagement on rural issues at EU level

- > The RPCG was recognised as a unique space bringing together EU institutions, rural stakeholder organisations and civil society around integrated rural development issues. No other formal stakeholder space currently fulfils this role in such a holistic and cross-sectoral way.
- > It is important to maintain strong rural stakeholder engagement at a particularly important moment for discussions on the post-2027 framework, NRPPs, and the 'right to stay' strategy. Concerns exist that concluding the mandate of the RPCG without a clear alternative could weaken rural representation and reduce the momentum built over recent years.
- > The need for continued EU-level stakeholder dialogue and governance structure focused on advancing the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas (LTVRA) towards 2040 is strongly emphasised. Any future structure for rural dialogue could go beyond the Rural Pact as an

initiative and provide a broader strategic space to support integrated rural policy discussions and coordination across EU institutions and stakeholders.

- > Maintaining institutional recognition by and involvement of the European Commission and other EU institutions in any future governance structure is key. A purely voluntary or informal format would significantly reduce the influence and legitimacy of rural stakeholder engagement and their voice at EU level.
- > Future governance arrangements for rural stakeholders could get inspired by current formats organised for other EU stakeholder groups such as the Urban Agenda model. At the same time, rural issues should retain a dedicated and visible place within EU policymaking and continue promoting integrated and place-based approaches across policy areas beyond agriculture and cohesion, including housing, mobility, employment, health, democracy and youth.

The Rural Pact: 2026 Annual Work Plan and needs for the future

RPSO Y1 Annual Work Programme (2026)

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

RURAL PACT

The main priorities and activities foreseen under the 2026 RPSO Annual Work Plan revolve around a strategic focus on supporting integrated approaches for rural areas and building stakeholder capacity to engage in the future National and Regional Partnership Plans. Key planned activities for 2026 include Good Practice Webinars, Policy Labs, the High-Level Rural Policy Forum in Ireland, national Rural Pact events, publications, Community Groups and stakeholder engagement activities.

Group discussions explored potential synergies between RPCG members' work and forthcoming RPSO activities. Main results from the group discussions:

Group 1: Providing spaces for exchange and promotion of integrated strategies for rural areas, and inspiring the future NRPPs

- > Policy Labs and events should further promote integrated and cross-sectoral approaches for the development of rural areas, including stronger links between rural, urban and territorial policies, and greater attention to themes such as youth, women and intergenerational cooperation.
- > Rural competitiveness is an important topic requiring further clarification and practical examples, particularly regarding strengthening rural SMEs, supporting economic diversification and creating higher added value from local resources and territorial assets.
- > It is important to strengthen the focus on – and promotion of – good practice examples of the partnership principle and stronger involvement of Local Action Groups (LAGs), young people and rural stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of the future NRPPs.



Group 2: Build capacities of Rural Pact Community members to take a proactive role in the development of the NRPPs in their countries

- > Capacity-building activities should support communities and stakeholders in identifying and addressing structural barriers affecting generational renewal, competitiveness and resilience of rural areas, including youth employment opportunities, women entrepreneurship and the integration of newcomers into rural labour markets.
- > Communication and dissemination activities should continue promoting practical examples of stakeholder engagement, integrated territorial approaches and ambitious political commitments from national and regional authorities to inspire action across Member States.
- > Showcasing practical examples of rural youth participation in rural policymaking and entrepreneurship, vocational training and skills transfer, labour market integration, and energy transition and sustainability are outlined as important topics.
- > The role of national partners and stakeholder networks is key to increasing outreach, sharing experiences and mobilising stakeholders to actively contribute to the development of future NRPPs.

Guiding the direction of future Rural Pact activities

Participants took part in breakout group discussions to reflect on priorities for future Rural Pact activities until 2027, focusing on thematic and policy priorities, capacity-building needs and support for stakeholder engagement in the future NRPPs. Main results from the discussions are:

- > The 'right to stay' emerged as a relevant topic for the future, including building a common understanding about the concept, the future strategy and how it can be supported with concrete actions, measures, investments by the future NRPPs.
- > Youth participation and generational renewal are key priorities, including stronger involvement of rural youth in governance and policy processes. Other topics such as social economy, social innovation, biodiversity, energy, digitalisation and artificial intelligence also provoke interest.
- > Rural proofing is an important area for future work, particularly through the development of practical tools, methodologies and capacity-building activities.
- > Peer learning and exchange between Member States and regions are important, particularly regarding stakeholder participation and implementation of the future NRPPs.
- > Continued reinforcing of the work of the Rural Pact in Member States and building RP community capacity to participate in the design of the post 2027 EU policies for rural areas are key.

Relevant RPCG member activities

The following initiatives and activities were highlighted by members:

- **Smart Village Network event series on sustainable rural communities** – an [ongoing series](#) focused on food, housing and energy, combining practical community-led approaches, workshops and policy discussions, including activities on sustainable food systems and climate adaptation.

- **National rural development conference in Croatia** (March 2026) – a major rural development conference, supported by the RPSO, which discussed rural proofing and wider rural policy issues.
- **Emerging Rural Pact initiative in Hungary** – a national rural initiative led by civil society organisations, which brings together stakeholders around rural development priorities.
- **Support for local development initiatives beyond the EU** – exchange and cooperation activities with local development groups and rural stakeholders in neighbouring countries, including Armenia and Georgia, where local action structures and cooperation networks continue to operate despite difficult political contexts.

Members encouraged wider use of the Rural Pact platform to upload and promote events and initiatives, helping improve information sharing and visibility across the community.

Closing of the meeting

Radim Sršeň, RPCG Chair & Edina Ocsko, RPCG Vice-Chair



The work of the RPCG over the past three years is noteworthy, while maintaining continuity of cooperation and dialogue on rural policy beyond the current mandate of the group is crucial. The RPCG is a unique governance space bringing together EU institutions and rural stakeholder organisations around a shared rural agenda and common voice, whose work and recommendations will hopefully continue to influence future EU rural policies.

Continued coordination between institutions and stakeholders through a strong EU-level space for rural dialogue and cooperation remains a necessity. The support and constructive cooperation with the Rural Pact Support Office and the European Commission throughout the RPCG mandate over the last three years are appreciated.

Hugo Almeida, Acting Head of Unit, DG AGRI, European Commission



The commitment, constructive engagement and contributions of RPCG members to the development of rural areas over the past three years are notable and appreciated. Members are encouraged to continue contributing to EU rural discussions and initiatives through the Rural Pact and other relevant fora.

Maintaining the focus on the EU rural vision goals independently of future governance structures is important, as is a continued promotion of a positive narrative around rural areas and their role in Europe's future development and resilience.



The seventh RPCG meeting is a celebration of the achievements of the group over the past three years, and the work and contributions of Radim Sršeň, Edina Ocsko and all RPCG members are valued.

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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