



# Strengthening rural businesses for a more competitive Europe: creating value through business support, territorial assets and social economy

**17 September 2026**

## Draft agenda

| Timing (CEST) | Agenda items                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 09.00 – 09.10 | <b>Welcome and introduction to the day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Outline of the event objectives and agenda</b><br/>Patricia Martínez, Rural Pact Support Office</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 09.10 – 10.15 | <b>Setting the scene: EU initiatives supporting rural competitiveness</b> <p>Presentations of key EU policy frameworks and funding opportunities supporting rural competitiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Enterprise Europe Network: supporting SME competitiveness and growth</b><br/>Christos Skouras, DG GROW, European Commission</li> <li>&gt; <b>Connecting regional innovation ecosystems to strengthen rural competitiveness</b><br/>Magdalena Cymerys, DG RTD, European Commission (tbc)</li> <li>&gt; <b>Cohesion Policy for economic transformation and competitiveness in rural areas</b><br/>Matthew Lowell, DG REGIO, European Commission</li> <li>&gt; <b>Bioeconomy, circular value chains and local value creation in rural areas</b><br/>Carl-Johan Linden, DG AGRI, European Commission</li> <li>&gt; <b>The Social Economy Action Plan: opportunities for rural business ecosystems and entrepreneurship</b><br/>Julien De Beys, DG EMPL, European Commission</li> </ul> <p>Questions &amp; Answers</p> |
| 10.15 – 10.30 | <b>Virtual coffee break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 10.30 – 12.00 | <b>Parallel thematic exchanges: learning from practice and exploring solutions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group 1: access to finance and businesses support for rural areas</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Mobilising citizen investment to strengthen regional value chains</b><br/>Lars Kundt, Regionalwert AG, Germany</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |



- > **Supporting rural entrepreneurs through integrated business incubation and innovation**  
Olga Knez, Katapult, Slovenia
- > **Expanding access to finance and business support for rural enterprises**  
Gillian Buckley, Western Development Commission, Ireland
- **Group 2: creating value from territorial assets and rural identity**
  - > **Creating value from regional wood resources through innovation and local value chains**  
Alexander Pinter, Wood Cluster Styria, Austria
  - > **Creating value from natural assets through sustainable rural tourism: Ninemia Stay & Play**  
Demy Grypari, Ninemia Stay & Play, Greece (tbc)
- **Group 3: social economy models for rural competitiveness**
  - > **Strengthening rural competitiveness through cooperative entrepreneurship**  
Gordon Hahn, Coompanion, Sweden
  - > **Improving access to finance for rural social economy initiatives through tailored strategies**  
Mauricio O'Brien, NANOMA, Spain
  - > **Revitalising village centres through cooperative investment in local businesses and services**  
Gaëlle Cozic, Villages Vivants, France

12.00 – 12.10

Virtual coffee break

**12.10 – 12.50 Report back and stakeholder panel discussion: what is needed to strengthen rural competitiveness and diversification?**

- > Spyros Kellidis, Enterprise Europe Network
- > Marie Vial, European Microfinance Network
- > John Brosnan, Working Group on Primary Producers, Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking
- > Gianluca Pastorelli, Diesis Network

**12.50 – 13.00 Closing remarks**

- > Rural Pact Support Office
- > European Commission

