

Policy Lab

Strengthening a diversified rural economy in the post-2027 period

29 September – 01 October 2026

Kotka, Finland (Satama Areena)

Agenda

Tentative Timing (EEST)	Agenda items
29 September 2026 – Arrival and Welcome reception (Day 1)	
17:30	Shuttle from Helsinki Airport to Kotka
20:00 – 21:30	Welcome reception – hosted by the City of Kotka and the Finnish Rural Network Reception held at the Maritime Centre Vellamo in Kotka, housing the Maritime Museum of Finland Informal opening of the Policy Lab and networking among participants
30 September 2026 – Policy Lab (Day 2)	
08:30 – 09:00	Reception and welcome coffee
09:00 – 09:30	Welcome and introduction to the day > Welcoming words • Pekka Pesonen, Permanent secretary of the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry • Pierre Bascou, Deputy Director General, DG AGRI, European Commission > Introduction to the day Rural Pact Support Office
09:30 – 10:30	Setting the scene: The contribution of rural areas to a stronger and more competitive European economy > The rural economy in the post-2027 EU policy framework and the NRPPs Hugo Almeida, DG AGRI, European Commission > Drivers of a thriving and resilient rural economy Teemu Makkonen, University of Eastern Finland > Service provision and growth Michelle Marshalian, Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Commission > France – measures to boost the rural economy Christelle Bream, Agence National de la Cohésion et des Territoires (ANCT)
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 12:30	What are the main needs (including in eastern border regions) to boost the rural economy, and how to address them (round 1) <u>Group discussions</u> • Group 1: Strengthening the competitiveness and sustainable growth of rural economies Examples of practices to animate the discussion and group work • Luis González Sánchez, Cáceres Chamber of Commerce (Spain) – “Diputación Impulsa” and the Cáceres Investor Hub



- [Tuomo Puhakainen](#), Rajakuitu OY (Finland): Broadband connection of rural areas in Finland's border areas
- [Nicola Zanca](#), Municipality of Gaiba (Italy): Actions by the municipality of Gaiba to attract businesses

- **Group 2: Capitalising on new business models and economic opportunities for rural areas**

Examples of practices to animate the discussion and group work

- [Anna-Riikka Karhunen](#), Region of Kymenlaakso (Finland): Initiatives addressing regional economic challenges
- [Cristina-Ana Iliescu](#), Asociația Colinele Transilvaniei (Romania): Transylvanian Highlands
- [Thais Maria Glod Nuñez](#), EU Climate Pact Ambassador (EU): Developing Ecological Circular Operations Systems

- **Group 3: Enhancing the attractiveness of rural areas for workers and businesses**

Examples of practices to animate the discussion and group work

- [Petra Marinko](#), Non Tox Hub Institute (Slovenia): Community involvement to address under-utilised buildings and health concerns
- [Maciej Hawryluk](#), Socio-Educational Association "Our School" (Poland): Maintaining small village schools with parents' associations
- [Kaisa Pethman](#), Vuolenkoski (Finland): Community engagement as a driver of rural life

12:30 – 13:30

Lunch break

13:30 – 15:00

Translating needs into actionable measures and investments in the future NRPPs (round 2)

> **Group 1: Strengthening the competitiveness and sustainable growth of rural economies**

Additional comments to animate the discussion and group work

- [María-José Murciano](#), Spanish Network for Rural Development (Spain) on facilitating access to finance
- [Lucy Marchal](#), Merrill Rural Network Malta (Malta) on fostering innovation
- [Juergen Raizner](#), Steinbeis Network (EU / Romania) providing a view from investors

> **Group 2: Capitalising on new business models and economic opportunities for rural areas**

Additional comments to animate the discussion and group work

- [Jose Paulo Ribeiro Peixoto de Queiros](#), CIM Alto Minho (Portugal): Meeting business needs through coordinated investments
- [François Michel](#), Bouge ton CoQ! (France): Local and better food – supporting local communities
- [Georghe Cristian Popescu](#), Politehnica Bucharest (Romania): New opportunities in the circular economy



> **Group 3: Enhancing the attractiveness of rural areas for workers and businesses**

- [Patrícia Zölleiová](#), RegioDev (Slovakia): Improving the employability of adults
- [Mauricio O'Brien](#), NANOMA cooperative (Spain): Design and accompaniment of financing strategies for social economy entities
- [Stefania Molinari](#), Slow Food Bologna (Italy): Creating local micro-economies based on abandoned rural assets

15:00 – 15:30

Coffee break

15:30 – 16:30

Conclusions, recommendations and next steps

Report back from the group work and discussion

- Rapporteurs from Finnish ministry representatives.

Panellists:

- [Antonia Husberg](#), Ministerial Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland
- [Miklós Maácz](#), Senior Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Hungary
- [Ramona Vucâne](#), Senior Expert, Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development, Latvia

16:30 – 17:00

Closing remarks

> **Next steps**

Rural Pact Support Office

> **Closing words**

- [Sanna Sihvola](#), Unit for Rural Development, Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- [Hugo Almeida](#), DG AGRI, European Commission

Evening Programme

17:15 – 18:15

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences XAMK, Kotka Campus

Optional visit to the new campus of this polytechnic institute specialising i.a. in maritime and logistics, as well as health and social care, with facilities including an ambulance simulator.

19:00

Networking dinner – hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Dinner held at Villa Meriniemi, Kotka

Brief interventions from:

- [Pekka Pesonen](#), Permanent secretary of the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- [Ville Laakso](#), Kotkanravintolat Ltd.
- [Mikko Suur-Uski](#), Takatalo & Tompuri Brewery

01 October 2026 – Study visits with the Finnish Rural Network (Day 3)

08:30 – 09:00

Departure to the field visits



Funded by
the European Union

09:00 – 13:00

Field visits to rural economy initiatives in Finland

Site visits organised by the Finnish Rural Network across Southeast and Southern Finland. The journey starts in Kotka at 08:30 and concludes at Helsinki Airport at 14:00 EEST.

During the field visit, participants will explore the Finnish countryside and examine what **'Right to Stay'** means in practice from the perspectives of entrepreneurs and local communities as well as rural innovation, civil preparedness and security of supply. The visit will also provide an opportunity to learn about the role of EU funds in supporting the development of Finnish rural areas, including in the eastern border region context.

During the visits participants will meet:

- examples of initiatives that are ensuring that the population is prepared and resilient in case of emergency situations - [Ritva Pihlaja](#), Finnish Village Movement Association and [Siru Ahopelto](#), Kymenlaakso Villages Association
- a cultural entrepreneur in Pyhtää who has turned the community's old administrative hub into the Pyhtää Culture House, a venue for concerts and a centre for local cultural activities - [Vesa Ristimäki](#), Pyhtää Culture House; Mayor [Terhi Lindholm](#), Municipality of Pyhtää; [Marjo Tolvanen](#), LAG Sepra
- a local businessman who has restored the historic Strömfors Ironworks into a tourism destination as well as an incubator for business activities - [Aleksi Uusitalo](#), Strömforsin Ruukki, Run Group; [Päivi Muurikainen](#), Strömfors Business Park; [Miika Hämäläinen](#), Cupbio Ltd; [Pekka Ropa](#), Kymifloor Ltd.

Lunch will be provided during the trip, followed by the transfer of all participants to Helsinki Airport.

Transfers to Helsinki airport

Participants in the field visits will transfer to Helsinki airport, estimated time of arrival at the airport around 14:00 EEST

