Designing a comprehensive policy response to address rural needs and opportunities in the future NRPPs

Mario Milouchev, European Commission, DG Agriculture and rural development

High-level rural policy forum – «Europe's rural Future – Responding to rural priorities through integrated national and regionals strategies and LEADER»

Naas (Ireland), 3 November 2026



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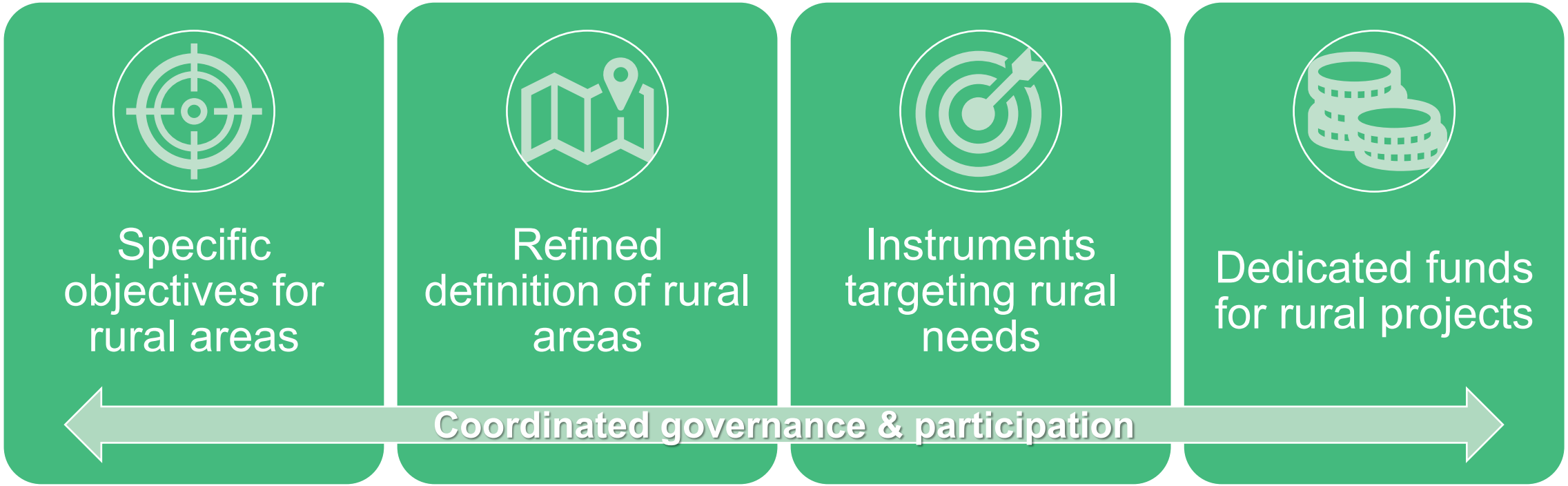
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Why do we need integrated strategies for the development of rural areas?



Holistic strategies improve coherence and effectiveness

*"The analysis finds generally a **deeper integration of CAP and other EU funding sources in Member States implementing holistic strategies** or frameworks for rural areas, going beyond demarcation prominent in most other Member States."* [Study on funding for EU rural areas, 2024]



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How is the new framework for EU policies for 2028-2034 promoting a more integrated approach for rural areas?



Specific policy objectives addressing rural areas

Art. 3 NRP Reg. *Specific objectives of the Fund*
Commission proposal July 2025

(a) To support the Union's **sustainable prosperity** across all regions

(b) To support the Union's defence capabilities and security across all regions

(c) To strengthen **social cohesion** by supporting people and strengthening the **Union's societies** and the Union's social model

(d) To sustain the **quality of life** in the Union

(e) To protect and strengthen fundamental rights, **democracy**, the rule of law and to uphold Union values by

(i) Fostering the attractiveness of territories to support the **right to stay** including by supporting **strategies for the integrated development of urban and rural areas,** including support for territorial services and infrastructure.

(iii) Improving the **attractiveness and living standards, including access to healthcare**, in rural areas and fair work conditions and fostering generational renewal; improving farmers' preparedness and ability to cope with crisis and risks; enhancing the access to knowledge and innovation and accelerating the digital and green transition for a thriving agri-food sector.

Inviting a comprehensive policy response to develop thriving rural areas

1. Addresses the **specific needs, challenges and opportunities** of diverse rural areas
   - Unlocks **enabling conditions** (access to services, infrastructure, connectivity)
   - And **invests in potential**: place-sensitive **competitiveness, business, skills, innovation**

2. Develops an **integrated planning,** ensuring **complementarity and synergies** across policies
   - **E.g. Health:** Investments in local health centres & measures to attract doctors (housing, mentoring) & reform to improve training of GPs for rural practice
   - **E.g. Digital**: Investments in broadband & measures to increase digital skills & support for digital innovation in businesses

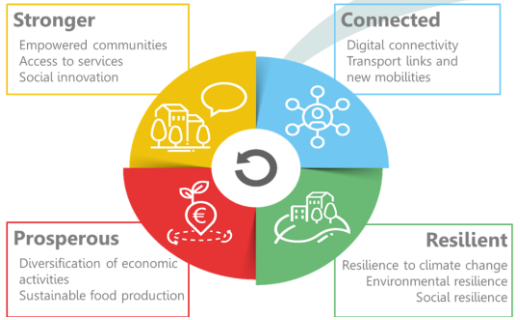
3. Funds through **appropriate instruments** considering the **capacities** of beneficiaries
   - **Territorial instruments: LEADER/CLLD**, ITIs, etc.
   - **Other instruments:** smaller & simpler, multi-sectoral/multi-service, securing community benefits

4. Coordinates through adequate cross-sectoral **governance structures**

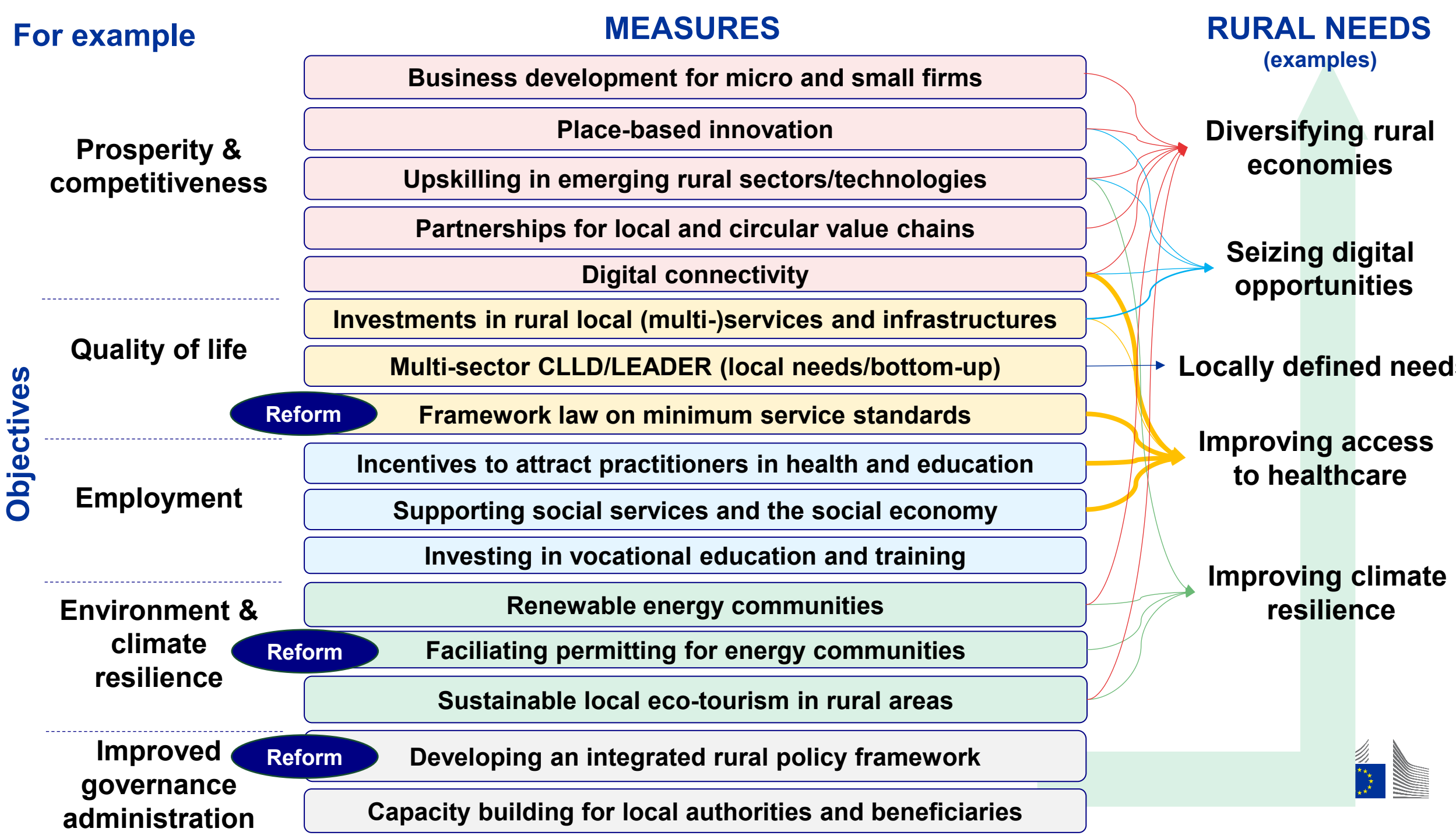
5. **Builds capacities** for both administrations and beneficiaries

6. **Engages early and meaningfully with rural authorities and stakeholders** in the partnership of all relevant chapters

The EU rural vision: Shared rural goals by 2040






For example
MEASURES
RURAL NEEDS
(examples)
Objectives
Prosperity & competitiveness
Quality of life
Employment
Environment & climate resilience
Improved governance administration
Business development for micro and small firms
Place-based innovation
Upskilling in emerging rural sectors/technologies
Partnerships for local and circular value chains
Digital connectivity
Investments in rural local (multi-)services and infrastructures
Multi-sector CLLD/LEADER (local needs/bottom-up)
Reform
Framework law on minimum service standards
Incentives to attract practitioners in health and education
Supporting social services and the social economy
Investing in vocational education and training
Renewable energy communities
Reform
Faciliating permitting for energy communities
Sustainable local eco-tourism in rural areas
Reform
Developing an integrated rural policy framework
Capacity building for local authorities and beneficiaries
Diversifying rural economies
Seizing digital opportunities
Locally defined needs
Improving access to healthcare
Improving climate resilience

A rural target to ensure continuity of targeted investments in rural areas

Proposal from the Commission to the co-legislators (Nov 2025)

Objective:

- Ensure that rural areas **continue to benefit from targeted investments in their development**.
- MS and regions are expected to build a **consistent set of measures addressing rural areas' specific needs and challenges**, building on **synergies across all policy areas**.

Allocation:

- **10% of each plan's NRP envelope***
- **EUR 48,7 billion** > EU 63,7 billion if loans are used

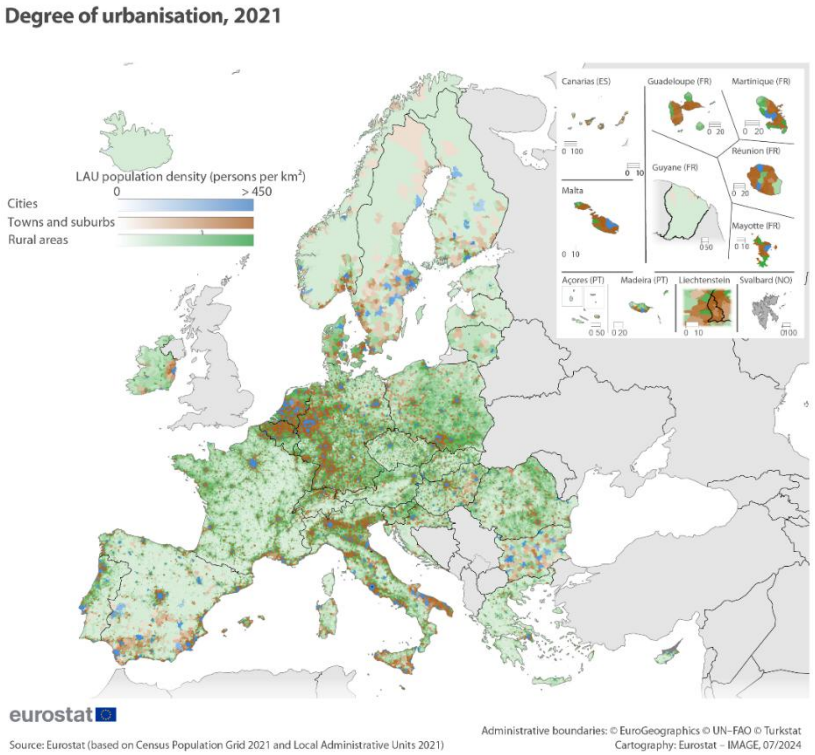
In practice:

- Measures counting towards the rural target should be tagged with territorial code "**02-rural areas**".
- Sum of EU Funding allocation of tagged measures > target

** total Union allocation including Catalyst Europe loans, excluding the social climate fund, the EU facility and minimum amounts for CAP and CFP income support to agriculture and fisheries.*

Rural target > Under discussion in the negotiation (Council and Parliament)

Should there be a common definition of ‘rural areas’?



European typology ‘Degree of urbanisation’
Rural areas: **25% of population – 75% of land**

Should the scope & focus be further defined?

Continuity of most relevant measures?

- Investments in basic services and small infrastructure
- CLLD/LEADER & other forms of cooperation
- Rural business creation and development
- Knowledge, advice, and innovation
- Capacity building

Making room for a comprehensive policy response?

- Examples: entrepreneurship, local tourism, agrifood, renewable energy communities, social services, housing, mobility on-demand, local healthcare etc.

Excluding things that are less relevant?

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How is the Commission supporting Member States to move to a more integrated approach?



Steering, building capacities and inspiring

Steering — The reference policy framework

- **CAP recommmendations**
- **European Semester**
- & more…

Capacities — Networking, assistance, peer-learning

- **Official training** sessions and expert groups
- **Rural pact events** and networking activities
- **Cooperation** with the **OECD** on rural strategies & the rural dimension of NRPPs
- **European community of practice on the partnership principle (ECOPP)**

Resources — Data, good practices & more

- **Data**: Rural Europe Statistics explained + Rural observatory
- **Good practices**: Rural Pact, EU CAP network, Compendium of good practices on partnership (ECOPP)
- **Integrated strategies**: Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States; OECD Principles on Rural Policy | OECD

Final thoughts & takeaways

- **Rural areas have potential:** success is possible if we jointly **address the bottlenecks and invest** in these areas potential

- **NRPPs are a great opportunity to enhance support**:
  - More **comprehensive**, better **coordinated** multi-level policies for rural areas
  - **Synergies** between **investments** and combination with **reforms**
  - In **genuine partnership with rural communities**

- **National or regional integrated strategies for rural areas can improve coherence** and effectiveness between EU, national, regional and local action. Although not mandatory, they can:
  - ***Where they exist*** – facilitate the design & implementation of the NRPP.
  - ***Where they do not exist yet*** - be developed in complemenntarity with the NRPPs and building on the partnership and reflection for the NRPPs.

- Some have already done such strategies, **let's get inspired!**

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Thank you


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EUROPE'S BUDGET

Building stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural communities

JUNE 2026

Rural areas cover three quarters of the European Union's territory and are home to one in four Europeans. They play an important role in Europe's economy, environment, and quality of life.

Under the proposed 2028–2034 budget, the European Commission is renewing its commitment to rural areas to help Europe respond to their economic, environmental, and social challenges while supporting communities across the Union.

The proposal would bring together different sources of EU funding, including support for farmers and rural areas currently provided through the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) under a single National and Regional Partnership Plan (NRPP)** in each Member State. A dedicated spending target for rural areas has been proposed to ensure the future plans continue investing in rural territories.


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EUROPE'S BUDGET

Unlocking synergies integrating EU funding for farming and rural communities

JANUARY 2026

Fostering links within and between EU funding instruments is a key principle for the 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework (MFF).

The more integrated programming framework under the new National and Regional Partnership (NRP) Plans for 2028-2034 seeks to increase efficiency and impact on the ground, strengthening complementarities across EU spending.

Integrated programming under the NRP Plans means **looking at challenges in holistic terms, rather than from the point of view of funding sources**. It brings together different policies and funding streams to address the real needs of a specific territory or a sector—such as jobs, services, infrastructure and quality of life—in a coordinated way. This helps ensure that investments reinforce each other and maximise impact for larger groups and more sectors.


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EUROPE'S BUDGET

Seizing the Opportunity: Reforms for Agriculture and Rural Areas under the 2028–2034 MFF

SEPTEMBER 2026

To maximise the impact of EU spending at national and regional level in the next 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), Member States should use the National and Regional Partnership (NRP) Plans to embed structural reforms alongside investments and agricultural income support. This will create a powerful new lever to modernise the conditions under which the farming sectors operate, and to unlock the full potential of EU support for rural communities[1].

By pairing well-designed reforms with targeted investments through the NRP Plans, **Member States can ensure that EU funding does more than finance projects and support agricultural incomes**, it changes the conditions under which those projects succeed. The agriculture and rural development sector can highly benefit from this opportunity.

More information on our factsheets on rural communities, synergies and reforms