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GOOD PRACTICE WEBINAR

Highlights report


Rural communities tackling climate change


Introduction


This Good Practice Webinar, organised in collaboration with the [European Climate Pact](#), showcased EU-level initiatives and local experiences to help anticipate and mitigate the impacts of climate change in rural areas, and adapt to the changes that are inevitable.


The webinar provided opportunities to: analyse a range of successful community-led initiatives across European rural areas, which address climate issues locally; exchange experiences and good practices; and build further engagement in rural communities.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office

 20 March 2024

 Online

 75 participants from 26 EU Member States and 2 non-EU countries (local project developers and implementers of climate change initiatives in rural areas, including project holders in local communities, regional and national private and public actors, experts and researchers, other EU-funded projects)

 Presentations & recordings ([here](#))



If you see this icon, click to watch the recording

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The Rural Pact and the place of tackling climate change in the rural vision

Silvia Nanni (DG AGRI) ([PPT](#))



One of the shared goals of the [Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#) is to support “flourishing sources of nature, enhanced by and contributing to the objectives of the Green Deal, including climate neutrality, as well as sustainable management of natural resources”.

Several of the flagship actions of the [EU Rural Action Plan](#), under ‘resilient’ pillar, address climate change. The flagship on ‘Support rural municipalities in the energy transition and fighting climate change’ is coordinated by the European Commission’s department responsible for the EU’s energy policy ([DG ENER](#)) and includes projects relevant to climate change in rural areas under the [New European Bauhaus](#).

The flagship on ‘Climate action in peatland through carbon farming’ is coordinated by the European Commission’s department leading the fight against climate change ([DG CLIMA](#)). The action promotes carbon farming business models to help sequester carbon and provide an additional source of income. The ‘EU mission: a soil deal for Europe’ flagship action, funded under the EU’s research and innovation programme [Horizon Europe](#), focuses on developing living labs to improve soil health across Europe.

Setting the scene: EU initiatives to foster the fight against climate change in rural areas

Climate Chance Europe 2024 Wallonia – Liège Declaration of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU

Céline Tellier, Walloon Ministry for Environment Nature, Animal Welfare and Rural Renovation ([video](#))



The [Liège Declaration](#) of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January to June 2024) is a roadmap on climate change adaptation in Europe for non-state actors. It was adopted at the Climate Chance Europe Wallonia Summit on 8-9 February 2024 in Liège, Belgium.

This declaration demonstrates a collective commitment between businesses, researchers, civil society, governments to adapting to the challenges posed by climate change. The declaration represents a call to action, rooted in the spirit of the European Green Deal, encouraging cooperation, resilience and shared responsibility for the well-being of our communities and the planet.

Supporting community-led action to build resilience against the impacts of climate change in rural areas – European Climate Pact

Laura Maanavilja, European Commission, DG CLIMA ([PPT](#))



Under the [European Climate Law](#), the EU is required to take necessary steps to achieve the 2050 climate neutrality target. The [European Climate Pact](#) is among the numerous European Commission initiatives, which brings individuals, communities and organisations together to build a more sustainable Europe and help the EU to become climate-neutral by 2050. It provides an opportunity to learn about climate change, develop and implement solutions, and connect with others.

The Climate Pact relies on more than 800 [ambassadors](#) who could collaborate with the Rural Pact.

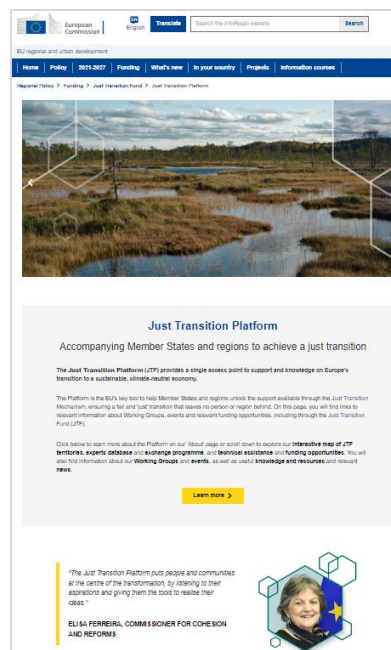
The Transition Platform and the Cohesion for Transitions

Angela Olcina Sala, European Commission, DG REGIO ([PPT](#))



The [Just Transition Platform](#) (JTP) is the key tool to help EU Member States and regions unlock support available through the [Just Transition Mechanism](#) (JTM). The platform provides the guidance, information and knowledge needed to support Europe's just transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral economy. It gives financial actors, social partners, business representatives, youth organisations and transition experts the opportunity to discuss the needs and challenges of the just transition.

The [Cohesion for Transitions Community of Practice](#) (C4T) supports the implementation of sustainability transitions under Cohesion Policy Objective 2 'A greener, low-carbon transition towards a net-zero carbon economy and resilient Europe'. It is a community-based platform that supports EU Member States and regions in making a better use of EU funds for sustainability transitions, by engaging practitioners in sharing experience and good practices, creating partnerships and jointly identifying solutions.



Renewable energy production and potential in EU rural areas

Carolina Perpiña Castillo, European Commission, JRC ([PPT](#))



This [JRC study](#) provides a quantitative assessment of the technical potential of renewable energy sources in EU's rural areas, focusing on solar, wind and hydropower. It offers relevant insights into how rural areas and communities can contribute to and benefit from the EU's green energy transition, without undermining natural areas, key biodiversity and bird areas, high-nature value farmland and food production. Moreover, a comparative analysis between current renewable energy production and potential in rural areas identifies which sustainable development trajectories for the future deployment of renewables are the most suitable in each specific territory.



Addressing linkages between building, housing, climate and social inclusion in rural areas

Solène Gautron, European Commission, JRC ([PPT](#))



The [New European Bauhaus](#) (NEB) is an interdisciplinary initiative of the European Commission that integrates the [European Green Deal](#) into our living spaces, promoting beauty, sustainability, and inclusivity. It supports rural areas' green transition, like the '[NEB Lab of the Mountains](#)' fostering collaboration for innovative solutions. [NEB Prizes](#) recognise and support rural achievements aligned with NEB values. Additionally, the [NEB's €120 million Research and Innovation facility](#) drives innovation for sustainability and inclusion in rural areas.



New European Bauhaus
beautiful | sustainable | together

Learning from inspirational projects and practices

Community-led development for Climate Justice

Kieran Harrahill, Think Tank for Action on Social Change – Tasc (IE) ([PPT](#))



The [People's Transition](#) project promotes climate justice to make climate action fair and inclusive and to address the immediate challenges faced by rural communities in Ireland. The initiative focuses on community wealth building, ownership, and community-led local development, valuing the local knowledge and experiences.

The project has worked in various communities in Ireland, revealing consistent barriers to local development, notably lack of community involvement in decision-making, insufficient local employment opportunities, and limited access to public transport. The project emphasises the importance of funding measures and policy support to enable the development of climate solutions beneficial for rural communities. It calls for collaborative efforts involving academia, organisations, and policy support to facilitate climate action and address community needs effectively.

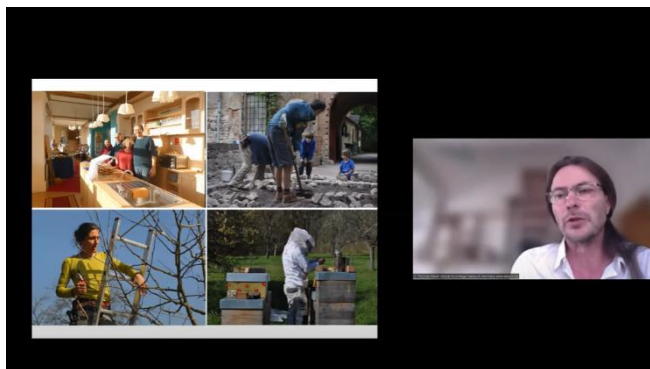
Holistic regeneration of a rural valley in Central Germany

Thomas Meier, Ecovillage Schloss Tonndorf (DE) ([PPT](#))

Starting with the Thuringia ecovillage in 2006, part of the global ecovillage network, an intergenerational group of 65 individuals created [Talvolk](#), an eco-community to combat climate change, focusing on holistic regeneration. Activities include land regeneration, job creation, cultural events, and fostering enduring community relations.

Recognising the need for broader community involvement, in 2018, the eco-community engaged eight neighbouring villages in the valley, inhabited by around 2 500 people, to implement joint regeneration projects like community-supported agriculture and multi-generational housing cooperatives. Notably, the community established a free school funded through donations.

The financial sustainability of the eco-community is ensured through donations, festivals, and a cooperative, investing in ethical funds and income parity. It is successful locally, triggering socio-economic and regenerative change in the area, while providing inspiration for systemic change on a broader scale.



Accelerating transformative climate change adaptation for higher resilience in European mountain regions

Marie Laurent, Euromontana ([PPT](#))



Mountain areas are highly vulnerable to climate change because of their ecological sensitivity. The Horizon Europe [MountResilience](#) project works to strengthen climate adaptation in these regions.

The project operates in Austria, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Switzerland and Finland and uses a model based on demonstration and replication. The demonstrators will tackle diverse issues such as tourism, water management and pastoral activities, and will act as centres of innovation. Replicators will then apply successful strategies in similar contexts, amplifying the impact. This approach fosters collaboration and allows solutions to be tailored to local needs while maximising scalability and effectiveness in mountain communities.

Strengthening the adaptability of the region's nature-based livelihoods and the entire economic structure

Lotta Eriksson, Regional Council of Lapland (FI) ([PPT](#))



In Lapland – a demonstrator region of the Horizon Europe project [MountResilience](#) – the focus is on improving the adaptability of nature-based livelihoods, particularly reindeer husbandry and tourism, against a backdrop of accelerating Arctic warming.

The municipalities of Enonteki and Utsjoki, the project's pilot areas, are facing these challenges. In partnership with research institutes, tourism boards and municipalities, the project works to identify climate risks, develop regional adaptation plans and implement business-specific adaptation strategies. The project promotes stakeholder engagement through geographic information systems for public participation, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement strategies, while fostering collaboration across sectors.

Co-creation of strategic actions to adapt local areas and economies to climate change

Guillem Bagaria, Associació d'Iniciatives Rurals de Catalunya (ES) ([PPT](#))



The LIFE [eCOadapt50](#) project works to enhance climate change adaptation in the farming, forestry, fishing, and tourism sectors by engaging local stakeholders through living labs. Nineteen project territories host individual living labs with frequent meetings, fostering collaboration among public, private, research, and third-sector actors. The overall objective is to promote territorial transformation, investment, and awareness in climate change adaptation. The project carries out vulnerability assessments and local action plans to integrate climate change adaptation into public and private policies, facilitating access to funding and promoting green insurances.

Model Regions in Austria: empowering regions for climate mitigation and adaptation

Michaela Niederhofer, Climate and Energy Fund (AT) ([PPT](#))



In line with the Paris Agreement and its emphasis on the dual pillars of international climate policy – mitigation and adaptation – Austria established two complementary programs: [KEM Climate and Energy Model Regions](#) and [KLAR! Climate Change Adaptation Model Regions](#).

KEM, launched in 2009, supports regions in transitioning to renewable energy sources and bolstering energy efficiency. KLAR!, initiated in 2016, assists regions in climate change adaptation and seizing related opportunities. Both programs operate through a bottom-up approach, requiring municipal contributions and fostering collaboration. Key success factors include robust implementation strategies, local leadership, and stakeholder engagement, facilitated by ongoing training, networking, and expert consultation.

Tackling depopulation challenges to improve environmental resilience in rural areas

Jorge M. Blanco Ballón, Galician Rural Development Agency (ES) ([PPT](#))

Addressing rural depopulation and its environmental impacts, the Interreg Europe [Down to Earth](#) project enables exchange of best practices among six regions to enhance their institutional capacities to design and manage regional development policies with reinforced effectiveness.

During the first year of activity, the project focused on identifying and mitigating environmental risks related with depopulation and ageing population in rural areas, such as soil erosion and loss of biodiversity, which was materialised in the publication of six [Regional Reports](#) and a [Thematic Report](#). Key recommendations include coordinated strategic planning for basic services, promoting initiatives in primary sectors and renewable energy, and enhancing public participation.

Moreover, multifunctionality and ecosystem services are considered crucial for sustainable territorial management. By fostering technology, entrepreneurship, and urban-rural links, the project strives to attract population and strengthen rural communities amidst demographic challenges.

Moving forward in addressing climate change at local level – group discussions

Group 1: Awareness-raising of rural communities to identify and address climate challenges

Farm to Fork Academy for Green Western Balkans – Our shared European Future

Lira Hakani, Albanian Network for Rural Development (AL) ([PPT](#))



The [Farm to Fork Academy](#) is an EU-funded, four-year project (2023-2027), led by the Albanian Network for Rural Development and jointly implemented by the family of National Rural Development Networks. It addresses pressing climate challenges in seven Western Balkan countries, including EU member states such as Croatia.

Civil society organisations (CSO) and networks play a crucial role in addressing societal challenges, monitoring government accountability, and building citizens' trust. However, an assessment of Western Balkan CSO capacities reveals significant gaps, with only 25% of surveyed CSOs considering current policies for sustainable agriculture effective, while awareness of key initiatives, such as the EU's Farm-to-Fork strategy and the Green Deal, remains limited.

The Farm to Fork Academy prioritises awareness-raising and capacity-building activities for CSOs, support to innovative solutions through sub-grants, and grassroots advocacy and policy development.

Climate Pact tools for citizen engagement

Betsy Vivegnis, European Commission, DG CLIMA ([PPT](#))



The [European Climate Pact](#) invites EU individuals and organisations to engage in [citizen-led activities](#) such as raising awareness, exchanging solutions, and networking, which offer visibility and recognition. Organising such activities within the Climate Pact framework provides experience in dialogue facilitation and event presentations and contributes to encouraging climate action. Participants [register](#), host, [share results](#), and disseminate outcomes to inspire others. Hosting activities leverages trusted opinions, fosters community spirit, and clarifies complex issues through everyday language, motivating collective action. Some activity ideas that can be easily run and require minimal preparation include [climate walks](#), [photo stories](#), [Local Climate Action Groups](#), and [peer parliaments](#). Joining forces through campaigns such as [ACT NOW](#) and [AWorld](#) furthers the impact, approaching the target of 500 000 climate actions by Earth Day 2024 (22 Apr 2024).

Main points from the group discussion

- > There is a need to adopt a **common language** to discuss climate issues, balancing more technical and accessible terms for rural communities. Moreover, to run successful awareness campaigns and activities, it is important to tailor messages to a particular audience and to the territorial specificities.
- > Rural communities face challenges linked to a **lack of technical knowledge and limited access to funding** when dealing with climate issues. A potential solution may involve investing in training while promoting climate-friendly initiatives that citizens can easily implement.
- > **Collaboration with different types of stakeholders**, such as citizens, members of civil society organisations and policymakers, through living labs and local fora, can be beneficial for communities to foster inclusivity and lead to more comprehensive and effective solutions tailored to the specific needs of rural areas. Efforts should be made to ensure that rural residents feel heard and valued in discussions on climate.

Group 2: Building and implementing community-led initiatives as drivers for climate change capacity building by rural stakeholders

Communities for Climate: Local action to respond to climate change

Shannon Pfohman, European Association for Innovation in Local Development - AEIDL ([PPT](#))



The [Communities for Climate](#) (C4C) pilot action will support 50 community-led projects in 11 EU countries, accompanying them in the realisation of new and innovative ideas for citizen engagement in addressing climate and sustainability issues.

These projects will serve as replicable models for other local communities willing to engage in climate projects across the EU. The scope of the C4C action covers four areas: renewable energy; sustainable water management; circular and resource-efficient economy; and biodiversity.

Support and advise Local Action Groups in Spain to face the climate emergency in the territories

Raquel Pastor, Red2Red (ES) ([PPT](#))



[GALxClima](#) is a project developed by the Spanish Red2Red company with support from the [European Climate Foundation](#). Its overall objective is to strengthen the response of the rural environment to the challenges posed by the climate emergency, favouring a position of openness to change. The project promoted a training and exchange of

experience programme dedicated to Local Action Groups (LAGs).

Supporting the adoption of sustainable and cooperative business models in rural areas

Maria Dolores Mainar Toledo, CIRCE Technological Center ([PPT](#))



The [BRILIAN project](#), funded by the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking, supports the adoption of sustainable and cooperative business models in rural areas, enabling a smoother transition towards bio-based economies. Supporting this integration and promoting the bioeconomy in rural areas is a priority, particularly given

the opportunities it presents for job creation, diversifying primary producers' income, and encouraging rural regeneration.

Main points from the group discussion

- > Managing climate change still requires a **societal transformation**, the appropriation of a common language, and citizen awareness, which are based on key rural actors' commitment, capable of motivating other actors. LAGs represent this type of actor but are not the only ones.
- > Community-led initiatives addressing climate change are numerous and mounting, but it is important to **develop synergies** among them by activating coordinated strategic planning at regional and local levels. Exchange of experience and practices should be strengthened through demonstrator and replicator initiatives, living labs, emergence of new business models, community- and citizen-led initiatives, multi-stakeholder approaches, etc.
- > For initiatives to achieve real impact, significant support is needed to transform **ideas into impactful projects (scaling-up)**. Dedicated funds and direct funding must be strengthened, including to reinforce local capacities such as co-creation working processes based on multi-stakeholder collaboration or to support managers of climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Group 3: Evidence-based local development policies in alignment with the European Green Deal and the LTVRA objectives

Vulnerability of territories and eco-climate crisis

Federica Burini, University of Bergamo (IT) ([PPT](#))



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI BERGAMO

The research work carried out by the University of Bergamo focuses on an in-depth analysis of the links between the vulnerabilities of territories and the eco-climate crisis. It highlights greater socio-environmental impacts in rural areas, particularly due to governance challenges, such as slower decision-making processes in the face of crises.

To respond to these challenges, the research work done by the University of Bergamo proposes to develop visions for the future of rural areas based on the concept of justice. These visions support a systemic approach to the development of rural territories, promoting networking strategies for better governance.

Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes

Petri Kahila, University of Eastern Finland (FI)



UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND

The Horizon Europe project [RUSTIK](#) is a transdisciplinary research project to enable rural community actors and policymakers to design better strategies, initiatives and policies fostering sustainability transitions of rural areas.

In view of increasing social and ecological challenges, the project envisages an analysis of current adaptation requirements and the support of effective rural policymaking processes. The project will contribute to an advanced understanding of different rural functionalities and characteristics as well as the potentials and challenges of rural areas.

Main points from the group discussion

- > Local climate change policies must be based on **evidence from reliable data obtained through advanced technologies and local knowledge**. Obtaining local data on the basis of which to develop a diagnosis of the situation needs to be improved. This is a call for strengthening rural proofing at the local level.
- > **Connecting several policies and instruments with local cooperative action** is key to ensure that the local policies respond to the needs of the stakeholders in tackling climate change. Such a renewed local governance needs to be practice-oriented and strengthen the coordination of policies and instruments in place through collective local action plans.
- > There is a need to strengthen **capacities at local level** to drive participatory processes and in achieving consensus so to develop bottom-up strategic action and initiatives. Given the complexity of the topic and solutions needed, many rural communities require support to enhance their technical capacities to design and implement suitable projects to their contexts. Grouping several municipalities or villages would have an accelerating effect in driving initiatives by aggregating resources and skills. Simplifying bureaucracy would enable local actors to dedicate more time and energy on the design and implementation of initiatives on the ground.

Concluding remarks

The webinar outlined the upcoming [Rural Pact activities and events](#), as well the [upcoming report on the Rural Vision implementation](#), published on 27 March.

More information from group discussions is available on the whiteboards uploaded on the [website](#).

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



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