



GOOD PRACTICE WEBINAR



22nd EUROPEAN WEEK
of REGIONS and CITIES



Highlights report

Advancing the Rural Pact: Fostering local action for the future of rural areas

Introduction

This Good Practice Webinar was jointly organised by the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO), DG AGRI, DG REGIO and Interreg Europe in the context of the [European Week of Regions and Cities](#). It brought together around 85 participants to explore inspiring initiatives from France, Spain, and the Netherlands, which empower rural communities to achieve their ambitions. The event reflected on ways of enabling local action.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office, DG AGRI, DG REGIO, Interreg Europe



8 October 2024



Brussels (Belgium)



Around 85 (policymakers, public authorities, local practitioners, researchers, advisors, EU-funded project representatives)



Presentations ([here](#))



Welcome and framing the day

The EU's rural vision & Pact: Ways ahead

Mihail Dumitru (European Commission, DG AGRI)



Significant progress has been made in advancing the [Rural Pact](#), with notable achievements in the [Rural Action Plan](#) and numerous flagship actions delivered.

The Pact has successfully brought together a community of over 3 000 members, supported by the [Rural Pact Support Office](#) and [Rural Pact Coordination Group](#), the online [Community Platform](#), and the [Rural Revitalisation platform](#).

Additionally, important steps have been taken to put in place rural proofing at the Commission level and the [Rural Observatory](#) to collect data to inform policy decisions. Two important reports were published: the '[Study on funding for EU rural areas](#)' and '[Evaluation on the impact of LEADER on Balanced Territorial Development](#)'.

Looking ahead, a major challenge will be to mobilise financial resources in the current period, particularly ensuring the effective use of CAP, Cohesion Policy, and Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) funds. There is a strong focus on delivering positive results from these funding streams, with emphasis on making the most of the current budget cycle.

Furthermore, the future political landscape will bring new dynamics, with renewed European Parliament and Commission (expected by the end of 2024). These changes, along with key inputs from the Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture, will influence the preparation of future EU policies, including those impacting rural areas.

As priorities for the future are considered, delivering on agriculture and rural development will remain crucial. The generational renewal strategy, emerging from the Strategic Dialogue, and the European Housing Plan are expected to be important for rural areas, along with the European Water Resilience Strategy. Opportunities for rural areas will also be explored through the new Bioeconomy Strategy.

Once the new Commission is in place, efforts will focus on preparing for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the future EU policy proposals, including the CAP. LEADER/CLLD is recognised as an essential policy tool for supporting local development, and it is expected to remain a key policy instrument in the next period. Stakeholders will play a pivotal role in defining a simplified policy framework for the years ahead.

Empowering local communities to take action for the rural vision

Urszula Budzich-Tabor (Rural Pact Support Office) ([PPT](#))



The Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) has been working actively to empower local communities and foster action on the ground. Recent efforts aim to ensure that regional and local authorities recognise the added value the Rural Pact can bring to them.

The primary objective of the Pact is to amplify the voices of rural actors in policy agendas, ensuring that policies are responsive to rural needs. Additionally, the Rural Pact fosters networking, collaboration, and mutual learning, providing opportunities for rural communities to exchange experiences and solutions that can be transferred across regions. Lastly, the Pact focuses on ensuring that actions are implemented on the ground through better policy coordination at all levels.

The Rural Pact is already in place at the EU level, along with the 10 shared goals of the rural vision 2040 and Rural Action Plan. However, for the Pact to be truly effective, actions need to be implemented at the national and regional levels. To this end, the RPSO's Policy Briefing '[Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States](#)' explains the necessary steps to establish the Rural Pact at these levels.

The forthcoming RPSO Policy Briefing has a local focus, targeting both local actors and policymakers. Expected by the end of 2024, the Briefing will outline a number of 'ingredients' to add value at local

level through the Rural Pact and recommendations that can be tailored to fit national, regional, and local contexts, building on what already exists.

On one hand, local actors should organise themselves around leaders, use formal organisational structures to build consensus on a local vision and plan. To achieve this, they need support from national and regional policymakers. On the other hand, policymakers must recognise local actors as partners in policy design and implementation and support capacity building at local level. They need to ensure that all policies with an impact on rural areas – such as social, education, health and mobility – add to the support provided under traditional agricultural and rural policies and empower local communities. Simplification of funding mechanisms is another crucial factor enabling local actors to access resources.

Untapping the potential of rural communities to take action

The local vision of El Priorat to mobilise the community and plan action (Spain)

Sergi Mendez (El Priorat region, Catalonia, Spain) ([PPT](#))



Priorat, a small county in Catalonia (Spain), famous for its beautiful landscapes and wine production, faces the common challenges of depopulation, economic diversification, housing, and spatial planning. With 23 municipalities and 1 000 inhabitants, the region has adopted a strategy of self-organisation, coordination, and cooperation among policymakers and local actors to ensure efficient local governance and enable action. This participatory approach allows the community to make decisions collectively, while collaborating with relevant administrations outside the region.

Priorat successfully developed a shared local vision with common objectives and agreements between public and private agents in 2014. These ambitions were aligned with broader policy strategies, such as UNESCO World Heritage, the Catalan Rural Agenda, and LEADER strategies.

To support these efforts, the region established the Landscape and Sustainability Commission, a consultative and advisory body tasked with coordinating policies on territory, landscape, and sustainability. It is composed of six decision-making bodies providing technical support for initiatives and participatory processes. These bodies involve over 20 public and private stakeholders, such as the county council, local municipalities, the Catalan government, SMEs, private sector associations, and civil society groups.

The Commission's technical support team is responsible for implementing agreed actions, securing necessary funding, and coordinating participatory fora on topics such as agriculture, tourism, education, and culture. Current initiatives include: a local agreement for renewable energy; agricultural sector plan; deal for sustainable tourism; water charter; and strategic lines to reverse depopulation by addressing housing, economic diversification, urban planning, and fostering local development.

The Rural Pact in the Grand Est region to support local action (France)

Marie Clotteau (Grand Est-Europe - Région & collectif régional) ([PPT](#))



The 'Pacte pour les Ruralités' (Pact for Ruralities) was introduced to support the 2 million rural residents of the Grand Est region (France) where 89% of villages have fewer than 2 500 inhabitants. The Pact was adopted in April 2024 and is led by the region's president. It is a strategy developed in consultation with rural actors and mobilises EUR 800 million from both EU and regional funds to address rural needs.

The Pact outlines 100 measures across four key areas: preserving quality of life; protecting the environment and local agriculture; improving mobility in rural territories; and enhancing the attractiveness of rural areas. To improve healthcare, the strategy includes measures for hiring 39 doctors, deploying 14 medical centres and six mobile buses focused on women's health, and supporting healthy

ageing by doubling home-care training places by 2027. Additionally, new housing will be created for seniors and 400 care assistants will be trained to support the elderly in their homes.

Environmental protection and local agriculture are prioritised through measures such as biodiversity training for youth, set-up of 200 pilot farms to test sustainable agricultural practices, and planting 1 000 km of hedges. The Pact also provides for renovating 500 individual houses by 2027 and developing on-demand services, car-sharing spots, local train networks, and 15 new bike routes.

To enhance rural attractiveness, the strategy will support local food supply chains and 600 rural shops, provide vehicles for the unemployed, and encourage entrepreneurship in bioeconomy and biorefineries, aiming to establish 300 enterprises by 2027. Through its comprehensive approach, the Pact places rural issues at the forefront of the political agenda, empowers local actors with funding and capacity building, and drives concrete actions on the ground.

Governing Community Resilience ([GOCORE](#), [Interreg Europe initiative](#)), the Netherlands

Dorrit Jorritsma (Province of Friesland, the Netherlands), Richt Sterk (Province of Friesland, the Netherlands), Elena Ferrario (Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform) ([PPT](#))



This Interreg-funded project, launched in 2023, works to strengthen the resilience of local communities by fostering engagement and participation to better address current and future challenges. By promoting local social participation, including that of government representatives, the project seeks to make communities more inclusive and ensure their voices are heard, aligning it with the objectives of the Rural Pact. The initiative is built around three core principles: engaging local communities in policymaking; empowering them to implement actions; and demonstrating the impact of bottom-up initiatives on local development goals.

To achieve these objectives, the project established a regional stakeholder group to explore and implement interregional practices. It identified and analysed best practices in community engagement, organised intensive learning events, peer reviews with experts, and webinars, while also formulating policy recommendations for regional implementation. The project was initiated following a peer review organised by Interreg Europe in 2022, which provided a foundation for its development.

Key lessons from the project highlight the importance of fostering dialogue, supporting existing initiatives rather than creating new ones, and reaching out to communities rather than waiting for them to engage. The peer review process facilitated by Interreg Europe offers local and regional authorities tailored advice to address specific challenges, providing hands-on support and expert guidance to build capacity and resolve development issues.

Participatory Lab: What is needed from policy to enable rural communities to take action?

Empowering local participation and governance

- > **Involve all social groups in decision-making:** Rural policy should actively include youth, women, and other underrepresented groups, ensuring they participate in shaping local policy. This fosters a continuous dialogue that enhances democratic processes and strengthens community cohesion.
- > **Build local capacity for decision-making:** Policies should provide tools and capacity-building initiatives for local communities, enabling them to take ownership of their future. This includes offering technical and expert support, and ensuring young people have the skills needed to contribute effectively.

Enhancing access to resources and funding

- > **Simplify funding processes and broaden scope:** Policies should make it easier for rural communities to access funding through simplified procedures, especially for smaller projects. Additionally, funding should be expanded to cover a wider range of development areas, enabling communities to take action across various sectors, including services, innovation, and local governance.
- > **Raise awareness and provide incentives:** Local communities need better awareness of and guidance on existing funding schemes. Incentives should be introduced to motivate local participation in policy and funding applications, encouraging community-led, development projects.

Fostering coordination and innovation

- > **Promote local structures and coordination:** Policy should leverage existing local structures such as Local Action Groups (LAGs) and ensure better coordination among local, regional, and national levels. This can enhance the development of locally tailored solutions and empower communities to take strategic action.
- > **Encourage knowledge exchange and innovation:** Supporting exchanges between communities to learn from best practices can drive innovation. Policies should create spaces for local governance, fostering local innovation and enabling communities to address their unique challenges through participatory and creative approaches.

Concluding remarks

Mihail Dumitru (European Commission, DG AGRI)



The event showcased inspiring and successful examples highlighting the key ingredients for empowering local communities. The need for strong political coordination across different governance levels to effectively address the diverse needs of rural areas is a key takeaway.

The Rural Pact plays a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of such examples and encourages public authorities to join and continue benefitting from the inspiration and learning opportunities it offers. By uniting the voices of decision-makers, the Pact enhances support for rural areas across Europe. The European Commission relies on local and regional authorities to contribute to shaping future policies, and hope to see the Pact's ambitions developed and expanded at national, regional, and local levels.

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



 www.ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/

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