

# RURAL VISION

magazine<sup>#2</sup>



Empowering  
Rural  
Europe



RURAL  
PACT



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## EDITORIAL

We have come a long way since the launch of the ground-breaking **long-term vision for rural areas** (LTVRA) in June 2021. And I am pleased that we have laid a solid foundation to take rural areas forward in the next mandate of the European Commission – up to and beyond 2029.

The journey toward implementing the LTVRA is both challenging and inspiring as we seek to create vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable rural communities across the EU.

The recent **implementation report** is a critical milestone. It highlights successes and sets out key questions for further stakeholder engagement. These questions are vital to ensure that the voices of those living and working in rural areas continue to shape our policy responses.

As we move forward, the **Rural Pact** plays an instrumental role in fostering collaboration among all stakeholders – citizens, local authorities, and organisations. I was encouraged to see that the **Rural Pact Coordination Group** has been particularly active, culminating in the forthcoming **Declaration for the Future of rural areas**. This Declaration will set clear expectations for enhancing cooperation and ensuring that rural priorities are at the top of political agendas across Europe. I urge all stakeholders to engage with this Declaration and contribute to its continued evolution.

One of the most significant developments for rural communities is the launch of the **Rural toolkit on EU funding** in early 2024. This toolkit provides critical information on funding opportunities, guidance, and practical examples that will empower local actors to leverage available resources effectively. I encourage rural stakeholders to explore the toolkit and take advantage of its comprehensive offerings.

In addition, the **Rural Pact Community Platform** continues to be a valuable tool for networking, sharing good practices, and collaborating on local and national commitments. It enables stakeholders to engage in meaningful exchanges that can strengthen rural areas across the EU. The platform's recent updates further enhance its functionality, making it easier to connect with others who share a vision of vibrant rural communities.

Finally, we must **continue to elevate rural voices in political discussions**. **Political commitments** to the Rural Pact are a vital step in this process, and **I call upon regional and national authorities to submit their pledges**.

Together, we can ensure that rural areas receive the attention they deserve.

The future of Europe's rural areas is bright, right across our European Union, the Mediterranean region and of course in our neighbourhood. A common people-centred approach based on partnerships will help us address the challenges ahead. Through ongoing collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and concrete actions, we will bring this long-term vision to life, ensuring that rural areas remain dynamic, sustainable, and thriving for generations to come.

Thank you for your contributions and enjoy the read!

**Dubravka Šuica,**  
European Commission Vice President  
for Democracy and Demography



# Key achievements and ways forward for rural areas in Europe



By Antonia Gámez Moreno, Head of Unit D1,  
DG AGRI, European Commission

**R**ural areas are an essential part of the European economy and cultural diversity. In 2021, **the ambition of the Communication on the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas (rural vision) was to create a new momentum towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.**

The rural vision identified **ten shared goals** and **four areas of action**. To achieve these goals, the Commission committed to launching a **Rural Pact** in order to mobilise public authorities and stakeholders to act on the needs and aspirations of rural residents. The Rural Pact community now brings together over **2 700 members across Europe**.

It also introduced an **EU Rural Action Plan**, with 30 actions to be implemented by the Commission across a range of EU policy areas – of which **nine are already completed**.

## For inspiration

- Launching a **rural revitalisation platform** for areas facing demographic and economic challenges;
- Starting 60 **rural research and innovation** projects with a budget of EUR 253 million, contributing directly to rural areas;
- Supporting the implementation of **LEADER/CLLD** and guiding around 150 communities towards the creation of **Smart Villages** through dedicated networking activities;
- Earmarking a total of EUR 23.5 billion in grants and loans for underserved areas, as well as updated state aid rules to improve **rural connectivity**;
- Creating the **Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub** which has supported 27 rural energy communities;
- Increasing the available number of datasets for rural areas and access to relevant data and analysis through the **EU Rural Observatory** and the new publication '**Rural Europe**' to improve capacities for rural proofing; and
- Launching the **Rural toolkit** to ease access to EU funding for rural areas and enable optimal combinations of EU funding opportunities.

## European Commission report (March 2024)

'Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: key achievements and ways forward'

An exercise to identify what has been programmed for rural areas in both the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** and **Cohesion Policy** programmes revealed how EU policies **contribute to the objectives of the rural vision** for the period 2021-2027 (or 2023-2027 for the CAP). This forward-looking exercise was inspired by the very supportive and progressive positions taken on the LTVRA by the European Parliament, Council, European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions and important EU stakeholders.

The resulting Commission report provides "**a set of reflections** on possible orientations for enhanced support action and financing for rural areas, as well as on the **ways forward**, based on the implementation of the EU Rural Action Plan". The **nine open questions** it raises have the purpose of informing the **reflection on the preparation of the proposals for the post-2027 programming period**.



# Declaration on the Future of EU's rural development policy



Edina Ocsko,  
Rural Pact Coordination Group Vice-Chair

Members of the [Rural Pact Coordination Group](#) (RPCG) are developing a Joint Declaration with strategic proposals for the post-2027 EU rural development policy. The Declaration aims to inform and influence the future policy in providing better support for rural areas and communities by directly addressing the open questions set out in the European Commission's [report on the long-term vision for EU's rural areas](#) of March 2024.

It will highlight the importance of rural areas and communities not only for rural inhabitants, but for the broader economic, environmental, and social well-being of the European Union as a whole.

The draft Declaration emphasises key economic, social and environmental challenges – such as demography, lack of services and accessibility – and the need to address these urgently. It **calls for a strong shift in EU rural development policies post 2027** to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the EU's rural areas in the long run.

## Increased and streamlined funding for rural areas

In the context of the future EU policy and funding models, the draft Declaration calls for a **compulsory minimum allocation to rural areas from all post-2027 EU funds**. This includes a considerably larger share of funding to Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approaches than the current allocation to LEADER. Overall, **community-led, place-based approaches** – such as LEADER, Smart Villages, 'rural movements' and rural networking led by civil society – **should be strengthened and better resourced**.

## Enhanced coordination at all governance levels

The Declaration suggests that the increased share of EU funding to rural areas be reinforced through **better coordination among relevant administrative bodies** at EU, national and regional levels, including the European Commission's Directorates-General and national ministries.

Additionally, the Declaration calls for **compulsory implementation of the Rural Pact model**, including multi-fund and multi-stakeholder coordination, and methodological guidance and training to better implement the 'rural proofing' mechanism at all levels.

## Capacity building and tailored interventions

The Declaration emphasises the serious capacity constraints of rural communities, which additionally hamper access to relevant funds. It calls for **improved capacity building of local actors**, including specific funding and mechanisms, such as simplified procedures to access funds, and provision of seed funding for idea and project development.

Highlighting the diversity of rural areas and their particular needs, the Declaration underlines the importance of **targeted and tailor-made interventions**. Funding spent on rural areas should be better monitored through territorial tagging of funds, extending the use of data and informing **evidence- and result-based future policies**.

The Declaration has been developed through a strong participatory process and contributions by Rural Pact Coordination Group members.

**RPCG members are expected to adopt the Declaration by the end of 2024, publication will follow in early 2025.**

See the Policy Briefing 'Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States'.



More on the Rural Pact Coordination Group

© Rural Pact Support Office



# The Rural toolkit: easier access to EU funding for rural areas



By Dr Giulia Testori and Elisa Bazzani,  
Joint Research Centre, European Commission

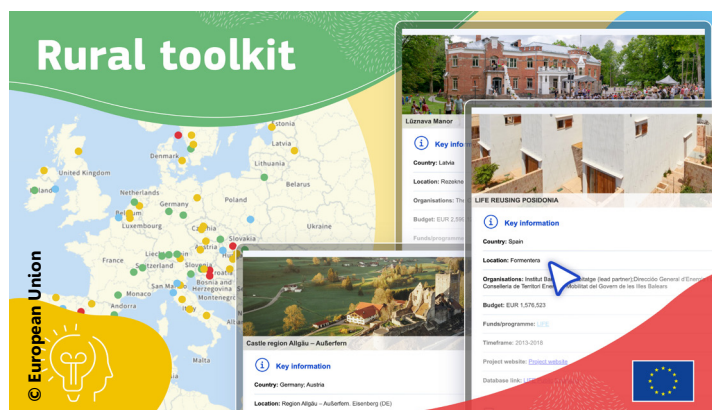
**P**lenty of EU funds and programmes can foster sustainable growth and well-being in rural areas. However, identifying the most appropriate option is not always straightforward for potential beneficiaries. Launched earlier this year, the **Rural toolkit** is **a comprehensive gateway to EU funding and support initiatives available for rural areas.**

Designed to address the limited administrative resources in rural regions, the Rural toolkit makes it easier for local authorities, businesses, associations, project managers and individuals to identify the most appropriate sources of funding. Available in **all EU languages**, it also offers tips and examples on how to **combine existing schemes**, inspiring applicants to adopt creative solutions to **address local needs and revitalise rural areas.**

Before we, at the Joint Research Centre (JRC), created the platform, relevant funding opportunities had to be searched separately and their potential use for rural development was not evident. Following several rounds of consultations with rural stakeholders, we structured the Rural toolkit into three main sections to provide answers to the most common questions.

An **interactive funding finder** allows users to filter existing schemes based on their role or organisation (Local Action Group, NGO, local authority...), the activity they seek to fund and the kind of support needed (e.g. loans, grants or technical assistance). The most relevant options then become available as printable factsheets, containing the key information, practical details, links to applications and relevant contact points.

Browsing a clickable map, users can **get inspired** by dozens of case studies from across the EU, offering best practices and practical tips on how to combine funds. The **resources** section collects guides on EU funding opportunities available for specific sectors such as broadband, education, energy, environment



and tourism, as well as on the integrated approach to local development.

We have received extremely positive feedback and continued interest in the platform and we hope it will further contribute to empowering rural communities and giving them a more significant role in shaping Europe's future.

The Rural toolkit is part of the Commission's **long-term vision** for stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas in the EU. Detailed statistics and analyses on EU rural areas, covering economic, social and environmental aspects, are available in the **Rural Observatory**.

“

Navigating the broad landscape of EU funds and programmes is not an easy task. There is a lot of different information and rules to process, and the management of EU-funded projects can be daunting.

Florian Lochner, Healthacross initiative, EU Project Manager

“

The Rural toolkit is very useful to partnerships, because it offers information about possible funding all in the same place, which makes it much easier for us to plan our next steps.

Gerardo Vidal Goncalves,  
University of Evora

# Join the Rural Pact online community, access knowledge and networking opportunities



By Veneta Quoibion,  
Rural Pact Support Office

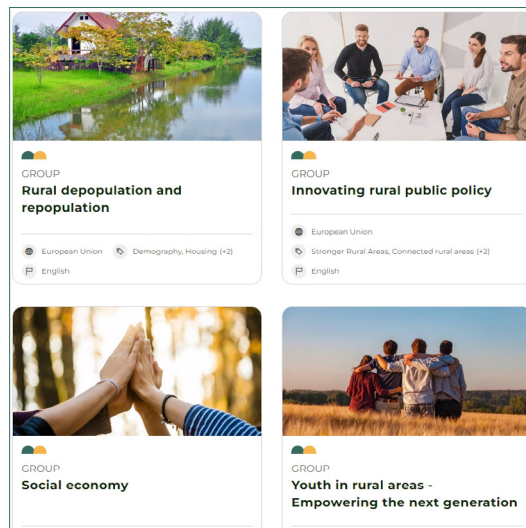
## Not yet a member of our online community?

Sign up to get exclusive opportunities to network, exchange on specific topics with peers and translate the Rural Pact into concrete actions.

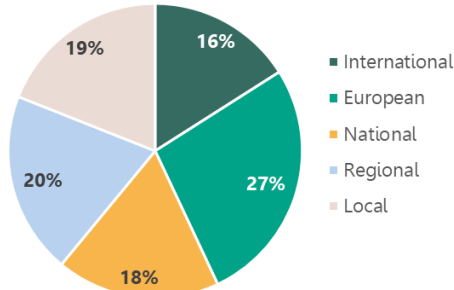
## Become a member to:

- Get notified of **upcoming Rural Pact events** and related outputs.
- Keep informed on the latest developments relevant to rural areas and communities – you will get **access to the monthly newsletter**.
- Connect with **over 1 200 peers!** Look them up by country, topic or funding instrument. Connect with them according to sector. Learn from each other's knowledge and experience!
- Join **nine online discussion groups** on a range of topics, including **innovative rural policy, repopulation, mobility, youth, Smart Villages and more**. Learn from one another, trigger collective action!
- **Start a new discussion** on a rural challenge that is not yet addressed. Create and coordinate your own community group!
- **Commit to act for the Pact – propose an action**, big or small, towards the shared goals of the **EU rural vision!**

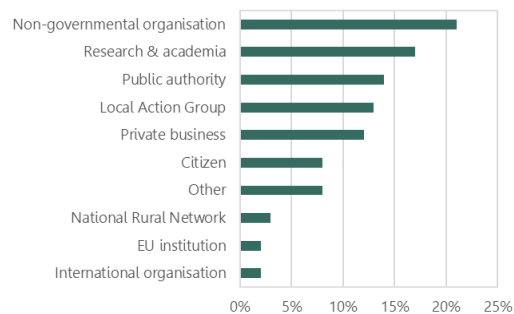
With **over 1 200 members**, our ever-growing online community platform offers you a space to connect and exchange - **only if you have online membership access**.



Peers by scope



Peers by sector



# Commit to act for the Pact

## Who?

Anyone and everyone! You can commit in your individual capacity or on behalf of your organisation.

Whether you're a citizen or public authority representative, an entrepreneur or academic, a farmer or NGO, we'd like to hear from you.

## What?

Identify an action that you or your organisation is willing to implement in order to enhance the development of a rural area. This could be:

- **Communication and advocacy**
- **Rural development strategy**
- **Knowledge sharing**
- **Event**
- **Capacity building**
- **Research and evaluation**
- **Networking activity**
- **Action on the ground**

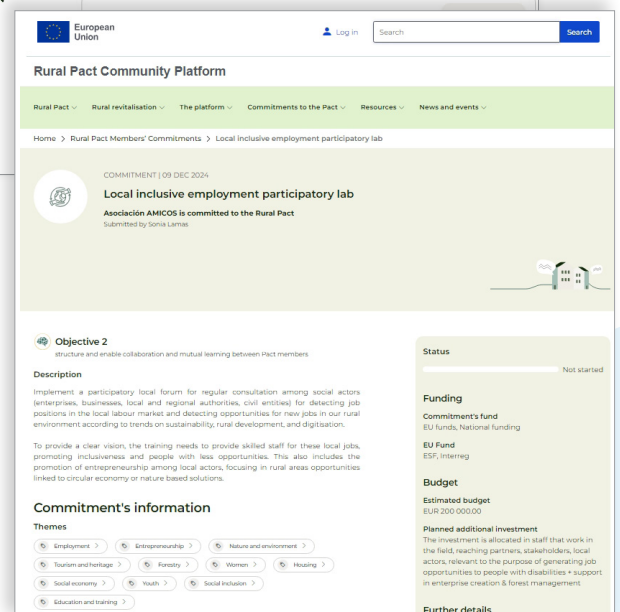
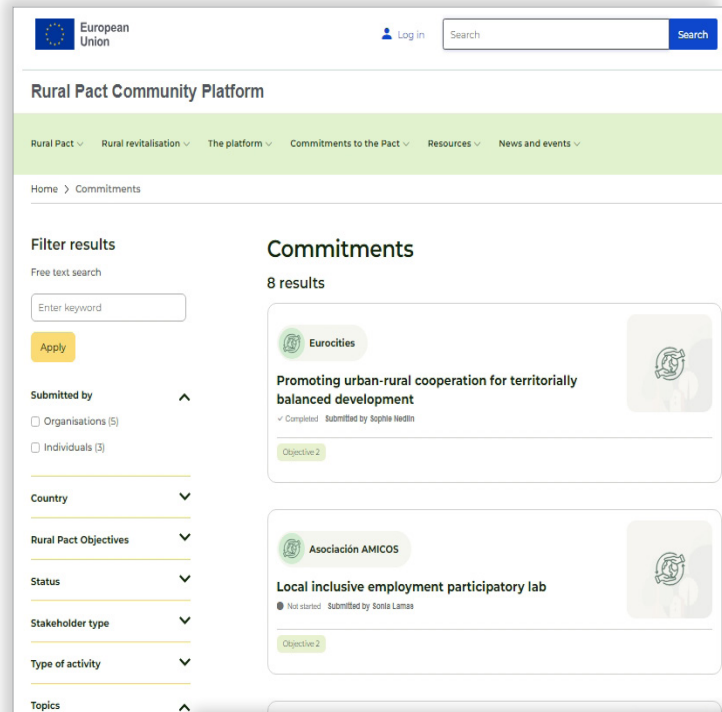
## How?

1. **Create your member profile** on the [Rural Pact Community Platform](#), unless you already have one, and log in.
2. Navigate to 'Commitments' in the main website menu and click the '**Commit to act for the Pact**' button to fill in the online form.
3. **Review and save** your commitment.

That's it! Upon publication, your commitment will be visible and searchable through the main commitments search page.

Find out what others have committed to and get inspired – browse through the [list of existing commitments](#).

**Spread the word!** Encourage your networks, colleagues, and friends to make a commitment – **let's work towards a bright rural future, together!**



# Political commitments to the Rural Pact in support of EU's rural vision



By Enrique Nieto,  
Deputy Team Leader,  
Rural Pact Support Office

It is time to act for the benefit of rural residents and make the EU's shared vision for rural areas a reality. To achieve meaningful results, the Rural Pact must extend beyond the EU level and involve stakeholders at national and regional levels, with the active support of their governments.

## How can governments contribute to the Rural Pact and vision?

The Rural Pact serves as a platform that unites stakeholders in acting towards the shared goals of the rural vision. Concretely, over 128 commitments driving action on the ground have already been pledged by the Rural Pact community.

Nevertheless, the involvement of national and regional governments is essential for the EU's rural vision to succeed. The first edition of the **Rural Pact Policy Briefing** outlines the key ingredients for making the Pact happen in EU Member States and regions:

- Structures and mechanisms to engage with rural communities;
- A designated government member and dedicated services to address rural issues across policies;
- Capacity-building and networking support for a broad array of stakeholders;
- A forward-looking vision implemented through a holistic strategy or action plan;
- Rural proofing and adequate data systems;
- Appropriate governance systems to facilitate coordination;
- Mechanisms to ensure integrated funding streams and synergies.

Many national and regional governments are already stepping up to support these efforts. The Rural Pact Support Office has compiled six country pages showcasing existing national and regional initiatives that contribute to the goals of the vision and Pact.

## National and regional governments taking a step further

In December 2021, European Commission Vice-president Šuica, and Commissioners Wojciechowski and Ferreira issued an open invitation to **public authorities to join the Pact**, encouraging national and regional governments

to express their support and actively engage in its development.

In 2024, the Rural Pact Support Office launched a [portal](#) to showcase governments that have committed to concrete actions in support of the rural vision. The contributions received from EU institutions and bodies are also highlighted on this portal, providing a transparent view of commitment progress.

Through collaboration at all levels, the Rural Pact can help build stronger, prosperous, connected and resilient rural areas for the future.



## Andalusia officialises its commitment to the Rural Pact

In February 2024, Andalusia formally committed to contribute to the Rural Pact by engaging to design its regional rural vision 'Rural Development Strategy of Andalusia – Horizon 2030' (es. 'Estrategia de Desarrollo Rural de Andalucía – Horizonte 2030').



# Empowering local communities to contribute to the rural vision and Pact



By Albert Puigvert Tuneu and Eduard Trepas Deltell,  
Association of Rural and Maritime Initiatives of Catalonia (ARCA)

One of the main demands of rural communities is to be part of the decisions that affect them at the territorial, economic, social, and cultural levels. Being heard and involved in decision-making is crucial to ensuring their needs are reflected in political agendas, supporting the development of locally relevant actions that contribute to the [EU's rural vision](#). Achieving this requires promoting and implementing the Rural Pact at all levels – European, national, regional, and local.

The Policy Lab '[Bringing the Rural Pact closer to citizens](#)' of 22 May 2024 identified the necessary elements for the Pact to add value to local development. It is essential to adopt a **shared local strategic vision and implement transformative actions tailored to needs and opportunities on the ground**. These processes require inclusive structures that engage local governments, social organisations, and businesses, promoting joint decision-making.

## Enhancing existing structures rather than creating new ones

The Catalan 'Landscape Charters', promoted by the governmental agency '[Landscape Observatory of Catalonia](#)', set out **common objectives, agreements, and management strategies among public and private organisations** in a supra-municipal area to enhance its landscape.

On this basis, the [Landscape Charter of the Priorat region](#) fosters a **co-creation framework** of transformative projects, which contributes to the rural vision at all levels and empowers the local community. It has provided a comprehensive **roadmap for the socio-economic development** of the rural area, fostering self-organisation on the territory, and coordination and cooperation among different actors.

LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) can play a key role here, with their **local governance structures and participatory strategies able to mobilise capacity, cooperation, and networking**. However, the LEADER governance and methodology are not useful if LAGs do not periodically update and expand their representation, strengthen relationships with territorial stakeholders, and actively participate in energising their communities. They must go beyond being simple bureaucratic offices managing funds and distributing grants.



Catalan Rural Pact working groups

## Activating all governance levels

Working only at a local level is not enough. Regional and national governments must show political, technical and strategic commitment to address rural challenges and give voice to local communities. Building **spaces for co-creation and dialogue among stakeholders at all levels** is therefore crucial to prevent rural areas from being excluded from decision-making and to address widespread discontent present in many areas.

Since 2020, the [Rural Agenda of Catalonia](#) has supported a **territorial coordination space** where all stakeholders involved in rural development collaborate and work together. The governance of the [Catalan Rural Pact](#) succeeds in placing the needs of rural territories at the centre of the political agenda. This helps prioritise and coordinate public and private efforts to respond to rural needs from a broad and integrated perspective, rather than a solely sectoral one.

# Empowering rural communities to enhance mobility options



By Brendan Finn and Andrea Lorenzini,  
SMARTA-NET project coordinators

**T**he strengths and assets of rural communities – such as local knowledge, strong social and community connections, and culture of volunteering – **can significantly boost rural mobility** and help to address ongoing challenges, including access to services, equity and development. By enhancing engagement and leveraging local insights, rural communities can tailor transportation solutions to meet their specific needs.

This would achieve the multiple benefits of developing local economies, strengthening access to basic services, and enhancing territorial and social cohesion. This emerged among the key messages of a [rural mobility webinar](#) of 20 June 2024, jointly organised by the Rural Pact Support Office and the SMARTA-NET project.

## Encouraging local action

Local rural mobility solutions, based on social cohesion and volunteer networks, include flexible transport services, ride-sharing and asset-sharing services. When these options are coordinated and combined with other services – such as bus, railway, and various public transport networks – they become even more effective. This is why it is essential for **local authorities to both facilitate conventional transport and support the community-based approach.**

Enhancing rural mobility options requires **innovative, even creative, funding solutions** to help finance community-based projects. Public-private partnerships, tourist tax, minimum service level of mobility for rural areas could all provide potential sources of financing.

## Capitalising on EU-wide action

The EU-funded [SMARTA project](#) (2018-2020) highlighted a lack of rural mobility policies across EU Member States. The consequent absence of commitment, goals, funding or accountability are root causes of inadequate provision of [rural mobility services](#). The project showcased [good practice examples](#) of addressing these challenges.

Its successor, the EU-funded [SMARTA-NET project](#) (2022-2024) continued seeking solutions through three linked strands.

The core initiative was the set-up of a [European Rural Mobility Network](#) (ERMN) which gives a voice to rural municipalities and other rural mobility stakeholders. Launched in 2023, the ERMN brings together 70 participating organisations from 14 countries, providing exchange fora through a range of conferences and webinars.

The project also provided **capacity-building and training support** to network members. Its [guidance documents](#) address good rural mobility practice, rural tourism, the integration of rural aspects in Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, and financing.

## What next?

The SMARTA-NET project team, jointly with network members, seeks a long-term solution for the network to continue and grow beyond the lifespan of the project and, above all, to provide a voice for Europe's rural areas.

The greater, ongoing issue it will aim to address is mobilising both the EU Member States and institutions in order to bring about transformative change to rural mobility, enabling rural residents and visitors to move around freely, thus contributing to the 'Connected' strand of the [EU's rural vision](#).



© SMARTA-NET project

Members of the  
European Rural  
Mobility Network

# Improving rural communities' access to health services



By Dr. Veronika Rasic,  
Founder of Rural Health Compass,  
EURIPA Honorary Treasurer

Attracting and retaining people to live and work in rural areas largely depend on the availability of and access to health services. Enhancing these is an important contributor to rural development, as people's well-being and economic growth are "interdependent and mutually reinforcing," as recognised by the [EU Council](#).

However, the challenges are many, ranging from ageing populations, to inadequate infrastructure and connectivity, to shortage of essential public services and professionals.

Improving access to health services across rural Europe therefore goes beyond providing a basic right to healthcare. It is a **multidimensional challenge** that influences various aspects of rural life and, as such, requires an integrated response.

**Rural proofing regulations, unifying political support, and cooperating across public administration departments**, including education, health, agriculture and rural development, are ever-present needs. This resonates with one of the recommendations in [EURIPA's Lincoln Statement](#) of June 2024 to make rural proofing a formal national framework.

Rural women are struggling to access the care they need at all life stages. Health services in rural areas - from contraception to birthing, maternity and menopause - are generally rated poor to very poor.

**Source:** Rural Health Compass survey on 'Access to women's health services in rural Europe'

A [Rural Pact webinar on rural access to health](#) explored ways of attracting and retaining healthcare professionals, designing innovative healthcare services, and creating integrated, community-based solutions.

To begin with, healthcare workers need to be more aware of and better equipped to handle rural contexts and needs. Developing and investing in undergraduate and postgraduate **rural training pathways for health and care workers**, the Lincoln Statement claims, needs to be part of workforce development and planning.

Beyond education and training, rural communities can experience continuous inability to access healthcare services, which is also referred to as 'medical deserts'. Addressing this issue requires **subsidies** and benefit packages to medics, **mandatory practice** in the affected areas as part of internship or residency programmes, and



The 13th EURIPA Rural Health Forum, 2024

investing in rural **healthcare infrastructure**.

Innovative approaches to healthcare provision – such as telemedicine and mobile health units – require **enabling regulations addressing legal barriers, as well as privacy and standard** concerns. Such novel solutions need to be collaboratively designed by healthcare professionals, patients and IT experts.

Collaboration among diverse stakeholders can have the additional benefit of providing **integrated healthcare**, joining up professionals and volunteers through public-private partnerships.

Improving access to healthcare in rural areas requires a **concerted effort at all levels of government**, healthcare professionals, and local communities.

**The Rural Health Compass holds online consultations between October and December 2024 to explore what European rural communities want and need from their health and social care systems.**



# Supporting the green transition through place-based tools grounded in local needs



Stefan Kah,  
European Policies Research Centre,  
University of Strathclyde

**T**he high relevance of climate change for rural areas manifests itself in many ways. On the one hand, rural regions are leading in renewable energy production, but on the other, as shown by [OECD data](#), average emissions per capita in rural places are significantly higher than in metropolitan regions.

Yet, policy responses in the context of the green transition are usually designed elsewhere, typically at national levels and driven by national-level actors. Giving stakeholders on the ground a stronger role in policy delivery might also be a way of addressing rural discontent, as rural areas continue to fall behind, despite attempts to reverse this trend.

The Rural Pact Policy Lab '[Territorial development for the green transition](#)' of 19 September 2024 highlighted the **great potential of territorial development instruments to act as place-based frameworks that include local communities in the green transition.**

Policy responses can become more effective if they are place-based, adapted to the area type and its specific challenges, OECD's Jose Enrique Garcilazo argued in his [keynote speech](#). The **use of place-based instruments is connected to local empowerment**, i.e. local communities step into decision-making roles.

The EU offers a range of [territorial development instruments](#) for rural areas, beyond the well-established LEADER approach, such as Community-led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated

Territorial Investments (ITIs) within [Cohesion Policy](#). Numerous examples of successful application exist – such as a [Czech](#) CLLD case and ITIs in [Italy](#) and [Portugal](#) – which are linked by their place-based, integrated character.

The Policy Lab revealed that, although territorial development instruments offer a lot of opportunities, many countries and regions do not pick them up, or only do so to a limited extent. This is not necessarily due to a lack of interest on the ground, but rather to concerns about the perceived additional complexity and expected administrative effort. It results in a hesitant attitude by Member State institutions that manage funding programmes for these tools.

It is important to **convince the decision-making levels of the benefits of territorial development instruments**, especially looking beyond 2027. The use of these tools could be encouraged not only by offering incentives, but also by including some form of regulatory requirement. This might be slightly controversial in the context of the bottom-up nature of many of these tools, which is why any obligation needs to give Member States enough scope to tailor policy frameworks to their specific contexts.



# Empowering European rural youth



By Spyros Papadatos,  
Secretary General, Rural Youth Europe

Involving rural youth in decision- and policymaking is crucial to address the specific challenges and lack of opportunities we face, in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and mobility. While holding untapped potential for shaping the future of Europe and its rural communities, this demographic group is still not prioritised in policy agendas.

So, which are the biggest trends we see in Europe today when it comes to rural youth?

**Rural exodus:** a reality for the majority of rural areas across Europe for several years or even decades now. Rural youth is seeking better education or employment, or even general living conditions in urban or suburban areas. This feeds into the various crises that bigger city centres face due to the rapidly growing population, including housing, health and social welfare system overload.

**Rural proofing:** most policies and measures today are taken to support primarily bigger urban and suburban areas due to their higher population density. This, combined with the lack of rural proofing, has an impact on rural development, agriculture and youth.

**More at stake than agriculture:** rural youth is a diverse group with varying needs based on our unique geographic, economic, and cultural contexts. And while rural communities are built on and interlinked with the agricultural activities of their areas, many other aspects are at stake, such as access to services, mobility, digitalisation, education, employment, and environmental sustainability.

**It is essential for measures and policies to truly support the development and wider participation of rural youth in society.** The Rural Pact [Good Practice Webinar on rural youth](#) of 24 April 2024 identified a number of elements to help achieve that.

## Create youth-friendly spaces through place-based initiatives

Youth is increasingly asking to be engaged in policymaking from a young age, with our inputs integrated across all policy areas and based on



© Rural Youth Europe

European youth rally in Estonia

diverse representation. Such engagement can be facilitated through **targeted communication campaigns and youth-friendly spaces for meaningful dialogue with policymakers** within official structures, backed by institutional support.

## Empower local youth voices

Empowerment is a critical factor, requiring **investment in both rural youth and our organisations**. Resources need to reach individuals in rural areas and build our capacities, enabling active participation and amplifying our voices in policymaking.

Establishing **interconnected platforms, such as youth councils** or organisations, is crucial for facilitating effective communication and representation across different governance tiers.

With enhanced political will to improve the current status quo, a meaningful dialogue with rural youth can start. This would make us feel more valued, more heard and more empowered to improve our lives and to bring rural areas higher on the political agenda.

# Facilitating rural actors' access to funding



By Urszula Budzich Tabor,  
Policy Expert,  
Rural Pact Support Office

**M**any local actors and communities have faced difficulties in navigating and accessing EU funding due to **lack of information or capacity, administrative complexities or lack of match-funding**. The wide range of EU funding instruments intended to respond to rural communities' needs include the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), and many other dedicated funding streams.

To facilitate access to funding for rural projects and initiatives, the following key elements need to be in place.

## Information about available funding sources

The [Rural toolkit](#) is very useful as it indicates the types of projects and beneficiaries that can be supported. Available online in all EU languages, the toolkit **enables rural stakeholders to search through a wide range of funding opportunities** for rural development and provides information in an easy-to-understand language.

## Capacity building and technical support

Potential and existing beneficiaries need support to develop their projects, apply for funding and implement their initiatives.

In many rural areas, LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) **provide advice and guidance to beneficiaries**, and help them access different sources of funding, playing the role of a 'one-stop shop'. In the example of the Austrian region of Tyrol, [LAGs help municipalities, businesses and NGOs](#) to access local, regional, national and EU funding.

## Coordination of different funding sources

Avoiding overlaps and fostering synergies require **shared values, regular exchange of information** on who does what, combined with a **clear division of tasks and responsibilities**. See, for example, how the [management of different EU Funds is coordinated](#) in the German region of Saxony.

## Simplification of rules and procedures

For many rural actors, access to EU funding is limited by administrative complexity or excessive bureaucracy. Managing authorities can put in place solutions to reduce the administrative burden, such as **Simplified Cost Options** (see examples from [Finland](#) and [Spain](#)) or **umbrella projects** (example from [Sweden](#)).

## Facilitating access to private funding

Support to cover the beneficiary's own contribution or to advance funds to cover the project costs before they are reimbursed can be provided in the form of **bridging loans, micro-credits or private shares**. Public authorities or LAGs can help rural actors obtain such funding by **cooperating with the banking sector or credit unions**, or by **facilitating crowdfunding**.

For more information and material on facilitating rural actors' access to funding, visit the web page of the Rural Pact Policy Action Lab on ['EU funds paving the way to the rural vision'](#) of December 2023.





# Overview of relevant sources of information

In our ongoing effort to keep you well-informed and engaged, we have curated a list of resources that offer valuable insights into rural development and sustainability. These resources are instrumental for policymakers, researchers and citizens alike who are interested in the progress and initiatives under the Rural Pact.



## Rural Pact community platform

A digital hub where stakeholders can connect, share ideas, and collaborate on projects. Community groups within the platform focus on specific rural development topics, offering a space for targeted discussions and problem solving. Visit the [Rural Pact community platform](#)

## Good practice database

A repository of successful initiatives and projects that have made a significant impact in rural areas. These good practices serve as a guide for implementing effective and sustainable solutions. Explore the [good practice database](#)

## Publications

Keep up-to-date with our latest highlight reports and policy briefings that delve into the intricacies of rural development, offering data-driven insights and actionable recommendations. Read the [Rural Pact publications](#)

## Other relevant publications



**Compass for Local Empowerment in rural areas:** explores a set of tools, including Smart Villages, Community-led Local Development (CLLD) and 'Village Pacts', to identify practical ways of reaching the grassroots and bringing the Rural Pact closer to citizens. [More+](#)



**Study on funding for EU rural areas:** examines the contribution of the 2014-2022 CAP, 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy, and the Common Fisheries Policy in addressing the needs and actions outlined in the EU rural vision. It provides a preliminary analysis of the 2023-2027 CAP programmed measures. [More+](#)



**Rural Proofing: Lessons from OECD countries and potential application to health:** explores ways of developing more robust rural proofing models and proposes a roadmap for more effective mechanisms to help embed the practice in governments' policy space and culture. [More+](#)



**Renewable energy production and potential in EU rural areas:** provides insights into how rural areas and communities can contribute to and benefit from the EU's green energy transition, without undermining natural areas, biodiversity and food production. [More+](#)



**Assessing the framework conditions for social innovation in rural areas:** identifies support factors, provides guidance for policymakers, and proposes an approach to measure readiness and capacity to embark on rural social innovation. [More+](#)

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 [ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu](https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu)

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