

GOOD PRACTICE WEBINAR




Highlights report


Rural housing


Introduction

The webinar explored key challenges, including rural housing affordability, availability, and energy efficiency, while showcasing inspiring examples of integrated housing strategies, innovative financial models, and community-led solutions. Discussions highlighted approaches to revitalising rural housing through renovation, unlocking vacant properties, and enhancing collaboration between public and private stakeholders.


Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office

 20 February 2025

 Online

 Over 140 participants from 24 EU Member States and 5 non-EU Members States, including representatives of NGOs, Local Action Groups (LAG), public authorities, private business and project implementers and developers of housing initiatives in rural areas.

 Presentations & recordings ([here](#))

 If you see this icon, click to watch the recording.

Main highlights from the event

Housing renovation and revitalisation through sustainable solutions

- > **Improving access to funding for housing renovation and repair:** public grants should cover a substantial share of investment costs, particularly for households experiencing energy poverty, to incentivise renovations. Awareness-raising campaigns and targeted EU research can further enhance access to financial support.
- > **Enhancing local capacities to boost the implementation of initiatives:** skilled professionals and local knowledge hubs are crucial for accelerating renovation efforts. Training initiatives and knowledge-sharing networks should be expanded to boost efficiency and encourage best practice adoption.
- > **Simplifying legislative and administrative barriers to rural housing renovation:** planning restrictions, technical limitations, and challenges in using bio-based materials hinder renovation efforts. Co-designed policies, developed in collaboration with local stakeholders, can streamline processes and remove bureaucratic obstacles.

Improving rural housing availability and attractiveness through community platforms

- > **Enhancing trust between landlords and tenants:** public authorities can play a role in facilitating rental agreements, offering guarantee schemes, and mitigating risks for both parties to foster a more stable rental market in rural areas.
- > **Unlocking vacant properties:** strategies such as tax incentives, digital property databases (e.g. housing banks), and cooperative housing models can help bring underutilised housing stock back into the market. Addressing legal barriers, including inheritance laws and the high cost of property restoration, remains critical.

Community-led solutions for inclusive rural housing

- > **Promoting community-led housing models,** such as housing cooperatives, Community Land Trusts (CLTs), and co-housing communities, enables long-term affordability and social cohesion by allowing residents to collectively own, manage, or develop housing.
- > **Creating and managing a sustainable 'community culture':** Beyond financial and legal structures, maintaining a cooperative and inclusive culture is essential for these housing models to thrive. Participants highlighted the importance of fostering a shared vision, implementing conflict resolution mechanisms, and ensuring participatory decision-making to reduce tensions among residents.
- > **Supporting intergenerational and flexible housing solutions:** Rural housing developments should accommodate diverse demographics, including young families, elderly residents, and newcomers. Intergenerational housing models promote mutual support, reducing social isolation for seniors while assisting working families.

Setting the scene: EU initiatives for rural housing

The Rural Pact and the place of housing in the rural vision

Haude Blanc, European Commission, DG AGRI ([PPT](#))



Housing is a key priority for the new [European Commission \(2024–2029\)](#), particularly challenges of rural housing affordability, availability, and sustainability. Ensuring stronger, more connected, prosperous, and resilient rural areas by 2040, as envisioned in the [long-term vision for rural areas](#), requires an integrated approach to housing policies.

The Rural Pact serves as a key framework for multi-stakeholder collaboration, fostering voluntary [commitments](#), exchange of [good practices](#), and structured cooperation between local, regional, national, and EU-level actors to address rural housing needs effectively.

European Commission housing taskforce



Matthew Baldwin, European Commission, DG ENER ([PPT](#))



The newly established [Housing Taskforce](#) is charged with developing a [European Affordable Housing Plan](#). Priorities include improving the construction sector's competitiveness, revising state aid rules, analysing speculation, and enhancing funding and financing mechanisms.

In 2025, the Taskforce will focus on outreach and dialogue to facilitate knowledge exchange and stimulate coordinated solutions to housing challenges. The Rural Pact community is encouraged to participate in upcoming consultations to share insights and best practices in order to ensure rural perspectives are incorporated into future housing strategies.

Housing and energy efficiency in EU rural areas

Clara Hormigos Feliu, Joint Research Centre ([PPT](#))



Data-driven insights highlight the energy efficiency challenges of rural housing. Rural households spend a higher share of their income on energy compared to urban counterparts, often relying on diverse energy sources, including gas, coal, wood, and electricity.

Although renovation rates for energy-efficient improvements are higher in rural areas, challenges persist due to larger, less compact buildings that are typically less efficient to heat. Rooftop photovoltaic systems offer significant potential for rural areas, with the capacity to generate enough energy to meet the consumption needs of many households.

The New European Bauhaus and opportunities for rural housing

Laura Hagemann Arellano, Joint Research Centre ([PPT](#))



The [New European Bauhaus \(NEB\)](#) initiative is an opportunity to promote sustainable, inclusive, and aesthetic high-quality rural housing. For instance, the [NEB Lab of the Mountains](#) supports socio-ecological transformation in rural and mountain areas.

Housing projects, such as [Supershine](#), focus on renovating social housing to tackle energy poverty. The [NEB award for small municipalities](#) recognises innovative housing solutions, such as the 'Village as House' project in Topolò, Italy, which won a NEB Rising Star Award in 2022 for its community-driven approach to sustainable housing.

Insights from ESPON HOUSE4ALL: addressing affordability and quality housing challenges in rural areas

Martin Gauk, ESPON European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation ([PPT](#))



The ESPON [HOUSE4ALL](#) project analyses housing affordability and availability across EU rural regions. Weekly real estate data collection reveals that some rural areas face rising housing prices due to urban spillover and tourism demand.

The study also examines homelessness, energy efficiency, and secondary housing's impact on local markets, while providing insights into shrinking rural populations and potential policy interventions.

Developing integrated rural housing strategies



Public support for rural housing in France

Alexandre Huet, Agence Nationale de l'Habitat (ANAH), France ([PPT](#))



The [National Housing Agency](#) (*fr*: Agence nationale de l'habitat, ANAH), alongside the Directorate General for territorial planning, housing and nature of the Ministry of Territorial Planning and Decentralisation, is in charge of implementing France's rural housing strategy as part of the [France Ruralités](#) action plan. The agency supports municipalities and individuals (e.g. landlords, owners-occupiers, etc.) through financial and engineering assistance to renovate and improve private housing stock.

ANAH's agreements with local authorities, covering 78% of rural municipalities, provide structured funding for pre-operational studies, housing refurbishments, and energy-efficient improvements. Specific measures focus on tackling vacant housing, offering financial incentives to encourage property owners to put empty homes back on the market.

The [French National Vacant Housing Plan](#) leverages tax data to track and address long-term vacancies, and the [Zero Vacant Housing](#) is a digital tool for local authorities to identify vacant houses and support their owners.

Integrated village renewal: strategic approaches to rural housing and heritage in Tyrol

Diana Ortner and Hannes Lechner, Government of Tyrol, Austria ([PPT](#))



The [Tyrolean Integrated Village Renewal strategy](#) promotes sustainable rural development through housing renovation, heritage preservation, and community engagement. The initiative prioritises [revitalising village centres](#) instead of expanding outward, balancing modern housing needs with cultural heritage conservation.

Financial support is provided for repurposing vacant buildings into functional housing while maintaining architectural identity. Through their [Neighbourhood development](#) plans, they involve experts and users in developing holistic village strategies. Community-led planning, supported by the [Local Agenda 21](#) instrument, ensures local participation in shaping village renewal efforts.

Sierra de la Demanda housing plan

Déborra Serrano, LAG AGALSA, Spain ([PPT](#))



The [Sierra de la Demanda Housing Plan](#) is a comprehensive initiative addressing rural depopulation and housing shortages through a public-private partnership. The plan follows a four-step approach:

- 1) identifying housing challenges through research and interviews;
- 2) categorising key issues, including property vacancies, renovation barriers, and financial limitations;
- 3) assessing demand through a targeted campaign focused on both current residents and newcomers;
- 4) implementing local initiatives, such as a professional network platform, home price calculator, housing fairs, municipal housing inventory, and financial advisory services to revitalise housing stock and attract new residents.

Learning from inspirational local projects and practices

KoDörfer (Co-Villages): a sustainable approach to rural revitalisation

Frederik Fischer, Neulandia, Germany ([PPT](#))



A [CoVillage](#) (*de.* KoDörfer) is a rural housing model integrating small, energy-efficient homes with shared communal spaces. These communities are managed by housing cooperatives and developed in collaboration with local municipalities to attract new residents and boost rural economies.

Key challenges include land acquisition, cooperative management, and financial sustainability through shared ownership models.

Renovation and revitalisation of rural social housing in County Cork

José Ospina and Ana Ospina, Carbery Housing Association, Ireland ([PPT](#))



The [Carbery Housing Association](#) (CHA) renovates and manages rural social housing to provide affordable, energy-efficient homes. Established in 2001, the CHA leases and purchases vacant properties, retrofitting them with EU and national funding, such as the [Mortgages to Rent Programme](#).

Collaborative partnerships with councils, housing bodies, and private owners maximise impact, while financial sustainability relies on rental income, grants, and low-interest loans.

Villagehouse project: unlocking vacant rural houses

Ángel Poveda, ADRISS, Spain ([PPT](#))



The [Villagehouse](#) (es. Casa Pueblo) project increases housing availability in Spanish rural areas by identifying and advertising vacant properties. Through collaboration with local mayors and property owners, the project ensures that unused homes are documented and marketed, enhancing their digital visibility and accessibility to potential residents.

Since September 2024, the initiative has registered hundreds of homes, country lands and other spaces, resulting in over a dozen properties sold or rented. The [Revitalizar 2.0](#) project builds on this approach by integrating housing, employment, and social network development to attract new residents.

Concluding remarks

Keynote listener

Dr. Stefan Kordel, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany

Rural housing is shaped by broad and interconnected challenges such as demographic shifts, financial barriers, spatial inequalities, rapid economic changes and the need for energy transition and industrial transformation. Rural housing solutions must therefore be designed to take account of other socio-economic factors.

Three key issues characterise the rural housing crisis:

- 1) Financialisation of rural housing affects affordability as external investors influence pricing, making it harder for local residents to access housing and land.
- 2) Increased residential mobility creates mismatches between housing supply and demand, particularly for newcomers and seasonal workers.
- 3) Selective gentrification in some areas leads to rising property values, displacing long-term rural residents and limiting access to affordable housing.

Housing issues vary significantly, with some rural areas experiencing high vacancy rates and ageing populations, while others face housing shortages due to tourism demand and second-home ownership. Addressing these disparities requires multi-level, place-based strategies that reflect local needs and conditions.

Changing the narrative on rural areas is also essential to recognise them as spaces for innovation and opportunity, rather than decline.

Next steps for the Rural Pact Support Office (PPT)

- upcoming [Rural Pact activities and events](#)

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en



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