

Declaration on the future of rural areas and rural development policy in the EU

December 2024

Rural Pact Coordination Group Declaration

Short version



I. The future of rural areas is a concern of our whole society

- > They play a **pivotal role in the EU economy**, hosting the vital resources on which key sectors depend. They are important in **addressing climate change, enriching the EU's social fabric, preserving European traditions and cultural diversity and securing our borders**.

II. Rural challenges need urgent responses

- > Challenges: **demography** (depopulation and ageing), low **service provision**, digital, green, and economic **transitions**, and **constrained human and financial resources**.
- > Responses: **investments** in local capacities, infrastructure, services, and innovation; **strengthened Community-led Local Development (CLLD)** and **simplified funding** mechanisms.

III. The future rural development policy must take the needs of rural areas more seriously

- > A **holistic approach** to rural development and **coordinated funding** from EU, national and regional sources;
- > Reinforced application of **rural proofing** to ensure all policies consider rural needs;
- > **Compulsory minimum allocation** – e.g. at least 30% of total EU long-term budget – to rural development (beyond agriculture). Alternative: set-up of a **dedicated European Rural Development Fund (ERUDF)**;
- > Wider use of **community-led initiatives** – including LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages – through a mandatory allocation of at least 10% of rural development funding.

IV. Turning the long-term rural vision into a concrete strategy and realising the Rural Pact model

- > Translation of the EU rural vision into **actionable rural development strategies at national, regional and local levels**, aligned with EU priorities and formulated in partnership with stakeholders;
- > **Robust horizontal and vertical coordination** (the Rural Pact model) through designated government members,

compulsory inter-ministerial coordination groups (national/regional levels) and compulsory coordination among relevant Directorates-General (EU level).

V. Building local capacity and creating local ownership

- > **Technical support, networking, capacity building** for local governments, civil society organisations, local communities, and small businesses to navigate funding mechanisms and implement innovative projects;
- > **Seed funding** for project preparation and idea development at local level, and **simplified application processes**, including results-based payments and performance-based funding models.

VI. Improving monitoring of EU rural spending

- > **Tagging of EU funds by sector and type of territory** to enhance transparency and accountability. Territorial tagging should consider the specificities of rural areas and help prevent disproportionately benefitting territories with higher capacity.
- > **SMART indicators** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) to evaluate the impact of rural projects, short and long-term, balancing quantitative and qualitative aspects. **Technical support** to rural stakeholders to implement the indicators effectively.

RPCG Declaration: adopted on 12 December 2024 by consensus, it sets out a strategic proposal for the post-2027 EU funds and policies. It is a collective response to the questions set out in the European Commission's report on the long-term vision for EU's rural areas of March 2024.

Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG): informal group, representative of the Pact participants to further develop it and steer its process

Rural Pact: cooperation framework across governance levels and stakeholders to address rural challenges



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The opinions expressed are those of the Rural Pact Coordination Group only and should not be considered as representative of the European Commission's official position.

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