

RURAL VISION

magazine^{#3}



Empowering
Rural
Europe



**RURAL
PACT**



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Empowering rural Europe: the Rural Pact Community in action



EDITORIAL

Since its launch in 2021, the **Rural Pact** has grown into a **vibrant and living movement**. Its community, strong of over 3 500 members, represents all parts of society and governance levels, which work together towards the shared goals of the **EU rural vision 2040**.

Building on the first successful years of **implementation** of the rural vision, the European Commission has taken EU action for rural areas one step forward with the **Vision for agriculture and food** presented in February 2025. The Vision recognises rural areas as central to the European way of life and commits to update the Rural Action Plan, strengthen the Rural Pact and rural proofing, further work on functional rural areas and strengthen participatory territorial development tools, such as LEADER and Smart Villages.

Improving living standards in rural areas is key for rural communities and economies, including a fair agrifood system. There are no rural areas without viable agriculture and no agriculture without thriving rural areas. And beyond that, rural areas mean much more: they are part of the **solution to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, resilience and sustainability**. The inspiring initiatives showcased through the Rural Pact demonstrate the wealth of good ideas, skills and energy that rural communities have to offer.

The Rural Pact highlighted the need for more **integrated approaches and policies** that should **enable rural communities to tap into their potential** with simpler and targeted instruments. The proposals for the **post-2027 EU budget** answer the call for **synergies, integration, coordination and simplification** by bringing support for rural areas under a single National and Regional Partnership Plan per country. The Plans should channel funding to address territorial disparities and improve living standards in rural areas. They will use the same key instruments as today, including LEADER, and be developed in partnership with rural authorities and stakeholders.

The **Rural Pact Conference** (16-17 September) represented a key milestone in engaging with stakeholders on the rural implications of the post-2027 EU budget proposals. We continued the conversation at a **dedicated Rural Pact Policy Lab** (5 November) and with the **Rural Pact Coordination Group** (6 November). I invite all of you to use forthcoming opportunities to engage in the debate on future policies.

The rich discussions at the Conference were also highly inspirational for the **update of the EU Rural Action Plan**, which we intend to publish in early 2026, and for **strengthening the Rural Pact**, whose facilitation will benefit from increased support in 2026-2027. This includes enhanced dialogue with Member States to facilitate the elaboration of good National and Regional Partnership Plans for rural areas.

Thank you for your engagement in the Rural Pact and I trust you will appreciate this third edition of our magazine!

Christophe Hansen,
European Commissioner
for Agriculture and Food



Towards an updated Rural Action Plan



By Silvia Nanni,
DG AGRI, European Commission

Demonstrating the European Commission's commitment to rural communities and the development of rural areas, the [Rural Action Plan](#) has achieved a lot since its launch in 2022. Strong of 30 thematic and horizontal actions, it represents a truly collaborative effort among Commission departments to advance concrete initiatives for stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.

More than **EUR 280 million** have been allocated to rural research and innovation and **EUR 23.5 billion** have been invested in grants and updated state aid rules to improving digital connectivity, while numerous networking initiatives have strengthened **LEADER**, **Community-led Local Development (CLLD)**, and **Smart Villages**. The Commission has also supported **27 energy communities** and the creation of a **mobility network** of rural municipalities.

Further efforts include dedicated projects to develop the **social economy** and **bioeconomy**, the launch of a [Rural toolkit on EU funding](#) and continued expansion of the [Rural Observatory](#). These and other milestones are detailed in the [Commission's report](#) on the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: key achievements and ways forward.

Building on these successes, the [Vision for agriculture and food](#), published in February 2025, set the bar higher by committing to update the Rural Action Plan and align it with the new priorities and the new momentum brought by the proposal for the [2028-2034 EU budget](#).

The **update of the Rural Action Plan is grounded in dialogue** with the 3 500 members of the Rural Pact Community. Continuous consultation is essential to ensure the new Plan reflects national, regional and local realities.

The [Rural Pact Conference](#) (16-17 September 2025) brought together over 250 stakeholders to exchange ideas across eight key themes that may be part of the updated Rural Action Plan. These include: **digitalisation and connectivity**; **energy transition**; **rural attractiveness for young people**; **local empowerment**; **innovation and competitiveness**; the '**right to stay**' in rural areas; **social inclusion**; and the **bioeconomy**.

The [sixth meeting of the Rural Pact Coordination Group](#) of 6 November 2025 built on the Conference discussions, refining priorities for the next phase.

All the ideas collected over recent months are being analysed and reviewed by Commission departments involved in the update process. The selected actions will form the basis of the updated Rural Action Plan – expected in early 2026.

We would like to thank all those who have contributed to implementing the Rural Action Plan and shaping the forthcoming update. Stay tuned!



New legislation proposals bring less security but more space to fulfil the potential of rural areas



By Radim Sršeň,
Rural Pact Coordination Group Chair

In December 2024, the Rural Pact Coordination Group published a [Joint Declaration](#) with strategic proposals on how the future rural development policy would look like.

The new [proposals for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034](#) and related legislation raised a lot of very diverse reactions and, certainly, even more questions as the proposals are more revolutionary than evolutionary, however, today's world as well as rural areas are facing new major challenges, which cannot be addressed by using old tools.

The need for flexibility

A major part of the rural community has been calling for years for more flexibility and less bureaucracy, which is exactly what the new proposals are bringing. Now, quite a lot of those voices claim that there is perhaps "too much" flexibility. There is definitely less security, however, it is impossible to face the challenges of rural areas with 5% from the EAFRD for LEADER anyway. I am happy to say that the [RPGC Declaration](#), approved last December, has been very visionary on these points.

Towards a holistic approach

There is a critical need for a shift in the traditional approach to rural development in order to face the challenges rural areas are facing. We are not able to solve them just by using the Common Agricultural Policy. A holistic, integrated, multi-fund and multi-policy approach is urgently needed, as advocated by the [Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas](#).

What is needed is targeted interventions and policy innovations to address the numerous challenges arising from depopulation, towards enhanced resilience, energy transformation, and the green and digital transitions to the economic decline in rural regions. Such an integrated approach should be recognised and reflected in the management of EU funds and policies, that the success of rural communities is critical not only to rural inhabitants, but to the broader economic, environmental, and social well-being of the European Union as a whole. Our

collective aim should be to create vibrant, resilient rural communities capable of contributing to sustainable economic, environmental, and social transitions.

The role of local authorities and regions

The local and regional dimensions are crucial and should get a much more significant role in the future. Each rural region has its specificities, problems and challenges. This requires place-based, tailor-made approaches and strong involvement of all local and regional stakeholders through bottom-up, multi-level governance models. There is also a need to scale all the existing EU tools with strong local and regional dimensions, like [LEADER/CLLD](#), [Smart Villages](#), [Rural Pact](#), [rural proofing](#) etc.

Focus on rural areas in the National and Regional Partnership Plans

Whilst there is significant potential for all of this in the new proposals for the EU budget 2028-2034, there needs to be enough attention given to rural areas in all National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP), starting from a mandatory ringfencing for rural development within all NRPPs and, I am sure, we will all fight for it. This will require much more negotiating efforts on the national level than we have been used to. However, it also assigns more importance to the Rural Pact and the [Rural Pact Coordination Group](#) for assistance and mutual inspiration in those negotiations.

Together, we are stronger, and I believe in a better future for rural areas! Remember, Europe starts in rural areas...!

The EU Technical Support Instrument helps Member States boost rural development



By Florin Popa (left), DG EAC (formerly DG REFORM), European Commission
Edward Tersmette (right), DG REFORM, European Commission

The Technical Support Instrument (TSI) is an EU programme designed to provide tailored technical expertise to help Member States design and implement necessary reforms. It offers strategic and legal advice, studies, training, and expert visits, which are particularly beneficial for rural areas facing challenges such as demographic decline, economic underperformance, and labour shortages. The TSI is demand driven and does not require co-financing from Member States. It is aimed at addressing these issues in a structural manner.

A notable TSI project currently in preparation is **“Preparing rural regions in Romania to adapt to demographic change and talent shortage”**. Romania’s rural regions are struggling with demographic decline, low economic performance and a shortage of skilled labour. These challenges are exacerbated by outmigration from these areas, driven by poor connectivity, productivity challenges, and limited access to essential public services, such as education and healthcare. Previous national efforts have not been successful, largely due to a lack of coordination between national, regional, and local development strategies.

To address these issues, the Romanian Ministry of Development, Public Works, and Administration sought technical assistance to create a comprehensive national framework. Implemented with the expertise of the OECD between 2025 and 2027, this framework will enhance the capacity of national and local authorities by providing policy guidelines and methodologies for effective

collaboration in addressing rural challenges. The project aligns with the OECD’s Rural Well-being Policy Framework and supports the development of a place-based national rural policy. This policy will focus on strengthening multi-level collaboration, improving access to public services, and promoting territorial cohesion to reduce regional disparities.

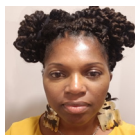
Furthermore, the Netherlands is engaged in a TSI project involving the design of a rural policy review at national level. The rural areas of the Netherlands face complex issues such as maintaining a good service level, working towards a future-proof agricultural sector, rural discontent and demographic change. To address these issues, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature sought technical assistance to launch a consultative rural policy review conducted by the OECD. The review will provide insights into what challenges the vitality and quality of life in rural areas, their socio-economic state and the opportunities that could be embraced. The project started in September 2025, for a duration of 18 months.

The TSI provides a valuable opportunity for rural regions to align their development strategies with EU legislation and recommendations. Should you need further information, please contact SG-REFORM-TSI@ec.europa.eu

Relevant links: [TSI 2026 Call](#)



Rural proofing – strengthening the process and managing expectations



By Betty-Ann Bryce,
OECD

Rural proofing – the act of checking to ensure that a policy will not inadvertently cause adverse consequences in rural regions – is often misunderstood. Some treat it like a policy that, when implemented, will yield immediate outcomes in rural areas. As a result, when immediate change is not realised or visible, there is a tendency to classify it as a failure or ineffective.

Governments across the globe and within the European Union are increasingly turning to rural proofing to support rural development. As such, it is essential to understand its scope and limitations. This article explores how the effectiveness of rural proofing could be framed and offers practical ways to improve the process.

Rural proofing as a process

Rural proofing is not a policy, it is a process designed to inform decisions. This process can reveal risks and opportunities, but it cannot force policymakers to act on the information. It relies on three pillars: **stakeholder involvement**; **evidence gathering**; and **timely delivery of information that is clear, concise and tailored** to the context and the 'rural proofer'.

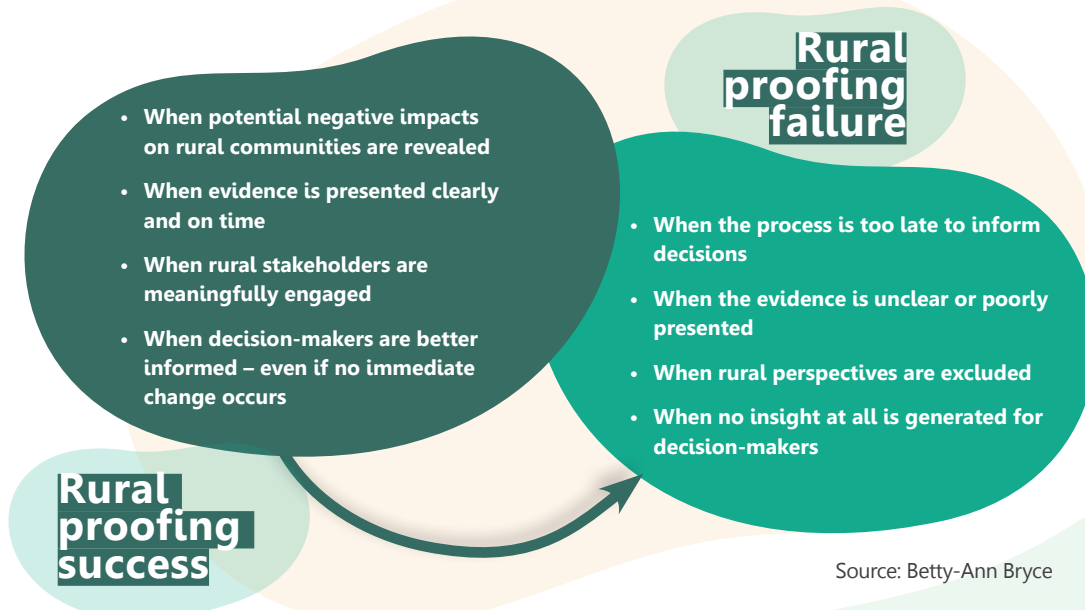
Discover a wealth of resources – documents, speaker presentations and video recordings – from the dedicated [Rural Pact Policy Lab](#) of June 2025.

Find rural proofing examples from Ireland, Finland, and Catalonia (Spain) in the [Policy Lab highlights report](#).

The quality of the process determines success

This becomes evident when looking at where rural proofing consistently falls short. Failure occurs, for example, when the evidence is not clear, when supporting documents are vague or overly complex, or when the information is not delivered in a way that can actually be used. Rural proofing is better positioned for success when the process is refined to get these elements right – see figure 1.

Figure 1. Rural proofing success or failure



Source: Betty-Ann Bryce

Level of governance and timing

The way rural proofing is designed must match the level of government where the process is taking place. At the national level, the rural proofing process may need to deliver information quickly. This could impact how the rural voices are heard as well as how experts are brought into the process.

Whereas at the regional or local level, there could be more time, for example, to organise town halls, bring stakeholders together, and deliberate. If rural proofing is to be effective, its design must reflect these different time pressures. Failures often occur not because the process is conceptually flawed, but because it is not adapted to the governance level or timeframe in which it operates.

Transparency can help to manage expectations

As noted earlier, sometimes, in the absence of visible improved policy outcomes in rural regions, stakeholders conclude that rural proofing has failed. However, if stakeholders gain insights into what was done, they would be better informed and better positioned to distinguish between whether the process itself was sound and the policymaker's ultimate decision.

Publishing summaries of rural proofing exercises could help. With transparency, there is more scope to see the value in continuing to refine and strengthen the process.

Build sophisticated rural intelligence

One way to improve the process is more substantive and robust evidence built around three pillars:

- **State of Rural Data** establishes the baseline picture of rural. It is the broadest category – understanding the overall conditions of rural areas.
- **Potential Impact Data** is more specific and assesses the possible positive or adverse effects linked to a particular policy proposal or proposed action. For example, if a government introduces an e-governance strategy, this data could examine whether the rural regions with limited broadband or lower levels of digital literacy would be disadvantaged if the proposal were to move forward.
- **Value-Added Data** goes a step further to identify or explore opportunities where a rural region could actively help achieve the policy's objectives, particularly where the impact data reveals potential negative consequences.

Changing the narrative: how you talk about rural regions matters

Too often, rural areas are portrayed as dependent, rather than as equal contributors to national development.

Analysis reveals that this framing can impact how non-rural government departments perceive and respond to rural issues. Rural is not a burden – it is part of the solution.

More often than not, rural stakeholders or experts rely on arguments framed in deficit terms – reminding policymakers of rural weaknesses rather than strengths. Arguably, this is where value-added data that shows how rural can actively help achieve the policy's goals becomes essential as it helps to communicate rural realities in ways that highlight their relevance to broader national goals.

Test and co-design rural proofing materials with stakeholders and rural proofers

Do not design rural proofing processes in isolation. Leverage existing arrangements with academic institutions and stakeholder networks to gather rural intelligence. These can support both the technical side of data gathering and the value-added dimension, ensuring that evidence is both rigorous and grounded in lived realities.

Involve government officials from non-rural departments, where feasible, in the design of documents. It is imperative to have their buy-in and ensure that their feedback on documents, questions, and data formats is incorporated.

In conclusion

Rural proofing is a process, not a policy, which can inform but cannot force decisions. Success depends on the quality of the process. Sharing findings – even if no policy change follows – helps manage expectations and maintain stakeholder trust. Even when no immediate action is taken, increasing knowledge about rural issues in non-rural government departments can still be a success that could be helpful in future actions.

For further information

Bryce, B. (2024), 'Rural Proofing: Lessons from OECD countries and potential application to health', OECD Regional Development Papers, No. 73, OECD Publishing, Paris

OECD (2025), 'Reinforcing Rural Resilience', OECD Rural Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris

European Commission, 'Rural proofing'

European Network for Rural Development (2022), 'A Framework of Rural Proofing Actions', thematic group final output

Enhancing policy coordination to unlock rural potential

Better coordination between different institutions and governance levels can make a real difference in supporting rural communities across the EU and addressing the multifaceted challenges they face.

The Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) [Declaration](#) – adopted in December 2024 – advocates for the implementation of the Rural Pact model which is based on a multi-fund and multi-stakeholder approach across all governance levels. This would contribute to improving the effectiveness of rural development initiatives.

By combining funding sources for rural development policies and engaging all relevant stakeholders, resources can be used more efficiently, and actions can be better aligned. Clear governance structures with defined roles at each level support ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and policy adaptation.

The Declaration calls for translating the EU rural vision into long-term rural strategies at EU, national, and regional levels, developed in partnership with rural stakeholders to ensure that policies truly reflect local priorities and needs.

Explore three examples of national and regional managing authorities committed to making the Rural Pact happen in their territories.



By Franck Leroy,
Région Grand Est, France

Enhancing the richness, diversity and vitality of rural areas is a priority for us. Our region is implementing a Rural Pact since April 2024 to improve quality of life in our 4 544 rural communities.

The initiative is built around two main goals: addressing residents' daily needs and creating a cross-cutting approach that goes beyond sectoral limits. To shape the Pact, we conducted 40 workshops with 1 000 participants who identified local priorities. The resulting 100 financial and technical engineering measures, supported through EUR 800 million, address key concerns, including mobility, housing, healthcare access, training, and job creation.

A board of elected officials oversees the initiative's success and visibility on the ground. Twelve regional centres support local stakeholders in developing their projects, bridging the gap between regional authorities and communities. A dedicated team ensures coordination and implementation across departments.

After just one year, our [Rural Pact](#) has supported over 70 rural businesses, 1 100 SMEs, 163 building and public space renovations, 120+ projects to improve active mobility, sport facilities or early childhood services and eight on-demand transport systems. An example of a successful scheme is the '[Coup de pouce rural](#)' which funded 541 projects for small-scale works – such as renovation of churches and public buildings, installation of new street furniture, beautification – with a big impact in local communities.





Eva van der Meulen, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, we do not yet have an integrated rural development policy, but several initiatives are moving in that direction.

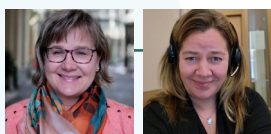
In 2025, the Ministry of the Interior launched the [National Programme for Vital Regions](#) to reduce disparities and secure future prospects for peripheral regions. High-level representatives from different ministries act as contact points, promoting inter-ministerial involvement and supporting coordination between governance levels. The process is coordinated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with the whole central government committed to this approach.

A [Rural Review](#) (planned for 2025), in cooperation with the OECD and funded by the European Commission under its Technical Support Instrument, aims to analyse how rural

development policies can be better aligned with rural needs, well-being, and long-term, socio-economic challenges.

A coalition of 33 rural municipalities, the [P10 Network](#), provides a strong, bottom-up governance structure. It facilitates exchange and rural advocacy at national and EU levels, supporting collaborative planning between residents, institutions and entrepreneurs to deliver place-based strategies. Its common goal is to sustain services, amenities and prospects in rural areas to prevent decline.

The [Dutch Rural Pact](#) – a bottom-up initiative that we launched in 2024 – brings together national, regional and local stakeholders to discuss priorities and implement the EU rural vision in the Dutch context.



Sanna Sihvola and Marianne Selkäinaho, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland

Finland is one of the most rural countries in the EU, with 95% of its land area classified as rural and roughly a third of the population living in rural areas. This is why rural policy and rural development are crucially important for us.

For over 35 years, we've had a national rural policy, led by a [Rural Policy Council](#). The Council – bringing together 35 governmental and civil society organisations – is chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture and supported by a secretariat and thematic networks. Its main tool is the national rural policy programme, setting out objectives in

the areas of: natural resources; rural actors and sustainability; competitiveness; day-to-day life; and inclusion and community.

Taking a holistic approach, the programme defines the needs and targets for rural development, based on research and facts. The integration of various funding sources, including EU rural funding, and decisions on EU structural funds happen at regional level, with regional management committees coordinating the preparation and implementation of regional development programmes.



For more information and examples, see the event web page of the Policy Lab on [Enhancing Policy coordination](#) (November 2024) and the [country-specific information](#) web pages on advancing the Rural Pact.

Turning rural voices into action: stakeholder perspectives from the Rural Pact Conference

Over 250 rural stakeholders from across Europe gathered in Pecq, Belgium, on 16–17 September 2025 for the Rural Pact Conference, a two-day event dedicated to generating concrete actions for the EU rural vision. Organised by the Rural Pact Support Office, the Conference focused on shaping policies that strengthen rural resilience, competitiveness, and inclusiveness, while feeding directly into the upcoming update of the Rural Action Plan. For more information, speaker presentations and video recordings, see the [Rural Pact Conference web page](#).

Read a range of stakeholder perspectives and takeaways from the event!

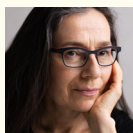


Anita Seļicka,
Latvian Rural Forum (Latvia)

The Rural Pact Conference confirmed how diverse rural Europe is – and how urgent it is to turn this diversity into strength. My key takeaway is that we can no longer afford fragmented or accidental support. Rural areas need national strategies that translate the EU's long-term vision into clear responsibilities, stable funding, and concrete action on the ground.

The examples presented showed that even small initiatives can spark major change: multifunctional village shops that secure food and services; 5G recognised as public infrastructure; Smart Villages testing new ways of delivering energy or care. LEADER/CLLD has already proven that when support is ringfenced, communities deliver.

But these seeds must not be lost like grain through a hole in the pocket, or drowned out in battles with powerful lobbies. Europe's villages can't be treated as spaces to be helped, but should rather be recognised as engines of resilience and innovation.



Hilikka Vihinen,
LUKE Institute (Finland)

My key recommendation is to strengthen support for researchers to implement rural proofing in EU, national and regional policies. We need to compare different rural proofing approaches and improve the ways of collecting and presenting the needed data and knowledge for an efficient use in all policy sectors that have an impact on rural life.

Special rural-proofing activities should be directed to such mechanisms and practices that systematically leave rural areas behind. These are policy frameworks and measures that result in only sustaining rather than renewing the economic structures of rural areas, while concentrating renewing activities in already well-off urban areas. This unintended bias causes a vicious cycle that makes us under-perform both in terms of well-being and economy.

In my institution, the priority of our new research strategy is resilient and competitive bioeconomy in the northern, sparsely populated rural areas of the EU.



Kevin Grauwels,
Flemish Land Agency (Belgium)

My key takeaway from the Rural Pact Conference is the opportunity that the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP) could present for a more integrated approach to structural investments in rural areas, complementing rural interventions under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and LEADER.

However, this should require that Member States elaborate integrated strategies for rural development at national or regional level, involving the whole government. The involvement of crucial departments – such as mobility, healthcare, economy – in this would be indispensable.

This is also where the NRPP can create a threat for rural development: the Plans require interdepartmental engagement to work well. This can be strengthened with the development of national or regional Rural Pacts. In the next months, we will continue working on the development of a Rural Pact in Flanders, involving all levels of government and policy domains.



Ben van Essen,
ERCA, European Rural Parliament

"Don't underestimate us," said rural resident Lina Noreikaite-Rimkienė at the start of the well-organised Rural Pact Conference which had broad representation at all levels. To my delight, 37% of the participants were civil society organisation representatives who presented numerous best practices clearly demonstrating that everywhere in rural Europe, local efforts are underway to find "rural community solutions to global challenges".

This was precisely the motto of the [European Rural Parliament](#) of October 2025 where around 400 participants discussed new ideas for the best future for rural areas.

"The future of Europe depends on how we handle local communities", in the words of EESC member Lidija Pavić-Rogošić. The new Rural Action Plan must make room for what local communities have to offer by providing (earmarked) support for Community-led Local Development, regional financial hubs, knowledge sharing and coaching for grassroots initiatives.

This way, the 'right to stay' becomes what it has to be: the right to shape your own future.



Mihail Dumitru,
DG AGRI, European Commission

The Conference addressed a wealth of topics showing the complexity of the challenges faced by rural areas, as well as the opportunities and the funding instruments that exist in Europe at all levels. These are at the disposal of rural communities to mobilise and to make rural areas the places where people would like to live, stay, and work. We are on track on the journey that we initiated some years ago, towards our vision for 2040, and with the Rural Action Plan, we have reached one more milestone.

I take home an important message: throughout the years, we succeeded to build a very strong and powerful community. I am very pleased about this because this was our objective, to make this community and rural stakeholders a strong voice and to defend rural areas beyond agriculture. Let us keep up the good work and continue our journey through the Rural Pact.



Charlene Lambert,
Women Entrepreneurship
Platform

We were encouraged by the growing recognition of the need to support women farmers, female rural entrepreneurs, and youth to reverse the current trend of rural decline. Women and youth bring welcome new ideas, approaches, and solutions to the table, and should have high priority for improved policies and programmes. By having 'all hands-on deck', we can better achieve the goals of the CAP, Green Deal, F2F strategy, and EU rural vision.

Our work to benchmark these policies against the EU Gender Equality Strategy as part of the Horizon Europe GRASS CEILING consortium has demonstrated, however, that there is still much to do in order to achieve equality. By having targeted programmes, supportive policy language, and dedicated funding, progress can be made. We will continue to work with members and partners to advocate for rural female farmers and entrepreneurs, and young women, to ensure that EU and national policies fully support them.



Hugo Sobral,
DG REGIO, European Commission

My three takeaways from the Conference relate to:

1. Co-creating and continuously updating the Rural Action Plan (including work on the 'right to stay'), and systematically sharing success stories to enable mutual learning – the Plan should be a living document which reflects today's realities, but also tomorrow's ambitions.
2. The necessity of strong networks, public administration capacity, and investing in what makes people choose to stay: services, education, transport, digital connectivity, jobs, and security.
3. The European institutions' commitment to sustained partnership – the institutions are listening and engaging with local voices, in line with the long-standing partnership principle of cohesion policy. The Conference highlighted many valuable ideas and recommendations, but this is not the end. This is part of an ongoing conversation – the future of policies for rural areas must be shaped in partnership with rural actors.

The Rural Pact in 2025: highlights from the Support Office



By Sophie Nedlin,
Rural Pact Support Office

Get a glimpse into what the Rural Pact Support Office has been up to over the past year! From inspiring events and publications, to actions driving the rural vision forward.

Rural Pacts taking shape across EU Member States and regions

A growing number of countries are putting the Rural Pact into practice, translating its principles into national and regional action. To make these efforts visible, a set of new web pages with [country-specific information](#) brings together examples from ten Member States – Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands – structured around the seven ingredients set out in the Policy Briefing ‘[Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States](#)’.

From the creation of national platforms to the development of innovative policy tools, these examples illustrate how governments and communities can work together to strengthen rural Europe.

In the Netherlands, a recently launched Rural Pact connects rural networks, researchers, civil society, and government to identify shared priorities – discover more Dutch initiatives on page 8. Poland has launched its first Rural Parliament, giving mayors, youth, NGOs, farmers and associations a collective voice in policymaking. Germany carries out ‘equivalence checks’ to ensure new laws support balanced living conditions, while additional tools provide detailed data on housing, services, and mobility to help tailor policies to rural realities. Browse through the [country-specific information](#) to discover more examples!

Turning rural priorities into policy action: lessons from the Policy Labs

The Rural Pact Policy Labs provide spaces for stakeholders to explore solutions, share practices, and translate the EU rural vision into practical policy approaches. A Policy Lab on [enhancing policy coordination](#) (28 November 2024) highlighted the importance of integrated governance structures, active stakeholder involvement, clear communication, and simplified, well-monitored funding to ensure that policies deliver lasting impact at all levels. See national and regional examples on pages 8-9.



Seven ingredients to translate the Rural Pact into action

1. Structures, mechanisms to engage with rural stakeholders
2. A designated government member and dedicated services to deal with rural issues across policies
3. Capacity-building and networking support for a broad array of actors and stakeholders
4. A forward-looking vision, implemented through a holistic strategy/action plan
5. Effective rural proofing and adequate data systems
6. Appropriate governance systems to facilitate coordination
7. Mechanisms to coordinate the allocation of funding and ensure synergies

Another Policy Lab, focused on [rural proofing](#) (12 June 2025), stressed the need to embed rural thinking throughout the policymaking process – from agenda-setting and impact assessment to delivery and evaluation – rather than treat it as a one-off check. See how to strengthen the rural proofing process and manage expectations of its delivery on pages 6-7.

Finally, a Lab on the [post-2027 EU budget and policy framework](#) (5 November 2025) explored the [European Commission's proposals](#) of July 2025, their implications for rural communities, and ways to make rural voices heard in the policy debate.

Practical solutions for rural housing, tourism, and innovation

The Rural Pact Good Practice Webinars in 2025 illustrated concrete ways to strengthen rural communities through exchange on innovative approaches and initiatives.

The **rural housing webinar** (20 February 2025) highlighted that affordability, accessibility, and energy efficiency require targeted financial support, especially for households facing energy poverty, coupled with awareness campaigns and EU research to improve funding access. Simplifying planning procedures, building local skills, and developing digital property databases can contribute to accelerating renovations and bringing vacant homes back into use. Community-led models, such as cooperatives or land trusts, can help ensure long-term social cohesion and housing security.

The webinar on **sustainable rural tourism** (7 May 2025) emphasised its key role in local revitalisation and safeguarding nature and culture, backed by skills development across the tourism value chain, integrated planning, and strengthened digital and physical infrastructures. Flexible, long-term funding, reduced bureaucracy, and local governance are key to fostering entrepreneurship and coherent, regenerative tourism offers.

The **rural innovation webinar** (22 May 2025) stressed the central role of local innovation in sustaining vibrant, future-ready communities. It highlighted the need for place-based policies, flexible funding, and partnerships that combine local knowledge with technological advances. Strong connectivity, digital skills, and inclusive participation – particularly of youth and women – were seen as crucial to social, ecological, and economic innovation. Tailored metrics, governance structures, and long-term investment are essential to making rural innovation visible, measurable, and sustainable.

Actions for the rural vision: make an impact!

These **voluntary initiatives implemented and shared by Rural Pact Community members** help shape the future of Europe's rural areas. While there is no obligation or financial compensation, every action – big or small – matters.

Anyone can participate: citizens, entrepreneurs, NGOs, academics, or public authorities. Actions can be existing projects or new initiatives that strengthen rural communities, spark innovation, and address local challenges.

Actions you can propose

- **Policies & advocacy:** strategies, debates, and initiatives that strengthen rural development policies;
- **Capacity building & knowledge sharing:** training programmes, workshops, and peer-learning opportunities;



@ European Union, 2025

Rural Pact Conference 2025

A flagship Rural Pact event, the **Conference** brought together over 250 stakeholders from across Europe to connect rural realities with EU policymaking and debate on the future of rural areas. Discussions highlighted the importance of **integrated, place-based policies, inclusive participation, and multi-level governance** to empower communities and turn the EU rural vision into concrete action. Read an **overview of key insights** and a range of stakeholder takeaways on pages 10-11.

- **Events & networking:** stakeholder gatherings to connect, exchange, and inspire;
- **Local projects:** tangible initiatives on the ground;
- **Any other action on the ground,** implemented in a rural area.

Sharing your action brings real benefits: it showcases your work across Europe, inspires others, and highlights your leadership. It connects you with like-minded members, fosters partnerships, and amplifies rural voices in policymaking, showing the increasing number of people who are willing to act for rural areas.

Become a member of the Rural Pact, find out **how you can contribute**, explore **existing actions** – make your contribution to thriving rural areas!

Empowering rural Europe: the Rural Pact Community in action



By Urszula Budzich Tabor,
Rural Pact Support Office

As part of the EU rural vision, the European Commission has put in place the Rural Pact at EU level to help make European rural areas stronger, more connected, resilient, and prosperous. The Pact has brought together and activated a community of more than 3 500 organisations and individuals from across Europe. However, **to achieve a real change in rural areas, the Pact needs to spread beyond the EU level** and reach stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.

This requires the involvement and collaboration, not only of the institutions and organisations in charge of food, agriculture and rural matters, but also others, dealing with health, education, transport and mobility, housing, employment, environment or energy, at all governance levels.

In most EU Member States, [certain elements of the Rural Pact are already in place](#). These range from mechanisms for coordination between different policy fields and between funding sources, to ongoing dialogue with and capacity building for rural communities and civil society organisations.

Making the Rural Pact happen also requires strong leadership at national and regional levels, access to reliable information (rural intelligence) and long-term strategic thinking about rural development.

Examples at national level

- In [Czechia](#), rural areas benefit from integrated Community-led Local Development (CLLD) strategies [financed under different EU Funds](#), with a number of mechanisms to ensure coordination across policy silos.
- The [Irish](#) 'Our Rural Future' strategy addresses economic diversification, reversing rural decline, and leveraging technology and digitalisation for growth. Ireland has also produced a [Guide to rural proofing](#) for policymakers.
- In [Finland](#), all policies affecting rural areas are coordinated by a [Rural Policy Council](#) representing diverse sectors, including administration, business, civic activities, advisory organisations, and research (see page 9 for more detail).
- [Norway](#) is piloting an approach where vulnerable rural municipalities develop action plans to strengthen community development and implement place-based solutions. Annual political dialogue brings these municipalities together with counties and national authorities to ensure continued alignment.

Examples at regional level

- The [French](#) region [Grand Est](#) has put in place a [Rural Pact](#) to support the diversity and vitality of rural areas. This is done through a comprehensive, long-term commitment to preserving quality of life, protecting the environment and local agriculture, enhancing connectivity, and boosting the attractiveness of rural territories, while fostering opportunities for youth engagement and innovation (see page 8 for more detail).
- In the [Spanish](#) region of [Catalonia](#), the highly participatory [2022 Rural Agenda](#) lays down a rural vision and identifies needs, challenges and opportunities to ensure living and development conditions. An action plan outlines the measures for the various regional government departments to coordinate the deployment of funds in rural areas.
- Rural proofing in the [Spanish](#) region of [Castilla-La Mancha](#) is institutionalised through a comprehensive approach outlined in regional law, which mandates that new regulations, plans, or programmes should undergo a 'demographic impact report' to evaluate effects on rural areas.
- In [Belgium](#), the Flemish government has launched a [Rural Pact](#) – a partnership among a wide range of stakeholders – structured around five themes: a multifunctional open space; attractive living environment; welcoming rural community; economic activity and innovation; and strong local governance.

At the local level [communities strive to make their areas better places to live](#): this requires local-level leaders or 'champions' that help the community develop a shared vision and practical action plan, as well as appropriate organisational set-up to implement it. However, the local community alone cannot achieve a significant impact: the complexity of rural action, with multiplicity of players and issues, requires strong input from policymaking levels.

National and regional authorities have an important role to play in supporting community action by building local capacity and facilitating access to funding. It is essential that these national/regional decision-makers recognise local leaders and organisations as partners in rural development, and that the different policy strands deliver harmonised impacts on the local level.

Both at national/regional and at local level, the methods and approaches to move forward with the Rural Pact must be adapted to the legal and administrative culture and build, as far as possible, on existing structures and mechanisms. These include LEADER and Smart Village groups, as well as civil society networks such as Rural Parliaments.

It is particularly important to have intermediary organisations or 'rural mediators' in place to bridge the gap between local initiatives and support programmes. At the policymaking level, a clear framework to ensure coordination and synergies between policies, and to support, strengthen and multiply bottom-up initiatives is needed.

Strengthening the Rural Pact depends on coordinated efforts across all levels of governance, with support for local leadership, and practical mechanisms to address the specific needs and opportunities in rural areas.

Examples at local level

- Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the Italian region of Tuscany play a crucial role in supporting the National Strategy for Inner Areas by providing capacity building and engaging local stakeholders. For example, the [MontagnAppennino LAG](#) provides technical support to local beneficiaries of the national strategy, and implements its own territorial strategy to create synergies.
- In France, LAGs are usually organised around supra-municipal associations called 'pays'. The [Pays Vallée du Loir](#) gathers 57 municipalities and is steered by a committee of elected local representatives and an advisory board of volunteers representing the local community. The Pays supports local actors to work on a wide range of topics, using LEADER funding and other county, regional, national and European funds.
- In the Netherlands, the [Hilvarenbeek Smart Village](#) association brings together residents, local government and various organisations to promote sustainable local development and support bottom-up initiatives through connectors and platforms with local experts. Local initiatives, ranging from upgrading and repurposing community buildings to improving local bus transport, are largely driven by dedicated residents who share their knowledge and experience with new projects.



Read the Rural Pact Policy Briefings on '[Making the Rural Pact happen in Member States](#)' and '[Empowering communities to take action for the rural vision](#)' available in all official EU languages.

Browse the [country-specific information](#) pages for a range of examples at national and regional levels.

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Contents and editing: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, AGRI-D1 and Rural Pact Support Office

Acknowledgements:

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- Layout: Rural Pact Support Office
- Cover photo: © European Union, 2025

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Print ISBN: 978-92-68-31298-8 ISSN: 2812-2666 doi:10.2762/1004122 KF-01-25-038-EN-C

PDF ISBN: 978-92-68-31297-1 ISSN: 2812-2674 doi:10.2762/5082834 KF-01-25-038-EN-N



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of the European Union

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