

GOOD PRACTICE WEBINAR



Highlights report

Generational renewal in rural businesses: empowering youth, supporting elders

Introduction

The webinar explored policy measures and practical examples that support the creation, development and transfer of rural businesses beyond agriculture. It looked into ways for these approaches to foster intergenerational collaboration, strengthen local economies and enhance the attractiveness of rural areas for young people and diverse populations.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



10 June 2026



Online



Over 150 participants from 25 EU Member States and nine non-EU countries, including public authorities, representatives of Local Action Groups (LAGs), NGOs, private sector and researchers.



[Presentations and recordings](#)



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

Main highlights from the event

Supporting business creation, succession and continuity

- > Generational renewal requires more than identifying successors: **tailored advisory services, mentoring schemes, matchmaking initiatives, simplified administrative procedures and dedicated funding** can help facilitate business transfers and continuity in rural areas.
- > **Intergenerational knowledge transfer**, including mentoring by senior experts and experienced business owners, can strengthen entrepreneurial skills, build confidence and support younger generations entering rural economic activities.
- > Practical support mechanisms such as **mentoring, paid incubation programmes, business planning assistance, start-up capital, and vocational training opportunities** can help transform ideas into viable businesses and professional careers.

Generational renewal requires attractive rural ecosystems

- > Decisions to stay in, return to or invest in rural areas are influenced not only by economic opportunities but also by **housing, services, connectivity, mobility and quality of life**.
- > **Innovative approaches** such as digital nomad initiatives, rural placements and clerkships, talent attraction programmes and links between educational institutions and local businesses can help connect people, skills and opportunities in rural areas.
- > **Integrated place-based strategies** are needed to create attractive environments for young people, entrepreneurs and skilled professionals and to respond to demographic challenges in rural areas.

Inclusive approaches to entrepreneurship, employment and rural renewal

- > Women, migrants, international students, newcomers and senior experts represent important **resources to address labour shortages, support business continuity** and contribute to the development of emerging sectors such as care services, sustainable tourism, digital activities and other local economic opportunities.
- > Women and newcomers often face additional barriers related to access to networks, services, finance, social protection, and recognition. **Inclusive and supportive rural ecosystems**, combined with confidence-building, mentoring, peer learning and networking opportunities, can strengthen participation in entrepreneurship, employment and community life.
- > **Partnerships** between educational institutions, public authorities, businesses and community organisations can help identify talent, connect people with local opportunities and facilitate their integration into rural labour markets and communities.

Generational renewal and business continuity in rural economies: trends and opportunities

Alen Mujčinović and Tatiana Ferreira, European Rural Youth Observatory (EURYO) ([PPT](#))



Rural youth increasingly view mobility as a dynamic process, combining periods of study or work elsewhere with the possibility of returning later to rural areas with new skills, knowledge and resources. At the same time, EURYO insights reveal lower rates of entrepreneurship among young people in rural areas compared to those in urban areas.

Access to finance, mentoring, practical guidance, skills development, trust in institutions and supportive local ecosystems are important enabling factors for business creation and continuity. Opportunities linked to the green and digital transitions are present in sectors such as renewable energy, the bioeconomy, care services, digital services and sustainable tourism.

Setting the scene: EU initiatives supporting generational renewal in rural economies

Strategy on intergenerational fairness: territorial opportunities for rural areas

Biliana Sirakova, DG EAC, European Commission ([PPT](#))



The [EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness](#) is a cross-cutting policy framework promoting fairness between younger and older generations, and between current and future generations. It supports a long-term approach to policymaking that balances opportunities and responsibilities across generations.

Relevant elements for rural areas include youth engagement, trust, the 'right to stay', and measures to address disadvantages across the life course. The strategy also highlights the role of intergenerational cooperation and knowledge transfer in strengthening social cohesion and supporting resilient communities.

Strategy for generational renewal in agriculture: ensuring a fair standard of living in rural areas

Alba Barrutieta, DG AGRI, European Commission ([PPT](#))



The [Strategy for Generational Renewal in Agriculture](#) responds to the ageing of the farming population, with only 12% of EU farmers under 40 years of age and 33% over 65. Five priority areas include: access to credit and finance; access to land; knowledge and skills; succession and retirement; and ensuring a fair standard of living in rural areas.

Attractive rural living conditions, including access to services, infrastructure and opportunities beyond farming are particularly important. Planned actions under the strategy include Rural Youth Ambassadors, farm relief services, support for rural development through LEADER and Community-led Local Development, and promoting an integrated approach to rural areas in the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs). Implementation will take place through the future NRPPs, which will include national strategies for generational renewal in agriculture.

Talent Booster Mechanism: lessons learned from support to regions to attract and retain talent

Agnieszka Bednarska-Bernatek, DG REGIO, European Commission ([PPT](#))



The [Talent Booster Mechanism](#) responds to demographic decline and talent shortages affecting many European regions. Lessons from its implementation highlight the importance of retaining as well as attracting talent, and of developing place-based approaches tailored to local needs.

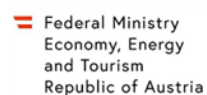
Integrated strategies combining economic opportunities, skills development, transport, digital connectivity, housing and services are key elements of strengthening the attractiveness of rural areas and regions, improving quality of life, linking skills to local labour market needs and supporting long-term responses to demographic change.

Learning from practice and exploring solutions

> Generational renewal and business transfer in rural economies

Supporting business succession in rural tourism through CAP-funded advisory schemes (Austria)

Renate Penitz, Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism (BMWET) ([PPT](#))



In Austria, a CAP-funded measure supports the succession of tourism SMEs in rural areas through the preparation of business plans for business transfers. The scheme was developed in response to the large number of family-owned tourism businesses expected to change ownership in the coming years, with more than 7 000 tourism enterprises projected to be transferred by 2029.

A lump-sum grant of EUR 8 000 supports the development of business plans by approved tourism consultancies, helping successors assess business viability and plan future development. The scheme combines tailored advisory support and simplified administrative procedures to facilitate business succession in rural tourism.

Facilitating the transfer of rural businesses through territorial matching: the 'Reconnecting generations' initiative (Spain)

Elena Plaza Díaz, Asturian Rural Development Network (READER) ([PPT](#))



The 'Reconnecting Generations' initiative supports the continuity of small rural businesses by identifying businesses at risk of closure and matching them with potential successors. Implemented by the "Alto Narcea Muniellos" Local Action

Group, the project established a business transfer bank, mapped over 100 businesses and supported 20 succession processes, resulting in seven completed or ongoing transfers. Local mediation, awareness raising and tailored support are important elements for facilitating business transfers and preserving economic activity and services in rural communities.

Intergenerational mentoring and skills transfer through senior expert networks: the VerAplus initiative (Germany)

Bernd Tuchen, Senior Expert Service (SES) ([PPT](#))



VerAplus is a mentoring programme that connects apprentices with trained senior volunteers to support them throughout vocational education and training. The initiative provides confidential one-to-one mentoring focused on strengthening motivation, social skills, learning outcomes and practical training performance.

Since 2008, around 28 000 mentoring processes have been carried out, with 75% completed successfully and around 95% of participants indicating they would recommend the programme. The approach demonstrates the potential of intergenerational mentoring and knowledge transfer to support younger generations in developing skills and professional careers.

> **Building attractive rural ecosystems for young talent and entrepreneurship**

Supporting youth entrepreneurship and rural business creation through incubation and tailored mentoring: the PONI programme (Slovenia)

Maruša Bonča, Kovačnica Business Incubator, Melita Meglič, rural young entrepreneur ([PPT](#))



KOVAČNICA

The PONI programme supports aspiring entrepreneurs across all 12 Slovenian regions by providing four months of paid entrepreneurship development, mentoring, training and business planning support. Participants receive a salary and dedicate time to develop and test their business ideas, helping overcome financial and practical barriers to entrepreneurship.

Around 50-60% of participants nationally, and around 70% in the Gorenjska region, establish a business after completing the programme. The experience of rural entrepreneur Melita Meglič demonstrates how tailored support can help transform local ideas into viable businesses in rural communities.

Attracting digital talent and remote workers to rural areas through digital nomad initiatives: the Nomadland project (EU)

Matevž Straus, ID20 Institute ([PPT](#))



The Nomadland project explored how digital nomadism can contribute to rural revitalisation by attracting mobile professionals to rural communities and creating new connections between newcomers and local residents.

Through research and the identification of good practices across Europe, the project examined different models, including co-living spaces, temporary relocation programmes and the re-use of vacant buildings. Particular emphasis was placed on knowledge exchange between digital professionals, local youth and rural communities, helping strengthen local skills, entrepreneurship and new economic opportunities while supporting sustainable forms of rural development.

Supporting generational renewal in rural healthcare: attracting young medical professionals to underserved rural areas (Czechia)

David Halata and Kateřina Javorská, rural general practitioners ([PPT](#))



In Czechia, a national programme is supporting the recruitment and training of future general practitioners in underserved rural areas. Building on research into the motivations of young doctors, the initiative combines collaboration with medical faculties, rural clerkships, training centres and support for healthcare educators and practice teams.

The programme seeks to improve awareness of rural medical careers, strengthen the quality of training and provide practical experience in rural practices. By supporting the next generation of healthcare professionals, the initiative contributes to maintaining essential services and improving the attractiveness of rural areas as places to live and work.

> Women's entrepreneurship and inclusive rural business ecosystems



Supporting international students revitalising businesses in depopulating rural areas in Central Finland

Taneli Minkkinen, Economic Development Centre of Central Finland ([PPT](#))



Elinvoimakeskus

In Central Finland, the 'Career Trips' initiative connects international students and jobseekers with businesses and municipalities in smaller rural communities. The initiative combines company visits, networking and information on living and working opportunities in rural areas, helping address labour shortages and attract new residents.

From 2023 to mid-2026, 17 trips involving over 300 participants were organised, leading to internships, employment opportunities and stronger collaboration between municipalities, educational institutions and local businesses. The approach has also evolved into related initiatives, including hackathons, talent challenges and internship pathways linking international talent with rural employers.

Community-based support for rural entrepreneurship, employment and inclusion: the CAPES initiative (Spain)

Ana Isabel Alarcón López, Action Against Hunger ([PPT](#))



The CAPES initiative uses learning communities to bring together local authorities, businesses, educational institutions, rural development actors and residents to identify employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in rural areas. Activities include training, mentoring, networking, business support and capacity building tailored to local needs and strategic sectors such as tourism, forestry, care services and retail.

Particular attention is paid to women, young people and migrants, recognising their role in entrepreneurship, labour market inclusion and generational renewal. Between 2024 and 2025, the initiative supported 723 participants, contributed to the creation of 30 new businesses and helped 200 people find employment.

Women-led rural diversification and sustainable micro-entrepreneurship in remote rural areas

Aoife Gould, entrepreneur and member of GRASS CEILING project's Living Lab Scotland ([PPT](#))



A female entrepreneur's experience of developing a rural micro-enterprise on the Isle of Skye resulted in transforming locally produced sheep wool into value-added craft products, workshops and educational activities.

Support through the GRASS CEILING project combined entrepreneurship training, mentoring, peer learning and networking opportunities, helping strengthen business skills and confidence. Tailored support, peer networks and skills development can help women diversify rural economies and develop sustainable business activities in remote rural areas.

Stakeholder panel discussion: what is needed to support generational renewal in rural businesses beyond agriculture?

A panel of four stakeholder representatives reflected on the conditions needed to strengthen generational renewal in rural businesses beyond agriculture, drawing on perspectives from rural youth, women entrepreneurs, senior experts and research.

Tatiana Ferreira and Alen Mujčinović, [European Rural Youth Observatory](#) (EURYO)

Young people's decisions to stay in, return to or invest in rural areas are influenced not only by business opportunities but also by housing, services, connectivity, mobility and community networks. Generational renewal should be understood as a social, cultural and economic process linked to the long-term vitality of rural communities.



Successful entrepreneurship depends on enabling local ecosystems combining infrastructure, services, tailored mentoring and opportunities for participation. Young people should be involved more directly in shaping local policies and development strategies, with support measures adapted to local realities and needs.

Ismael Páez Cívico, [Confederation of European Senior Expert Services](#) (CESES)

Intergenerational mentoring can support business continuity and entrepreneurship in rural areas when organised through structured and accessible mechanisms. Local institutions, municipalities and community organisations can play an important role in connecting younger entrepreneurs with experienced professionals willing to share knowledge and expertise.

Greater support is needed for mentoring initiatives and opportunities for intergenerational knowledge exchange. Senior experts represent an underused resource that can contribute to entrepreneurship, skills development and business succession in rural areas.

Blanca Casares, Coordinator of Rural Pact [Community Group on rural women](#), [AEIDL](#)

Women entrepreneurs require supportive business ecosystems that extend beyond individual business support. Access to markets, finance, training, mentoring and business development services are important conditions for enabling women-led entrepreneurship and business growth in rural areas.

Childcare, transport, access to land and supportive institutional environments also influence women's participation in rural economies. Rural development policies should give greater attention to measuring the social and community impacts of women's entrepreneurship and generational renewal.

Adriana Borsellino, [Rural Youth Europe](#) (RYE)

Non-formal education, youth organisations and peer-learning opportunities can strengthen confidence, leadership skills and entrepreneurial capacity among young people. Such initiatives provide spaces to develop networks, gain experience and transform ideas into concrete projects and businesses.

Young people should be actively involved in local decision-making processes and development strategies. Opportunities for participation and leadership can strengthen their attachment to rural areas and support their contribution to local economic and community development.

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



<https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu>



info@rural-pact.eu