



POLICY ACTION LAB



Highlights report

Anchoring rural areas in the National and Regional Partnership Plans

Introduction

This Policy Action Lab, organised by the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) in cooperation with DG AGRI and DG REGIO, exchanged on the diverse measures that can support rural communities within the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).

Discussions highlighted how rural actors and communities could best be involved in the planning and preparation of the Plans in line with the partnership principle. They also built the capacity of rural stakeholders and improved understanding of the proposed provisions for monitoring and tracking expenditure in the performance framework.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



3 June 2026



In person



Around 120 participants from 23 countries (policymakers, public authorities, local practitioners, researchers and civil society representatives)



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Main highlights from the event

Potential benefits for rural areas through the NRPPs

- > For rural areas to fully benefit from **the opportunities offered by NRPPs**, including the **rural spending target**, there is a need for an integrated approach at Member State level, as well as a widespread application of place-based instruments, including Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI).
- > Designing rural support within the NRPPs will be easier in Member States that have in place **strategies that address the complex and cross-sectoral needs** of rural areas. Examples of such approaches already exist in several EU Member States and regions.
- > Rural areas can benefit from a wide range of **measures** focusing on such topics as innovation, entrepreneurship, public services, food or cultural identity, social inclusion, contributing to **addressing demographic and economic trends** and promoting the **right to stay**.
- > The successful drafting and implementation of strategies to support investment in rural areas requires a **participatory approach ensuring the involvement of rural stakeholders placing local inhabitants and rural communities at the centre of the process**.
- > Implementation of such integrated approaches involves **national, regional and local levels**, with the specific arrangements adapted to each governance level.

Measuring and tracking support to rural areas

- > The proposed **performance framework** for NRPPs has been designed with a view to streamlining and simplification of rules. The proposal includes the introduction of a territorial code for rural areas that would allow for tracking and monitoring of the amount of funds planned and spent in rural areas.
- > **Considerable data is being collected** to track what is happening in rural areas, however the data sets are in disparate places and need to be integrated.
- > The combination of these data sources, as well as the use of granular data, is useful to design finer rural-urban typologies. It also enables a better and **more precise allocation** of various funding streams and **tailoring of policies** to specific needs.
- > Granular data sets applicable to a variety of classes of rural and urban areas can serve as a basis for **effective rural proofing** of policies, as well as for monitoring support and assessing impacts.

Engagement of rural stakeholders

- > The requirements for the application of the **partnership principle** will continue, with some refinements in the legislative proposal possible. There is a wealth of material to draw on – a code of conduct, a compendium of examples where the principle is applied, as well as a community of practitioners that exchange on the topic.
- > Member States are already **engaging stakeholders in the planning and design of the NRPPs** even when the legal texts have not yet been fully agreed.
- > The benefits of stakeholder engagement include improved quality of the Plans themselves, enhanced democratic legitimacy of the proposals, and ensuring the **diverse needs of rural stakeholders** are taken on board.
- > The public authorities engaging rural stakeholders in their processes need to be mindful that this is part of a longer process that needs regular review, to ensure transparency and **involvement of actors that do not traditionally engage in policy dialogues**.

Welcome and framing the day

Peter Berkowitz, European Commission, DG REGIO



Competitiveness is a central pillar of the [next Multi-annual Financial Framework](#). **Ensuring the competitiveness of Europe**, however, is not just about concentrating on leading areas, but on all territories, including rural territories. A quarter of Europe's population lives in rural territories, and if Europe is to be competitive, then these areas need to contribute to competitiveness as well.

The NRPPs are intended to provide a **more flexible and more streamlined framework** for both administration and beneficiaries. The Commission's proposals maintain continuity in some elements, such as the shared management approach – while others are being strengthened, such as the **territorial focus**. With this focus, Member States will be required to identify rural areas' needs and appropriate resources to meet these, including demographic challenges.

A new element is the **rural spending target** which is designed to be a steering mechanism that builds on an adequate rural strategy. The NRPPs need to engage more with national strategies for rural areas, making it possible to foster and support a diverse and resilient rural economy. All of this not only provides a real opportunity to break silos, it also contributes towards ensuring the '**right to stay**' concept that the Commission is currently developing.

Partnership has been key to both cohesion and rural development policies for 40 years. The proposed **legal provisions on partnership** are stronger than they have ever been and will be verified by the Commission. It is important to put these legal provisions into reality – local and regional authorities, Local Action Groups, rural parliaments, and representatives of key economic sectors all need to engage. It is important to be strongly represented at local and regional levels, but also at national and European levels.

The NRPPs provide significant opportunity for synergies, for rural voices to be heard outside the rural communities, and involve a substantial offer of new instruments to be utilised for rural areas.

NRPPs: targeted measures to address diverse rural needs

Hugo Almeida, European Commission, DG AGRI (PPT) 



The NRPPs provide multiple [opportunities for rural stakeholders](#), including a **10% rural target** allocating minimum EUR 48.7 billion to investments in rural areas. For this purpose, the Commission advises defining **rural areas as local administrative units** classified as "rural areas" under the degree of urbanisation territorial typology.

The NRPPs will be required to provide a **comprehensive policy response to rural areas specific needs and challenges**, through a consistent set of measures building synergies across policy domains. A specific section in the plan will provide the overview of the measures targeting rural areas, which will have to be tagged with a specific **code for rural areas to count towards the rural target**.

Under the new NRPP, Member States will be able to use an expanded toolbox of instruments from the agricultural policy domain and other policy domains such as energy, mobility, culture, social services. They are encouraged to tailor and target their interventions to areas with specific needs (such as remote areas, border areas, areas with specific geographical constraints), and to promote integrated territorial development tools such as multisector **Community-led Local Development (CLLD), including LEADER, or Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs)**. The NRPP approach is one that demands **synergies and integrated planning**. Coherent packages of measures are expected to lead to coherent approaches that address rural challenges, and broad needs can be addressed through a single project.

Putting in place national and regional integrated strategies for development of rural areas is an effective tool to build a comprehensive policy response to rural challenges. These integrated approaches will be further addressed at the [High-level Policy Forum](#) co-organised by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission in Ireland in November 2026.

Learning from Member State experience



Sabela Festa, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge ([PPT](#))

The Spanish government is implementing a multi-annual programme through cohesion funding to support territorial strategies and integrated action plans in non-urban areas. The programme is implemented in four Spanish regions and has three key features: it is **tailored to the specific needs of rural areas** while taking into account their capacity to attract funding; it **targets functional areas** to enable the scaling of projects and avoid duplication; and it aims to **reduce the administrative burden for small municipalities**.

The programme includes: land management measures; incentivising economic activity; addressing territorial imbalances in access to public or essential services (such as health, education, housing, or those affecting territorial mobility or connectivity); and ensuring sustainable development and inhabitants' well-being. The main themes are innovation and entrepreneurship, sustainability and energy, housing and services, climate resilience, social care, education and digitalisation.

Justine Watremez, Rural Policy Officer, Prefecture of Saône-et-Loire, France ([PPT](#))

The PARI rural innovation lab is being developed in the Saône-et-Loire department in central France since 2024. It aims to provide support at the local level to help communities define their needs and co-develop responses to these needs.

It was launched to address rural challenges, such as mobility and accessing public services; scarcity of affordable housing and essential services; the provision of adapted and sufficient support to local economies. The PARI laboratory is not a predefined model or solution, rather it is **a method and toolbox to guide rural innovation**. It benefits from being small scale and low cost while at the same time engaging the communities concerned.

Alessandra De Renzis, Member, President's Cabinet, Government of Tuscany, Italy ([PPT](#))

The Italian region of Tuscany has been implementing various forms of **decentralised and integrated territorial approaches** for several decades. This has resulted in the development of a strong integrated regional development approach that is participatory as well as focused on social capital, community regeneration and innovative local development.

The [2025 law](#) is a model that aims to ensure **horizontal integration** across various agencies and governance levels, as well as align various European, national and regional funding mechanisms. It is a multi-funding approach that involves LEADER groups.

It exists to counter the dominance of traditional low-impact sectoral interventions. The approach requires broad multi-level and horizontal territorial governance, where **integration is rewarded, multi-sector local strategies are possible, and support and brokerage assistance is provided** to assist innovation.

Tracking and monitoring support for rural areas



Sophie Hélaine, European Commission, DG AGRI ([PPT](#))



The proposal for the **performance regulation** aims at harmonising reporting and budget tracking rules across the whole EU budget, while streamlining the number of output and result indicators. It sets an EU website (the single gateway) for reporting on performance, call for opportunities and transparency data.

The performance regulation establishes a direct link between what is funded (the activities classified by intervention field); the contributions of those activities to horizontal priorities (EU coefficients); and their expected outputs and results, measured through performance indicators.

The climate and environment as well as the social spending targets are calculated based on EU coefficients defined by intervention field. The rural target would be based on a territorial tagging with a '**02- rural areas**' code intended to track measures (and funding) relevant for rural areas.

Learning from Member State experience

Marianne Selkäinaho, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland ([PPT](#))



Finland has created an **urban-rural classification system** that has been developed by research and educational institutions at the request of the state's statistical office as well as two line ministries. It has a granularity that is independent of administrative / municipal boundaries, and it allows for the application of seven distinct regional classes, from inner urban areas, through local centres in rural areas, to sparsely populated rural areas.

Statistics based on administrative boundaries are not suitable for policy purposes and spatial analyses because they do not represent the true regional differences in Finland. The existence of this **granular classification** forms the basis of studies, the allocation of public funding (EU funds, as well as national schemes, such as the one used to support village shops), the maintenance of an adequate transportation system and for rural proofing, among others.

Konstantinos Asikis, Ministry of the Environment and Energy, Greece ([PPT](#))

There is an increasing need to better understand how EU investments impact rural territories. The key challenge to this is less the lack of data, but rather the **fragmentation of data across systems, sectors and levels of governance**.

The combination of data sources, which is facilitated through legislative regulation, allows both for thematic approaches (environment, water, spatial planning, energy, forests, waste), as well as horizontal coordination. Both vertical and horizontal mechanisms are essential for focused implementation along with territorial tracking, linked data and policies.

Territorial tagging is not only about collecting data, but also about linking it, integrating governance and looking at territories. Existing data and governance systems need to be better connected to allow for an understanding of territorial impacts and **more effective and place-based rural policies**.

Engaging rural stakeholders in the NRPP design and implementation

Nevena Biševac, European Commission, DG REGIO ([PPT](#))



Complying with the **partnership principle** involves not only ensuring the right stakeholders are consulted, but also that they are informed in a timely manner, their capacity to interact is supported, feedback mechanisms are in place, and the partners have an impact. The proposals for the post-2027 EU legislative package strengthens the partnership principle with more explicit requirements and partners including representatives of rural public authorities.

The [Code of Conduct on Partnership](#) and the [European Community of Practice on Partnership](#), made up of Member State representatives and active since 2022 are important instruments to implement the partnership principle. The Community has put together a [Compendium of Good Practices on Partnership](#) with examples from across the Member States.

The proposed legislative framework for the NRPPs largely **continues the requirements for partnership** that were applied to cohesion funding in the 2021-2027 period. The proposed legislation foresees that all chapters of the plan will be covered by a monitoring committee with a Coordinating Committee when more than one chapter.

Learning from Member State experience

Ewa Orleańska and Bożena Sękalska, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, Poland ([PPT](#))

The Polish Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, which has the lead role in coordinating the drafting of the NRPP, established a **task force of 90 representatives of various sectors** who have been intensively engaged in working out the recommendations for the Plan. Once the Plan's structure has been agreed by the government, the task force and its working groups will participate in the drafting of the measures.

The thematic groups established under the task force address various sectoral issues, but there is also a group looking at the **territorial dimension of the Plan**. The territorial group, which meets on a weekly basis, includes all levels of government as well as civil society representatives. The group looks at territorial instruments, just transition measures, as well as other targeted interventions in urban, rural and border areas.

Aare Kasemets, Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, Estonia ([PPT](#))

Making sure that rural communities and their concerns are reflected in the NRPP is necessary to restore **institutional credibility and strengthen the legitimacy of public policies**. This is part of a rural proofing approach, but the full inclusion of stakeholders is key to give rural communities the visibility in planning the NRPP or in discussing the 'right to stay'.

The involvement of rural stakeholders is a way to ensure proper evidence in policy design and to provide democratic legitimacy. Broad consultation is possible where there is a will to organise it. In Estonia, the process has strongly benefitted from **involving the LEADER groups** who have helped to bring rural stakeholders into the process and supported the organisation of interactions.

Christian Rosenwirth, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management, Austria ([PPT](#))

The federal structure of Austria requires not only coordination between line ministries, but also among the nine federal states. **Stakeholder engagement** thus has to be sensitive to these parameters, and public meetings and consultations need to be carried out not only by the country's CAP network and federal ministries themselves, but also by the Austrian Conference on spatial planning (ÖROK).

The involvement of ÖROK has addressed rural and territorial aspects, including LEADER/CLLD, functional areas, local development strategies and urban-rural cooperation. It has also allowed for the **identification of synergies, transparent coordination needs** and discussion on possible follow-up topics.

The development of the NRPPs can build on existing structures (such as the Local Action Groups), but discussions continue to define how best to monitor the funds, how to align the various existing funding streams into the NRPPs, and how to effectively and efficiently involve non-traditional actors given time and financial constraints.

Key takeaways from group discussions on the application of the partnership principle

- > There is uncertainty around the structure and availability of future funding for rural areas – a **broader information network** is necessary to help rural actors understand the new approach and the support potentially available. The wide range of actors involved in the group discussions face a similar challenge: their **capacity to engage in the planning of the NRPPs**.
- > All partners need to be involved as early as possible in the process. It is essential to acknowledge that the challenges facing rural actors may not directly correspond to the thematic priorities of EU funding – **early engagement makes it more likely for the funding to be aligned with rural needs**.
- > Putting the partnership principle into action requires a broad representation, with a varied group of participants. The involvement of rural actors is needed not only at an early stage, but throughout the whole process of designing and **implementing** NRPPs. The current uncertainty

around the final details of the future funding and policy approach cannot be an excuse for not involving actors early. In addition, engagement has to be **place sensitive and accessible**.

- > The **transparency of the NRPP planning and implementation process** requires clarity of who is the lead entity for the NRPP process at national and regional levels; certainty for stakeholders in respect of what happens with their contributions; and a clear sense of the timing of the processes.

Concluding remarks



Next steps for the Rural Pact Support Office

Enrique Nieto, Rural Pact Support Office ([PPT](#))

Forthcoming events in 2026:

- > [High-level Policy Forum](#) 'Europe's rural future: Responding to rural priorities through integrated national and regional strategies and LEADER' (3-4 November 2026);
- > [Policy Lab](#) on 'Strengthening a diversified rural economy in the post-2027 period' (29 September – 1 October 2026);
- > National Rural Pact event in France towards the end of 2026.

Closing remarks of the European Commission

Mario Milouchev, Director, European Commission, DG AGRI



The Policy Lab was the occasion to present many good practices illustrating how rural areas could be supported following an **integrated approach** in the NRPPs as well as how **targeting and monitoring** can work, and the conditions for a **successful partnership**. As the shape of the future funding framework is negotiated, it is important **rural actors** engage not only with the European Commission, but also with the co-legislators, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament and with the authorities in their own Member States.

There are real opportunities for rural areas through the NRPPs, including the minimum **10% rural target** and the proposed definition of rural areas that are both currently under discussion. This process can only benefit from the active participation of rural stakeholders and practitioners in the political process.

The European Commission is strongly committed to encouraging **synergies and complementarities** that are important for rural areas' needs and challenges to be addressed through different funding instruments and policies. The European Commission encourages Member States to **adopt national or regional level integrated rural strategies**, as an effective tool to ensure a comprehensive policy response to rural areas needs and opportunities– we are keen to help Member States develop and implement such rural strategies. The alignment of policies will maximise the effect of interventions that aim to benefit of rural areas.

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info@rural-pact.eu