

The Rural Pact conference



15-16 June 2022
BRUSSELS



The [Rural Pact](#), is a **framework for cooperation among authorities and stakeholders** at the European, national, regional and local level. It contributes to achieving the shared goals of the [Communication outlining the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas](#).

The Rural Pact initiates a **long-term process**, seeking to foster and simplify interaction on ideas and experiences, and to help public authorities, stakeholders and citizens to make their voice heard and intensify efforts for the benefit of rural areas.

To develop the Rural Pact, the European Commission launched the [Rural Pact community](#) in December 2021, inviting all European institutions, national and local authorities, stakeholder organisations and citizens from the 27 Member States to reflect on the pact. It also brainstormed and coordinated with the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Parliament, the French presidency of the Council of the EU, as well as stakeholder organisations steering the European Rural Parliament movement and the ENRD Contact point. The Rural Pact community and stakeholder organisations were also consulted in a dedicated webinar in May 2022. The [final proposal](#) formed the basis for the conference discussions.

According to this proposal, the Rural Pact would have three objectives: **amplify rural voices, structure collaboration and mutual learning and structure voluntary commitment to act** for rural areas. Participants would be **public authorities, civil society organisations, businesses, academic and research and innovation bodies and citizens** who want to act for one of these objectives. A **Rural Pact coordination group** would be created to follow the development and implementation of the pact, in which the European Commission would act as **facilitator**.

The intention of the Rural Pact conference, held in Brussels on 15–16 June 2022, was to assemble representatives from EU institutions, as well as national, regional and local authorities and stakeholder organisations wishing to play a role in achieving the shared goals of the vision. Speakers were invited to present examples, scientific outcomes or best practices that could inspire action towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.

The conference was further intended to discuss and endorse the Rural Pact proposal, plan its organisation and future steps, guiding the inter-institutional dialogue and the various events and networking activities programmed in 2022 that will take forward the rural vision and contribute to the Rural Pact. The conference aimed to elicit concrete [commitments](#) to act from different institutions, public and private actors and stakeholders to serve as key inputs to this process.

Attended by **over 450 participants**, the conference started with a first morning of pre-events collecting inputs from various levels of governance and stakeholders and taking



stock on the development of actions taken by the European Commission in the framework of the [Rural action plan](#), then continued with plenary sessions to discuss how to strengthen governance at various levels as well as the Rural Pact proposal. The second day was dedicated to identifying specific actions across nine themes from the rural action plan and concluding on the next steps of the Pact.





Summary of pre-events #A to #C

These sessions presented initiatives that various levels of government and stakeholders had taken in the run-up to the Conference. Participants had the opportunity to highlight their views of how each level can best contribute.

Pre-event A: The national dimension of the Rural Pact

Among the key takeaways from this session were:

- The national level can contribute by creating holistic national rural strategies addressing all aspects of rural lives, by setting up rural proofing mechanisms and by actively relocating jobs, activities or university centres in rural areas.
- Rural proofing should aim to maximise the positive impact of legislation and to consider the possible side-effects of proposals for rural areas. Experience had shown that the earlier these checks are done, the better-informed the outcome will be. Implementing and monitoring rural proofing requires tools, methodologies and engaging with diverse rural stakeholders.
- Funding schemes should be simpler, less risk-averse and use selection processes that are accessible to rural stakeholders and communities with more limited capacities.
- Collaboration between the various European funds and national funding sources may become more difficult in the 2021–2027 period and should be improved again in the following period.

Pre-event B: The local and regional dimension of the Rural Pact

Among the key takeaways from this session were:

- Digitalisation and service infrastructure are key for rural areas. During the pandemic, people used the opportunity to live and work outside the city centres, but this is viable only if adequate infrastructure is present.
- Rural life is bigger than just agriculture, but innovation in agriculture, more sustainable agriculture and better conditions for family farming are important for food security, and can also attract young people to stay and return to rural areas.
- Greater awareness of EU funds and funding opportunities, and how to access them, is essential. Budgets and policies exist, but these need to be connected to the communities that need them, combining bottom-up and top-down approaches.



Pre-event C: Inputs from local communities and stakeholders

This session presented the views collected by the ELARD network, ERCA, PREPARE and the European Economic and Social Committee on how local and stakeholder organisations see the strengthening of the governance of rural development at all levels and their contribution to the Rural Pact. Among the key takeaways from this session were:

- More ongoing engagement with, and empowerment for, local rural-urban participative organisations and civil society organisations is needed for the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas to be fully understood and inclusive.
- Rural parliaments and other rural movements and networks should be supported and integrated into the Rural Pact.
- Combining long-term strategies with local actions is the key - none of the big challenges of our time can be solved without the active participation of citizens.





Summary of pre-events #D to #F

Pre-event D: Revitalising rural areas lagging behind

This session focused on practical actions needed to boost vitality and viability of rural areas facing population loss, building on the insights and outputs emerging from the [ENRD Thematic Group on Rural Revitalisation](#). Among the key takeaways on actions to take from this session were:

- **Integrated strategies:** Develop integrated strategies in a participatory way. Regional rural pacts can help in the process.
- **Multi-level governance:** Improve capacities of public administrators in rural development. Set clear roles and functions in the governance systems and boost exchanges with stakeholders at all levels.
- **Local capacity:** Build expertise and brokering solutions. Peer exchanges and networking are key to strengthening cohesion and improving capacities.
- **Territorial cooperation:** Support long-term cooperation among actors and territories to achieve better strategic results.
- **Local innovation:** Develop policy interventions that enable rural stakeholders to design and develop their innovative solutions.

Pre-event E: Combining funds to achieve the vision goals

This session discussed the Commission's work on preparing a 'Toolkit and on the use and combination of EU funds for rural areas', which is due to be released in 2023. It presented projects that have successfully combined EU funds to support rural revitalisation. The session also sought to engage participants about the major difficulties they anticipate or have encountered in combining funds in rural areas, solutions found and recommendations for the toolkit. Among the key takeaways from this session were:

- Stakeholders in rural areas need assistance in assembling information on the various sources of funding available, understanding how to access these opportunities and dealing with different rules and requirements.
- The toolkit should be translated in all EU languages, significantly increasing the impact of this work and widening the potential pool of beneficiaries from rural areas throughout Europe.
- An ecosystem approach to financing in rural areas, encompassing financial services providers and corporate entities that are incentivised to do business in rural areas, can help to overcome some of the difficulties of combining financing inputs. There is also a need to train local authorities on the use of EU

funds and collaborate with LEADER local action groups on building the toolkit and disseminating it.

Pre-event F: What evidence for better rural policies?

This session aimed to present the state of the art in the provision of statistics, data and analyses from Eurostat and the Joint Research Centre, enabling a better understanding of rural areas and tailored policy design. It explored which evidence is needed for various uses, for example for rural proofing, or to map "Functional Rural Areas". Participants were expected to provide their own expectations and help identify data gaps, with the final objective to become actors of the soon-to-be-established "Rural Observatory". Among the key takeaways from this session were:

- New and more specific data as well as new perspectives on data organisation and interpretation were identified as essential elements of efforts to better map the challenges facing rural areas, and consequently the most appropriate policy interventions.
- Healthcare and education were widely identified as the two key priorities around which rural policy planning and functional design should be oriented, and that travelling time rather than simply distance should be a major consideration.
- Data collection should also focus on illuminating progress towards long-term goals, e.g. quality of life, multilocality and mapping "the invisible" those who live in rural areas from time to time.





Day 1 plenary

Session I – high-level opening

This session included video messages from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Commissioner for Agriculture & Rural Development Janusz Wojciechowski, a keynote speech on the Rural Pact proposal from European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography Dubravka Šuica and a panel discussion that included Isabel Carvalhais, MEP, rapporteur on the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, Ulrika Landergren and Peter Schmidt, chairs of the Natural Resources commissions of the Committee of the Regions and European Economic and Social Committee respectively, and Marion Eckardt, President of the European LEADER association for rural development. The panel discussion focused on the main challenges and opportunities facing rural areas and expectations from the Rural Pact.



President von der Leyen, European Commission: *“Rural areas are at the heart of many major transitions – from an ageing society to the green and digital transition, and the building of European sovereignty. The resilience of rural life in Europe is about healthy communities: a balanced relationship with nature and hard work. It is about passing on traditions to the next generation and giving young people the opportunity to follow their dreams, without having to leave their land behind. I invite all rural stakeholders to join the community. Now is the time to come together – farmers and entrepreneurs, ecologists and technologists, young and old, and shape the future of rural life in Europe. Rural communities are a cornerstone of Europe’s resilience and independence. And when life in our countryside flourishes, so does our European way of life.”*





Vice-President Šuica, European Commission: *“In December of last year, we launched the Rural Pact community. We asked you to join us and you said yes, in large numbers. Given our ambition, I have no doubt about the potential for this community to grow. But of course, this is not only about numbers, but about what we can achieve when we put efforts together. The objective of this conference is that we end up with a shared understanding of the Rural Pact, and with an action-oriented programme. In the European Commission, we had an idea, we had a vision – a long-term vision for rural areas. This community is turning our idea into a reality on the ground, because great ideas can only become truly great when they are implemented to the benefit of those who need it most.”*

Isabel Carvalhais, MEP: *“Many of the rural communities in Europe have this sense of abandonment... this sense, this feeling, of being alienated by the political decision process, can ultimately lead to something very dangerous, which is the alienation from politics, from democratic politics, from the European project. It's not that rural communities are not heard, but no-one is actually listening to them... so it's really important that we amplify the voices of the rural world, and make sure they are active parts, active elements, of the entire decision-making process. I believe the Rural Pact can have an important role in this regard, because it creates the opportunity to bring and to keep rural communities... in the centre of the political debate.”*

Ulrika Landergren, CoR: *“The rural vision has been an important step towards making rural areas' voices heard in all policy fields. And I am sure the Rural Pact can take the vision a step further. Rural areas play a crucial role in the solutions that we are currently discussing. Food is mainly produced and processed in the rural areas. Farming, forestry, nature reserves provide a massive potential for carbon sequestration. Wind farms, solar power plants, power from water, most of sustainable energy solutions are built from rural areas. At the same time, we are still discussing if investment in digital infrastructure or services in rural areas are worth it. We should realise that we all benefit from investments made in rural areas. In the short term, we need to make sure that rural areas receive the funding they need to recover from crises and make their contribution to Europe's green and digital transitions. And we need to prepare the ground for a fair share of funding for rural areas in the next programming period.”*

Peter Schmidt, EESC: *“I think we need a rural movement. We as EESC would like to be part of this movement. We have to be vocal, extremely loud. We do not have the money, but we can be loud and organised. We must facilitate policy process across all the DGs, across the Member States, to bring life back to the rural areas. What does it mean? I grew up in the 60s in the 'nowhere' of Bavaria. We had in every single village a hospital, a police station, a pharmacy, all the facilities. We lost it. The main reason was to say that we do not have the money, or we need to do it differently. We had schools,*

now the kids need perhaps one hour to go to school! Then we say this is attractive, it is not! That is why we must facilitate this process. And we, as the EESC, can bring together the various actors from businesses and civil society to convince them that they must be active in the rural areas.”

Marion Eckardt, ELARD: *“As stakeholders we have been committed all the time. I hope that the process of the European Rural Parliament (ERP) coordinated with ERCA and PREPARE led to the situation that we now have the long-term vision for rural areas and that we are starting up the Rural Pact. The ERP has been amplifying the voice of rural Europe since 2013. ELARD does the same: local action groups themselves are like little Rural Pacts. At local level, they run debates with politicians, organise knowledge exchange and encourage people to act for rural areas. My biggest hope for this Rural Pact is that we will enable a framework for local rural actors to keep doing that and really contribute to the prosperity of our Union. We have a window of opportunity now, with the coronavirus and Ukraine crisis that showed that rural areas are really important for the whole territory. If we want to invest in local people, there needs to be funding. I hope we can look back at this conference as the starting point, after which the investment started to go to rural areas, we reached an equilibrium and we have a European Union where people can freely choose where they want to live.”*

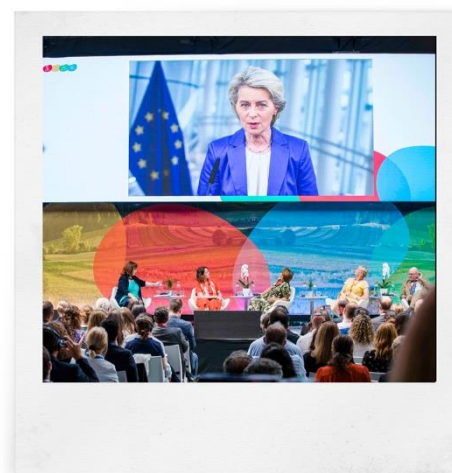
Commissioner Wojciechowski, European Commission: *“To make the most of our rural areas, we need all policies to contribute, especially in areas such as mobility, digitalisation, energy and services. Therefore, the Commission is actively following the programming of the Common Agricultural Policy, the Cohesion Policy and the Resilience and Recovery Fund. But to fully address the needs of rural areas, and to fully realise their potential, we not only need strong actions and strong funding – we also need strong cooperation. We must forge stronger links of governance, bringing together EU institutions, bodies and agencies, with national ministries, regional authorities and local communities. The Rural Pact is a key new initiative. Our aim is to mobilise public authorities and stakeholders to act on the needs and aspirations of rural residents.”*



Session II - Cooperating across departments and governance levels

This session highlighted the role public authorities at the national and regional level can play in acting for rural areas. Representatives of authorities presented successful national and regional strategies that were implemented to deal with rural areas and explained how these strategies came about and how they will move forward. Among panellists' messages were the following:

- Patrice Joly (President of the [French Rural Parliament](#)), reflecting on the French [rural agenda](#): the challenge is to valorise rural areas, build comparable and reliable data and allocate funds for rural areas. Public authorities must ensure the rural dimension permeates all levels of public policy and debate, and that the dominance of the centre-periphery logic is replaced by going beyond normative frameworks to articulate and defend the interests of rural communities.
- José Luis Martínez Guijarro (Vice-President of the Region Castilla-La-Mancha, Spain), presenting the region's pioneering [law against depopulation](#): legislation that guarantees public services in depopulated areas, prioritises the establishment of and support for companies, and incentivises inhabitants through tax relief in Castilla-La Mancha. Measures in the region also include fibre internet provision.
- Gareth Makim (Department of Rural and Community Development, Ireland), sharing insights from the [Irish strategy "Our rural future"](#): Irish rural development policy starts from a perspective of realising potential and opportunity rather than managing problems. An integrated approach across ministries, coordinated by a dedicated rural policy department, involving them early in policy planning and decision-making, facilitates a more cohesive approach.



Session III – Empowering local communities and engaging stakeholders in building the future of rural areas

This session was about the action local authorities and stakeholders can take to act in their rural area. Local authorities, civil society and business organisations that have successfully implemented actions at the local level presented their work and views. Among panellists' messages were the following:

- Thomas Fisher (Director of Community Development Lens, UK), presenting research on [redefining peripherality](#): empowerment starts with changing

the narrative about rural areas, in particular the notion that these areas are behind and need to catch up. This was disproved during the pandemic. Rural proofing needs to be delivered and extended.

- Christian Jonet (Coordinator of the [Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liègeoise](#), Belgium): this initiative has benefited from an alliance between committed citizens and communities and local authorities that has made Liège a hub of sustainable food production through looking anew at supply chains and developing public-private partnerships.
- Eva-Lotta Oberg (Business Developer for the [Municipality of Härnösand](#), Sweden), leading a local rural policy council: the work to develop an exchange platform for sharing ideas between rural communities and municipalities has led to easier communication, building trust and a concrete action plan.
- Aris Adlers (President of [PREPARE - Partnership for Rural Europe](#)), talking about the role of digitalisation on islands: he spoke about the importance of enhancing the capacities and opportunities for rural entrepreneurs to mobilise the economies of rural communities in the long term.

STRENGTHENING MULTI LEVEL AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE FOR RURAL AREAS

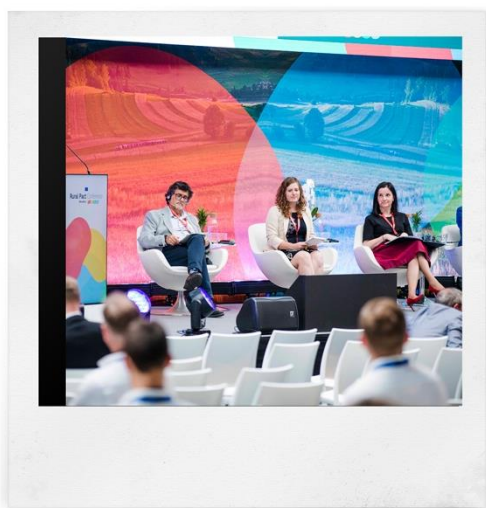


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Session IV – High-level stakeholder panel: shaping the Rural Pact together

This roundtable reflected on the previous sessions and presented the [proposal](#) for the Rural Pact, including goals, participants and governance, for all interested parties to discuss and give feedback. The panel included representatives of the various potential participants in the Rural Pact (public authorities, civil society organisations, businesses and citizens). The panellists' messages on the Rural Pact or what they can bring to it can be summarised as follows:



- Marija Vuckovic ([Minister of Agriculture of Croatia](#)) bringing the national authority perspective: the Rural Pact provides a framework and content to better manage rural areas as areas with high potential to create new jobs and preserve ecosystems. Croatia will develop the smart village concept, digital literacy, competitiveness, connectivity and diversification. The country plans important investments in renewable energy and broadband infrastructure.
- Juanan Gutierrez Lazpita (President of [EUROMONTANA](#)), bringing the civil society perspective: the Rural Pact must be autonomous and not depend on the European Commission. Its governance should include thematic groups. Opening the Rural Pact to neighbouring countries could also be considered. Euromontana will invite its network to engage in the Pact at its next European mountain convention.
- Petri Salminen (President of [SME United](#)), bringing the business perspective: the Rural Pact is about diversity, entrepreneurship and building platforms. Connecting rural areas to SMEs is a key aspect. SME United will encourage its members to collect data to help promote a bottom-up approach to the Rural Pact.
- Doris Letina (Vice-President, [European Council of Young Farmers](#)), bringing the young rural citizens' perspective: the Rural Pact can support rural youth and fill the gap between those living and working in rural areas and other citizens. Young people are the future and the present of rural areas. As a platform for best practices and networking between young farmers, ECYF will focus its contribution to the Pact on food security, inter-generational dialogue and generational renewal.





Day II – breakout sessions

Session 5.1: Rural youth as leaders of change

This session explored rural aspirations from different perspectives: those of a young farmer, an entrepreneur, an activist and a youth worker. Youth-led initiatives and actions supporting generation renewal and positive rural demography were presented and fed into the broader participatory discussion on youth engagement in the Rural Pact. Points made included:

- The European Year of Youth 2022 should create a legacy for young people in rural areas that builds a solid base for the Rural Pact.
- Creating and promoting tools that enable young people in rural areas to express themselves and participate in discussions about the future of their communities is one of the most effective ways to secure their engagement.
- A 'Rurasmus' concept, based on Erasmus, could be developed to enable meaningful exchanges between young people from rural areas across Europe – this would underline the European dimension of the Rural Pact and facilitate dialogue on common challenges.

Session 5.2: Digitalisation as a chance for rural areas

The session was intended to highlight new opportunities to improve connectivity, including 5G communities and new broadband state aid guidelines, alongside practical examples of how these can be used in various domains. It sought to engage stakeholders in considering how they can take action to benefit from these opportunities. Points made included:

- Ensuring 5G and high-speed broadband coverage of all areas by 2030 remains the EU's target, and this process should involve integrating all capacities together, not separately.
- The Rural Pact presents rural areas with an opportunity to become cradles of innovation through connectivity, in particular through the development of vertical applications that support rural lives, livelihoods and services.
- The Rural Pact's connectivity and digitalisation ambitions afford a great opportunity to showcase European technology, and to support smart agriculture.

Session 5.3: Community-driven sustainable energy action in rural villages

Energy communities promote the uptake of renewables and energy security in rural areas, and provide social, economic, and environmental benefits. Participants were invited to present how they have overcome institutional and financial barriers to implement their strategies. Points made included:





- Energy communities have an important role in the green transition: renewable energy production and supply, building renovation and the promotion of energy efficiency and flexibility – and rural areas are well placed to develop such communities.
- The European Commission's Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub¹ helps to identify best practices, provide technical assistance and support networking opportunities to the energy communities and local stakeholders selected to participate.
- Local authorities can bring together different stakeholders and promote innovation through co-creation and citizen engagement – many examples already exist – and can profit financially from engaging with renewable energy communities, for example through the generation of stable business tax revenues.
- Increasing collaboration between the different parties by ensuring that local authorities, farmers, citizens, grid operators and national-level planners are heard and involved in the development and creation of rural energy communities.

Session 5.4: Rural research and innovation ecosystems: social innovation, tourism and cultural and creative industries, start-up villages

The session sought to raise awareness on the concept of rural innovation ecosystems, and to illustrate it through inspirational examples. The session discussed drivers, enabling conditions and barriers to the development of rural innovation ecosystems. Participants discussed concrete actions that stakeholders can take to support rural innovation ecosystems. Points made included:

- Innovation requires new forms of funding, driven by multi-stakeholder engagement: associations, local administrations, research centres and universities, local enterprises and start-ups should all be involved actively in the processes of defining the local needs and building together a vision for the sustainable development of rural areas.
- Small entities often lack capacity to participate in bids for major financing platforms, so it is important to shape innovative mechanisms that allow small enterprises and associations, even those without legal status, to apply for and access funding.
- Social innovation and heritage to drive cultural growth is an important element to engage people from urban areas and migrants.

¹ [Launch of the Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eip-ri/en/launch-of-the-rural-energy-community-advisory-hub)

- There is a need to match research and local needs and to make knowledge easily available to rural people, and research centres and universities should act as facilitators of this process.

Session 5.5: Sustainable mobility solutions to connect rural areas with urban centres

Public authorities and transport sector stakeholders considered examples of mobility management at the local and regional level, including better urban planning to connect rural and suburban areas, and promoting the roll-out of digital solutions allowing people to use different modes of transport to reach their destination. Points made included:

- The most significant challenges to enhancing mobility in rural areas are chronic isolation, an ageing population, high per capita public transport costs and a dependence on individual transport (private cars) to get around within the rural area, and to move from the rural area to urban centres.
- The EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas seeks to develop rural mobility through support to rural municipalities, and through multi-modal digital services. The LTVRA offers experience with networking, guidance and best practices.
- The new EU urban mobility framework stresses more sustainability, increased quality of life, better connection to rural/suburban areas for commuting, active multimodal mobility and better provision for walking and cycling.
- Rural innovation for mobility requires a strong policy framework, country-wide accessibility, sustainable regional mobility plans, and data on the range of commuting patterns in an area: planning and regulatory frameworks for rural mobility should come from a bottom-up approach, generated from local, rural communities' needs and not in an office in a city.

Session 5.6: Services for socially resilient and welcoming rural communities

This session looked to address access to social and care services and the integration of minorities, people with a migrant background and refugees in rural areas. It considered how these services can be provided, also by benefitting from services across national borders. Points made included:

- EU countries and authorities must think across borders, not only by sharing healthcare services across the national borders of peripheral rural regions but also by thinking outside the boundaries of our current health systems – to make them open for digital, mobile and networked health services, and to be open for collaborations across villages, and for public-private partnerships.
- Access to health services and other basic services should not be a local responsibility. Rural proofing is needed to get rid of rules and regulations that hinder developing good services in less densely populated areas.
- Think across the borders of the comfort zone of our familiar social networks, by meeting and interacting with refugees and migrants in our communities, so that they can also develop social roots and become part of the community.



Session 5.7: Place-based approaches for rural development: LEADER, CLLD and Smart Villages

This session explored the potential of place-based development in creating broader rural coalitions for action and advocacy. LEADER and CLLD networks and Smart Village initiatives grow from local needs and opportunities, bringing together private and public stakeholders and NGOs in many corners of rural Europe. Points made included:



- Creating broader rural coalitions will help to narrow the gap between citizens and politicians.
- Resources allocated to agriculture and rural development are often seen as competing areas, whereas they should complement each other.
- The Rural Pact requires a framework that enables civil society to become fully involved in its evolution, and that facilitates the amplification of rural voices in pursuit of positive change.

Session 5.8: Social economy as catalyst to boost resilience and twin transition in rural areas

The session sought to present examples of the role of social enterprises in promoting the twin transition. Participants reflected on how they could engage with social enterprises and stakeholders in the various policy domains contributing to reaching both the goals of the LTVRA and the Transition Pathway for the 'Proximity and Social Economy' ecosystem. Points made included:

- Renewable energy cooperatives and communities, agriculture cooperatives, food distribution and short circuits, non-profit social services (community led), housing (cohousing), work integration, community forestry management, heritage and culture, leisure, tourism etc. are all social economy activities that can contribute to the objective of revitalising (and sometimes repopulating) and strengthening the attractiveness of rural areas.
- Public-private/social economy partnerships can help to boost local/rural development, tourism, and cultural industries and economic activities linked to local heritage.
- The co-creation of rural development policies and strategies, reuniting different ministries, public authorities (from EU to local), and stakeholders, including farmers, NGOs, citizens, researchers, trade unions, enterprises etc, is a key element for successful co-creation of and implementation of policies.

Session 5.9: The strategic role of rural areas for climate and food security



The session discussed how the EU's rural areas are simultaneously a cradle of carbon storage and provide food for the EU's population. These roles can be complementary as local food value chains provide more stable income and involve small farms, which can be more easily incentivised to adopt climate friendly schemes, e.g., peatland restoration on soils. Points made included:

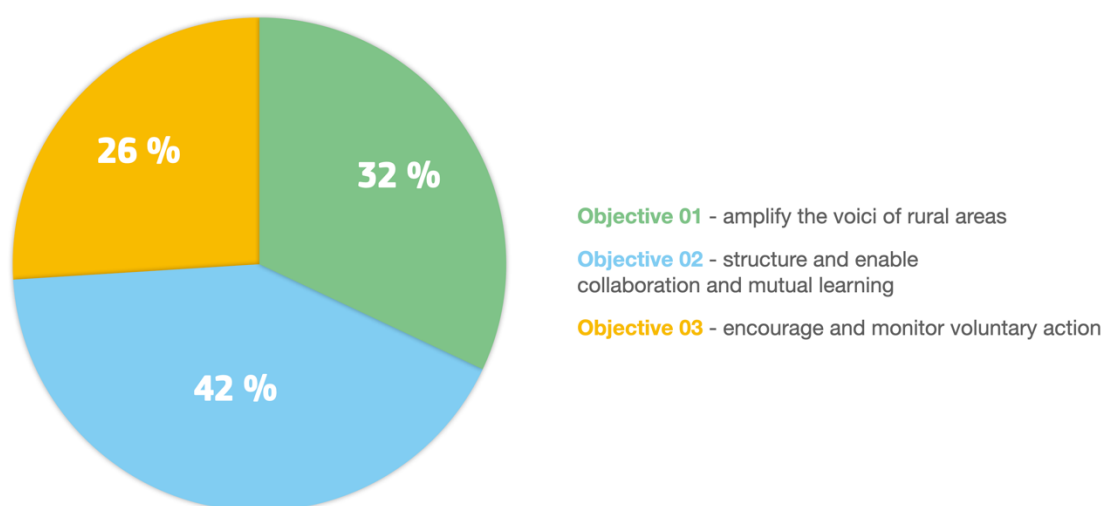
- Rural areas are critical to food security, especially at a time of war and global climate change. The pandemic demonstrated that short supply chains and rural systems were more resilient. The CAP plays an important role in consolidating this role at the apex of food security.
- Knowledge transfer should be prioritised especially when it comes to demonstrating better environmental practices; also, farmers could be paid for managing land that is not suitable or viable for food production.
- Rural areas have an important role to play in advancing measures to address climate change, but this necessitates a significant shift in farmer behaviour and market structures and cannot take place overnight. Its success will depend on transformational change and relies upon the sharing of peer-to-peer knowledge.



Session VI – Actions, ideas and commitments for the work programme

In this lively session, participants were able to learn more about the main results of the parallel sessions, and to communicate numerous ideas for actions they draw from the conference's parallel sessions, complementing the commitments submitted by participants. The pie chart below demonstrates the distribution of commitments according to each of the three objectives of the Rural Pact:

Distribution of commitments submitted during the conference between the various Pact objectives



Session VII – High-level round table: the way forward for the Rural Pact

This round table summarised conference outcomes, bringing together the perspectives of representatives of EU institutions (Commission, European Parliament, incoming Czech presidency of the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions) and the European Rural Communities Alliance.

European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms **Elisa Ferreira** initiated the session with a video message, which included this passage:

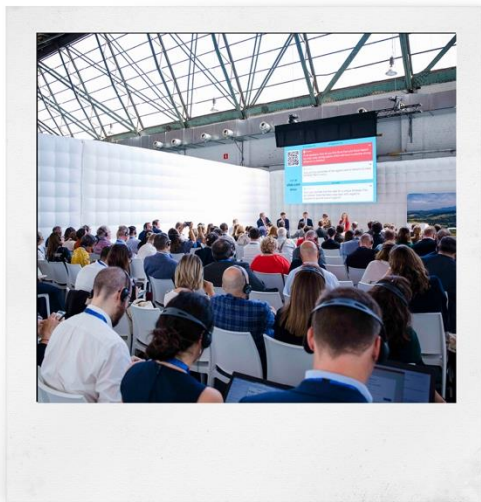
"I very much wanted to underline my personal commitment to the Rural Pact, and to the way forward for Europe's rural areas. This way forward must include making the most of new opportunities opened up by the industrial revolution 4.0 we are currently living. This requires a strategy, a plan and a pact. This requires diversification of economic activities. This requires investment, from skills to infrastructure. Our years of experience working with rural areas have shown us that rural areas are very diverse, that one-size-fits-all approaches do not work, and that we need place-based solutions tailored for each specific territory. This is why Cohesion Policy, among EU-

level support instruments, is an important tool to accompany the development of rural areas and initiatives of local communities.”

Among the key messages from the panellists in this session regarding the future of the Rural Pact were:

- The potential of the Rural Pact to bring people together to achieve greater impacts for rural areas.
- The importance of listening more, and more effectively, to rural people, acting upon their views and involving them in designing their own solutions.
- The need to approach rural development in a holistic way.
- The need to consider rural diversity.
- The need to focus on reversing rural depopulation, building attractiveness, investing in education, connectivity, health and infrastructures.
- The need to promote a culture of inclusivity, reaching out to minorities, disadvantaged groups, young people and women.
- The interdependence of urban and rural areas.
- The centrality of community-led local development, the smart village concept, their capacity to unite communities, and the need to combine EU funds in efficient ways to support them.

The panellists also committed their organisations to promote the Rural Pact and stay involved in its next steps in the following ways:

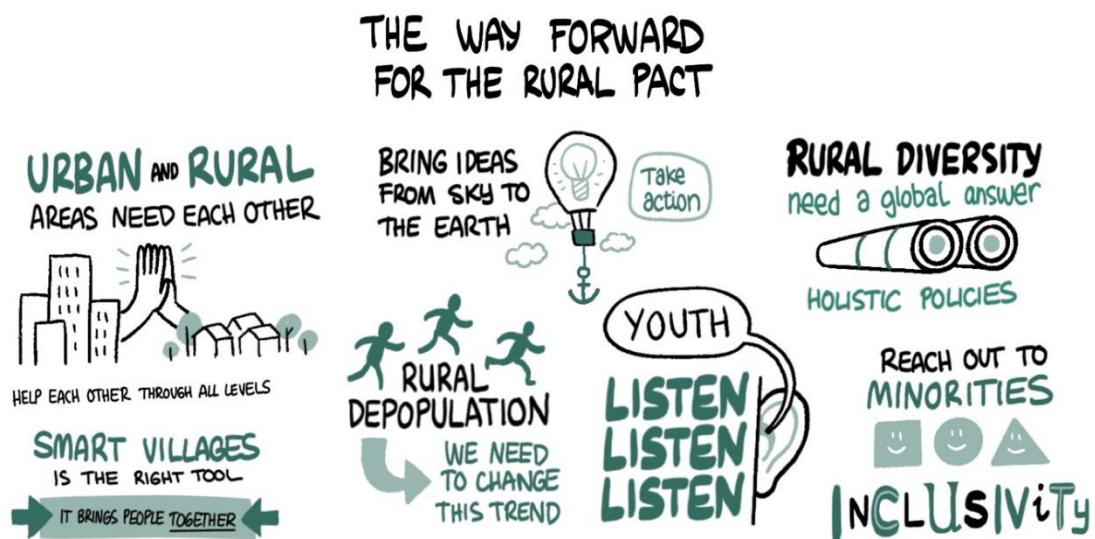


- The Czech presidency of the Council of the EU will bring the topics of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and the Rural Pact to the Council (Radim Srsen).
- The Committee of the Regions and the RUMRA intergroup of the European Parliament will organise, under the Czech presidency, a seminar on community-led development and smart villages in Lednice (27-28 October) (Radim Srsen and Ulrika Landergren).
- The Committee of the Regions will continue making its members think rural. It will include rural proofing in its own better regulation tools, co-organise an event on smart villages to promote the Rural Pact, and invite its members to join the Pact (Ulrika Landergren).
- The European Economic and Social Committee will engage its members, representing civil society, in taking part in the Pact, ensuring rural aspects are taken on board in all its sections and opinions (Josep Puxeu).
- The next [European Rural Parliament](#) in Kielce (12-15 September) will be a key event to discuss the future of the Rural Pact (Tom Jones).

In addition to sessions organised by panellists, the following events could provide opportunities to advance reflection on the Rural Pact:

- [OECD rural devolvment conference](#) (28-30 September, Ireland).

- ENRD [workshop on advancing gender equality in rural areas](#) (15-16 November, Andolsheim, France).



Rural Pact Conference
 15-16 June 2022



Session VIII - Conference closure

Normunds Popens, Deputy Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission, spoke about the centrality of Cohesion Policy to the Rural Pact:

“Very importantly we have also the new instruments set up, the Just Transition Mechanism with the Just Transition Fund, which will be channelled to those territories that need to go to a very deep transition for energy, industry, and where people need help to find new businesses, to find new jobs, to find new skills. And this is what the Just Transition Fund will be doing, of course, together with other funds. We will also be supporting infrastructure gaps. You know very well that the Regional Fund invests in different modes of transport, particularly sustainable modes of transport but also the gaps in other types of infrastructure. Our commitment is also through the Social Fund, to support massively areas linked to social inclusion, to access to main services, which is very important, I think, for rural areas.”

Wolfgang Bartscher, Director-General for Agriculture & Rural Development, European Commission, discussed the next steps in the development of the Rural Pact:

“We will set up a single website for all the information related to the Rural Pact, and the rural vision more broadly. The Rural Revitalisation Platform, which was announced last year... will be put in place. We will use its collaborative functions to also support networking between Rural Pact members. Furthermore, we will continue animating the Pact itself until the Rural Pact Coordination Group kicks off in 2023. We will continue developing our rural proofing mechanism and coordinating the activities of all Commission departments, which is at the core of our commitments. All these actions will come in addition to the following-up the programming of the Members States’ CAP Strategic Plans.”



More information: programme, presentations and recordings:
https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/events/rural-pact-conference-2022-06-15_en



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