

Rural Pact



Proposals from the Rural Pact preparatory group for the Rural Pact conference on 15-16 June 2022

Introduction

With the adoption of the Communication on a Long-term Vision for the EU's rural areas, the European Commission committed to setting-up a Rural Pact. This Pact will contribute to reaching the shared goals of the Long-term Vision for the EU's rural areas but also fits into the EU's broader commitment of implementing the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring balanced territorial development.

Following the launch of the Rural Pact Community, in December 2021, over 1000 individuals and organisations have endorsed the shared goals of the rural vision and want to work towards their achievement. This draft is the next step in the Rural Pact process. Drafted by EU institutions and rural stakeholders¹, it outlines the main features of the Rural Pact. Rural Pact Community members were invited to express their views on this proposal in May through a survey. Their feedback was taken on board for the final proposal which was presented at the Rural Pact conference on 15 and 16 June 2022.



Objectives

The Rural Action Plan, which was adopted with the Long-term Vision for the EU's rural areas, represents the European Commission's commitment to acting for rural areas. One of its actions is to propose a Rural Pact, which aims to strengthen multi-level governance for the EU's rural areas. This means that the Pact will engage the European, national, regional and local level, all of which have a key role to play in the future of rural areas, to work together.

The activities of the Rural Pact could be classified as contributing to three broad objectives:

¹ Presidency of the Council of the EU, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, ELARD, PREPARE and ERCA from the European Rural Parliament, as well as the European Parliament and the European network for Rural Development as observers.

1. **Amplify the voice of rural areas to bring them higher on the political agenda:** activities under this objective should strengthen participation of Rural Pact community members to decision making processes, ensure a participatory approach to the ten shared goals of the rural vision, and contribute to acting upon the concerns and potential of rural areas. Spreading the word on the benefits rural areas provide to society is key to change the perception that surrounds rural areas.
2. **Structure and enable collaboration and mutual learning between pact members:** Rural Pact community members will be given the opportunity to inspire each other and collaborate across different sectors, as well as with social partners, on how to deliver the shared goals. These activities will be coordinated with existing networks and platforms.
3. **Encourage and monitor voluntary commitment for action by Rural Pact community members:** the Rural Pact will provide a framework for Rural Pact community members to launch new initiatives contributing to the rural vision.

Participants



The Rural Pact Community brings together rural stakeholders who all endorsed the ten shared goals of the Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas. There are five main types of members in the Rural Pact community:

- Public authorities
- Civil society organisations and different networks
- Businesses
- Individuals
- Research, innovation and academic institutions and organisations

When joining the Rural Pact, members will receive regular updates on the implementation of the Rural Pact (Rural Pact newsletter), including **key information on tools, funding opportunities and have priority access to collaborative work and future Rural Pact events**. They will also receive information on EU public consultations impacting rural areas, giving them an opportunity to voice their concerns or innovative ideas directly to the EU level.

The Rural Pact aims to invite organisations which are less traditionally involved in rural discussions or actions to join the debate and start acting for rural areas. Individuals and organisations which are already taking action towards the rural vision's shared goals, will also be able to promote their actions and find peers to interact in the framework of the Rural Pact's objective 2 on 'Collaboration and mutual learning'.

The members of the Rural Pact Community will be able to join the Rural Pact itself by committing to actions they can take at their own level and commit to report on their progress (see under "Action"), hence becoming Rural Pact members as such.

The Rural Pact should remain flexible and allow each type of participant to find its own way to contribute.

Governance - The Rural Pact coordination group

A Rural Pact coordination group will be responsible for:

- Evaluating progress towards the objectives of the Rural Pact and, ultimately, the ten shared goals of the rural vision.

- Monitoring the commitments to action of Rural Pact members at their level of governance.
- Engaging and encouraging their stakeholder groups or partners to become members of the Rural Pact and disseminate information about the EU rural vision and activities the Rural Pact members are taking.
- Suggest events or tasks to be organised under the Rural Pact.
- Acting as a 'network of organisations'.

The **Rural Pact coordination group** will include a total of 20 representatives of each category of members of the Rural Pact and will aim for a **balance of types of actors** (public authorities, NGO representations, business representatives and citizens representatives), **country of origin and diversity of rural contexts**.

The first Rural pact coordination group will be appointed by the Rural Pact preparatory group, after consulting the Rural Pact Community.

Engaging people and maintaining momentum

Members of the Rural Pact will receive information through:

- The Rural Pact website, including collaborative tools;
- A newsletter;
- Social media updates;
- Participation in Rural Pact events.

This work will also be accompanied by a communication effort, to publicise the role rural areas play in modern society and push the positive narrative around rural areas contributing to giving them a renewed sense of pride and belonging.



Action



Facilitation by EU level

The European Commission is already preparing services to support the Rural Pact:

Action	Purpose	Timing
EU Rural website	A single place to access information on the EU's rural areas, activities under the Rural vision and the Rural Pact.	2022
Rural Pact facilitation	Organisation of Rural Pact conference and events, communication activities.	2023
Rural revitalisation platform	A one-stop shop for collaboration between authorities and stakeholders to share best practices for areas facing population losses. The IT tools developed for this platform could also be used for collaboration on Rural Pact activities that go beyond the scope of the rural revitalisation platform.	2023
Meetings with EU institutions	Maintain the momentum at EU level, including relations with the Council presidencies.	2022
Evaluation of EU programming for rural areas	Assess the level to which EU funds support rural areas	2023

The Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee will also continue to play a strong role in supporting the animation of the Rural Pact. Other European Institutions may announce further contributions in the future.

Commitments to action by Rural Pact community members

Any member of the community can take an active role in achieving the Pact's objectives. Commitments from all members will build the Rural Pact Work Programme. The first version of this work programme will come together at the Rural Pact Conference. Following this event, Rural pact community members will be able to submit commitments at any time.

These commitments for action can be taken according to the resources each person or organisation can dedicate to this process. When making a commitment, members will indicate whether they take their commitment as an **individual**, a **small-scale organisation** or a **large-scale organisation**. They should also say which objective of the Rural Pact they support.

Commitments under objective 1 – Amplifying rural voices

Members could act by:

- *For individuals:* creating or joining a local group to discuss the future of the area, connecting to other voices at local, regional and national level and relaying the results to the Rural pact coordination group and proposing practical actions;
- *For small-scale rural organisations:* improving the way they cooperate with one another to make their voice better heard;

- *For larger organisations:* developing democratic processes (e.g. national or regional rural parliaments) to better listen to rural people and take their opinions into account in decision making.

Commitments under objective 2 – Collaboration and mutual learning

Under this objective, members could propose actions such as, for example:

- *For individuals:* relay successful examples to the European level .
- *For small-scale organisations:* actively participate in networking and collaboration activities, in particular with peers, showcasing their good practices and existing actions.
- *For large-scale organisations:* organise networking and collaboration activities in their domains and areas of expertise/responsibility, in connection with activities undertaken in the EU Rural action plan.

Commitments under objective 3 – Encourage voluntary commitment to action

Under this objective, members could propose actions to develop **new** initiatives under the different objectives of the Rural Pact and in the blocks of the EU Rural Action plan. Individuals would not be expected to contribute to this goal.

- *For small-scale organisations,* these would be at the local level and aim at improving the well-being of their community.
- *For larger organisations,* such as national or regional level governments or businesses larger than individual SMEs, or large NGOs, wherever they are based in urban or rural areas, who have the potential to trigger large-scale impact, these would be commitments to action in the form of **new, targeted and measurable initiatives benefitting rural areas**. This covers a range of different possibilities:
 - *A public authority* could commit to implementing rural proofing on its territory or develop a dedicated rural strategy or improve cooperation between its various departments;
 - *a civil society organisation* could launch a new training scheme for access to higher education in rural areas, or new actions that target the needs and potentials of rural areas;
 - *a business* could promote working from home to allow its staff to set-up in a rural area or set-up services or a factory in a rural area.

Monitoring Progress

In the first year of the Rural Pact, the Coordination Group will be tasked with developing a way of monitoring the commitments made by Rural Pact members. In the meantime, individuals or organisations that commit will be invited to self-monitor their achievements.

