

ENRD workshop

Building a Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

Rural#2040 Highlights report

This workshop was part of the [European Week of Regions and Cities](#). It consisted of three framing presentations – from DG AGRI, DG REGIO and the OECD, followed by four interactive breakout sessions. The breakout sessions dealt with rural “digital, resilient, green and socially inclusive futures” respectively. Each was introduced by a speaker and led to a discussion about what rural areas might look like in 2040 and the conditions required for getting there.

The workshop was moderated by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and many of the key ideas and messages were fed into an afternoon panel made up of Vice President Suica (Democracy and Demography), and Commissioners Ferreira (Cohesion) and Wojciechowski (Agriculture, including Rural Development Policy).

Event Information

Date: 13 October 2020

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point, DG AGRI, DG REGIO

Participants: 86 participants – covering a wide range of rural development stakeholders.

Outcomes Insights on various aspects related to the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA).

Web page : [ENRD Workshop on Building a long-term vision for rural areas](#)

The aims and main components of the LTVRA



Maria Gafo (DG AGRI) pointed to the renewed political importance attached to rural areas as expressed by President Von der Leyen’s statement that “rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy.” She explained how Commission services are working together on the development of the LTVRA. To make sure that this vision reflects the views of people in rural areas a wide consultation to engage with rural people, national and regional authorities will take place, including a number of activities and events. An online [public consultation](#) – (open until 30 November 2020) – is available in all MS national languages.

The online public consultation will be complemented by a Eurobarometer survey, a Foresight exercise (developed by the JRC and supported by an ENRD Thematic Group on the Long Term Rural Vision) and by further analytical work. In addition, a Workshop Package for engaging stakeholders, to help any rural group to contribute to the process is being prepared. The results of the public consultation and of other contributions will feed into the ENRD LTVRA conference planned for March 2021 before the publication of a European Commission Communication in the summer of 2021. Maria argued that it is important to focus on the emerging opportunities as well as the challenges faced by rural areas. She ended by pointing out that the children of today will be the ones who live and lead the vision of tomorrow.



Wallis Goelen Vandebroek (DG REGIO) stressed that rural areas are not homogeneous and that there is a need to address their specific challenges and opportunities. She argued that agriculture is no longer the predominant activity in most rural areas and that economic diversification is essential to ensure sustainable rural development.

Cohesion Policy pays considerable attention to reducing the disparities between rural and urban areas and an estimated 25% of the Cohesion Policy investment is spent directly on rural areas. However, Cohesion Policy is “not only about funding, it is about a modern and varied set of place-based options for all territories”. This requires “integrated sustainable development strategies designed by local authorities with the participation of partners”. The Cohesion Policy objective for “Europe closer to citizens” and territorial instruments such as CLLD and Integrated Territorial Investments are especially relevant tools.



José Enrique Garcilazo (OECD) also highlighted the need for different strategies to deal with different types of rural areas. Rural-urban divides have grown since the global financial crisis. Four megatrends are shaping the context for rural places - demography, environment, technological change and globalisation. It is important for policy makers to think through how these trends are shaping reality in different rural places now and in the future and to take advantage of new opportunities.

Enrique presented the OECD’s new [Rural Well-Being Policy Framework](#) which identifies a series of policy recommendations in the economic, environmental and social dimensions of well-being. These include “smart specialisation” on key rural assets and sectors, developing “silver” services for the elderly, rethinking transportation, developing renewable energy, integrated and targeted programmes for youth and newcomers, enhancing digital tools and skills, and many more.

Breakout discussions on digital, resilient, green and socially inclusive rural futures

After an introductory presentation, each of the parallel breakout discussions were structured around two questions: ‘What would a resilient/environmentally sustainable/socially inclusive/digitally equipped rural area look like in 2040?’ and ‘What are the conditions needed to achieve this vision?’.



Digital futures – [Emilija Stojmenova Duh](#) from the University of Ljubljana and Slovenian Digital Innovation Hub introduced her vision for “digitally equipped” rural areas of the future. This includes functioning digital innovation ecosystems, efficient and interoperable data platforms, human-centred digital technologies, life-long learning in digital skills and solutions which fuel economic growth, social innovation and climate risk mitigation. Based on Emilija’s presentation and the discussion, it became clear that several conditions are required to achieve this vision:

- High-speed broadband coverage is a basic requirement;
- Participants emphasised the importance of human capital, digital literacy for all, and the development of human centred technologies and, consequently, trust in digital technologies;
- Rural innovation hubs can play a very important role in building sustainable digital ecosystems in rural areas.



Resilient futures – [José Enrique Garcilazo](#) from the OECD outlined some of the key conditions for achieving a more resilient rural future. He referred to the implications of the COVID pandemic and the emerging ‘new normality’ for rural development. This includes more remote working, shifts in consumption towards local products, greater awareness of the importance of access to quality services, the emerging role of e-health and e-education and others. Rural policies must be forward looking in order to anticipate the impacts of these kinds of changes.

- Participants insisted that rural areas should not simply copy the urban strategies used for improving resilience;
- Rural areas should focus on the distinctive components of rural wellbeing and their attributes rather than simply the problems they face;
- Diversification is critical, not only in terms of sectors but in terms of people (skills, human capacities, ages, origin etc.);
- Investments in key infrastructure, governance systems and local capacities are essential for the transition to a more resilient future;
- Integrated approaches such as LEADER should be promoted.



Green (Deal) futures – [Celia Nyssens](#) from the European Environmental Bureau presented the key features of an environmentally sustainable rural future. These include clean and affordable energy, the circular economy, sustainable and smart mobility, a pollution-free environment, thriving ecosystems and sustainable food systems. In order to move toward this vision, Celia suggested that more ambitious climate and nature restoration agendas need to be in place in the CAP and other policies, and a reform of economic and fiscal incentives should be undertaken.

- Participants argued that the transition to a green rural future also has to be people centred;
- This means that the needs of different types of rural areas and rural stakeholders as well as the impact of different drivers should be taken into account;
- The balanced use of land and other resources is a key consideration, not only as regards agriculture but also other activities. It is important to ensure the future diversity of land use, rural-urban balance, biodiversity and the use of rural space for living and working.



Socially inclusive futures – [Maura Farrell](#) from the Irish National Rural Network presented her vision of a socially-inclusive, people-centred Rural 2040 that is environmentally aware, economically viable and socially inclusive. Such rural future would embrace diversity and harness people’s skills and ability to achieve success. Importantly, it would view diversity as a rural opportunity rather than a challenge. The conditions for achieving such a vision include the availability of high-quality public facilities and services to create opportunities for rural inhabitants and enhance well-being.

- Participants pointed out that socially inclusive rural areas need to be open to all vulnerable groups such as youth, elderly, women, migrants and many others;
- A culture of mutual respect is essential - but changes in attitudes take time and are difficult to achieve through one-off public programmes;
- Good-quality and easily accessible basic services such as education, health care or housing need to be in place to make rural areas inclusive and enhance the well-being of all rural inhabitants.



Closing remarks

- The future Vision should be about feelings, hopes and dreams – in one word, people, not just about statistics, definitions and data.
- It is essential to recognise and value the importance of rural areas for European society as a whole. As President Von der Leyen says, they are ‘a core part of our identity and our economic potential’.
- There is no one-size fits-all solution. It is also important to recognise the diversity- not only with regards to the types of rural areas and their challenges, but also with regards to the possible solutions.