

CONNECTIONS

THE EUROPEAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

NEWS AND UPDATES

- **RURAL REVITALISATION AND RURAL PROOFING**
- **SUSTAINABILITY AGREEMENTS**
- **NEW ENRD CONTACT POINT TEAM**

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

- **TRANSFORMING FARM TO FORK CONFERENCE CONTENT INTO TANGIBLE ACTION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**
- **A RURAL RENAISSANCE: HOW EU RESEARCH IS BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO RURAL AREAS**
- **COMBINING EUROPEAN FUNDS TOWARDS THE VISION FOR RURAL AREAS IN 2040**



EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union (EU). The ENRD contributes to the effective implementation of Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) by generating and sharing knowledge as well as by facilitating information exchange and cooperation across rural Europe.

Each Member State has established a National Rural Network (NRN) that brings together the organisations and administrations involved in rural development. At EU level, the ENRD supports the networking of these NRNs, national administrations and European organisations.

Find out more on the ENRD website (<https://enrd.ec.europa.eu>).

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EDITORIAL



Welcome to a new edition of Rural Connections!

As we write these pages, EU Member States are fully engaged in the transition to the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and associated national CAP Strategic Plans. These are expected to include support actions based on national and regional specificities, while making them more responsive to current and future global challenges – from climate change to generational renewal. ‘Think local, act global’, as the saying goes.

We have tried to reflect the necessary balance between local and EU perspectives in this edition of the magazine, particularly in the **Rural issues, rural perspectives** section (page 11), which alternates between local experiences and EU-wide initiatives. Here, you can find inspiration on a variety of topics, from food sustainability to youth engagement, from Smart Villages to digitalisation.

The **News** section (page 4) includes an overview of recent EU policy developments, particularly the reformed CAP and the Vision for rural areas that we have all been so active in developing in recent months. These pages also include updates from the ENRD Contact Point, the Evaluation Helpdesk and EIP-AGRI. We will be able to tell you more in the upcoming months about how their increased future coordination will help to better support agriculture and rural development across the EU, so stay tuned for more updates!

Whether you act locally or globally (or both), we hope this edition of Rural Connections provides you once again with uplifting stories and constructive input. On our side, we welcome your feedback, suggestions and proposals for contributions to future editions.

Elena Di Federico

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NEWS & UPDATES

ENRD NEWS



New ENRD Thematic Groups

The ENRD has launched five new Thematic Groups (TG), which bring together agricultural and rural development stakeholders and experts around key topics, ranging from sustainability to competitiveness, from LEADER implementation to the rural Vision. For each TG, members are selected via an Expression of Interest which is disseminated widely through ENRD's communication channels, including monthly newsletters and social media.

For each TG, two meetings will be organised in the first half of 2022, with coordinated exchanges across its members in between meetings. The key documents produced by the TGs are publicly available on the ENRD website.

Even if you are not part of a TG, you can share your experiences or materials through the relevant email addresses that you find in the TG web pages listed below.

Rural Revitalisation and Rural Proofing

The ambition of the long term vision for rural areas, which was launched by the European Commission on 30 June 2021, is to revitalise rural areas so that, by 2040, they are stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous. Two new TGs are contributing to achieving this vision and focus respectively on rural revitalisation and rural proofing.

The TG on **Rural Revitalisation** aims to 1) identify and understand the key enabling conditions to drive rural revitalisation across Europe and to 2) explore needs as well as develop ideas and recommendations to help shape the

future rural revitalisation platform to be developed by the European Commission.

The first TG meeting took place on 15 December 2021 and the second on 30 March 2022.

The TG on **Rural Proofing** is designed to share experience and develop recommendations that can guide the design and implementation of rural proofing within Member States, at different administrative levels. Rural proofing is a mechanism that can help boost rural revitalisation by aligning all relevant policies with rural needs and realities.

The first TG meeting took place on 27 January 2022 and the second one is scheduled on 19 May 2022.

 FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD Thematic Group on Rural Revitalisation: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/long-term-rural-vision/TG-rural-revitalisation_en_en

ENRD Thematic Group on Rural Proofing: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/long-term-rural-vision/TG-rural-proofing_en_en



Sustainability Agreements

The TG on Sustainability Agreements in the agri-food supply chain focuses on how sustainability agreements are currently framed and implemented (horizontally and vertically) through the food value chain. The TG aims to identify some of the challenges and barriers that collective actions around sustainability face as well as the added value of pursuing sustainability objectives through collaboration.

The first TG meeting took place on 17 March and the second one is scheduled on 1 June 2022.

 FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD Thematic Group on Sustainability Agreements in the agri-food supply chain: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sustainability-agreements-agri-food-supply-chain_en

NEWS & UPDATES

Carbon Farming

The TG on **Carbon Farming** will explore how greater action on carbon farming can be encouraged via the CAP and the economic opportunities that this can bring, including collecting good practices, insights and examples from the current CAP and other programmes, such as LIFE, Interreg, Horizon 2020 and the Structural Funds. This TG provides an opportunity to bring Member State representatives and stakeholders together to discuss how to upscale carbon farming.

The first TG meeting took place on 24 March 2022 and the second one is scheduled in June 2022.

FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD Thematic Group on Carbon Farming:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/carbon-farming_en

Making the seven LEADER principles work

The TG on **Making the seven LEADER principles work in practice for all Local Actions Groups (LAGs) under the CAP Strategic Plans** aims to identify and promote a better understanding of the various ways that can ensure that the seven LEADER principles are fully delivered in local development by every LAG in the EU. Ideas and recommendations from the TG could be used by Member State authorities and LAGs for developing relevant rules, criteria, guidance, training and networking support.

The first TG meeting took place on 10 March 2022 and the second one is scheduled on 24 May 2022.

FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD Thematic Group on Making the seven LEADER principles work in practice for all LAGs under the CAP Strategic Plans:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/making-seven-leader-principles-work-practice-all-lags-under-cap-strategic-plans_en



Networking

The 21st National Rural Networks (NRN) Meeting was organised by the ENRD Contact Point jointly with the Slovenian Rural Network on 18 November 2021. This virtual meeting provided an opportunity for all Member States' NRNs and National Support Units (NSUs) to exchange information about their progress with preparations for both the CAP Strategic Plans and the future national CAP networks. Participants also

discussed the development of ENRD activities and priority actions for NRNs, including regional networking clusters.

For several months, all NRNs and NSUs have been involved in at least one of four regional clusters: Nordic-Baltic, Atlantic, Central-Eastern and Mediterranean. Online meetings take place once a month based on the 'coffee break model' initiated by

the Nordic-Baltic NSUs for their own activities. The aim of these meetings is to create a common informal space where NRN/NSUs can exchange information regularly with their peers.

FURTHER INFORMATION

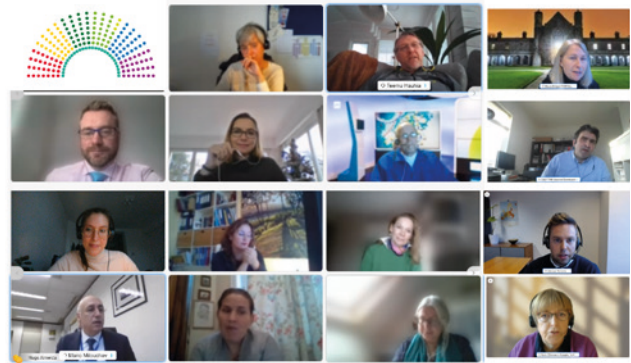
21st NRN Meeting: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/21st-nrn-meeting_en

NEWS & UPDATES

Governance



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The 8th meeting of the EU Rural Networks Assembly took place online on 7 December 2021. Participants exchanged information on the latest developments on the CAP reform and other relevant EU policy initiatives, including the long term vision for rural areas and Horizon Europe. The meeting also provided an update on planned and forthcoming rural networks' activities and an opportunity to discuss ideas for governance arrangements for the future EU CAP Network.

The 10th Meeting of the LEADER/

CLLD Sub-Group (LSG) took place on 22 February 2022. LSG members received updates on the state of play of the CAP regulatory framework concerning LEADER and on various aspects of LEADER implementation in the new period. They also discussed the outcomes of the latest LEADER needs assessment survey, the planned ENRD activities related to LEADER and the results of a LEADER evaluation study.

The 7th Rural Networks Steering Group Meeting is scheduled to take place on 16 May 2022.

FURTHER INFORMATION

8th meeting of the EU Rural Networks Assembly: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/8th-meeting-eu-rural-networks-assembly_en

10th Meeting of the LEADER/CLLD Sub-Group: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/10th-meeting-leaderclld-sub-group_en

17th Rural Networks Steering Group Meeting: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/17th-rural-networks-steering-group-meeting_en

New ENRD Contact Point team

The new ENRD Contact Point (CP) team became operational in July 2021, implementing a new contract with the European Commission to support the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans across the EU. David Lamb, who has been managing the CP's networking activities for several years, has taken over as Team Leader.

A few 'new faces' have joined the team. **Soumaya Bouker**⁽¹⁾ has joined the Management & Horizontal Coordination team as an administrative assistant. The policy team has been strengthened by the inclusion of the following experts: **Elena García Garrido**⁽²⁾, **Kaley Hart**⁽³⁾ and **Alistair Prior**⁽⁴⁾. **Eirini Litina**⁽⁵⁾ has joined the Networking team.



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NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM THE EVALUATION HELPDESK

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The 18th Good Practice Workshop: 'New tools for monitoring and evaluation – insights from the evaluation knowledge bank'

The 18th Good Practice Workshop of the Evaluation Helpdesk, 'New tools for monitoring and evaluation: insights from the Evaluation Knowledge Bank' (20–21 October 2021) brought together 127 participants from 21 different EU Member States. Participants included Rural Development Programme (RDP) Managing Authorities (MAs), evaluators, European Commission representatives, researchers, National Rural Networks and other evaluation stakeholders. The overall aim of the workshop was to build evaluation knowledge based on the innovative outputs of EU-funded research projects in relation to data management systems and tools.

This workshop specifically aimed at:

- exchanging and sharing experiences from existing outputs of EU-funded research projects/studies and data management practices that can be used for evaluations of the CAP;
- discussing specific issues that can facilitate or hamper the incorporation of identified (data collection, management and monitoring) outputs into evaluations at the Member State level;
- identifying needs for further support, principally for Managing Authorities (MAs), Paying Agencies (PAs) and evaluators, in relation to using research project outputs for future CAP evaluations.

Outputs from ten EU-funded projects were presented during the two-day workshop, covering the topics of local development, social innovation, digitalisation, interoperability, small farm performance and environmental performance. These outputs can serve the needs of CAP evaluation stakeholders by providing new indicators, new data and methodologies that may help answer evaluation questions, obtain data and information for existing or new indicators and offer insights and inspiration in relation to methodological approaches and tools.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

New indicators may help connect programme outcomes to drivers of geographic inequalities at the local scale. Examples include the 'IMAJINE composite indicator for local development'⁽¹⁾ and the 'MATILDE indicators'⁽²⁾ for capturing the social dimension of third country nationals' participation in local life or the economic impacts of migration at the local level.

The SIMRA database of social innovations in marginalised rural areas⁽³⁾ can help answer questions on how, why and under what circumstances social innovations increased participation, sales or supported competitiveness.

The SALSA project⁽⁴⁾ is valuable for its capacity to make small farms visible, which are often not in official statistics and can complement the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN).⁽⁵⁾

The DIONE maps of crop types and non-productive EFAs,⁽⁶⁾ together with the soil property maps, offer very high resolution data, along with field sensors to produce low cost, accurate and timely data.

DESIRA offers a quantitative (econometric) model⁽⁷⁾ that can measure the impact of broadband access on economic growth. The novelty of this model is that it can be used at the regional level.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Explore all the presentations: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practice-workshops/new-tools-monitoring-and-evaluation-insights-evaluation-knowledge_en

Find more outputs in the Evaluation Knowledge Bank: <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/knowledge-bank>

(1) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/knowledge-bank/_en?f%5B0%5D=sm_field_prj_output_project%3Ataxonomy_term%3A20909

(2) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/knowledge-bank/_en?f%5B0%5D=sm_field_prj_output_project%3Ataxonomy_term%3A20896

(3) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/knowledge-bank/database-social-innovations-marginalised-rural-areas_en

(4) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/knowledge-bank/_en?f%5B0%5D=sm_field_prj_output_project%3Ataxonomy_term%3A20908

(5) https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/facts-and-figures/farms-farming-and-innovation/structures-and-economics/economics/fadn_en

(6) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/knowledge-bank/maps-crop-types-non-productive-efas-permanent-pastures-and-farming_en

(7) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/knowledge-bank/modelling-broadband-access-impact-economic-growth-nuts-3-level_en

NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM EIP-AGRI



Boosting innovation and knowledge flows across Europe through AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems)



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Better flows of knowledge benefit agriculture, forestry and rural communities, but also food and non-food systems, biodiversity, the environment, climate and consumers. Efficient Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) facilitate innovation and make it easier for knowledge to be exchanged between advisors, farmers and foresters, researchers, rural networks, national and regional authorities, media, all those involved in education and training, and consumers. When knowledge is co-created, used efficiently and shared

widely, it will boost the development and scaling-up of innovative solutions that work in practice.

STIMULATING MORE COMPETENT ADVICE AND INNOVATION SUPPORT

In a well-functioning AKIS, advisors are essential as they offer farmers, foresters and rural entrepreneurs up-to-date and tailored information to support their daily decisions. Advisors can also provide innovation support by connecting people and helping to prepare and develop EIP-AGRI Operational Groups or other interactive innovation projects. Specialist advisors can offer additional support with knowledge on specific, practical themes. Advisors regularly exchange with national and international researchers and with CAP networks that collect and share innovative project results. Their knowledge helps to create national or even wider knowledge reservoirs that can benefit everyone in the AKIS ecosystem.

CONNECTING THROUGH CAP NETWORKS

From 2023, the innovation strands of national CAP networks will broaden the scope of the current National Rural Networks to support knowledge exchange and foster innovation in EU Member States. They can do this by organising networking events that bring people

together, stimulating regional, national, cross-border or international Operational Group projects (OGs) to interact, and connecting them with European projects. National CAP networks are vital to make innovative knowledge more widely accessible by collecting, translating and sharing practical project results that are most useful for their country. The EIP-AGRI Support Facility will connect these national innovation strands to foster peer-to-peer exchange and provide further support, including links to Horizon Europe.

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Researchers, farmers and foresters, advisors, students at agricultural schools and others need to be connected to boost flows of knowledge and innovation. By getting involved in Operational Groups or other innovative, practical projects, researchers can help develop solutions for real needs from the field. These projects allow farmers or foresters to test new ideas, innovative technologies or methods, co-create solutions to the challenges they face or benefit from peer-to-peer learning. Networking events, project collaboration, discussion groups, social media exchanges and on-farm demonstrations can all bring people together and boost knowledge exchange, sparking innovative solutions that are created together, widely shared, and ready to be taken up in the field.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Read the new EIP-AGRI brochure on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems. The new brochure highlights a number of key features, inspiring examples and projects that help build stronger Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems across Europe: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/publications/eip-agri-brochure-agricultural-knowledge-and-0>
- What is AKIS? Watch the EIP-AGRI animated video for an illustrated overview: <https://youtu.be/O5u-xTkJG3g>
- Find all EIP-AGRI activities related to AKIS on the 'spotlight' page: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/about/akis-eip-agri-spotlight>

NEWS & UPDATES

EU NEWS

New Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) regulations (2023-27)

The new CAP regulations,⁽¹⁾ which constitute the basic acts, were published in the Official Journal on 6 December 2021. The new CAP is designed to be fairer, greener, more animal-friendly and more flexible. It includes higher environmental and climate ambitions, in line with the European Green Deal, as well as new social support features.

Member States' CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) are now being assessed by the European Commission. The Commission has six months to approve the national CSPs, as revised by the Member States if necessary, to apply from 1 January 2023, when the new CAP will enter into force.⁽²⁾

Join the Rural Pact!

An EU-wide Rural Pact⁽³⁾ was launched at the end of 2021 as part of the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas. The Rural Pact aims to mobilise public authorities and stakeholders to act on the needs and aspirations of rural residents.

The Rural Pact will provide a common framework to engage and cooperate at EU, national, regional and local level. Commission Vice President Šuica, Commissioner Wojciechowski, and Commissioner Ferreira extended an open invitation⁽⁴⁾ to join the discussion on the Rural Pact. All interested parties are invited to express their support for the goals of the vision by completing the Rural Pact engagement form⁽⁵⁾ and by participating in the development and implementation of the Rural Pact.

In June 2022, the Commission will organise a high-level Rural Pact conference, which will offer the opportunity to bring all contributions together and define the actions to be taken.



(1) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L:2021:435:TOC>

(2) https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/new-cap-regulations-enter-force-2021-dec-07_en

(3) https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en#theruralpact

(4) https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategy/strategy_documents/documents/launch-rural-pact-2021.pdf

(5) <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/RuralPact>

NEWS & UPDATES

EU Soil Strategy for 2030



The EU Soil Strategy for 2030,⁽¹⁾ which was launched in December 2021, sets out a framework and concrete measures to protect and restore soils and to ensure that they are used sustainably. It sets a vision and objectives to achieve healthy soils by 2050, with concrete actions by 2030. It also announces a new Soil Health Law by 2023 to ensure a level playing field and a high level of environmental and health protection.

This new EU Soil Strategy for 2030 is a key deliverable of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030⁽²⁾ and will contribute to the European Green Deal objectives.⁽³⁾ Healthy soils are

essential for achieving climate neutrality, a clean and circular economy and halting desertification and land degradation. They are also essential for reversing biodiversity loss, providing healthy food and safeguarding human health. Agriculture will play a decisive role in the EU Soil Strategy and farmers will be aided by risk assessment methodologies implementing the Fertilising Products Regulation.⁽⁴⁾ The feasibility of introducing a soil health certificate for land transactions will also be examined as part of the new Strategy. In addition, a ‘test your soil for free’ initiative aims to help farmers and other actors to know more about the health of their soil.

(1) https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/soil-strategy_en#ecl-inpage-1444

(2) https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en

(3) https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

(4) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019R1009>



Transforming Farm to Fork Conference content into tangible action: a global perspective

ENRD Contact Point

The 2021 Farm to Fork (F2F) Conference reinforced Europe's position as a global leader in transforming food systems while leaving no one behind.



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Better production, better nutrition, better environment and a better life: these four 'betters' are the strategic pillars of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and are closely connected to the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy,⁽¹⁾ as highlighted at the European Commission's F2F Conference on 14–15 October 2021.⁽²⁾ The FAO pillars also closely correlate with our planet's Sustainable Development Goals⁽³⁾ concerning food. The world's food experts are watching F2F closely and are looking forward to learning how its achievements and lessons can be shared with all the members of the United Nations (UN).

Europe's F2F framework is a unique geopolitical food systems initiative in terms of its scale and scope. It is successfully coordinating food chain policy in a coherent way for nearly half a billion people across 27 distinctly different, relatively well developed and interconnected sovereign States. It aims to transform the production, trade, consumption, and governance of Europe's food chains to protect current and future generations against climate and health risks. Furthermore, it has a strong influence on EU neighbours and trading partners (as explained on the European

Commission's F2F webpage information about trade policies and international cooperation instruments).

The F2F conference attracted global attention as a state-of-the-art source for international knowledge exchange on transforming food systems. F2F has been built by drawing on insights from the international community's key knowledge banks on food systems, including the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Committee of World Food Security as well as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Selected insights from the conference are highlighted below.

F2F TOOLKIT

The EU is developing practical tools to help EU Member States improve their performance in terms of, e.g., productivity, use of pesticides, organics, nutrition, climate, nature, welfare and fairness. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) networking on F2F topics concerning strategic plans, innovation and evaluation is also a highly valuable F2F tool for harvesting, packaging and sharing intelligence about F2F successes and lessons.

(1) https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en

(2) https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/farm-fork-conference_en

(3) <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

A notable example of EU collaboration on the F2F toolkit is the Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices.⁽⁴⁾ The Code of Conduct can help food chains align with responsible and sustainable standards in terms of human rights, nutrition, climate, equality and many more policy priorities, transforming food policy rhetoric into reality for every part of rural Europe. The EU F2F Code was built around international knowhow from OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains.⁽⁵⁾ The Code of Conduct's current voluntary standard remains under scrutiny. Lessons learnt from rolling out the Code of Conduct across the continent could subsequently be fed back into the FAO's institutional intelligence and be further applied around the world.

HEALTHY EUROPE

Another globally important food issue being tackled by F2F, and one highlighted by European Commission Vice President Timmermans during his opening address to the F2F Conference, relates to healthy diets. Europe suffers badly from unhealthy eating habits and the current pandemic has underlined the importance of healthy eating.

Nutrition is a widely appreciated F2F priority and the F2F campaign to transform European eating habits will only grow in significance for our future. Shifting to healthy fats and more plant-based diets can help reduce emissions and capture more carbon. Eating healthily is not only good for everyone but also great for the planet.

Much of the planet's top nutritional policy expertise is clustered in Italy. The renowned Rome-based Agencies (RBAs)⁽⁶⁾ are involved in both providing information about and learning from F2F on various fronts. For example, RBA good practice advocacy and their e-learning course on nutrition-food-value-chains⁽⁷⁾ offer EU Member States the opportunity to benefit from ideas for F2F healthy food sensitive actions.

CLIMATE ACTION

The 2021 F2F Conference was attended by many high-ranking decision-makers, including the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski. The CAP's contributions to F2F climate goals were widely recognised and applauded during the event.

The CAP's potential to help EU Member States reduce emissions and capture carbon through food systems is considerable. CAP funding spanning both Pillars is now targeted more than

ever towards F2F agendas for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The EU recovery and resilience funds, as well as cohesion and fisheries policy resources, research, finance, InvestEU and EIB/EBRD investment portfolios, all also represent practical F2F support tools for tackling food-related climate impacts.



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The rich content of the F2F Conference 2021 cannot be reviewed in full here. Animal welfare, social inclusion, pollinators and food chain fairness are just a few of the other noteworthy F2F components that the EU, and the whole planet, is benefitting from now, and will continue to do so in the future.

The 2021 F2F Conference confirmed Europe's vanguard position in transforming food systems. It showcased what European ambition can achieve when applied in practice on the ground in our fields, towns, cities and villages. We can all look forward to next year's conference that will no doubt build even more useful global capacity to guide us in transforming our food systems further.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Council of the EU perspective on F2F Conference:
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13434-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

EU and FAO: Strengthening a long-standing partnership through a renewed strategic dialogue:
<https://www.fao.org/brussels/news/detail/en/c/1377797/>

Game Changing Solutions for Food System Transformation:
<https://www.glopan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Game-Changing-Solutions-for-Food-System-Transformation.pdf>

(4) https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/sustainable-food-processing/code-conduct_en

(5) <https://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/investment-policy/rbc-agriculture-supply-chains.htm>

(6) <https://www.wfp.org/rome-based-agencies>

(7) <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=566>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

InSite: supporting local initiatives in rural France

Elsa Chuinard

At InSite, our aim is, by working together, to invent a new rural way of life in harmony with people and nature.



Elsa Chuinard,
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Nowadays, rural areas in France are facing social, environmental and economic issues such as the withdrawal of public services, an ageing local population and a lack of work opportunities. However, several associations, local authorities and businesses as well as farmers and citizens are developing relevant solutions for their territories.

Since 2018, the NGO InSite has been supporting some of these cultural, social and environmental initiatives in French villages through two programmes: Erasmus Rural and Artisans d’Idées (Idea makers).

The aim is to help create social cohesion and meet the inhabitants’ needs in rural areas and, while doing so, to work together to invent a new way of life that will be more in harmony with people and nature.

ERASMUS RURAL: A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE FOR YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Erasmus Rural (Rural Erasmus, from the name of the well-known European youth programme) gives young citizens – from 18 to 25 years old – the opportunity to settle down in small villages for six months to volunteer for local projects. Their missions are varied, depending on the local needs. For example, they may develop common gardens, organise digital workshops, create hiking paths or raise public awareness about environmental issues.

The programme is free for local actors (e.g. municipalities, local associations) who are only asked to provide accommodation for the volunteers and supervise them during the whole process. The young volunteers receive a monthly allowance (approximately

€500) and benefit from civic training within the scope of the ‘Service Civique’ (Citizen service, a programme to foster youth’s social engagement through hands-on activities across the French territory).

Erasmus Rural is often a life-changing experience for the participants. They develop new skills, change their perception of rural life and many of them then consider pursuing their career in the NGO sector.

“Erasmus Rural allows me to live an outstanding experience: I live, work, learn and bloom with the inhabitants and various ‘makers’ in the village. I already know that this experience will be important for my personal fulfilment and my professional future.” Léo, volunteering in Aureille (in Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur).

“This experience gives a young volunteer a chance to discover a rural area, how it’s organised, how it works. The inhabitants had the opportunity to meet someone coming from somewhere else who saw things from a different perspective.” Geneviève Gasq-Barès, Mayor of Condom-d’Aubrac (Occitanie).

Since its creation in 2019, the Erasmus Rural programme has mobilised 83 young volunteers in 57 villages, especially in the South of France (Occitanie, Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur and Corsica) but also in a few villages in Normandy and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.

We are currently evaluating the results of Erasmus Rural:

- 92% of the volunteers say that Erasmus Rural was a “good” or “very good” experience for them;
- 100% of the municipalities and associations supported would recommend others to appeal to InSite; and



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- about 20 young volunteers decided to stay in the village where they settled down for their Erasmus Rural, and 12 of them found work opportunities or training courses locally, which enabled them to keep collaborating with the projects they volunteered for.

You can find the complete results of our impact reports on our website.⁽¹⁾

The results are really promising, which is why the programme is going to continue and spread throughout France in the medium term.

ARTISANS D'IDÉES: A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY FOR POSITIVE RURALITY

The Artisans d'Idées programme brings together local representatives, associations and all those who develop rural initiatives to revitalise their territories. The objective is to create a community and share ideas, resources and advice in order to learn from each other and make progress together. The programme includes:

- monthly online events, the 'Cafés de Campagne', to discuss various topics such as rural mobility, 'third places' (informal public gathering places) or ecological transition;
- online resources on how to communicate properly, how to get funding or how to measure one's impact;

- a monthly newsletter to inform the community about interesting calls for projects, events and other news; and
- mutual aid groups on various issues.

In 2021, the Artisans d'Idées community had nearly 1000 members who were convinced that sharing and cooperating with each other was the key to a better rural life.

We at InSite would be delighted to share more and get in touch with similar initiatives in other countries. So, if you are interested to learn more, get in touch!

FURTHER INFORMATION

InSite website: www.insite-france.org
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 Insite monthly newsletter (in French):
<https://insite-france.us20.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=673571ff6bfa296e29249bbd6&id=2bb205012d>
 Join our mutual aid Facebook group:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/artisansdidees>

(1) <https://www.insite-france.org/qui-sommes-nous/presentation>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

A rural renaissance: How EU research is breathing new life into rural areas

Fintan Burke and Corinna Hackenbroch

The EU has launched a multi-year plan to help rural areas become more resilient to climate change and be better places to run a business. EU-funded research projects are helping Europe's rural communities make this a reality.



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Whether you call it a 'staycation' or 'domestic tourism' there is no doubt that lockdowns in 2020 caused a boom⁽¹⁾ in terms of people relaxing in their own country's rural regions. However, despite their new found attractiveness, several problems persist in these areas.

A 2019 Eurostat survey found that 22% of Europe's rural population is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. As COVID-19 hit the continent, this weakness intensified – job losses were five times greater⁽²⁾ in rural areas than in cities.

Now the European Commission wants to bring growth back to rural regions. In late June it unveiled its long-term vision for rural areas.⁽³⁾ This includes launching investment and engagement initiatives to make rural communities more sustainable, resilient to climate change and attractive to set up a business.

A leading initiative in the Vision is to encourage the rural bioeconomy to grow. In a high growth scenario, the EU estimates that this sector's yearly turnover could reach €3 trillion by 2050⁽⁴⁾ and create up to 700 000 jobs, mostly in urban, coastal and rural areas.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

However, money is not enough – new businesses need the right business strategies to survive. To meet that potential, researchers in the recently completed Rubizmo project⁽⁵⁾ have examined business models from hundreds of previous enterprise initiatives to see what strategies worked (and which did not) in the past. These can now be accessed through a virtual library.⁽⁶⁾

These success factors are being shared with rural businesses and policy makers across Europe through online business tools, summer schools and e-learning seminars. Some partner universities are now using the virtual library to teach students about rural business strategies.

Rubizmo's long-term goal is to provide rural entrepreneurs, investors and policy makers a full suite of plans to best suit their needs. Rural businesses can now use the project's training resources, a library of previous business models, cooperation networks and personalised advice on business models.

(1) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/coronavirus-holidays-europe-travel/>

(2) <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1226&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10039>

(3) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3162

(4) https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategy/strategy_documents/documents/ltvra-c2021-345-documents-part2_en.pdf

(5) <https://rubizmo.eu/news/view/f216c0c8-8c6b-49f6-929b-63aeaa4d9e7d>

(6) <https://rubizmo.eu/business/virtual-library>

A 'STEPPE' IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The aim of the long-term vision is to ensure that rural businesses are both financially and environmentally sustainable. Fortunately, Europe is already quite 'green' thanks to its bountiful supply of grassland plains, which cover around 21% of the EU's total surface area. In fact, the largest grassland on earth, the Eurasian Steppe, begins in the plains of Hungary's Pannonian Steppe.

Despite this wealth, grassland tends to be underused in the EU – and even then, mostly for animal feed. But the GO-GRASS⁽⁷⁾ project suggests that it can be used for much more. For example, using new production techniques can take ordinary, renewable grass to make sustainable paper and packaging, biochar (a high-carbon form of charcoal) and even organic protein for animal feed. Providing protein for animal feed means that businesses in the EU may soon begin to replace some of the regions' soy imports, valued at over €3.7 billion in 2019.

The project is using four demonstration sites⁽⁸⁾ in Europe to work with farmers, researchers and local companies to create these different grass-based products. This will also involve developing business models so that rural areas can then create long-term jobs that can be replicated throughout the EU and help it become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. The project has three follower regions in Hungary, Romania and Spain that will test this business model to see how it can be used throughout Europe.

SUSTAINABILITY TO GO

Asking farmers to invest in new sustainable farming methods can be tough – two-thirds of agricultural holdings in the EU are less than five hectares in size, according to 2016 Eurostat figures.⁽⁹⁾

This means that most of these small farms will struggle to adapt their farming to the diverse value chains and the greener, more cost-effective processes which the EU pictures.

One example of this is digestate, a liquid fertiliser made from a farm's organic waste. While the EU is encouraging digestate production as part of its circular economy push, it still needs to be pasteurised to avoid any pollution risks. Sending digestate to a treatment plant can be expensive for small-scale farmers.

To cut down on costs, the treatment plant can instead come to them. Researchers at the NOMAD project⁽¹⁰⁾ are designing a mobile digestate treatment truck to treat digestate in order to make an eco-friendly, high-performance biofertiliser.

Once ready, this truck can then visit farms to collect, pasteurise and separate the digestate. This helps farmers cut down on transport costs and their fertiliser and water demand by recovering it as a by-product. It also produces biogas, a source of added value to farming since it can be sold to the grid.

There is a growing understanding throughout the EU that rural areas have been undervalued and under-appreciated for a while now. As the continent sets out to reinvent itself once again after the COVID-19 pandemic, rural areas can lead the way in making their communities more environmentally resilient and attractive to new businesses.

© Courtesy of the GO-GRASS project



(7) <https://www.go-grass.eu/project/>

(8) <https://www.go-grass.eu/project/>

(9) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Farms_and_farmland_in_the_European_Union_-_statistics

(10) <https://www.projectnomad.eu/project/>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Combining European funds towards the Vision for rural areas in 2040



Matej Štepec and Janja Jordan

The development of rural areas requires coherent and integrated rural development approaches. Combining different European funds offers opportunities to invest in infrastructure, technology and people for resilient, inclusive and prosperous rural areas.



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Recent high-level events organised in the framework of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU looked at topics close to the ambitions and goals of the long-term vision for rural areas for 2040.

The international conference entitled **Women and their position in rural areas**⁽¹⁾ (20 August 2021) was attended by 11 delegations from EU Member States, Western Balkan partners and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Representatives from the delegations adopted a declaration⁽²⁾ emphasising that strengthening the role of women in rural areas requires a comprehensive approach, which calls for cooperation between different policy areas, such as infrastructure, the economy, social affairs, healthcare, education as well as tax, land and demographic policy. They welcomed future cooperation and further efforts to find solutions for the integrated development of the European countryside.

Strengthening the dialogue between the urban and rural areas⁽³⁾ was the topic of the informal meeting of EU agriculture ministers (5–7 September 2021). Key challenges include the integration of agriculture and non-agricultural activities in new rural settlements and society's expectations towards rural areas. There

is an expectation to provide rural inhabitants with living standards similar to those in cities, to contribute to natural ecosystem services and other public goods. The ministers discussed how Member States see the coexistence of urban and rural areas, how to solve challenges and prevent conflicts and what role the CAP can play in this. They agreed that rural areas are a multi-purpose space in which various activities coexist and complement each other but sometimes also compete with each other. The social role of rural areas needs to be redefined and at the same time supported in terms of its quality and diversity.

The international conference entitled **Smart Villages for a Green, Digital and Resilient Europe**⁽⁴⁾ (1 October 2021) focused on how to make rural areas attractive and vibrant in order to reduce the development gap between urban and rural areas. High level speakers included European Commission Vice President Dubravka Šuica and FAO Director General Qu Dongyu, four Slovenian ministers responsible for agriculture, regional development, social affairs and digital transformation, as well as business representatives from different fields (energy, connectivity, e-health) and local stakeholders such as LEADER Local Action Groups. The high level of the participants confirmed the importance of rural areas in Slovenia and policy-

(1) <https://seerural.org/news/adopted-joint-declaration-in-the-scope-of-the-international-ministerial-conference-women-and-their-position-in-rural-areas-brdo-pri-kranju-slovenia-20-august-2021>

(2) http://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Joint-Declaration_20_8_2021_final.pdf

(3) <https://www.gov.si/en/news/2021-09-07-eu-agriculture-ministers-for-strengthening-the-dialogue-between-urban-and-rural-areas>

(4) <https://rajhenburg.pametne-vasi.info>

makers' awareness of the countryside's needs. The conference also established the European Forum for Smart Villages⁽⁵⁾, which will bring together politicians at all levels and businesses with the aim of developing concrete activities that contribute to rural development.

Good practice examples of digitalisation in various economic and social sectors showed how the business sector is already developing future-oriented solutions for the countryside and small cities. For example, Toyota Adria is developing innovative mobility services for rural areas; Huawei on connectivity; and Telekom Slovenia on e-health. An outstanding example from the social sector, the Smart Silver Villages, is presented in detail below.

One common message from all these events is that the use of different EU funds can make the long-term vision a reality. The new CAP is one of the key sources of EU funding for rural areas while the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund Plus can also provide significant investments in people and infrastructure in rural areas. The Recovery and Resilience fund and European Investment Bank support can be used to cover existing investment gaps.

SMART SILVER VILLAGES: A CASE STUDY

The Smart Silver Village concept brings together different EU funds to address the growing need for long-term elderly care in the countryside, close to people's homes. The Slovenian countryside has an ageing population and villages face an increasing lack of services, which diminishes the quality of life. The LAG Posavje joined forces with other Slovenian LAGs to design smart solutions that would keep the countryside vibrant, developed and populated.

(5) <https://smart-villages.info/>

(6) <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice/smart-villages-tomorrow>

(7) <https://www.krsko.si/objava/508547>

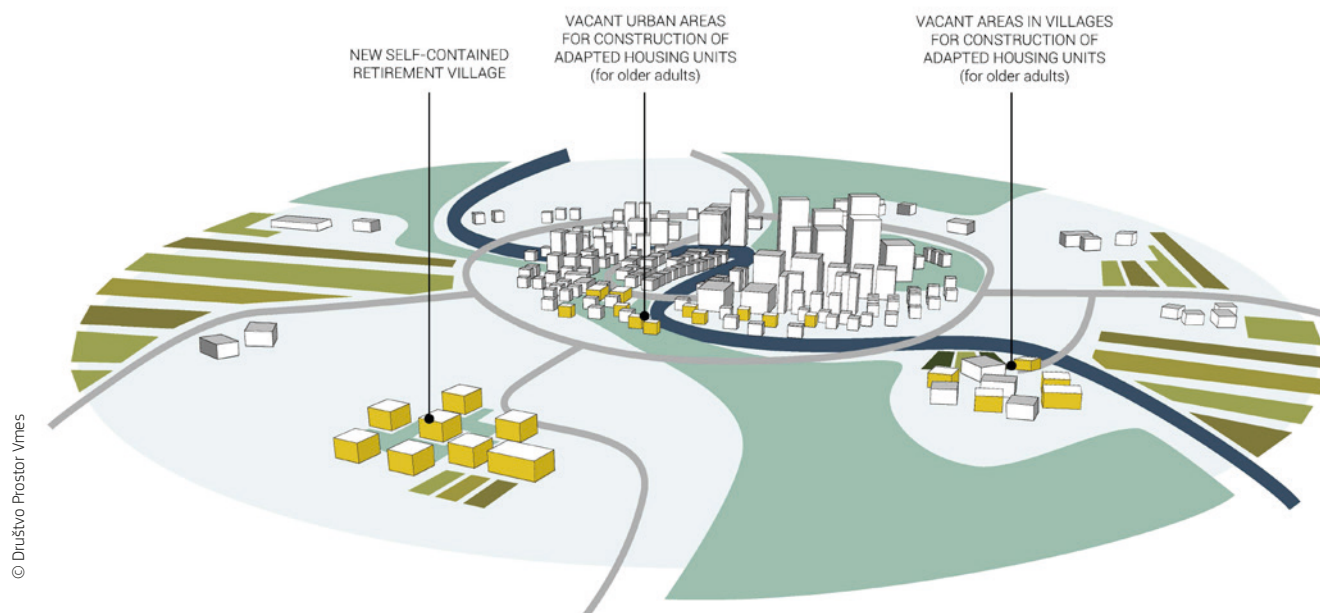
The Smart Silver Village concept was developed in the framework of the LEADER cooperation project entitled **Smart Villages for Tomorrow**⁽⁶⁾. As part of the project, a study examined different smart living systems for older people with long-term care needs. Based on the study's results, there are various concepts of housing units that could be developed across Slovenia and beyond. Smart housing systems include health and social services upgraded with digital technologies, telecommunication technologies and green innovations (e.g. locally-produced energy and food, free transport).

The concept of a Smart Silver Village can be implemented by bringing different funding sources together. An example of this is the day centre built in Videm⁽⁷⁾, co-financed by the European Fund for Regional Development and the Krško Municipality. The day centre serves elderly people whose relatives are absent during the day due to their jobs and creates skilled local jobs for young people.

The Smart Silver Village also encouraged the implementation of another pilot project, MOST, which offers integrated health and social care for elderly people at home. This project was funded by the European Social Fund. In the future, the Krško municipality is planning to build other 'silver villages' with support from a combination of EU funds.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Video from the Smart Village conference:
<https://rajhenburg.pametne-vasi.info/en/stream/>



RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Unlocking the potential of rural areas

Ashya Lane-Spollen

Digitalisation is the gateway, but connectivity is the key.



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Digitalisation has enormous potential to transform life and opportunities in rural and remote areas. Our recent experience has proven that digitalisation can bridge physical distances to bring opportunities and services to us no matter where we live – so long as we have good digital connectivity. Yet, paradoxically, the exponential role of digital connectivity, services and skills over the last couple of decades has exacerbated rural-urban disparities, where it should have healed them.

The one great barrier to bridging the rural-urban divide is the lack of reliable, high-speed broadband connectivity.⁽¹⁾ During the European Broadband Competence Offices (BCO) Network's 2021 EU Regions Week workshop, high level experts explored this challenge and highlighted a number of important considerations, applications and impacts.⁽²⁾

Ensuring greater connectivity can help foster citizens' engagement and empower local communities and associations. It can alleviate gender inequalities, particularly for education and employment opportunities. It can encourage the sustainable mobility of people and goods while also making more services available in local areas, from e-learning (which can help reverse negative demographic trends) to e-health (critical for remote communities). All of this contributes to improving quality of life in the long term.

Specifically for land-based sectors, increasingly accessible and affordable smart agricultural innovations enable small and medium-sized farms to become more competitive, more profitable and more sustainable and



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engender additional social and environmental benefits.

To accelerate the implementation of technical solutions, territories, cities and communities can work together collaboratively, through such platforms as Living-in.EU⁽³⁾, to share knowledge and even co-invest in solutions.

The paradigm shift which entails a switch to remote living and which has become more prevalent due to the pandemic, offers a unique opportunity to harness the ensuing wave of innovation and investment in remote services and digitalisation for the immediate and long-term benefit and growth of rural and remote areas, citizens and communities. We must keep the momentum going and make this level of access to opportunities and services the long-term norm.

Public demand is a key element in driving broadband investment. As such, digitalisation must be leveraged as a demand-driver in order to ensure that broadband investment reaches all rural and remote citizens.

The European Commission and BCO Network therefore strongly encourage interested communities to reach out to their Broadband Competence Offices (BCOs)⁽⁴⁾ to see how they can help deliver high-speed connectivity, close the digital and opportunity divide, and unlock the full potential of rural and remote areas.

i FURTHER INFORMATION

Find out about the BCO Network and EU support for broadband: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/bco-network>

(1) The status of connectivity across the EU can be explored through the European Broadband Mapping Portal: <https://www.broadband-mapping.eu/>

(2) For further details about the event, including a replay, visit <https://eu.app.swapcard.com/event/eu-regions-week/planning/UGxhbm5pbmdfNjMxMjkx>

(3) <https://living-in.eu>

(4) <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/broadband-eu-countries>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Alternative Green Areas for Rural Europe



Luigi A. Dell'Aquila

Alternative Green Areas for Rural Europe (AGARE) is one of the 33 projects selected under the Civil Society Projects action of the Europe for Citizens programme. In line with the EU Green Deal ambitions, AGARE looks at rural areas as alternative/new actors of the ecological and digital transition.



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The main objective of the AGARE project⁽¹⁾ is to strengthen the participation of rural citizens in the European Union in shaping policies and taking actions for the well-being of rural economies and communities. Its specific goals are:

- to raise awareness about the importance of rural areas and their current challenges, as well as to disseminate information about the EU and its support for rural territories;
- to promote and reinforce European citizenship by encouraging citizens' participation in the debate on the future of rural Europe and in developing solutions for rural development sustainability;
- to empower rural people to become key actors of the EU Green Deal⁽²⁾ and circular economy; and
- to improve the potential of rural areas in the digital transition.

The project was designed whilst keeping in mind the ambitions of the EU Green Deal and New European Bauhaus,⁽³⁾ as well as the priorities of the White Paper on the Future of Europe.⁽⁴⁾

Through awareness-raising, identification and dissemination of good practices, the project stimulates debate among rural citizens and their engagement in improving their territories.

The main target groups are rural citizens, in particular those who were not involved in NGOs, institutional or social activities before the project.

An important part of the AGARE project are the Local Observatory Groups. Set up in each partner country, the Local Observatory Groups collect and share good practices (projects, ideas or organisations that achieve the objectives of the EU Green Deal), facilitate networking to create a dynamic AGARE community, build a Digital Map and define a certification system for an AGARE Open Badge.

AGARE will produce a Digital Map of good practices around the Circular Economy for rural areas; an E-book on support for the digital transition of rural areas, fostering new approaches and job opportunities; and a Policy Brief on the EU Green Deal as a tool to build a new European rural citizenship.

Follow the progress of AGARE on its website and social media!

FURTHER INFORMATION

AGARE is led by EuLabTEC – European Laboratory on Training, Education and Citizenship (Italy – <http://www.eulabtec.com>), with project partners in Croatia, Bulgaria, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia and Serbia.

<https://www.agarenetwork.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/agareproject>

(1) www.agarenetwork.com

(2) https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

(3) https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

(4) <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ba81f70e-2b10-11e7-9412-01aa75ed71a1/language-en#:~:text=The%20White%20Paper%20looks%20at,and%20the%20rise%20of%20populism.&text=A%20positive%20global%20force%2C%20Europe's,strong%20links%20with%20its%20partners>

Books & publications



Being young in a mountain area

Mountain youth's needs in 2022 and aspirations for the future

Euromontana, the European Association of Mountain areas, has released a new European wide report on mountain youth ten years after

its first survey. At the start of the European Year of Youth, this report brings together the voices of 1 134 mountain young people between 18 and 29 years old from 18 EU and non-EU countries.

<https://www.euromontana.org/en/being-young-in-a-mountain-area-euromontanas-report-is-out/>

Climate action

Successful experiences and promising practices from the 2021 EESC Civil Society Prize



Launched in 2006, the European Economic and Social Committee – EESC's Civil Society Prize rewards creative and innovative initiatives – ongoing or completed – carried out by EU-based civil society organisations and individuals at European, national, regional or local level which promote and have a long-lasting impact on European identity and integration. This

brochure presents outstanding examples of civil society engagement on the theme of the latest edition – climate action – celebrating effective and creative initiatives that promote a just transition towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy.

ISBN 978-92-830-5436-8

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/2021-eesc-civil-society-prize-climate-action>

2021 Summary Report on the Implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds

The European Commission has published the 2021 Summary Report on the Implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds). The report presents the cumulative achievements of the ESI Funds for the 2014-20 period by the end of 2020.

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2021/12/17-12-2021-2021-summary-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-european-structural-and-investment-funds



Just transition in the EU agriculture and land use sector

This IEEP's (Institute for European Environmental Policy) paper examines how a 'just transition' model could be applied to European agriculture. It sets out the relevance of a just transition to agriculture and land use, some key issues arising in its application to the complex web of European farms,



potential winners and losers, and proposes a first list of policy components to include in a focused EU plan.

<https://ieep.eu/publications/just-transition-in-the-eu-agriculture-and-land-use-sector>

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