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Launch of the rural pact: strengthened governance for EU rural areas

On 30 June 2021, the European Commission adopted its communication “A long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040”¹. The Communication is people-centred and forms part of the Commission’s work on democracy and demography. It comes at a vital moment for the European Union, when we need to join forces to work our way out of the pandemic, the economic difficulties it has generated and the inequalities it has highlighted.

Rural areas are key to the future of Europe and are core components of the twin green and digital transitions. To reach their full potential under these transitions, rural areas must overcome a number of challenges, which are reviewed in the Communication. The Communication also sets out the many new opportunities that rural inhabitants, businesses and communities can, and already are, seizing. These opportunities can flourish under an enabling environment, which can in turn be nurtured by investments under the various EU funds. The Communication is therefore accompanied by an Action Plan, which outlines the main instruments for investment in rural areas, and puts forward actions that deploy all EU policies.

In addition, the Commission Communication introduces a key new initiative, the Rural Pact, which aims to “mobilise public authorities and stakeholders to act on the needs and aspirations of rural residents”. These aspirations are described through ten shared goals, which resulted from the extensive participatory consultations and stakeholder engagement processes. Despite the diversity of rural areas, we have been pleased to hear how widely stakeholders from across Europe support them.

Through this letter, we would like to invite all interested public and private stakeholders at European, national, regional and local levels to engage and commit to the shared goals expressed in the Long Term Vision for the Rural Areas and to participate in the implementation and development of the Rural Pact.

¹ COM (2021) 345 final of 30 June 2021

In June 2022, the Commission will organise a high-level conference to endorse the Rural Pact. In this conference, we intend to assemble representatives from the other EU institutions, as well as national, regional and local authorities. We will also welcome key stakeholder organisations and representatives from all organisations wishing to play a role in achieving the shared goals of the vision. We will invite speakers to present examples, scientific outcomes or best practices that can inspire action towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040. The conference will also discuss and plan the future steps and the organisation of the Rural Pact.

We look forward to 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. Concrete engagements from different institutions, public and private actors and stakeholders will be key inputs to this process - the development of the process can be followed on the rural vision webpage².

We hope the Pact will provide a common framework for engagement and cooperation, and contribute to increased coherence between policies at all levels to reach the objectives of the long-term vision and respond to the common aspirations of rural communities.



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² https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en#the-rural-pact-strengthened-governance-for-eu-rural-areas