

ENRD webinar

1st Thematic Group meeting on the Long Term Rural Vision

Rural#2040 Highlights report

A wide range of stakeholders from 23 EU countries attended the first of four [Thematic Group](#) meetings to help build the EU 'Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas' (LTVRA) announced by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. Participants worked on the first phase of a Foresight exercise that will feed into an EU Communication expected in the second quarter of 2021. They also heard about the activities and steps that are planned for developing the Vision, discussed the key trends and drivers that are shaping the future of rural areas, and considered how to support stakeholder engagement in the development of the Vision in different parts of Europe.

Event Information

Date: 22&23 September 2020

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 55 participants attending in a personal capacity - but including experience from MAs, NRNs, European organisations, the European Commission, Local Action Groups (LAGs), stakeholder organisations and researchers.

Outcomes Insights for the Foresight exercise and on how to support stakeholder engagement in the development of a Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

Web page: [1st TG meeting on Long Term Rural Vision](#)

Building the EU Long Term Vision for Rural Areas



[Maria Gafo](#) (DG AGRI) described the process of developing the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. The aim is to ensure that rural concerns are high on the EU agenda and to find ways for addressing underlying challenges such as demographic change, lack of connectivity, poverty and unequal access to services. New thinking and responses are also required in the light of the COVID pandemic to ensure that rural areas benefit from the opportunities emerging from the digital and ecological transitions, the circular and bio-based economy and many more.

Maria stressed that the EU Vision must come from rural people themselves and be developed in close cooperation with regional/national authorities to ensure that local needs and opportunities are taken into account in future EU policies. The [public consultation](#) – (open until 30 November 2020) - is one of the central channels for collecting stakeholders views. It will be complemented by the results of the Foresight exercise (developed by the JRC and supported by this Thematic Group) and by further analytical work. The results of the public consultation and of other contributions will be presented at the ENRD LTVRA conference planned for March 2021 before the publication of a Commission Communication in the summer of 2021.

Lessons from OECD countries



[Enrique Garcilazo](#) (OECD) outlined the key issues that should be taken into account in the rural Vision based on the experience of the OECD. He highlighted the diversity of rural areas and stressed their mutual interdependence with cities. Demographic change and aging are pressing problems in most remote rural areas and he pointed to the growing rural-urban divide, with rural areas suffering more than urban areas since the financial crisis. However, the panorama is shifting rapidly as a result of COVID-19 and some rural communities have provided remarkable examples of resilience. All these issues need to be considered in a global context where key 'megatrends' are conditioning the opportunities and policy responses (e.g. shift to service sectors, well-being as a priority, rural-urban linkages, digitalisation and climate change).

He argued that a focus on well-being and a people-centred approach to development (with an emphasis on partnerships and linkages with urban areas) will help ensure rural areas can embrace change and build positive futures.

Key messages from Horizon 2020 projects



[Alexia Rouby](#) (DG AGRI) provided an overview of the key messages for the LTVRA process from projects supported by EU research and innovation programmes. She pointed out that many of the findings of the foresight analyses carried by projects like [FARO](#) in 2009 and [Volante](#) in 2015 are still relevant today.

Currently, there are seven H2020 projects working on different types of foresight analysis or visions. For example, [PoliRural](#) on the revitalisation of rural areas, [SHERPA](#) which has conducted an overview of previous foresights and [ROBUST](#) on vision of rural urban interlinkages.

Some of the recent trends identified by these projects include: the 'reverse' migration of certain groups from cities to rural areas; the continuing population decline and aging; the rise of new types of economy/society backed by strong social and environmental values with well-being as an objective; issues around globalisation vs localism; the opportunities offered by digitalisation; and various types of activism around environmental, social and democratic issues.

European Foresight Exercise



During a large part of this first TG meeting, members worked on the Foresight exercise led by the JRC that will contribute to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. Participants started by discussing the key factors that might affect a 'day in the life' of different rural actors in different types of rural areas across Europe. They used this as a reality check for identifying nearly 40 key Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental and Policy drivers that could shape the future of rural areas. Participants then discussed the drivers that were likely to have *the greatest impact* on rural areas towards 2040. The top ten included demography and migration, climate change, the availability and quality of services, community solidarity and collaboration, availability and quality of natural resources (e.g. soil and water), multilevel governance/local empowerment, digitalisation of production and services, access to digital infrastructure, new forms of mobility and transport, the coherence of rural-related policies (rural proofing).

Finally, participants voted on those important drivers which were also the *most uncertain* regarding the direction of their future development. The top two drivers stemming from the two votes will be used as a starting point for generating four possible scenarios for rural areas. The two strongest candidates from the voting appeared to be demographic change and multilevel governance. However, there was little time to discuss the outcomes and get a first idea about the scenarios. In order to offer this possibility a further interim meeting of the TG will be held on 20 October 2020. This will help prepare the second full TG meeting to finalise the Foresight exercise on the 2&3 December 2020.

Stakeholder engagement in the development of the Vision

What is happening around the EU?



[Veronika Korcekova](#) (ENRD CP) presented an ENRD survey of National Rural Networks (NRNs). The 24 responses received (from 23 MS) indicated that NRN stakeholders are interested in getting involved in the LTVRA. A total of 19 NRNs mentioned that different types of enquiry about the future of rural areas have already taken place in their countries. These include consultations (e.g. Poland, Estonia, Sweden, Luxembourg), surveys (Spain) and visioning exercises (Latvia, Finland, Wallonia-BE). NRNs expressed a need for support for engaging stakeholders in the process of developing the Long Term Vision.

Example from Finland



[Juha-Matti Markkola](#) (Finnish NRN) described the very imaginative 'Finnish Rural2030' visioning exercise. This helped to identify rural needs, discuss suitable responses and collect the expectations of rural people for the future. It involved a variety of stakeholders through an online platform, webinars and two face-to-face foresight camps. Well-being was identified as the key encompassing priority for rural policy. This is shaped by factors such as social inclusion, investments, infrastructure, livelihood, competences, and rural-urban interactions.

Engaging rural stakeholders in the LTVRA: A workshop toolkit



[Zelie Peppiette](#) (DG AGRI) presented ideas for a toolkit to support short workshops through which the voices of EU citizens can be heard and their needs and aspirations captured and reflected in the Vision. The toolkit will consist of a package of common materials (e.g. script, cards explaining key drivers, harvest sheets, practical guidance for hosts, etc). The aim is to provide a common format that allows rural groups to run a session themselves, take stock of where they are now, where they are likely to be in 2040, where they would like to be, and to identify the enabling conditions for closing the gap and realising their aspirations. The results of these discussions could feed into the Long Term Vision process in different ways.



After discussing these presentations in small groups, the members of the TG made a number of recommendations for improving and deepening stakeholder engagement in the Long Term Vision exercise:

- Local people need clear information about the value for them, who is listening, how the information will be used and taken into account, and when it is needed;
- LEADER groups might be interested in initiating such discussions but they would probably want to know whether the results could be used in some way to help prepare for their future local strategies or other programmes;
- NRNs could play an important role, possibly using existing meetings, activities and events including those organised by them and by other stakeholder groups;
- The toolkit material needs to be short, simple to understand, quick to implement, and flexible so it can be adapted to the local circumstances. It needs to support face-to-face meetings but, in the current context, also virtual meetings;
- The definition of common harvesting sheets would help to ensure the collation and communication of results.



Next Steps

- **The next meetings** will develop and complete the Foresight exercise. An interim meeting is planned for 20 October 2020 and the second TG meeting will take place on the 2&3 December 2020, focusing on scenario building;
- The **workshop toolkit for stakeholder engagement** will be fine-tuned with key stakeholders before being published shortly;
- The [web portal on the Long Term Rural Vision](#) has just been launched and contains relevant information about the process, key resources, inspiring examples, news and events.