



Joint Opinion Paper on the “Vision for Agriculture and Food” and the Multiannual Financial Framework

Co-initiators of the European Rural Parliament (ERP) – ERCA, PREPARE, and ELARD – present this opinion paper as a contribution to the discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). We also share our perspective on how the Vision for Agriculture and Food will influence and shape the future of rural areas across Europe.

Rural challenges and opportunities

Rural areas face a range of challenges, including demographic decline, ageing populations, poor generational renewal, limited human and institutional capacities, economic stagnation, and restricted access to services. Border regions may also face security concerns. Rural areas are under pressure to catch up with the digital, green, and economic transitions and to find new ways to engage citizens in shaping their communities and improve their ability to act and access funding.

At the same time, rural areas hold significant untapped potential: in food security, climate action, social and community enterprise, quality of life, renewable energy, biodiversity, and key sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and the circular economy. Rural areas are essential to shaping Europe's future.

The EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas outlines an integrated approach to tackle these challenges and unlock opportunities — aiming for prosperous, connected, resilient, and strong rural areas. No one should be left behind. ERP partners have welcomed this initiative and its accompanying Action Plan. Nearly all 30 actions have been set in motion, including the Rural Pact. It is now essential to strengthen the tools and capacities needed to deliver real impact for rural Europe.

The Commission's upcoming 2025 EU Rural Action Plan offers a chance to align rural initiatives across policies in response to post-2027 priorities and the next MFF. ERCA, PREPARE, and ELARD are ready to contribute actively, building on strong grassroots links to turn the long-term vision into concrete strategies at all levels.

As the EU revisits its MFF and Cohesion Policy, rural development must be treated as a cross-cutting priority. This may be the moment to reposition the CAP as a broader territorial tool—bridging agriculture, Cohesion Policy, and Territorial Cooperation—and to rethink how rural development is structured in the EU.

A Paradigm Shift Toward Holistic Rural Policy

The European Rural Parliament (ERP) calls for a truly integrated rural policy, backed by coherent programmes, policies, and funding. A strong, connected, and resilient countryside benefits not only rural residents but all Europeans. A vital rural fabric and a strong agricultural sector go hand in hand.

Rural Development Programmes should value traditional knowledge and culture, support meaningful public participation, and promote community-based governance. They must address generational renewal, depopulation, and brain drain; elevate the role of women and youth; and foster social innovation and tech-for-society solutions.

We believe that integrating open innovation with rural movements—through co-creation platforms engaging local actors, civil society, businesses, and academia—is essential to both improving policy relevance and driving innovative solutions for rural development. This means shifting from “policy for rural areas” to “policy with rural areas,” unlocking the collective creativity needed for an inclusive and dynamic rural future.

A true paradigm shift is needed: toward a holistic and integrated rural policy, supported by rural proofing, coordinated funding, and reinforced community-led innovation and place-based approaches.

Our recommended actions:

1. Turn the long-term vision into Rural Development Strategies at all levels.
2. Horizontal and vertical coordination (Rural Pact model) – a condition for accessing the rural development share of funds.
3. Build capacities of managing authorities, rural movements and networks, and local communities. Empower rural movements and networks, as well as Local Action Groups as key territorial governance actors, enabling them to play a more structured role in rural crisis response, digital transformation, and the green transition. Managing authorities, rural movements and networks, and Local Action Groups are also instrumental in fighting disinformation and strengthening democratic participation in rural areas.
4. Facilitate access to funding for local beneficiaries and homogenize rules for financial management, auditing and reporting across funds. This would simplify fund management, reduce bureaucracy, and enable a truly cross-sectoral approach to rural development.
5. Ensure the continued implementation and development of the Farm to Fork Strategy as a core element of the EU's transition to sustainable food systems, with particular attention to its relevance and impact in rural areas.
6. Ensure that competitive funding schemes are inclusive and do not disproportionately disadvantage smaller or place-based farms and rural entrepreneurs, by adapting criteria and application procedures to reflect their specific capacities and contexts.
7. Enlargement process and activities must be strengthened and new partnership structures/funding schemes developed. This would also contribute to overall security in Europe.
8. Support community-led innovation and peer exchange by bringing together open innovation approaches and the experience and networks of rural movements, and by promoting co-creation platforms to develop and scale solutions tailored to rural development.
9. Maintain funding for rural research that enables a broader range of rural stakeholders to benefit and manage grant projects, with stronger post-project dissemination. Rural development and communities must be given a fair share of research opportunities in the next programming period, ensuring respect for rural diversity and avoiding sectoral domination. These opportunities should also be made available to candidate and pre-accession countries.
10. Make participatory rural development tools mandatory across all EU Member States, and ensure sustained funding and support for rural movements and networks at local, national, and EU levels, recognising their crucial role in fostering bottom-up development, strengthening civil society engagement, and ensuring that rural voices are effectively represented in policymaking.
11. Expand and support LEADER/CLLD to align with key EU priorities. The next MFF should ensure that LEADER/CLLD is explicitly included in major EU strategic priorities (Green deal, JTF digital decade, social inclusion and youth employment initiatives), including strengthening LEADER/CLLD in candidate and pre-accessions countries.
12. Leave no-one behind: The granularity and diversity of rural places and territories must be visible in programs and actions as targeted measures.