



European Network for
Rural Development

Rural
Vision
Week

Rural Vision Week

Imagining the future
of Europe's rural areas

ENRD webinar

Rural Vision Week

Highlights report

Introduction

The ENRD Rural Vision Week was a five-day interactive online conference focused on involving stakeholders with preparations for a long-term vision for the future of EU rural areas. The associated European Commission (EC) Communication is due to be adopted in summer 2021.

Keynote contributions and stakeholder inputs were gathered from high-level presentations and discussions, workshops, a virtual marketplace, and 'fringe' activities.

More than 550 stakeholders participated directly during the event and its online outreach connected with thousands more through social media, including [video-streaming of the conference sessions](#) and [Rural Inspiration Awards ceremony](#).

Event Information

DATE: 22-26 March 2021

LOCATION: Online

ORGANISERS: ENRD Contact Point

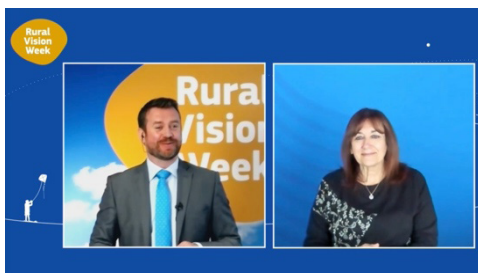
PARTICIPANTS: National Rural Networks, LEADER Local Action Groups, RDP Managing Authorities, EU institutions, and a broad spectrum of other rural development stakeholders

OUTCOMES: Stakeholder perspectives on imaging the future of Europe's rural areas

WEB PAGE: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/rural2040-vision-week_en

OPENING MESSAGES

[Rural Vision Week](#) was launched with scene-setting presentations from high level speakers and inspirational testimonials from rural stakeholders.



Dubravka Šuica, EC Vice President for Democracy and Demography, opened the conference stressing that the discussions during the week would build on the [earlier public consultation and Foresight exercise](#) on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas. She particularly emphasised the ambition to ensure this becomes a joint vision, developed by rural areas for rural areas, where nobody should feel left behind. The Long term vision will go beyond any specific policy, as its added value is in its comprehensive approach, aiming to respond to different rural needs. Synergies between funding and other support was highlighted as a vital success factor for the long term and the Vice President drew attention to the importance of development needs such as digitisation, public transport and green farming. The aim of the Vision is to turn the challenges into opportunities, with the goal of creating fair, green, innovative and sustainable development for resilient and connected rural areas and communities in 2040.



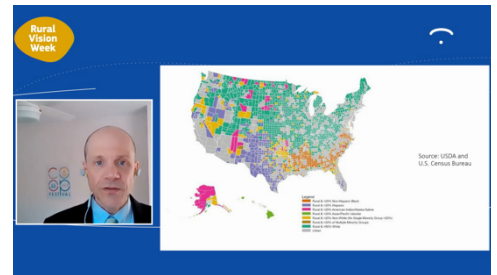
Maria do Céu Antunes, Portugal's Minister of Agriculture representing the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, echoed the key roles that farmers must play in rural Europe's future. Farms would not be able to provide food supplies so successfully without the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and this fact has been underlined by the pandemic crisis. CAP's capacity to catalyse rural regeneration and reduce environmental risks was also spotlighted - with innovation and digitisation being promoted to help land managers contribute more to the sustainable development of Europe's countryside.



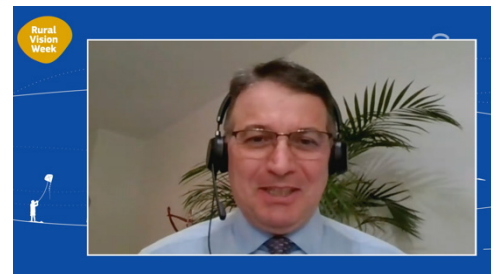
Janusz Wojciechowski, European Commissioner for Agriculture, stressed the importance of rural areas. He signalled some key emerging messages expressed during the consultations, especially on the recognition of specific needs, including improved infrastructure and services. He underlined the importance of addressing the challenges faced by rural areas, and the need to reduce disparities. The Long Term Vision is envisaged as providing ambitious but realistic approaches to the development of rural areas over the next 20 years. Acknowledging the differences and needs, it should aim to make European rural areas attractive, particularly for next generation. Rural areas unique characteristics need to be recognised, keeping in mind in particular the role of agriculture. He underlined that the Vision goes beyond any specific policy but builds on different options available for the future.

KEYNOTE CONTRIBUTIONS

Following the opening messages, keynote speaker **Doug O'Brien**, President National Cooperative Business Association, USA, observed the importance of employing better and more rural-targeted data to make better policies for rural development, as this forms the foundations for well-informed growth. Comparing rural support in the EU and USA, he saw rural areas holding many assets which are fundamental to global agendas that are advancing green transitions, stressing also the importance of active engagement of stakeholders in discussions.



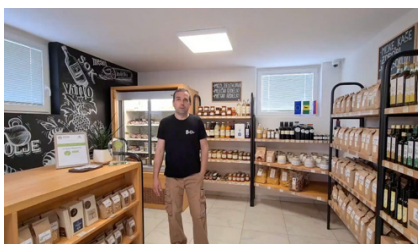
Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director General at DG AGRI, signalled the differences but also the similarities of issues rural areas face across the world, including green transition. Responding to comments from Doug O'Brien, he underlined the advantage and the importance of using and sharing data for future development.



He saw benefits from more consistent and comprehensive data sets covering rural socio-economic and environmental matters. He particularly stressed the importance of involving stakeholders in unlocking the potentials of rural areas in Europe.

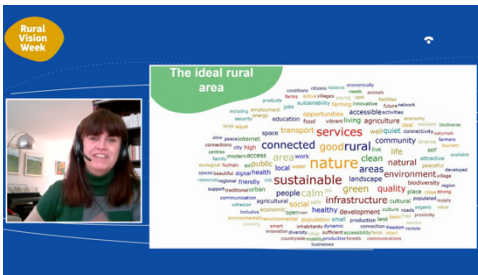
'MY RURAL' - STAKEHOLDER TESTIMONIALS

During Rural Vision Week the voices of rural stakeholders were featured prominently and interspersed throughout the various working sessions. This included in-person interventions through a series of short 'My Rural' video clips, which were produced by National Rural Networks. Overall, 20 stakeholder videos were produced from 17 Member States illustrating many different dimensions of rural circumstances, expectations and aspirations.



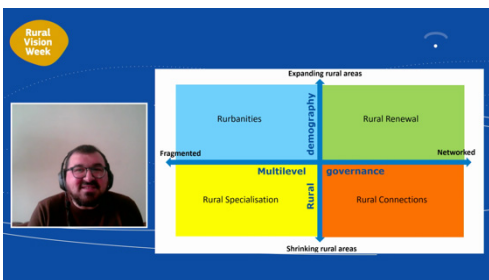
BUILDING A LONG-TERM VISION

The opening working plenary session included four specific contributions, which explored different components of the process contributing to the building of the LTVRA.



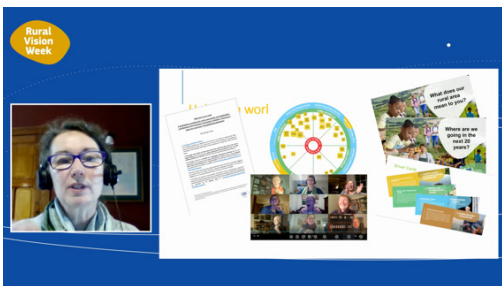
María Gafo Gómez-Zamalloa, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, presented an overview of the results of the EC’s public consultation. An extensive process of public consultation and stakeholder engagement was employed using multiple tools, all of which were being fed into Rural Vision Week and will ultimately contribute to the Communication expected in June 2021. Key messages for rural areas today included: the need for access to transport, services, jobs and fast internet; that there are multiple reasons for people to stay or settle in rural areas; that agriculture clearly helps to ensure economic sustainability but that additional quality jobs are needed; and both landscape protection and climate adaptation should be given greater priority.

The consultation findings also indicate that the attractiveness of rural areas is conditioned by multiple factors such as access to services, connectivity, care facilities and economic opportunities. Respondents underlined the importance of participatory approaches. Less than half of respondents feel left behind by society, but this is higher for those living in remote rural areas.



Maciej Krzysztofowicz, DG Joint Research Centre (JRC), explained the Foresight exercise carried out by the JRC with the support of the ENRD Thematic Group on the LTVRA. Thematic Group members started by identifying the main 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 drivers that could shape the future of rural areas. After much discussion, they narrowed this down to two – demographic changes and multilevel governance – which were used as the axes for defining four exploratory scenarios for the future of European rural areas.

These were given the following titles: ‘Rurbanities’ for rural areas with fragmented multilevel governance that are attracting people who essentially want to continue an urban lifestyle; ‘Rural Renewal’ for areas with networked multilevel governance that are attractive primarily because of their environmental and social attributes; ‘Rural Specialisation’ for rural areas with fragmented multilevel governance whose population is shrinking and that specialise in providing cities with the goods and services they require; and ‘Rural Connections’ for rural areas with networked local governance whose population is shrinking but maintain interconnected hubs of economic and social activity.



Zelie Peppiette, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, described the ‘Welcome to our Rural’ initiative that was jointly developed with the ENRD Contact Point. This was a package of workshop tools explaining ‘what to do’ and ‘how to do it’ for engaging local stakeholders directly in conversations concerning the LTVRA. It resulted in 166 contributions from different workshops involving over 2900 people from 19 Member States.

A wheel diagram was used to plot: where communities found themselves now on a series of thematic axes; the likely direction of travel; where people would like to be in the future; the main gaps and opportunities; and the steps needed to get to their desired future. Stories, quotations, keywords and phrases resulting from this initiative help to capture the rural realities experienced by rural stakeholders across Europe.

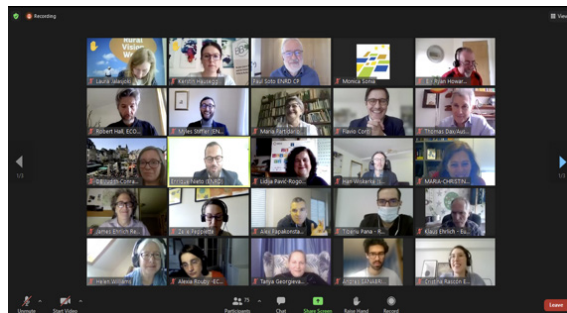


Paul Soto, ENRD Contact Point, concluded the conference’s first day sessions by presenting the outcomes from several strands of the ENRD Contact Point’s work in relation to the LTVRA. These highlighted immediate priorities of rural stakeholders for action in the short and medium term and showed how the differences between rural areas shape their views.

Common themes included: the need to ensure a base level of infrastructure and services; building the innovation capacity of rural areas; seizing the opportunities of more decentralised local and regional models of production and new forms of work; raising awareness among all stakeholders to implement the European Green Deal; and the need for stronger participatory models of governance. The ENRD Thematic Group had suggested that the EU policy framework for supporting such goals should include: quantifiable, operational objectives and targets; proofing and stocktaking of existing policies; clear mechanisms for leading and coordinating initiatives; better data; and a shift from controls to enablers of local action.

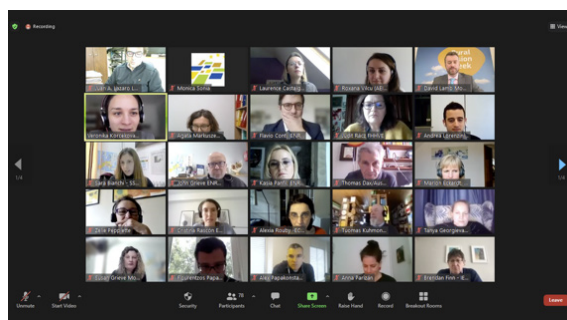
Workshop 5. Strong and dynamic rural-urban partnerships

- Rural proofing urban policy and urban proofing rural policy. Recognising the core functions and value of rural areas.
- Recognition and support for more equal, flexible governance mechanisms, platforms and frameworks for rural-urban cooperation.
- Support for the animation, capacity building and technical assistance, skills and enabling institutions for balanced rural-urban co-operation.



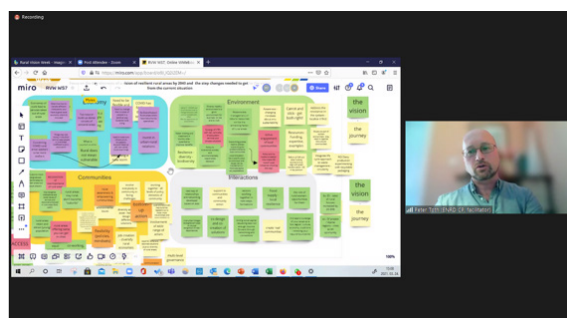
Workshop 6. Vibrant rural areas

- Benchmarking essential services and comprehensive mobility planning for rural areas.
- Reduce administrative burden and support social innovation and local empowerment to boost rural attractiveness and seek innovative solutions to enhance access to services, transport and employment.
- Vitalise rural areas by building bridges between old and young generations and local decision-makers, as well as facilitating the involvement of marginalised rural groups.



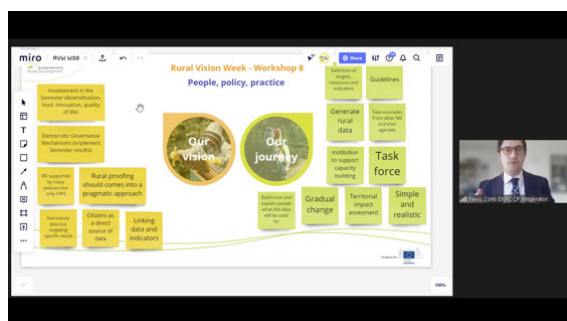
Workshop 7. Diverse and resilient rural areas

- Avoid over-specialisation and dependence on a small number of activities and strengthen rural diversity and diversification.
- Continuous investment is needed to prepare rural communities for adapting to change and improving connectivity and networking at all levels (local, regional, national and EU).
- Retaining youth and an inclusive attitude to welcoming newcomers can help to re-energise rural communities.



Workshop 8. People, policy, practice

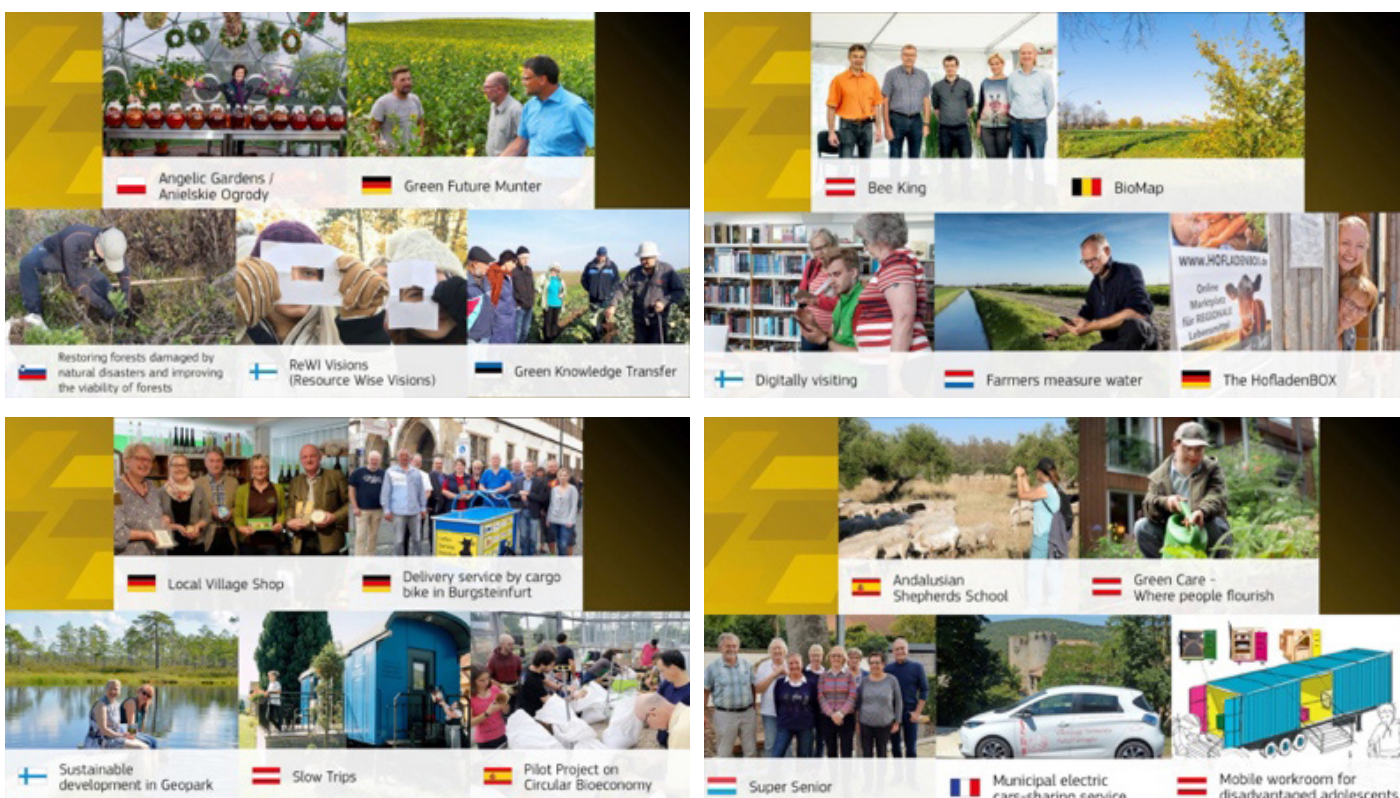
- Simple and easily implementable mechanisms to ensure rural proofing is backed-up by a task force involving civil society and policy makers.
- Establishing governance mechanisms to clearly identify the responsible bodies, targets and promote rural aspects in coordination mechanisms like a 'Rural Semester'.
- Developing rural agendas/rural strategies at the EU, national and regional levels and establishing a rural think tank/rural observatory.



VIRTUAL MARKETPLACE, FRINGE EVENTS AND RURAL INSPIRATION AWARDS

A virtual marketplace provided online space for rural stakeholders that wanted to share their activities and display their messages about #RuralVisionEU. [Eight National Rural Networks](#), [nine Horizon 2020 projects](#), and [six other organisations](#) took advantage of this occasion for virtual networking and international publicity. Rural stakeholders also organised [11 different fringe workshops](#) focused on subjects such as organic food, youth, small islands, mountains, and LEADER, among others.

This year's [Rural Inspiration Awards ceremony](#) was [live-streamed](#) with Commissioner Wojciechowski announcing project winners in the four 'Our Rural Future' categories and the Popular Vote category. The latter attracted over 10 000 votes online for the 20 finalists:



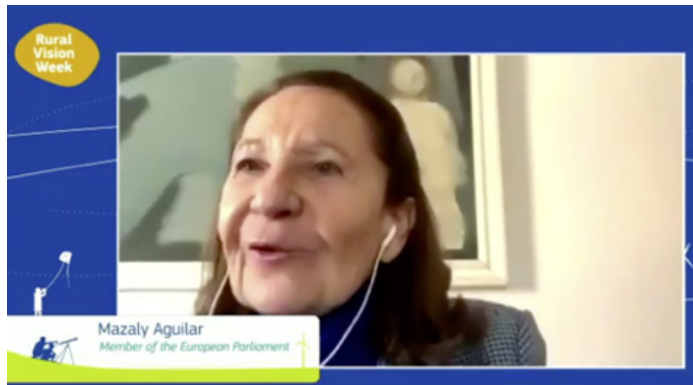
The winners of the 2021 Rural Inspiration Awards were:



- **Popular vote**
 - [Angelic Gardens / Anielskie Ogrody](#) (PL)
- **Green futures category**
 - [ReWI Visions \(Resource Wise Visions\)](#) (FI)
- **Digital futures category**
 - [The HofladenBOX](#) (DE)
- **Socially inclusive futures**
 - [Green Care – Where People Flourish](#) (AT)
- **Resilient futures category**
 - [Pilot Project on Circular Bioeconomy](#) (ES)

WORKING PLENARY: BRINGING IT TOGETHER

On the [final day of Rural Vision Week](#), participants discussed the issues, opportunities and challenges that had been highlighted during the conference. The four keynote listeners drew out and presented the main themes from the workshops which they had carefully listened to and reported from. This was followed by a panel discussion and responses involving representatives from the European Parliament (Mazaly Aguilar), Committee of the Regions (Enda Stenson), and the European Economic and Social Council (Peter Schmidt).



Mazaly Aguilar's main messages were that agriculture was central for the future of Europe and that if EU policies acted in a coordinated, holistic manner they could improve the perception of rural areas. She also proposed raising more awareness in cities about the needs and relevance of rural areas. She recommended easy-to-understand communication approaches to achieve this aim. Other priorities for the MEP were infrastructure for public transport and broadband as well as a fair competition system for EU farmers.



Enda Stenson's interventions included encouraging all EU funds to work closer together in order to be more effective at developing rural areas. European Structural & Investment funds could finance more rural projects and rural proofing should be applied to Member States' Recovery plans. He believed that local and regional representatives could help to facilitate successful CAP Strategic Plans by ensuring that the views of all rural stakeholders are taken into consideration during the design and implementation of CAP support.

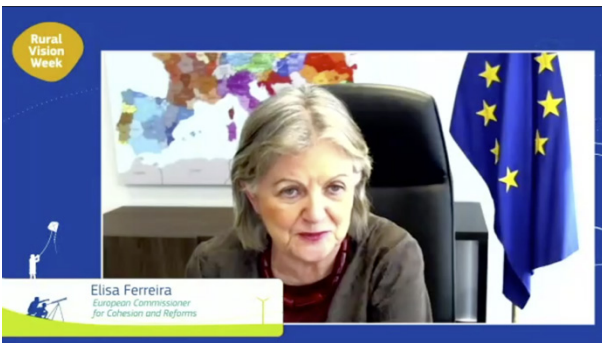


Peter Schmidt suggested a move towards using 'well-being' economic frameworks that reflected holistic values. He stated that Europe's rural areas can make significant contributions to high-level political ambitions like the Sustainable Development Goals, European Green Deal and Biodiversity strategy. Food council models were endorsed to improve food security and create quality jobs, whilst also providing a channel to help bring urban and rural policies closer aligned.

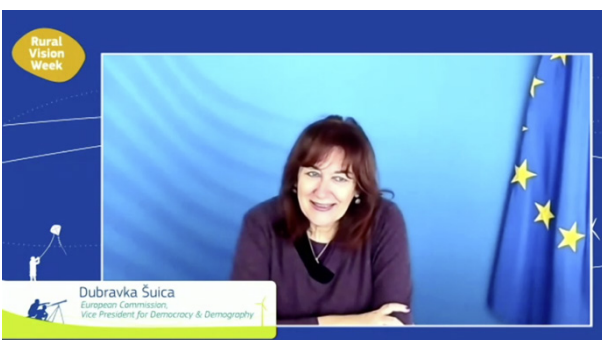
Janusz Wojciechowski, European Commissioner for Agriculture, **Elisa Ferreira**, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, and **Dubravka Šuica**, Vice President for Democracy and Demography, joined the closing high-level panel.



Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski re-asserted a need for collaboration among all levels and stakeholders to help rural Europe develop sustainably without anyone feeling left behind. The recent pandemic has highlighted the values of rural areas, and this should be capitalised on now through consistent and coherent policies directing support and funding. He underlined the importance of different contributions to the Long Term Vision. As the Vision will bring together different stakeholders and policy areas, it will also bring the rural areas in the core of policy making. To reach the goals, we need better data as well as consistency and coherence of different instruments. The forthcoming EC Communication will focus on proposing what needs to be done in order to achieve an inclusive, fair, resilient future for rural areas.



Commissioner Elisa Ferreira acknowledged that Europe is facing urgent and important challenges and that the answers we find now about rural Europe would shape its long-term future. She identified four broad priorities for overall development of Europe and in particular its rural areas: availability of basic public services; digital connectivity; good transport connections and best use of natural and specific assets of rural areas. While rural areas already benefit from different EU funds, all the broad priorities would benefit best from well-informed targeting of EU resources. Smart and targeted solutions, fitting the different realities, are needed to develop rural prosperity, while local knowhow can direct integrated approaches that secure synergies to improve the functionality of Europe's rural areas. Commissioner Ferreira stressed that attractive, dynamic and prosperous rural areas are at the core of a prosperous Europe.



Vice President Dubravka Šuica welcomed the fruitful findings of the Rural Vision Week, particularly underlining the importance of hearing different voices from diverse rural areas of Europe. The adoption of the Communication on a Long Term Vision for Rural Areas, foreseen for June, is a starting point for a new approach towards rural areas. On reflecting how to make rural areas more attractive, she particularly identified the opportunities that digital and green transitions bring. To make the rural areas prosper in the future, it is important that their cultural realities are respected, while keeping in mind the demographic and social changes happening in Europe. Vice President Šuica closed the event by recalling some of the key messages of the week and underlining the importance of a targeted approach to different realities of rural Europe. Ensuring that policy initiatives answer the needs and expectations of rural communities will be at the core of the Vision.