

ENRD webinar

1st Thematic Group meeting on Rural Revitalisation

Highlights report

The meeting explored and discussed the key enabling factors for rural revitalisation and the lessons emerging from other initiatives such as the Small Places Matter Pilot Action and the Smart Rural 21 Pilot Project.

Participants also learnt from policy initiatives implemented in Italy (Inner Areas Strategy) and in the region of Castilla-La Mancha in Spain (Law to combat depopulation) to revitalise rural areas suffering from depopulation and economic decline.

Break-out discussions were organised to exchange ideas on what can be done to ensure the enabling factors are put in place in policy initiatives.

Participants also identified stakeholders' needs that could be supported by the future Rural Revitalisation Platform to be set up by the European Commission and how this can provide a distinct added value.

Event Information

Date: 15 December 2021

Location: Virtual meeting


Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 52 participants from 21 EU Member States, including MAs, NRNs, European organisations, the European Commission, Local Action Groups (LAGs), national/regional stakeholder organisations and research.

Outcomes: Suggestions on how to support rural revitalisation and initial ideas to shape the future Rural Revitalisation Platform that will be developed by the European Commission.


Web page: [1st TG Meeting on Rural Revitalisation](#)

Rural Revitalisation and the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

 [Maria Gafo](#) introduced the key elements on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and outlined the ambition for stronger, connected, prosperous and resilient rural areas by 2040. The vision proposes nine flagship initiatives and 15 accompanying actions, one of them being the creation of a Rural Revitalisation Platform in 2022-2023. This Platform will focus in particular on rural territories suffering from depopulation, population aging and a lack of economic opportunities. The TG will provide ideas on how the platform can add value for stakeholders, help to identify and understand the key enabling conditions and priorities to drive rural revitalisation across Europe and explore the needs to help shape the platform. Maria also highlighted that the [Rural Pact](#) — just launched — will create a space for interaction between Member States, regions, stakeholders and European actors to work together to advance towards the shared goals of the vision.

Identifying the key enabling factors for rural revitalisation


Small Places Matter

 Dr [Irene McMaster](#) presented the pilot action on [Small Places Matter](#) supported by the Territorial Agenda 2030. The pilot action aims to demonstrate innovative practices and strengthen the territorial dimension in policies in small towns in the pilot areas. The pilot action links up grassroots initiatives from various countries and offers the opportunity for **cooperation** across regions. Enhancing **capacity building** in small towns is one of the key enabling factors for rural revitalisation, including improving the administrative capacity of local governments. Irene also stressed that small towns face complex interrelated issues that need effective **coordination**. **Resources** (in terms of time, people and finance), a simple and **enabling supporting framework**, as well as **leadership** are needed to boost development in small towns.

Smart Rural 21


E **4** **0** [Edina Ocsko](#) outlined the main lessons emerging from [Smart Rural 21](#). The main thematic focus of the Smart Villages strategies supported by the pilot project are related to economic development, mobility and connectivity, governance, living and environment. A key factor for achieving smart communities is building social resilience and **stakeholder engagement**. This is challenging in areas suffering from demographic decline due to the lack of local capacities, hence there is the need to provide support for **animation** and **facilitation** at local level. Capacity is also needed to support **strategic planning** and develop a local vision, which should be accompanied with **funding**. Finally, engaging technical experts can support the generation of **innovative ideas and projects** in the areas that lack capacities.

Enabling factors for rural revitalisation

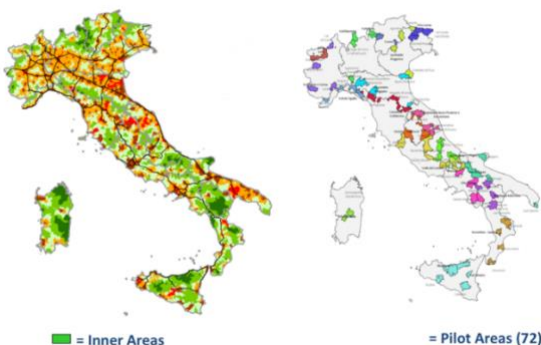
 [Enrique Nieto](#) highlighted the main results from the analysis of enabling factors identified in relevant documents and reports on rural revitalisation and from stakeholders that expressed their interest to be a member of the thematic group. The enabling factors are presented in the TG [background document](#) and classified in four main groups: i) horizontal integration and coordination; ii) vertical integration and coordination; iii) local empowerment and capacities; and iv) rural innovation, local smartness.

Understanding the key enabling factors from existing national and regional strategic initiatives


Lessons from the Inner Areas Strategy in Italy

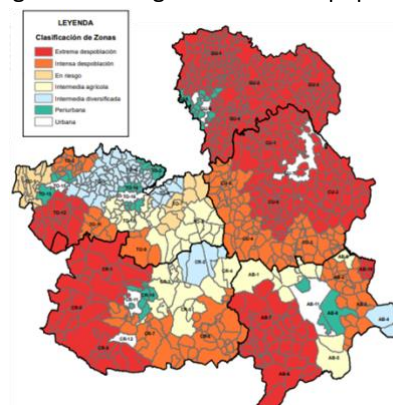
 [Francesco Mantino](#) presented the lessons learnt from the implementation of the Italian Inner Areas [Strategy](#) targeting 72 pilot areas suffering from depopulation. The strategy is supported by multiple coordinated funding sources (deploying more than 1 billion Euros through EU and national funding complemented by private and other public funds). He outlined that the key enabling factors implemented through the strategy are i) **local strategic planning**; ii) **multilevel governance** - a system to co-design local strategies, connecting local-regional-national public decision makers in continuous dialogue; iii) a **multi-funding approach** to support the variety of local needs; iv) **innovation**; and v) **partnership** promoting inter-municipal cooperation. The main challenges for the implementation of the strategy are related to cooperation in the vertical governance system, the design of targeted interventions, the allocation of resources, continuity in political support, the efficient coordination between funding sources and the national technical support to local interventions.

Italy's Inner Areas



Regional Law to combat depopulation, Castilla-La Mancha (Spain)

 [Francisco Martínez Arroyo](#) shared the experience of Castilla-La Mancha, one of the lowest-densely populated areas in Spain and Europe, where a specific law to combat rural depopulation was recently adopted. The Law implements a **holistic approach** to rural development and aims to maintain rural population, improve infrastructure and services, promote balanced social, economic and territorial cohesion, preserve the natural landscape, heritage, cultural and leisure values, and guarantee the equality between men and women. The Law classifies rural areas according to the intensity of depopulation and, based on that, defines different scales of aid intensity for public subsidies. It also establishes a Regional Council as the key **governance structure** to ensure cooperation, coordination among administrations involved and with civil society, and guides support from all **ESIF Funds and regional funds**. Finally, Francisco highlighted that this Law defines specific taxation measures to combat depopulation by, for instance, providing **tax benefits** to people living and working in the most depopulated areas.





Key enabling factors for policy design

Participants gathered in groups to identify the key ingredients to be considered in policy design to create an enabling environment for rural revitalisation.

- **High-level political leadership and engagement** is the key to ensuring the coordinated commitment of all relevant authorities to plan and define support mechanisms to combat depopulation in a holistic way. Interventions for rural revitalisation require coordinated action among several authorities responsible for relevant thematic areas such as taxation, mobility, social affairs, energy, agri-food, culture, etc.
- **Enhanced capacities of local actors and authorities to plan and implement action:** Small towns and regions suffering from depopulation have often lost their social capital and the capacity to seize the opportunities available for their development. Policy frameworks should provide specific resources to these territories to facilitate local processes for strategic thinking, to support the design of innovative ideas and projects, and to access technical expertise to apply for funding opportunities. Targeting these areas in particular will avoid creating greater development gaps with urban areas and with other rural areas that do have the ability to seize opportunities and funding.
- **Local Integrated Strategies** backed with **flexible and easy to access funding:** The creation of rural spaces to build social capital, design strategic action, welcome newcomers etc, is key to addressing depopulation (such as those provided by Hubs, co-working spaces, LAGs, etc). Support is needed for facilitating and animating these spaces and to engage communities and produce integrated development strategies. These should be designed with a long-term vision for the area, but include planning actions now. Funding should follow the actions designed by communities.
- **Integrated and multilevel governance structures** are essential to break the silos among stakeholders and authorities working in relevant fields for rural development. These should support the coordination and alignment of various policies. In addition, governance structures should link with local actors, and help translate higher policy level strategies into specific local action. This can strengthen horizontal and vertical connections and boost collaboration.



Ideas for the future Rural Revitalisation Platform

TG members had a first brainstorming in groups about the needs and expectations from the future Rural Revitalisation Platform (RRP) and the elements it should contain to provide a distinct added value to that of existing tools.

- The Platform could be targeted at providing support to stakeholders and authorities (at all levels) involved in tackling **rural depopulation**. However, language differences may be a barrier to enable exchanges and involve local actors.
- Stakeholders and authorities need both **physical and virtual learning spaces** to connect, exchange and access information to build capacities to tackle rural depopulation in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner.
- The Platform needs to go beyond the existing networking activities focused on the CAP to build alliances and links with the activities supported by other EU funds and policies. It should help raise awareness and boost **connections among non-traditional rural stakeholders and authorities** and build synergies among them (in areas such as taxation, mobility, energy, health, infrastructure, etc). It could provide a tool to boost cooperation (e.g. sharing a list of contacts of actors and authorities working on rural depopulation in the different countries).
- The Platform and its actions should **connect with other initiatives** of the Vision such as the Rural Pact and the Rural Observatory, but also with other relevant initiatives, networks and tools (e.g. supported by Interreg, Horizon Europe, civil society organisations, etc).
- Stakeholders and authorities need **access to knowledge** and **examples** of initiatives, including in relation to key enabling factors for rural revitalisation (methods for local cooperation, stakeholder engagement, policy interventions, etc). Information on available **EU funding opportunities** and **guides** on how these could be accessed by local actors will add value.