European Network for Rural Development

ENRD Thematic Group (TG) on Rural Revitalisation

TG recommendations for the Rural Revitalisation Platform

Thematic Group Report

May 2022

Table of Contents

1.   Introduction

This document was prepared by the ENRD Contact Point, based on inputs, views and work carried out by the [Thematic Group](#) (TG) on Rural Revitalisation, and in particular during the [2nd TG meeting](#) which took place on 31 March 2022[1]. The meeting aimed to build recommendations on the key elements and features to help shape the future Rural Revitalisation Platform for rural stakeholders in areas affected by population loss, ageing and lack of economic opportunities.

This document elaborates on all the recommendations and long-term ambitions emerging from TG members and provides inputs to support the European Commission to design the Rural Revitalisation Platform.

2.   Thematic Group recommendations to inform the shaping of the Rural Revitalisation Platform

The TG recommendations concerning the design of the Rural Revitalisation Platform are clustered around three main categories:

- •   General principles
- •   Access to information
- •   Virtual space to meet and exchange (Forum)

The sub-sections of this report present the recommendations by each of the above categories.

2.1.   General principles

This section outlines the cross-cutting principles which TG members identified as important to drive the design, development and implementation of the Rural Revitalisation Platform (RRP):

► **The main RRP target audience should be actors driving action in rural areas suffering from depopulation.** The platform will add value only if it targets efforts to engage and support **stakeholders actively working for the development of rural areas in decline**. This should include actors at national, regional and local levels. However, it was acknowledged that reaching out to local stakeholders in marginal rural areas is very challenging, hence the **importance of engaging intermediary actors** that can facilitate the process and help connect local actors with the platform (e.g. such as Local Action Groups (LAGs), National Rural Networks (NRNs) and other stakeholder organisations). The development of **communication products** will help intermediary actors raise awareness about the Platform, its added value, and spark interest among local actors to join it.

► **Focus on thematic areas which are not sufficiently addressed at EU level**. Several existing initiatives and networks already connect key rural stakeholders, provide useful information and carry out networking activities on a regular basis (e.g. CAP Network, FARNET, etc.). The RRP should go beyond the thematic scope of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and focus its action on filling the information gap in other relevant thematic areas which are not sufficiently addressed, such as rural

---

[1] The content of this document is based on the outcomes of the discussions of the ENRD Thematic Group Rural Revitalisation, and does not represent the views of the European Commission.

mobility, taxation, digitalisation, housing, health, education, care, energy, culture, etc. Notwithstanding, the Platform should also create linkages and synergies with existing EU-funded initiatives and networks (CAP Network, Interreg, Territorial Agenda 21, Smart Rural 21, Smarta, etc.).

► **Act as an aggregator of relevant information and actors.** To achieve this, it is of capital importance that the Platform is managed and coordinated by a high-level body of the European Commission with the capacity to mobilise and bring together all the relevant policy-makers and stakeholders from a wide variety of fields, and which traditionally do not engage in rural development.

► **Respond to users' needs and demands.** The Platform should flexibly respond to stakeholders' needs, providing them with adaptable tools and features to support their activities (e.g. the possibility to create discussion groups, a searchable database for relevant experts and projects, a match-maker to facilitate partnerships, etc.) as well as enabling them to share relevant information (e.g. cooperation offers, upcoming events, etc.).

2.2. Access to information

Access to information was identified as a priority needs for stakeholders in rural areas suffering from depopulation, to be addressed by the RRP. In this respect, TG members recommend the following:

► **Enable two-way provision of information**. The RRP should include some 'bottom-up' features, enabling users to share information by themselves (e.g. articles, news, events, projects etc.) and giving them ownership of the tool. Suggested 'bottom-up' features are further described in section 2.3 – A virtual space to meet and exchange (Forum). In addition, the Platform should also provide space for sharing 'top-down information' made available by EU institutions as well as national and regional authorities (e.g. on strategies, policy developments, governance mechanisms, funding opportunities, legislation, etc.).

► **Provide information outputs relevant for each type of user**. TG members outlined that there could be two types of actors engaging in the RRP, whose needs should be considered: i) intermediary actors, professionally working with information and networking, that will regularly consult and use the Platform, such as LAGs, civil society organisations, NRNs, policy-makers or other existing networks; ii) actors that will only sporadically access the Platform searching for specific information, tools or solutions (e.g. potential project developers, etc.). Overall, the TG outlined the following information areas that the RRP could provide:

o **Local projects and initiatives.** Information on initiatives implemented in rural areas lagging behind, with an emphasis on challenges faced and lessons learned during the implementation process. There has been a tendency to focus on inspiring and innovative projects, but the TG outlined the need for information on projects and practices that can realistically be implemented in these areas and are supported by the full array of EU funds or a combination of them (one TG member said that the information should be "more functional than inspirational"). A filtering function based on thematic areas, geography or funds would help users identify relevant information faster.

o **Policies, strategies, interventions and proofing.** The RRP can provide didactic information on how different EU policies and related funds support the development of lagging rural areas to help raise awareness and build capacity among policy-makers, particularly in those thematic areas which are not traditionally looked at through a rural lens. In addition, the RRP could provide access to emerging policy initiatives in Europe targeting the integrated development of rural areas suffering from depopulation (e.g. Law to combat depopulation in Castilla la Mancha in Spain; Inner Areas Strategy in Italy). Finally, it would be of great help if the RRP could also collect information on rural proofing initiatives across the EU.

o **Tools and methodologies for rural revitalisation** which can support stakeholders in taking action to revitalise rural areas, such as the self-assessment tool on enabling factors for rural revitalisation developed by the Thematic Group or other tools developed by other initiatives, such as H2020 projects, Interreg projects, etc.

► **Simple structure and easy to find information**. The use of search and filtering functions was recommended to help users easily find the information they need. In addition, an alert function (e.g. by email) could inform users when relevant information is added to the portal.

2.3. A virtual space to meet & exchange (Forum)

A virtual space to enable actors to meet and interact with each other has been identified as one of the core functions needed in the RRP. In this respect, the TG recommends the following:

► **Enable users to create their own spaces for discussion**, which can boost more specific connections among stakeholders with similar types of interests. With this flexibility, the Platform could be used to support local, regional and national level interactions among stakeholders. It would add value to include specific interactive tools that can facilitate the exchanges and enable common work (e.g. polls, whiteboards, etc.).

► **Avoid language becoming a barrier in the Platform**. There are technical options and modules that allow instant translation of texts in any EU language. No stakeholder should be excluded from participating in the RRP due to a language barrier.

► **Support match-making and the identification of stakeholders**. The Platform can provide an excellent opportunity for users to find and get in contact with peers and experts that share a common interest.

► **Establish formal links with the Rural Pact to boost dialogue on some key issues for rural revitalisation.** The Rural Pact can offer an important opportunity to bring together face-to-face stakeholders that work on the revitalisation of rural areas suffering from depopulation. The Rural Pact can provide a space in its gatherings (e.g. Conference, meetings, etc.) for actors, thematic issues and examples emerging from the Platform. The Rural Pact can support awareness raising and capacity building of actors for the revitalisation of declining rural areas.