

ROADMAP

Roadmaps aim to inform citizens and stakeholders about the Commission's work in order to allow them to provide feedback and to participate effectively in future consultation activities. Citizens and stakeholders are in particular invited to provide views on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions and to make available any relevant information that they may have.

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE	Long term vision for rural areas
LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT	AGRI – F1 Conception and consistency of rural development
LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions
INDICATIVE PLANNING	Q2 2021
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	-

This Roadmap is provided for information purposes only and its content might change. It does not prejudice the final decision of the Commission on whether this initiative will be pursued or on its final content. All elements of the initiative described by the Roadmap, including its timing, are subject to change.

A. Context, Problem definition and Subsidiarity Check

Context

The need for designing a long term vision for rural areas was underlined in [President Von der Leyen's political guidelines](#) and in the mission letters to [Vice-President Suica](#), [Commissioner Wojciechowski](#) and [Commissioner Ferreira](#). The Communication on this long term vision will be developed under the umbrella of the Democracy and Demography priority and has links to the report on the impact of demographic change and the Green Paper on ageing. It will also embrace further relevant aspects for the future of rural areas including the implementation of the [European Green Deal](#) and the Conference on the future of Europe.

Problem the initiative aims to tackle

Predominantly rural regions are home to 96 million people and cover 45% of the EU's territory. These areas produce high quality food and non-food products and contribute to the richness and diversity of European culture. Their important role in ensuring the stewardship of natural resources and mitigating the effects of climate change will make them a crucial part of the transition to a green and sustainable Europe. Studies have shown though that many people in these rural areas feel politically 'overlooked'. Specific socio-economic issues contribute to this. The shift from the primary and secondary to the tertiary sector of the economy has contributed to an outflow of labour from the primary sector and has concentrated job opportunities in urban centres. This has been accompanied by negative demographic trends in particular in remote rural areas, in a vicious cycle with a reduction in access to basic services and a widening of the digital gap. Despite these challenges, there are many opportunities in rural areas. These include the role rural areas can play in ensuring balanced territorial distribution of the population avoiding overpopulation of cities, in providing food, in mitigating climate change, providing alternatives to fossil fuels and developing the circular economy. Many eco-system services (food, feed, raw materials, water regulation, biodiversity, etc.) depend upon and are generated in rural areas. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis may introduce significant changes to society (increased teleworking, appreciation for green spaces) which rural areas could benefit from. Further action at European level would facilitate and support rural residents in benefitting from the opportunities ahead and ensure that they are not "left behind". Finally, ensuring the involvement of EU citizens is especially important in the context of the Recovery plan.

Basis for EU intervention (legal basis and subsidiarity check)

The legal basis for this initiative is Article 39 (2) (a) and Articles 174 and 175 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. A response at EU level is most appropriate due to the common challenges and opportunities that rural areas face and their cross-border nature. Furthermore, the Common Agricultural Policy, Regional, Cohesion and Social policies and a number of other EU policies such as energy, transport, connectivity, environment or climate play important roles in the future of rural areas. The Commission can use the extensive network it has built in rural areas together with the Member States (European Network for Rural Development, National Rural Networks, Managing Authorities and Monitoring Committees of the Structural and Cohesion Funds) and the public consultation to reach as many citizens as possible. Coordinated action at EU level would help identify the most pressing needs for rural areas and further contribute to improving coordination between funding streams and other policy responses at EU and national governance levels. The Commission could also build on other existing initiatives, notably the Conference on the Future of the Europe, to reach a wider audience.

B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how

The Communication aims to create a debate at European level on the future of rural areas and the place they should have in our society. As this is the first time a holistic vision for the future of rural areas will be designed, there is a need for gathering a strong evidence base. The Communication will set out a vision for the future of rural areas with 2040 as a horizon, building on the outcome of a wide consultation process, the result of the foresight exercise and also drawing on the [Report on the impact of demographic change](#) and the Green Paper on Ageing (foreseen for Q1-2021). It will go beyond the scope of demography and embrace all relevant aspects for the future of rural areas, including links with other initiatives such as the Green Deal and the Conference on the future of Europe. It will also chart the course for potential (non-legislative) actions which could address the identified issues and make the most of the opportunities. An assessment of the complementarity and the coordination between different policies will also play a central role.

C. Better regulation

Consultation of citizens and stakeholders

A comprehensive consultation process is planned to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders and European citizens are heard. It will collect views on the current opportunities and challenges in rural areas, the different policies implemented in rural areas, the aspirations for rural areas in 2040, and the actions needed for these to materialise. The result of the consultation process, which includes an online public consultation, dedicated questions in Eurobarometer, a number of public events and a final conference, will be an important element feeding into the final Communication. The public consultation will be published in all EU languages on the Commission's "[Have Your Say](#)" website. The main identified stakeholders are farmers, consumers, agro-food sector, rural SMEs, Member States, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, rural youth, NGOs, local action groups, rural networks, academics and interested individuals.

Evidence base and data collection

The existing evidence base is linked to the [public consultation on modernising and simplifying the Common Agricultural Policy](#), which was undertaken in 2017, the data gathering of the [Report on the impact of demographic change](#) published in 2020, and several publications and reports by [JRC](#), [Eurostat](#) and a number of EU projects (e.g. [ESPON](#)). The public consultation will contribute to gathering a bottom-up evidence base, identifying the needs and aspirations of European citizens. Building on the evidence base gathered and the needs identified, the Communication will give directions for future follow up initiatives, which in line with better regulation rules may be subject to an impact assessment.