

# Delivering EU's Rural Vision 2040 through urban-rural cooperation

## Key messages:

The European Commission's Rural Vision 2040 is an opportunity to reinforce urban-rural partnerships across Europe. Partnerships between urban and rural areas are essential to achieving EU long-term goals, including the European Green Deal. There are three main areas of action needed to make this a reality during the implementation of the Rural Vision 2040:

- Strategic involvement of cities and metropolitan areas in the governance frameworks and mechanisms that will support and monitor the delivery of rural-urban partnerships in the Rural Vision 2040
- Promotion of strategic, rural-urban partnerships in relevant actions and flagship projects, which are being launched as part of the Rural Action Plan.
- A political agenda and a dialogue supported by a platform for exchange on rural-urban investments and joint strategies, build evidence at EU and national level, and support a range of urban-rural policies.

Fifty per cent of the rural population in the EU lives close to a city, often as part of a wider metropolitan area<sup>1</sup>. Metropolitan areas are integral to and a key stakeholder in developing rural areas within and close to them. The EU can achieve more balanced territorial development by supporting and facilitating increased collaboration between urban and rural areas, going beyond past differences that divided rather than connected urban and rural areas. Partnerships between urban and rural areas are essential to achieving EU long-term goals, including the European Green Deal. These partnerships can also pave the way for more equitable post-Covid19 recovery through collaboration around investment strategies, delivering benefits across urban and rural areas.

The European Commission's Rural Vision 2040 is an opportunity to reinforce urban-rural partnerships across Europe. There are three main areas of action needed to make this a reality during the implementation of the Rural Vision 2040:

<sup>1</sup> Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication 'A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040'

- 1) Strategic involvement of cities and metropolitan areas in the governance frameworks and mechanisms that will support and monitor the delivery of rural-urban partnerships in the Rural Vision 2040. In particular:
  - a) The Rural Pact and the common framework for cooperation, to be established in 2021, should include and recognise metropolitan areas as the level of governance that allows for the management of complex rural-urban relationships and the delivery of critical services for the benefit of the entire functional area.
  - b) Metropolitan areas can contribute to the delivery mechanisms of the Pact. They can mobilise resources and deliver integrated territorial investments.
  - c) The mid-term assessment of the Vision should be conducted at the metropolitan scale and could be included in the reflection for the next Rural action plan 2028-2034. In addition, the rural proofing mechanism would benefit significantly from incorporating rural-urban considerations from the metropolitan perspective
- 2) Promotion of strategic, rural-urban partnerships in relevant actions and flagship projects, which are being launched as part of the Rural Action Plan.
  - a) Rural-urban interdependencies should be addressed in the areas for action. The four drivers, and the complementary areas for action identified in the plan, open many opportunities for cooperation. Recognising and managing the interdependencies and flows between urban and rural areas is crucial. This will be instrumental to achieving a stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous future for rural areas in all sectors and flagship projects identified.
  - b) There should be a more systematic assessment of the sectors identified from the perspective of rural-urban partnerships. Local communities can better promote partnerships and achieve common objectives in traditional and innovative sectors by pooling resources, developing strategies, and reaching agreements at the metropolitan scale. For example:
    - (i) Rural areas within metropolitan areas, both those close to a city and those more remote, are strongly connected and greatly benefit from an integrated mobility approach. Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans and Mobility as a Service are important examples of how this connectivity can be fostered. These can help rural mobility, by vertical coordination with governance at the metropolitan scale. The Vision opens opportunities for cooperation by highlighting urban-rural linkages in both the new EU Urban Mobility Framework and the flagship for Multimodal digital mobility services.
    - (ii) Critical public services - ranging from mobility to housing, education and health - are often organised most cost-effectively at the metropolitan scale. Similarly, urban populations depend on rural areas for essential ecosystem services, food, energy, and natural resources. Going beyond rural-urban dichotomies to a more systemic approach will support Europe's climate neutrality and social inclusion objectives. We welcome the initiative to support rural municipalities in energy transition and fighting climate change. We look forward to exploring synergies with the rural stream of the Covenant of Mayors and for actions within the New European Bauhaus in rural areas.
    - (iii) Sustainable rural tourism and leisure and cultural activities are important from a metropolitan and rural-urban perspective. There is potential to develop common strategies and integrated investments to strengthen tourism at the metropolitan

scale, ensuring that touristic and cultural flows between core cities and surrounding municipalities grow sustainably. The Covid-19 pandemic clearly outlined the potential for strengthening tourism and leisure activities (e.g. access to nature) in surrounding areas.

- (iv) Digital technology, innovation and entrepreneurship, which promote economically dynamic communities and social innovation, can benefit from cooperation as part of a metropolitan innovation ecosystem by building and exchanging established practices (e.g. participatory democracy). The Vision puts forward flagships to strengthen rural areas such as the rural revitalisation platform and the research and innovation for rural communities, which can benefit significantly from linking up across a wider metropolitan area.
- (v) Demand patterns often drive short supply chains and the circular economy at the metropolitan level. For example, for food, metropolitan areas have already created actions that strengthen rural-urban partnerships and support rural populations directly and, as such, contribute to CAP objectives and the EU mission on soil health and food. More generally, the Vision would benefit from recognising the potential of short supply chains at the metropolitan scale, due to the proximity of EU industrial ecosystems. This would contribute to a more balanced distribution of businesses and services following the principles of smart specialisation and place-based investments. The proposed flagship 'entrepreneurship and the social economy in rural areas' can strengthen cooperation.

- 3) A political agenda and a dialogue supported by a platform for exchange on rural-urban investments and joint strategies, build evidence at EU and national level, and support a range of urban-rural policies.
  - a) A structured EU dialogue should be established at technical and political level between rural and urban authorities in the context of the Vision, by strengthening planned flagship actions such as the rural revitalisation platform or research and innovation for rural communities.
  - b) The Vision should support broader evidence gathering, monitoring and foresight about rural-urban partnerships at EU level, through the new Rural Observatory or the support provided by ESPON. Focus areas could include, among others, evidence and lessons learnt on integrated territorial investments and complementarities with CLLD, spatial mobility, and sustainability frameworks.
  - c) We suggest better connections with other EU initiatives through synergies with existing EU programs on urban areas and territorial development, including the European Urban Initiative, the Urban Agenda for the EU, the Horizon Europe missions on climate-neutral and smart cities, and climate adaptation, the New European Bauhaus and other relevant EU programmes. Similarly, we recommend further considering the possibilities for cooperation within existing EU territorial strategies such as the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the New Leipzig Charter.