The long-term vision for EU's rural areas: key achievements & ways forward

European Commission report on the long-term vision for EU's rural areas

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MOVING Final Conference - 13 June 2024

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The long-term vision for EU's rural areas

In June 2021 the European Commission adopted a **vision for rural areas by 2040** which identifies the existing challenges and opportunities, and the ways forward.

A very **broad public consultation** set the consensual goals of achieving stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas.

To reach these goals the Commission elaborated a **Rural Action Plan** - and engaged with the other EU institutions, public authorities, rural communities, and stakeholders through the **Rural Pact**.

Link: the rural vision Commission Communication

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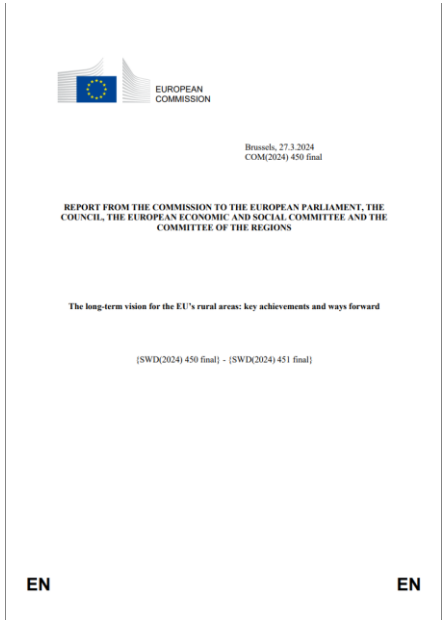
Report on the implementation of the long-term vision for EU's rural areas

1. **New evidence under the four action areas**
2. **Looking back at 30 months of implementation**
   - 2.1. How do **EU policies contribute to rural areas**?
   - 2.2. Where are we with the **implementation of the EU rural action plan**?
   - 2.3. The **launch** and development of the **rural pact**
3. **Looking forward**
   1. **Consolidating** achievements and implementing the **EU rural action plan**
   2. **Consolidating the rural pact**
   3. **Reflecting on how to enhance support for rural areas** in the future
4. **Conclusions and next steps**

Report from the EC

(March 2024)


EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 27.3.2024
COM(2024) 450 final

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

The long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: key achievements and ways forward

{SWD(2024) 450 final} - {SWD(2024) 451 final}

EN EN

Staff working documents: 'Taking stock of rural action plan implementation' & 'Reviewed EU rural action plan'

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European Commission

EU policies contributions to rural areas

2023-2027 CAP
Study reports on [September] & [November] 2023
+ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council:
"[Summary of CAP Strategic Plans for 2023-27: joint effort and collective ambition]"

2021-2027 Cohesion policy
Report [May] 2023
+ Collection of examples [March 2024]

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European Commission

The rural action plan: 24 thematic actions

- **Rural revitalisation platform launched**

- **Research and innovation for rural communities**
  - **€253 million** in **Horizon EU**
  - European **Startup village forum** launched

- **Networking for LEADER** (EU CAP Network) **and Smart villages** (SmartRural 21 & 27)

- **Study on land-use** for **sustainable agriculture** launched

- **Youth:**
  - Inclusion in **ERASMUS**
  - EU youth Strategy **Goal 6**
  - **Study** on rural youth opportunities for learning

- **Networking on mobility for rural communities under SMARTA-NET**

- **Urban mobility framework published** & urban mobility plans being updated

- **Rural Digital Futures**
  - **€23.5 billion** invested in **connectivity**
  - Pilot on digital education in remote areas "Learning from the extremes"
  - **Rural digital indicators** in digital decade reports

- **Broadband competency office network renewed**

- **R&I projects for digitalisation of agriculture**

- **Rural energy communities advisory hub** (RECAH)
  - **27 municipalities** received technical assistance
  - **Guidance** for all

- **Certification of Carbon removals**

- **EU mission: A soil deal for Europe** (R&I calls)

- **Social resilience and Women in rural areas**
  - European **care strategy** (2022) highlighting rural
  - Study on **working conditions** of farm employees

- **Entrepreneurship and social economy (SE)**
  - European social economy **action plan**
  - **Good practices for rural** under "Transition pathway for proximity and social economy"
  - Funding for **consortia in SE in rural areas**

- **Education for youth**
  - WG education & values
  - Rural under school education platform & online teacher community

- **Toolkit for producer groups in GIs**

- **Thematic group for forest-dominant municipalities**

Staff working documents: 'Taking stock of rural action plan implementation' & 'Reviewed EU rural action plan'

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The rural action plan: 6 cross-cutting actions

More and easier to access rural data

- ▶ Better statistics: twice more indicators, geospatial datasets, new legislation on population statistics
- ▶ Proposed method to define functional rural areas
- ▶ Rural observatory on-line

Easier access to info on funds

- ▶ Toolkit on rural funds

Mechanism in place to rural-proof policies

- ▶ Rural proofing included in 'Better regulation guidelines', toolbox, methodologies

Improving governance

- ▶ Rural Pact operational at EU level, pacts being adopted at national and regional levels

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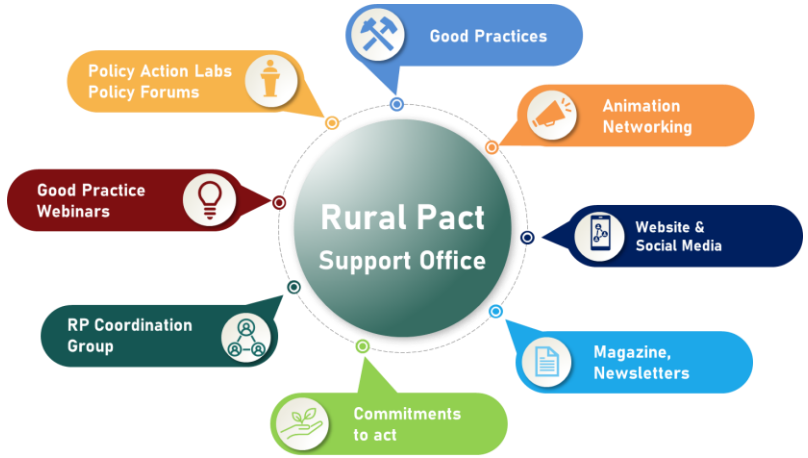
The Rural Pact
All building blocks are operational

+2460
Rural Pact Community Members by Nov 2023

+120
Commitments to act



Rural pact support office created (Dec 2022)

Rural Pact Coordination Group

Rural pact Coordination group created (June 2023)

Rural pact community platform launched (June 2023)

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The Rural Pact in figures

One EU-wide community with a clear ambition

Amplify rural voices through

2 Rural Pact Conferences
1 High-level Policy Forum
2 Policy labs
1 Policy briefing translated in **24** languages

Enable networking through

1 online Rural Pact community platform
10 policy & networking events
1 magazine translated in **24** languages

Encourage voluntary commitments

121 commitments to act towards the shared goals of the rural vision
70% expressed by from organisations – **30%** by individuals

Connected through the Rural Pact online Community Platform…

> **650+** registered members

> **140** news, **100** events, **50** good practices, **7** community groups, **5** publications

… with an emphasis on Rural Revitalisation

> **110** news, **73** events, **37** good practices, **5** publications

*Data collected on 10 April 2024.

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After the key achievements ....
... looking ahead

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Looking forward – EU Rural action plan
Some key milestones

Stronger - Empowerment, services, innovation, youth

> Improving the **revitalisation platform**
> Programming **rural research** under **Horizon EU work programmes 2025-2027**
> Continued **networking for LEADER**
> Startup Village **forum in 2024**
> Finalising **study on youth participation in ERASMUS**

Connected - Physical and digital connectivity

> **SMARTA-NET final conference** Autumn 2024
> Improving the **regulatory environment for digital transformation**
> support to **digital innovation for agriculture** and other rural sectors (Horizon, DEP)

Prosperous – Economy

> Continue work on the **social economy and formal education in rural areas**
> **Review** of the implementation **of the youth guarantee** addressing barriers to equity

Resilient – Environment and social

> continue work on **rural energy communities** through the **new facility launched in 2024**
> new **Mission soil calls** to enhance soil health
> Developing **methodologies for rewetting peatland**

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Looking forward – Rural Pact

- **Keep up facilitation through the Rural pact support office**
- **Improve the community platform**
- **Sustain efforts at national level**
  - Using policy brief "**Making the rural pact happen in Member States**"
  - Developing inspiring "**Country pages**"
  - Raising awareness through the **Rural Pact Coordination Group** and **national experts**
  - Cooperating with **international organisations** to engage States
  - **Government-level commitments**
- **Going more local**
  - Policy lab on translating the pact at local level (22 May 2024)
  - Working closely with those who committed
  - Good practice webinars
- **Rural Pact conference (April) 2025**

Looking forward – EU policies

European Parliament

Council of the European Union

European Economic and Social Committee

European Committee of the Regions

European Rural Parliament

Contributions from EU institutions & stakeholders

?

Questions for reflection

Debate on post-2027 EU policies

(> Mid-2025)

Ways forward – questions for reflection (point 3.3.2)

- What are the **key challenges** arising from **depopulation**, ongoing transitions and structural changes?
- What are the best ways to **address them** in a targeted way?
- How to **enhance financial support** for rural areas and communities through EU, national and regional funds, including improving synergies and complementarities?
- What is needed to **improve financing, quality of delivery and effectiveness** via e.g. CLLD/LEADER?
- How to improve the **monitoring and assessment of the resources** from the different EU funds and programmes?
- What is needed to **improve access to support** for the final beneficiary?
- What can be done for wider implementation of the **rural proofing mechanism** at all levels?
- What are the best policy tools to ensure **institutional, governance and integrated support** for rural areas?
    - At EU level, would **turning the rural vision into a strategy** have added value in terms of meaningful actions on the ground?
    - How can the EU further help Member States, regions and local communities **develop national and regional rural strategies and action plans**?
- How to improve the **availability of policy-relevant rural statistics and data,** without increasing the administrative burden?

Ways forward - Opportunities for debate

- 9th Cohesion forum (11-12 April 2024)
- 5th European Network on Rural Mobility (14-16 May 2024)
- Technical workshop on Solidarity and rural communities (16-17 May 2024)
- Rural Pact coordination group (16 April and November 2024)
- Rural Pact policy labs (May, September and November/December 2024)
- Rural Pact Community Platform and good practices
- Rural Pact Conference (April 2025)

The ongoing **strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture** also reflects on the future of rural areas.

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Preliminary take aways from workshop on the future CAP (16-17 May 2024)

A flavour of the reflections held recently at the **CAP workshop on solidarity and rural communities:**

- The **CAP is highly relevant for rural communities** ("jointness"), but the CAP budget is not enough to address all needs: other policies should contribute. There is a **need to strengthen rural proofing**;
- Future policies should **target specific areas** (i.e. mountains and remote areas), **themes** (i.e. broadband, mobility, public services) and target **groups** (i.e. young people or migrants);
- Emphasis should be put on the **ring-fencing** of EU cohesion funds and national territorial funds for rural areas or the rural areas most in need;
- When it comes to designing policies and governance systems:
    - At national level: **holistic and strategic approaches** lead to more synergy between various EU/national policies;
    - The regional level is an important intermediary layer, very **relevant to empower integrated local action, ITI, building capacities;**
    - The local level is key for implementation thinking in terms of **functional approaches** (i.e. ensuring service provision and deliver integrated actions).

Study on funding for rural areas

- **Assessing the role of the CAP 2014-2022 in addressing needs and actions of the LTVRA**
  - Supporting rural areas and development beyond farming
  - Brief forward-looking assessment of CAP and other EU funds, 2023-2027
- Approach:
  - **NUTS3 territorial needs analyses, using available socio-economic indicators and data**
  - **Analysis of CAP funding data, mapping against needs,** considering alongside other funds and strategies
    - Literature and document review (legal texts, RDPs, CAP SPs, Structural fund OPs)
    - 12 case studies (IT, IE, FR, ES, AT, DE, CZ, FI HR, RO, BG, PT) to aid causal / systemic understanding
- Study timeline: May-June 2023 to April 2024 (**publication in June 2024**)

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Study on funding for rural areas: Recommendations

- **CAP funding is very relevant** for supporting LTVRA in most countries and territories
- Application of **more targeted and refined definitions** of rural areas in strategic frameworks for rural areas by Member States
  - **Examples:** sparsely populated areas and areas at risk of depopulation (ES), various types of peripheral inner areas (IT)
- To ensure a synergistic delivery and high relevance of the EU support to rural areas, a more integrated and holistic delivery of CAP and **other EU** and **national** funding is recommended, especially at local level.
  - **Examples**: locally integrated funding services (ELY centres in FI), strong LEADER/CLLD (e.g. in CZ)
- Increased attention to the funding needs of **remote and constrained** rural regions from EAFRD, and cohesion policy support as well as the EMFAF.
  - **Examples**: introduction of specific calls/eligibility criteria for disadvantaged regions (IT, ES)
- Integrated support to rural areas should also be offered outside the use of multi-funding LEADER/CLLD.
  - **Examples**: ITI in Italy and Spain, strong integration with national support to village renewal and quality of life (IE)

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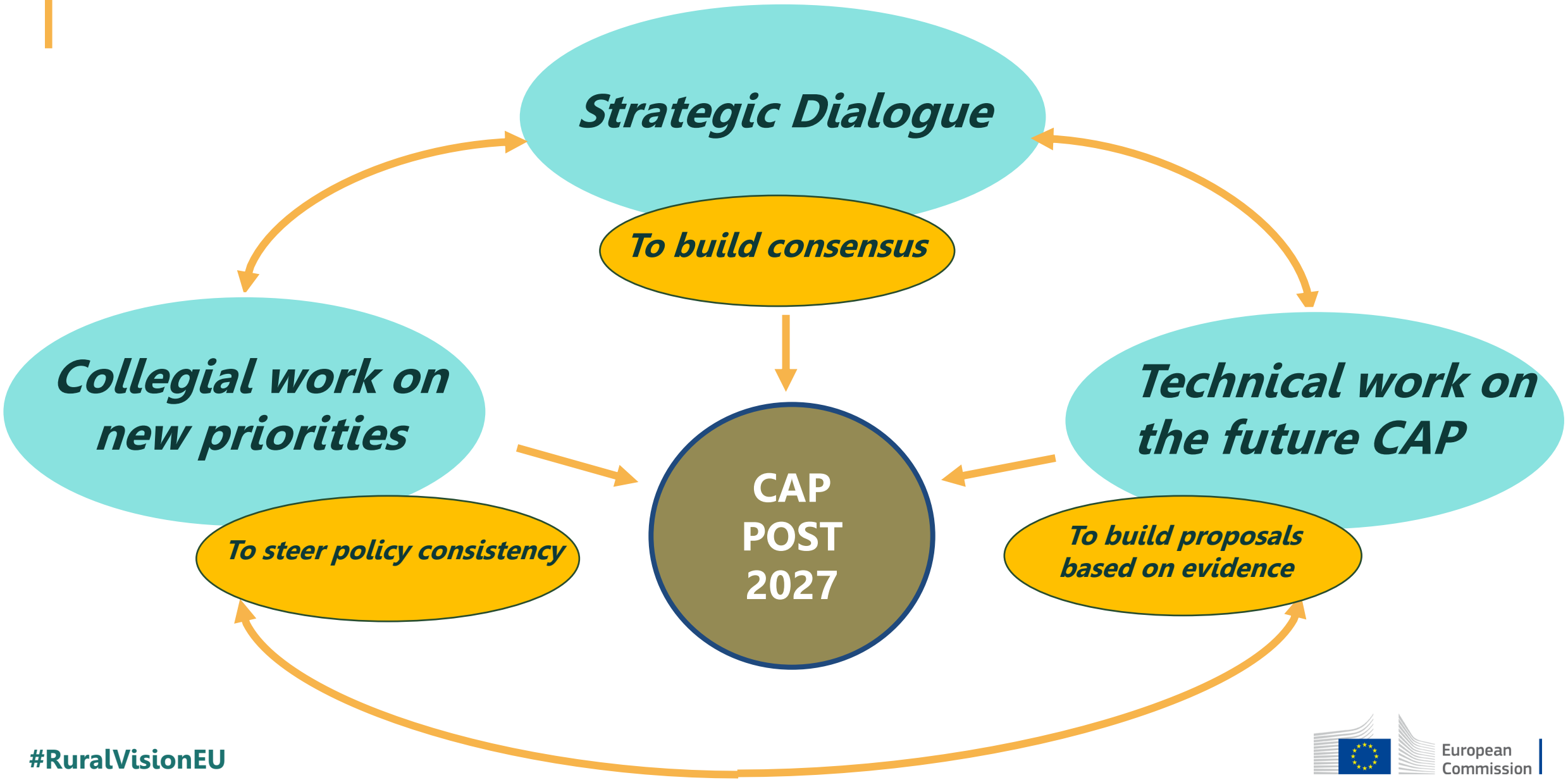
Different on-going processes with different roles



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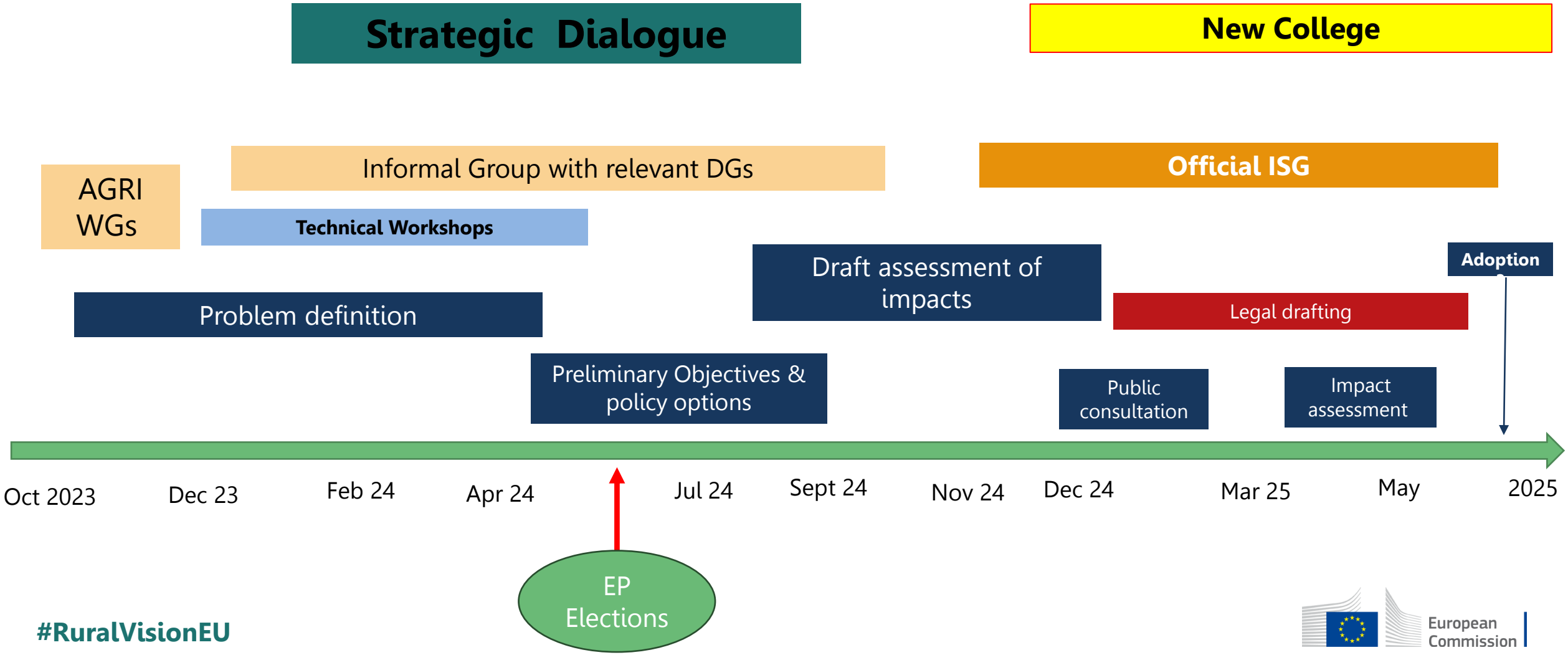
Towards a new CAP: Where are we?



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Preliminary policy problems (foresight exercise)

1. Farmers' economic resilience and competitiveness increasingly compromised

2. Inadequate adaptive capacity of agriculture at farm and landscape level

3. Socio-economic decline in agriculture and rural areas

4. Persisting environmental pressures from farming and financial challenges

5. Suboptimal policy use

From policy problems …. to objectives …. and to policy making

3. **Problem:** socio-economic decline in agriculture and rural areas

Objective: Strengthen attractiveness and socio-economic fabric of rural areas by making them prosperous, connected, stronger, resilient to enable a fair and just transition

Thank you!

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en

https://www.rural-vision.europa.eu

Be informed, participate and take action

Steps

1. **Join the Rural Pact Community**

   Form: https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member

2. **Take action contributing to the vision & share it with us**

   Form:
   https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/TheRuralPactCommitmentCanvas