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Uachtaránacht na hÉireann ar Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh 2026
Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

European Commission

High-level Rural Policy Forum

Europe's Rural Future - Responding to rural priorities through integrated national and regional strategies and LEADER

RURAL PACT

3 - 4 November 2026

Naas, County Kildare, Ireland

Agenda

Time (GMT)	Agenda items
	02 November 2026
18:30	**Shuttle buses from Dublin Airport to the town of Naas**
	03 November 2026 – Integrated rural strategies at national and regional levels
09:00	**Shuttle buses from Naas to the venue:** Departure from the entrance of Lawlor's Hotel
09:30 – 10:30	**Registration and welcome coffee**
10:30 – 11:15	**Welcome and high-level opening interventions. Integrated rural development: From Cork 1.0 to today** > **Mr Dara Calleary**, Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Ireland > **Mr Michael McGrath**, Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection
11:15 – 12:30	**Keynote speakers on integrated rural policies as engines for the future of rural areas** > **Enhancing policies for competitive, resilient and sustainable rural areas through integrated national rural strategies** **Mr Jose Enrique Garcilazo**, Deputy Head of Division and Head of Regional and Rural Policy Unit, OECD > **Designing a comprehensive policy response to address rural needs and opportunities in the future NRPPs** **Mr Mario Milouchev**, Director, DG AGRI, European Commission > **Experiences from Member States designing and implementing integrated, national and regional rural strategies** • **Our Rural Future: Advancing integrated support to rural communities (Ireland)** **Ms Michelle McKiernan,** Principal Officer, Rural Strategy Unit, Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Ireland • **Developing the Rural Pact in Flanders (Belgium)** **Mr Dirk Van Gijseghem**, Head of Unit, Flemish Land Agency, Belgium
12:30 – 14:00	**Lunch**
14:00 – 15:30	**How can whole-of-government policy approaches help foster rural attractiveness under future National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs)?** > **The voice of civil society: Expectations from the National Regional Partnership Plans** **Mr Seamus Boland**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee **Panel**: > **Mr Martin Heydon**, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, IE Presidency of the Council of the EU > **Ms Cristina Guarda**, Member of the European Parliament > **Mr Hugo Almeida**, Head of Unit, DG AGRI, European Commission > **Mr Radim Sršeň**, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and Rapporteur of the opinion on the Future of the Rural Development 2028+
15:30 – 16:00	**Coffee break**

16:00 – 17:45 **Group discussions: Ensuring effective design of integrated rural strategies at national and regional levels**

> **Group 1: A forward-looking rural vision implemented through a whole-of-government strategy and rural proofing**

- **France Ruralité (France)**
  Mr David Armellini, Deputy director of missions for rural areas, mountains, and the 'village of the future' program, Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires, France
- **Rural Agenda of Catalonia (Spain)**
  Mr Ramón Armengol, Director General, Department for Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food of Catalonia, Spain
- **A forward-looking rural vision implemented through a whole-of-government strategy and rural proofing**
  Ms Clare O'Connell, Rural Transport Programme at the Department of Transport, Ireland
- **Key messages from the EESC Opinion on rural proofing**
  Ms Lidija Pavić-Rogošić, Member of the EESC, Rapporteur of the own-opinion on "A rural proofing tool to unlock the full potential of rural areas and communities through better rural-centred EU policymaking for a fair and sustainable EU"

> **Group 2: Mechanisms to coordinate action and funding across governance levels to deliver innovative, place-based solutions**

- **Finland's Rural Policy Council (Finland)**
  Ms Antonia Husberg, Ministry of Agriculture and forestry, Finland
- **Participatory, integrated governance to boost local action in rural Tuscany (Italy)**
  Ms Alessandra De Renzis, Expert to the President's Cabinet, Government of Tuscany, Italy
- **Simplify access to funding at local level in the region of Tyrol (Austria)**
  Ms Juliane Weickert, Regional Government Tyrol, Austria

> **Group 3: Structures to engage rural communities and civil society with decision makers and build capacities**

- **The Dutch Rural Pact (The Netherlands)**
  Mr Ben van Essen, European Rural Communities Alliance (ERCA)
- **A National Rural Parliament (Slovenia)**
  Mr Primož Kroflič, Slovenian Rural Development Network
  Ms Prof Irma Slavic, University of Ljubljana
- **Local Government Structures in Ireland (Ireland)**
  Mr Shane Tiernan, Roscommon County Council

17:45 – 18:00 **Transition to plenary**

18:00 – 18:30 **Report back from the Group Discussions**

> **Ms Betty-Ann Bryce,** OECD
> **Ms Antonia Husberg**, Ministry of Agriculture and forestry, Finland
> **Ms Karen Keaveney,** University College Dublin, Ireland

18:30 – 20:30 **Networking dinner**

21:00 **Shuttle buses from the venue to the town of Naas (Lawlor's hotel)**

04 November 2026 – LEADER/CLLD

08:00 **Shuttle buses from Naas to the venue:** Departure from the entrance of Lawlor's Hotel

08:30 – 09:00 **Registration and welcome coffee**

09:00 – 09:05 **Opening**

> **Introduction of the agenda of the day**
Rural Pact Support Office

09:05 – 10:30 **LEADER: A European success story delivering value for rural communities and Europe**

> **Stronger rural communities: The added value of LEADER/CLLD**
Ms Elena Pisani, University of Padova, Italy

> **Stakeholder Panel:** Local stakeholder stories outlining their experience with LEADER and the impact in their territories

- **Mr Alistair Adam Hernández**, University of Vechta, Germany
- **Ms Anita Selicka**, Latvian Rural Forum, Latvia
- **Mr Brian Kehoe**, Wexford Local Development, Ireland
- **Ms Claudia Adjudeanu**, LAG Asociația Grup de Acțiune Locală Microregiunea Văilor Crișurilor Alb și Negru, Romania

10:30 – 11:45 **LEADER/CLLD in the future**

> **Prospects for LEADER/CLLD in the post-2027 EU policy**
Ms Iwona Lisztwan, DG AGRI, European Commission

> **Stakeholder Panel:** Exchanging views about the future of LEADER/CLLD

- **Mr Jerry Buttimer**, Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Ireland
- **Ms Begoña García**, Secretary of State for Agriculture and Food, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and fisheries, Spain
- **Mr Klaus Heider,** Deputy State Secretary & Head of Directorate-General Department of Regional Identity, Rural Areas, Social Policy in Agriculture, Innovation. Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity, Germany
- **Ms Beata Rodak,** Head of LEADER unit, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Poland
- **Ms Marion Eckardt,** Executive Director & Policy Lead, European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD)

11.45 – 12.00 **35 Years of LEADER in Ireland: From local action to lasting impact**

> **Mr Dara Calleary,** Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Ireland

12:00 – 13:30 **Lunch and LEADER showcase**

Make the most of your lunch break! Explore the interactive exhibition and discover inspiring LEADER-funded projects from all the LAGs in Ireland and five selected LAGs from other EU Member States. Meet the LAGs, exchange ideas and take home practical inspiration for your own territory.

13:30 – 14:15 **Panel Debate - Embedding strategic rural policy approaches and LEADER/CLLD in the National and Regional Partnership Plans: Conclusions from the Forum and next steps**

- **Ms Genovaitė Beniulienė**, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania
- **Mr Mario Milouchev**, Director, DG AGRI, European Commission
- **Mr Tom Jones,** President, European Rural Communities Alliance (ERCA) & Member of the Steering Committee of the European Rural Parliament
- **Mr Luis Chaves**, Coordinator, Minha Terra, Portugal

14:15 – 14:30 **Forum closure**

- **Mr Fintan O'Brien**, Assistant Secretary General, Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Ireland

15:00 **Shuttle buses to Dublin Airport**

Ní neart go cur le chéile

Strength with unity