



**European Leader Association
for Rural Development**
Brussels, www.elard.eu

**POLISH
PRESIDENCY**
2025-2026



Piotr Sadłocha
President of ELARD
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Łagów, July 14th, 2026

Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Ms Roberta Metsola
President of the European Parliament

Taoiseach Micheál Martin
Taoiseach of Ireland

Cc:

Mr Raffaele Fitto
Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms, European Commission

Mr Piotr Serafin
Commissioner for Budget, Anti-Fraud and Public Administration

Mr Christophe Hansen
Commissioner for Agriculture and Food

Subject: Ensuring Equal Participation Rights and Development Opportunities for Rural Citizens under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034

Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear President Metsola,
Dear Taoiseach Martin,

I am writing on behalf of 2,600 Local Action Groups (LAGs) across Europe, bringing together approximately 100,020 active citizens engaged in rural development and community-led local initiatives.

Europe is a community founded on the equality of all those who create it – both its citizens and its local and regional authorities. For this reason, we strongly welcome the European Commission's commitment to protecting democracy and European values. In our view, this objective is among the most important priorities of the European Union and constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of European integration.

At the same time, Europe faces unprecedented challenges that require stronger competitiveness, resilience, preparedness and territorial cohesion. These ambitions cannot be achieved by focusing only on Europe's cities and metropolitan regions. Vibrant rural areas are indispensable to Europe's food security, energy transition, innovation capacity, demographic resilience and strategic autonomy. Ensuring that rural citizens are fully involved in shaping the future of their





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territories, so that they can suggest the best tools for this, as guardians and those who know best about our rural areas, is therefore not only a matter of democracy and equality, but also a prerequisite for achieving the European Union's broader strategic objectives.

It is therefore with considerable surprise and concern that we have analysed the legislative proposals relating to the Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2028–2034, and the first proposals of the European Council and Parliament. Having a view of all three of them, the proposed regulations do not guarantee the same development opportunities for people living in rural areas as those available to citizens living in urban and metropolitan areas – and can sometimes contradict one another on the topic.

Our main concern lies in Article 5 of the proposal for a **Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Regional Development Fund, including for European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg), and the Cohesion Fund as part of the Fund**, which provides explicit guarantees that **urban citizens** will participate in decision-making processes regarding the implementation of the Cohesion Policy at local level through integrated urban development strategies, but no equivalent guarantee for citizens living in rural areas.

In practice, this means that more than 20% of the European Union's population is not afforded the same opportunity as urban citizens to participate in shaping the future development of the territories in which they live. This is not only a matter of equal treatment. It is also a missed opportunity to mobilise the knowledge, initiative and innovation potential of rural communities at a time when Europe needs every territory to contribute to its competitiveness and resilience; not mentioning the wide opening it leaves to far right movements to place themselves.

This issue is particularly important for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, whose development continues to be significantly supported by Cohesion Policy. Evidence from the **Ex Post Evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund**, including the example of Poland, demonstrates that support delivered through integrated territorial instruments during the previous programming period was directed primarily towards urban agglomerations. In some cases, the level of support allocated to metropolitan areas was up to ten times higher than that received by rural territories.

Such disparities undermine the objective of territorial cohesion and create unequal development opportunities for European citizens solely on the basis of where they live. It also endangers the objective of territorial cohesion but also Europe's long-term competitiveness and resilience. By limiting the ability of rural communities to shape their own development, Europe risks leaving significant local knowledge, entrepreneurial capacity and innovation potential untapped at a time when every territory is needed to contribute to the Union's common objectives.

We firmly believe that participation, democracy and territorial cohesion should not be privileges reserved for urban communities. The right of citizens to shape the future of their local territories should apply equally to people living in villages, small towns and rural regions throughout the European Union.

For this reason, we respectfully call upon the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union to introduce the following amendment during the forthcoming legislative negotiations.





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Proposed amendment to Article 5

Sustainable urban and rural development

*As part of their territorial development, Member States shall support integrated urban development strategies, **as well as local development strategies**, which focus on sustainable development and tackle environmental, energy and climate challenges, in particular the fair transition towards a clean and climate-neutral and resilient economy by 2050, paying special attention to housing, poverty, cultural heritage and to harnessing the potential of digital technologies for innovation purposes and energy efficiency, to supporting the development of functional urban **and rural areas**, as well as supporting urban-rural linkages.*

Similarly, this must be specified in the **Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Social Fund as part of the National and Regional Partnership Plan set out in Regulation (EU) establishing conditions for the implementation of the Union support to quality employment, skills and social inclusion for the period from 2028 to 2034.**

Proposed amendment for article 7

*Member States shall ensure meaningful participation of the social partners and civil society organisations in the delivery of support for quality employment, education and skills and social inclusion policies in accordance with Article 6 of Regulation XX [NRP Plan]. **In order to achieve that, Member States shall, in particular, provide support for community-led local development referred to in Article 76 of [the NRP Regulation].***

These amendments would ensure that rural communities are granted the same rights and opportunities as urban communities to participate in decision-making processes and to influence the future development of their territories. It would also better reflect the principles of partnership, subsidiarity, territorial cohesion and democratic participation that have long been at the heart of the European project.

Europe's strength lies in its diversity and in the equal value of all its citizens and territories. A truly cohesive Europe cannot be built if the voices of rural citizens are not given the same recognition and influence as those of citizens living in urban areas.

We therefore respectfully urge the European institutions to ensure that the future Cohesion Policy framework provides balanced opportunities for both urban and rural territories and guarantees equal participation rights for all European citizens, regardless of where they live.

Yours faithfully,

Piotr Sadlocha

President of
European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD)

