



Strengthening rural businesses for a more competitive Europe: creating value through business support, territorial assets and social economy

17 September 2026

Draft agenda

Timing (CEST)	Agenda items
09.00 – 09.15	Welcome and introduction to the day > Outline of the event objectives and agenda Rural Pact Support Office > The economic contribution of rural areas: challenges and opportunities for Europe's competitiveness Expert presentation (tbc)
09.15 – 10.15	Setting the scene: EU initiatives supporting rural competitiveness Presentations of key EU policy frameworks and funding opportunities supporting rural competitiveness > The Competitiveness Compass and opportunities for rural businesses DG GROW/DG RTD, European Commission (tbc) > Cohesion Policy for economic transformation and competitiveness in rural areas Matthew Lowell, DG REGIO, European Commission > Bioeconomy, circular value chains and local value creation in rural areas Carl-Johan Linden, DG AGRI, European Commission > The Social Economy Action Plan: opportunities for rural business ecosystems and entrepreneurship Julien De Beys, DG EMPL, European Commission Questions & Answers
10.15 – 10.30	Virtual coffee break
10.30 – 12.00	Parallel thematic exchanges: learning from practice and exploring solutions Parallel break-out sessions to explore inspirational examples supporting rural competitiveness, experts' presentations and facilitated discussions among participants. Tentative break-out sessions:



> **Access to finance and businesses support for rural areas**

Discussions may cover microfinance, crowdfunding, community-based finance models, advisory services, business development support, market creation or expansion, and intermediary organisations that help rural businesses improve their competitiveness, resilience and growth potential.

> **Creating value from territorial assets and rural identity**

Discussions may cover initiatives linked to the bioeconomy, circular economy, forestry, renewable resources, rural manufacturing, crafts, sustainable tourism and local value chains. The session could also examine approaches to territorial branding, geographical indications, quality schemes and craft and industrial geographical indications that help rural businesses differentiate their products and services and strengthen their market position.

> **Social economy models for rural competitiveness**

Discussions may cover cooperatives, social enterprises, mutuals, community-owned businesses, energy communities and other collective approaches that support entrepreneurship, create employment, retain value locally and strengthen service provision and economic activity in rural areas.

12.00 – 12.10

Virtual coffee break

12.10 – 12.50

> **Report back and stakeholder panel discussion: what is needed to strengthen rural competitiveness and diversification?**

The panel will bring together representatives from SME support organisations, business networks, social economy actors, microfinance institutions and/or research organisations to reflect on the challenges and opportunities discussed during the webinar.

12.50 – 13.00

Closing remarks

- > Rural Pact Support Office
- > European Commission

