
Energy transition and climate neutrality

- **Purpose:** Support rural regions in adopting renewable energy and achieving climate neutrality.
- **Challenges:** High upfront costs, grid integration issues, and limited technical expertise in rural communities.
- **Relevant EU Policies and Initiatives:** EU Climate Law, Fit for 55 package, Renewable Energy Directive, Cohesion Policy funding for green projects.¹
- **Opportunities for Rural Actors:** Local cooperatives can influence energy planning, apply for EU grants, and participate in community energy projects.

MFF Insights²

- The MFF proposals invest heavily in renewables, grids, storage, and hydrogen, framing rural areas as key providers of renewable generation and carbon sinks.
- Community-led energy systems, farm-based bioenergy, and smart grids could be transformative for rural resilience and prosumer empowerment.
- However, the new Performance Framework is skewed toward supply-side capacity (MW installed, km of networks) rather than demand-side or distributional justice.
- Energy poverty, affordability, and behavioural change are largely absent from monitoring.
- These risks reinforcing rural inequalities if benefits of the transition are not fairly or justly shared.
- The opportunity lies in embedding indicators on affordability, energy poverty reduction, biodiversity impacts of renewables, and job transitions in energy-intensive rural industries.

Questions

1. Energy transition and climate neutrality

- 1.1. Rural areas are often energy producers but not energy beneficiaries — how do we flip this imbalance?
- 1.2. What radical partnerships (EU + regions + cooperatives) could make rural areas net-positive in the energy transition?
- 1.3. Can rural communities become the testing grounds for climate neutrality by 2040 — and if so, what's stopping them?

EU Budget specific

¹ Sinerma, J., & Pazos-Vidal, S. (2025). Analysis of EU policies around rural innovation, RURACTIVE Policy Brief. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15227863>

² AEIDL on behalf of RURACTIVE submission public consultation EU's next long-term budget (MFF) – implementing EU funding with Member States and regions - Feedback from: European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)

-
- a. How can rural areas move beyond their role as producers of renewable energy to become active beneficiaries of the transition ensuring affordable access, local ownership, and community resilience?
 - b. The EU performance framework track capacity and infrastructure but overlook fairness and inclusion. How could we integrate indicators that reflect affordability, energy poverty reduction, and fair job transitions in rural territories?