

## DESIRA Declaration: Together for a more inclusive and sustainable rural digitalisation in Europe

We, 120 participants from 20 countries, met for DESIRA Final Conference in Brussels from the 26<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, gathering citizens, researchers, policymakers, European Union institutions, representatives of civil society organisations and private companies.

We understand that **digitalisation generates socio-economic impacts** in rural areas, agriculture and forestry and we pursue to improve the capacity of rural stakeholders, farmers and foresters to **respond to the challenges that digitalisation entails**.

We recognise that digitalisation is an integral part of a broader “twin” transition that the European Union has committed to pursuing in line with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. We recognise that achieving a **sustainable and inclusive digital transformation** requires a comprehensive understanding of the intended and unintended benefits, challenges and obstacles associated with digital technologies.

We emphasise the importance of establishing sustainable **rural digitalisation as a strategic objective**, with priorities based around **rural issues** and set through **community engagement**. This requires a **coordinated strengthening** of policies related to rural digitalisation, identifying responsible parties for implementation, assessing available resources, and determining how they should be allocated. Furthermore, it is necessary to expand the scope of digitalisation **beyond agriculture** and extend it beyond the timeframe of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Additionally, policymaking for rural digitalisation requires an **evaluation of the current status of digitalisation** in rural areas and to consider **adopting flexible policy approaches** that can accommodate rapid changes as well as **diverse policy pathways** that account for contextual differences across rural areas.

The **European Commission should provide instruments** to make rural digitalisation policies effective and therefore, to enable for alignment, monitoring and accountability of policies in the Member States.

We endorse **future policies to provide directionality** to the technological pathways and to integrate them with the specificity of the contexts where technology applies, rather than fostering only market-based digitalisation. This implies the adoption of **Responsible and Research Innovation principles** into the digitalisation strategies.



## DESIRA Declaration: Together for a more inclusive and sustainable rural digitalisation in Europe

As a result, we propose ten pathways to support policies towards more inclusive and sustainable rural digitalisation in Europe that are fully aligned with the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas:

### **1. To ensure accessible, high-quality connectivity and digital infrastructures in rural areas.**

It means an affordable, reliable, stable connectivity that presents low latency and redundancy. Physical and backbone infrastructure are required to fully benefit from agriculture/forestry 4.0 and to move towards digital sovereignty.

### **2. To increase interoperability of digital technologies for rural areas, forestry and farming.**

Achieving real interoperability of digital systems needs to tackle legal, organisational, data structure/semantic and technical elements.

### **3. To improve rural, forest and agriculture data governance and data management following ethical principles.**

There should be clarity about how data is collected, managed, processed, and owned to fully benefit from the use of data.

### **4. To streamline digital education and competencies adapted to different groups in rural areas.**

Digital strategies should tackle all three components of the digital divide: infrastructure, skills, and uptake.

### **5. To promote innovation and digital ecosystems in rural areas.**

Knowledge and innovation can contribute to achieving the goals of the LTVRA and the European Green Deal -capitalising on localised Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems- and generate new business opportunities.

### **6. To provide easy-to-use and affordable digital services to rural communities, farming and forestry.**

Digital services should be more transparent and user-friendly to increase their adoption. Digital services should be co-designed with rural users and pass rural proofing.

### **7. To mainstream digital solutions to support service provision and administrative routines in rural areas.**

Digital technologies can support improving and enhancing -not replacing- the quality of the service provision in rural areas.

### **8. To support data-driven decisions in farming, forestry and rural areas.**

This should be the last step of the digital transformation, as it can only happen when there are advanced digital skills, high-quality connectivity and full trust in the digital ecosystem.

### **9. To monitor rural digitalisation policy's progress, impacts and efficiency.**

Making disaggregated rural digitalisation data available and establishing mechanisms to push Member States to fulfil the objectives related to rural digitalisation.

### **10. To raise awareness about the value of rural areas and to foster public engagement in rural issues.**

Society at large should recognise the goods and services provided by rural areas, the inter-dependency of all territories and the role of rural areas in the EU's green and digital transitions.



## DESIRA Declaration: Together for a more inclusive and sustainable rural digitalisation in Europe

Signatories commit to supporting rural areas in their transition to digitalisation and:

- To **generate research-based evidence** about rural digitalisation and to make it accessible.
- To **share available resources** to improve rural digitalisation, including funding and supporting instruments, at regional and local levels.
- To work on **reducing the rural digital divide** (enhancing interoperability of digital systems; generating and sharing accessible and safe data and tools; contributing with resources to improve digital education; supporting ethical development of technologies; etc.).
- To **strengthen collaboration and knowledge exchange** among researchers and rural stakeholders.
- To **engage in transdisciplinary and collaborative projects** regarding rural digitalisation.
- To **support and disseminate rural digitalisation projects** that follow **Responsible Research and Innovation** approach.

*In Brussels, 27th of April 2023,*

**If you want to endorse this Declaration, please visit: [Sign the DESIRA Declaration for a digital future! \(google.com\)](https://www.google.com)**

