

## **Declaration**

### **For the Future of Hungary's Rural Areas and LEADER Beyond 2028**

We, the participants of the “Rural Development in Cohesion Policy 2028–2034” LEADER Workshop — professional leaders of 40 Hungarian Local Action Groups — adopt the following joint declaration in Kakucs on 23 September 2026:

We welcome Hungary's accession to the EU Rural Pact and stand ready to contribute our professional expertise, local experience and community connections to putting Hungary's political commitment into practice.

We firmly believe that the future of Hungary's rural areas cannot be shaped solely through centrally managed programmes and sectoral measures. Successful rural development requires genuine partnership, opportunities for local decision-making, recognition of the knowledge accumulated within local communities, and predictable funding.

Rural areas are equal partners in national development. In line with the European Union's policy framework, “A Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas”, extending to 2040, we propose a rural policy for Hungary that builds on communities' own strengths and resources, thereby upholding the European “Right to Stay”, which guarantees the opportunity to thrive in one's home region.

To this end, we set out the following seven shared objectives and policy proposals.

#### **1. Rural communities must have a voice in decision-making**

We call for a broad public consultation process involving rural communities, resulting in the establishment of a permanent, bottom-up Hungarian Rural Pact — with the proposed domestic name “Forum for Rural Public Consultation” — in the spirit of the EU Rural Pact. The Forum should bring together representatives of the relevant ministries, other government bodies, Local Action Groups, local authorities, civil society organisations, relevant academic disciplines, local businesses, young people and other rural communities. Its role should be to give rural Hungary a direct voice, effectively promoting synergies between EU funds and the application of rural proofing across all sectoral policies.

Dialogue must be regular, transparent and documented, and its recommendations must be reflected in planning for the 2028–2034 period, government decisions and development programmes.

#### **2. Subsidiarity and genuine local decision-making must be upheld**

Decisions affecting rural areas must be taken locally, where the necessary knowledge, responsibility and community mandate are available. It is time to place trust in rural communities, local knowledge and local problem-solving capacity. Local Action Groups must be granted genuine decision-making powers in developing local development strategies, defining funding objectives and selecting local projects. At central level, the substance of

local decisions should be subject to review only in terms of legality, compliance and alignment with regional and national strategies; any assessment of their justification must require evidence of a public consultation process.

Particular attention must be paid to enabling young people to stay in or return to their home regions, generational renewal, rural businesses, opportunities for women, an ageing society, and the differing needs of small villages, areas characterised by scattered farmsteads, small towns and urban regions. Development measures must make rural living more attractive to young people.

### **3. Local Action Groups must be recognised as strategic development partners**

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are territorial partnerships with local knowledge, experience in community organising, networks of contacts, development expertise and experience in international cooperation. They can therefore participate as strategic partners in the planning, implementation and evaluation of National and Regional Partnership Plans, rural development programmes and territorial interventions.

We, the signatories of this declaration, offer our experience, knowledge, local networks, cooperation and support to ensure that active members of our Local Action Groups and all local residents are well prepared to participate in consultation processes, future strategic planning and implementation. Above all, we seek to help LEADER return to a local development process based on its seven fundamental principles, in the interests of a successful future for rural areas.

### **4. Dedicated and predictable funding must be secured for LEADER**

We call for the Single National Plan currently under preparation to retain dedicated funding for LEADER sufficient to implement local interventions. The level of funding for LAGs must reflect the needs of their territories and their actual operating costs.

### **5. Local development financed from multiple funds**

Functional areas should increasingly become the basic units of development, through urban–rural cooperation, building on economic, transport and service links between settlements. We share the European view that the challenges of rural life cannot be divided into separate agricultural, economic, social, environmental or infrastructure sectors.

We support the wider application of community-led local development in Hungary, an integrated national programme and a multisectoral approach.

### **6. Simpler, more proportionate and more predictable rules are needed**

LEADER must operate on the basis of trust, proportionality and a results-oriented approach. We call for simplified administration, a unified digital system for administrative procedures, the elimination of duplicate checks, adherence to decision-making and payment deadlines, and the exclusion of retroactive interpretations of rules.

## **7. Rural considerations must be incorporated into every policy, and commitments must be accompanied by an implementation plan, measurable objectives and public evaluation**

We call for the mandatory and transparent introduction of rural impact assessment, or rural proofing, in Hungary. Before new legislation, strategies and funding programmes are adopted, their effects on rural residents, services, businesses, local authorities and communities must be assessed.

Local Action Groups and other rural stakeholders must be involved in these assessments from the early stages of planning. The findings must be supported by territorial data and made publicly accessible. Regular staff training, the sharing of experience, the involvement of young professionals, and support for domestic and international networking are needed to ensure that Local Action Groups can serve as well-prepared local development bodies within the future institutional structure for rural development.

We ask that the Government's political commitments under the EU Rural Pact be accompanied by a public implementation plan with clearly defined responsibilities, deadlines, measurable outcome targets and adequate financial resources. All related activities must ensure broad public participation that amplifies local voices, begins at local level, and is diverse and democratic.

### **Concluding commitment**

Those adopting this declaration stand ready to cooperate closely and on a representative basis with government, local government, professional and European Union partners to ensure that the proposals above are incorporated into Hungary's long-term rural development strategy and its National and Regional Partnership Plan for 2028–2034.

We commit to strengthening participation, cooperation, innovation, knowledge sharing and local communities' assumption of responsibility within our own organisations and territories, thereby effectively increasing rural resilience.

We call on, and offer our support to, the Government of Hungary, the institutions of the European Union and all relevant policy stakeholders to recognise rural communities as partners and responsible contributors to shaping the future of Europe and Hungary, alongside their role as beneficiaries of development measures.

Kakucs, 23 September 2026

The participants of the "Rural Development in Cohesion Policy 2028–2034" LEADER Workshop held on 23 September 2026, as listed on the attached attendance sheet.