Press Release - Building a new path to reclaim and renew Europe's rural communities

For immediate release

Amsterdam, October 19, 2026 – Over the past decade, European rural communities have navigated severe demographic shifts and housing pressures that have triggered a rural housing affordability crisis which pushes local youth and vulnerable residents out of their homes. To support rural areas in revitalising their communities, the **EU funded Ruralise project** will make housing across Europe more affordable, accessible, and climate resilient. This will be done through rigorous data collection and analysis combined with hands-on community action in Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Norway, to document and address barriers within rural housing and across rural communities.

Persistent youth outmigration and lower birth rates have accelerated population decline and aging across non-metropolitan regions, leaving rural spaces vacant or deteriorating due to shrinking income or human resources to maintain communities. Concurrently, the post-pandemic rise in remote work, combined with a surge in holiday home acquisitions and short-term rentals, has inflated property prices and tightened rental supply in attractive countryside destinations. These dynamics have triggered a rural housing affordability crisis that pushes local youth and vulnerable residents out of their homes.

Despite these systemic barriers, the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas recognises that these regions possess underutilised social, cultural, and ecological capital essential to achieving the continent's green and digital transition goals. The Ruralise project seeks to address this gap through rigorous data collection and analysis combined with hands-on community action in six European pilots (Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Norway), supporting rural areas in revitalising their communities, and making rural housing across Europe more affordable, accessible, and climate resilient. In doing so, housing regeneration is positioned as a lever for social, economic, and environmental transformation across rural Europe.

The main output of Ruralise will be an interactive online platform, the Ruralise Studio, featuring a comprehensive knowledge centre and decision-making tool. It will bring together various data, community insights, and tested solutions to assist local governments, planners, developers, and residents in making informed choices about how to improve rural housing based on specific community characteristics and needs, making these areas more affordable, attractive, productive, and competitive.

"Improving rural housing is not just about increasing the availability or quality of residential buildings in rural areas. It is fundamentally about ensuring the future of rural communities and

their capacity to remain and grow into places where people can live, work, belong, and thrive. Ruralise therefore responds to this challenge by bringing together housing and energy data, local knowledge on regenerative housing, and community-led innovation to co-create practical solutions for more affordable, inclusive, and climate-resilient rural housing that maintains and improves rural communities. In doing so, we aim to turn rural housing challenges into opportunities for regeneration, creating housing affordability and energy efficiency solutions that can be tested locally and replicated across Europe."

- *Mara Oprea, Project Coordinator of Ruralise and Senior Expert at Institute For European Energy And Climate Policy (IEECP)*

By combining property market and demographic trend analysis with participatory research, community-led development, and public science frameworks to co-design solutions to increase the affordability of housing alongside rural residents, Ruralise will bridge systemic market intelligence with hands-on local engagement. The project will therefore align with the EU Renovation Wave by extending its focus specifically to vulnerable and overlooked rural districts and transforming aging buildings into energy-efficient, decarbonized, and climate-resilient ones. The project will also align the Green Deal's Just Transition Principle by reducing energy demand, ensuring that the transition to a green economy is socially fair and leaves no community behind.

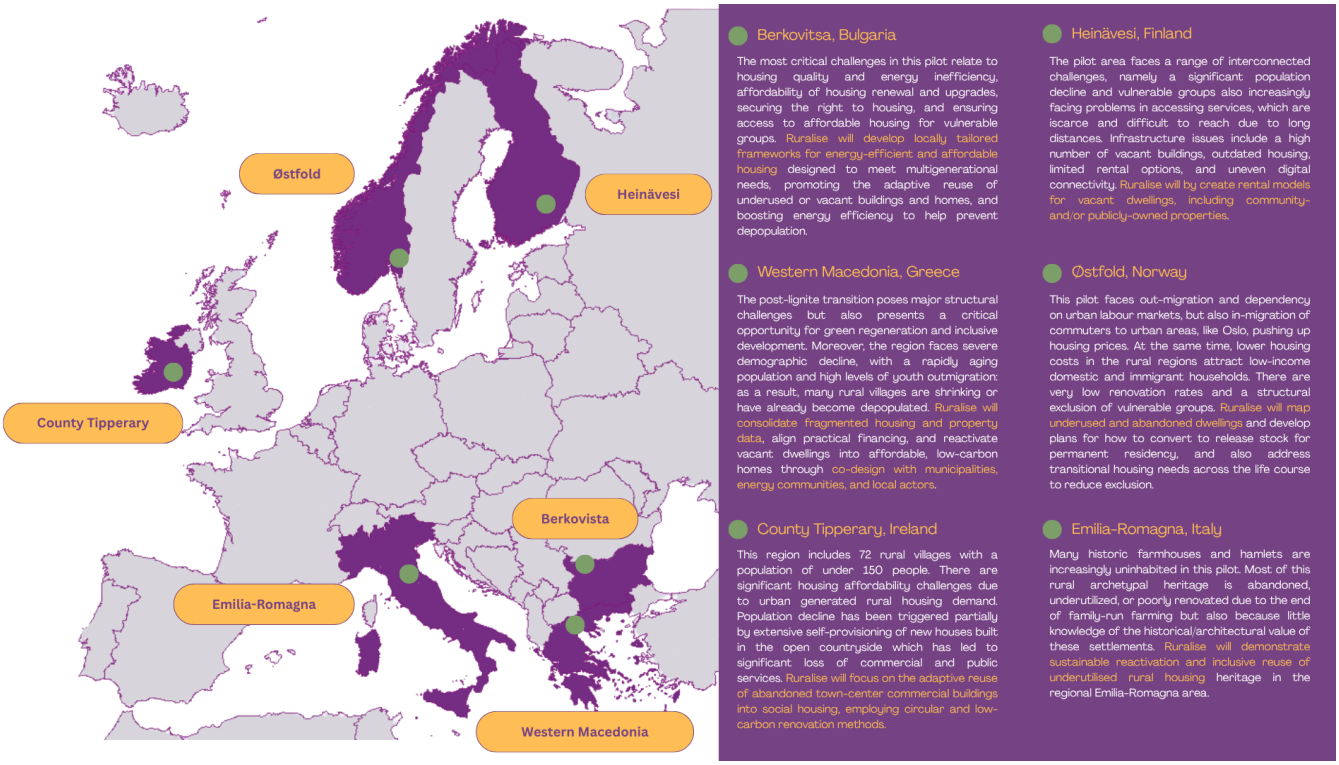
More information can be found on the project webpage: https://ieecp.org/projects/ruralise/

PRESS CONTACT

Axelle Gallerand
Institute For European Energy And Climate Policy (IEECP)
Communication Expert
Email : axelle@ieecp.org
Mobile : +33 6 40 60 66 73

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Ruralise aims to make rural housing more affordable, accessible, and resilient by testing local solutions by running six pilot projects across Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Norway.



ABOUT RURALISE

Ruralise stands for *Revitalising Rural Communities*.

Start-end date: September 2026 - November 2029

Partners: IEECP - Institute For European Energy And Climate Policy, ECOLISE - European Network for Community-Led Initiatives, Mapping for Change, University College Dublin, University of Ferrara, The University of Manchester, Polimi – Politecnico Milano, Savills – Global Real Estate Services, UPRC - University of Piraeus Research Center, Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia, NTNU Samfunnsforskning AS - NTNU Social Research, Øsfold County, University of Eastern Finland - Ita-Suomen yliopisto, CAC – Centre for Sustainable Housing, Municipality of Heinävesi, GAL Delta Duemila, Habitat for Humanity Bulgaria.

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REVITALISING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Ruralise

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Ruralise Project

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