



Harnessing skills in rural areas: the role of local and regional governments

Wednesday, 08 November 2023

09:30-14:00

Hybrid event:

Manos Conference Centre - Chaussée de Charleroi, 135, Room Grand Place

and via Zoom

Welcome and introduction

Welcome and presentation of the agenda by the moderator Michael Schmitz, Chair of CEMR expert group on territorial cohesion.

Alina Apostol, CEMR Spokesperson on Rural Development and Mayor of Ciortesteți, Iași County, emphasized the importance of ensuring that opportunities for rural areas are the same as those in urban areas. She highlighted the challenges local producers face in selling their products and suggested the need for a rule for supermarkets to promote local products, encouraging local producers. Alina also mentioned the support provided by local authorities in Romania advising on application for financial resources.

Harnessing skills in rural areas: the role of local and regional governments

This panel focused on existing initiatives. The moderator stressed the difficulties faced in harnessing skills in rural areas where retaining talent can be a challenge and young people usually move out.

- **Presentation by Margaux Tharoux, OECD Junior Policy Analyst:**

Margaux shared insights from the OECD's work on rethinking regional attractiveness. The OECD focused its work on three target groups: Talent, Investors, and Visitors.

The OECD conducted statistical analysis to measure regional attractiveness across 14 dimensions in six domains: Economic Attractiveness, Visitor Appeal, Land and Housing, Resident Well-being, Connectedness and Natural Environment. The methodology has so far been applied in 30 regions to help policymakers identify priority areas for action.

The case of Liguria, Italy was briefly presented as example. Margaux highlighted its strengths, such as digitalisation, and weaknesses such as access to housing, according to the OECD assessment.

Key factors for talent attractiveness include broadband internet access, affordable housing, and an international student presence. More detailed results can be found in the recent report : "[Rethinking Regional Attractiveness in the New Global Environment](#)".

Margaux also emphasized the cross-sectoral nature of attractiveness and the role regions can play in coordinating local stakeholders and exploiting synergies, which is discussed in more detailed in the link she provided: <https://www.oecd.org/fr/regional/globalisation.htm>.

- **Presentation by Gianluca Pastorelli, President of Diosis network:**

Gianluca Pastorelli mentioned the European Commission's Social Economy Action Plan, which was published in 2021 and supports social economy organizations, whether for-profit or non-profit, as long as their mission is social and the profit are reinvested in the company. He highlighted the increasing trend of young and female entrepreneurship in rural areas, which extends beyond farming to sectors such as sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, renewable energy, healthcare, and retail.

Gianluca emphasized that access to finance is important but not sufficient; the motivation to stay in rural areas is equally vital. He cited examples from Italy, Montenegro and Albania to illustrate this point, where there are job opportunities, but many young people are still not motivated to stay.

- **Presentation by Marie Laurent, Project Manager, Euromontana:**

Marie Laurent drew parallels between mountain and rural areas. Although they are heterogeneous, they share many similarities and challenges.

Marie shared findings from the Euromontana study '[Being young in a mountain area: Mountain youth's needs in 2022 and aspirations for the future](#)' ([key findings](#)). The study explored the attractiveness of mountain areas for 1134 young people between 18 and 29 years old from 18 countries on the European continent, living in and out mountains. 66% of the ones living in mountains declared wanting to stay and 46% of young people not living in mountains would like to live there in the future. The most important factors for youth attractiveness are the quality of life and the proximity with nature.

According to the study, the ideal vision young people have for mountain areas by 2040 emphasises diversification of jobs and activities and environmental concerns, making territories resilient to environment issues and economically sustainable. Euromontana supports this sustainable development through diversifying activities, including traditional sectors, such as farming activities, as much as new emerging activities and initiatives combining both. Euromontana made recommendations on this in its [contribution to the DG REGIO consultation on brain drain](#) last year. One idea shared was implementing rural internship programs to attract young people in a diverse range of domains. [An example of an Erasmus programme in rural areas in Spain can be found on Euromontana's website.](#)

Marie highlighted the French and Italian concern about tourism's environmental impact, particularly in the Alps. She mentioned [Euromontana's upcoming conference 'Skills for Mountains in Transitions' to be held on November 21](#) that will address skills needed for sustainable development in mountain areas.

- **Gary Robinson, Councillor, Shetland Islands Council, CEMR spokesperson for inclusive society:**

Gary Robinson discussed the transition from the gas and oil industries to renewable energy in the Shetland Islands which have been generating many opportunities. He mentioned the growth of the cruise sector and the challenges related to housing and accommodation.

European Rural Areas in 2040

This session explored the policies and initiatives taken in the framework of the [Long Term Vision for Rural Areas](#) and next steps for future of European rural areas.

- **Isabel Bombal, Director General for Rural Development, Innovation and Agrifood training, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Spanish Presidency of the EU Council.**

Isabel Bombal provided insights on the European Union's Rural Pact and highlighted the opportunities it presents. She mentioned the High-level Rural Policy Forum held in Sigüenza (Spain) last September, where

ministries and stakeholders actively engaged to address main challenges in rural areas, such as women, youth, connectivity and administrative obstacles. The Spanish Presidency of the EU Council has worked on Council Conclusions on Long Term Vision for Rural areas which are expected to be adopted on the occasion of the AGRIFISH Council meeting of 20 November. This Council conclusions will provide political guidance and strategic orientations on the next steps for developing EU's rural areas further.

- **Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development**

The Deputy Director General highlighted the significance of addressing challenges in rural areas, including demographic changes and democratic representation. He stressed the need to provide rural areas with a sense of inclusion, emphasizing that the long-term vision aims to ensure they are not left behind.

Regarding skills and talents in rural areas, he mentioned the rapid transformations due to green and digital transitions and the challenges of maintaining existing skills while developing new ones. He also emphasized the importance of preserving traditional skills to protect the rural landscape.

Finally, the speaker discussed the importance of mobilizing resources and creating platforms to facilitate collaboration among different actors in rural areas. There is a need for a cohesive and coherent approach to rural development, encouraging stakeholders to work together towards common objectives.

- **Radim Sršeň, Deputy Minister of Regional Development of the Czech Republic, Mayor of the Municipality of Dolni Studenky, Member of the European Committee of the Region**

Radim Sršeň stressed the need for a holistic approach to rural development, emphasizing a focus on quality of life and leveraging crises as opportunities. He highlighted the importance of using technology and innovative approaches to enhance social relations and create economic opportunities. He also discussed the significance of political leadership and collaboration to improve rural areas' quality of life and retain the population.

- **Comments from the audience**

Participants emphasized the multifaceted nature of motivation for people to stay or return to rural areas, such as economic, social, and welfare-related motivations, as well as the attachment to rural values. Education's alignment with the labour market was highlighted as important, along with individuals who move to rural areas for environmental and lifestyle reasons. The potential of retired people and the "silver economy" was mentioned, calling for appropriate policies to leverage this trend.

A representative from the Austrian Association of Municipalities highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by small and medium-sized municipalities in Austria. She mentioned that housing has become a unifying challenge for both cities and rural areas. Education was discussed as a crucial factor in attracting skills to rural regions. The need for better consideration of rural areas' challenges in European policies, including the provision of public services, was emphasized, especially in the context of different challenges faced by rural and urban areas.

Towards European Parliament elections in 2024: what role for rural municipalities and stakeholders in rural areas?

There were two group discussions about the topic in the agenda, one in person and one online. Participants shared their insights about the most striking challenges in rural areas and the most inspiring solutions addressed by the event speakers. In the group discussions, they also recommended actions and policies for the local/regional level, national level, and European level.

Wrap up and conclusions.

The two groups briefly presented the results of their discussions. Among the challenges raised were the need

for more funding and the demographic changes happening in rural areas. The inspiring solutions included the green transition, such as in the case of Shetland Islands, and cooperation between different areas and levels.

Finally, CEMR Secretariat informed that the event was a first step to the launch of the impact community on territorial cohesion, which aims to engage a broader and more diverse range of stakeholders with CEMR work, such as academics and NGOs.

Annex and additional information

- [The EU Rural Vision](#)
- [Rural Pact Platform](#)