

## Holapueblo: connecting people with rural municipalities to revitalise depopulated areas in Spain

### SUMMARY

Holapueblo is a collaborative initiative that tackles rural depopulation in Spain by connecting entrepreneurs, families, remote workers who want to start a new life in the countryside with rural municipalities facing demographic decline. The programme runs an annual national call, matches selected candidates with participating villages, and provides personalised mentoring, technical support for entrepreneurial projects and accompaniment throughout relocation and integration.

Since its launch, it has received more than 15 000 applications, engaged over 130 municipalities across Spain, and supported more than 150 families to relocate to rural areas.



### CONTEXT

Rural Spain has faced decades of demographic decline. Large parts of the interior have lost younger residents to urban centres, leaving villages with ageing populations, closed services and declining local economies. Many municipalities have fewer inhabitants today than at any point in their recorded history. At the same time, a growing number of urban dwellers express interest in moving to the countryside in search of more affordable housing, a different pace of life or the chance to launch a project of their own.

The challenge is bridging the gap: matching the right people with the right places, preparing both sides for the move, and ensuring that newcomers can build a livelihood and become part of the community over the long term.



### OBJECTIVES

- > Attract and support new residents (entrepreneurs, families and remote workers) willing to relocate to rural areas;
- > Foster local economic development through entrepreneurship and job creation in host municipalities;
- > Strengthen community integration and long-term settlement so that newcomers stay and become active members of the village.



**Themes:** Social inclusion, Entrepreneurship, Demography, Rural revitalisation

**Country:** Spain

**Organisations:**

- > AlmaNatura, non-governmental / civil society organisation
- > Redeia, private business
- > IKEA Spain, private business

**Start & end date:** 10/2019 - ongoing

**Budget:** EUR 100 000 per year (approximately)

**Funding sources:**

- > Private sector contributions

**Website:** <https://www.holapueblo.com>

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## ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The Holapueblo initiative has been running annually since October 2019, led by AlmaNatura and co-financed by Redeia and IKEA Spain. AlmaNatura coordinates the programme and provides the **methodology and field expertise**, while the corporate partners contribute **funding, visibility and complementary resources**. Such resources can include furniture and equipment support from IKEA to winning projects of the 'Reactivating Projects' call. In addition, Holapueblo provides specific support to participating municipalities for reactivating disused public spaces.

Municipalities **apply each year to host new residents** and commit to providing housing options and local accompaniment.

Implementation is structured around an annual cycle with four main components:

- > **National call for participants:** AlmaNatura issues an open call inviting individuals and families, particularly those with an entrepreneurial idea or a remote-work profile, to apply if they are considering moving to a rural area;
- > **Matching candidates with municipalities:** a selection process pairs the most suitable applicants with participating villages, based on the needs of the territory, the skills and project of the candidates, and practical conditions such as housing and services;
- > **Mentoring and technical support:** selected candidates receive personalised mentoring to develop their entrepreneurial project, including business viability advice, training and connection to local resources;
- > **Relocation and integration accompaniment:** the programme follows new residents through the move and the first months of settling in, working alongside municipalities to help newcomers build links with the existing community and reduce the risk of early departures.



## RESULTS

- > **More than 15 000 applications** received from individuals and families interested in moving to rural areas.
- > **Over 130 municipalities** across Spain have joined the programme as host territories.
- > **More than 150 families** have successfully relocated to rural areas through the programme.
- > Creation of **new businesses and services** in host communities, ranging from small workshops and food producers to remote-work-based ventures, contributing to local economic diversification.
- > Positive impact on **local economies and social cohesion**, with newcomers reinforcing services such as schools, supporting demographic renewal and bringing new dynamism to host villages.



## SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Match people and places carefully:** long-term settlement depends on a good fit between the candidate's profile and project and the realities of the host municipality, one-size-fits-all matching fails.
- > **Accompany the whole journey, not just the move:** personalised mentoring before, during and after the relocation is decisive to prevent early drop-out and turn arrivals into lasting residents.
- > **Public-private partnerships add scale:** combining a specialist civil-society implementer (AlmaNatura, social innovation organisation) with corporate partners (Redeia, IKEA Spain) brings stable funding, visibility and complementary in-kind resources that a single actor could not provide.
- > **Engage municipalities as active partners:** villages that prepare housing, services and a local welcoming culture in advance attract and retain newcomers far more effectively than those that simply put themselves on a list.
- > **Frame repopulation as opportunity, not rescue:** a positive narrative building a project and a life in the countryside mobilises both candidates and municipalities far more than a deficit-focused discourse on depopulation.



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