



Addressing brain drain in mountain areas

Tools to reverse the trend and boost territorial attractiveness



EUROMONTANA'S RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON BRAIN DRAIN – MITIGATING CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH POPULATION DECLINE

JUNE 2022

Summary of recommendations

- 1. General recommendations:** to better cope with rural brain drain, Euromontana calls on the European Commission to:
 - ▶ Analyse demographic challenges, including brain drain, at **infra-regional level, below the NUTS3 level**.
 - ▶ **Provide updated data of post-COVID-19 populations flows in the European Union**.
 - ▶ Encourage the **exchange of experiences** between rural, mountainous, sparsely populated and remote areas on the issue of brain drain with the aim of exchanging good practices and replicating existing successful solutions. This exchange of knowledge could take place in the framework of:
 - **the Rural Pact Community**.
 - **the Interreg Europe programme**.
- 2. Diversifying the economy:** to create more diversified employment opportunities in mountain areas, Euromontana invites:
 - ▶ The European Commission to pay attention that the **new Operational Programmes not yet adopted for 2021-2027 open economic opportunities for the most rural and mountainous areas of the regions**. Many promising sectors, such as the bioeconomy, the circular economy or renewable energies, can contribute to create qualified jobs and attract young talents.
 - ▶ Regions facing a brain drain to work in partnership with private actors to encourage job creation and the return of qualified young people through comprehensive support mechanisms.
- 3. Promoting existing opportunities and supporting professional integration:** Euromontana recommends using the regional policy to:
 - ▶ Promote existing opportunities and support professional integration of skilled workers using the European Cohesion Policy funds, especially the European Social Fund.
 - ▶ Create subsidised contracts in rural areas targeting young skilled workers to encourage them to settle in these territories.
- 4. Attracting young graduates back after their studies and taking into account their life cycle:** in the framework of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, Euromontana:
 - ▶ calls on the European Commission and public authorities at national, regional and local level to **change the narrative about rural mountainous areas**, emphasising the benefits they offer in terms of quality of life, including among university students.
 - ▶ Invites the European Commission to deploy effort to **bring universities in the Rural Pact Community** in order to encourage them to take action for rural territories.
 - ▶ Encourages local authorities to facilitate the emergence of **“diaspora” networks** to maintain a link with those who left rural areas and provide them with **information that might trigger a return** to the place of origin.

Euromontana also calls on Universities to:

 - ▶ **Create incentives for their graduates to envisage working in rural areas**, for instance by creating rural internships programmes, by including in their career orientation courses some information about employment in the surrounding rural areas.
 - ▶ Create, where there is potential and demand, **decentralised campus in mountain areas** offering training opportunities in key sectors.
- 5. Supporting rural entrepreneurship:** to better support entrepreneurship, Euromontana:
 - ▶ Calls on the European Commission to **ensure that rural stakeholders are well-informed on the funds available to support entrepreneurship**, especially through the rural revitalisation platform.
 - ▶ Invites concerned regions to create **one-stop-shops** at regional level and to develop support mechanisms for rural entrepreneurs.
- 6. Tapping into the potential of teleworking:** teleworking can encourage some skilled workers to work in rural mountainous areas. Therefore, Euromontana:
 - ▶ Calls on the European Commission to **maintain the digitalisation efforts in rural Europe** and especially through the support provided by the Broadband Competence Office.
 - ▶ Invites concerned territories to use the Cohesion Policy funds to finance the creation of well-equipped coworking places and third places, as part of a global territorial attractiveness strategy.

Demographic change and population flow in mountain areas

Demographic change affects many mountain territories in Europe. This trend, which is foreseen to continue in the coming decades, has well-known cyclical effects of **loss of attractiveness, loss of services and declining quality of life**. Demographic change in mountain areas results from the combination of multiple factors. **General population shrinkage, ageing, youth migration and land abandonment drive demographic decline** and loss of territorial attractiveness.

While some regions have experienced a structural decline in population for several decades, in other territories population shrinkage results from recent population transfers from rural areas to intermediate areas. 28% of the EU population was living in rural areas back in 2015, this proportion falls to 21% in 2020 while 32% of the EU population was living in intermediate areas in 2015 for 39% in 2020¹. While the urban population so far remains unchanged (40% of the EU population), **people tend to leave rural territories for semi-urban ones**, offering more services. Population loss in rural areas puts some **new mountainous areas at risk of becoming sparsely populated** in the future, in particular in the mountainous areas of Romania, Spain, Greece and France².

The COVID-19 pandemic raised expectations of a population flow from urban to rural areas, especially among workers with families. Yet, so far, it is difficult to identify the territories that could benefit from a "return to the countryside" trend and there is a risk that peri-urban territories will capture most of this positive demographic change than more remote areas.

The demographic decline and outmigration of young people from the rural mountains inevitably leads to an **ageing of the population**. Rural, remote, mountainous, and sparsely population areas record high concentrations of people over 65. Mountainous regions such as Evrytania (Greece), Ourense (Spain), Creuse (France) and Alto Tâmega (Portugal), are among the most ageing territories in Europe, with respectively 36.7%, 31.4%, 30.3% and 30.3% of their population being over 65³.

In the future, it is foreseen that most mountainous countries will be affected by population shrinkage. The Joint Research Centre recently highlighted that **population decline in mountain areas is foreseen to affect both children (<15) and the working age population (15-64)**. The trend will in particular be important in Southern countries (Portugal, Croatia, Greece, Southern Italy and Sardinia), Slovakia, at the border between Slovenia and Austria, in the Southern Carpathians in Romania and the Rhodopes mountains in Bulgaria. In other countries, the share of young people below 15 is foreseen to decrease in mountain areas, especially in Portugal, Slovakia, Poland, Spain and Romania.

Among European mountainous countries, France is the only one with an expected positive trend in terms of children and working age population living in the mountains by 2050. Yet, if 18% of the population was under 15 in the French Alps in 2010, **population statistics must be observed below the NUTS3 level**. The Hautes-Alpes country for instance records a higher rate of older adults than other French alpine territories because young generations leave the area to go to study or work in large cities such as Grenoble, Annecy or Chambéry⁴. Thus, some mountain cities remain attractive while the surrounding rural or remote mountain areas keep declining.

¹ European Commission, [Report on the Impact of Demographic Change in the EU](#), 2020

² ESPON BRIDGES - Territories with Geographical Specificities, [Final report](#), 2019

³ Eurostat, [Ageing Europe — Looking at the lives of older people in the EU](#), 2020

⁴ Alpine Convention, [Demographic changes in the Alps : report on the state of the Alps](#), 2015



State of play of the lack of employment opportunities in mountain areas

The **lack of employment opportunities for skilled young people is the main driver of youth brain drain** in mountain areas. In the framework of the European Year of Youth, Euromontana published in 2022 a European-wide report on mountain youth⁵. Based on 1134 contributions of mountain young people between 18- and 29-years old from 18 EU and non-EU countries, the report shows that young people want to live in mountain areas, but that territorial realities in terms of education and employment force them to migrate to other regions. **Mountain youth want to stay living and working in mountain areas in the future (66%)**, and especially value the quality of life and the proximity to nature they find in the mountains. Yet, **young people deplore the poor dynamism of these regions and the lack of employment opportunities** and mobility services. These reasons for living the mountains are the same as in 2012, when the previous Euromontana survey on mountain youth was conducted, showing no improvement in policy efforts to create jobs and limit brain-drain in 10 years.

The recent Riabitare l'Italia's study on youth living in Italian inner areas⁶ found similar results to those of Euromontana. On the 1.008 young people living in inner areas, 67% want to stay living there, especially for the proximity with environment and the good quality of life. Among those wishing to leave, **84% mention the lack of adequate employment and education opportunities as the main reason**.

Likewise, the Alpine Convention observes in the Italian Alps “a constant decrease in the share of people aged 15-64, due especially to a massive process of mountain exodus (depopulation) in order to pursue better job opportunities or studies”⁷.

The potential of Smart specialisation strategies to fight brain drain

The European Commission intends **fighting brain drain using Cohesion Policy** instruments, including the **new Operational Programmes** and **Smart specialisation strategies**. Smart specialisation strategies are place-based approaches taking advantage of each region's assets and involving a wide range of stakeholders to boost innovation.

Most mountainous regions in the European Union have already adopted a Smart specialisation strategy, often **taking advantage of traditional sectors** like tourism and agri-food production or of promising ones such as circular economy and sustainable energy. The impact of some Smart specialisation strategies was found to be very positive for mountain territories. The Aosta Valley's Smart specialisation strategy for instance focuses on three pillars “Excellent Mountain” (focus on quality), “Smart Mountain” (focus on ICT networks) and “Green Mountain (focus on sustainability) and was considered positive for the diversification of the local economy⁸.

⁵ Euromontana, [Being young in a mountain area: mountain youth's needs in 2022 and aspirations for the future](#), 2022

⁶ Riabitare l'Italia, [Giovani dentro : uno sguardo alle prospettive e ai bisogni dei giovani delle aree interne](#), 2022

⁷ Alpine Convention, [Demographic changes in the Alps : report on the state of the Alps](#), 2015

⁸ Wymann von Dach, S. & Ruiz Peyré, F., eds. 2020. [Vibrant mountain communities. Regional development in mountains: Realizing potentials, tackling disparities](#). Bern, Switzerland, Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, with Bern Open Publishing (BOP). 56 pp

Yet, the governance of Smart specialisation strategies is often relying on a few authorities and key stakeholders, **centralised around major university towns** such as Zaragoza in the Aragon region or Lyon in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. In the most rural and remote mountain areas, which are usually those facing brain drain and depopulation, stakeholders have few resources to truly contribute to the region's Smart specialisation strategy⁹. As a result, in many mountain regions, the most **remote territories may struggle to really benefit from regional Smart specialisation strategies**.

Thus, **Euromontana is concerned that Smart specialisation strategies may not really benefit mountain territories that are facing a brain drain** - or that these strategies might be too focused on sectors such as tourism or agri-food to really contribute to diversifying the local economy and attracting more qualified workers.

Therefore, Euromontana welcomes the initiative launched by the European Commission to limit brain drain and underlines the importance of the Cohesion Policy in this respect. However, Euromontana wishes to raise **other possible approaches** which could be complementary and could be articulated through regional and rural development policies.

General recommendations:

Demographic decline, linked in particular to the exodus of young people and the ageing of the population, is not inevitable for mountain areas. Euromontana welcomes the adoption of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and hopes that the initiatives of its Action Plan and its Rural Pact will have concrete positive effects on the mountains. In particular, Euromontana has high expectations for the revitalisation efforts and the implementation of a rural proofing mechanism.

Yet, in order to better cope with rural brain drain, Euromontana calls on the European Commission to:

- ▶ Analyse demographic challenges, including brain drain, at **infra-regional level, below the NUTS3 level**, in order to identify the territories that are most at risk of continued demographic decline and of outmigration of young and working population groups. Such data would also allow for a **better analysis of the impact of policies on rural territories**, and not only on a regional scale.
- ▶ **Provide updated data of post-COVID-19 populations flows in the European Union**. Such data should in particular help identifying whether rural areas – and which type of rural areas - have been steadily gaining population as a result of the pandemic, and whether territories have in this respect established territorial attractiveness strategies towards newcomers. These data should be provided by **Eurostat** or the new **Rural Observatory**. The analysis of post-COVID demographic data and trends could be carried out through a **call for projects from Horizon Europe**.
- ▶ Encourage the **exchange of experiences** between rural, mountainous, sparsely populated and remote areas on the issue of brain drain with the aim of exchanging good practices and replicating existing successful solutions. This exchange of knowledge could take place in the framework of:

⁹ Teräs J., Dubois A., Sörvik J. and Pertoldi M. (2015). [Implementing Smart Specialisation in Sparsely Populated Areas](#). European Commission. Joint Research Centre. S3 Working Paper 10/2015.

- **the Rural Pact Community.** This initiative is relevant because it engages rural organisations in a constant effort of revitalisation. The Rural Pact is also an appropriate place for exchange on this topic as it brings together not only public authorities but also companies that can create jobs.
- **the Interreg Europe programme.** Euromontana invites the programme's Managing Authority to encourage the uptake of funds by territories facing brain drain in order to allow them to get inspired by existing solutions. In the same way that the [SILVER SMEs project](#) is creating jobs in the rural Silver Economy sector in response to the challenge of ageing in these territories, a project dedicated to the rural brain drain could help territories implementing attractiveness strategies among young people and skilled workers.

Other levers for action to fight brain drain

1. Support the development of qualified and diversified jobs

The lack of diversification of the economy in some mountain areas is an important factor of brain drain. While some territories offer a wide range of jobs, other regions are very focused on a few sectors, notably agriculture and tourism.

The European Parliament's report 2021 on demographic trends stressed that "this lack of diversification in the regional economic structure of certain regions risks creating a negative 'label' [...] leading to the migration of highly trained and qualified people from a particular region or country to another"¹⁰.

The lack of diversified job offers in the mountains can be observed in the results of the Euromontana survey. Among the young mountain people surveyed, 5% categorically answered that they would like to leave their region. Most of them (53%) are engaged in a specialised academic or professional career, such as law, psychology, medicine, or engineering, and none of them wish to pursue a "traditional" mountain job (like farmer, forester, shepherd, ski instructor or tourism operator). It is therefore very likely that it is the educational and employment opportunities that make them want to leave the mountains.

Diversification is the key to the employment issue in mountain regions. Apart from the traditional mountain sectors, especially agriculture and tourism, these regions offer few diverse opportunities compared to large urban or industrial areas. Many young people surveyed by Euromontana in fact point out the lack of economic diversification as a major issue, whether it be the dominance of agriculture in the French Pyrenees or tourism in the Italian Alps. Thus, young people who have left rural mountain areas to study a specific skilled discipline are less likely to return to the mountains once they have graduated.

The Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture of Bolzano (Italy) analysed the reasons why emigrants leave South Tyrol. **Over 62% of working-age emigrants (15-64)**

¹⁰ European Parliament, [Report on reversing demographic trends in EU regions using cohesion policy instruments](#), 2021

raised the lack of interesting job opportunities, 55% the lack of career opportunities and 50% mentioned the lack of jobs corresponding to their educational background¹¹.

Rural mountainous territories must thus **find the opportunities to create jobs outside these traditional sectors and attract skilled workers**. The cooperation between public authorities and local companies can be a lever for creating jobs, which in the medium and long term can benefit regional economic development and help reverse the demographic trend. Moreover, rural and mountain areas must seize the opportunities offered by new promising economic sectors that are well suited to their territory, such as the bioeconomy and the circular economy.

Good practice: [“Return of Young People to Aragon”](#) (region Aragon, Spain)

The programme “Aragón Retorno Joven” was launched in October 2018 by the Aragon region. This is a multi-annual initiative aimed at facilitating the return of young Aragonese who have left the territory due to the lack of jobs.

The initiative also aims to multiply the efforts of the different institutional and private actors to create jobs and avoid this forced professional exodus. Among the people who contacted the programme in the first year, 53% declared the shortage of jobs was a barrier to settle in the region.

The programme supports young people in their search for jobs, connects them with local businesses and facilitates their settlement in the region. The programme offers a comprehensive support, including help to find suitable accommodation. It is therefore adapted to the specific challenges of the territory, where housing can be an issue for newcomers.

Thanks to various calls, 156 companies have joined the programme. They cover various sectors from health to education, computing, tourism, architecture, chemistry or automotive. Thanks to “Aragón Retorno Joven”, 332 young people have returned to settle in the region since the programme creation.

The programme covers the period 2018-2022, with a budget amounting 2.509.500 euros. All departments and agencies of the region are involved, and the programme is coordinated by the Aragonese Youth Institute.

Good practice: [Euro-med 2021-2027 specific objective “Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy”](#)

The new Interreg Euro-med Operational Programme for 2021-2027 includes a specific objective aiming at developing the circular economy in Mediterranean areas.

In addition to the environmental benefits provided by a more circular economy, the Interreg Euro-med programme underlines that developing the sector can help creating new business opportunities in rural, remote and mountain areas and in islands. Such opportunities are in particular offered by agriculture and forestry.

By taking advantage of some emerging trends, such as biomass supply, circular design and waste reduction in food supply, circular economy “rural and mountainous areas can boast a strong attractiveness potential”.

Such sectors will need to recruit skilled workers such as engineers and technicians, but also workers with sales, communication or marketing profiles. They will also offer new entrepreneurial opportunities.

To create more diversified employment opportunities in mountain areas, Euromontana invites:

- ▶ The European Commission to pay attention that the **new Operational Programmes not yet adopted for 2021-2027 open economic opportunities for the most rural and mountainous areas of the regions**. Many promising sectors, such as the bioeconomy, the circular economy or renewable energies, can contribute to create qualified jobs and attract young talents.

¹¹ Institute for economic research of the Chamber of Commerce of Bolzano, Brain Drain - Brain Gain: How attractive is South Tyrol's labour market?, 2019

- ▶ Regions facing a brain drain to work in partnership with private actors to encourage job creation and the return of qualified young people through comprehensive support mechanisms.

2. Limiting brain drain by promoting existing jobs and professional integration

Beyond the lack of jobs, the outmigration of qualified workers from rural areas to cities can also be the result of a **lack of promotion of the opportunities offered** by the territory.

Thus, preventing brain drain also calls for working with secondary school students, by promoting the sectors that employ people in the territories. It is also essential to **support their professional integration** by helping them to find their first job, otherwise there is a risk that they will leave the territory and move to urban centres with more opportunities.

Good practice: [“Mountain municipality – Youth, our future”](#): a label to encourage mountain municipalities to act for youth” (Switzerland)

Youth migration is a major issue for many mountain areas. In order to encourage municipalities to act in support of young people and for the attractiveness of the territory, the SAB (Swiss Association for Mountain Regions) launched in 2015 the label “Mountain Municipality – Youth, our future”.

Employment is one of the policy areas that allow municipalities to be labelled. Several municipalities in Switzerland are therefore focusing their measures on the promotion of regional economic sectors and on access to employment for young people.

The municipality of Leukerbad for instance organises annual workshops for young people to familiarise them with local jobs and companies. Thanks to this measure, about 40 students find their apprenticeship placement in Leukerbad every year. Likewise, the municipality of Safiental has integrated into secondary school’s career orientation courses a presentation of the region’s jobs and sectors.

Good practice: [Prvi izziv](#) (Slovenia)

The Prvi izziv (First Challenge) programme was launched in 2015 to help young people in Eastern Slovenia finding their first job.

Through this programme, employers can request a subsidy of up to € 7,250 for a contract of at least 15 months, to be used to employ local young people under the age of 30 who are currently unemployed. Young people have access to a full-time contract, with a 3-month probation period.

Approximately, 3,000 young people found their first job thanks to this programme, accelerating their professional integration.

The programme was financed through the 2014-2020 European Social Fund.

Euromontana therefore recommends using the regional policy to:

- ▶ Promote existing opportunities and support professional integration of skilled workers using the European Cohesion Policy funds, especially the European Social Fund. The [Montana174](#) campaign demonstrated that the Cohesion Policy makes a valuable contribution to reducing inequalities in mountain areas.
- ▶ Create subsidised contracts in rural areas targeting young skilled workers to encourage them to settle in these territories.

3. Attracting young graduates back after their studies and taking into account their life cycle

In its European report on mountain youth, Euromontana found out that 29% of young mountain people would like to leave their area for a while and then return to the mountains. Among them, 78% are currently studying and **moved from their home village to study elsewhere**. Although there are good examples of universities offering education opportunities in mountain areas, such as the [Mountain University](#) in Edolo, a decentralised campus of the University of Milan, it is rather unrealistic to expect that all rural mountains will be able to offer the same educational opportunities as the large academic cities.

It is therefore essential **to take into account the life cycle of young people leaving rural mountainous areas to study elsewhere**. To tackle brain drain, mountain areas should adopt territorial marketing strategies¹² to encourage them going back to the mountains to work there once they have graduated. **Rural internship programmes** can help mountain territories in raising awareness among young graduates on existing jobs that match their qualifications. This work experience in rural areas also contributes showing young people the quality of life they could enjoy by working in the mountains.

Euromontana backs the position of the Southern Sparsely Populated Areas network (SSPA) that a change in the image of rural areas is needed, and that education and training institutions can play a key role in promoting the advantages of rural life and **changing the mindset on rural areas among students**.

Good practice: [Desafio, the “rural Erasmus” programme](#) (region Aragon, Spain)

Desafio is a rural internship programme created in 2018 to revitalise rural and mountainous areas by improving their attractiveness among students. Created by the Chair on Depopulation and Creativity of the University of Zaragoza, Spain, the programme connects rural public and private organisations willing to train young people and students eager to put in practice their academic knowledge.

Thanks to Desafio, students at the University of Zaragoza can take an internship in rural areas between June and November, which includes 120 to 500 working hours. Internships must take place in municipalities with less than 3,000 inhabitants and students must live in the municipality for the duration of their internship. A daily allowance is granted to interns and travel and accommodation costs are covered by the Desafio programme.

So far, different entities offered traineeship placements, such as companies from all industrial sectors, public institutions, foundations and Non-Governmental Organizations and LEADER LAGs. Likewise, participating students have diverse academic backgrounds, from veterinary medicine to law, marketing, fine arts, social care, nursery and childcare.

Good practice: [ODISSEU](#) (Catalonia, Spain)

ODISSEU is a rural internship programme launched in 2016 to encourage young people to work in rural areas. The programme wants to address the lack of skilled employments in rural areas and to tackle the depopulation and masculinization of the region’s rural territories.

The programme offers an internship grant to university students from the Catalan region completing a traineeship in a rural area, with a least 300 training hours spent in the host organisation.

57 grants were for instance allocated for rural internships in 2019. Results from the first editions show good rates of integration in employment. Around 21% of internship contracts were extended and, after one year, 17% of students were still working in their host enterprise.

¹² PADIMA, [Good Practices on Education and Training](#), 2014



52% of host organisations are SMEs and 40% are public bodies. The profiles the most requested by companies over the past years were students in law, economics, tourism, marketing, and communication as well as agronomy, forestry and natural sciences.

ODISSEU is a LEADER/CLLD initiative addressing Priority 6 “social inclusion and local development” of the regional Rural Development Plan.

Good practice: [InSite](#) (France)

The French association InSite created a “rural Civic Service” programme in 2019. The internship offer requires young people to spend 6 months in a village to work on local projects on 4 topics:

- Solidarity and social cohesion
- Culture and heritage
- Environment and sustainable development
- Local development

In 2020, 22 young participants benefited from the programme, for example to work on the development of an eco-village in Corsica, to meet with older adults to discuss their needs and promote home-stay accommodation, to run a co-working area or to support local initiatives launched after the first lockdown.

Young people benefit from a “Civic Service” contract: a scheme that exists in France and in other European countries to support the professional integration of young people while promoting missions of general interest. Young people must be between 16 and 26 years old, can have a contract for a maximum of 6 months and receive a monthly financial allowance of €580 (financed mainly by the French State - €473.04 – with a complement from the host organisation - €107.58). The Civic Service is therefore attractive for small villages with few resources.

Good practice: [Territorial Volunteering in Administration](#) (France)

Following the adoption of the national Rural Agenda in 2019, the French government created the Territorial Volunteering in Administration contracts in 2021. The scheme allows young graduates to get a first professional experience in administration and provides support to rural public authorities.

Participants can be missioned in a public authority for 12 to 18 months. The scheme is open to young graduates from 18 to 30 years-old with at least two years of university education. The programme mainly targets graduates in law, geography, territorial management, and political sciences.

300 rural public authorities joined the scheme in its first year. The proposed missions often included territorial project management, territorial diagnostic, or management of grant applications.

The national government provides public authorities with a financial support amounting €15.000 per contract. The programme is managed by the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion. So far, participating rural public authorities welcomed the territorial engineering skills and new ideas brought by the young graduates.

In the framework of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, Euromontana:

- ▶ calls on the European Commission and public authorities at national, regional, and local level to **change the narrative about rural mountainous areas**, emphasising the benefits they offer in terms of quality of life, including among university students.
- ▶ Invites the European Commission to deploy effort to **bring universities in the Rural Pact Community** in order to encourage them to take action for rural territories.
- ▶ Encourages local authorities to facilitate the emergence of “**diaspora**” networks to maintain a link with those who left rural areas and provide them with information about job



opportunities and other forms of incentives (success stories, new public services, tax incentives, etc.) that might **trigger a return** to the place of origin.

Euromontana also calls on Universities to:

- ▶ **Create incentives for their graduates to envisage working in rural areas**, for instance by creating rural internships programmes and by including in their career orientation courses some information about employment in the surrounding rural areas.
- ▶ Create, where there is potential and demand, **decentralised campus in mountain areas** offering training opportunities in key sectors such as engineering but also in hard-to-find domains in the mountains, such as communication or economics.

4. Support entrepreneurship

Given the lack of employment opportunities in the mountains, **self-entrepreneurship is seen as a solution to offset the job shortage**. Many of the mountain young people surveyed in Euromontana's report express their wish to set up their own business in the fields of communication, IT, food chemistry, heritage management or in more nature-oriented business activities such as yoga teaching or mountain guiding.

Entrepreneurship could therefore be part of the solution to encourage the creation of SMEs and the diversification of job offers in mountain areas. However, support mechanisms must be provided to help entrepreneurs setting up their business, in order to keep self-entrepreneurship attractive. Young entrepreneurs might for instance need support to obtain funding, to be guided through the administrative tasks and to promote their business. In fact, support for entrepreneurship is what young mountain people ask the most for the future, as showed in Euromontana's mountain youth report. Mountain regions should therefore be able to **develop appropriate support schemes for rural entrepreneurship for young people**, who represent the future for innovation, job creation and dynamism in the mountains.

Good practice: [EMER-N](#) (Portugal)

To encourage the creation of small and micro businesses in rural mountainous areas, EMER-N offers tailored made guidance to entrepreneurs.

Thanks to funding from the Cohesion Policy's European Regional Development Fund, 344 companies situated in 8 provinces of Northern Portugal have received technical support to create, structure and streamline their business, promoting the creation of more than 400 new jobs.

Entrepreneurs received guidance from experienced technicians, specialized consultancy and researchers from higher education institutions. Businesses can also ask for customized support to boost their promotion and dissemination, along with access to funding. For example, EMER-N helped the Montes De Laboreiro tourism operator to boost its nature and adventure tourism.

Good practice: ["Stay in the countryside – it pays off"](#) (Poland)

The "Stay in the countryside - it pays off" campaign was carried out in 2018 in the four mountainous regions of Małopolskie, Świętokrzyskie and Podkarpackie and Lubelskie. The overall aim of the initiative was to encourage young people to stay and live-in rural areas, showcase the employment and entrepreneurship opportunities offered and explain the available financial support from rural development funds.

4 training workshops were organised with a total of 280 young people below 35 years old.



The workshops informed young people about funding opportunities offered by the 2014-2020 Common Agricultural Policy, especially the financial support provided to young entrepreneurs in rural areas, through its the CAP Pillar 2.

Workshops promoted the multi-functionality of rural areas, insisting on the fact that funds are not only available for young farmers but that rural development funds are also available for young entrepreneurs. Such an initiative is easily transferable, should be encouraged under the 2021-2027 period and should cover more funds.

To better support entrepreneurship, Euromontana:

- ▶ Calls on the European Commission to **ensure that rural stakeholders are well-informed on the funds available to support entrepreneurship**, especially through the rural revitalisation platform. Stakeholders should be able to find at the same place information about the COSME programme, the CAP second pillar support and the Cohesion Policy funds, among others.
- ▶ Invites concerned regions to create **one-stop-shops** at regional level and to develop support mechanisms for rural entrepreneurs, involving key stakeholders like regional and local development agencies and chambers of commerce, to help entrepreneurs in carrying out market analysis, going through administrative process and accessing funds.

5. Tap into the potential of teleworking

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that many jobs are suitable for teleworking practices, and many people from the city temporarily moved to rural areas. In the framework of Euromontana's report on mountain youth, 22% of the young people surveyed said they would be interested in doing remote working in the mountains.

Yet, teleworking can also become a non-sustainable solution. From an environmental point of view, it is crucial that teleworking in rural areas does not have a negative impact on the environment, especially through carbon emissions. Thus, travelling long distances to telework for a few days cannot be considered as a solution for mountain areas. Looking at the socio-economic dimension, telework must be able to **encourage the social revitalisation and the creation of real added value in the territory**; the practice must therefore not be limited to an occasional practice reflecting a bucolic vision of working in the countryside. Teleworking should therefore be encouraged as part of a **global approach that promotes settlement in mountain areas**.

Teleworking can be an opportunity for mountain areas. On September 22, 2020, Spain adopted a [national law on teleworking](#) to encourage the practice and protect workers' rights in view of attracting more skilled employees in rural areas and tackle depopulation. However, to encourage the practice, it is necessary to provide **suitable infrastructures**, especially in terms of access to broadband. Co-working spaces and third places are for instance essential providers of appropriate IT equipment and Internet access. Beyond the technical aspect, these places also help preventing the social isolation that teleworking can cause and to encourage exchanges and creativity between employees, start-ups and SMEs.

Good practice: [MiaEngiadina's co-working spaces](#) (Switzerland)

Lower Engadine, Switzerland, is a peripheral area facing different issues common to other mountain areas such as depopulation, especially youth leaving to cities, of the lack of skilled employment and of the dependency to the tourism sector.

To address the challenge of attractiveness among skilled workers, the "MiaEngiadina" initiative decided to create 4 co-working places in Scuol (the "Mountain Hub"), Ardez, Ftan and Motta Naluns. Each of them relies on a different governance or funding, sometimes involving the support of municipalities or local foundations. The co-working space in Motta Naluns was created within the ski station to propose a model combining opportunities for remote working and leisure activities.

The 4 co-working places provide IT equipment and fast Internet connection of 100Mbits/s (compared to an average of 30 Mbit/s in the region).

Good practice: [Demanda co-working](#) (Castilla-y-Léon, Spain)

"Demanda coworking" is a network of coworking spaces in Sierra de la Demanda, in region Castilla-Y-Léon.

3 fully equipped co-working spaces are available for users throughout the territory. Beyond the spaces and equipment, "Demanda coworking" proposes an integrated offer, with trainings to boost a concept or digitalise a business and networking events for co-workers.

"Demanda coworking" belongs to a wider initiative called Digital Valley, which aims at revitalising the territory by creating employments and attracting workers. To do so, Digital Valley adopts a comprehensive approach of territorial attractiveness among workers, proposing equipment, support for project development and social exchange platforms for entrepreneurs and remote workers for instance.

Teleworking can encourage some skilled workers to work in rural mountainous areas. Therefore, Euromontana:

- ▶ Calls on the European Commission to **maintain the digitalisation efforts in rural Europe** and especially through the support provided by the Broadband Competence Office.
- ▶ Invites concerned territories to use the Cohesion Policy funds to finance the creation of well-equipped coworking places and third places, as part of a global territorial attractiveness strategy.

Euromontana - the European Association for mountain areas

Euromontana is the European Association for mountain areas. Founded in 1996, it assembles around 65 organisations (regions, universities, chambers of commerce, of agriculture, development and environmental agencies) from 15 European countries in and out of the EU. Dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life of mountain people, Euromontana is working on different themes of crucial importance for mountain areas, such as cohesion policy, rural development, climate change, innovation, mountain products, tourism, agriculture and forestry, transport, youth among others. Euromontana is also officially supporting the RUMRA (Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas) & Smart Villages intergroup of the European Parliament.

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