



XIII European
Mountain
Convention
15 - 16 - 17 - 18 October 2024



PUIGCERDÀ DECLARATION

MOUNTAIN ECONOMIES

Ensuring a vibrant future for
mountain economies

Co-constructed during the XIII European Mountain
Convention in Puigcerdà from 15 to 18 October 2024

We, mountain stakeholders, convened in Puigcerdà on 18 October 2024, declare:

Mountain economies are sustained by sectors and operators that form the core of our territories. They provide employment for local communities, key products and services, essential ecosystem services for society at large, and preserve cultural heritage and mountain know-how. These sectors and their value chains face numerous economic, social, and environmental challenges, exacerbated by the geographical constraints specific to mountain areas.

To address such challenges and ensure that our regions remain attractive places to live and work, we affirm the need to **shape prosperous, sustainable, and resilient mountain economies**.

The vibrant mountains of tomorrow should be culturally rich and socio-economically **prosperous**. They should be primarily, but not exclusively, driven by the **flagship economic sectors** of our regions, namely agriculture and tourism, while promoting the endeavours of those involved, particularly small farmers and SMEs. The future mountain economies should also benefit from the digital transition, which can boost the creation of small enterprises and innovative business models, as well as from the green transition. The latter can not only contribute to job creation, particularly by encouraging the **relocation of certain processing industries**, but also promote **fair and efficient remuneration for ecosystem services**, especially those provided by pastoralism. Finally, the mountains of tomorrow should capitalise on the **social economy**, particularly through the cooperative model, which creates sustainable local employment, fosters social cohesion, and addresses local socio-economic needs.

The prosperity of mountain areas also hinges on **their resilience in the face of various crises**, particularly **climate change**, which impacts mountain areas faster and harder. Our economic sectors, particularly agriculture, industry, and tourism, must adapt to this new reality. As rising temperatures challenge the long-term viability of winter tourism in certain mountain regions, these territories must be **supported in their strategies for tourism diversification**, while carefully considering the risks of maladaptation and potential conflicts over the use of natural spaces and resources. Special attention must be given to **employment in these sectors**, with a stronger emphasis on training. In addition to diversifying tourism, resilient mountain economies also require **diversification across economic activities** within regions. This will not only strengthen their resilience to economic fluctuations but also to demographic changes. In an era when many regions face population decline and a lack of attractiveness, particularly for the working population, restructuring sectors and promoting emerging industries can create a **new narrative for mountain areas**. Demographic resilience should also be reinforced by other sectors such as the silver economy and care.

Finally, in the face of the environmental challenges of our century, the mountain economies of tomorrow must be **resolutely sustainable** and work with and for nature. The **green transition** offers mountains tangible opportunities to develop the **circular economy in a sustainable way**. By building on key mountain value chains such as agriculture, particularly livestock farming, and forestry, it can enhance the value of natural resources, support a more sustainable economy and create attractive jobs.

However, in line with the principles of sustainable development, transition to a greener economy cannot be achieved without paying particular attention to the **social dimension of sustainability**. As such, mountain areas must offer **quality employment**, fair remuneration, and guarantee **equal opportunities** for women, young people, and vulnerable groups.

As we strive towards prosperous, resilient and sustainable economies, we advocate the importance of an enabling environment and **mountains that are attractive places to live and work**. Our territories must therefore be inclusive and attractive for workers, facilitate access to land and to affordable, quality housing, and promote the emergence of socio-cultural and economic initiatives led by local communities in third places and shared workspaces. This environment can be enhanced by the smart village approach and existing spatial planning tools, as well as by appropriate mountain governance that puts citizens at the heart of socio-economic life.

With the aim of making our economies more prosperous, resilient, and sustainable, we call on European, national, and regional institutions to:

- **Extend the scope of the EU Just Transition Fund and Just Transition Platform** to provide support for the socio-economic transition in mountain regions, where local GDP is largely based on winter tourism and where stability will be severely affected by climate change.
- **Give greater consideration to the specific characteristics of mountain areas** and their economies in national and regional **climate change adaptation plans**, including in the future EU European Climate Adaptation Plan.
- **Ensure fair remuneration for mountain farmers** taking into account **ecosystem services** provided by mountain agriculture and the need to encourage generational renewal, through a **mandatory implementation of payments for Areas with Natural Constraints** in the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy.
- **Promote certifications** that enhance the value of mountain farming products and encourage the uptake of the **Optional Quality Term "mountain product"** through the adoption of recognisable logos in member states that are using it.
- **Make mountain products cheaper and more accessible** for consumers by introducing tax incentives on agropastoral products, creating vouchers for local communities, or introducing guaranteed price mechanisms for producers. At EU level, revising the Procurement Directives to facilitate purchases from local and small-scale producers.
- **Simplify access to EU promotion funds for quality products** for small mountain producers, for example by allocating more funding to campaigns targeting the domestic market and by facilitating market research.
- **Recognise and promote the role of mountain products in sustainable and healthy food systems** and as part of the implementation of the Farm to Fork strategy.

- **Support the development of locally-based processing industries** by deploying investment mechanisms such as the Cohesion Policy's Integrated Territorial Investments, and fostering cooperation with stakeholders in existing value chains.
- **Step up support for the circular economy in mountain areas** and the cascade use of wool and wood in particular. At the European level, the **new EU Circular Economy Act** should better address the specific challenges of remote areas, where collection and processing are more difficult. At national, regional and local levels, the installation of circular processing companies should be facilitated through shared cooperative infrastructures and support production through circular public procurements.
- **Maintain strong support for the social economy** and social innovation in economic orientation and green transition policies, recognising their roles as drivers of resilience and prosperity.
- **Foster better integrated, place-based and knowledge-based policymaking** by further developing the **EU Rural Observatory** to include more NUTS3 level data relevant to framework conditions to economic development, and support the creation of similar regional observatories across Europe.
- **Use the EU Rural Observatory to collect data on housing** at NUTS3 level including the number of vacant properties, the occupancy rate of properties, fluctuations in real estate prices and the rate of poorly insulated properties.
- **Address the specific challenges of mountain areas in housing policy**, especially within the European Union's future **Affordable Housing Plan**, by taking into account the increased risk of population decline and loss of attractiveness in rural areas with lower-quality housing and promoting a constructive and inclusive dialogue at the regional and local levels.
- **Promote rural-urban linkages** by integrating the socio-economic functional area scale into territorial planning.
- **Implement rural proofing mechanisms** - as a minimum and at best mountain proofing - in the adoption of European, national and regional policies to ensure the coherence of public policies in our territories.
- At national, regional and interregional levels, **create the conditions for structured cooperation** and peer-to-peer learning between mountain areas facing similar development challenges through specific programmes, macroregional strategies or dedicated territorial administrations.
- **Increase efforts in retaining and attracting talent in mountain areas** and pay special importance to young people, as pointed out by the Sila Declaration for smart mountains.

Finally, we, Euromontana, are committed to shaping the mountain economies of tomorrow by:

- **Strengthen our relationships with regional, national and EU policymakers** to amplify the voice of mountain communities and ensure that the specific needs of mountain economies are better reflected in public policies.
- **Facilitating the exchange of knowledge** and best practices for the sustainable development of mountain economies.
- **Developing research and field projects** that align with the objectives of this Declaration, particularly regarding the transition of tourism, the promotion of mountain products, support for pastoralism, and the advancement of the circular economy.
- **Encouraging research about, for, and with mountain regions** through NEMOR, the Network for European Mountain Research, to foster interdisciplinary economic approaches and support the development of evidence-based public policies.
- **Promoting the European Rural Pact**, encouraging mountain stakeholders to take action for their territories, and amplifying the voice of mountain communities within the Pact including through the mountain community group.
- **Supporting the further development of the tools from the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas** by raising the needs of mountain communities to establish the conditions for prosperous, sustainable, and resilient economies.
- **Leveraging the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists in 2026 to promote the continuity and sustainability of pastoral and extensive livestock farming** in mountain areas, to give a voice to the needs of pastoral stakeholders and to develop adequate policy solutions.
- **Exploring the uses and benefits of digital technologies for mountain economies**, including new tools emerging from artificial intelligence.



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