



THE NEW KRAKÓW DECLARATION (2025)

Thirty Years On - Calling for a
Stronger European
Commitment to its Mountains

Thirty years ago, in this very city, representatives from across Europe's mountain regions stood together to proclaim that mountains are not Europe's margins, but a shared heritage requiring protection and collective action. In 1995, Euromontana committed to protecting the communities, landscapes, and cultures of these territories, to building cooperation across borders, and to demanding respect for the specific challenges and contributions of mountain areas.

Since 1995, the context for Europe's mountain regions has changed profoundly. Some challenges, such as rural depopulation and access to services, remain as pressing as ever, while new ones—like the accelerating impacts of climate change and the twin green and digital transitions—have emerged. At the same time, important progress has been achieved, for example in the protection and labelling of mountain products at European level, an area where Euromontana's action has played a decisive role. Our demands have evolved accordingly: from seeking recognition in European policies to calling for concrete, well-funded, and place-based solutions designed with and for mountain communities.

1 - A Turning Point for Europe's Mountains

While the past thirty years have brought progress—from greater visibility in policy debates to new collaborative networks and initiatives—much remains to be done. We therefore come with a clear warning: recognition without action is not enough. The promises made to mountain regions—including those enshrined in Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union—remain largely unmet. Mountain regions are still under-recognised, underfunded, and disadvantaged in European and national policymaking.

We face a time of growing challenges.

- Climate change strikes hardest in our territories, reshaping landscapes and affecting both the ecosystems and human activities
- Rural depopulation and ageing are reducing vitality.
- Mountain economies are under heightened pressure due to structural disadvantage
- Essential services are becoming harder to access.

And yet, mountain communities continue to manage and protect the ecosystems and landscapes that feed Europeans with high-quality food products, store carbon, provide water, offer natural and cultural experiences for all, fuel the bioeconomy, and support biodiversity. Their well-being is Europe's shared responsibility.

2 - Our common commitment

We, the undersigned—representatives of mountain communities, local and regional authorities, academia, businesses, and civil society—issue this renewed Declaration not only to recall past commitments, but to call for immediate and decisive action.

We hear the growing concern across Europe's rural areas: decisions taken at the centre too often ignore realities on the ground. Strategies may be promising on paper, but their implementation remains slow. Mountain territories are admired for their beauty, yet overlooked in policymaking. We reject this logic.

3 – Ensuring the Right to Stay

Everyone should have the choice to live, work, and thrive in their home community. For mountain regions, this means targeted investment in services, infrastructure, opportunities, and connectivity. It means valuing mountain farmers and foresters. It means supporting young people, women, new enterprises, and cooperation. It means making sure that green and digital transitions reach mountain areas and respond to their specific needs. In short, it means guaranteeing a true “right to stay” for all European citizens.

4 – Beyond narrow views

We reject narrow perspectives that define mountains only by their geographic constraints, their natural resources, or their touristic and sporting appeal. Public authorities must recognise the strategic value of these regions – whether in terms of food security, biodiversity, water management, or economic potential. Mountain communities are not just beneficiaries; they are stewards of complex ecosystems, custodians of cultural traditions, and at the same time territories with strong potential for innovation.

5 – The challenge of generational renewal

Generational renewal is essential for the future of mountain territories. We must create environments where young people see a future, where they are supported to innovate, take over farms and businesses, and shape their communities. As Euromontana has consistently underlined, young people are ready to engage, if given real opportunities. Likewise, the role of women in sustaining mountain economies and communities must be fully recognised and strengthened, as emphasised in Euromontana's past work on gender equality and inclusion. Supporting female entrepreneurship, leadership, and participation is critical to the resilience and vitality of these regions.

6 – Seizing the opportunity of the post-2027 EU budget

Too often, funding tools remain overly complex, centralised, and disconnected from the lived experiences of mountain actors. While EU and national strategies may reference mountain areas, meaningful implementation is lacking without tailored approaches. The post-2027 EU budget presents a key opportunity to correct this course and to truly reflect Europe's territorial diversity. Mainstream instruments such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the Cohesion Policy must adopt mountain-specific approaches that respond to the distinct needs and strengths of these regions. Across all mountain countries, we must move beyond symbolic recognition to practical, well-funded solutions that are co-designed with mountain communities and led by those who know these territories best.

In the current draft of the Multiannual Financial Framework, rural development lacks a clear and dedicated budget line. Its objectives risk being diluted within broader envelopes and competing with other priorities. Cohesion policy itself is also at risk of recentralisation, which would prevent an adequate response to local needs. To meet Europe's commitments to cohesion and solidarity, the post-2027 MFF must provide rural development with transparent allocations and dedicated monitoring, while ensuring that policies are designed and implemented as close as possible to mountain territories.

7 – Towards greater policy coherence

As a foundation for greater policy coherence, we call for the adoption of a clear, common definition of mountain areas at European level, to be used as a baseline across European policies. This should not replace existing definitions established in national or regional legislation, which remain essential, but rather provide a consistent reference framework for EU institutions. Such a baseline definition would strengthen coherence between policies, avoid discrepancies between sectoral instruments, and ensure equal treatment of mountain regions across Europe—especially in Member States where no definition currently exists.

8 – Smart, Sustainable, and Resilient

We believe in smart and sustainable development. We see a future of “smart mountains” where technology bridges distance, resources are managed locally, where local economies diversify beyond agriculture and tourism, where young people stay and return, and climate resilience grows through local knowledge and solidarity. To continue playing their essential role in the long term, mountain communities must be both environmentally sustainable and economically resilient.

We know the solutions exist, in energy-independent villages, in cooperatives revitalising local wool or wood sectors, in youth projects linking heritage to modern enterprise. They also lie in ensuring that the value created from mountain natural resources—such as water, forests, energy, and tourism, contributes directly to the well-being of the communities who host and manage them. Fair benefit-sharing mechanisms, whether through taxation, levies, or income redistribution, are essential to guarantee that resource-based value creation supports local development and reduces socio-economic disparities. What is needed is the political will to scale up such practices, flexible funding to support them, and recognition that mountains are not a problem, but part of the solution.

9 – Europe Needs a Pact for Mountains

Therefore, we call upon the European Union, its Member States and regions, as well as other European mountain countries, to recognise the strategic importance of mountain territories and work in true partnership with them. We support the call that emerged from the Alps for the establishment of a European Mountain Pact—a binding commitment among EU institutions, regions, and civil society to ensure long-term, cross-sector recognition of mountain areas. This Pact must guarantee that the specific characteristics of mountain regions are systematically taken into account, in a coherent way, across all

European policies and programmes. It must also be matched with an observatory to track mountain-specific data and performance indicators, and a dedicated monitoring at EU level. Only then can the promise of Article 174 TFEU be realised.

10 - A Shared Future

This Declaration is more than a message of concern. It is a demand for fairness, recognition, and action. Europe cannot meet its environmental, economic, or social goals without the full inclusion of mountain regions. Europe's well-being and future development are inseparable from the vitality and resilience of its mountains.

Over these three decades, Euromontana's mission has evolved from seeking visibility to demanding implementation. In 1995, we asked to be seen and heard. In 2025, we demand that commitments be honoured through targeted investment, fair policies, and long-term governance tools worthy of the strategic role mountain areas play for Europe.

Thus, we renew our original commitment with optimism and resolve, and call on all mountain stakeholders who share our vision to stand with us—to defend it at every level of governance and to work together to turn it into reality.

Mountains need Europe, and Europe needs its mountains.

Kraków, 09 September 2025



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