

Berceni Declaration: Fostering the economic and social development of Villages in close proximity to Cities

12 September 2025

The European Alliance (EA) group in the European Committee of the Regions, at its extraordinary meeting in Berceni (Romania) held on 12 September 2025, confirmed its commitment to fostering the economic and social development of communes in close proximity to cities and agreed on the following declaration.

The European Alliance Group:

1. **recognises** the unique potential of communes in peri-urban areas to serve as dynamic bridges between urban and rural areas, combining quality of life with economic opportunities, and calls for their strategic inclusion in territorial development planning;
2. **underlines** that villages in the vicinity of cities are not mere 'commuter towns' and emphasises that every such community has the right to be complete and vibrant, with its own local identity, economy and high-quality services;
3. **supports** strengthening local governance in peri-urban towns and villages and fostering cooperation between nearby cities and villages through joint planning and partnerships to tackle common challenges, and to support the economic development of these areas;

Public services

4. **stresses** the importance of connectivity between villages and nearby towns, providing adequate local public services in peri-urban areas so that residents can have access to quality community-based services – such as education (in particular nursery and primary), healthcare and social support – within their community instead of relying solely on nearby cities; also recalls its *Leitrim Declaration (2019)* and the *Ciugud Declaration (2023)*, which highlighted the potential of smart villages, smart solutions and digital tools to improve quality of life and public services in rural areas;
5. in this regard, **emphasises** the need to close the digital divide by investing in high-speed broadband and digital infrastructure in all villages – including those on the fringes of metropolitan areas – so that residents and businesses can fully participate in the digital economy and access public services, e-learning and remote work opportunities;
6. **calls for** stepping up investments to improve mobility and public access in peri-urban areas by expanding public transport not only to nearby cities but also between neighbouring villages and small towns, thereby reducing isolation and car dependency;

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7. notes with concern the difficulties faced by elderly residents in villages in accessing daily essential services **therefore** calls for targeted measures – such as community transport or mobile services – to ensure older citizens can obtain essential goods and services in or near their village;

Funding

8. **underlines** that villages in close proximity to cities are often overlooked in policy and funding allocations despite their strategic position bridging urban and rural areas; calls on the EU and national authorities to explicitly recognise and support these communities in relevant policies, ensuring they receive dedicated and fair access to development funds and programmes, along with other disadvantaged territories such as rural, island and mountainous regions;
9. **insists** that ‘rural proofing’ must be systematically applied in the development of all EU and national policies to ensure that the interests of rural communities – including villages in metropolitan hinterlands – are considered, and to prevent legislation or funding mechanisms from inadvertently disadvantaging these areas;
10. **underlines** that villages located near towns often have limited administrative and financial capacities, which hinders their access to European funds and existing support mechanisms; **therefore, calls** for enhanced support through simplification, networking and territorial engineering measures, in order to strengthen their capacities to conceive, finance and implement projects tailored to their needs;
11. **calls on** the European Commission and co-legislators to ensure that the next Multiannual Financial Framework (post-2027) includes dedicated support for villages, by strengthening territorial targeting in Cohesion Policy and Rural Development Policy, with simplified access to funds for small municipalities;
12. **warns** that without adequate support for local economic opportunities and services, even villages near urban centres can suffer from depopulation and demographic imbalances; emphasises the importance of creating local jobs, recognising the right to a decent housing and access social amenities to attract and retain young people and families;
13. **emphasises** the need to preserve cultural heritage and community identity in villages near cities, and encourages civic engagement initiatives that celebrate local traditions and strengthen social cohesion as these areas evolve;
14. **instructs** its President to forward this declaration to the President of the European Committee of the Regions, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, along with national and regional governments.