



Ciugud Declaration: The EU Village as a basis of cohesion and development in the EU

9 June 2023

The European Alliance (EA) group in the European Committee of the Regions, at its extraordinary meeting in Ciugud, Romania, held on 9 June 2023, confirmed its commitment to empowering villages in the EU as a basis for cohesion and community led local development. The EA Group agreed the following declaration:

The EA Group:

1. believes that the sustainable future of Europe depends on greater territorial cohesion and the development of a strong Rural Agenda supporting the key role of rural areas while tackling depopulation;
2. sees the sustainable development of rural areas as an opportunity that can have beneficial effects on the whole of society, especially in the domains of the quality of life, cultural heritage, wellbeing, food safety, healthy environments, jobs and growth;
3. reiterates its support for the Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas 2040 (LTVRA), which brought about new instruments like Rural Proofing or the Rural Pact. These will create new opportunities, attract innovative businesses, ensure access to quality jobs, promote new and better skills, ensure better digital and physical infrastructure and services, all while strengthening the role of sustainable agriculture and diversified economic activities;
4. supports education as a priority for the development of rural communities in the European Union. Children living in European villages have a fundamental right to learn in modern, well-equipped and properly funded schools;
5. insists that the right to health must be guaranteed to the citizens of European villages, through investments that give them the opportunity to have access to quality medical services;
6. sees the current crises as a challenge and a unique opportunity for the transformation and revival of rural areas, and believes that the CAP, the Structural Funds, and NextGenerationEU should serve to give a socio-economic boost to rural areas.
7. highlights the importance of providing a fair standard of living for farmers and keeping a modern and sustainable agriculture to strike the right balance between urban and rural development policies;

8. believes that specific measures need to be put in place for rural territories to make sure they grow economically and promote new employment opportunities, while enhancing accessibility and connectivity to main economic centres. Insist that the right to sustainable mobility be proposed to the citizens of European villages, through investments in smart and flexible local and regional traffic systems;
9. invites the EU institutions, Member States, and regions to harness the full potential of Smart Villages to increase economic, social, and territorial cohesion and decrease gaps between rural and urban areas; argues that the Smart Villages and Smart Rural areas initiative should become an integral part of regional development policy through synergies with existing tools;
10. calls for the development of a more ambitious, targeted, and forward-looking policy on Smart Villages, enlarged to smart rural areas, with a view to the new programming period, and for its real incorporation into the European Rural Agenda;
11. calls for extended use of the bottom-up, place-based approach, including integrated territorial instruments (ITI) and CLLD, to ensure greater participation of local stakeholders and citizens;
12. stresses that thought must be given to setting up positive interrelations between rural and urban areas and highlights the role of small cities, towns, and villages, acting as "regional centres" for people living in the surrounding rural areas who come to these places for services;
13. stresses the importance of giving local and regional authorities the power to initiate and manage targeted environmental measures and allow them to introduce territorial contracts, signed jointly with rural providers of innovative methods to source locally-generated sustainable energy;
14. considers local and regional authorities to be ideally placed to perform the function of innovation brokers to catalyse the potential of rural areas, and in some cases already do so through development boards, enterprise offices, competitive tenders, functional areas composed of cities adjacent to rural areas;
15. calls for the simplification of access to funding streams – in the current and future rural development programmes;
16. insists that rural proofing must be embedded in the development of all EU territorially-sensitive legislation to make sure that rural communities can guarantee adequate access to basic services and opportunities;
17. calls for post-2027 Cohesion Policy to include specific EU-level regional targeting and earmarking for rural areas and regions with geographic and demographic handicaps (art 174 TFEU), with areas with a minimum aid threshold in Partnership Agreements;
18. proposes that the macro-regional strategies including the Carpathian Region be a priority in all future European Union policies;
19. calls on the CoR to organise a special prize for Smart Villages in the EU to encourage the development of rural areas;
20. instructs its President to forward this declaration to the presidents of the main European Commission, European Parliament and the European Council.
