



INTERREGIONAL CITIZENS' PANEL ON "TERRITORIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES IN THE EU: THE CHALLENGES FACING MOUNTAIN REGIONS".

Cantabria and Asturias

Date: 24 November 2021

Venue: Argüeso Castle



*From the outset, there have been **major territorial and demographic disparities in the European Union** which could constitute obstacles to integration and development in Europe.*

*Strengthening its economic, social and territorial cohesion is one of the Union's main objectives. It devotes a significant part of its activities and budget to **reducing disparities between regions**, with particular attention to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition and **regions suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps**.*

*The challenges faced by such territories are closely linked to **demographic change** and raise the general question of the level of EU funding for regional development.*

Low population levels and the existence of remote areas mean that the economies of sparsely populated areas and regions with low population density tend to grow much less than the EU average or to stagnate. These regions suffer from a number of challenging **structural problems**, such as low birth rates and lack of transport links, employment opportunities and adequate social services. However, while all these problems may be seen as serious, broadband technologies, tourism and agriculture could offer **new opportunities** to boost the economic prosperity of sparsely populated areas and regions with low population density.

Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that particular attention should be paid to regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, such as mountainous regions.

EU funds offer a number of ways to address these challenges. In some cases, their use by Member States has been limited. « **Mainstreaming demography** » in Member States' **regional planning** and a **clear commitment of EU funding programmes** in this direction could help to address the problems faced by sparsely populated areas and regions with low population density. While the challenges for these territories are considerable, the prospects are far from bleak. Local agricultural products, ICT, the creation of business clusters and education centres, smart specialisation strategies and tourism can contribute to the economic development of sparsely populated areas and regions with low population density.

Cantabria approved last May the **Strategy against the Demographic Challenge**, which includes 344 actions, and Asturias has also approved a **Demographic Plan (2017 - 2027)** with 216 actions. The objectives of both regional plans, in line with the National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge and with European policies, is to achieve equal opportunities and the free exercise of citizens' rights throughout the territory in order to tackle the threat of depopulation of its most endangered rural areas.



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PROGRAMME

OPENING

- 10h30** Welcome from the Mayor of Hermandad de Campoo de Suso, **Pedro Luis Gutiérrez González**
- Welcome from the Mayor of Valderredible, **Fernando Fernández**
- 10h38** **Ana Cárcaba García**, Regional Minister of Finance of the Principality of Asturias,
- 10h45** **Paula Fernández Viaña**, Regional Minister of Presidency, Interior, Justice and External Action of the Government of Cantabria.

INTRODUCTION

"Long-term vision for rural areas in the EU"

- 10h55** Speech by **María Gafo Gómez-Zamalloa**, Deputy Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), European Commission

THEMATIC ROUNDTABLES

11h10 Thematic tables with citizens from Cantabria and Asturias on:

- **Connectivity, innovation and business development:** moderated by **Pablo Priesca**, Director of CTIC (Information and Communication Technology Centre).

o Speakers: **Secundino Caso**, President of the Saja-Nansa Rural Development Association; **Pablo Gómez Fernández**, President of the Association for the Territorial Development of Campoo Los Valles; **Jesús Barros López**, independent consultant and trainer in the Nansa Emprende programme; **David Fernández García**, entrepreneur, "Patatas Vallucas"; **Tomás Cabezas**, entrepreneur, "Quesería La Brañuca" in Bejes; **Manuel Niembro**, rural entrepreneur in Asiegu (Cabrales); **Emilio Tereñes**, researcher; **Josefina Vega**, rural entrepreneur in Carreño; **Ruka Muñiz**, digital entrepreneur; **Enar Areces**, entrepreneur "Puru Remangu".

- **Education in mountain areas:** moderated by **María Bulnes**, facilitator of the Rural Development, Heritage and Territory Programme of the Botín Foundation.

o Speakers: **Rosalía Palazuelos Cosío**, Entre Valles Association; **Rebeca Herrero**, Headmistress of the CEIP of Valdeolea; **Jésica Torre Sánchez**, Headmistress of the CRA Río Pisueña; **José Antonio Quintana**, Director of CEIP San Andrés de Luena; **Virginia Trueba Jenaro**, leisure time monitor in Liébana; **Covadonga Laviada**, primary school teacher; **David Balseira**, primary school teacher; **Marité Lana**, rural librarian and eco-museum manager; **Jesus Lana Feito**, retired teacher; **María Montesino**, sociologist and livestock farmer.

-: moderated by **Antonio Martínez Torre**, Director of Primary Health Care in Cantabria.

o Speakers: **Carlos Fernández de Viadero**, coordinator of **Health Services in areas with natural disadvantages** several European projects related to chronic care and rural population; **Paloma González**, IDIVAL; **Francisco Javier Álvarez Álvarez**, doctor of the basic health area of Nansa; **Gregorio Miguel Alonso Bedoya**, President of the Association Local Action Group Liébana; **Ángel Emilio Fernández Fernández**, Primary Care Nurse, Campoo Los Valles Health Centre; **Ana Eulalia Alba Rodríguez**, pharmacist in Tudanca and Lamasón; **Marta de la Fuente**, Tineo Health School; **Ignacio Pedrosa**, CTIC health and active ageing line; **José Antonio Labra**, technician of the Mancomunidad Comarca de la Sidra; **Adolfo García**, anthropologist.

PLENARY

- 12.35 pm Conclusions of the thematic round tables by the moderators of the round tables.
- 12:50 Speech by **Francisc Xavier Boya Alós**, Secretary General for the Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain.

CLOSURE

- 13h00 Closing address by **Adrián Barbón Rodríguez**, President of Asturias, and **Miguel Angel Revilla Roiz**, President of Cantabria.

Description:

The three thematic roundtables will be composed of 10 citizens from rural municipalities of Cantabria and Asturias who will have been selected respecting diversity in terms of age, gender, educational level, etc. Special attention will be paid to the participation of young people and, in particular, youth organisations, such as the Entre Valles Association, will be involved.

They will discuss what it is like to live in areas with permanent natural disadvantages, such as mountain areas, which are considered to be at risk of depopulation, and reflect on what they expect from the future and how Europe can help to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas. What are their needs, aspirations, projects?

The roundtables will be moderated by experts in the subjects covered to ensure the right approach to the issues. The moderators will share the conclusions of each of the roundtables in a joint session.

There will be interventions at the political level (representatives of the National Government, the Government of the Principality of Asturias and the Government of Cantabria, members of the Committee of the Regions, mayors, etc.) and at the technical level, as detailed above. The

30 citizens selected in the two Autonomous Regions to take part in this dialogue will have the floor on a common problem: **What do EU citizens expect from the EU to alleviate the disadvantages faced by mountain areas?**