

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Resolution 422 (2017)<sup>1</sup> A better future for Europe's rural areas

1. Across Europe, rural areas are characterised by their social, economic and environmental diversity. Some rural areas are performing well in socio-economic terms, even out-performing their neighbouring urban areas, with prosperous populations working in well-paid jobs. Others are experiencing depopulation, demographic ageing, high levels of poverty, land abandonment, a heavy reliance on small-scale agricultural production, limited basic service provision and severe infrastructure challenges.

2. The disparities between rural regions have become more marked since the 2008 financial crisis. Whereas many rural areas close to cities have become more dynamic and resilient, the more remote rural areas have not been able to bounce back in terms of employment and productivity. The long-term developments of globalisation, information technology and climate change are also contributing to making the differences within and between rural areas even more pronounced.

3. Some rural areas are experiencing a shift to a “new rural economy”, with a reduced dependence on land-based activities and the emergence of a more diversified economy, including a range of manufacturing and service sector activities, helped by advances in information and communication technologies and more flexible working practices.

4. Against this backdrop, new approaches to rural policy need to be adopted, supporting the exploitation and valorisation of local assets, the local identification of needs and opportunities, and improving the competitiveness of rural areas through identifying new economic functions beyond agricultural production. These policies deserve to be pursued and taken forward.

5. In the light of the above, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe:

*a.* bearing in mind:

i. Congress Resolution 128 (2002) and Recommendation 107 (2002) on the problems of Europe's countryside;

ii. Congress Resolution 252 (2008) and Recommendation 235 (2008) on services of general interest in rural areas, a key factor in territorial cohesion policies;

iii. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on local and regional public services;

iv. the Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016, “A better life in rural areas”;

*b.* aware of the social, economic and environmental diversity that characterises Europe's rural areas and localities;

*c.* aware of the importance of rural areas in the preservation of Europe's natural and cultural heritage;

*d.* convinced that improved interrelations and partnerships among urban centres and rural areas are important pre-conditions for economic viability, environmental performance, territorial cohesion and social sustainability in the member States of the Council of Europe;

*e.* convinced of the value of rural resources capable of delivering sustainable solutions to current and future social challenges, such as assuring a safe provision of quality food, developing the circular economy and combating climate change;

*f.* concerned about rural depopulation and youth out-migration and the need to ensure that rural areas and communities remain attractive places to live and work;

*g.* determined to secure the sustainability of Europe's rural areas and guarantee a high quality of life and well-being for those living in them;

6. Calls upon local and regional authorities in rural areas of the Council of Europe member States to:

*a.* raise public and policy-makers' awareness on the diversity of rural areas and localities, of their potential and assets, and on the importance of rural areas in preserving Europe's heritage;

*b.* devise a rural strategy for their area in partnership with all rural development stakeholders and other affected parties, especially by encouraging broad stakeholder participation in evaluating service needs and implementation of the strategy;

*c.* set minimum service standards in order to guarantee continuity in the provision of essential services in rural areas, including the provision of access to reliable and affordable broadband and mobile coverage;

*d.* enhance the resilience of rural communities through community engagement, knowledge exchange, capacity support and capacity-building;

*e.* improve education and training by developing policies targeted at low-skilled workers and expanding higher education;

*f.* support entrepreneurship and innovation to diversify the local economy, including through mentoring and peer support, grant and/or loan funding from the public and private sectors, or by providing help and advice on the different aspects of running a business, such as marketing and networking;

*g.* decentralise regional administrative services from regional capitals in order to provide skilled employment in rural zones and remote areas;

*h.* disseminate among the local stakeholders information concerning national and international assistance

programmes that support rural development projects, such as the European Union LEADER programme;

*i.* encourage and develop the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, to gather accurate and up-to date information about all aspects of rural areas and their stakeholders,

with a view to ensuring more effective implementation of rural policies across Council of Europe member States.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 19 October 2017, 2nd sitting (see Document [CG33\(2017\)16](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Philippe LEUBA, Switzerland (R, ILDG).