



**European Committee
of the Regions**



Press Release

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Rural areas should not be left behind in the recovery plans

At the start of the "**Rural Vision Week**", members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) have expressed concern that rural areas may benefit less from the European Union's plans to help rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe that is greener, more digital and more resilient. The following statement, which was adopted by the members during the meeting of the CoR's **Commission for Natural Resources (NAT)**, is supported by the European Parliament's Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas & Smart Villages, which strongly rejects any plan that does not follow the partnership principle and associates rural areas in the drafting.

The pandemic is serving to exacerbate many of the already existing problems in rural areas and highlighted once more the vulnerability of these regions, notably in terms of digital capacity, quality and delivery of health services, education, access to broadband, specific needs of the population, resilience of distribution chains, and innovation skills. A clear strategy is needed to avoid recovery plans worsening the gap between lagging rural communities and urban areas accelerating towards sustainability and digitalisation. Otherwise, we risk missing a key economic and social growth opportunity for the whole Union as well as losing the consensus of future generations in the largest part of EU territories.

The members of the NAT Commission are concerned that:

- Regions, and in particular, rural regions are not sufficiently involved in the decision-making with regards to the elaboration of the national Recovery and Resilience plans in the majority of the Member States;
- Rural areas may be allocated less by the Next Generation EU funds due to the structural framework of National Recovery and Resilience plans and their priorities for action and implementation methods, despite rural regions having been hit particularly hard by the COVID 19 pandemic;
- Many funds will be allocated through a call for proposal, which could undermine the capacity of rural areas to access Next Generation EU funds as they have traditionally weaker capacity building and technical support in programming and spending EU funds;
- The current delineation of rural areas probably underestimates the true extent of rural areas in Europe as the intermediate grey zone areas most likely face the same challenges as rural areas.

The members of the NAT Commission call on:

- the European institutions and national governments to involve local and regional authorities in the preparation of the national Recovery and Resilience plans: these measures need a local dimension to be effective;
- Member States to engage in policy dialogues with all the relevant stakeholders. Rural regions cannot be left behind and their needs must be fully reflected and streamlined in the national Recovery and Resilience Plans;
- all relevant institutional actors to carefully monitor the use of Next Generation EU funds at territorial level to ensure that funds are distributed fairly between regions;
- Member States and managing authorities to facilitate and simplify access of rural areas to Next Generation EU funds.

Find here the list of members of the **NAT Commission** and the **EP intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas & Smart Villages**.

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The European Committee of the Regions

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