



Services of general interest in mountain areas

Summary of Euromontana's position paper

What is Euromontana?

Euromontana is the **European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories**. Euromontana brings together organisations of mountain people: development and environmental agencies, agricultural and rural development centres, territorial authorities, research institutes, etc. It includes organisations from the whole Europe, with the aim of developing international co-operation.

Euromontana's mission is to promote living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas.

In order to achieve this, Euromontana facilitates the exchange of information and experience among these areas by organizing seminars and major conferences, by conducting and collaborating in studies, by developing, managing and participating in European projects and by working with the European institutions on mountain related affairs.

The context

- The European Commission underlines that **services of general interest (SGI) play a major role in ensuring social, economic and territorial cohesion** throughout the European Union (*source: COM(2007) 724 final*).
- In article 174 of the Lisbon Treaty **mountain areas are given a specific role when it comes to achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion**. Specific attention should be paid to mountain areas due to their permanent natural or demographic handicaps.
- In the 5th Cohesion Report it is confirmed that **access to services differs between thinly and densely populated areas** which was also affirmed in a study that found that **largest gaps in the provision of SGI and the quality of the services can be found (...) in rural and peripheral regions**

Policy recommendations to improve access and delivery of services of general interest in mountain areas

1 Grant SGI a prominent place in legislation

The crucial role of SGI must be recognized and transposed into the legal framework at the appropriate level.

2 Implement and constantly adapt legislative frameworks

A legal framework must be put in place specifying which services must be provided and what minimum standards must be respected for their supply. As technologies and customer needs evolve over time constant adaptations of the frameworks concerned are required.

3 Roll out of ICT infrastructure in rural areas first

ICTs are a powerful tool to bridge physical gaps. New ICT technologies should first be rolled out in mountain and rural areas to improve their accessibility.

4 Territorial impact assessment

New or changed legislation in SGI have a territorial impact. Therefore, each such act must be preceded by a territorial impact assessment which takes into account the specificities of mountain and rural areas.

5 Regulatory frameworks to create transparency

Independent regulatory authorities should be installed that verify whether the universal services are provided as foreseen by legislation.

6 Modification of state aid rules to enable innovative solutions

Current state aid rules are often prohibitive and interdict innovative solutions e.g. in partnerships between public and private service providers. Innovation is however a key to overcome the difficulties in provision of and access to SGI.

7 Territorial and integrated view on SGI

A sound spatial planning policy can contribute to fostering SGI. Decentralised economic activities will e.g. help to upkeep a demand on services. It is necessary to focus on the spatial distribution of services within a region (responsibility of spatial planning authorities).

8 Proactive regional and local strategies

New and innovative approaches to provide services need to be developed proactively. Best use must be made of ICTs, possible synergies of different networks and inter-municipal cooperation as well as multifunctional offers.

For more information...

The Euromontana position paper is available [online](#) upon request, writing to birte.vietor@euromontana.org

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