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Press release

Commissioner Šuica reaffirms the opportunities to tackle demographic change in rural and mountainous areas at SILVER SMEs conference

On 21 April 2021, Euromontana organised an online conference on the **challenges and solutions to cope with ageing in rural Europe** co-organised with the Provincial Government of Teruel, in the framework of the Interreg Europe **SILVER SMEs project**. The conference was held the same day as closure of the public consultation on the Green Paper on Ageing and just before the publication by the European Commission of its Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas in June.

Guest speaker at the event, the **Vice-President of the European Commission, Ms Dubravka Šuica**, recognised the vulnerability of rural and mountainous areas towards demographic change and encouraged territories to *“grasp the economic opportunities and innovative character of the Silver Economy”*. In reference to the sector, Commissioner Šuica pointed out that **“addressing ageing as both a challenge and an opportunity can harness the full potential of this key demographic trend, including when it comes to rural areas”** which is precisely the essence of our SILVER SMEs project. Mrs Šuica also reaffirmed that the upcoming Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas will address challenges from demographic change to connectivity, low income and limited access to services by offering a real toolbox and operational solutions to rural stakeholders.

Isabel García Muñoz, Member of the European Parliament, also welcomed the opportunities offered to rural areas under the new programming period and shared her hopes for rural regions to benefit from the social pillar, new tourism initiatives and recovery plans. To tackle demographic change, MEP García Muñoz also called for the **promotion of economic opportunities and the creation of jobs in rural and mountainous territories** and encouraged stakeholders from the Silver Economy sector to participate in the coming debates of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Euromontana welcomes the future-oriented messages of Commissioner Šuica and MEP García Muñoz and is pleased to see that the interconnected issues of rural attractiveness, depopulation, ageing, lack of services are addressed comprehensively by European institutions. Therefore, Euromontana hopes that both the **EU Green Paper on Ageing** and the **Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas** will provide an enabling environment for vibrant mountainous areas able to address the needs of their entire population.

The event also looked at **solutions to deal with the ageing** of the population in rural and mountain areas which often offer few goods and services adapted to the needs of our elderly. Various **initiatives implemented in rural and mountainous regions** were therefore showcased, such as the Social Entrepreneurship Programme that accelerates new SMEs in region Aragon (Spain), Smarter Homes which provides businesses from the Silver Economy sector with a show flat to exhibit their products, in region Dalarna (Sweden) or the Age-friendly town programme which raises awareness on the needs of seniors in four rural towns of County Cork (Ireland).

Through the promotion of inspiring examples and discussions on possibilities offered by regional policies, the SILVER SMEs conference demonstrated that business creation and development of the Silver Economy is not only a prerequisite for local development, but also an essential factor for the well-being of older generations.

For more information

The [SILVER SMEs](#) project aims to support regional policies in rural and mountainous areas by enlightening the potential for SMEs to develop new innovative products and services of benefit and joy for a senior population. By supporting the development of new SMEs in the Silver Economy, an intrinsic objective is to stimulate growth and competitiveness of rural areas and mountainous areas. This 5-years Interreg Europe project was launched in June 2018. The project leader is the Spanish province of Teruel, and the other 8 project partners come from Ireland, Slovenia, Portugal, Spain, France, Sweden and Poland.

SILVER SMEs' conference website "[Challenges and solutions to cope with ageing in rural Europe: the role of the Silver Economy](#)".

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Euromontana is the European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories. It embraces regional and national mountain organisations throughout greater Europe, including regional development agencies, local authorities, agriculture organisations, environmental agencies, forestry organisations and research institutes. Euromontana's mission is to promote living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas.

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