

Balcões Móveis: bringing administrative services closer to mountain citizens

The closure of public administrations and the access to services of general interest are challenges that arises in more and more mountain territories, especially if they are isolated. To address this problem, the Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes, Portugal, decided to bring these facilities to citizens thanks to mobile services buses.

MORE INFO

Remoteness and ageing affect the provision of services

The Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes is a grouping of 9 municipalities from the Northern region of Portugal (Alfândega da Fé, Bragança, Macedo de Cavaleiros, Miranda do Douro, Mirandela, Mogadouro, Vila Flor, Vimioso and Vinhais). This mountainous territory is affected by the lack of services of general interest, in particular in remote villages.

Moreover, the population of the Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes is ageing and has mobility difficulties. The [SILVER SMEs](#) project, working on the development of the Silver Economy in rural areas, has demonstrated that older adults have specific needs in terms of mobility and access to services. The geographical and demographic specificities of this territory, in particular remoteness and ageing, therefore called for placed-based solutions.

Mobile facilities to address the lack of administrative services

To tackle the challenges of access to administrative services for isolated rural mountainous residents, the Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes created in 2018 itinerant services points, the “[Balcões Móveis](#)” or Mobile Helpdesks in English. These consist of 9 buses equipped with computer equipment, internet access and support for online administrative procedures.

The 9 vans are electric vehicles and run through the 9 villages of the Intermunicipal Community. Citizens can request the presence of one of the buses in their village if they need to carry out administrative formalities. This way, mountain citizens can more easily pay they water bills or renew their identity card on their doorstep.

Itinerant services can benefit older adults and any person with restricted mobility. This also includes young people who are not of driving age but must complete their first administrative formalities, persons with disabilities or even families or couple with one private car for the household.



Credits CM Mirandela

Resources

The “Balcões Móveis” bus helpdesks were financed by the European Regional Development Fund, under the 2014-2020 Operational Programme of the Northern region of Portugal. The total cost of the project amounted to 449.937 euros, of which 86% (382.446 euros) were financed by the ERDF.

This project, funded by the European Union's Cohesion Policy, concretely improves the daily life of mountain citizens. This is why it was also chosen as a [good practice](#) by [Montana174](#), a communication campaign funded by DG REGIO aimed at raising awareness of the benefits of Cohesion Policy in mountain areas. Find this example and many others on mobility, tourism, innovation, climate change, youth and employment in the [Montana174 brochures](#).



Credits Balcões Móveis



Innovative aspect

Itinerant services can be a way of addressing the lack of public services in mountain areas, especially where the viability of a permanent office is challenged by the remoteness or the sparseness of the population. Such solution brings public services closer to mountain citizens and, by using electric buses, it also takes into account environmental impact of the initiative.