



2023/2044(INI)

19.9.2023

OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on Regional Development

on harnessing talent in Europe's regions
(2023/2044(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Camilla Laureti

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas rural areas are more affected than other regions by demographic decline and insufficient talent development, suffering from high numbers of young people leaving and low generational renewal, which contributes to ageing demographics and overall population decline and this difference is likely to be exacerbated in the future owing to the difficulty of promoting, retaining and attracting talent; whereas the common agricultural policy (CAP) 2023-2027 is structured around 10 specific objectives, with generational renewal being a priority, along with ensuring vibrant rural areas and fostering knowledge and innovation, which will contribute to counteracting the ‘talent development trap’;
- B. whereas young people living in rural areas have a significantly lower share of tertiary level educational attainment (29.6 %) compared to those living in cities (51.4 %) and in towns and suburbs (35.3 %); whereas 72.3 % of farm managers in the EU in 2020 had only practical experience, 17.15 % had basic agricultural training and only 8.9 % had graduated from tertiary education (in 2019); whereas all young people should have equal opportunities regardless of geography; whereas in some EU countries, multi-functionality already represents, for young people, a driving force for entrepreneurial growth, and many innovative companies led by under 40s operate in activities connected to traditional agriculture, such as agri-kindergartens, agri-wellness, renewable energy production, or social agriculture; whereas young farmers tend to be innovative, especially in the use of new technologies and their skills and capabilities are essential to enable the green and digital transition;
- C. whereas rural areas are of great importance for food production as well as for delivering on the European Green Deal, climate neutrality and Sustainable Development Goals; whereas the Eurobarometer shows that 91 % of 15–24-year-olds believe that tackling climate change can help to improve their own health and well-being;
- D. whereas the latest statistics indicate that the EU population is projected to decrease from 447.9 million in 2022 to 419.5 million in 2100; whereas it is estimated that the average age of the EU 27 population will increase by 5.8 years between 2022 and 2100, with a considerable reduction in the number and share of working-age persons¹; whereas one in three persons living in rural areas are likely to be aged 65 or over by 2050² and the working age population is expected to shrink still further over the next years and decades; highlights the challenges for public expenditure in relation to pensions, healthcare, and the labour markets; whereas a long-term European vision is needed, placing particular emphasis on programmes for the active involvement of older people

¹ Eurostat 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_projections_in_the_EU.

² Eurostat, Ageing Europe, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ageing_Europe_-_statistics_on_population_developments.

in community life;

- E. whereas Parliament's resolution of 13 December 2022 on a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas³ underlined the need to ensure access to services of general interest in rural communities, with due consideration to education, training, lifelong learning and upskilling, in particular with regard to digital and business skills; whereas people living in certain rural areas suffer from a lack of access to important basic services such as water services, sanitation, road connectivity, transport, healthcare, education and broadband internet, among others; whereas it is essential to improve rural infrastructure, with adequate financial support, as this would make these regions more attractive to the younger generation and entrepreneurs;
- F. whereas farming will require more know-how from farmers and other professionals and constant adaptation, owing to the rapid progress of digitalisation and farming-related technologies; whereas it is essential to enhance information technology infrastructure, particularly through the establishment of high-speed broadband connections; whereas in some Member States, up to 25 % of rural households do not have access to the internet⁴; whereas it is equally important to promote digital education and training in line with the EU's digital targets for 2030, given that having the right skills is essential to manage a farm, to adapt to changing farming conditions as well as to face crises and challenges;
- G. whereas the EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2022 measures the major factors of competitiveness for all the NUTS-2 level regions across the EU, which includes rural areas; whereas the Index found that the Member States with the highest proportion of the least competitive rural regions in the EU were Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain⁵;
- H. whereas 82 regions from 16 Member States are severely affected by the declining working-age population, low percentage of graduates or negative mobility of the population aged 15-39; whereas 46 of these regions are already judged to be in the 'talent development trap', while the other 36 are at risk of falling into in this trap in the near future;
- I. whereas Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that the EU must aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions, paying particular attention to certain regions, notably rural areas;
- J. whereas gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU, recognised in the Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights; whereas gender inequalities persist in particular in rural areas; whereas the role of women is essential in the development of territories, both through innovation and the preservation of traditions;
- 1. Stresses that a concerted effort is needed to harness the potential of people living in rural areas in order to ensure that their communities are vibrant and that they offer good services, work opportunities and favourable economic prospects to mitigate brain drain,

³ European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2022 on a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040. OJ C 177, 17.5.2023, p. 35.

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ISOC_CI_IN_H__custom_2784346/default/table?lang=en.

⁵ European Commission, EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2022.

as well as fostering the sustainable development of society, the environment and diverse economic activities, both agricultural and non-agricultural, including multifunctional farms and short supply chains to promote local resilience; highlights that the implementation of EU policies and actions should be combined with national, regional and local ones with a place-based approach, offering tailored-made targeted solutions;

2. Recalls that access to basic services of general interest is a prerequisite to keep communities attractive for residents and potential newcomers; recognises that many rural regions have suffered from long-term underinvestment; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure appropriate public support and targeted investments to tackle these challenges; calls for greater targeted financial support, especially for SMEs in rural areas, to enable these regions to grow and develop; calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop concrete and prompt actions to grant equal access to quality services and infrastructure, such as early childhood education and care, training and education, healthcare, public transport, energy supply and internet access, for people living in every European region;
3. Highlights the potential of rural areas, and farms in particular, for the development of renewable energies, for example by placing solar panels on the roofs of farm buildings; underlines the need to ensure that rural areas are well connected to an adequately reinforced electricity grid in order to allow rural renewable energy producers to fully participate in the energy transition;
4. Welcomes the Commission communication on harnessing talent in Europe's regions, agrees with its general objectives and considers it an opportunity for coordinated action for the future of Europe's talent and regions, ensuring that no one is left behind;
5. Recognises the importance of infrastructure development in rural regions in order to attract investment and employment opportunities to these areas and halt rural depopulation;
6. Emphasises that the decline of certain regions, in particular in rural areas, if not correctly addressed, will continue to have a negative impact on the potential for growth, development, and attractiveness of these areas and of Europe's regions as a whole;
7. Calls for a rural-proofing mechanism for EU legislation to be introduced, to ensure that rural regions are not unfairly impacted by any new proposals and to ensure that rural concerns are taken into account during the decision-making process;
8. Calls for increased support for higher education institutes in rural regions to improve their research and development capabilities to attract increased funding, and thereby improve their potential for innovation;
9. Points out that the 'talent development trap' occurs in regions with insufficiently skilled workers, and constitutes a greater challenge, particularly for communities that are far away from universities and higher education institutions, or where effective transport solutions are not available to enable access to these institutions; calls on the Member States to cooperate with regions and local stakeholders to develop efficient strategies to ensure that suitable transport solutions are in place to allow citizens living in rural areas to access higher education or vocational training; underlines the importance of

providing incentives, including but not limited to financial benefits, for individuals and organisations that carry out activities or provide services in rural areas, in order to stimulate economic activity, to promote new activities and help young people to find alternative jobs; points out that innovation and education play a crucial role in ensuring that all EU regions can build a supportive innovation environment and develop their populations' talents in order to ensure their future competitiveness; stresses that rural areas face a greater challenge than urban areas in ensuring the development of digital skills and calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure broadband connectivity in rural areas and improve the level of digital skills;

10. Points out the importance of bringing children closer to agriculture even in early childhood, through both theoretical and practical school learning; calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen existing programmes and to take additional actions in this domain;
11. Insists on the need to reduce administrative burdens while ensuring better access to land and capital, predictable incomes and fair standards of living, as well as better awareness of funding options, in particular among young farmers;
12. Highlights that regions faced with a shrinking workforce need to develop economic diversification strategies to foster local resilience, offer more work opportunities and increase their attractiveness; whereas rural regions comprise much more than agricultural landscapes, and these regions play a central role in a just, green and digital transition and have a diverse range of economic, cultural and environmental attributes, making an indispensable contribution to the structure of our societies; calls for actions to enhance the role of agritourism, sustainable tourism and related sustainable activities in Europe's regions in order to increase additional sources of income in rural areas and to promote and preserve natural and cultural heritage; stresses that, besides agriculture, tourism is a key source of competitiveness for rural areas, especially considering the potential of diversified models of sustainable rural tourism;
13. Regrets that people in rural areas face multiple challenges such as a lack of appropriate resources and administrative burdens, and believes that Member States should consider tax exemptions in rural areas as a measure to attract young people and investors; recognises the importance of the EU Pact for Skills in the agri-food sector and calls on the Commission and the Member States to allocate funding for agricultural and rural development innovation, training and advisory hubs to boost the provision of training on farming skills, digital skills and administrative or financial issues, going beyond compliance with the obligations under the CAP, in order to reduce the digital gap and the availability of services compared to urban areas;
14. Recognises the importance of investing in the skills and capabilities of women and young people in areas at risk of depopulation, which benefits all communities; calls, therefore, for measures to create economic, social and other opportunities, as well as innovative and sustainable jobs and services, in particular with a view to supporting generational renewal in the farming sector and the setting up of new businesses in rural areas; insists on the importance of providing adequate support for young farmers to develop sustainable farming practices from a social, environmental and economic perspective, including agroecology and organic farming, to maintain the vitality of the

territories; calls for efforts to identify and deploy resources to encourage farmers to develop short supply chains and to boost the EU's agri-food sector;

15. Calls on the Commission to increase EU funding for research into support for women in rural areas, in order to strengthen the evidence base for future policies; highlights the economic potential of women in rural areas and calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure targeted support to facilitate access to funding opportunities and business skills, with a view to increasing female entrepreneurship in rural areas;
16. Welcomes the social conditionality introduced by the new CAP, aimed at improving the working conditions of workers employed in the agri-food sector;
17. Calls on the Commission and Member States to undertake actions aimed at improving technological, environmental and managerial skills among farmers, in particular young farmers, and fostering the exchange of best practices;
18. Stresses the importance of the availability and quality of agricultural education and training in supporting farmers in adapting to a changing environment and fulfilling their vital role in ensuring food security, environmental sustainability and contributing to the sustainable development of rural areas; highlights the potential of diversifying training models to better address farmers' diversity and specific needs (e.g. peer-to-peer learning or mentoring schemes); calls on the Member States to strengthen public-private cooperation, in particular between vocational training institutions and local businesses, to tailor curriculums to labour market needs, aligning theory and practice on the ground to seize local and regional opportunities; considers that young people should use the programmes offered by Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and other relevant EU funds such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in order to maximise their opportunities;
19. Underlines the importance of including women and young people's perspectives in relevant strategies, policies, action plans and measures as well as of involving them in the decision-making process, applying gender mainstreaming and an intergenerational approach at every level of policymaking;
20. Highlights the importance of access to well paid jobs in rural areas and notes that those who move out of rural areas generally experience higher earnings growth; insists that rural and remote areas be given special attention with regard to employment prospects as they are at higher risk of having fewer opportunities; recognises the role played by the CAP in fostering cooperation at local level, by offering Member States a range of instruments, such as the EU CAP Network, LEADER, Smart Villages and support to producer organisations;
21. Considers that the establishment of a rural observatory should be taken as an opportunity to improve databases, especially through the collection of age and gender-disaggregated data, and better reflect local realities; underlines the need , in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation⁶, to collect and analyse more data

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC. OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1.

concerning the overall situation of rural areas, in particular regarding women and young farmers;

22. Stresses that the increasing use of digital technologies in agriculture, and in particular space data, is helping to address a host of challenges that farmers are faced with, improving farm profitability and resource efficiency while contributing to sustainability goals; calls on the Commission and the Member States to make full use of the potential of space data in agriculture, as this will increase farm profitability and the attractiveness of farming for younger people; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure stable, high-speed broadband coverage throughout the EU, including in rural areas, to certify geospatial data for use in precision agriculture, to ensure that digitalisation is inclusive and accessible and to support farmers with training, resources and incentives to adopt new technologies;
23. Invites Member States to begin mapping public arable land, and to prioritise its allocation to young farmers;
24. Points out that EU funding, such as that disbursed through rural development measures, plays a crucial role in the ability of rural areas to react to demographic challenges; underlines that where national, regional or local strategies allow for synergies between EU cohesion policy and the rural development dimension of the new CAP, the implementation should be carefully planned to maximise simplification and avoid administrative burdens for beneficiaries; calls for particular attention to be paid to the problems of young farmers and for increased support for their access to EU funds; calls on the Commission and on Member States to draw up guidelines aimed at facilitating funding synergies between the CAP, cohesion policy, NextGenerationEU and any other source of EU funding.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	19.9.2023
Result of final vote	+: 46 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Mazaly Aguilar, Clara Aguilera, Attila Ara-Kovács, Carmen Avram, Adrian-Dragoş Benea, Benoît Biteau, Daniel Buda, Isabel Carvalhais, Asger Christensen, Angelo Ciocca, Dacian Cioloş, Ivan David, Paolo De Castro, Jérémy Decerle, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, José Manuel Fernandes, Paola Ghidoni, Dino Giarrusso, Francisco Guerreiro, Martin Häusling, Martin Hlaváček, Krzysztof Jurgiel, Jarosław Kalinowski, Camilla Laureti, Gilles Lebreton, Norbert Lins, Marlene Mortler, Ulrike Müller, Maria Noichl, Juozas Olekas, Eugenia Rodríguez Palop, Daniela Rondinelli, Bronis Ropė, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Anne Sander, Petri Sarvamaa, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Veronika Vrecionová, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Substitutes present for the final vote	Peter Jahr, Petros Kokkalis, Tilly Metz, Michaela Šojdrová, Irène Tolleret, Emma Wiesner

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

46	+
ECR	Mazaly Aguilar, Krzysztof Jurgiel, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Veronika Vrecionová
ID	Angelo Ciocca, Ivan David, Paola Ghidoni, Gilles Lebreton
NI	Dino Giarrusso
PPE	Daniel Buda, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, José Manuel Fernandes, Peter Jahr, Jarosław Kalinowski, Norbert Lins, Marlene Mortler, Anne Sander, Petri Sarvamaa, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Michaela Šojdrová, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Renew	Dacian Ciolos, Jérémy Decerle, Martin Hlaváček, Ulrike Müller, Irène Tolleret, Emma Wiesner, Asger Christensen
S&D	Clara Aguilera, Attila Ara-Kovács, Carmen Avram, Adrian-Dragoş Benea, Isabel Carvalhais, Paolo De Castro, Camilla Laureti, Maria Noichl, Jozas Olekas, Daniela Rondinelli
The Left	Petros Kokkalis, Eugenia Rodríguez Palop
Verts/ALE	Benoît Biteau, Francisco Guerreiro, Martin Häusling, Tilly Metz, Bronis Ropé

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0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention