

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-005063/25
to the Commission
Aldo Patriciello (PFE)
(29 December 2025)**

Subject: Need for extraordinary EU stimuli to safeguard and rejuvenate very small municipalities

In many Member States of the European Union — and in particular inland and mountain areas — thousands of municipalities with a population of under 500 are experiencing gradual depopulation, with an ageing population and the loss of essential services.

Such municipalities are a mainstay of the local economy, culture and the environment, but are often excluded or disadvantaged when it comes to accessing the EU's primary funding instruments, which are designed with larger entities in mind.

In the absence of any targeted policies, these communities are liable to disappear forever, with serious consequences in terms of hydro-geological instability, the protection of cultural heritage and the territorial cohesion of the Union.

Could the Commission therefore answer the following questions:

1. Will it bring forward extraordinary EU instruments dedicated to municipalities with fewer than 500 inhabitants, providing for simplified access criteria and specific resources to combat depopulation?
2. Does it plan to mainstream policies on living in small municipalities, essential services there and their economic attractiveness into the cohesion funds and rural development programmes?

Submitted: 29.12.2025

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Fitto on behalf of the European Commission
(13 March 2026)**

The proposals for the next EU budget ⁽¹⁾ simplify the EU funding landscape, establishing a single National and Regional Partnership Plan per Member State.

This new framework strengthens policy synergies while allowing to tailor the Plan to the specific challenges of Member States and their regions, including those of small municipalities. A unique set of rules will also simplify beneficiaries' access to EU funds.

Among the objectives that Plans need to tackle are 'fostering the attractiveness of territories to support the right to stay' and 'improving the attractiveness and living standards [...] in rural areas'.

This requires integrated and innovative approaches based on local needs, including community-led local development strategies such as Leader and other forms of cooperation like Smart villages, across many policy fields: from fostering economic development and strengthening sustainability to investments in basic services and infrastructures so that no community feels left behind ⁽²⁾.

Ensuring an effective 'right to stay' is one of the EU's priorities for 2024-2029 ⁽³⁾ and the Commission is working on a corresponding strategy.

In line with the Vision for agriculture and Food ⁽⁴⁾, the Commission is working on an updated EU Rural action plan and strengthened the facilitation of the Rural Pact with new activities to be organised by the Rural Pact Support office in 2026-2027.

In the 2021-2027 period, Member States were encouraged to pay special attention to addressing the challenges of disadvantaged regions and areas, in particular rural areas and areas which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.

This should take the form of an integrated approach including dedicated funding for addressing demographic challenges.

⁽¹⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en.

⁽²⁾ Small municipalities are also in focus within the activities of the EU Rural action plan and the European Rural Pact, both launched in 2021 following the adoption by the Commission of the Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas — cf. COM(2021)345 final — https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en.

⁽³⁾ As reflected in Article 3(1)(a)(i) of COM(2025) 565 final.

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2025) 75 final.