

CEMR Contribution on Right to Stay

CEMR Answer to European Commission [Call for Evidence](#)

The [Council of European Municipalities and Regions](#) (CEMR), representing the diversity of subnational governments across Europe, welcomes the European Commission's initiative on the "Right to Stay". For CEMR, the right to stay means that every person should be able to live, work, and thrive in the place of their choice, whether in urban, peri-urban, or rural areas, without being constrained by lack of services, opportunities, or affordability.

Delivering on this right requires a **place-based, integrated, and multilevel governance approach**, with local and regional governments at its core.

1. Ensure access to affordable, high-quality Services of General Interest everywhere

Access to essential services and services of general interest remains a decisive factor shaping people's ability to stay. Persistent gaps exist both in urban areas (e.g., shortage of healthcare professionals or childcare facilities, pressure on housing, and insufficient public transport or mobility systems) and in rural areas (e.g., lack of public transport, limited access to healthcare and education). In many cases, these issues are based on direct functional connections between urban and rural environments, like mobility, green/blue infrastructure, climate, logistics, etc.

CEMR recommends:

- Strengthening EU support for **better governance models, intercommunal cooperation**, capitalising on the synergies and complementarities between urban and rural areas functional connected for a more efficient usage of public finances.
- Strengthening EU support for **Services of General Interest (SGI)**, including healthcare, education, mobility, and energy, recognising their territorial dimension.
- Supporting innovative and integrated service delivery models (e.g., "tiers lieux", one-stop shops, mobile services), particularly in rural and shrinking areas.
- Ensuring universal access to **high-speed broadband and digital services**, as a precondition for economic and social participation.

2. Make affordability and balanced development of settlements a central pillar of the Right to Stay

The rising cost of living, particularly related to housing, undermines the right to stay in cities where real estate speculations and dynamics between high demands and low supply lead to an increase in the cost of living. Rising rents and purchase prices, as well as high costs for new housing construction, result in a lack of affordable housing, affecting vulnerable people, but also key workers essential to

fulfil Services of General Interest. Many rural and remote areas are facing depopulation and thus also a decrease in investment in housing.

CEMR recommends:

- Reinforcing EU action on **affordable housing and measures against depopulation**, including through Cohesion Policy, State aid flexibility and investment support, while taking into account interlinkages and interdependencies between urban and rural areas;
- Foster tailor-made EU and national support programmes for the provision of affordable housing, addressing the difficulties in access to housing for low- and middle-income households, and paying special attention to strategic and essential workers, needed to fulfil Services of General Interest and other essential public services, preserving local infrastructure.
- Addressing **territorial disparities** through targeted recommendations in the European Semester.
- **Supporting local authorities in regulating local housing** markets and combating speculation.

3. Create enabling conditions for local economic opportunities everywhere

Competitiveness can and should be developed across all territories. Especially in less urbanised areas, urban areas with inadequate or outdated infrastructure, and lagging areas which require dedicated enabling conditions to attract businesses, workers, and families. Moreover, persistent investment gaps, demographic ageing, skills shortages, and the widening digital divide risk deepening disparities and local economic opportunities.

CEMR recommends:

- Investing in **connectivity (transport and digital), local infrastructure, and cultural amenities** to enhance territorial attractiveness.
- Supporting entrepreneurship ecosystems at the local level, including through **ITI and CLLD/LEADER and similar integrated approaches**.
- **Addressing labour shortages in key local public services** by ensuring sufficient support for reskilling/upskilling, including through targeted recommendations on national reforms in the European Semester.
- The right to stay should also address the **challenges of people living in poverty**, and of poverty-driven migration, to fight against depopulation in some regions and EU Member States and attract (or retain) especially young people and essential workers through attractive living conditions.

4. Strengthen attractiveness and competitiveness through increased climate resilience, local energy production, and sustainable mobility

The ability to stay is closely linked to resilience and mobility. Increasing climate risks, energy vulnerabilities, and insufficient transport connectivity can undermine quality of life, economic

activities, and access to essential services. This is particularly relevant for areas exposed to acute climate risks. Tailored adaptation strategies and provision of **accessible, affordable, and sustainable mobility options are therefore strong enablers for the future strategy**. Decentralised renewable energy production not only contribute to decarbonisation and job creation but also enhances price stability, energy resilience, and supports local revenue generation and reinvestment.

On the other hand, many rural and remote areas are facing depopulation, and thus a decrease in investment in housing, investments related to climate-resilience, and energy transition are, of course, also a current topic in the countryside.

CEMR recommends:

- Strengthening EU support for the local level to **adapt public infrastructures** (e.g., investments in climate resilience and energy transition) to preserve living quality for locals and incoming residents.
- Supporting **sustainable, affordable, and inclusive mobility systems** adapted to territorial realities, ensuring access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services.
- Investing in transport connectivity and resilient infrastructure
- Reducing dependence on fossil fuels and Europe's resilience on imports of raw materials and construction products through investment in alternative solutions.
- Integrating climate adaptation and **resilience objectives** into territorial strategies, including investments in nature-based solutions, disaster prevention, and climate-resilient infrastructures (further recommendation in CEMR policy paper: [Adapting Together – A territorial approach to resilience and risk management](#))
- Enable decentralised renewable energy production via adequate funding mechanisms and capacity building schemes for municipalities and local communities.

5. Strengthen the Cohesion Policy as the main delivery tool for the Right to Stay

Cohesion Policy is uniquely placed to address regional imbalances through its place-based and multilevel governance approach.

CEMR recommends:

- Maintaining a **strong, adequately funded Cohesion Policy** in the next MFF, with a clear orientation towards addressing demographic, economic, and territorial imbalances.
- Recognising the Right to Stay as a guiding objective of the next Multiannual Financial Framework and Cohesion Policy programmes, the Commission should therefore ensure that the Right to Stay strategy is addressed in the National and Regional Partnership Plans of the Member States.
- Ensuring that Member States will form the National and Regional Partnership Plans **together** with local and regional governments
- Requiring Member States to allocate **at least 30% of relevant funds, including ERDF, to integrated territorial approaches**, including 15% for urban areas and 15% for non-urban

areas, through instruments such as ITI, CLLD/LEADER, and any other territorial tool supporting initiatives designed by the Member State.

6. Embed the Right to Stay in EU governance and monitoring frameworks

To ensure coherence and accountability, the right to stay must be reflected across EU policies.

CEMR recommends:

- Integrating the “Right to Stay” into the **European Semester**, including through territorial analyses and country-specific recommendations addressing population outflows, service access, and cost of living.
- **Strengthening territorial and governance impact assessments** of EU policies, to better understand the role of local and regional governments in the implementation of EU regulations and EU Semester country-specific recommendations. **Consultation of associations representatives of local and regional governments** should become automatic as soon as the area covered falls under the competence of the local and regional governments¹.
- Linking the Right to Stay with ongoing EU agendas on urban, rural, and territorial development.

7. Empower local and regional governments as key actors

Local and regional governments are best placed to design and deliver solutions tailored to territorial needs.

CEMR recommends:

- Securing **EU funding and technical support** for local authorities in the future National and Regional Partnership Plans, but also through the European Competitiveness Funds with dedicated support for “attractive places”: supporting the attractiveness of regions, cities, and municipalities for business and economic development.
- Investing in **administrative capacity-building** and **multilevel governance mechanisms**.
- Recognising the importance of **local democracy and participation** in strengthening territorial resilience and attractiveness.
- Right to stay should aim at striking a balance between unhindered freedom of movement of EU citizens, and the need to retain skilled workers and talents wherever they are needed.

¹ For overview of the legal and institutional competences of subnational governments in Europe, see CEMR TERRI report country profiles: <https://terri.cemr.eu/en/>

Conclusion

The “Right to Stay” can only be achieved through **integrated, place-based policies that empower local and regional governments on equal footing**, ensure access to services and opportunities, and address affordability challenges and municipal investment obstacles in the public infrastructure sector in regard to population growth, climate resilience, and energy transition. The upcoming MFF negotiations offer a crucial opportunity to translate political ambition into concrete commitments.

About CEMR:

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is Europe’s first and broadest association of local and regional governments. We are the only organisation that brings together 60 national associations of local and regional governments from 41 countries.

We empower cities, towns, and regions to build peaceful, inclusive, just, and resilient communities by amplifying their voices at European and international levels. Our aim is to ensure that local leaders are fully equipped to drive the sustainable transition of their territories to effectively respond to global challenges.

CEMR also serves as the European section of the global organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

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