ENRD Workshop on Vibrant Rural Areas: Access to Services

Access to services for vulnerable groups in rural Spain

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Depopulation of rural areas is constant

Currently, **only 16.2% of the Spanish population inhabits the rural environment**, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries:
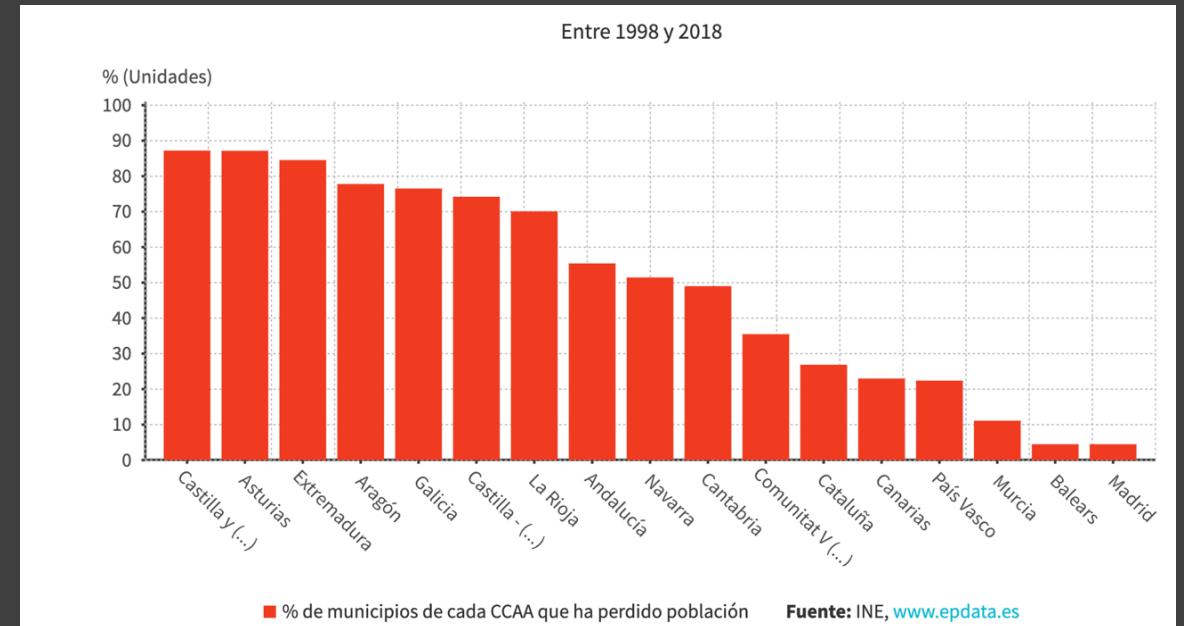
- 7.6 million people spread over **6,676 municipalities** with less than 10,000 inhabitants.

- In the **last year, this group fell by 10%**, a figure on the rise without brake.

- This translates into **less investment in infrastructure**, which restarts the vicious cycle.
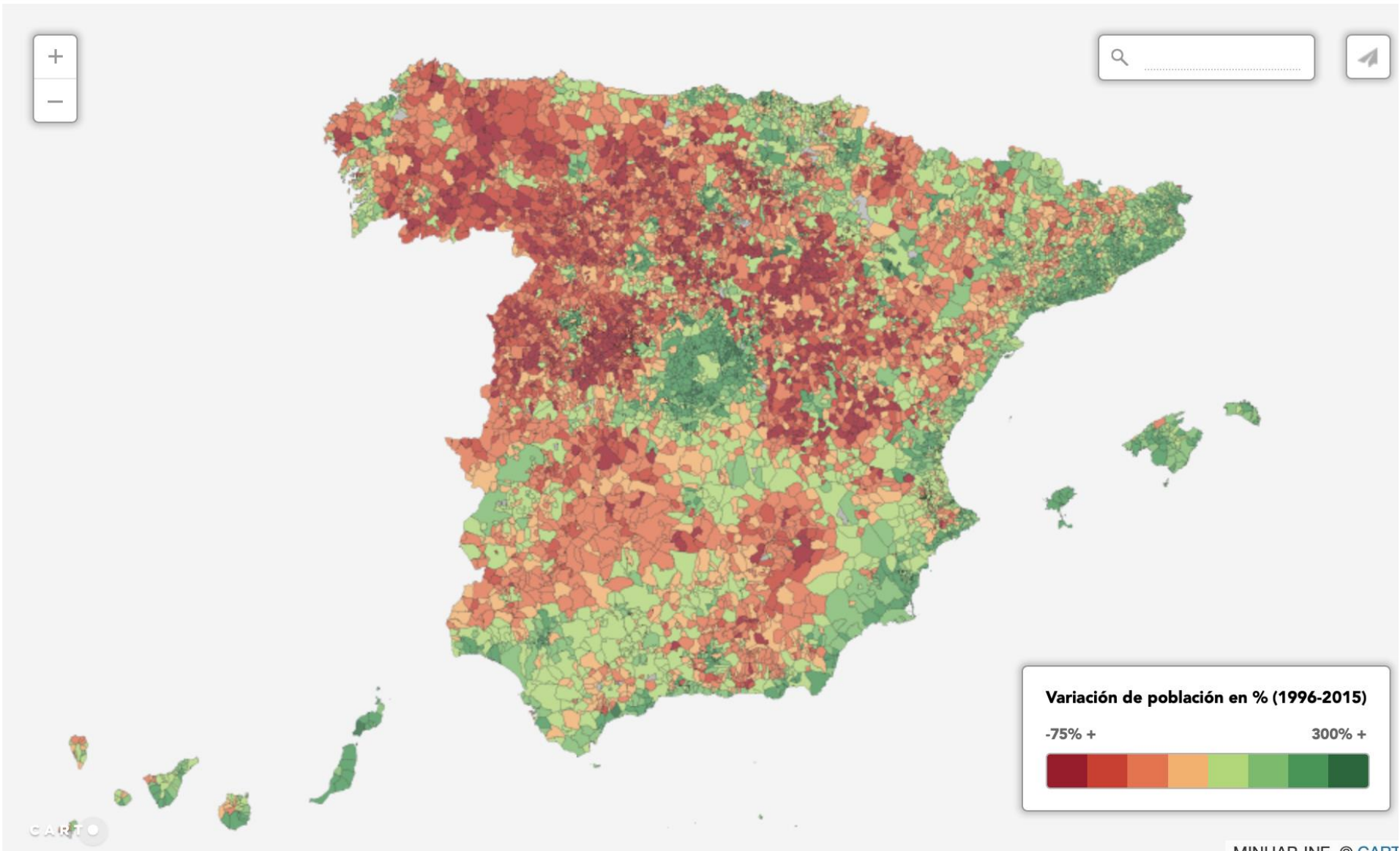
Considering the period from 1998 to 2018, **Castilla y León** is the Autonomous Community most affected by local population abandonment: almost 88% of the municipalities had lost population in this period. Followed by **Asturias**, **Extremadura** and **Aragón**.

On the opposite side, Madrid, Balearic Island and Murcia are those with less loss of local population.

Municipalities that have lost population between 1998 and 2018, by Autonomous Communities

Entre 1998 y 2018

% (Unidades)

■ % de municipios de cada CCAA que ha perdido población   **Fuente:** INE, www.epdata.es

Variación de población en % (1996-2015)

-75% +   300% +

The risk of poverty and social exclusion is greater in rural areas than in cities

- An important factor is aging: 51% of people over 65 live in municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants and 74% in those with less than 100 inhabitants.

- Their income usually depends on their retirement pensions or non-contributory pensions, generally of small amounts.

- Wages tend to be low and conditions of employment are precarious and seasonal, coexisting with the shadow economy.

- The migration of young people and families with school-age children, especially in the second cycle of education, questions the economic sustainability of traditional public services, as well as transportation and communication options, sports, leisure and free time , which allow to establish a better quality of life.

- Territorial inequality in the health, education and social services fields among Autonomous Communities also happens between rural and urban areas.

EA PN
EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK ES

Are you willing to have a doctor only one or two days a week?

According to the Confederation of Rural Development Centres, COCEDER, member of EAPN Spain:

- **Lack of services and job opportunities are the main cause of abandonment of rural towns.**

- **Not all municipalities have the same conditions to provide accesible and good quality services.**

The Spanish Association Against Depopulation: "In general, there is a lack of services in all imaginable aspects"

- Communications (one bus a day), schools (which are reached by road buses many times), sparse doctor visits and social services visits, lack of banking offices and shops, etc.

- «The Empty Spain is the Spain of disconnection: not only we do not have broad-band, but the mobile signal is bad. Both services are necessary for work, business and for many aspects of daily life »

- Without broadband there is no business development, online shopping (alternative to the lack of shops), banking operations (now that offices are closed) or telework.

Implications of this lack of services for vulnerable groups

- EAPN AROPE Indicator Spain Report (2019): "**One in three people experiencing poverty lives in rural areas**".

- **Over-representation of elderly inhabitants**: Challenges in terms of long-term care, without sufficient paid caregivers and nursing residences, nor "health and care" services.

- **Rural digital divide**. IT solutions are technically feasible, even to provide tele-services, but not in practice due to lack both of infrastructure and digital illiteracy.

- **The low population density** conditions the availability, extension and specialization of services, because criteria of **economic efficiency** are applied, without considering demographic and social impacts. E.g. Health care, education, social services, culture and sports.

Good practices

COCEDER launched the "Socio-labour insertion itineraries aimed at curbing depopulation", of the Operational Program for Social Inclusion and Social Economy (funded by the European Social Fund) within its axis to promote social inclusion and fight against poverty and any form of discrimination.

VOLVER AL PUEBLO (**BACK TO THE VILLAGE**). Platform to promote the settlement of new settlers in rural areas through the bank of houses, lands and businesses.

Map with the Autonomous Communities and Provinces in which there are houses, lands and businesses available

PROPOSALS: Develop the 2030 Agenda, the green transition and social inclusion, advancing in all the SDGs

- **Establish broadband and telephone coverage throughout the territory, with a plan to combat the digital divide in all ages and social groups.**

- **Repopulate rural towns:**
  - Mainstream gender equality through all policies, with goals and indicators to control progress.
  - Promote the integration of immigrants and grant equal opportunities.
  - Deliver housing to families who want to move.
  - Provide income support through the Vital Minimum Income, until the household's income level is above the poverty line.
  - Create "decent jobs" (not insecure, nor unregistered). Invest in green and social employment opportunities.
  - Develop teleservices, combined with face-to-face services. Grant transportation to the nearest towns to ensure access to specialized assistance and education.
  - Invest in the productive economy and innovation. Improve the productivity and sustainability of the local economy, through the "green lens" and digitization of businesses. Diversify the economy so as not to depend excessively on the CAP. Redistribute ownership (or at least productive use) of land. Improve the joint management of agricultural prices, to avoid dumping and oligopsony. Expand seasonal tourism with sufficient investment in infrastructure and a sustainable approach.

- **Invest European Funds with access and participation of civil society organizations.**

Thank you!

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