Press Release

# A group of people standing in front of a projector screen Description automatically generated

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# European project revitalises rural areas with smart innovation packages

## Trento, Italy – January 17-18, 2024: The EU-funded project SMART ERA, worth €6.5 million, aims to revitalise rural areas using smart innovation packages to combat depopulation.

A new project **– Smart Era –** has been launched to **empower rural communities** which are facing **socio-economic and environmental challenges**. Using **co-developed solutions bundled into "smart innovation packages,** the 4-year **project fosters a community-led pathway to change and covers technology, governance, business, societal aspects, and policy making.**

**Rural areas** are often perceived as **lagging behind, facing fewer services, structural issues, limited job opportunities, and an aging population.** The ongoing **digital revolution**, coupled with **the rise in remote and location-free work opportunities**, offers a **unique chance to redirect migration flows back to rural landscapes.**

In this respect, **the 25-strong Smart Era consortium from 10 countries recognises** the need for **strategic interventions** and to **capitalise on trends like multi-local living**. The aim is not only to **address the challenges of the communities** but also to **find innovative solutions together within the project.**

**Project coordinator Matteo Gerosa** from FBK states: "I am confident that the SMART ERA project will represent a significant step towards constructing more environmentally friendly, compact, sustainable, and innovative growth models in rural Europe. It will integrate technological solutions and social innovation to provide a strategic response to the challenges posed by depopulation, with the goal of reversing migration flows and igniting sustainable growth. I appreciate the opportunity to lead a remarkable and skilled team of 25 partners from 10 European countries, all dedicated to shaping intelligent and sustainable development in rural areas."

The project will innovate at **six pilot sites:**

* **Trentino (Italy),**
* **Tramuntana/Sóller (Spain),**
* **Northern Ostrobothnia (Finland),**
* **East Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzgovina),**
* **Šmarje (Slovenia, Italy, Croatia)**
* **Devetaki Plateau (Bulgaria).**

These sites will work to **enhance their communities' ability** to **address challenges, promoting cooperation** not only within their regions but also **in line with the EU macro-regional strategies.**

Lastly, **SMART ERA will manage two distinct open calls** – one for the **replication of its solutions in follower rural regions and another for third-party projects.** This will broaden the project's **expertise and foster collaboration.**

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