

Launch of 'Catalonia Rural Hub', an initiative for encouraging digital talent to take root in Catalonia's rural areas

- The goal of the project, which is the first of its kind in Spain, is to encourage digital professionals to relocate to sparsely populated rural environments in Catalonia where they can live and develop professionally
- The initiative is intended to boost the new digital economy throughout Catalonia while exerting a positive impact on the region's productive, commercial and economic fabric
- The pilot trial, promoted by the Regional Government of Catalonia and Mobile World Capital Barcelona as part of Barcelona Digital Talent, offers 20 professionals a week's stay in La Garrotxa region and first-hand experience of living and working remotely from a rural area in Catalonia



La Vall d'en Bas, 19 April 2020.- Encouraging partial or indefinite relocation of the digital talent concentrated in the metropolitan area of Barcelona to rural and more sparsely populated areas of Catalonia where these digital professionals could settle and live while developing their professional careers.

This is the goal of ‘Catalonia Rural Hub’, a project promoted by the Ministry for Digital Policy and Public Administration and Mobile World Capital Barcelona as part of the Barcelona Digital Talent alliance, which seeks to boost the development of the new digital economy throughout Catalonia while exerting a positive impact on the region’s productive, commercial and economic fabric.

The initiative, which is the first of its kind in Spain, was presented today at the **Can Trona Culture and Nature Centre in La Vall d’en Bas** by **Jordi Puigneró**, Minister for Digital Policy; **Jordi Arrufí**, Director of the Digital Talent programme of Mobile World Capital Barcelona and spokesman for Barcelona Digital Talent, and **Lluís Amat**, Mayor of La Vall d’en Bas.

Since last June, current circumstances dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic have led people increasingly to migrate from Barcelona. According to the latest data from the Municipal Data Office (OMD), 8% of the population of Barcelona have decided to leave the city.

This trend, prompted by a growing digitization of companies, an increase in remote work and a willingness of professionals to shift their working environment and their home to the country in order to improve their quality of life, is generating new opportunities for rural towns to increase their populations and to stimulate their economies.

Catalonia Rural Hub

The Catalonia Rural Hub pilot project offers 20 digital professionals the chance to stay for a week in La Vall d’en Bas and to gain first-hand experience of living and working remotely from a rural area in Catalonia.

The trial, which is aimed at self-employed professionals, ICT company employees and public administration personnel, will involve two groups of 10 people and take place over two weeks in the month of May (from 3 to 7 and from 17 to 21 May).

For 5 days, participants will move their place of work to La Garrotxa region and will co-work and share experiences with a small team of professionals with different profiles and from different corporations. They will also be offered activities through which to engage with local agents and therefore enhance and deepen their knowledge of the opportunities offered by this environment, exert a positive impact on the area’s economic, commercial and productive fabric and perhaps even settle there to develop new business and a new digital economy.

Making this experience possible and implement it throughout Catalonia requires good regional connectivity. The public optical fibre network deployed by the Government in recent years, which now covers every region of Catalonia and 91% of the population, is therefore a key infrastructure for guaranteeing the implementation of a new decentralized employment model with which people can develop professionally wherever they are and make the most of the opportunities presented by the new digital economy throughout Catalonia.

The Minister Jordi Puigneró stated that Catalonia Rural Hub “represents a major remedy for depopulation”. According to Puigneró, “during this term in office the Government has striven to extend the optical fibre network all over Catalonia. He added that “now it is time to deploy digital talent all over the country”.

Jordi Arrufí, Director of the Digital Talent programme of Mobile World Capital Barcelona pointed out that the project is not simply a pilot trial but will rather be extended to different

places in Catalonia. “This experience shows that public-private collaboration can provide a catalyst for dealing with the current demand for digital talent”, he stated.

For his part, the Mayor of La Vall d’en Bas, Lluís Amat, explained that “this commitment to environments like ours is a good move because what we want is for rural areas to concentrate on innovation, renovation and talent”.