

Programme of Action for the Regional Provision of Public Services

The Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development's Programme of Action for the Regional Provision of Public Services is designed to assist 21 pilot regions in rural areas – districts, municipal associations or regional associations – in 2012/2013 in sustaining the provision of basic public services, despite an ageing and declining population, by autonomously developing a regional strategy based on a tried-and-tested procedure. In 2012/2013, each of the pilot regions will receive grants of up to 180,000 euros for this purpose. For those regions that show a high degree of dedication in shaping their strategy and use the results to develop innovations that are ripe for implementation, further funds have been budgeted for 2014 for follow-up projects to implement the regional strategies, with further grants of between 50,000 and 200,000 euros. The programme of action is accompanied by various milestones such as professional conferences and demography congresses. The ministries responsible for spatial planning in the non-city states were included in the programme of action right from the outset.

At the kick-off conference in Berlin on 1 and 2 December 2011, Federal Minister Peter Ramsauer gave the starting signal for the working phase of the 21 pilot regions in this, the most comprehensive spatial planning pilot project "MORO"¹ to date.

With funding totalling 6.5 million euros in its lifetime from 2011 to 2014, the Programme of Action for the Regional Provision of Public Services is one of the focal points of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development's "Rural Infrastructure Initiative", and thus supports in particular the implementation of a Regional Strategy. This strategy is a key component of the joint spatial planning guide principles adopted in 2006 by the Standing Conference of Minister of the Federal Government and the federal states, responsible for Spatial Planning as "Concepts and Strategies for Spatial Development in Germany". The programme of action thus also supports the effectiveness of the urban development assistance programme entitled "Smaller Towns and Communities", which funds local authority investment for the socially acceptable adaptation of rural infrastructure to social changes, thereby enabling small and medium-sized communities to cooperate across local authority boundaries in order to deliver projects that they cannot fund by themselves.

In addition to the activities in the pilot regions, the programme of action wants to encourage a strategic dialogue on making professional standards for the provision of regional public services more flexible.

¹ „MORO – Modellvorhaben der Raumordnung“ are spatial planning pilot projects run by BMVBS and BBSR (www.bbsr.bund.de/MORO)

This dialogue is to be initiated by the Federal Government and federal states joining forces to stage specialist workshops and thematic working parties to address the following issues, in particular:

- social infrastructure (education, health, young and elderly people);
- mobility;
- energy, public utilities;
- settlement patterns, cultural landscapes.

More information on the programme can be found at www.regionale-daseinsvorsorge.de.

Regional Strategy for the Provision of Public Services

The purpose of developing a regional strategy is to adapt the numerous and diverse spheres of technical and social infrastructure to the challenges of demographic change, in cooperation with the population, local government and public service providers, and to avert, or at the very least minimize, impending cuts in the range of services provided. This is primarily a discussion-based process initiated by districts, regions or collaborative schemes crossing local authority boundaries with the aim of joining forces with the interested population, public and private sector providers of public services and local authorities to systematically address the impact of demographic change on the various fields of infrastructure involved in the provision of public services, to develop scenarios and adaptation strategies and to ensure politically and organizationally that will be implemented.

Here, regional coordination across local authority boundaries is often a difficult process of negotiation. Frequently, it is a question of deciding which public services are to continue to be provided and at which localities, and where they are not to be provided in the future or provided in a different form. These decisions, which are not always easy, often have a great impact on individual localities and the entire region. Ultimately, the regional players have to develop the adaptation strategies themselves, because it is they who will be responsible for implementing them and placing them on a permanent basis in the future.

The individual thematic areas / infrastructure fields are addressed in working groups comprising experts from the public authorities and representatives of institutions, societies and associations. By addressing the issues in working groups, it is possible to frankly discuss far-reaching consequences of adaptation strategies (e.g. the closure of facilities, the initiation of processes to change the statutory framework or the changing of organizational structures).

Intensified cooperation between public and private sector players and the active involvement of the interested public improve the chances of finding new approaches. In addition, community participation makes people more willing to accept the results and is a major prerequisite for the involvement of civic engagement.