



Brussels, 8 July 2024

## Minutes

### Meeting of the Dialogue with CPR Partners 2021-2027

12 June 2024

#### **A. NATURE OF THE MEETING**

The meeting focused on exchanging with the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) partners on the 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report. Partners were also updated on the outcomes of the European Year of Skills and the Action Plan on Labour and Skills shortages (DG EMPL) and DG REGIO informed about recent advancements of the Just Transition Platform and the development of an inspiring practices compendium for partnership. DG HOME discussed their experiences applying the partnership principle, and ECOLISE (European Network for Community-Led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability) showcased their work on community-led initiatives related to the Green Deal.

The meeting was chaired by the Head of Unit for Political and Inter-Institutional Coordination, Strategic Management and Document Management of DG REGIO (REGIO 01).

#### **B. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

The Chair announced the agenda and confirmed the approval by the participants.

#### **C. LIST OF POINTS DISCUSSED**

##### **1. 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report**

**DG REGIO Director-General** Themis CHRISTOPHIDOU emphasized the importance of continuing discussions on the shape that cohesion policy should take and highlighted the main findings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion report and the role of partners in ensuring the success of the policy.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report shows cohesion policy's positive impact on convergence and the economy. However, challenges such as regional disparities and the triple transition are leading us to reflect on a modernisation of the policy, new performance-based delivery models, combining investments and reforms, investment in governance and administrative capacity, and building in more flexibility. In all this, the partnership principle remains crucial.

##### **2. Question and Answer Session on the 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report**

DG REGIO (Director REGIO.B, Peter BERKOWITZ) opened the discussion on the 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion report.

CEE Bankwatch Network, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE/CEMR), European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), Capital Cities and Regions Network (CCRN), and FSG/EURoma Network advocated for a **reinforcement of the partnership principle** during the execution and management of programmes and for considering its **expansion to other EU policies**

such as the European Semester. They also emphasised the need for **simplification**, proposing a unified set of rules for beneficiaries across all cohesion policy funds. JTF territorial plans were highlighted as a successful approach.

CEE Bankwatch raised the need to **support small-scale beneficiaries** stressing that funding opportunities should not solely cater to large-scale recipients and underlined the importance of green investment, calling for more dedicated measures. Eurocities reminded of the necessity for an Integrated Territorial Investment Approach to support economic development and the triple transition.

The discussion also covered **subregional focus and inequality** (FSG/EURoma, CCRN), emphasising the importance of concentrating on subregional areas with specific poverty and development challenges, maintaining a targeted approach to avoid inequality.

Eurocities raised the issue of **economic development and fiscal independence** for metropolitan regions of central and eastern Europe, noting that these regions are becoming wealthier but receive less investment and lack fiscal independence. **Fundamental Rights Compliance** was raised (ENIL European Network on Independent Living), urging the Commission to pay more attention to fundamental rights in the future cohesion policy and be more proactive in monitoring fundamental rights compliance. CCRN highlighted the need to strengthen **links between urban and rural areas** rather than fostering competition between them. Lastly, the need for greater **local level involvement** in fund management was suggested (CCRN & FSG/EURoma) to improve outcomes, as it leads to more successful projects, with the lack of involvement of local stakeholders in the RRF model being a disadvantage.

**DG REGIO** underlined that the partnership principle is integral to cohesion policy. As detailed in the Communication accompanying the 9th Cohesion Report, any future modifications to cohesion policy or new delivery models must align with the Treaty objectives of economic, social, and territorial cohesion, considering experiences with cohesion policy programmes. It was emphasised that the future policy should include **capacity building and reforms**. The need for **simplification** was acknowledged, reflections on a single rule book for cohesion policy taking into account the perspective of the beneficiary would be desirable. The **place-based and territorial approach** should be reinforced and the JTF serves as a good example – successful implementation is very much linked to internal organisation and the **capacities** of the different Member States. Regarding **fiscal challenges for cities and local authorities**, DG REGIO referred to the cohesion report examining data on subnational revenue distribution. On **enabling conditions** and the rule of law, lessons can be learned from the RRF model to make them more targeted and tailored to individual Member States. Proposals for the **Multiannual Financial Framework** are expected by mid-2025, accompanied by proposals for the future cohesion policy.

Discussions about future cohesion policy are ongoing, and DG REGIO invites the partners to continue **providing input to this discussion**.

### **3. European Year of Skills & Action Plan on Labour and Skills shortages ([Link presentation 1 and 2](#))**

**DG EMPL**'s presentation "*Towards a Skills Revolution: Results of the European Year of Skills*," focused on how the Year promoted a mindset of reskilling and upskilling through addressing the specific objective of increasing strategic investment, strengthening skills relevance, aligning skills and aspirations with labour market opportunities, and attracting talent from third countries. The presentation showcased successful initiatives. The "*Labour and Skills Shortages in the EU: Action Plan*" presentation discussed the risks posed by these shortages to growth, competitiveness, and social cohesion, explained that the shortages are driven by demographic changes, evolving skill requirements, and unfavorable working conditions and outlined the structure, actions and added value of the Action Plan.

During the discussion, points were raised on the **Development of Capacity Building** (REVES, CEE Bankwatch), emphasising the need for a framework that enables vulnerable groups to participate in skills development and small businesses in social economy to provide training. They highlighted the importance of further investments and the right resources, and questioned how capacity building can be improved to create an enabling framework. **Labor and Skills Shortages** (CCRE, ECRE) were also discussed. CCRE asked about potential activities linked to difficulties of local administrations to recruit staff. ECRE highlighted the working conditions of migrants and asylum applicants, welcoming the recognition of skills. They also asked about the state of play of the EU talent pool. CEE Bankwatch underlined the importance of connecting the labour and skills shortage Action Plan with cohesion policy measures to focus on essential services and attract people to less-developed areas. They advocated for a more targeted, inclusive, and participatory approach to address structural issues region by region. Additionally, they raised questions about the next steps, stressing that more jobs are created due to green and digital deals, but not always in the places where jobs are lost, thus calling for a more holistic approach.

**DG EMPL** recalled that **working conditions of migrant workers** are reflected in the action plan and Member States are encouraged to implement the EU action plan with social partner engagement. **On the vulnerable groups**, funding from the European Social Fund and other EU funding tools support integration measures for those further from the labor market. However, tailored, holistic measures are required to address the multiple challenges vulnerable people face.. The European Year of Skills National Coordinator Network facilitated **mutual learning** between the Member States, sharing good practice in skills (e.g. training to women in rural areas in Spain, instilling lifelong learning culture in SMEs through innovative approaches in the Netherlands).. DG EMPL is aware of the shortages in local administrations, 42 occupations were classified as shortages in the EU in 2023.

#### **4. Just Transition platform (JTP) ([Link presentation](#))**

**DG REGIO** presented the Just Transition Platform that brings together stakeholders through various work streams, such as conferences, working groups, technical assistance, capacity building, a knowledge hub, and communication activities, all supported by the JTP secretariat. These efforts exemplify the partnership principle embedded in the Just Transition Fund and aim to offer guidance and support for all involved parties. Experts in just transition are encouraged to join the database to improve efficiency and support, with a call for applications scheduled for the fall.

Participants commended the Just Transition Platform's (JTP) achievements so far (Euromontana, Eurocities, WWF, CEE Bankwatch, CoR), highlighting its significance for JTF regions and **valuable lessons learned** during implementation, particularly concerning stakeholder engagement. Euromontana suggests creating a similar instrument for regions adapting to other transitions, such as those heavily reliant on winter tourism, facing challenges due to climate change affecting snowfall and tourism. Climate Change Actions and the Social Climate Fund were also discussed. Eurocities expressed concern about potential **backlash against local climate policies** but also reported from local administrators forming alliances with civil society and industry to raise awareness about just transition issues, which could benefit from multi-level governance support and mobilisation of actors at the European, national, and regional levels. WWF appreciated the JTP's efficiency and emphasised the need for continued efforts, sharing insights with the broader community, and integrating learning into wider policies and instruments.

The Committee of the Regions proposed exploring the complementarity of just transition initiatives with other types of programmes and discussing the variety of **technical assistance** and territorial tools available, focusing on good practices and partner feedback.

**DG REGIO** welcomed the positive feedback on the JTP's work. On using **the JTF approach in other economic areas**, DG REGIO recalled that the Just Transition Fund's power lies in bringing

partners together to develop the territorial just transition plans, encouraging and facilitating the transition process. This inclusive approach could be applied to other transition contexts, emphasising the importance of partnerships rather than solely relying on resources. DG REGIO appreciates the efforts of all stakeholders in raising awareness of the transition and acknowledges the importance of grassroots involvement. On **future meetings**, DG REGIO plans to host an autumn JTP conference session on the broad range of technical assistance for just transition, acknowledging the importance of various types of support.

DG REGIO invites participants to proactively discuss their positive experiences with the JTF and the JTP within their networks and during exchanges with their constituencies, regions, or Member States to place just transition in a broader political agenda and raise awareness.

#### **5. Discussion on ECCOP and European Code of Conduct on Partnership – compilation of inspiring practices ([Link presentation](#))**

**DG REGIO** presented updates on the **European Community of Practice on Partnership (ECoPP)**, and the ongoing work on the **European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP)**.

In 2023, a new call for ECoPP members was launched, resulting in a more balanced ECoPP membership. The 2024 ECoPP work programme focuses on the themes of co-creation, learning, and capacity building, with seven task forces addressing topics from the partnership principle to awareness raising. Members are encouraged to continue engaging in the ECoPP to strengthen institutional capacity in implementing the partnership principle.

The Commission updated on the reflections on the **Code of Conduct**. Valuable recommendations on how to update the Code were received, such as, from ECoPP, The Code remains the core instrument to encourage the implementation of the partnership principle in cohesion policy. While an update could be beneficial, the right timing is crucial. The impact of an update is likely to be greater when the key components of cohesion policy post-2027 are more apparent. The Commission is working in the meantime on a **compendium of inspiring practices** for partnership principle implementation, targeting different contexts, programmes, and regions with varying levels of partnership culture maturity. The goal is to encourage managing authorities to adopt a partnership culture by showcasing successful examples, which will also inform future code updates.

During the discussion, members (CEE Bankwatch, Eurochild, ECRE, ENIL, FSG/EURoma), expressed their hope that ECoPPs work on the reform of the code will not have been in vain and that the recommendations will be considered in a future update. They welcomed the idea of the **best practice compendium**, emphasising the need for a **mandatory code of conduct** for a successful implementation of partnership and encouraged **mainstreaming of the partnership principle** across all EU funding. CEE Bankwatch asked for a more proactive approach in promoting partnership, as it is crucial for effective decision-making and implementation in the current transformation affecting all aspects of society. There is a need for more partnerships to ensure the benefits of cooperation, such as access to expertise, raising citizens' awareness and getting them involved in the decision-making process, but also helping to prevent misuse or corruption.

Eurochild and ECRE asked for better promoting of the **partnership principle at national level**. ECRE reported about the struggle of smaller organizations to engage due to limited resources and welcomed the application of the **partnership principle for Home Affairs** funds but acknowledged that cultural change takes time. The **compendium of inspiring practices** should ideally include examples from Home Affairs funds as well. ENIL underlined the crucial role of **technical assistance** in encouraging partnership but raised concerns about the lack of information regarding its usage and effectiveness. The code of conduct's emphasis on involving the most marginalised requires genuine commitment from managing authorities. For future improvements, there should be a strong link between technical assistance and the implementation of the partnership principle, potentially with

some **conditionality** for Member States. FSG/EURoma expressed a **positive outlook**, recognising the importance of identifying specific practices that further the partnership principle and highlighting the progress made by some managing authorities.

**DG REGIO** took note of the wish to **mainstream the partnership principle** across all EU funds and confirmed that there is a general awareness of the importance of partnership. The **compendium** should serve as a guide for future policy development and implementation. DG REGIO acknowledged that smaller organisations and marginalised groups face challenges in participating, requiring investment and preparedness from managing authorities. Technical assistance could be used more effectively to promote partnership and more tools and instruments may be needed. The compendium on inspiring practices is in its early stages - input from the CPR partners will therefore be very welcome.

#### **6. First lessons learned of the Home Affairs Funds applying the partnership principle under the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) ([Link presentation](#))**

**DG HOME** presented the state of play of the Monitoring Committees in Member States and their role in assessing and ensuring the application the Partnership Principle. Main points raised in establishing **Monitoring Committees** included concerns for possible non-compliance with legal requirements on civil society representation (especially BMVI and ISF) and lack of voting rights for all members. **Lessons learned** during the first year include difficulties in securing partner commitment (civil society, regional, and local authorities) for balanced and comprehensive committee structures. This was particularly challenging in BMVI (border management and visa policy) and ISF (internal security) due to national sovereignty and scope. Some organisations were reluctant to be associated with decision-making in migration and border management, while managing authorities had concerns about potential beneficiaries' involvement. DG HOME will continue to support Member States in meeting CPR requirements, with balanced representation being a focus of mid-term evaluations.

During the discussion, ECRE, ENIL and CEE Bankwatch highlighted the **importance of knowledge-sharing and collaboration** between Member States to address challenges in forming Monitoring Committees. **Positive examples** from some Member States demonstrate the benefits of civil society involvement in monitoring committees, focusing on fundamental rights and migration issues. Capacity-building through technical assistance could be a solution, with clarification needed on how it can be used in practice to support civil society organisations' participation. CEE Bankwatch congratulated the systematic evaluation of the application of the partnership principle across committees, stressing the importance of balanced representation and stakeholder involvement. Sharing the evaluation process and recommendations for improvement would be valuable.

**DG HOME** thanked the partners for sharing good practices and underlined that the implementation is still in an early phase which could be contributing to sometimes difficult onboarding of partners. Therefore, sharing of good examples and best practice is crucial for successful implementation. **Technical assistance** can support capacity-building, but Member States ultimately make the final decisions within eligibility limits of how Technical Assistance is spent. The Commission supports Managing Authorities in the programming and points out if certain activities could be better supported. DG HOME guides with advice and monitoring, while checking for compliance with the partnership principle. Desk officers ensure a constant follow-up and encourage improvements.

#### **7. Communities for the Future – Localizing the European Green Deal ([Link presentation](#))**

**ECOLISE (European Network for Community-Led Initiatives on Climate change and Sustainability)** presented their work on the [Time for Collective Action Manifesto](#) which represents their whole society approach to the European Green Deal. Successful implementation requires

grassroots engagement and ECOLISE focuses on making the Green Deal tangible at the local level. Their two-year initiative encourages long-term, in-depth discussions on the European Green Deal. Deep conversations and capacity-building are crucial for effective collaboration. The power of storytelling aids in engaging partners and policymakers, while social change and citizen-led systemic choices are necessary for successful implementation. Funding focused on climate and environment should also support social innovation and **empower citizens as agents of change**.

During the discussion, partners (CEE Bankwatch, REVES), emphasised the value of sharing different approaches among participants. CEE Bankwatch welcomed the interactive session, appreciating the opportunity for exchange, while REVES emphasised the need to discuss possible limitations and concerns that organisations focused on specific groups might face, particularly regarding the negative impacts of green transition initiatives. Partners (FSG/EURoma, ENIL, REVES) recalled the **challenges faced by vulnerable groups in the energy transition**. Sufficient funding of green transition is needed ensuring no one is left behind during implementation. The European Green Deal's impact on citizens will require attention, considering vulnerable groups' capacity and potential risks. Local-level initiatives may already be implementing the Green Deal, and continued funding support is necessary for informal initiatives' longevity. Collaboration on CPR funds and Green Deal implementation is encouraged.

**DG REGIO** thanked Ecolise for the engaging presentation and reported from the [5th Citizen Participation and Deliberative Democracy Festival](#), where the first day focused on how citizens engagement can help the green transition and highlighted the importance of local-level initiatives for implementation. Effective progress requires resources, participation, and civil society involvement. ECOLISE's work on the Manifesto showcases the effectiveness of local Action Group initiatives, offering added value for participants and serving as a model to foster Green Deal implementation.

## **E. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

The chair concluded that the partnership principle's importance and added value as a core strength of cohesion policy were emphasised throughout the exchanges. It ensures better policy implementation on the ground and fosters ownership of all actors involved. The partnership principle will remain crucial in future policy, with its strengthening and integration being a key focus of the ongoing discussions. Discussions showed that the Just Transition Platform serves as an inspiring example of an inclusive approach that encourages and facilitates the transition process, underlining the importance of partnership. The CPR partners are invited to proactively discuss positive experiences with the JTF and the JTP within their networks to raise awareness of the added value of meaningful partnership when implementing EU funds. A key takeaway for the chair is the significance of knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and capacity-building to address challenges.

Members are invited to contribute to the compendium of inspiring practices to further improve and strengthen the “partnership culture” in programme implementation and to guide future policy development.

The chair thanked the participants and speakers for their active participation and welcomed the growing interaction among members in the group's Microsoft TEAMS channel, encouraging feedback on its management. The chair underlined the **added value of regular participation** in the meetings of the group, given that the group's establishment by legislation warrants regular and active involvement of all actors. Given the transition period pursuant to the European Elections, the chair suggested that the next in person meeting could potentially take place in spring, allowing for the new Commission's establishment. Combining this planning with a virtual webinar could help maintain engagement. Partners present emphasised the importance of meeting at regular intervals. Members are encouraged to provide suggestions on topics for discussion and are invited to volunteer as presenters, like ECOLISE to share good practice and reflect different perspectives.

## **8. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

1. BUSINESSEUROPE
2. CCRE/CEMR (COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS)
3. CCRN (CAPITAL CITIES AND REGIONS NETWORK)
4. CEE BANKWATCH NETWORK
5. CPMR (CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS)
6. EAPB (EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC BANKS AND FUNDING AGENCIES)
7. ECRE (EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON REFUGEES AND EXILES)
8. ECOLISE (EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY)
9. ENSIE (EUROPEAN NETWORK OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION ENTERPRISES)
10. EURADA (EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES)
11. EUROCHILD
12. EUROCITIES
13. EUROMONTANA
14. EARTO (EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATIONS)
15. ENIL (EUROPEAN NETWORK ON INDEPENDENT LIVING)
16. EUA (EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION)
17. FSG (FUNDACION SECTREARIADO GITANO/EUROMA NETWORK)
18. REVES (EUROPEAN NETWORK OF CITIES AND REGIONS FOR THE SOCIAL ECONOMY)
19. WWF EPO (WWF EUROPEAN POLICY PROGRAMME)

### **OBSERVERS:**

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE