



The views of the EESC on the future of cohesion policy

Group of Experts on the Future of Cohesion Policy
31 January 2023

Members of the EESC

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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body that represents **organised civil society**

“The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission shall be **assisted by an Economic and Social Committee** and a Committee of the Regions acting in **an advisory capacity.**”

Treaty on European Union, Article 13



WHAT DOES ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY MEAN?

The EESC comprises all the groups and organisations in which people work cooperatively:



In the EESC we are representing the views and proposals of civil society as a whole, and act as intermediaries between decision-makers and citizens.



WORKING METHODS

The Committee can be consulted by the European Parliament, the Council of the EU or the European Commission. Opinions can be **mandatory**, **own-initiative** or **exploratory**.

To issue opinions, the sections usually set up **study groups**, each with a **rapporteur**.

Constructive debate in meetings to reach consensus.

A vote is taken at the **section meeting**, and then at the **plenary session**.

The **final opinion** is sent to the **European institutions** and published in the **Official Journal of the EU**.



AN ASSEMBLY OF 329 MEMBERS FROM ALL MEMBER STATES OF THE EU

- appointed for a **renewable five-year term** by **the Council** on a proposal from each Member State
- Their travel and accommodation costs are covered by the EESC
- **not based full time in Brussels**: most continue their own jobs “back home”





The EESC

- was the first European institution to contribute to the development of the new financial programming period (2021-2027) by adopting four opinions on cohesion policy that served as input to the decisions that EU leaders made
- emphasized from the first days of the COVID-19 crisis that cohesion policy must play a key role in ensuring a balanced recovery and fostering convergence



The EESC brochures:

[Cohesion policy as fundamental pillar for bringing the EU closer to its citizens and for reducing disparities among EU regions and inequalities among people - The views of organised civil society for the programming period 2021-2027](#)

[Building a resilient and inclusive European economy after the COVID-19 crisis - The views of organised civil society](#)



Questions:

- Does the policy's approach of contributing to multiple objectives and of being a key tool to deliver EU sectorial policies need revisiting?
- Should the policy be focused instead on territorial and social needs within more limited EU priorities?
- Or, by contrast, should Cohesion Policy put a stronger emphasis on contributing to the delivery of EU level objectives and policies?
- Could there be a definition of European common goods that the policy should contribute to?
- And how should this be achieved compared to existing Cohesion Policy mechanisms and its place-based approach?



The EESC

- strongly acknowledges the importance of economic, social and territorial cohesion as a principle beyond crises, as a well-run policy, as a policy objective and as a founding pillar of the EU and **believes that Cohesion Policy should put a stronger emphasis on contributing to the delivery of EU level objectives and policies.**



The EESC

- Reaffirms that it is in all of our interest that we continue strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion based on strong **multi-level governance and partnership** with the regional stakeholders, citizens and civil society partners, and across the different EU policy fields



The EESC

- supports the need for the cohesion policy to strike a fine balance in the very unstable environment we live in:
 - on one hand, the **challenges of unforeseen events** may become more frequent and pronounced and cohesion policy needs to be able to react flexibly.
 - on the other hand, the cohesion funds are intended for **long-term investments** in the less-developed and poorer regions, and territorial convergence must not be sacrificed by such crises.



The EESC

- emphasizes that the main principle of cohesion policy "**No one should be left behind**" is still accurate and valid and that civil society partners are ready to continue to work towards this principle.



Questions:

- Should Cohesion Policy put more focus on particular types of territories, potentially below NUTS2 level?
- Should Cohesion Policy cover all Member States and regions, or focus only on Member States or regions lagging behind?
- Should it differentiate more in terms of financial support, modalities of support, budget management, objectives and investment?
- Should the funds in Cohesion Policy follow the same approach or should they be more differentiated?
- Should Cohesion Policy focus more on the needs and opportunities of certain types of individual or societal groups?



The EESC

- Strongly **believes that cohesion policy is a policy for all regions**: Three-quarters of cohesion policy investment focuses on the least developed regions, but provisions remain for regions in industrial transition as well as for the outermost regions of the EU. In addition, cross-border cooperation has been stepped up and the role of cities, metropolitan areas and local initiatives strengthened, with a new priority devoted to bringing "Europe closer to citizens".



The EESC considers it particularly important to

- call on the Member States and the EU's **regions to involve the social partners and other civil society organisations as broadly and genuinely as possible** in shaping cohesion policy and monitoring its effects. This inclusion will also help measure the extent to which cohesion policy objectives have been achieved, which should not be based solely on quantitative indicators, but also on quality indicators (**measuring development, not just growth**)



The EESC considers it particularly important to

- **setting up "enabling conditions" tailored to the investment, ensuring that the preconditions for success are in place**



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- counteract pressure on democracy and its values, in such ways as developing participatory democracy and active involvement of local actors, including those from the social economy sector
- expand the Just Transition Mechanism, particularly by taking into account the social costs of mitigating and adapting to climate change



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- **invest more in skills, stimulate people's creativity and entrepreneurship** throughout their lives, particularly through education, upskilling and lifelong learning geared towards the processes of the technological, green and digital transformation
- **increase investment in R&D, thereby supporting innovation** that can help less developed regions to grow, as well as the overall system for supporting them at regional level



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- strengthen urban-rural links, including in order to ensure all EU citizens access to services of general interest, which are often concentrated around urban areas.
- emphasize more on **territorial policy strategies like ITI** (Integrated Territorial Investment) and **CLLD** (Community-Led Local Development)



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- strengthen **cross-border and interregional cooperation**, particularly in developing climate-friendly railway infrastructure in border areas and consistently maintaining open borders between Member States. The importance of single market should be secured by all means as the single market is at the heart of the European project. An efficient single market should allow EU citizens to enjoy a wider choice of services and products and better job opportunities. The single market should stimulate trade and competition.



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- continue to **protect SMEs and their sustainability**. Therefore, the usual, existing European tools such as the European Social Fund, ERDF, Cohesion Fund must be deployed in a very creative but simple way so that SMEs can have easy access to funding and ensure favourable long-term credit conditions



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- ensure that the use of funds under the Recovery and Resilience Facility is fully compatible with the implementation of cohesion policy through the proper use of resources
- streamline cohesion policy for beneficiaries **through simplification and flexibility** in implementing the funds that should be used to achieve its objectives
- ensuring **clear and simple rules for the EU funds** implemented under shared management in a single rulebook



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- enhance the **administrative capacity** of the regional, local administrations and civil society partners to ensure that the cohesion Funds are spent effectively and with added value. This is why there is the need to **provide the authorities with the necessary tools for more funds to be managed in a decentralised way**



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- state that a well-coordinated European industrial policy is fundamental, taking into account both the challenges of the post-COVID-19 situations and the war in Ukraine
- identify and **support Key industries**, from human resources to research, resulting in a European industrial policy which will become autonomous and independent



The EESC considers it particularly important to:

- contribute to the works of the High Level Group on the future of cohesion policy as much as possible ensuring that the voice and the views of civil society are illustrated clearly in the next programming period.



Conclusion

Cohesion policy should be a policy for all regions, tailored to local needs, modern and dynamic.



Further reading

[The 8th Cohesion Report](#) – EESC opinion adopted in May 2022

[The role of EU structural and cohesion policy in driving forward the transformation of the economy in an innovative and smart manner](#) – EESC exploratory opinion adopted in September 2020



THANK YOU

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