

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and Cohesion Fund, 2007-2013

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This report provides the second strategic overview of the implementation of the 2007-2013 cohesion policy programmes which are due to end in 2015. The first report was presented in March 2010. This report summarises the 27 strategic reports presented by the Member States at the end of 2012.

The financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 has dramatically altered the context for cohesion policy programmes. In 2008, GDP growth in the EU was already very low (0.3%) but, in 2009, it shrank by more than 4%. In 2010 and 2011, the EU returned to positive growth rates, but a further contraction is likely to have occurred in 2012. The recession has been particularly severe in the Baltic States, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain.

This report shows that, since the 2010 report, implementation has accelerated making important contributions to many areas necessary for sustaining growth and creating jobs. Equally, evidence points to clear progress towards the objectives set at the beginning of the period.

The policy has also demonstrated its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and to respond effectively to the crisis. That said, significant and additional results are still expected from the programmes up until the end of 2015 and it is important to maintain and even redouble the efforts made so far.

Lastly, the Commission has proposed significant changes for the 2014-2020 period related to many of the issues analysed in this report: concentration of resources, focus on results, reliable reporting against common indicators, a performance framework and evaluation. This report and the accompanying documentation support the relevance of the changes proposed.

The main conclusions of the report are as follows:

- there is clear and growing evidence of programmes delivering across many policy priorities and Member States;
- Cohesion policy programmes have shown that they have the flexibility to respond to the crisis but with much still to be delivered and risks in some strategic areas;
- the Commission is willing to consider reductions in national co-financing;
- there are important lessons to be drawn from the past and the current programmes;
- evaluation and use of indicators needs to be strengthened;
- better programming is needed for the future.