

Deployment of cohesion policy instruments by regions to address demographic change

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The European Parliament adopted by 506 votes to 103 with 77 abstentions, a resolution on the deployment of cohesion policy instruments by regions to address demographic change.

Reacting to demographic change: Members recalled that demographic change is a **key challenge**, not only at European and global level, but also for local development and territorial enhancement policies in the EU.

Parliament felt that **demographic change should be tackled in a coordinated manner** through the action of all European, national, regional and local authorities and civil society representatives, taking into account the role of cities, rural areas and coastal and rural areas, fisheries, as well as areas facing specific problems related to their geographical or demographic situation.

While demographic change is creating new issues, it also opens development prospects at the local level. In this context, Parliament felt that the importance of **smart specialisation strategies** should be stressed to support regions and local territories in identifying high value-added activities and for building attractive innovation ecosystems that incorporate the circular economy into regional planning.

Characteristics of demographic change in the EU: stressing the disruption of the age pyramid, Members stated that one of the main objectives of an EU demographic policy should be to take into account all territories having to contend with demographic imbalances and the specificities of those territories. They suggested support for small and medium-sized mountain and rural farms, which produce products with specific quality characteristics and could serve to reverse or **decrease depopulation in those areas**.

The resolution stressed the steady increase in the number of elderly people – around 2 million people every year reach the age of 60 – which impacts on spatial, housing and transport planning and on other types of infrastructure and services. Regions have to adapt service provision, infrastructures and policy-making to those demographic patterns and trends.

Coordination of EU policies: Parliament called for a **greater coordination of EU instruments**, in particular the common agricultural policy (CAP), ESI Funds, including the Cohesion Fund, European Territorial Cooperation, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and the Connecting Europe Facility, so as to ensure a more comprehensive approach to demographic change.

The Commission should propose a **strategy on demographic change** which gives priority to the following areas:

- provision of **new paid employment opportunities** to maintain populations;
- **infrastructure** development as a factor in setting up businesses;
- the **extension of information and communication technology (ICT) coverage** in sparsely populated areas;
- the provision of **basic state services** and local public transport to ensure access to public services;
- policies designed to ensure sustainable **generational renewal** and appropriate care for dependent persons;

- policies on the **reception, integration and return of migrants** and refugees under international protection;
- the extensive use of **new, more attractive settings** for conveying information about rural life.

Members suggested:

- incorporating demographic considerations throughout the policy spectrum, including in its **budget headings**, in order to enable the development of these policies, particularly in cohesion, employment, agriculture, environment, the information society, RDI (research, development and innovation), employment, education, social policy, and transport;
- creating, at a **pan-European level, of networks for the exchange of good practices** and experiences through which local and regional authorities, as well as civil society stakeholders, can educate each other on addressing issues created by demographic change.

Enhancing the effectiveness of European funds: Parliament stressed that ESI Funds must address demographic change more effectively in the next programming period:

- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) should make a greater contribution to and provide more support towards helping areas with high aging, rurality and population outflow indices to improve their transport and telecommunications infrastructure, bridge the digital divide (including between generations), and enjoy better public services;
- the European Social Fund (ESF) should step up its work in **training and educating young people**, and should promote employability and help people strike a better work-life balance and combat the social and digital exclusion of elderly persons.

In general, the regions should use ESI Funds more proactively in order to tackle youth unemployment. Cohesion policy should also promote the employability and inclusion of women.

Members take the view that consideration of a **special status for demographically disadvantaged regions** should be discussed in the development of post-2020 cohesion policy.

The Commission was asked to: (i) consider the allocation of **specific resources**, within existing funds, to cover areas with serious and permanent demographic disadvantages; (ii) consider defining **new criteria** for distinguishing territories facing demographic challenges; (iii) incorporate a **flagship demography initiative** into the Europe 2020 Strategy, funded by existing ESI Funds.