

Harnessing talent in Europe's regions

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted the own-initiative report by Cristina MAESTRE MARTÍN DE ALMAGRO (S&D, ES) on harnessing talent in Europe's regions.

The report welcomed the Commission communication entitled 'Harnessing talent in Europe's regions', which is the first key deliverable of the European Year of Skills, and its overall objective of promoting, retaining and attracting talent to transform all regions into dynamic places.

Rural proofing and OR reflex

Members called for cohesion policy to be provided with new budgetary resources in order to face future challenges. They believe that it is fundamental to implement the concept of 'rural proofing', which must include the assessment of the demographic impact, the proximity and accessibility of public services, the question of the creation of quality jobs, the impact on the educational and training framework and the gender impact on rural areas when developing Union policies. They stressed that the strategies and mechanisms presented by the Commission in its communication entitled 'Harnessing Talent in European Regions' must adopt an 'OR reflex', meaning that the specific characteristics of the ORs should be systematically taken into account in EU initiatives, legislative proposals.

European semester

The report welcomed the introduction of the '**do no harm to cohesion**' principle, which is defined as 'no action should hamper the convergence process or contribute to regional disparities'. It called on the Commission to strengthen and develop this principle as part of the European Semester and to involve local and regional authorities at all stages of the procedures linked with the European Semester and its country-specific recommendations (CSRs).

Members called on the Commission to include in the country-specific recommendations an **inventory of cohesion at NUTS 2 level** in the Member States to monitor lagging regions' level of convergence towards the EU average. Country-specific recommendations should set measurable and binding social objectives at territorial level.

Regions in a talent development trap

The report called for the establishment of **clear and objective criteria** for defining regions that are or risk finding themselves in a talent development trap. It urged the Commission and Member States to seriously address this challenge by setting regions in, or at risk of, a talent development trap as a core priority of their action and investment under cohesion policy. It underlined the need to include in the categorisation of regions at risk of falling into a development trap those deemed as 'less developed', as defined in Article 108(2) of the Common Provisions Regulation.

Talent booster mechanism

Members considered that policies developed under the Talent Booster Mechanism should focus on developing high-quality labour and formation markets, creating new job opportunities that offer attractive wages, ensuring decent living standards, supporting regions in attracting European funds, optimising

public services and infrastructure, fostering economic diversification and creating attractive business environments and social cohesion in order to strengthen the economic competitiveness of the affected regions and the EU as a whole.

Combating the brain drain

The report encouraged Member States and local authorities to put in place **policies and strategies** to combat brain drain and bring back talent in the context of multi-level governance. It suggested involving all relevant stakeholders (public authorities, companies, universities, non-governmental organisations, etc.) in the development of the most appropriate tools, such as subsidies for employers hiring young talent and returning talent, allowances to cover return costs, and subsidies for launching entrepreneurial activity.

Financial support

Both the Commission and Member States should finance and promote projects for **young people's access to training**, the creation of quality jobs, and guaranteed paid traineeships. Future Partnership Agreements should align specific priorities with demographic needs. While existing instruments provide financial support to regions at risk of a talent development trap, the creation of a dedicated Fund addressing brain drain is recommended for the new programming period.

The report underlines the central role of Member States and regional authorities in **tackling gender inequalities** from education to the workplace, and therefore called for additional financial support for regions with lower rates of participation by women in the labour market in order to promote equal opportunities.

The Commission and Member States are invited to finance and promote specific projects for the development of initiatives to ensure that young people, including those with fewer opportunities and from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, can access quality education and work-related training, with a particular focus on deficit or high-demand occupations.

Migration

Lastly, Members recalled the need to define an ambitious and sustainable policy on legal migration and integration at EU level. They stressed that it is essential to adopt a **strategic approach to the integration of non-EU nationals** as a potential driver of local growth and welcomes measures paving the way towards a more sustainable and inclusive approach to labour mobility.