

# Cohesion policy 2014-2020 – implementation and outcomes in the Member States

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted the own-initiative report by Andrey NOVAKOV (EPP, BG) on cohesion policy 2014-2020 - implementation and outcomes in the Member States.

## *Outcomes*

Members noted that evaluations carried out by the Member States on the outcomes of 2014-2020 cohesion policy investments show that, in general, cohesion policy brought about positive results in the areas that it supported.

They welcomed cohesion policy's contribution to research and innovation, as it, among other things, strengthened cooperation between the research community and businesses and helped turn research into marketable products or services. By the end of 2022, more than 75 000 companies had cooperated with research institutions and around 37 000 had introduced new products to the market thanks to support through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

## *Energy efficiency and climate change*

The report noted there is evidence that cohesion policy supported investments in several coal regions that contributed to decarbonisation.

Moreover, measures aimed at renewable energy production have increased renewable production capacity in the EU by 6 000 MW by the end of 2022, with a target of 8 700 MW by the end of 2023.

Regarding climate change adaptation, thanks to cohesion investments 29 million people are now less exposed to flooding.

## *Water*

The report noted that cohesion support from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund has also increased the number of people benefiting from a better water supply (8.3 million people by the end of 2022 and better management of their municipal waste. Most of the targeted beneficiaries (70 %) of the measures to improve water supply live in Italy, Romania, Greece, Portugal, Bulgaria and Czechia.

## *Energy and transport*

Energy and transport networks have received significant investments from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund.

## *Employment*

The report pointed out that cohesion policy support has also brought tangible benefits to thousands of **SMEs**. It stressed that this has been one of the best performing areas of ERDF support.

Members acknowledged that cohesion, especially through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative, has supported successful employment, social inclusion and educational and

vocational training measures. By the end of 2022, 6.8 million people had found a job thanks to measures supported by the ESF and the Youth Employment Initiative, and 10.2 million people had earned a qualification.

The report also underlined that evaluations from Member States such as Italy, Germany, Poland and Ireland have shown that people, especially young people, who participated in training measures, apprenticeships or traineeships supported by cohesion policy funds were significantly more likely to find jobs.

Moreover, the ESF has helped entrepreneurs launch new businesses and provided training so that companies can better adapt to changes in the market.

The report stressed that, through cohesion policy financial support for projects in the healthcare sector, mainly through ESF and ERDF investments, 58.3 million people had access to improved healthcare services across the EU by the end of 2022.

### ***Future cohesion policy***

The report insisted that cohesion policy should remain the EU's main investment instrument for reducing disparities, ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion and stimulating regional and local sustainable growth and that it should continue to be a key contributor to supporting a socially just transition and recovery from symmetric and asymmetric shocks and the fight against climate change.

Members regretted the **reduction** in the share of the 2021-2027 MFF dedicated to cohesion, compared to the previous programming period. They believe that there must be an increase in real terms in the overall cohesion budget and in the MFF's share of the policy compared to the 2021-2027 programming period.

According to Members, cohesion investments should remain under shared management for programming and implementation in order to be able to respond to the needs of Member States, regions, and urban, rural and remote areas.

The report acknowledged the need for **built-in crisis flexibility** and proposed, in this regard, the creation of a dedicated axis for local and regional authorities to address emerging priorities.

### ***Financing***

Regretting that delays in the MFF negotiations led to considerable delays in the 2021-2027 programming period, Members called on the Commission to assess the legal possibility of creating two distinct parts within the Common Provisions Regulation, namely the content-related part (political) and the MFF-related part (financial resources), for the post-2027 programming period.

Members called on the Commission, the Member States and regional authorities to use and enhance existing mechanisms to detect and fight irregularities, fraud and corruption in cohesion policy funding.

### ***Future priorities***

The Commission is called on, in the post-2027 cohesion policy regulations, to:

- continue to underline the importance of tackling climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity loss and protection of the environment, including better water and waste management, resource and energy efficiency, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management;

- guarantee better access to funding for local and regional authorities, and also for cross-border and less-developed regions;
- ensure that every new Commission initiative be accompanied by a corresponding budgetary top-up.