Ninth report on economic and social cohesion

2024/2107(INI) - 08/05/2025 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 392 votes to 125, with 55 abstentions, a resolution on the ninth report on economic and social cohesion.

Preserving the cohesion policy model

Parliament believes that the cohesion policy model – a focus on regional and local levels, a place-based approach and decentralised strategic planning, programming and implementation based on the partnership principle – should be maintained across all regions and, where possible, deepened as the EU's main long-term investment instrument to reduce disparities, ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion and stimulate sustainable regional and local growth.

Members called for a clear demarcation between cohesion policy and other instruments, to avoid overlaps and competition between EU instruments.

Parliament opposed any form of centralising top-down reform of EU funding programmes, including those under shared management, such as cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy, and advocates greater decentralisation of decision-making to local and regional level. It called for **greater involvement of local and regional authorities,** as well as economic and civil society stakeholders, at every stage of EU programmes under shared management, from preparation and programming to implementation, execution and evaluation.

Robust financing

Members believe that future cohesion policy must be provided with robust funding for the post-2027 financial period. They reaffirmed the need for a **more ambitious post-2027 cohesion policy** in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 and called for the next MFF to ensure that cohesion policy continues to receive at least the same level of funding in real terms as in the current period. The MFF must be more responsive to unforeseen needs, including by providing sufficient margins and flexibilities from the outset.

Conditionality

Parliament stressed that **rule of law** conditionality is an overarching condition for granting funding under cohesion policy. It therefore considered it necessary to strengthen respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights and to ensure that all actions are consistent with support for democratic principles, gender equality and human rights, including workers' rights, the rights of persons with disabilities and the rights of the child, in the implementation of cohesion policy.

Simplification

Parliament called for further efforts to simplify, make more flexible, strengthen synergies and streamline the administrative rules and procedures governing cohesion policy funds. The Commission and the Member States are invited to grant greater **flexibility** to regions, starting from the programming stage, in order to respond to their particular needs and specificities by involving economic and civil society stakeholders.

Parliament advocated for a tailored, territorial approach to fostering innovation and economic convergence between regions and reducing the innovation gap. It called for strengthening the role of **local and regional innovation** in building competitive research and innovation ecosystems and promoting territorial cohesion.

Members also called for continued funding of the **just transition** process, with the Just Transition Fund being fully integrated into the Common Provisions Regulation and provided with increased financial resources for the post-2027 programming period.

Areas in decline

Members are concerned about the growing number of regions in a **development trap**, experiencing economic stagnation, steep demographic decline and limited access to essential services. They therefore called for an increase in co-financing for projects aimed at strengthening **essential services**. They also stressed the need for a tailored approach for the **outermost regions**, which face unique and cumulative structural challenges due to their remoteness, small market size, vulnerability to climate change and economic dependencies.

As regards **urban areas**, the resolution stressed the need to strengthen coordination between the initiatives of the Urban Agenda for the EU and cohesion policy instruments, to promote more direct access to EU funding for regional and local authorities, as well as for cities and urban authorities, and to strengthen investment in affordable housing within the framework of cohesion policy.

Lastly, Parliament noted that delays in the MFF negotiations, as well as the increased focus by Member States on programming RRF funds, have led to considerable delays in the 2021-2027 programming period. It called for a swift agreement on the next framework and therefore recommended finalising negotiations on the Common Provisions Regulation and the budget at least **one year before** the start of the new funding period.