

## Increasing partnership in cohesion policy

The partnership principle lies at the very heart of the EU's cohesion policy. A process involving public authorities, economic and social partners, and civil society, partnership reinforces the legitimacy of EU policymaking and, by increasing ownership of the policy on the ground, can help to communicate the results of EU policies more effectively. A report on increasing engagement of partners and visibility in the performance of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) is due to be debated in Parliament's June plenary session.

### Background

The partnership principle has been greatly strengthened during the 2014-2020 cohesion policy framework, with Article 5 of the [Common Provisions Regulation](#) providing that Member States must organise a partnership for all ESIF operational programmes (OP) and the Partnership Agreements (PA), which outline how countries intend to allocate funding under the ESIF. Partners, who include local and regional authorities, economic and social partners as well as civil society organisations, should participate in the design, delivery and monitoring of cohesion policy. They should be the most representative of relevant stakeholders, according to the [European Code of Conduct on Partnership](#), which sets out principles for the timely, meaningful and transparent consultation of partners.

### Assessing the partnership principle

A July 2016 European Commission [study](#) on the implementation of the partnership principle and multi-level governance in 2014-2020 funds found that the partnership principle had been satisfactorily respected in a large number of countries and that the level of stakeholder involvement had improved since the 2007-2013 period. The view among stakeholders has been more mixed, however. Key problems raised include the over-representation of certain interest groups, concerns over how partners are selected, the quality of the actual consultation process as well as the low take-up of stakeholders' views in cohesion documents. The EU's advisory bodies have also highlighted several concerns, with the Committee of the Regions [arguing](#) that local and regional authorities have rarely been sufficiently involved in drafting PAs and OPs and pointing to the existence of superficial partnerships, while the European Economic and Social Committee has [emphasised](#) that the European Code of Conduct on Partnership is not fully implemented and respected by all countries.

As negotiations begin on the future of cohesion policy, stakeholders have called for the partnership principle to be strengthened, stressing the need to consistently improve it post 2020 and increase local level involvement to ensure better ownership of ESIF on the ground. A Regional Development Committee [report](#) on building blocks for the future of cohesion policy, also to be debated in the June plenary, argues that the partnership principle still has room for improvement, and recommends strengthening the partnership principle and Code of Conduct, by introducing minimum requirements for partnership involvement.

### Report on increasing partner engagement and visibility

The Regional Development Committee's report [argues](#) that public authorities need to involve stakeholders in all negotiation and implementation phases of cohesion policy, in line with the partnership principle, stressing that it is vital to increase ownership of the policy on the ground to ensure efficient delivery and communication of results. Highlighting the importance of the Code of Conduct in enhancing collective commitment to and ownership of cohesion policy, the report calls for more efforts and resources to be invested in partnership involvement, adding that partners can act as multipliers of success stories. In particular, it urges Member States to consider participatory governance to increase citizen engagement, e.g. in public spending decisions.

Own-initiative report: [2016/2304](#). Committee responsible: REGI; Rapporteur: Daniel Buda (EPP, Romania).

