

The impact of cohesion policy on the integration of vulnerable communities and groups

European Parliament resolution of 17 June 2008 on the impact of cohesion policy on the integration of vulnerable communities and groups (2007/2191(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 87(3), 137 and 158 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 July 2005 entitled Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013 (COM(2005)0299),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 9 February 2005 on the Social Agenda (COM(2005)0033)
- having regard to Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion²,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 May 2005 entitled Third progress report on cohesion: Towards a new partnership for growth, jobs and cohesion (COM(2005)0192),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 12 June 2006 entitled The Growth and Jobs Strategy and the Reform of European Cohesion Policy: Fourth progress report on cohesion (COM(2006)0281),
- having regard to the Territorial Agenda of the EU, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, and the First Action Programme for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union,
- having regard to the preparation by the Commission of the Green paper on Territorial Cohesion,
- having regard to the report by the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON) entitled Territorial Futures – Spatial scenarios for Europe and that of the European Parliament entitled Regional Disparities and Cohesion: what Strategies for the Future?
- having regard to Articles 3, 13 and 141 of the EC Treaty, which require the Member States to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens,

¹ OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25.

² OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p. 11.

- having regard to its resolution of 31 January 2008 on a European strategy on the Roma¹,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A6-0212/2008),
- A. whereas one of the Community's goals, as laid down in Article 158 of the EC Treaty, is to promote harmonious economic and social development across the whole of the Community and reduce socio-economic disparities between individual regions,
 - B. Whereas disparities may arise within as well as between regions,
 - C. whereas addressing social, economic and territorial disparities between the more prosperous and the poorest regions remains the underlying objective of cohesion policy and whereas its scope should therefore not be reduced to supporting the objectives of other strategies, which could hamper economic, social and territorial cohesion,
 - D. whereas, cohesion policy has, up to now, made an effective contribution in helping the poorest regions to reduce the gap in terms of socio-economic development,
 - E. whereas entire countries still face considerable challenges to their development and convergence is unlikely to occur within the current framework 2007-2013,
 - F. whereas in some Member States economic growth is concentrated around national and regional capital cities and large urban centres, leaving other areas such as rural, peripheral, island and mountain areas, with uneven socio-economic development and aggravating the vulnerability of social communities and groups within these areas,
 - G. whereas the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union lists territorial cohesion as one of the EU's objectives and provides for shared competence between the Union and the Member States in this area,
 - H. whereas the concept of "vulnerable community" is very broad and there are no clear criteria for defining it,
 - I. whereas many territories still suffer the ill effects of remoteness and of their geographical disadvantages and lack the necessary infrastructure for real development opportunities for catching up with the average level of development in the EU,
 - J. whereas improving transport infrastructure and access to transport will help to make isolated regions more accessible, while also alleviating the exclusion of communities and groups living in these remote areas, and whereas improving services of general interest, particularly education, will improve the lives of vulnerable groups and communities,
 - K. whereas the poorest countries and regions lack the necessary financial resources to provide their own contribution to the Community funding for which they are eligible and, moreover, most often lack the administrative capacity and human resources to make good use of the funding granted,

¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0035.

- L. whereas, due to its strong territorial impact, it is necessary to better coordinate rural development policy with regional policy in order to foster synergies and complementarities between these policies and to consider the advantages and disadvantages of reintegrating these policies,
 - M. whereas there is a lack of available and comparable micro-regional statistical data for the regions of the EU where vulnerable communities and groups live,
 - N. whereas poverty and exclusion have a strong territorial character,
 - O. whereas most of the least favoured micro-regional territories are facing complex multi-dimensional problems relating to their peripheral location, reduced accessibility, lack of basic infrastructure, socio-economic under-development, tendency to de-industrialisation, low levels of education and training, lack of administrative capacity, high levels of unemployment, deteriorating housing and living conditions, difficult access to services of general interest, lack of conditions for technological development and progress and large populations of segregated minorities and vulnerable groups,
 - P. whereas cohesion policy requires a budget commensurate with its objectives and efficient instruments enabling regions to overcome development disparities and to cope with territorial challenges including demographic change, urban concentration, migratory movements, globalisation, climate change and energy supply;
1. Stresses that the territorial concentration of vulnerable communities and groups and the social exclusion affecting the most underdeveloped regions is an increasing challenge to cohesion in the EU; emphasises, moreover, that this phenomenon is not only inter-regional in underdeveloped areas but also intra-regional, to a significant extent, in both developing and developed areas, and requires particular attention because such vulnerable communities and groups tend to lose visibility within a more general, favourable picture;
 2. Calls on the Member States to determine the criteria defining vulnerable communities and groups in order to better identify the problems they face and to facilitate targeted and systematic measures;
 3. Considers that the territorial dimension of social exclusion should be dealt with in the context of territorial cohesion policy;
 4. Emphasises in this connection that individual actions alone are not sufficient to overcome the territorial problems of social exclusion and recommends therefore that the Member States apply a holistic territorial development strategy, carrying out an equalizing policy, putting the cross-sector integrated approach into practice and focusing on the potential of all EU territories;
 5. Points to the need to address through an integrated approach the shortcomings in terms of equal opportunities and the potential concentration of social conflicts in underdeveloped areas;
 6. Notes, in this regard, that vulnerable groups may exist in all regions, even the more prosperous ones, and that an integrated approach should take such groups into account;
 7. Points out that impoverishment and exclusion are not unique to urban areas but also affect rural areas, even though they may assume specific forms in those areas, particularly on account of the fact that, in rural areas, social exclusion is compounded by territorial

exclusion and since the exclusion of those areas from economic development means that all the social groups living there are affected;

8. Stresses the importance, in the framework of an integrated approach, to make the development of a healthy environment at Community, Member State and regional levels a priority in order to achieve the aims of cohesion policy, such as fighting poverty, the sound health of citizens and a better quality of life in all regions, which are crucial to long-term development and social, economic and territorial cohesion in the EU;
9. Emphasises the importance of involving regional and local authorities as well as the economic and social partners and relevant NGOs in the planning and implementation of integrated development strategies and the importance of supporting bottom-up initiatives;
10. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to allocate resources between developed cities and isolated territories, including rural areas, in a way that is adapted to their specific needs and to establish tailor-made long-term programmes for specific vulnerable communities and groups, with the participation of local authorities, relevant social and economic partners and representatives of the relevant population groups in the decision-making process and in the implementation of such programmes in order to best address their needs and bring about genuine solutions to overcome exclusion and its consequences ;
11. Calls for the continuance of income-generating activities in rural areas, for which purpose particular attention should be devoted to family farming and to small and medium-sized farmers, with the CAP being revised in order to make it fairer, as well as to non-agricultural entrepreneurial activities which supply goods and services that are essential to maintaining the population and welcoming new arrivals;
12. Stresses the importance of agricultural and non-agricultural economic activities (such as processing and direct marketing of agricultural products, tourism, services, small and medium-sized industries) in rural areas in providing employment, preventing poverty and stemming the rural exodus; calls, therefore, for improved facilities for further vocational training in rural areas to support the development of businesses;
13. Urges the Commission and the Member States to make greater use of the synergies and complementarities of the various financial instruments available, such as the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Integration Fund, the programme of Community action on public health and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, in order to increase their added value;
14. Calls on the Commission to present, in the framework of the forthcoming Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, an objective for and a clear definition of territorial cohesion, the criteria determining it, its instruments and the means available for achieving territorial targets;
15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to produce comparable micro-regional statistical data , with special regard to social indicators, such as the Human Development Index established by the United Nations, in order to address with appropriate measures the situation in the areas where the most vulnerable communities and groups live and the problems they face;
16. Calls on the Commission in this connection to carefully examine the extent to which new quantifiable development indicators in addition to GDP per capita, such as social indicators, should also be used in order to identify the most vulnerable communities and groups and

their location, reveal disparities between and within regions, evaluate implementation and policy efficiency and be used as guidance for development planning;

17. Urges the Commission to examine, in the framework of the Green Paper on territorial cohesion, whether the NUTS 4 level would be appropriate for pursuing a differentiated policy to achieve the objective of territorial cohesion;
18. Emphasises the need to address the demographic trends of further urban concentration and rural exodus and their territorial impact; calls therefore on the Member States to draw up strategies to revitalise vulnerable areas by developing infrastructure, fostering real development opportunities in accordance with their specific potentials, maintaining services of general interest through enhanced local administrative capacities and the decentralisation of the public sector, offering appropriate training and employment opportunities, improving housing and living conditions and increasing the attractiveness of those areas to investors; considers that, at the same time, towns need support for their efforts to remedy urban difficulties;
19. Considers that, although rural exodus acted in the past as a safety valve for farmers excluded from their original activity, this is no longer the case, since unemployment is now seriously affecting the unskilled and thus the industrial units established in rural areas are among the first victims of restructuring and relocation operations, which have the effect of reducing the scope for the multiple activities upon which small farmers in difficulty used to be able to rely in order to supplement their income from farming, thus driving them even more rapidly into penury;
20. Stresses that not only structural policies should be retained after 2013, but that the budgetary review should be used as an opportunity to ensure that the necessary resources are made available in order to guarantee economic, social and territorial cohesion among regions and countries in the EU in the future;
21. Recommends that political measures taken to tackle social exclusion and make vulnerable communities and groups more active should include the element of voluntariness;
22. Calls on the Commission to present a specific proposal addressing in a realistic and specific manner the problems faced by vulnerable communities and groups, including social exclusion;
23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.