

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THINKTANK – TOPICAL DIGEST**October 2021**

Organised by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions from 11 to 14 October 2021, this year's [European Week of Regions and Cities](#) (EWRC) is one of the most important dates on the EU's regional policy calendar. Bringing together local and regional representatives, beneficiaries of EU programmes, and EU institutions for four days of workshops and debate, the 2021 event will be taking place online for the second year running. Organised under the banner headline: 'Together for Recovery', this year's event will focus on four themes: Green Transition, Cohesion, Digital Transition, and Citizens' Engagement. With the negotiations on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and cohesion policy framework completed and an ambitious recovery plan in place to support EU growth, this year's event provides a major platform for EU regions and cities to share their experiences and consider how the post-2020 MFF and recovery package can make a real difference on the ground. This Topical Digest contains a selection of research papers from the European Parliament's Secretariat on regional and cohesion policy.

Green Transition: For a sustainable and green recovery**European Green Deal and cohesion policy**

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, October 2021

The European Green Deal aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. This significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions will require profound social and economic changes, while ensuring a socially fair and just transition. Cohesion policy supports this process by 'climate-proofing' investments, earmarking funds for climate objectives and implementing concrete actions in EU regions. Local and regional authorities across the EU are also working together to tackle climate change through initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, and Green Deal Going Local.

European Climate Law

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Gregor Erbach, European Parliamentary Research Service, August 2021

On 4 March 2020, the European Commission adopted a legislative proposal for a European climate law, setting the objective for the EU to become climate-neutral by 2050 and establishing a framework for achieving that objective. On 17 September 2020, the Commission amended the proposal to introduce the updated 2030 climate target of a net reduction of at least 55 % of the EU's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to 1990 levels. The regulation was published in the Official Journal on 9 July 2021 and entered into force on 29 July 2021.

Just Transition Fund

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021

The EU aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50-55 % by 2030, and achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This will require a socio-economic transformation in regions relying on fossil fuels and carbon intensive industries. As part of the European Green Deal, on 14 January 2020, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a regulation to create the Just Transition Fund, aimed at supporting EU regions most affected by the transition to a low carbon economy. The Fund was adopted by the Parliament and Council in May 2021.

Sustainable and smart mobility strategy – Delivered at local level

Briefing by Marketa Pape, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2021

On 9 December 2020, the European Commission put forward a sustainable and smart mobility strategy, outlining its planned steps to transform the European Union transport system to meet the ambition of the European Green Deal and the objectives of the EU's digital strategy. The strategy aims to rebuild the European transport sector, badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic, making it greener, smarter and more resilient, while leaving no one behind. This is to be achieved by strengthening the existing rules, proposing new legislation and providing support measures and guidance.

[Sustainable Development Goals in EU regions](#)

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020

The Sustainable Development Goals were established in 2015 as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The signatories adopted a policy framework with 17 goals, addressing such issues as poverty, hunger, health and wellbeing, education, gender equality, environment and climate, strong institutions, peace and justice. Sustainable development aims at balancing social, economic and environmental aspects, seeing them as interconnected. The European Union has contributed to creating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and takes action to implement them.

Cohesion: From emergency to resilience

[Cities in a globalised world: Exploring trends and the effect on urban resilience](#)

Study by European Parliamentary Research Service, October 2021

Cities are inevitably affected by shocks and disruptions, the pandemic being a case in point. The extent of the impact however depends on cities' preparedness and capacity to adapt. By thinking ahead, cities can explore emerging or plausible developments in order to anticipate them and contain potential disruption. Drawing on a report prepared by the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), this paper explores the impact on and implications for cities of current global trends, such as climate change, population growth, urbanisation, economic growth, increasing energy demand, higher connectivity and a changing world order, that will have direct consequences for the future of cities and their inhabitants.

[Recovery plan for Europe: State of play. September 2021](#)

Briefing by Magdalena Sapata, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021

Since the beginning of 2021, Member States and EU institutions have been preparing intensively to launch the recovery instrument, Next Generation EU (NGEU). In order to make this unique financial stimulus package fully operational, many conditions have needed to be met and preparatory steps completed. Preparations have been ongoing for the spending of the biggest part of NGEU (90 %) under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). This process includes the drawing up of national recovery and resilience plans by the Member States, their evaluation by the European Commission, and approval by the Council of the EU.

[Common Provisions Regulation: New rules for cohesion policy for 2021-2027](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021

For the EU budget covering the 2021-2027 period, EU cohesion policy has a new set of rules. The Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) sets out common provisions for eight shared management funds: the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy. Additional specific regulations add certain provisions needed to cater for the particularities of individual funds, in order to take into account their different rationales, target groups and implementation methods.

[European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021

The new single regulation on the ERDF and CF (previously covered by two separate regulations) identifies the specific objectives and scope of support for both funds, including non-eligible activities, over the 2021-2027 period. In line with evidence regarding impact, investments will focus on activities with the highest added value, such as support for SMEs, smart specialisation, the low-carbon economy, sustainable urban development and regional cooperation. The ERDF focuses mainly on smart growth and the green economy, and the CF on environmental and transport infrastructure. A special approach is taken for territories such as urban areas and outermost regions.

[Cohesion, resilience and values: Heading 2 of the 2021-2027 MFF](#)

Briefing by Magdalena Sapata, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2021

Heading 2 – Cohesion, resilience and values – is the biggest of the seven headings in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the 2021-2027 period in terms of budget. Since about 87 % of the heading falls under shared management and will be distributed in national envelopes, for the Member States it is a particularly important part of the MFF. It is also the most diverse heading in terms of the types of programme and fund included. It encompasses expenditure on cohesion, one of the EU's long-standing policies, on an entirely new budgetary

instrument supporting economic recovery and resilience, and on other increasingly important goals, including youth, the creative sector, values, equality and the rule of law.

Exceptional coronavirus support measures of benefit to EU regions

Briefing by Vasileios Margaras, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020

Although it is too early to make concrete predictions, the economic impact of the pandemic could further impede the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the EU by increasing the existing disparities between regions. The European Commission has put forward a number of proposals to alleviate the impact on EU territories.

European Union Solidarity Fund

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021

Established in 2002 to support disaster-stricken regions, the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) complements the efforts of public authorities by helping to fund vital emergency and recovery operations in areas affected by catastrophes such as flooding, earthquakes and forest fires. EUSF funding is granted following an application from a Member State or candidate country, and may be used to finance measures including restoring infrastructure to working order, providing temporary accommodation and cleaning up disaster areas.

European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) 2021-2027

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, EPRS, September 2021

Financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European territorial cooperation is the European Union's key instrument for supporting cooperation between partners across borders. In May 2018, the European Commission published legislative proposals aimed at defining the architecture of cohesion policy post-2020, one of which concerned the next generation of European territorial cooperation (ETC) programmes, better known as 'Interreg', with the regulation on the European Territorial Cooperation goal adopted on 24 June 2021.

A renewed territorial agenda for the EU

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020

The main objective of the territorial agenda is to strengthen territorial cohesion, an EU principle that seeks to ensure the balanced development of the EU and reduce its regional disparities. Agreed in May 2011 and the culmination of a process begun many years earlier with the European Spatial Development Perspective, the Territorial Agenda 2020 has been revised with a view to establishing a continued role for this initiative within the EU's new cohesion policy framework beyond 2020.

Outermost regions of the EU

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2021

The EU's outermost regions qualify for special treatment owing to structural difficulties, such as remoteness, difficult topography or economic dependence on a few products, which can severely hamper their development. Specific support mechanisms exist under cohesion, agricultural and fisheries policies, with the Commission outlining measures aimed at assisting outermost regions in its communications published in 2004, 2008, and 2012. With the outermost regions continuing to face numerous challenges in areas such as mobility, unemployment and climate change, discussions were launched on the formulation of a new strategy, published in October 2017. The shape of the EU's legislative and financial proposals will be of crucial importance for delivering the strategy post-2020.

Older people in the European Union's rural areas: Issues and challenges

In-depth Analysis by Marie-Laure Augère-Granier and James McEldowney, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020

One of the key demographic challenges facing rural areas is the ageing population, not only among farmers but also among the rural population in general. This paper examines the demographic profile of older people in the EU's rural areas, and presents a series of issues pertaining to the situation facing older people. Topics covered include health and access to services, issues of social isolation and loneliness, the role of technology and lifelong learning, access to social care, and the impact of climate change. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has brought the health status of older people more sharply into focus and highlighted their vulnerability.

Digital transition for people

Smart villages: Concept, issues and prospects for EU rural areas

Briefing by Ana Martinez Juan and James McEldowney European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2021

Although there is no legal definition of a 'smart village' within EU legislation, there are a number of distinguishing features associated with the smart village concept, with the involvement of the local community and the use of digital tools being seen as core elements. The concept implies the participation of local people in improving their economic, social or environmental conditions, cooperation with other communities, social innovation and the development of smart village strategies.

Digital Europe programme: Funding digital transformation beyond 2020

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Marcin Szczepanski, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2021

The Digital Europe Programme is a new financial support tool for the 2021-2027 period, aimed at bolstering the digital transformation of society, the economy and public administrations in the EU. With a financial envelope of €7.6 billion (in current prices), a figure 17.5 % lower than the initial Commission proposal, it will build up digital capacity and infrastructure and support a digital single market.

The EU digital decade: A new set of digital targets for 2030

Briefing by Mar Negroiro, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021

As part of its digital decade strategy, the European Commission's March 2021 communication puts forward its vision for new strategic digital objectives for 2030. These should prepare Europe for the roll-out of the next generation of broadband infrastructure with gigabit speeds, including 5G, as well as the digital transformation of public and private sectors, to enable an array of new innovative services that should transform the manufacturing, energy, vehicle manufacturing, digital government services and health sectors.

Digital cultural diversity

Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2021

Digital technologies have revolutionised every aspect of our lives, and culture is no exception. They have impacted on the value chains of all the cultural and creative industries not only as regards the creative process and its execution but also as regards the making of a work or product of art and its promotion, distribution, marketing and sale. Cultural heritage can be digitised and, in the case of analogue film, it needs to be digitised to be made accessible. Some production processes are solely digital and are born digital. Technology has a huge potential to make culture accessible to all, by democratising both consumption and involvement in cultural creation.

Citizens' engagement: For an inclusive, participative and fair recovery

Conference on the Future of Europe

Briefing by Silvia Kotanidis, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2021

After many debates and statements of principle in recent years, the time for a more structured discussion on the future of Europe's development has arrived. The Conference on the Future of Europe, announced by the Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen in her inaugural address, is set to start after a long period of standstill owing not only to changed priorities brought by the coronavirus pandemic, but also to lengthy negotiations among the institutions. The aim of the conference is to debate how the EU should develop in the future, identify where it is rising to the challenges of current times, and enhance those areas that need reform or strengthening.

Digital democracy: Is the future of civic engagement online?

Briefing by Gianluca Sgueo, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2020

Digital innovation is radically transforming democratic decision-making. Public administrations are experimenting with mobile applications (apps) to provide citizens with real-time information, using online platforms to crowdsource ideas, and testing algorithms to engage communities in day-to-day administration. The key question is what technology breakthrough means for governance systems created long before digital disruption.

[Democratic institutions and prosperity: The benefits of an open society](#)

Briefing by Jérôme Saulnier, Gianluca Sgueo, Ionel Zamfir, EPRS, February 2021

The ongoing structural transformation and the rapid spread of the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution are challenging current democratic institutions and their established forms of governance and regulation. At the same time, these changes offer vast opportunities to enhance, strengthen and expand the existing democratic framework to reflect a more complex and interdependent world. This process has already begun in many democratic societies but further progress is needed.

[Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme](#)

'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2021

Given the extent of inequality and discrimination, challenges to fundamental rights and citizens' lack of awareness of the rights they enjoy, the EU institutions have recognised the importance of funding to protect core EU values and fundamental rights, support civil society organisations and sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies. The regulation establishing a new Rights and Values programme, part of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), was published in the Official Journal on 5 May 2021.

Further reading:

[Research for REGI Committee-Cohesion Policy and Climate Change](#)

Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, April 2021

[Just Transition Fund 2021-2027](#)

Animated infographic by Sorina Ionescu and Frederik Scholaert, EPRS, October 2020

[The public sector loan facility under the Just Transition Mechanism](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Sidonia Mazur and Christiaan Van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020

[EU climate action in ocean governance and fisheries policy](#)

Briefing, by Frederik Scholaert, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2021

[European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Frederik Scholaert, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021

[Sustainable and smart transport in Europe \(EPRS Ideas Paper\)](#)

Briefing by Jaan Soone, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2020

[The future of regional airports: Challenges and opportunities](#)

Briefing by Maria Niestadt, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2021

[Connecting Europe Facility 2021-2027: Financing key EU infrastructure networks](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Marketa Pape, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2021

[EU agricultural policy and climate change](#)

Briefing by James McEldowney, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2020

[Development of organic production in the EU: 2021-2027 action plan](#)

Briefing by Anna Caprile and James McEldowney, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2021

[Strengthening the Urban Agenda for the EU](#)

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, January 2021

[The New Leipzig Charter](#)

'At a glance' note by Christiaan Van Lierop European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020

[Thirty years of European territorial cooperation](#)

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2020

[The European Education Area and the 2030 strategic framework for education and training](#)

Briefing by Denise Chircop, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2021

[Creative Europe programme](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, June 2021

[Cohesion policy contribution to New European Bauhaus](#)

'At a glance' note by Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, February 2021

[Brexit Adjustment Reserve](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Christiaan Van Lierop European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2021

[Better communication for cohesion policy](#)

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto and Pernilla Jourde, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2019

[Linking the levels of governance in the EU](#)

Briefing, by Yann-Sven Rittelmeyer and Klemen Zumer, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2020

[Towards a more resilient Europe post-coronavirus: Options to enhance the EU's resilience to structural risks](#)

Study by EPRS with the Directorates-General for Internal Policies and External Policies, April 2021

[The Conference on the Future of Europe](#)

Infographic by Silvia Kotanidis and Giulio Sabbati, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2021

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