

**October 2023**

Organised by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions from 9 to 12 October 2023, this year's European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC) is the 21st edition of the event. Bringing together local and regional representatives, beneficiaries of EU programmes, and EU institutions for four days of workshops and debate, the 2023 edition will once again be taking place exclusively onsite after a 3-year break. Organised under the banner headline 'Thriving Regions, Stronger Europe', the EWRC 2023 will focus on six themes: regions in post-industrial transition; retaining talent for regional growth; small and mid-sized urban centres driving growth; breaking barriers to cross-border cooperation; local energy shift for security and sustainability; and promoting social innovation. With the approval process for the 2021-2027 partnership agreements and operational programmes completed, this year's edition provides a major platform for EU regions and cities to share their experiences and consider how the implementation of these programmes can make a real difference on the ground. This topical digest contains a selection of research papers on regional and cohesion policy from the European Parliamentary Research Service.

Guide to EU funding – 2023 edition

Study by Vasilis Margaras and Balázs Széchy, EPRS, June 2023

The EU offers financial support to regional and local authorities, NGOs, businesses, professionals and citizens through a wide variety of funds. This 'Guide to EU funding' produced by the European Parliamentary Research Service provides easily accessible information on the full range of EU funding sources, conveniently grouped by area of action. The main funding themes of the guide are divided in subsections in order to facilitate research. A number of hyperlinks have been included in the text in order to make access to the source of funding information easier. A list of major potential beneficiaries is mentioned at the end of each section of the guide to help the reader.

Cohesion in the EU towards 2050: 8th Cohesion Report and stakeholder views

Briefing by Balázs Széchy, EPRS, November 2022

The 8th Cohesion Report, published by the European Commission in February 2022, paints a mixed picture of cohesion policy. On the one hand, since the 2008 financial crisis and the contraction of public spending, cohesion policy has played an increasing role in maintaining territorial integrity and public services. On the other, many less developed and middle-income regions, especially in the southern and south-western parts of Europe, are stagnating or falling behind. The report highlights that while it is relatively easy to increase growth in less developed regions, which benefit from low-cost labour, regions in transition often face several obstacles. Their industrial fabric is weak and their population numbers are falling, as young people move to more promising regions and urban nodes. There is a risk that distrust in the established institutional order – a 'geography of discontent' – may emerge. Taking the above into account, the report proposes the development of a more sophisticated strategy focused in particular on offering people training and education aligned with the needs generated by the dual digital and green transition.

The future of EU cohesion – Emerging debate

Briefing by Balázs Széchy, EPRS, October 2023

The years 2023 and 2024 are fundamental years for both implementation of the 2021-27 cohesion policy programmes and preparations for the policy's future. While cohesion policy is expected to change significantly in the coming years, there are certain key principles that most stakeholders are intent on keeping, such as multi-level governance, a place-based approach, and the partnership principle. One key challenge is the policy's future relationship with the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which undoubtedly has major implications for the post-2027 architecture of EU intervention.



'Do no harm to EU cohesion' principle

'At a glance' note by Enrico D'Ambrogio, EPRS, May 2023

The 'do no harm to cohesion' principle, introduced by the European Commission in the 8th Cohesion Report, puts an emphasis on enhancing the coherence between cohesion policy and other EU policies. The European Parliament recommended that the European Committee of the Regions be involved in defining the principle in more detail. While the principle's introduction has been welcomed unanimously, there have been a number of calls to flesh it out further and to redefine the relationship between cohesion policy and the European Semester.

Cohesion partnership agreements: Implementation and oversight

Briefing by Balázs Széchy, EPRS, June 2023

Partnership agreements (PAs) are overarching documents that define the strategy and investment priorities for the cohesion policy funds. By the end of 2022, the PAs for all 27 Member States for the 2021-2027 programming period had been adopted; EU support is worth €368 billion and the total investment is €545 billion, taking into account national financing. Most of the funding is earmarked for the less developed regions, where gross domestic product (GDP) per inhabitant was less than 75 % of the EU average in the 2015-2017 period. With programming completed, the implementation phase is now in full swing as the regions start spending the funds in accordance with the measures and priorities outlined in their PAs.

Empowering youth in the EU's outermost regions

'At a glance' note by Emmanuel Alvarez, EPRS, April 2023

Young people in the EU's outermost regions face challenges that are directly linked to the local geographical and socio-economic conditions. In May 2022, the European Commission launched a new strategy aimed at improving the living conditions of their inhabitants and, within that context, recently relaunched a €1 million grant scheme with the purpose of empowering young people to shape and implement projects at local level.

Assessment of the European Commission's 2022 communication on outermost regions

'At a glance' note by Emmanuel Alvarez, EPRS, June 2023

In May 2022, the European Commission launched a new strategy aimed at improving living conditions in the EU's outermost regions, fostering their development and sustainable recovery and growth, and unlocking their potential. An own-initiative report on the assessment of the Commission's strategy, tabled by the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development, was adopted by the plenary in June.

Outermost regions of the EU

Briefing by Balázs Széchy, EPRS, August 2022

On 3 May 2022, the European Commission adopted a renewed strategy for the outermost regions (ORs), prioritising place-based approaches and tailored support for them across all EU policies, aiming to unlock their potential through appropriate investment and reforms. In addition to the unprecedented level of funding for the ORs already negotiated in the 2021-2027 funds and programmes, the Commission's renewed strategy offers dedicated opportunities in many EU policy areas, including the launch of a series of calls for projects exclusively for the ORs.

European cross-border mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles

Briefing by Emmanuel Alvarez, EPRS, September 2023

The Commission's 2015 cross-border review revealed legal and administrative barriers as the main obstacle to cross-border cooperation. In parallel, the 2015 Luxembourg Presidency put forward plans for an EU cross-border mechanism. Both processes fed into discussions on a mechanism for cross-border areas, culminating in the present proposal. While the European Parliament adopted its first-reading position on the proposal in February 2019, progress has been slow, with the Council's working party on structural measures deciding to cease work on the proposal in May 2021. In October 2022, to break the impasse and take the lead on this issue, the Parliament's Committee on Regional Development started drawing up a legislative-initiative report, calling on the Commission to present a new legislative proposal.

Question time: Tackling depopulation through cohesion policy instruments

'At a glance' note by Balázs Széchy, EPRS, September 2022

Several Member States and regions are facing population decline, caused by factors such as low fertility rates, net emigration and a 'brain drain', undermining the growth potential of the areas concerned. An ageing society also

plays a part in depopulation. Depopulated regions are often low-income rural or post-industrial areas, with fewer job opportunities.

Cohesion and ageing society in the EU

Briefing by Enrico D'Ambrogio, EPRS, March 2023

A rising median age, a declining fertility rate, a shrinking working age population and decreasing population growth – not offset by migration – are currently the main demographic trends in the EU. One in three people live in a region that has seen a decline in its population over the past decade, while Eurostat data show that ageing is unevenly distributed among the EU's regions. The growing share of elderly people in the population is generating concerns over the sustainability of the social and economic model in many EU Member States and regions. Some EU actors have taken initiatives to tackle issues related to demographic change, including ageing societies. The European Commission launched the debate on ageing with a green paper, has presented a European care strategy and has launched a 'talent booster' mechanism in the framework of the 2023 European Year of Skills.

The gender dimension in cohesion policy

'At a glance' note by Enrico D'Ambrogio, EPRS, March 2023

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened existing inequalities between women and men. Data reveal significant gaps among EU regions in terms of access to the labour market, pay and working conditions, and leadership in decision-making. The European Parliament sees cohesion policy as key to achieving gender equality, but calls for action to go beyond the policy domains of the European Social Fund.

Proposal to make 2023 European Year of Skills

'At a glance' note by Marketa Pape, EPRS, November 2022

Following European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's announcement in her 2022 State of the Union address, the Commission has formally proposed to make 2023 European Year of Skills. The aim is to give fresh impetus to lifelong learning, boost EU companies' competitiveness and help achieve the green and digital transitions in a socially fair manner. Building on existing EU action, the activities of the European year would promote skills policies and investment so as to address labour shortages and secure a better skilled workforce.

Social approach to the transition to smart cities

Study by Scientific Foresight Unit, EPRS, February 2023

The study explores the main impacts of the smart city transition on our cities and, in particular, on citizens and territories. In our research, we start from an analysis of smart city use cases to identify a set of key challenges, and elaborate on the main accelerating factors that may amplify or contain their impact on particular groups and territories. We then present an account of best practices that can help mitigate or prevent such challenges, and make some general observations on their scalability and replicability. Finally, based on an analysis of EU regulatory frameworks and a mapping of current or upcoming initiatives in the domain of smart city innovation, capacity-building and knowledge capitalisation, we propose six policy options to inform future policy-making at EU level to support a more inclusive smart city transition.

Revision of the trans-European transport network guidelines

Briefing by Monika Kiss, EPRS, June 2023

To support its economy, provide mobility for people and goods and ensure the connectivity of all regions, while also limiting negative impacts on climate and environment, the EU has been building a multimodal transport network across its territory: the trans-European transport network (TEN T). TEN-T construction is supported by EU funding, an example of which is the dedicated Connecting Europe Facility programme. In December 2021, after evaluating progress in TEN-T implementation, the European Commission put forward a proposal on the revised TEN-T guidelines to ensure sustainable connectivity through a reliable and high-quality infrastructure network aligned with the objectives of the European Green Deal.

Energy poverty in the EU

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, September 2023

In 2022, over 41 million Europeans were unable to keep their homes adequately warm. Energy poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, considered to be caused by a combination of low income, high energy expenses, and poor energy efficiency in buildings. The EU has been addressing this issue in various legislative and non-legislative initiatives, most recently in the context of its climate policies and energy transition, as well as the energy crisis. The

Gas and Electricity Directives ensure the protection of vulnerable consumers, and the Energy Efficiency and Energy Efficiency of Buildings Directives require measures to alleviate energy poverty alongside efficiency efforts.

Revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive: Fit for 55 package

Briefing by Monika Dulian, EPRS, September 2023

The recast EPBD seeks to accelerate building renovation rates, reduce GHG emissions and energy consumption, and promote the uptake of renewable energy in buildings. It would introduce a new EU definition of a 'zero emissions building', applicable to all new buildings from 2027, and to all renovated buildings from 2030. The recast EPBD would accelerate energy-efficient renovations in the worst performing 15 % of EU buildings, and would set minimum energy performance standards. In due course, every building would need to achieve at least a Class E on a revised A-G scale of energy performance certificates (EPCs).

Further reading

Mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context

Study by Lenka Jančová and Christa Kammerhofer-Schlegel, EPRS, May 2023

Cities in a globalised world: Exploring trends and the effect on urban resilience

Study, EPRS, October 2021

EU cohesion policy support to 25 years of peace in Northern Ireland

Briefing by Enrico D'Ambrogio, EPRS, March 2023

An EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

Briefing by Enrico D'Ambrogio, EPRS, October 2022

Russia's war on Ukraine: EU cohesion policy support for refugees

'At a glance' note by Christiaan Van Lierop, EPRS, April 2022

Sustainable Development Goals in EU regions

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, June 2022

Culture and regional development

Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass and Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, July 2022

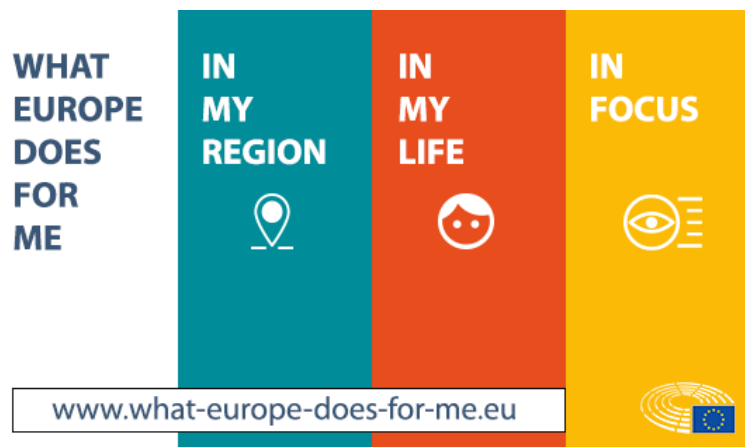
Digital in education and skills – Pre-legislative synthesis of national, regional and local positions on the European Commission's initiative

Briefing by Vasilis Margaras and Vasco Guedes Ferreira, EPRS, December 2022

Rural Tourism

Briefing by Karin Finer and Nikolina Sajn, EPRS, September 2023

More information



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