



2022/2032(INI)

01.07.2022

OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on Regional Development

on economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU: the 8th Cohesion Report
(2022/2032(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Dacian Cioloș

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Points out that the farming and livestock breeding sector has been suffering from numerous crises such as the climate crisis, trade wars, the effects of the pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine, accompanied by rises in the prices of energy, raw materials and supplies; points out, furthermore, that various crises are posing particular challenges for cohesion policy and European solidarity, as they are destabilising the agricultural sector, reducing food security within the EU as well as the Union's agricultural production and the supply of food to third countries, and increasing the risk of widespread economic stagflation, which will highlight and increase the perceived disparities in wealth between EU countries and regions, especially rural areas, which are at particular risk of job losses and poverty; stresses that all these crises are affecting the economic and social development of agricultural areas and hence social and territorial cohesion; stresses therefore the need for immediate and appropriate responses to urgent needs and future threats, making use of the instruments under both the common agricultural policy (CAP) and cohesion policy;
2. Recalls the key role that farmers and the agri-food sector play and have played, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite also facing extensive hikes in input costs and logistical difficulties in ensuring continuity of access to quality and affordable food, especially in short supply chains and for locally grown food; considers, therefore, that local supplies should be developed so as to make them permanent, as they ensure increases in farmers' incomes and allow consumers to have access to quality products;
3. Recalls that the ecological transition in food production could be a win-win-win situation for primary producers, the environment and society as a whole; highlights, therefore, that the European Green Deal, and in particular the Farm to Fork strategy, can be tools for more harmonised, cohesive and sustainable development in the EU;
4. Applauds the role played by migrant workers during the pandemic, who assisted our farmers in the labour-intensive sectors of agriculture;
5. Stresses that rural areas have become more attractive to people from other regions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby creating the conditions for the reversal of certain negative trends affecting rural areas; calls on the Member States, in this regard, to focus more attention and resources on developing these regions, especially in fields such as developing digital infrastructure in regions where levels of internet access penetration are below the EU average;
6. Points to the need for an effective and harmonised EU level implementation of the contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis, set out in the Commission's communication on this (COM(2021)0689);
7. Stresses the importance of increasing the resilience of the Union's agri-food system and

of equipping it with the necessary tools and flexibility to face new crises, such as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, by investing in research and innovation, technical assistance to farmers in accessing different types of funding digitalisation, promotion campaigns to grow the organic sector and the transition to more sustainable and territorially connected agriculture; recalls the primary need to ensure food security in the European Union and globally, in particular in vulnerable third countries, and the Union's responsibility towards third countries dependent on food imports; stresses, in this connection, that the full use of Europe's sustainable agricultural production potential is a prerequisite for the food security of our continent;

8. Notes that the cohesion policy and regional environmental strategies offer opportunities to support farmers and forest managers' sustainable investments in climate change adaptation, in particular the prevention of floods, drought and fires; suggests that these opportunities be highlighted in the future in order to encourage Member States and regional authorities to make full use of them;
9. Recalls the positive impact the CAP has had on European regions over the last 60 years, in particular on mitigating demographic trends; calls on the Commission to enhance complementarity, coordination, flexibility, coherence and to adopt a cross-cutting approach to all European policies for the implementation of EU funds, to prioritise the acceleration of synergies and access to funding, particularly for cohesion and agriculture policy, including projects funded through Recovery and Resilience facility, by ensuring coordination, complementarity and coherence in rural development, agricultural sustainability and territorial cohesion; stresses the need for effective coordination between European and national policies as well as for the removal of administrative burdens during implementation so that regions and territories can fully harness the opportunities offered by these financial instruments;
10. Notes the importance of highlighting the fact that rural development in insular regions faces special challenges;
11. Stresses the importance of EU cohesion policy for the rural areas, where almost 30 % of the EU's population live and which account for more than 80 % of its territory; recalls that our rural areas are at the heart of our food production and are part of the wealth of our continent; emphasises the role that a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas should play in fostering synergies between different EU policies by establishing a framework for flexible cooperation based on continuous assistance for farmers, between authorities and stakeholders and by implementing the initiatives provided for in the rural action plan; stresses the importance of the partnership principle and of the involvement of local and regional actors in programming, implementation and monitoring of rural development and territorial cohesion; stresses the need to set cohesion policy and CAP objectives that are consistent and comparable with each other; stresses that these processes should take into account the gender perspective;
12. Notes that depopulation has a negative impact on the EU's social, economic and territorial cohesion, especially in rural and remote areas; emphasises that this increases economic exclusion as well as the risk of poverty and social exclusion; calls on the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to devote more Regional Development Fund and cohesion policy funding to the financing of rural areas;

13. Underlines the importance of the agricultural sector for the creation of employment and securing livelihoods in rural areas and of the need to combat the depopulation and abandonment of rural areas, which is particularly serious in remote and mountainous regions owing to the low income and productivity potential of agricultural activities in these areas; stresses the problem of demographic ageing in the Union, which could be exacerbated in the coming years; stresses the importance of promoting measures designed to stabilise population levels in rural areas through targeted policies and the allocation of the necessary funds, by creating and facilitating conditions favourable to quality job creation and attracting new inhabitants and young people to rural areas and to the promotion of employment of young people in the agricultural sector by reducing wage gaps between agriculture and other sectors, by pinpointing solutions to ensure income compensation for farmers in line with accelerated rise in prices, by increasing labour productivity and business competitiveness, improving digital connectivity through high-capacity networks in rural areas, by increasing funding for the modernisation and digitalisation of farming and livestock breeding, and improving quality of life by encouraging investments in infrastructure and especially in health, school and road infrastructure and in services;
14. Stresses the need to continue investing in the digital and green transitions and in innovation and rural skills training in order to reduce the gaps between rural and urban areas and improve the attractiveness and dynamism of rural areas overall; regrets that today only one in six people in rural areas of the Union have access to very high-speed broadband networks; stresses that the transition to a digital and modernised agricultural model will not be possible without improving the connectivity of rural EU areas; stresses the role of local authorities, workers and companies in underdeveloped regions in providing education and training to better prepare inhabitants to respond to new challenges, which would help local authorities, workers and companies to take greater account of the new challenges faced by underdeveloped regions; notes that the digital transformation in Europe is still uneven; stresses the urgent need to strengthen the EU's core digital capabilities;
15. Notes that improving access to green transport and services in rural and remote areas is crucial to tackling the social and digital exclusion of the population in the regions; calls on the Member States, therefore, to recognise the importance of rural and remote areas, given their diversity, and to develop their potential by stimulating investment in the local economy, promoting entrepreneurship and improving their infrastructure;
16. Notes that less developed regions depend significantly more on agricultural employment and as a result feel a greater negative impact from economic restructuring and agricultural modernisation that requires less labour; calls therefore for new opportunities to be explored for keeping people in these areas, such as the development of rural tourism;
17. Notes that land abandonment can have a negative impact on biodiversity, as farming practices maintain high biodiversity habitats and landscape features;
18. Highlights the important role played by the LEADER programme in rural areas by involving local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, in decision-making and in resource allocation for the development of their rural areas; notes that community and

citizens' initiatives can provide substantial support for the local economy and social cohesion, the ecological transition, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation; notes, further, that local action groups and the LEADER programme can be primary tools for achieving these; calls on Member States to reinforce the LEADER programme, particularly its budget, and to ensure that its financial resources reach the projects on the ground;

19. Underlines the need to better study and adapt to the impact climate change is having on European regions, particularly in the agricultural sector, as this presents a significant threat to the future of these regions;
20. Stresses that equality and inclusion issues play an even more central role in regional development; highlights the special role of youth in cohesion policy;
21. Points out that some Member States have been harder hit by the effects of the war in Ukraine and calls on the Commission to allocate the additional funds needed to implement cohesion policies in these countries, with a focus on flexibility of transfers between different funds if funds have not been used;
22. Highlights that women are disproportionately impacted by the gaps in development between EU Member States and regions; notes the crucial need for providing women entrepreneurs in rural areas with an enabling environment, including legal and political support, leading to greater access to information, knowledge and skills, as well as for facilitating access to financial resources, leading to the creation of more jobs in rural areas;
23. Calls on the Commission to identify and implement the necessary flexibility measures to ensure the transfer of unspent EU funds, channelling them to different agricultural sectors, particularly with a view to developing the raw product processing sector and to strengthening short supply chains and the trade in locally grown food;
24. Recalls that Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which deals with economic, social and territorial cohesion, provides for priority to be given to rural areas; notes, however, that the allocation of cohesion funds does not take sufficient account of rural areas and their specific needs; calls on the Commission, therefore, to consider developing a clear methodology for assessing the share of cohesion funding to be assigned to rural areas;
25. Stresses the importance of increasing the number of jobs that can be filled by Ukrainian refugees, and calls on the Commission to develop urgently needed policies and measures to this end.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	30.6.2022
Result of final vote	+: 35 -: 2 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Mazaly Aguilar, Carmen Avram, Benoît Biteau, Daniel Buda, Isabel Carvalhais, Dacian Cioloș, Jérémy Decerle, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, Luke Ming Flanagan, Dino Giarrusso, Martin Häusling, Krzysztof Jurgiel, Camilla Laureti, Norbert Lins, Chris MacManus, Maria Noichl, Juozas Olekas, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Anne Sander, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Marc Tarabella, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Substitutes present for the final vote	Asim Ademov, Eric Andrieu, Franc Bogovič, Lena Düpont, Claude Gruffat, Pär Holmgren, Tilly Metz, Alin Mituța, Tonino Picula, Michaela Šojdrová, Tom Vandenkendelaere
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Vlad Gheorghe, Ondřej Kovařík, Andrey Kovatchev

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

35	+
PPE	Franc Bogovič, Daniel Buda, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, Lena Düpont, Norbert Lins, Tom Vandenkendelaere, Asim Ademov, Anne Sander, Andrey Kovatchev, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Michaela Šojdrová, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
S&D	Eric Andrieu, Carmen Avram, Isabel Carvalhais, Camilla Laureti, Maria Noichl, Juozas Olekas, Tonino Picula, Marc Tarabella
Renew	Dacian Cioloș, Jérémy Decerle, Alin Mituța, Vlad Gheorghe, Ondřej Kovařík
Verts/ALE	Benoît Biteau, Tilly Metz, Martin Häusling, Pär Holmgren, Claude Gruffat
ECR	Bert-Jan Ruissen
The Left	Luke Ming Flanagan, Chris MacManus
NI	Dino Giarrusso

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ECR	Mazaly Aguilar, Krzysztof Jurgiel

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention