OPINION

of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

for the Committee on Regional Development

on new territorial development tools in cohesion policy 2014-2020: Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) (2015/2224(INI))

Rapporteur: Michaela Šojdrová
SUGGESTIONS

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

A. whereas, according to Eurostat, in 2014 there were 61 European regions in 8 EU countries with unemployment rates between 14 % and 34.8 % and 63 regions in seven EU countries with unemployment rates between 2.5 % and 4.9 %.; whereas, furthermore, there are 7 countries with more than 30 % of unemployment;

1. Highlights the potential of cohesion policy for improving employment opportunities, promoting sustainable and inclusive growth and contributing to poverty reduction and social inclusion; points out, in this connection, the importance of integrated funding, and especially the combination of the ESF and ERDF;

2. Stresses the importance of incentivising sectors such as the green economy and the social economy, which can bring added value in terms of sustainable and inclusive employability;

3. Underlines the fact that CLLD and ITI initiatives will be successful only if they manage to properly address the social and employment-related challenges facing the regions and communities concerned;

4. Stresses the potential of the bottom-up approach of CLLD in supporting local development strategies, creating job opportunities and encouraging sustainable rural development; believes that ITI and CLLD have the potential to respond directly to local needs and challenges in a more focused and appropriate way, insists on the need for better inclusion of urban areas in this mechanism and calls on the Commission to actively pursue this strategy; notes that ITI is an effective delivery mechanism for the implementation of Integrated Plans for Urban Regeneration and Development; urges the Commission to implement regulations covering CLLD and ITI funding from the ESIF as a whole in order to strengthen synergies;

5. Is concerned that in some Member States CLLD is sometimes a ‘box ticking’ exercise rather than a genuine bottom-up approach; insists, in this connection, that local actors should have real decision-making powers;

6. Calls on the Commission to provide technical assistance to Member States and local authorities and create channels of communication with Member States and local agents in order to ensure real and meaningful participation by local actors in the process and in cooperation at all levels; points out that CLLD and ITI will only achieve success with the commitment and ownership of all the stakeholders involved, including civil society, and considers that the involvement of partners can also strengthen the integrated and place-based approach, in particular where take-up of CLLD and ITI is low; calls on the Commission to charge an existing body within its structure with coordination of CLLD and ITI, with a view to ensuring better communication and implementation;

7. Considers that the Commission should encourage Member States to use these instruments
on projects to create quality employment and social investment, especially in those regions and sub-regions where it is most needed; calls on the Commission, therefore, to develop a special investment plan, in line with the Social Investment Package, so that the regions and subregions with the highest unemployment levels can make the best use of them;

8. Recognises that both CLLD and ITI are particularly necessary in less developed regions, encourages the Commission and the Member States to provide support and capacity-building assistance to regional and local authorities in the design and implementation of such initiatives, and calls on them to pay particular attention to regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, improving their territorial cohesion in order to foster the development of the local economy, which will ultimately make it possible for the population to remain in those regions;

9 Regrets the absence of a more recognisable branding for CLLD and ITI and the possible lack of experience regarding these instruments among local stakeholders; encourages the Commission and the Member States to make both tools as visible and understandable as possible for their users, while avoiding any additional unnecessary bureaucratic burden and making further efforts to simplify rules and procedures; stresses that more effective performance and greater added value as well as increased synergies could be achieved when using not only the ERDF in CLLD and ITI instruments but also other funds, as stipulated in the respective regulations; considers that steps should be taken, in this connection, to transmit accurate information regarding specific funds and to strengthen information contact points in order to provide adequate technical support to those who wish to use the funds; stresses, in addition, the importance of carefully and constantly monitoring these resources;

10. Calls on the Commission to organise appropriately publicised information seminars, in order to ensure that as many people as possible know about these opportunities; hopes, moreover, to see the establishment of appropriate information tools such as regularly updated mailing lists and smartphone applications;

11. Recalls that the ESF Regulation allows for a specific investment priority on ‘community-led local development strategies’ under Thematic Objective 9, and encourages the Member States to include this in their operational programmes; points out that the fund may provide vital support for territorial employment pacts, urban development strategies and institutional capacity building at local and regional level, and asks the Commission to provide additional assistance to the Member States in implementing these specific investment priorities and to provide in its Annual Activity Reports information on the scope of such implementation; calls on the Commission to use the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) to address the difficulties that have already been identified in the application of the instruments and to find sustainable solutions;

12. Points out to the Commission that, in order for tangible progress to be made towards achieving the objectives of Europe 2020, more attention needs to be paid, in the review of that strategy and of the MFF, to regional and local contexts, and to the specific circumstances of the areas concerned.
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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<th>Date adopted</th>
<th>25.1.2016</th>
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| Result of final vote | +: 37  
| | -: 3  
| | 0: 0  |
| Members present for the final vote | Laura Agea, Guillaume Balas, David Casa, Ole Christensen, Jane Collins, Lampros Fountoulis, Arne Gericke, Thomas Händel, Marian Harkin, Czesław Hoc, Rina Ronja Kari, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Jean Lambert, Jérôme Lavrilleux, Jeroen Lenaers, Dominique Martin, Anthea McIntyre, Joëlle Mélin, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Emilian Pavel, Georgi Pirinski, Terry Reintke, Sofia Ribeiro, Claude Rolin, Sven Schulze, Jutta Steinruck, Romana Tomc, Renate Weber, Tatjana Ždanoka, Jana Žitňanská |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Maria Arena, Amjad Bashir, Lynn Boylan, Miapetra Kumpula-Natri, Paloma López Bermejo, Edouard Martin, Evelyn Regner, Michaela Šojdrová |
| Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote | Eleonora Evi, Anneli Jääätteenmäki |