

FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
TO THE OPINIONS OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
PLENARY SESSION OF JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2024
111th REPORT

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
DG SANTE		
1. DG ENV assoc.	<u>Green Deal and Health</u> Rapporteur: Juan Manuel MORENO BONILLA (ES/EPP)	Own-initiative COR-2023-03364-00-01-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/041
DG AGRI		
2.	<u>The risk management and market regulation tools to strengthen the sustainability of European agriculture</u> Rapporteur: Nicola CAPUTO (IT/renew E.)	Own-initiative COR-2023-02288-00-01-AC-TRA NAT-VII/034
DG REGIO		
3.	<u>Towards an integrated EU policy approach to support place-based innovation for the green and digital transition</u> Rapporteur: Andrea PUTZU (IT/ECR)	Own-initiative COR-2023-03934-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/042
DG EMPL		
4.	<u>EU disability card and parking card for persons with disabilities</u> Rapporteur: Marko VEŠLIGAJ (HR/PES)	Mandatory COM(2023) 512 final COM(2023) 698 final COR-2023-04646-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/044
DG MOVE		
5.	<u>Greening Freight Transport package</u> Rapporteur-general: José RIBAU ESTEVES (PT/EPP)	Mandatory COM(2023) 441 final COM(2023) 443/2 final COM(2023) 445 final COM(2023) 702 final COR-2023-04958-00-01-AC-TRA COTER-VII/033

DG TAXUD & DG GROW		
6.	<p><u>The SME Relief Package and the BEFIT framework</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Kate FEENEY (IE/renew E.)</p>	<p>COM(2023) 528 final COM(2023) 529 final COM(2023) 532 final COM(2023) 533 final COM(2023) 535 final</p> <p>COR-2023-04941-00-01-AC-TRA ECON-VII/035</p>
OPINIONS ADOPTED DURING PREVIOUS PLENARY SESSIONS		
DG CLIMA		
7. adopted during the plenary session of October 2023	<p><u>UNFCCC COP28: the role of subnational authorities in keeping climate ambition on track</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Rafał Kazimierz TRZASKOWSKI (PL/EPP)</p>	<p>Own-initiative COR-2023-00904-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE -VII/038</p>
8. DG ENER assoc. adopted during the plenary session of November 2023	<p><u>A multilevel governance for the Green Deal: towards the revision of the Governance Regulation</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Joško KLISOVIĆ (HR/PES)</p>	<p>Own-initiative COR-2023-00903-00-01-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/037</p>
DG EAC		
9. adopted during the plenary session of November 2023	<p><u>Building a values-based, bottom-up European sports model: a vehicle for encouraging inclusion and social wellbeing among young Europeans</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Roberto PELLA (IT/EPP)</p>	<p>Own-initiative COR-2023-02588-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/040</p>
10. adopted during the plenary session of November 2023	<p><u>Promoting cultural policies in rural areas within the framework of development and territorial cohesion strategies and the 2030 Agenda</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Csaba BORBOLY (RO/EPP)</p>	<p>Council presidency referral COR-2023-03454-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/041</p>

DG MARE		
<p>11. adopted during the plenary session of November 2023</p>	<p><u>The Common Fisheries Policy on the ground: towards sustainable and resilient coastal communities in the EU</u> Rapporteur: Jesús GAMALLO ALLER (ES/EPP)</p>	<p>Own-initiative COM(2023) 100 final COM(2023) 101 final COM(2023) 102 final COM(2023) 103 final COR-2023-02953-00- 00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/035</p>
DG CNECT		
<p>12. adopted during the plenary session of November 2023</p>	<p><u>EU Cyber Solidarity Act and Digital Resilience</u> Rapporteur: Pehr GRANFALK (SE/EPP)</p>	<p>Optional COM(2023) 209 final COR-2023-02191-00- 00-AC-TRA ECON-VII/034</p>
DG COMP		
<p>13. adopted during the plenary session of November 2023</p>	<p><u>2022 Annual Report on Competition Policy</u> Rapporteur: Antonio MAZZEO (IT/PES)</p>	<p>Own-initiative COM(2023) 184 final COR-2023-02190-00- 00-AC-TRA ECON-VII/033</p>

N°1 Green deal and health
Own-initiative
COR-2023-03364 – ENVE-VII/041
159th plenary session – January-February 2024
Rapporteur: Juan Manuel MORENO BONILLA (ES/EPP)
DG SANTE – Commissioner KYRIAKIDES
DG ENV (assoc.) – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>4. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) recognises the urgency of addressing the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on human health, emphasising the crucial role of local and regional authorities in implementing specific measures, especially in less developed and the outermost regions, to reduce the health disparities in the implementation of measures to mitigate or adapt to this impact, and in healthcare access, ensuring resilient healthcare systems and access to drinking water and proper nutrition.</p>	<p>The Commission shares the Committee’s view that proper nutrition, healthy and sustainable diets and access to drinking water are important determinants of health, for which local and regional authorities can play an important role.</p> <p>The Commission shares the Committee’s concern in reducing health disparities and increasing access to healthcare.</p> <p>Increasing the resilience of health systems, to cope with shocks, can help safeguard access to healthcare. The EU4Health programme is funding (with a grant of EUR 1.5 million) the project ‘Health system resilience testing and support programme’. The project is developing a methodology for testing the resilience of health systems against specific shocks (including climate change and environmental degradation) and developing recommendations for remedial action. The methodology has been tested in pilot scenarios of an infectious disease, heat wave, and sudden shortage of health workers. A handbook with this methodology was published in March 2024¹, thus made available to Member States and their regions to carry out resilience tests of their health systems should they wish so.</p>

¹ The handbook can be downloaded from either of the two following webpages:
<https://www.oecd.org/fr/publications/strengthening-health-systems-3a39921e-en.htm>
<https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/publications/i/strengthening-health-systems-a-practical-handbook-for-resilience-testing>

<p>6. The CoR calls for comprehensive strategies to combat the spread of diseases related to climate change, including vector-borne and water-borne illnesses, emphasising the importance of region specific assessments to develop and organise health systems. These assessments should focus on specific mitigation and adaptation measures for these regions and their populations based on their specific characteristics, and minimise differences in quality of care, particularly in less developed and the outermost regions, to ensure equitable access to healthcare services.</p>	<p>The regulation on serious cross-border threats to health² has strengthened the role of the Health Security Committee (HSC) to enable the coordinated action by Member States and the Commission on the prevention, preparedness and response planning and response to serious cross-border threats to health. The HSC can adopt opinions and guidance for the Member States for the prevention and control of serious cross-border threats to health.</p> <p>The European Climate and Health Observatory aims to support Europe in preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change on human health by providing access to relevant information and tools. It publishes country profiles, including the assessment of national adaptation plans.</p> <p>In addition, in accordance with the mission of the Commission’s Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) to strengthen health security coordination within the Union, relevant to medical countermeasures during preparedness and crisis response times, ‘Climate change-induced health threats’ is one of the four priority areas identified by HERA in its work plans. HERA aims at strengthening innovation and improving access to MCM for these types of threats in its activities.</p>
<p>18. The CoR recognises, therefore, the urgent need to continue investing more in scientific research, to ensure the development of digital tools, and to have more public investments in national health systems to be able to address the effects of these threats to human health as well as by adopting and implementing the strategies and regulations set out in the Green Deal, which should involve an increased role of local regional and authorities.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the support from the Committee to continue investing in scientific research.</p>

² Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 1082/2013/EU; OJ L 314, 6.12.2022, p. 26–63.

19. The CoR stresses in this regard that it is important to step up cooperation with third countries on health and climate change, particularly EU action in African countries and with neighbouring countries, and to promote the work of research centres specialising in monitoring, preventing, diagnosing and investigating a large number of communicable/tropical diseases whose incidence is on the rise in Europe or which are a potential risk to Europe.

In the context of the EU Global Health Strategy (GHS)³, in line with the objective of preventing and combatting health threats, including pandemics, applying a One Health approach, a number of ‘Team Europe’ initiatives have been foreseen. The Commission launched in March 2024 a Team Europe Initiative⁴ on strengthening Sustainable Health Security using a One Health approach in Africa. It builds in particular on the successful collaboration between the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). The Commission is paying particular attention to addressing climate change induced health threats within this framework. The aim is to strengthen systems and capacities for sustainable, risk-informed prevention, preparedness, and response to infectious threats and antimicrobial resistance in Africa.

A second initiative under the GHS relating to ‘Africa-based public health capacity’ aims to provide support to public health institutes in Africa, at national and regional levels and through partnerships between African Union and EU public health institutes. The EU contributes – with support from the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – to both initiatives, launched at the EU – African Union High Level meeting on 20 March 2024, organised by the Belgian Presidency of the European Council.

Under Horizon Europe, support is provided to the Global Health European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP3) Joint Undertaking with an objective to find new solutions to reduce the burden of infectious diseases in sub-Saharan Africa, through a Team Europe approach together with the countries of this

³ [EU Global Health Strategy: Better Health for All in a Changing World - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-124336.pdf)

⁴ [Team Europe Initiatives - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infographic-124336.pdf)

	<p>region, also addressing the rising threat of antimicrobial resistance and climate-crisis-related infectious disease challenges. Lastly, within the framework of the Pandemic Fund, jointly supported by the EU and its Member States as biggest donors, more than 30% of the initial round of grants have been allocated for projects in sub-Saharan Africa aimed at strengthening disease surveillance, early warning systems, laboratory services, and human resources. The EU is the largest donor to the Pandemic Fund (EUR 427 million).</p> <p>The EU cooperates closely with the Southern neighbourhood countries, guided by the Agenda for the Mediterranean and the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)⁵, which aims at strengthening healthcare systems, improving access to quality healthcare, and addressing common health challenges. In response to the transnational nature of these threats, the Commission funds, amongst others, the EU Initiative on Health Security⁶, implemented by the ECDC in enlargement and neighbourhood countries. It contributes to building a regional workforce responsible for the prevention and control of challenges posed by communicable diseases and to enhance regional cooperation to tackle cross border health security threats.</p> <p>In addition, HERA – through Horizon Europe – is investing this year EUR 120 million in the late-stage research, development, and production of medical countermeasures to increase not only Europe’s, but global preparedness to environmental and climate-related threats and ensure that they are accessible to all.</p>
<p>22. The CoR stresses the need to push forward with the Fit for 55 package aimed at reducing direct CO₂ emissions, which will reduce</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s comments on the Fit for 55 package but regrets that important relevant initiatives from the package are</p>

⁵ SWD/2021/23 final ([Southern Neighbourhood: EU proposes new Agenda for the Mediterranean - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/COM/regulation/2021/23))

⁶ [EU Initiative on Health Security \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/eu-press/en/initiative-on-health-security)

<p>respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and the increase in temperatures and frequent extreme weather events. Therefore welcomes initiatives such as those to decarbonise the construction sector promoted by the REpowerEU Directive; decarbonise heating and cooling as proposed in the Renewable Energy Directive; reduce the global emissions ceiling proposed by the amended Emissions Trading Scheme; introduce a carbon price for certain imports included in the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism; and those to harness the full potential of the agricultural and forestry sector under the amended Regulation on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry.</p>	<p>not addressed in the opinion, particularly on the Co₂ standards, Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation, Fuel EU maritime and RefuelEU aviation.</p>
<p>24. The CoR underlines the importance, with respect to clean energy, of revising the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) guidelines and creating a common framework to support EU cities in the transition to more sustainable mobility that promotes the use of energy-efficient modes of transport such as public transport and infrastructure for cycling and pedestrians, as well as accessible and affordable electric vehicles (battery electric vehicles, hydrogen-powered, etc.), in order to reduce health problems associated with transport pollution and generate positive health and shared societal effects related to increasing physical activity and reducing inequalities in access to goods and services.</p>	<p>The Commission fully agrees with the Committee on the respective importance of both TEN-T guidelines and a framework for EU cities on urban mobility. It can confirm that the revised TEN-T Regulation should be adopted in May/ June 2024 and that a new EU framework on urban mobility⁷ has been already adopted in order to help EU cities in the respective transition. The TEN-T guidelines are focused on providing a future-proof robust transport infrastructure that will also provide for the uptake of clean energy in transport. The Commission would also like to underline the link between TEN-T and the new Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation⁸, as well as the role of ports and airports as hubs for the provision of renewable and low-carbon transport fuels.</p> <p>The revised TEN-T Regulation indeed foresees to better integrate the urban dimension into the TEN-T network. For this reason, a wider network of urban nodes has been defined that will become part of the TEN-T network. This includes urban nodes in the EU with a population of 100.000</p>

⁷ COM(2021) 811 final.

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2023/1804 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2023 on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure, and repealing Directive 2014/94/EU; OJ L 234, 22.9.2023, p. 1–47.

	<p>inhabitants or more, or in case no such node exists in a given NUTS 2 region, the respective main node of this NUTS 2 region.</p> <p>Under the revised Regulation, these nodes are required to adopt and monitor a sustainable urban mobility plan (SUMP) by 31 December 2027 in order to integrate the different modes of transport and shift towards sustainable mobility, to promote efficient zero and low-emission mobility including urban logistics and to reduce air and noise pollution, and where appropriate, to assess the user’s accessibility to transport. Member States are also required to collect and submit to the Commission urban mobility data per urban node in the fields of sustainability, safety and accessibility by that date.</p> <p>Furthermore, each node should develop multimodal passenger hubs to facilitate first and last mile connections by 2030 with the aim to facilitate access to public transport infrastructure and active mobility. Such hubs should also be equipped with at least one recharging station dedicated to serve buses and coaches and, if appropriate, one hydrogen refuelling station. Lastly the regulation requires the development, of at least one multimodal freight terminal with sufficient transshipment capacity within or in the vicinity of the respective urban nodes by 2040.</p>
<p>26. The CoR expresses great interest in action to reduce emissions from transport by implementing sustainable and smart mobility solutions, with emphasis on alternative fuels; promoting rail and public transport; active mobility; measures to shift freight transport – especially inter-regional freight transport – from road to rail; and revising the regulation on trans-European transport networks.</p>	<p>In December 2020, the Commission presented its ‘Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy’⁹ together with an Action Plan of 82 initiatives. This strategy set out how the EU transport system can achieve its green and digital transformation and become more resilient to future crises. By April 2024, over 90% of the 82 initiatives outlined in the strategy will have been completed.</p>

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0789>

<p>37. The CoR emphasises the need to continue investigating the health risks related to climate change.</p>	<p>Under the EU Adaptation Strategy¹⁰, in 2021 the Commission launched the European Climate and Health Observatory. This Observatory aims to support Europe in preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change on human health by providing access to relevant information and tools. It provides data and evidence on key health risks associated with climate change. These risks include heatwaves, wildfires, floods, vector-borne diseases, water and food-borne diseases, air pollution, UV radiation, mental health effects and occupational safety and health effects.</p>
<p>45. The CoR considers that, in the light of the key role played by regional and local authorities in implementing EU policies, it is necessary to maintain and strengthen the competences, funding and capacity to act of the local and regional level as a whole, to step up the support given to them and to provide them with greater capacity to address the risks to society and the environment arising from climate change, encouraging them to simplify the administrative procedures necessary to implement the measures.</p> <p>46. The CoR believes it is essential to provide substantial support and technical assistance to regional and local authorities, while promoting coherence between EU-funded projects and local and regional policies to maximise their impacts. Implementing environmental policies and measures requires significant investment in sustainable infrastructure, clean technologies and awareness-raising programmes. Local and regional authorities often face budgetary constraints and depend on external funding. It is essential to ensure that they have equal access to financial resources so that they can fully participate in the transition to a green model.</p>	<p>Cohesion policy is a powerful tool to address the challenges stemming from the twin transitions and reap their benefits. Policy Objective 2 of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund + (ESF+), and the Cohesion Fund (CF) supports a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility. ERDF and CF contribute EUR 93 billion to Policy Objective 2.</p> <p>Quality of public administration and good governance determine the ability of a public administration to effectively manage and use EU funds, including developing and implementing projects that address the risks to society and the environment arising from climate change, and environmental degradation. Transparency, simplification of procedures, and streamlining administrative procedures and structures are important elements to facilitate this ability. Capacity-building at regional and local level includes all relevant actors, such as municipalities, non-profit organisations (NGOs), and other</p>

¹⁰ COM(2021) 82 final.

	<p>stakeholders, such as civil society organisations and citizens.</p> <p>In the programming period 2021-2027, EUR 1.81 billion (ERDF, CF, Just Transition Fund – JTF) has been allocated for Cohesion Member States (BG, CZ, HU, IT, LV, MT, PL, RO, SK) to reinforce their administrative capacity, including project development assistance. Member States can also allocate funds for the administrative capacity building of social partners and civil society organisations.</p> <p>The Commission can also initiate more targeted administrative and technical assistance actions for institutional strengthening and administrative capacity-building. In 2023, the Commission launched the Cohesion for Transitions (C4T) Community of Practice¹¹. With a budget of EUR 1.5 million, this initiative is helping several EU regions with Policy Objective 2 implementation, providing tailor-made technical assistance.</p> <p>With a total budget of EUR 142 billion for 2021-2027, the ESF+ is the main EU funding instrument that invests in people. It supports the Member States to achieve high employment levels, fair social protection and a resilient workforce ready for the future world of work, as well as inclusive and cohesive societies. In doing so, it helps the Member States ensuring that no one will be left behind.</p> <p>To illustrate, under the ESF+ significant resources will be devoted to the skills required to turn the transitions into a success. Almost EUR 9.6 billion are planned for investment in green skills and green jobs, and around EUR 2 billion for digital skills.</p>
<p>47. The CoR stresses, to this end, that a commitment to use European cohesion policy</p>	<p>As one of the largest investment instruments under the EU budget, cohesion policy supports the</p>

¹¹ [Inforegio - Cohesion for Transitions \(C4T\) \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/inforegio)

<p>financial instruments to implement the Green Deal is essential, as is the possibility that they may be used to support local and regional action under the Deal; highlights, in this regard, the need to step up the level of climate and environmental ambition in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and the key role that the European Social Fund+ should play in the just transition stemming from the Green Deal;</p>	<p>Green Deal objectives while promoting the economic, social and territorial cohesion of Europe's regions with EUR 93 billion from ERDF and CF over the 2021-2027 period. This represents 33% of ERDF's allocation and 56% of CF's allocation, which is a major increase compared to the level of 20% (EUR 56 billion) in the 2014-2020 period. Adding JTF and ESF+ allocation, a total of more than EUR 110 billion of cohesion funding will support climate action and transition. To ensure that EU funded investments contribute to the environmental and climate objectives, safeguards have been put in place with the obligations to comply with the Do-No-Significant-Harm principle and to ensure climate proofing of infrastructure, in addition to the environmental acquis in place, i.e. Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment.</p> <p>More specifically, under cohesion policy programmes for 2021-2027, investments of more than EUR 18.8 billion are planned in climate adaptation and risk management, of which over EUR 13.9 billion is EU funding. Cohesion policy investments for 2021-2027 will directly contribute to build resilience in EU regions. These investments will result in reducing the vulnerability of more than 40 million people to flood risks, and in decreasing the vulnerability of more than 130 million people to wildfire risk, by investments in protection infrastructure, including in green infrastructure.</p>
<p>48. The CoR stresses that the health issues linked to climate change call for close cooperation on the implementation of the measures envisaged in the Green Deal between the various levels of government (European, national, regional and local) and the various sectors involved, especially in the field of health, environment, urban planning, energy and</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view that the One Health approach encompasses aspects related to climate change, the environment, and health.</p> <p>The interaction with stakeholder organisations is an essential part of the Commission's health policy activities. The EU Health Policy Platform¹² is an operational health stakeholder platform,</p>

¹² <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/hpf/>

<p>transport. The desired approach to combine health and environment quality – which is encompassed within the One Health approach – is not possible without liaising with health institutions, civil society organisations and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>bringing together more than 6000 Platform members in about 60 networks led by either Commission services, Member State authorities or stakeholders. The Platform offers means to facilitate dialogue between health professionals, patient groups, members of the public sector and stakeholders with an interest in health. Climate and health education in Europe was a specific thematic network in the Health Policy Platform stimulating discussion around the topic.</p>
<p>50. The CoR emphasises the importance of LRAs in disseminating public information and promoting awareness across EU communities. Accordingly, it is deemed essential to step up cooperation between local and regional authorities by setting up knowledge-sharing and information platforms to allow local and regional authorities and academic and scientific institutions to work together more closely, thereby providing a robust knowledge base for optimising decision-making and monitoring progress towards achieving health and environment objectives.</p>	<p>Knowledge4Policy (K4P) is the EU Commission's platform for evidence-based policymaking. The platform provides high quality, relevant and scientifically robust knowledge, created and curated by teams of Commission scientists through a single database of interconnected knowledge to inform policy. This information platform is operated by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), and currently has 20 knowledge sharing services available.</p>

N°2 The risk management and market regulation tools to strengthen the sustainability of European agriculture
Own-initiative
COR-2023-02288 – NAT-VII/034
159th plenary session – January-February 2024
Rapporteur: Nicola CAPUTO (IT/renew E.)
DG AGRI – Commissioner WOJCIECHOWSKI

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential

European Commission position

The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.

N°3 Towards an integrated EU policy approach to support place-based innovation for the green and digital transition

Own-initiative

COR-2023-03934 – SEDEC-VII/042

159th plenary session – January-February 2023

Rapporteur: Andrea PUTZU (IT/ECR)

DG REGIO – Commissioner FERREIRA

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>14. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) calls on the EU Member States national level of governance and on the EU institutions to acknowledge more clearly the important role of local and regional authorities not only in the implementation, but also in the design of the EU policies, starting from the broader vision and objectives for the future EU policies, considering the policy work carried out by the Committee of the Regions;</p>	<p>The Commission underlines that the role of local and regional authorities (LRAs) is essential both in the conception and in the implementation of EU policies. The Commission is consulting relevant LRAs as part of the policy-making process, such as via stakeholder consultations and pilot initiatives.</p> <p>The Commission will continue the close cooperation with the Committee in the relevant stakeholder dialogues and processes concerning the future of EU policies.</p> <p>LRAs are in charge of implementing cohesion policy funds on the ground, and are therefore essential partners in multi-level bottom-up processes, such as in the design and implementation of regional innovation policy, smart specialisation strategies and transformative innovation policies. LRAs also play a key role in implementing cohesion policy support and setting up the priorities for cohesion policy support to place-based research and innovation investments.</p>
<p>30. The CoR stresses the continued need for structured dialogue between various European Commission services and regional innovation ecosystem players with a view to the viability of existing, and the design of new policies and financing instruments to support regional innovation ecosystems and interregional cooperation between them;</p>	<p>The European Research Area (ERA) Forum provides a venue for a structured dialogue between the Commission and Member States acting as multipliers for regional stakeholders.</p> <p>Cohesion policy is actively supporting structured dialogue with regional innovation ecosystem players through various means, such as the Working Groups on Innovation Diffusion,</p>

	Industrial Transition and Interregional Collaboration under the Smart Specialization Community of Practice. ¹
<p>31. The CoR calls for the setting up of new Partnerships for Regional Innovation Pilot Actions allowing other regions to participate in the innovation process, tacking stock of the first PRI Pilot Action's best practices;</p>	<p>The Action Book² resulting from the Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) pilot has been published and is actively promoted towards regions and local stakeholders.</p> <p>The first phase of the PRI Pilot is a stepping-stone regarding innovation for place-based transformation. Through institutional collaboration, the continuity of support is envisaged to LRAs in their efforts and challenges to build resilience, tackle climate change, implement the green and digital transformation, and strengthen research and innovation ecosystems.</p>
<p>34. The CoR recommends continued cooperation between regions and the EU institutions to develop further intra-regional partnerships and inter-regional cooperation for innovation, by building on the experience gained from the regional smart specialisation strategies and on the joint CoR-JRC Pilot Action on Partnerships for Regional Innovation, while strengthening cooperation with the European Parliament and paying particular attention to the ongoing call for Regional Innovation Valleys;</p>	<p>It remains a priority for the Commission to foster cooperation between regions and institutions, in particular to foster a better integration of less developed regions or regions with lower innovation performance. A central venue for cooperation is the Smart Specialisation Community of Practice where actors in place based innovation such as Regional Innovation Valleys can interact. The Smart Specialisation Community of Practice also supports Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms and Partnerships and a working group on interregional collaboration containing regional representatives. A major event – the 2024 Smart Specialisation Community of Practice conference – is planned for autumn 2024.</p>
<p>38. The CoR takes note of a variety of existing EU initiatives which can be used by regions in designing and implementing their strategies and the need for coordination for their effectiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH); • Euroclusters; 	<p>In this context, it is relevant to mention the opportunities that Living Laboratories (or Living Labs) offer to regions to engage in placed-based innovation initiatives through the active involvement of all the stakeholders of the</p>

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/s3-community-of-practice_en

² [Territories in ACTION - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/territories-in-action/)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interregional partnerships supported by the ERDF; • innovation ecosystems in low-innovation performance regions supported by EIT KICs and the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS); • Startup Europe; • Hydrogen Valleys; • Hubs for Circularity (H4C); and the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN); 	<p>quadruple helix.</p> <p>In particular, under Cluster 6 ‘Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment’ of Horizon Europe, the EU Mission Soil and the Partnership on Agroecology are instruments promoting living laboratories, as spaces for co-creation, testing and experimentation involving end users and all relevant actors. Both instruments have a strong placed-based focus, offering concrete opportunities for regions to engage and to network with other regions and actors participating in research and innovation activities. In the case of the Partnership on Agroecology, four European regions are members of the consortium.</p>
<p>40. The CoR calls on the European Commission to activate more synergies between the funds of various DGs, also bearing in mind the Structural Funds and cohesion policy;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the ambition of bringing policies and financing instruments closer together while recognising different objectives behind each of them. In 2021-2027 the framework for synergies has been strongly reinforced, i.e. between Horizon Europe and European Regional Development Fund.</p> <p>In July 2022, the Commission published a practical guidance³ on new opportunities to maximise the synergies between Horizon Europe and European Regional Development Fund programmes.</p> <p>The document covers legal and implementation details of all new opportunities for achieving operational synergies, including for the Seal of Excellence, transfer, cumulative funding, co-funded and Institutionalised Partnerships, Teaming, and upstream/downstream synergies including missions. It is also in the hands of regional and national authorities to use the synergies mechanisms where it is considered that it brings an added value.</p>

³ Commission Notice Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes; C/2022/7307 ; OJ C 421, 4.11.2022, p. 7–51 ([EUR-Lex - 52022XC1104\(02\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/notice/2022/7307)).

	<p>The approaches on innovation for place-based transformation developed in the recently published Action Book can help foster funding synergies and synergies between policies in EU territories.</p>
<p>44. The CoR calls on the European Commission to consider the possibility that part of the co-funding at regional level could come "in kind", meaning that Regional Innovation Valley projects could build upon ongoing R&I activities in each region, which could count as part of their co-funding, and to better explore the implementation of such an approach with a view to introducing it in future calls;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the proposal. It will closely monitor and assess the outcomes of the first Regional Innovation Valley calls to improve the design of the future calls.</p>
<p>45. The CoR calls on the European Commission and other EU institutions to better address the urgency of reducing the innovation gap across regions in the EU, strengthening the element of innovation, and spreading innovation by means of increased synergies between the EU Horizon programme for research and regional policy instruments;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the sense of urgency when it comes to reducing the innovation gap. This is in line with the New European Innovation Agenda⁴ which highlights the persistent innovation divide as one of the key challenges for the EU's innovation performance.</p> <p>A central element of addressing this challenge is to better connect national and regional ecosystems based on shared smart specialization priorities and complementary capabilities.</p> <p>The guidance document 'Notice on synergies between Horizon Europe and European Regional Development Fund programmes'⁵ aim is to reinforce synergies between EU funding policy instruments.</p>
<p>50. The CoR calls on the European Commission to continue the pilot action on Partnerships for Regional Innovation, stressing the EU support needed and the new actors and regions to be involved;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that continuous EU support is needed to strengthen and connect regional innovation ecosystems, particular emphasis is for regions that are struggling with poor institutional capacities, low innovation performance and weak innovation diffusion</p>

⁴ COM(2022) 332 final.

⁵ C(2022) 4747 final.

	<p>mechanisms. Options to advance the support to innovation for place-based transformation are being explored.</p>
<p>51. The CoR calls on the European Commission to provide targeted financial support for regions' efforts in strengthening cooperation at local/regional level between key innovation stakeholders seeking to leverage regional innovation potential in line with the green and digital transitions;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that it is important to leverage the innovation potential of EU regions to create local opportunities for sustainable development and economic growth, as well as for meeting the EU objectives such as the green and digital transition. Many regions and member states have identified green and digital priorities in the smart specialization strategies, underlying that regional and EU priorities are very often aligned.</p>
<p>52. The CoR calls on the European Commission and the EU budgetary authority to ensure that the Horizon Europe Research Framework programme should do more in the future to strengthen regional innovation hubs and ecosystems, and the connectivity between them, stressing in this context the huge potential of a dedicated action on ERA hubs within the framework of the ERA Policy Agenda; sees a crucial role for the European Research Area Forum in this regard, notably the new RIMA network which provides a platform to enhance dialogue and coordination between the European Commission and Member States to ensure synergies across all relevant funding sources and improve scientific and innovation excellence throughout Europe;</p>	<p>The ERA Hubs concept under Action 15 of ERA Policy Agenda 'Building research and innovation ecosystems to improve excellence and competitiveness', whose main objective is the strengthening of the innovation ecosystems for knowledge circulation and valorisation, has not yet been developed.</p> <p>On the other hand, the objective of European Network of Research and Innovation Authorities of Cohesion Policy and Member States' Research and Innovation Authorities, under Action 16 'Access to excellence', is to establish the dialogue and coordination between the Commission and Member States to ensure synergies implementation between Horizon Europe and European Regional Development Fund programmes, as well as boosting scientific and innovation excellence across the EU.</p>
<p>53. The CoR calls on the European Commission to provide guidelines helping regions to examine and better coordinate existing funding opportunities from different EU, national and regional programmes (Horizon Europe, Structural Funds, Erasmus, InvestEU, Recovery and Resilience Facility, Interregional Innovation Investments I3, Interreg Europe, Connecting Europe Facility, Digital Europe, EU4Health, EIB and EIT) in order to better exploit them in a</p>	<p>Ample information about the different funding opportunities is available on the Europa website and through contact points in the regions and Member States. For example, the Commission provided practical and user-friendly guidance on new opportunities to maximise the synergies between Horizon Europe and the European Regional Development Fund programmes.</p> <p>The Commission is also developing an overview</p>

<p>place-based perspective of implementation of the twin transition;</p>	<p>of the different funding sources for particular policy areas or sectors, e.g. funding compasses. The Commission will continue to update and publish such information as needed.</p>
<p>54. The CoR underlines the relevance of enlargement/accessing countries that have pockets of excellence which can be leveraged to spread excellence to other regions of the EU through the various funding opportunities (i.e. Interreg Europe, EU macroregional strategies, I3, EGCT); calls for an active exploration of opportunities for enlargement/accessing countries to be able to participate in future Partnerships for Regional Innovation, creating a more inclusive and dynamic innovation landscape;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee that it is important to engage with partners from third countries outside the European Union. The Commission underlines that many relevant initiatives are open to partners and regions from third countries, for example participation in smart specialisation thematic partnerships under the Smart Specialisation Community of Practice.</p>
<p>55. The CoR calls for additional and increased financing for Regional Innovation Valleys and PRI networks, keeping in mind that the European Commission, with the NEIA, is seeking to promote more innovation co-investments, fostering other funding leverages (COFUND) via HE EIE and the ERDF I3 instrument;</p>	<p>Specific support and advice to regional innovation networks is made available via dedicated facilities such as the Smart Specialisation Community of Practice as well as Interregional Innovation Investments capacity building Calls. The aim of these initiatives is to increase stakeholders' innovation capacity as well as their ability to participate in funding Calls and/or benefit from funding opportunities made available through national and regional programmes co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.</p> <p>Funding for innovation ecosystem stakeholder projects is made available through many European Regional Development Fund co-funded regional and national programmes as well as directly managed instruments such as the I3 Instrument or Horizon Europe European Innovation Ecosystems.</p>

<p>N°4 EU disability card and parking card for persons with disabilities Mandatory COM(2023) 512 final COM(2023) 698 final COR-2023-04646 – SEDEC-VII/044 159th plenary session – January-February 2024 Rapporteur: Marko VEŠLIGAJ (HR/PES) DG EMPL – Commissioner DALLI</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions’ opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>8. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) stresses the need to precisely define the scope of this Directive because of different procedures and different arrangements in the Member States in asserting preferential treatment, and to clearly define the services and activities covered by this Directive which should be differentiated from services and activities in the field of social security, social protection or social assistance not covered by this Directive;</p>	<p>The provisionally agreed compromise text by the co-legislators approved by the plenary of the Parliament in the first reading on 24 April 2024 but to be approved by the Council and the new Parliament in autumn (‘the Directive’) aims at facilitating short stays of persons with disabilities in a Member State other than that of which they are a resident. Therefore, it covers, in addition to parking conditions and facilities, a wide variety of services, activities and facilities, including when provided not for remuneration, in a variety of policy domains. An overview and concrete examples of areas and services to be covered are included in the recitals and in the corresponding Impact assessment report¹. The Commission believes that the services covered are clearly differentiated from the field of social security, protection and assistance, which is not covered.</p>
<p>9. The CoR recommends expanding the EDC to cover social security services during transition periods when it comes to studying or recruiting persons with disabilities in another Member State. This extension is proposed not only for the period until full entitlement is established in the new Member State, but also for short stays like youth exchanges, student exchanges, internships, professional training, etc. [...]</p>	<p>Member States shall apply the future provisions of this Directive, when they become applicable, for periods longer than a short stay for card holders participating in an EU mobility programme, for the duration of that programme. Member States may also decide to apply the provisions of the future Directive for periods longer than a short stay for card holders visiting or staying in their territory.</p> <p>However, in any case the future Directive will not</p>

¹ SWD(2023) 290 final.

	<p>apply to social security benefits under Regulations on the coordination of social security systems^{2 3}, cash or in-kind benefits in the area of social protection and employment, or social assistance covered by Article 24(2) of the Directive on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States⁴. These are already regulated by these legislative acts. Nevertheless, the Directive stipulates that 1 year after the date of application, the Commission shall carry out an assessment on any remaining gaps relating to the free movement of persons with disabilities. The Commission shall take due account of the outcomes of this assessment when deciding whether further action at Union level would be required to address any such gaps.</p>
<p>12. The CoR [...] welcomes the proposal from the perspective of crime prevention, given that the EU has major problems with, among other things, the abuse, theft and forgery of these cards. The system that needs to be built for the exchange of information between Member States could counteract this;</p>	<p>The Directive stipulates that the Commission will have the power to adopt delegated acts to supplement the Directive to set digital features (a QR code and any other digital features using electronic means) addressing fraud prevention on the physical format of both cards. Likewise, it allows the Commission to amend Annexes I and II to modify the data fields of the standardised formats in order to adapt the format to technical developments, prevent forgery and fraud, address abuse or misuse and ensure interoperability.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission shall adopt implementing acts to set the accessible digital formats for both cards and ensure interoperability. The Commission shall adopt implementing acts establishing common technical specifications for the digital card storage medium, for matters such</p>

² Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security systems; OJ L 166, 30.4.2004, p. 1–123.

³ Regulation (EC) No 987/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 September 2009 laying down the procedure for implementing Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems; OJ L 284, 30.10.2009, p. 1–42.

⁴ Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States amending Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 and repealing Directives 64/221/EEC, 68/360/EEC, 72/194/EEC, 73/148/EEC, 75/34/EEC, 75/35/EEC, 90/364/EEC, 90/365/EEC and 93/96/EEC; OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 77–123.

	<p>as verifying the validity of the cards and their number, for controlling their authenticity, for preventing forgery and fraud and for reading of the card(s) between Member States for their use in a digital identity wallet at EU level.</p> <p>Moreover, Member States, with the support of the Commission, should take the necessary steps to prevent any risk of forgery or fraud in relation to both cards and should actively combat fraudulent issuance, use and forgery of these cards. Members States should exchange information on such cases.</p>
<p>14. The CoR stresses that the EDC should complement the proof of disability issued at national level and issued separately, and that the issuing of the card, both in physical and electronic form, should be free of charge to all users, at their request, and that this framework will address the proof of disability status in all Member States;</p>	<p>The European Disability Card will complement and not replace the national disability cards or certificates. The provisionally agreed compromise text leaves it on Member States to decide if they issue or renew the European Disability Card directly or upon application by the person with disabilities (Article 6.4). The reason is that in some Member States the European Disability Card will also become a national disability card (currently, a pilot project is in place in 7 Member States and some of them are using it as a national disability card). The European Disability Card shall be issued and renewed free of charge to the beneficiary. Member States may decide to charge a fee for the costs relating to the reissuance of the card in cases of loss or damage. The European Parking Card may be issued and renewed free of charge or with a fee for the costs relating to the issuance and renewal. For both cards, in case of a fee, Member States shall ensure that this fee does not exceed the administrative costs concerned or prevent or discourage persons with disabilities from acquiring the card.</p>
<p>15. The CoR supports the requirement to fully respect the rights to privacy and the protection of personal data and the application of safeguards for the processing of personal data in</p>	<p>The backside of the European Disability Card will be the national one and the Member States are free to decide what information should appear there. They must ensure that both cards (also the parking</p>

<p>accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), with a focus on the confidentiality of information on the type of disability;</p>	<p>card) will be in line with the General Data Protection Regulation⁵.</p>
<p>16. The CoR stresses the need for swift implementation of the Directive and close cooperation with all stakeholders involved [...];</p>	<p>Member States shall transpose the Directive into their legal system within 30 months and implement it in 42 months after its entry into force.</p> <p>Indeed, the Commission shall, before adopting a delegated act or an implementing act, consult persons with disabilities and their representative organisations as well as experts designated by each Member State in accordance with the principles laid down in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making⁶.</p> <p>Moreover, Member States shall ensure the active consultation and involvement of representative organisations of persons with disabilities in the development, implementation and evaluation of both cards.</p> <p>The Commission considers involving persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in the implementation of the initiative important. The EU-level disability organisations and other relevant EU-level civil society organisations are members of the Disability Platform, which provides for cooperation and dialogue among the Commission, Member States, and civil society.</p>
<p>17. The CoR stresses the need for the rapid introduction of the new common EPC model because a large number of people with disabilities use transport in a private vehicle, as this is the most advantageous means or even the only way of moving independently;</p>	<p>Member States shall implement the Directive in 42 months after its entry into force.</p> <p>Member States shall replace current EU Parking Cards for people with disabilities, issued in accordance with the Council Recommendation on a parking card for people with disabilities⁷ adapted in 2008, within 5 years from the entry into force of</p>

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation); OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1–88.

⁶ [EUR-Lex - 32016Q0512\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁷ 98/376/EC: Council Recommendation of 4 June 1998 on a parking card for people with disabilities, OJ L 167, 12.6.1998, p. 25–28.

	<p>this Directive. During this period, Member States may allow cards issued before the date of application of this Directive, in accordance with the Council Recommendation, to have the same effect as the European Parking Card in their territory.</p>
<p>18. The CoR stresses the need for EU financial support for local and regional authorities to provide digital tools for EDC implementation at local and regional level, taking into account the fact that not all EU local and regional authorities have established a digital register of people with disabilities and digital tools;</p>	<p>The costs of the initiative are not estimated to be significant, as confirmed by the impact assessment.</p> <p>Currently, the Commission does not have any additional financial resources available for direct support to implement the initiative. However, under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), financial resources are available to Member States to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.</p>
<p>20. The CoR stresses the need to define minimum accessibility standards for people with disabilities, at European, national and regional level [...];</p>	<p>The Commission considers accessibility as a key prerequisite of full inclusion in the society. It implements the new accessibility measures in line with the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030⁸ and intends to pursue its policy action also in coming years.</p>
<p>21. The CoR believes that local authorities have a key role to play in promoting and increasing the visibility of the cards, which can be achieved through a wide range of awareness-raising campaigns [...];</p>	<p>The Directive stipulates that the Commission shall undertake a European awareness raising campaign in cooperation with the Member States and shall continuously promote awareness raising and dissemination of information on the implementation of this Directive. Moreover, Member States shall take appropriate measures to raise awareness, including in accessible ways, about the existence and conditions to obtain, use, or renew the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card for persons with disabilities. In addition, Member States shall take measures to raise awareness among public authorities and private operators and encourage them to voluntarily provide special conditions or preferential treatment, and parking conditions and facilities for persons with disabilities in as wide a range of services, other activities and facilities as</p>

⁸ COM(2021) 101 final.

	possible.
<p>Proposed amendment to Article 6(4) (add new paragraph): Member States shall ensure that persons with disabilities, or designated representatives acting on their behalf and with their approval, may appeal a decision by the competent authorities regarding the issuance, renewal or withdrawal of a European Disability Card.</p>	<p>The Directive stipulates that Member States shall ensure that adequate and effective means exist to ensure compliance with and enforcement of this Directive. The means shall include provisions, in accordance with national law and practice, whereby persons with disabilities, or designated representatives acting on their behalf and with their or their legal guardian's approval, are able to appeal against a decision by the competent authorities or bodies regarding the issuance, renewal or withdrawal of a European Disability Card or a European Parking Card.</p>

<p>N°5 Greening Freight Transport Package Mandatory COM(2023) 441 final COM(2023) 443/2 final COM(2023) 445 final COM(2023) 702 final CoR-2023-04958 – COTER-VII/033 159th plenary session – January-February 2024 Rapporteur-general: José RIBAU ESTEVES (PT/EPP) DG MOVE – Commissioner VÁLEAN</p>	
Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	Commission position
Count Emissions EU	
<u>Policy Recommendations</u>	
<p>16. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) argues that Europe needs to develop standards, supportive regulations and effective fiscal instruments to determine the carbon footprint and other external costs of transporting goods throughout their entire intermodal journey. It also aims, in the long term, for this information to reach the user;</p>	<p>The Commission underlines that its proposal on Count Emissions EU¹ already contributes to this recommendation by establishing an EU common framework for the accounting of greenhouse gas emissions of transport services across transport modes and national networks (Chapters II, III, IV, V, VI and VII). The Commission would also like to point to the package of measures already adopted under Fit for 55 package, such as Commission’s proposal on energy taxation directive², CO₂ standards, Fuel EU Maritime³, RefuelEU aviation⁴, and the reform of the European Emissions Trading System⁵.</p>
Railway infrastructure capacity	
<p>Amendment 2</p> <p><u>New recital after Recital 2</u></p> <p>In order to meet the sustainability and climate</p>	<p>This recital goes beyond the scope of the proposed</p>

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_23_3774

² COM(2021) 563 final.

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023R1805>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/2405>

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2023/959/oj>

<p>goals, unfair competition between various modes of transport must be avoided and a level playing field established. The framework conditions for such fair competition must be set at European level, ending unfair advantages for fossil-fuel powered modes of transport, thus incentivising choices for sustainable modes of transport for both passenger and freight transport.</p>	<p>regulation, which deals with the management and use of rail infrastructure capacity.</p>
<p>Amendment 3</p> <p><u>New recital after Recital 2</u></p> <p>EU's decarbonisation and modal shift targets will not be able to be addressed with this rail capacity regulation alone. Both Member States and the Commission should continue to work on numerous other elements that can help to further increase both transport and train capacity, such as the bundling of train paths, speed harmonisation, integrated regular timetables, efficient passenger changeover, the use of longer trains, the use of reciprocal commercial conditions for capacity-friendly behaviour (both infrastructure managers and applicants), the roll-out of harmonised ERTMS across Europe as well as automated trains operation (ATO).</p>	<p>Same reply as for amendment 2 (above).</p>
<p>Amendment 4</p> <p><u>New recital after Recital 2</u></p> <p>Tackling the multi-modal competitive aspect between different transport modes is important to facilitate a substantial modal shift and reach the targets set in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. In order to guarantee a fair level playing field between the transport modes, framework conditions need to be levelled out. This would incentivise people and companies to make transport choices in line with the Union's sustainable transport vision. With an increased demand for rail capacity by both passenger and freight services, investments will also be</p>	<p>Same reply as for amendment 2 (above).</p>

<p>needed to implement the capacity enhancing measures described above.</p>	
<p>Amendment 8</p> <p><u>Recital 19</u></p> <p>One of the main objectives of the Trans-European Transport Network is to ensure the connectivity of all the EU's regions and territories. Territorial and social cohesion must remain the main objectives of connecting citizens and regions through transport infrastructure. Cohesion must also be the main objective in the provision of railway transport services.</p>	<p>The proposal is beyond the scope of the proposed regulation, which addresses neither the development of transport infrastructure nor the provisions of rail services. However, the objectives of strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion by ensuring accessibility and connectivity for all regions of the Union are embedded in the provisional agreement reached by the co-legislators of the new Trans-European Transport Network Regulation which is pending final adoption.</p>
<p>Amendment 9</p> <p><u>Article 2(3)</u></p> <p>In fulfilling their responsibilities in accordance with paragraph 1 and 2, infrastructure managers shall:</p> <p>(a) make optimum effective use of the available infrastructure capacity as required in Article 26 of Directive 2012/34/EU <u>with the aim of increasing the share of rail transport, both for passengers and freight, in line with the Union's climate targets;</u></p> <p>(b) maximize the value to society of rail transport services enabled by rail infrastructure in social, economic and environmental terms, promoting in particular areas under their responsibility that suffer from low connectivity;</p> <p>(c) ensure non-discriminatory management of and transparent access to infrastructure capacity, including during works, with a view to supporting fair competition;</p> <p>(d) enable seamless and punctual rail traffic across more than one network and connecting all territories of the EU, by striving to eliminate bottlenecks and</p>	<p>Several of the tasks mentioned in this amendment refer to general policy goals that are within the remit of public authorities which can be included in the strategic guidance given to the infrastructure managers under Article 11(3). Therefore, these references could be included instead in the recitals to the proposed Regulation.</p>

<p>operational obstacles;</p> <p>(e) ensure transparency about the state and availability of rail infrastructure capacity;</p> <p>(f) review and improve the performance of rail infrastructure and transport services in close cooperation with rail sector operators, including improving the environment in terms of electrifying lines;</p> <p>(g) contribute to the implementation and development of the single European railway area thereby ensuring territorial and social cohesion, while ensuring that it is fully rolled out in all areas under their responsibility, under competitive conditions, and not just in border regions.</p>	
<p>Amendment 10</p> <p><u>Article 8(4)(a)</u></p> <p>The Commission shall adopt a delegated act in accordance with Article 71 setting out the criteria and the standardised methodologies for the calculation and application of the socio-economic and environmental criteria, as well as determining the standardised and representative data sources. The Commission shall include European Rail International Capacity Allocation body (ERICA) in its work.</p>	<p>The setting of a methodology for the application of socio-economic and environment criteria and determining the standardised and representative data sources is a matter to be under an implementing act rather than a delegated act.</p> <p>This matter is already addressed under Article 8(7) of the proposal which empowers the Commission to adopt implementing acts setting out the specific procedures, criteria and methodologies to be applied for the management of scarce capacity'. Such an act may thus address the question of the application of the socio economic and environment criteria referred to in Article 8(4).</p> <p>The competence for organising rail transport services operated under public service obligations is defined in national legislation. Whether an involvement of regional or local authorities is necessary or even useful, therefore depends on the specific situation in each Member State.</p>

Weights and Dimensions

General comments

The CoR highlights that COM has to implement measures to make freight transport more efficient and more sustainable by, among other measures, offering stronger incentives for low-emission lorries for last-mile and short-distance intermodal transportation.

The Commission welcomes the position of the Committee that supports the objectives of the Weights and Dimensions Directive proposal.⁶ The Commission notes that the proposal includes incentives to support the demand for zero-emission vehicles and to improve the efficiency of transport. These measures apply to both, road-only transport and intermodal transport.

The CoR underlines that the expanding size and weight of lorries may create substantial challenges and costs for regions and cities, necessitating significant adjustments to their road infrastructure to accommodate the larger vehicles and mitigating the heightened risk of accidents.

The Commission confirms that investments in the upgrade of road infrastructure are necessary. The Commission's impact assessment⁷ analyses this issue, showing that the adjustment costs for public authorities over the period 2025-2050 are estimated at EUR 4.2 billion. These costs are almost entirely linked to infrastructure costs. Namely, to the incentives in terms of extra weight and extra axle weight provided to zero-emission heavy-duty vehicles and to heavy-duty vehicles involved in intermodal transport.

Amendment 12

(recital 9)

The CoR proposes an amendment to recital 9 of the legal proposal, related to European Modular Systems (EMS), in order to recognise “regional” specificities, as well as national ones, when assessing the suitability of EMS the need to carry such assessment in cooperation with the regional authorities, specially where they exercise competencies in the management and maintenance of road infrastructure.

Moreover, the CoR considers that EMS should

The Commission recalls that authorising the circulation of European Modular Systems (EMS) is a voluntary measure and agrees that regional specificities should be taken into account when assessing the possibility to authorise EMS and that this assessment should be performed in cooperation with regional authorities.

The Commission disagrees to pre-empt the assessment by Member States and regional authorities of the convenience of authorising EMS

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_23_3770

⁷ SWD(2023) 443 final, Commission Staff Working Document, IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT, Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the use of railway infrastructure capacity in the single European railway area, amending Directive 2012/34/EU and repealing Regulation (EU) No 913/2010.

<p>be firmly rejected from those regions whose transport infrastructure, due to their topography, contain many structures that are costly and already highly congested.</p>	<p>and which part of the network is suitable for them. The Commission also recalls that EMS have been always introduced by Member States through trial schemes, allowing them to assess their impacts in a more controlled environment, including with geographical limitations. The proposal maintains this possibility.</p>
<p>Combined transport</p>	
<p><u>Amendment 13</u></p> <p>Recital 6</p> <p>For developing intermodal transport, the availability of transshipment terminals is essential. However, support measures for increasing terminal capacity should not be covered by this Directive, as they are included in the revised TEN T Regulation. However, it is necessary to increase funding for multimodal terminals in the successor programme of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) after 2027.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee on the proposal. It wishes however to clarify that the TEN-T Regulation as adopted by the co-legislators only provides certain requirements and priorities for multimodal freight terminals on the TEN-T, but does not prescribe any specific support measures. More importantly, the Commission cannot pre-empt the discussion on the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) and the future of the Connecting Europe Facility. This falls outside the scope of the Directive.</p>
<p><u>Amendment 14</u></p> <p>Recital 7</p> <p>Eligibility for the benefits from Directive 92/106/EEC is based on distance limits of different parts of operation. That approach of defining "combined transport operations" does not sufficiently support the objective of reducing external costs as it is not targeted enough. Furthermore, it does not reflect objectively the conditions and circumstances in different regions, especially peripheral and sparsely populated regions, and disregards the characteristics of the environmental performance of the actual operation, including for instance the type of vehicle and fuel used. Therefore, the support provided should apply only to intermodal transport operations that ensure a sufficient level of external costs savings and allow an optimised use of the transport network. To capture such operations,</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view of the Committee that conditions and circumstances of peripheral and sparsely populated regions should be more clearly reflected in the approach of defining 'combined transport operations'. Although not mentioned explicitly, conditions in these regions have been duly considered by the proposal.</p>

<p>a threshold of savings from external costs, including greenhouse gas ("GHG") emissions, air pollution, injuries and fatalities, noise and congestion, of an intermodal transport operation compared to the commercially viable alternative unimodal road operation should be set. The threshold should allow all modal combinations to benefit, while ensuring that rail, inland waterways and short sea shipping legs would constitute a major part of an intermodal operation. Moreover, external costs of all integral parts of the intermodal transport operation need to be taken into account when calculating the external costs savings to allow for fair comparison with other transport options.</p>	
<p><u>Amendment 15</u></p> <p>Recital 17</p> <p>Some Member States have national policies to promote intermodal rail, inland waterway or short sea shipping transport, aiming to reduce the cost difference between road transport and alternative transport options. However, those modal policies are not always aligned between the modes or between the neighbouring Member States. Furthermore, some Member States have no support measures in place. The fragmentation caused by uncoordinated approach reduces effectiveness of the existing support and results in an uneven playing field between the modes and Member States. Therefore, all Member States should establish and implement national policy frameworks to support the uptake of intermodal transport, considering the potential of each modal combination as well as the interactions of all modes comprehensively and across borders so that border regions are not penalised by their peripheral location. Cross-border intermodal transport should also not be hampered by the non-alignment of national policy frameworks;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view of the Committee that interactions of all modes should be comprehensive and across borders so that border regions are not penalised by their peripheral location. Furthermore, the proposal clearly addresses the risk of non-alignment of national policy frameworks through proposing a common target and evaluation process. Therefore, these issues have been duly considered by the proposal.</p>

<p>Member States should regularly reassess the effectiveness and relevance of the national measures.</p>	
<p><u>Amendment 16</u></p> <p>Recital 21</p> <p>Where there are no connections other than road between certain terminals or in their vicinity, "start-up" support to open new intermodal connections could be necessary as demand for services at start-up phase may not be sufficient to ensure profitability of such services. Thus, the role of regional and local authorities should be emphasised in relation to the renovation of railway lines, multimodal terminals and support for the creation of connected terminals.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee on the proposal but the role of regional and local authorities in relation to the renovation of railway lines, terminals and support for the creation of connected terminals falls outside the scope of the Directive.</p>
<p><u>Amendment 17</u></p> <p>Recital 22</p> <p>Member States can introduce State aid measures to achieve the goals of the European Green Deal and the Climate Law, provided those measures are compatible with the internal market. In particular, the State aid regime for railway companies will have to be developed in line with the objectives set out in this Directive.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee on the proposal, but notes that State aid regimes are not covered by the legal base of this proposal. However, the Commission works in parallel on the revision of the State aid rules to ensure better coordination between the policy areas.</p>
<p><u>Amendment 18</u></p> <p>Recital 26</p> <p>Dedicated regulatory provisions at Union level that address specific situations in intermodal transport can support the uptake and efficiency of intermodal transport. To ensure efficient terminal and non-road capacity use, it is important that exemptions from temporal driving limitations be limited to road legs leading to/from the nearest suitable terminal.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee on the proposal but disagrees that the proposed formulation would ensure efficiency of terminals and non-road capacity use. The REFIT evaluation of the Combined Transport Directive⁸ showed that the differences in application of the term 'nearest suitable terminal' is the main cause of problems encountered by operators and therefore the proposal avoids using this term.</p>

⁸ SWD(2016) 140 final, Commission Staff Working Document, Refit ex-post evaluation of Combined Transport Directive 92/106/EEC.

<p><u>Amendment 19</u></p> <p>Annex Part I</p> <p>(e) planning and lease conditions for the land suitable for intermodal transshipment terminal development.</p> <p>(f) the competitiveness gap between combined transport and road transport, with measures to support transshipment costs.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the opinion and notes that the competitiveness gap between combined transport and road transport, with measures to support transshipment costs is already covered by b) intermodal operation cost-competitiveness, including road charges and other charges, levies, taxes or fees in relation to the use of transport and intermodal infrastructure, and congestion charges;</p>
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N°6 The SME Relief Package and the BEFIT framework

COM(2023) 528 final

COM(2023) 529 final

COM(2023) 532 final

COM(2023) 533 final

COM(2023) 535 final

COR-2023-04941-00-01 – ECON-VII/035

159th plenary session – January-February 2024

Rapporteur: Kate FEENEY (IE/renew E.)

DG TAXUD – Commissioner GENTILONI

DG GROW – Commissioner BRETON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential

European Commission position

14. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) notes the Commission's commitment to ensuring that SME tests, SME filters and competitiveness checks become the norm in EU policy making; stresses that in relation to SME Tests, the European Commission should make sure its directorates are sufficiently resourced and have the organisational capacity to perform high quality SME Tests. The application of the SME Test should be applied in preparation of all draft legislation, and not be limited to economic files. It should also take into consideration the cumulative impact and trickle-down effect of legislation. The test should be updated throughout the whole legislative process. Similar mechanisms are needed at Member States level, which recognise the role of local and regional authorities in transposing EU law, without adding further requirements to legislation;

The Commission welcomes the Committee's focus on making sure that EU legislation is fit for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Careful assessment of the impacts of Commission proposals on SMEs seeks to ensure that action is targeted, that objectives are achieved and that it does not add unnecessary costs. A systematic and proportionate application of the 'SME test' helps achieve this aim and is not limited to economic files. The SME test is part of the better regulation toolbox¹. Furthermore, the Commission will develop guidance to systematically consider SME-friendly provisions in new legislative proposals. The 'Long-term competitiveness of the EU: looking beyond 2030' Communication² announced that the Commission will work on how to better assess the cumulative impacts of different policy measures at the EU level with a view to developing a methodology. In line with the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making³, the Commission reiterated its request to Member States to report when they choose to add

¹ [0d46029a-aaa8-4c21-bc51-cf9fdbef1f51_en \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/168/01/en).

² COM(2023)168 final.

³ Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on Better Law-Making. OJ L 123, 12.5.2016, p. 1–14. ([EUR-Lex - 32016Q0512\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/32016/01/01/en)).

	<p>elements that do not stem from EU legislation in its Communication⁴. Given that better regulation is a shared objective and responsibility of all EU institutions, the Commission, in line with the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making, continues to invite the European Parliament and the Council to carry out impact analysis (including the impacts on SMEs) in relation to their substantial amendments to the Commission’s proposal.</p>
<p>15. The CoR in relation to the SME Test, calls for the EC to ensure that impact assessments differentiate between different size-classes of SMEs (micro, small, and medium) to allow for a more granular and targeted assessment of each initiative's impact, with a more inclusive involvement of SME stakeholders;</p>	<p>The granularity of the analysis under the SME Test follows the principle of proportionality, whereby the depth of the analysis should be proportionate to the magnitude of the expected impact on SMEs. The analysis for initiatives classified as highly relevant for SMEs requires screening by size-class. The inclusive involvement of stakeholders is ensured on a continuous basis through regular contacts with the observers of the network of SME Envoys⁵.</p>
<p>19. The CoR is convinced of the significant potential of digitalisation in removing barriers and reporting burdens on SMEs; provides its full support for the deployment of European Digital Innovation Hubs across the EU and believes that the Single Digital Gateway and the new Once-only technical system, if developed and implemented properly, could offer further opportunities in this area;</p>	<p>The Single Digital Gateway/ Your Europe⁶ and the Once-Only Technical System⁷ are being successfully deployed in full compliance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1724⁸ and implementing regulations (EU) 2020/1121⁹ and (EU) 2022/1463¹⁰. The Your Europe web portal¹¹ has been online since 2020 and was the most visited Commission’s website in 2023, with more than 32 million visitors. The common services of the Once-Only Technical System¹² have</p>

⁴ ‘Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws (COM(2021)219 final).

⁵ [SME envoys network - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/sme/en/involve).

⁶ [The Single Digital Gateway \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/digital-gateway/).

⁷ [Once Only Technical System \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/your-europe/).

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 October 2018 establishing a single digital gateway to provide access to information, to procedures and to assistance and problem-solving services and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012; OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 1–38.

⁹ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1121 of 29 July 2020 on the collection and sharing of user statistics and feedback on the services of the single digital gateway in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council; OJ L 245, 30.7.2020, p. 3–14.

¹⁰ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1463 of 5 August 2022 setting out technical and operational specifications of the technical system for the cross-border automated exchange of evidence and application of the ‘once-only’ principle in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council; OJ L 231, 6.9.2022, p. 1–21.

¹¹ [Questions on your rights in the EU? Or your obligations? - Your Europe \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/your-europe/).

¹² C/2022/5628 final; COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) /... setting out technical and operational specifications of the technical system for the cross-border automated exchange of evidence and application of the "once-

<p>however, stresses the importance of making SMEs aware of these new tools, and the functionalities they offer, and suggests this can be best done at local and regional level;</p>	<p>been launched on 12 December 2023 and the onboarding of the competent authorities is now ongoing. The state of implementation was reflected in a first implementation report¹³.</p> <p>The business community and citizens are constantly informed through several initiatives. The Commission launched campaigns to improve the findability of the Your Europe portal. An upcoming poster campaign is being launched to raise awareness in 5 cities of 5 selected Member States. The Commission also participates in policy debates and business fairs (such as Digital Assembly 2023¹⁴ and Hannover Messe 2024¹⁵) and in high-level meetings at the Council and the Parliament. A high-level event along with the Belgian Presidency, involving both political figures and business representatives is being organised. The Commission has also launched an annual user satisfaction survey. Most recently, the Commission launched a survey targeted at both SMEs and trade associations to collect their feedback and expectations on the evolution of the Single Digital Gateway (SDG). Finally, the Commission is going to organise a series of forum discussions with SMEs aiming to improve their user journey on the Once-Only Technical System.</p> <p>The Commission stands at the disposal the Committee to present the state of implementation of the SDG, its success, and many benefits, especially for European SMEs.</p>
<p>20. The CoR notes that many local and regional authorities have examples of best practice of regulatory relief and reporting reduction measures for SMEs that have already been implemented. This is based on feedback from SMEs and local stakeholders. The CoR, as the representative of regional and</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the initiative of the Committee to prepare and disseminate best practices of regulatory relief and reporting reduction measures for SMEs from local and regional authorities.</p>

only" principle in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

¹³ COM(2023) 534 final.

¹⁴ [Digital Assembly 2023: A Digital, Open and Secure Europe | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/digital-assembly).

¹⁵ [Hannover Messe - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/hannover-messe).

<p>local authorities in the EU, has the expertise to collect these examples and promote their wider implementation;</p>	
<p>28. The CoR believes in strong regional ecosystems being firmly connected on a European level by international knowledge exchange between SMEs and between regional governments, in particular by means of interregional investment in innovation;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that strong regional ecosystems need to be connected at a European level. The S3 Thematic Platforms and Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships¹⁶ are there to support regions that decide to collaborate based on common objectives of their smart specialisation strategies.</p>
<p>30. The CoR calls for closer synergies between the ERDF, InvestEU, the Digital Europe programme and Horizon programmes, especially to strengthen cooperation between SMEs, universities, technology centres, European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) and other research and innovation organisations;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the relevance of synergies in support of SMEs between different EU funds and actors. Support for entrepreneurship and SMEs stems from various EU programmes. The Commission expects more than EUR 200 billion to be made available to SMEs under its various funding programmes under the ongoing multiannual financial framework and under the NextGenerationEU.</p>
<p>31. The CoR points out that support to SMEs in the Cohesion Policy remains essential, especially in the current context of supply constraints, high energy prices and inflation.</p>	<p>Cohesion Policy provided extended support to SMEs during the COVID-19 crisis. This has helped develop support processes and mechanisms that could be used post COVID-19.</p>
<p>35. The CoR takes note of a long-awaited legislative proposal for combatting late payments, which is in line with the CoR 2020 opinion on the SME Strategy; acknowledges the rationale for imposing strict and uniform rules of payments for all businesses across the EU, however, considers the proposed provisions do not distinguish between late payments and long payment terms;</p> <p>36. The CoR considers this will hamper SMEs freedom of contracts, in particular, by</p>	<p>Ensuring prompt payments means combatting both payment delays and unfairly long payment terms. This principle is already present in the current Late Payment Directive¹⁷, which fixes the period for payment between undertakings to a maximum of 60 calendar days, unless otherwise expressly agreed in the contract and provided it is not grossly unfair to the creditor.</p> <p>The Impact Assessment accompanying the Commission's proposal for a Regulation on combating late payment¹⁸ has found a cap of 30 days on payment terms to be the most effective and</p>

¹⁶ [Inforegio - Thematic Smart Specialisation Platforms \(europa.eu\)](https://inforegio.europa.eu/).

¹⁷ Directive 2011/7/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on combating late payment in commercial transactions (recast); OJ L 48, 23.2.2011, p. 1–10.

¹⁸ SWD(2023) 314 final.

<p>providing a single maximum payment period of 30 days in relations between businesses, would undermine their freedom, as private economic enterprises, to agree to different payment terms, also considering the different degrees of exposure to credit and the financial sector as between large and small/medium-sized enterprises;</p>	<p>efficient option among the measures available. This choice was supported by a large majority of respondents in the SME Panel¹⁹, where 83% of SMEs called for a maximum cap on payment terms without exceptions, with 30 days as the most popular option.</p>
<p>45. The CoR calls for a faster, more efficient recognition of professional qualifications of third country nationals, including through partnerships between Member States and the European Commission with third countries, to improve recruitment and job matching.</p>	<p>The Commission adopted a Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals²⁰ in November 2023 as part of the Skills and Talent Mobility package, setting out a series of measures to simplify and speed up the recognition of skills and qualifications of third country nationals. These measures seek to modernise recognition processes so that they do not block or deter third country applicants from seeking recognition. Moreover recognition processes should give visibility to the full skills and potential of third country nationals to support them to find job opportunities that reflect their potential. The recommendation can serve as a template and inspiration for Member States to reform processes for recognition. A number of recommendations are targeted at the specific issue of ensuring that recognition decisions can be taken quickly and with confidence to fill vacancies in EU shortage occupations, in particular, in priority regulated professions.</p>
<p>46. The CoR asks for a quick and targeted support in partnership with LRAs for SMEs in sectors facing most pressing labour shortages such as hospitality and retail for comprehensive training of migrant workers and refugees, that includes language and cultural awareness programmes.</p>	<p>The EU Pact for Skills²¹ brings together stakeholders at national, regional and local level including SMEs, industry, social partners and academia, in Large Scale Skills Partnerships²² that pledged to support the reskilling and upskilling of more than 10 million people in Europe in the coming years. SMEs represent about 18% of pact members and they</p>

¹⁹ [SME panel consultation - B2B Data Sharing | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#).

²⁰ C/2023/7700 final.

²¹ [EU Pact for Skills: upskilling and reskilling initiative for those training and working in the microelectronics industry | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#).

²² [Guidance Handbook-Nov edition with new sections 5 6 for comments \(europa.eu\)](#).

	<p>particularly benefit from being part of the Partnerships, where they can team up with bigger players and have access to more and better up and reskilling opportunities. For example, in the Cultural and Creative Industries ecosystem, the Large-Scale Partnership aims to address the most urgent horizontal skills needed in the sector, these being digital, green, entrepreneurial, technical and certain ‘hands-on’ skills. Through the activities of the Partnership’s members, an estimated 12,000 people have been reached through upskilling or reskilling activities and 350 training programmes have been updated based on new skills intelligence.</p>
<p>49. The CoR considers that BEFIT is a complex and detailed proposal with significant implications for governments and businesses. Emphasises that the current priority in the EU is the implementation of the Council Directive on ensuring a global minimum level of taxation for multinational groups in the Union (the Pillar Two Directive). Acknowledges that Governments and other stakeholders will need time to assess the impact of the Pillar Two Directive, and that the potential interactions between the Pillar Two Directive and the BEFIT proposal warrant careful consideration and analysis;</p>	<p>The BEFIT proposal introduces a comprehensive tax framework to replace the current complexity of having 27 different corporate tax systems. This framework builds on the Pillar Two Directive. As of 2024, Member States will calculate the effective tax rate of large groups in the EU, starting from the consolidated financial accounts and based on common tax rules. BEFIT aims to extend this novel approach to ensure that companies will be able to use similar tax rules, to calculate their tax base across the EU and to file a centralised ‘BEFIT Information Return’ for the whole group. As such, the combined effect of BEFIT and Pillar Two is expected to simplify company taxation in the EU and facilitate in-scope taxpayers in the internal market.</p> <p>During Council negotiations, Member States will have the opportunity to ensure that BEFIT interacts with the Pillar Two system without technical inconsistencies. It is therefore both important that negotiations can start, and that Member States have sufficient time to assess the proposal while continuing the implementation of the Pillar Two rules. To cater for this, the proposal provides for entry into application in 2028, which will allow Member States to have the Pillar Two implementation on track, considering that the first GloBE Information Return under Pillar Two will be</p>

	<p>submitted on 30 June 2026.</p> <p>In addition, the BEFIT proposal includes a transition period until 30 June 2035 in order to allow for a more thorough assessment of the impact that the implementation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/ G20 Inclusive Framework Two-Pillar Approach²³ will have on national tax bases. The proposal also requires that during the transition period, the Commission shall carry out a comprehensive review and prepare a study.</p>
<p>50. The CoR emphasises that if the Transfer Pricing Directive is to achieve its goal of reducing transfer pricing disputes and businesses' compliance costs it will need to ensure that it operates in a way that is in line with the arm's length principle and does not create the risk of divergence and increased disputes with third countries;</p>	<p>The Commission's proposal ensures harmonised transfer pricing rules within the EU and a common approach to transfer pricing problems. It incorporates the arm's length principle and key transfer pricing rules into EU law, clarifies the role and status of the OECD Transfer Pricing Guidelines²⁴ and creates the possibility to establish common binding rules on specific aspects of the rules within the Union.</p> <p>The proposal will increase tax certainty and mitigate the risk of litigation and double taxation. Moreover, it will also reduce the opportunities for companies to use transfer pricing for aggressive tax planning purposes.</p>
<p>51. The CoR considers that the success factor of the HOT initiative will be its ability to attract business to opt into the scheme; for that to happen, the scheme needs to provide a genuine simplification and a reduction of tax compliance costs;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view of the Committee that the success of the Directive, once adopted, will depend, among others, on the numbers of eligible SMEs that will opt to apply it. In this regard, it will be important to ensure that SMEs are aware of the advantages that the system can offer and have access to the relevant information, such as how to exercise the option, how to interact with the Head Office tax administration, etc.</p> <p>To evaluate its impact, the HOT proposal²⁵ includes</p>

²³ [OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework releases new multilateral convention to address tax challenges of globalisation and digitalisation - OECD.](#)

²⁴ [OECD Transfer Pricing Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and Tax Administrations 2022 | en | OECD.](#)

²⁵ COM(2023) 528 final; Proposal for a COUNCIL DIRECTIVE establishing a Head Office Tax system for micro, small and medium sized enterprises, and amending Directive 2011/16/EU.

	<p>a review clause which will allow such an assessment after five years.</p> <p>The HOT proposal is designed to accommodate a one-stop-shop which will enable in-scope SMEs to interact only with the tax administration of the Member State of their head office both for the procedure to opt in and for filing obligations and paying taxes.</p>
<p>52. The CoR believes that, in particular, smaller SMEs operating on their domestic markets may have a lot to gain in the new taxation rules set out in the proposal for the HOT directive, which could encourage them to grow and expand within the EU Single Market without being hindered with unnecessary tax compliance burdens. Emphasises that the potential benefits for SMEs need to be proportionate to the administrative burden and implementation costs for EU tax administrations.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the appreciation that the smaller SMEs operating in the domestic markets and wishing to expand abroad can benefit the most of the simplification.</p> <p>A one-stop-shop will allow in-scope SMEs to interact with only one tax administration, i.e. that of the Member State of their head office (for tax filing and collection). SMEs will thus file one single tax return with the tax administration of their head office for all their permanent establishments (PEs) and the head office.</p> <p>As with every simplification effort, there is an initial phase of additional burden due to the required change. However, the advantages of simplification that HOT offers, outweigh any initial compliance burden of which the effect would be limited and temporary. Indeed, given the limited scope for eligible entities and the fact that HOT is envisaged to function as a transitional rule for facilitating SMEs' growth through expansion abroad, it should not be expected that the Head Office Member States become overloaded with large numbers of electing taxpayers.</p> <p>The Commission will work with the Member States to find ways to streamline the burden associated with the application of the HOT rules for tax administrations. The Technical Support Instrument is available to provide reform support to Member States, regions and local authorities.</p>

N°7 UNFCCC COP28: the role of subnational authorities in keeping climate ambition on track
Own-initiative
COR-2023-00904 – ENVE-VII/038
157th plenary session – October 2023
Rapporteur: Rafał Kazimierz TRZASKOWSKI (PL/EPP)
DG CLIMA – Commissioner HOEKSTRA

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>10. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) reaffirms its commitment to strengthening synergies and promoting the engagement of LRAs in UNFCCC processes;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the engagement of the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA) constituency in the UNFCCC process.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes the commitment to strengthening synergies and the promotion of local and regional authorities (LRAs) engagement. Committee Members and representatives who are part of the delegation could also reach out to the EU negotiation team to make their positions known and thus inform the preparation of the negotiations.</p> <p>At the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), the EU welcomed the thematic day on 6 December 2023 with focused events on multilevel action. The Commission has organised several events focused on local action. On 5 December 2023, there were two events organised by DG ENER on energy and the roles of cities. On 11 December 2023, DG CLIMA also organised two events related to the work on the Global Covenant of Mayors.</p> <p>The Commission expressed its support for the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action, which are covered by the EU's existing policies, legislations and commitments. It showcases commitment to Collaborative Climate Action, coordinated between national and subnational governments.</p>

<p>10. The CoR invites the European Commission to further support the participation of European Climate Pact Ambassadors at COP28;</p>	<p>The Commission supported the participation of European Climate Pact Ambassadors at several events at COP28. For example, it hosted an event at the EU side-event pavilion on 8 December 2023 dedicated to citizen engagement with a specific focus on European Climate Pact Ambassadors.</p>
<p>11. The CoR calls on the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU to recognise in the Council Conclusions on the preparations for COP28 the leadership of LRAs in accelerating and broadening climate mitigation and adaptation action, while effectively engaging citizens in the transformative process to sustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production;</p>	<p>The Council Conclusions on the Preparations for the COP28 (published on 17 October 2023)¹ recognised the leadership of local and regional governments in accelerating and broadening climate action while effectively engaging citizens in the transformative process to sustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production.</p> <p>It also stresses the need for increased involvement of local and regional governments in the process of preparing and implementing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans (NAPs) and Long-term Strategies (LTS).</p>
<p>29. The CoR calls for locally-led adaptation approaches that enable affected communities to act as the primary agents of change and reiterates the importance of reducing the risks and effects of "maladaptation";</p>	<p>The Commission has a long-running experience supporting sub-national initiatives such as the Global Covenant of Mayors and the Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL). LoCAL helps local government authorities in developing and least developed countries access climate finance, capacity development and technical support they need to respond and adapt to climate change. Between 2014 and 2023, the EU has contributed over US Dollar 58 million with strong support from other EU Member States bilateral envelopes.</p> <p>The Horizon Europe Mission on Adaptation is developing tools and pathways to transformative adaptation at the regional and local level. While providing assistance to participating EU regions and communities, which together cover 40% of the EU's territory, the solutions, knowledge and data</p>

¹ [Environment Council - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

	<p>being developed will also be published on the Mission web-portal under Climate-ADAPT².</p> <p>The Commission is also of the view that locally led adaptation obtains its best results if framed in a coherent and coordinated national strategy (or plan) and contributes to achieving national, regional and global objectives. The 2023 Commission guidelines on Member State adaptations strategies and plans³ underlines the importance of local and regional administrations as key drivers of adaptation, and of coordination across the levels of governance. It recommends the inclusion of the private sector as well as of vulnerable stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of adaptation policy.</p>
<p>11. The CoR stress the need for increased involvement of LRAs in the process of updating and implementing nationally determined contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans (NAPs) and long-term strategies</p>	<p>With regards to the involvement of local and regional governments in the preparation of nationally determined contributions (NDCs), the Global Covenant of Mayors has issued the Multilevel Climate Action Playbook⁴ which contains recommendations for both national and sub-national actors enabling better coordination between the two. This publication is part of the Global Covenant of Mayors' work aiming at better embedding local and regional work strands.</p> <p>In that context, the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action⁵ obliges Member States, when preparing policies needed to meet their respective climate and energy objectives for 2030 (and subsequently for 2040 and 2050), to consult and draw on contributions from local and regional authorities (Article 11 of the above mentioned Regulation).</p>

² [About Climate-ADAPT — English \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ [Commission Notice – Guidelines on Member States' adaptation strategies and plans \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [Multi-Level Governance in Climate Action Co-creating policy solutions to tackle climate change.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action, amending Regulations (EC) No 663/2009 and (EC) No 715/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Directives 94/22/EC, 98/70/EC, 2009/31/EC, 2009/73/EC, 2010/31/EU, 2012/27/EU and 2013/30/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directives 2009/119/EC and (EU) 2015/652 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 525/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council; OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 1–77.

	<p>This was also emphasised by the intervention of Executive Vice-President Šefčovič announcing the support for the principles and objectives of the declaration of COP28 CHAMP initiative (see also the answer to paragraph 10).</p>
<p>13. The CoR underlines the importance of fully benefiting of the revision process of National Energy Climate Plans (NECPs) as an effective instrument to implement the Fit for 55 targets; stands ready to actively contribute to the establishment of a new EU climate target for 2040, in line with the urgency of the climate emergency;</p>	<p>The integrated national energy and climate plans (NECPs) play an important role of Fit for 55 targets. Each Member State is required to describe the involvement of local and regional authorities.</p> <p>The Climate Law⁶ mandates the Commission to come up with a proposal for EU’s climate target for 2040 within 6 months of the Global Stocktake. The Commission adopted a communication and a detailed impact assessment of the 2040 target on 6th February 2024. The legislative proposal for an amendment to the Climate Law to include this target in EU law will be in the hands of the new Commission. The EU climate target for 2040 will be an essential guide for investment and business decisions within the EU. It will also be the basis of the EU’s next Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement and a powerful signal to others on what is needed and feasible.</p>
<p>16. The CoR urges Parties not to compromise between these objectives and to speed up the shift to renewable energy, low carbon safe and sustainable energy production, and ultimately phase out the use of fossil fuels without placing disproportionately high costs on fossil-fuel-reliant cities and regions;</p>	<p>The Commission calls for work towards agreeing global 2030 1.5°C compatible goals and targets for rapidly increasing energy efficiency and accelerating renewable energy. These targets must go hand in hand with energy savings and the transition away from fossil fuel energy production and consumption, as adopted by COP28. The EU is leading in the diplomatic efforts to gather support for this pledge.</p> <p>In addition, the Council Conclusions⁷ underline that the 1.5°C goal will require the global phase out of unabated fossil fuels and a peak in their consumption already in this decade. In this regard,</p>

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 ('European Climate Law'); OJ L 243, 9.7.2021, p. 1–17.

⁷ The Council Conclusions of 9 March 2023.

	<p>In regard to tracking progress in sectors, the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action¹⁰ (MPGCA) can play an important role in tracking of progress notably in the view of the first Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement (GST).</p>
<p>23. The CoR highlights that in the EU, the contributions of LRAs to achieve national targets should be formally recognised by including a call on EU Member States to quantify subnational action in the upcoming revision of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action;</p>	<p>The Commission is currently in the process of evaluating the functioning of the existing Regulation on Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action, including when it comes to the involvement of LRAs, as a basis for a possible subsequent legislative proposal.</p>
<p>27. The CoR welcomes the decision taken at COP27 to initiate the development of a framework for the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) and reiterates that LRAs are the most suitable actors to define adaptation goals, as they retain first-hand knowledge of both the resilience needs and solutions of their population and territories; therefore, strongly recommends that Parties build NAPs that are based on subnational actions;</p>	<p>The Commission supports the decision taken at COP27 and in particular the important role given to LRAs. It has to be noted that the NAPs also need to take into account cross boundary issues and in particular cross boundary risk assessment.</p>
<p>39. The CoR underlines the need to climate proof all financial flows, and to move from finance commitment to disbursement of climate finance, and strongly calls for direct access to climate funding for LRAs as this is essential to provide tailored and effective solutions that address the unique challenges faced by communities within their respective territories;</p>	<p>The Commission places great emphasis on the principle of direct access to climate funding for LRAs. By empowering LRAs, it aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of climate finance, ensuring that it reaches the grassroots level where its impact is most profoundly felt. The City Climate Finance Gap Fund, developed together with the Global Covenant of Mayors and implemented jointly by the World Bank and the European Investment Bank (EIB) is among the instruments providing early-stage project preparation support to cities in developing countries. Domestically, cities and regions can leverage support opportunities arising from the Horizon Europe Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, Mission on Adaptation, LIFE Programme</p>

¹⁰ [Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action | UNFCCC](#)

	<p>public-private support for clean tech innovative technologies. It aims to accelerate the deployment of innovative low-carbon technologies while also reducing their green premiums The partnership is providing EUR 240 million in a combination of grants and commercial investment (equity and venture debt).</p>
<p>41. The CoR calls on the European Commission to propose direct funds via the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities to implement Green Deal projects on the ground</p>	<p>The Commission has put forward the call to deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030¹². A joint call between the Mission for 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 and the Mission Adaptation to Climate Change was opened 10 January 2023 – 27 April 2023, with an overall indicative budget of EUR 40 million. This call covered urban greening and re-naturing for urban regeneration, resilience and climate neutrality.</p> <p>The Horizon EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change¹³ plays a comparable role in supporting the development and demonstration of pathways to climate resilience at the local level.</p>
<p>44. The CoR calls for increased coordination to respond to misinformation and disinformation campaigns aiming to discredit local climate action and for adequate resources to raise awareness, build capacity and engage local communities with climate action;</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to countering climate disinformation at every level. This goal is integrated in the Commission’s overall communication and outreach activities. The Commission runs EU-wide communication campaigns to counter climate mis- and disinformation.</p> <p>Through its Network against Disinformation, the Commission collaborates with Representations in Member States, who engage in more localised action. Through the European Climate Pact, the Commission also shares resources to raise awareness, build capacity and engage local communities with climate action. Furthermore, the Commission counters disinformation at all levels</p>

¹² [Infogeo - Discover the 100 cities selected for the Cities Mission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/infogeo)

¹³ [EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change Portal \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/mission-adaptation)

	<p>through its policy tools such as the Code of Practice on Disinformation¹⁴ and the Digital Services Act¹⁵.</p>
<p>45. The CoR welcomes the launch of the COP27 Presidency Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe) Initiative, as well as the organisation of the first Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate and invites the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Presidency to continue this Ministerial Meeting at COP28 and actively participate in the SURGe initiative;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the inaugural Urban Ministerial Meeting. Recognising the significance of this forum in addressing the critical intersection of urbanisation and climate challenges, the Commission expresses its enthusiasm to actively participate in the subsequent Ministerial Meeting at COP28.</p> <p>In the spirit of fostering impactful collaboration, the EU advocates for building upon and reinforcing existing initiatives that are specifically geared towards local climate action, exemplified by the Global Covenant of Mayors. Rather than introducing new platforms, which may inadvertently dilute the collective focus, the EU emphasizes the importance of consolidating efforts within established frameworks. The Global Covenant of Mayors, with its proven track record, offers a robust platform that unites local authorities worldwide in their commitment to combat climate change. The Commission also looks into consolidation of its domestic initiatives in order to channel resources more effectively toward achieving tangible results in urban climate resilience and sustainability.</p>
<p>49. The CoR invites the Parties to leverage partnerships and collaboration with the LGMA Constituency and the Marrakesh Partnership for Global Climate Action, as well as with the High-Level Climate Champions;</p>	<p>The Commission supports the Global Climate Action Agenda and Marrakesh partnership which provides one of the formal links between the UNFCCC process and climate action from NonParty Stakeholders (NPS) by identifying opportunities where climate action from NPS helps to create the conditions for enhancing ambition and accelerating implementation.</p> <p>In terms of tracking of subnational action, the Commission would strengthen the two databases</p>

¹⁴ [The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation | Shaping Europe’s digital future \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁵ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act); OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1–102.

	<p>of climate initiatives: UNEP’s Climate Initiatives Platform (CIP)¹⁶, and the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA)¹⁷ also known as the Global Climate Action Portal.</p> <p>The Commission supports the involvement of high-level champions especially, under the GST in order to have non-Party stakeholders involved. The Commission encourages the COP presidency to improve communication to enhance understanding and accessibility of initiatives, partnerships and sectoral commitments made by Parties, non-Party stakeholders and other institutions.</p>
<p>51. The CoR welcomes the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at CBD COP15 and the endorsement of the key role of local governments in contributing to it, particularly through the formal inclusion of subnational governments as key partners in developing and implementing national biodiversity strategies and actions plans; strongly encourages the Parties to the Paris Agreement to adopt similar provisions of this exemplary approach;</p>	<p>The Commission is in favour of using best practices from the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) that could facilitate/scale up implementation of the Paris Agreement.</p> <p>The Commission has established an Urban Greening Platform¹⁸ to support cities in their urban greening efforts. These urban nature-based solutions make a significant contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation.</p> <p>Network Nature+¹⁹ is a resource for the nature-based solutions community, creating opportunities for local, regional and international cooperation to maximise the impact and spread of nature-based solutions. The project is funded by the Commission under the Horizon 2020 programme.</p> <p>The Horizon Europe Mission on Adaptation²⁰ explicitly includes nature-based solutions for climate resilience among those to be developed, tested and brought closer to the market.</p>

¹⁶ [Climate Initiatives Platform](#)

¹⁷ <https://www.bing.com/search?q=Non-State+Actor+Zone+for+Climate+Action+&qsn=&form=QBRE&sp=-1&ghc=1&lq=0&pq=non-state+actor+zone+for+climate+action+&sc=10-40&sk=&cvid=F9EFD2B91BF54BF3BD10AFC067B5CB7A&ghsh=0&ghacc=0&ghpl=>

¹⁸ [Urban Greening Platform - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁹ [NetworkNature](#)

²⁰ [EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change Portal \(europa.eu\)](#)

<p>N°8 A multilevel governance for the Green Deal: towards the revision of the Governance Regulation Own-initiative opinion COR-2023-00903-00-00 – ENVE-VII/037 158th plenary session – November 2023 Rapporteur: Joško KLISOVIĆ (HR/PES) DG CLIMA – Commissioner HOEKSTRA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p><i>Future proofing the EGD as a policy framework</i></p>	
<p>4. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) calls, therefore, on the European Commission to continue building on the EGD in the next EU term of office to ensure a stable framework going beyond one single term, by publishing a new communication on a "Green Deal 2.0" and by considering – as provided for in the mid-term review clause of the Environment Action Programme (EAP) to 2030 – presenting a legislative proposal to add an annex to the EAP.</p>	<p>The Commission remains strongly committed to the European Green Deal (EGD), which provides the necessary frame, incentives, and investment to support the EU’s ambitious green transition. The Commission takes note of the recommendations of the Committee regarding a possible ‘Green Deal 2.0’ communication. The Commission recalls that it will be for the next Commission to decide on any such communication and/or legislative proposals within its mandate.</p>
<p>5. The CoR calls on the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, and the European Commission to further engage in an in-depth review and revision of the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action Regulation (Governance Regulation) taking as a starting point the requirements of article 45 of the Governance Regulation and to improve the implementation of the European Climate Law (ECL).....Stresses that the CoR and local and regional authorities (LRAs) must be fully involved in this review.</p>	<p>Article 45 of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action (hereafter called the ‘Governance Regulation’) requires the Commission to report on the functioning of the Regulation to the European Parliament and to the Council within six months of each global stocktake agreed under Article 14 of the Paris Agreement, the first of which was finalised at 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) on 13 December 2023. The ongoing evaluation of the Governance Regulation¹ will also inform a possible future legislative proposal. The Commission is engaging with all relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, in its evaluation of the Regulation to ensure a thorough gathering of</p>

¹ [Energy Union and climate action – Review report on the Governance Regulation \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

	<p>a range of views. The Commission remains strongly committed to taking all necessary steps to reach climate neutrality by 2050, as written in the European Climate Law², as well as to reach the 2050 Nature Restoration and Zero Pollution goals for air, water and soil³, as enshrined in existing acquis and/or being endorsed by the co-legislators.</p>
<p>9. The CoR calls for health and gender policies to be connected more structurally in the EGD framework, leveraging the EU approach to gender mainstreaming and the "one health" principle;</p>	<p>The Commission is determined to protect and improve health and gender equality, both within and outside the EU, including under the EGD framework. For instance, the EGD aims to protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts, guided by the EU's Zero Pollution Action Plan. The Commission recalls that Recital 45 of the Governance Regulation encourages Member States to adequately integrate gender equality considerations in their integrated National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), long-term strategies, and biannual progress reports.</p>
<p>10. The CoR stresses the need to involve all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the Green Deal priorities and points at the positive experience of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform (ZPSP), jointly co-chaired by the European Commission and the CoR. The CoR commits to continue its support for the ZPSP and proposes to include it in the "Green Deal 2.0" in order to continue its work in the long term to help achieving the Zero Pollution Ambition for a Toxic-free Environment of the EGD;</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to involve stakeholders and has set up a number of platforms and activities to do so across all Green Deal policies. The Commission welcomes the continued commitment of the Committee for the continuation of the Platform. The work of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform is currently under evaluation and the Commission will present its future direction as part of the review of the Zero Pollution Action Plan in 2025, as mentioned in the Action Plan⁴.</p>

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 ('European Climate Law'); OJ L 243, 9.7.2021, p. 1–17.

³ [Zero pollution action plan - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/zero-pollution-action-plan/)

⁴ see COM(2021) 400 final.

11. The CoR highlights the fact that a **comprehensive EGD monitoring and outlook system**⁵ is needed to ensure appropriate guidance for EGD governance and implementation, paying particular attention to the territorial specificities - notably by taking into account the fragility of each region when it comes to natural events such as earthquake or flood risk – and vulnerabilities of some territories, including remote and rural areas, in view of promoting sustainable and inclusive wellbeing for all Europeans. The EU should **work towards a harmonised set of indicators, building on the existing ones**⁶, which enables **adequate granularity at subnational level** for key aspects, as is already happening, for example, in the case of the Zero Pollution urban and regional scoreboard⁷.

The Commission takes note of the importance the Committee attaches to the creation of a more comprehensive EGD monitoring and outlook system. The Commission recalls that it carefully measures progress towards EGD objectives, notably in an interactive dashboard to visualise statistics relevant for the Green Deal⁸. Moreover, the Governance Regulation establishes a governance mechanism based on long-term strategies with a 30-year perspective, integrated National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) with a 10-year perspective, and biennial integrated national energy and climate progress reporting by the Member States annually or biannually. The combined effect of these instruments is a comprehensive progress monitoring framework across climate and energy policies and measures, both planned and implemented. This includes biennial reporting on adaptation to climate change. The European Climate Law also stipulates that the Commission assesses the collective progress made by all Member States to achieve the climate-neutrality objective and progress on adaptation⁹, and the annual European Semester country reports include indicators tracking progress on the European Green Deal from a macroeconomic perspective as well as sustainability indicators¹⁰. The European Environment Agency (EEA)'s annual monitoring report on progress towards the 8th Environment Action Programme (8 EAP) also provides an indicator based assessment of the progress on the ground towards the programme's objectives and a 2030 Outlook, building on the European Green Deal complemented by more

⁵ See opinion on *A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy* (ENVE-VI/037) at <https://dm-publicapi.COR.europa.eu/v1/documents/cor-2018-05736-00-01-ac-tra-en.docx/content>.

⁶ See report [Measuring Progress towards Climate Neutrality | Ecologic Institute](#).

⁷ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/events/zero-pollution-urban-and-regional-scoreboard-workshop-2023-04-25_en

⁸ See [Statistics for the European Green Deal \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁹ See: [Climate Action Progress Report 2023 - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁰ See: [2023 European Semester: Country Reports - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

	<p>specific thematic monitoring and outlook assessments, e.g. on zero pollution, biodiversity.¹¹ The monitoring framework for the 8 EAP includes indicators for which regional/local data are also available, to measure progress on the ground, identify local best practices and hot spots, that are hidden by national averages. The Commission’s Joint Research Centre publishes the EU Resilience Dashboard¹², including a component of a green dashboard, and is developing the Risk Data Hub¹³ to facilitate the assessment of potential risks at different spatial resolutions. The Commission also welcomes the positive feedback on the Zero Pollution urban and regional scoreboard and calls on the Committee to support its finalisation and dissemination.</p>
<p>13. The CoR calls for the establishment of a European Energy Agency that would provide an impartial data, monitoring and knowledge infrastructure for energy-policy decisions;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the request to provide impartial data, monitoring and knowledge infrastructure. The responsibility for collecting, managing and distributing European energy data is shared between different entities, including the Commission (notably Eurostat), the EEA, the European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER), the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSO-G) and the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E). The Commission works continuously to further improve the quality, accessibility and reusability of this data. A good example of this is the ‘EU better data’ initiative launched by the Commission (notably DG Energy) in 2023. It aims to provide, on a voluntary basis from main energy data actors, greater accessibility, dissemination and harmonisation of energy data within the EU for better policy making. The DG ENER Chief Economist Team launched the ‘Better EU data</p>

¹¹ See : [European Union 8th Environment Action Programme — European Environment Agency \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹² See: [Resilience Dashboards](#)

¹³ See: [DRMKC Risk Data Hub \(europa.eu\)](#)

	<p>Initiative’ in June 2023 with a first seminar that brought together key EU energy data actors. During the second seminar in October 2023, participants presented short-term actions and immediate steps to improve data. They also discussed strategies and long-term measures. DG ENER will organise a new seminar later in 2024 to evaluate the advancement of measures and to engage with a wider range of stakeholders.</p>
<p><i>Towards the revision of the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action Regulation</i></p>	
<p>16. The CoR believes that the national long-term strategies (LTSs) stipulated in the Governance Regulation could be strengthened and broadened to encompass more facets of the EGD, encompassing fair transition with the aim of sustainable wellbeing, becoming LTSs for the Green Deal, and building on the work developed by the European Commission's Intelligent Cities Challenge blueprint on Local Green Deals¹⁴, while the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and National Adaptation Strategies (NASs) would remain focused on their current scope;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the recommendations by the Committee to strengthen and broaden the scope of the national long-term strategies (LTSs). The Commission recalls that it is currently evaluating the functioning of the Governance Regulation, including by looking at the functioning of LTSs, as a basis for a possible subsequent legislative proposal. The guidance to Member States for the updated NECPs 2021-2030 already included recommendations to strengthen planning and assessment of fair and just transition aspects, mitigating social and employment impacts, tackling labour and skills shortages, reducing energy poverty, and ensuring affordable access to essential services for all, in line with the 2022 Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality¹⁵.</p>
<p>17. The CoR welcomes the OECD's work on <i>Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development</i>; the CoR calls on the European Commission to further implement this framework, including it in the revised Governance Regulation, building on the consistency checks provided for in the ECL in Articles 6 and 7 and the best practices of several EU Member States¹⁶;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's recommendation to further implement the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) work on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development. The Commission recalls that it places great emphasis on ensuring policy coherence, as illustrated in the recent revision of the Better Regulation guidelines¹⁷ and</p>

¹⁴ www.intelligentcitieschallenge.eu/news/local-green-deals-blueprint-action

¹⁵ Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality 2022/C 243/04; OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 35–51.

¹⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/pcsd-country-profiles.htm>

¹⁷ SWD(2021) 305 final.

	<p>toolbox, which included specific provisions to comply with the climate consistency check laid down in Article 6(4) of the Climate Law. They stipulate that new policy initiatives should be consistent with other EU policy objectives, including the Charter for fundamental rights, and with other policy initiatives and instruments including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evaluations carried out by the Commission, including the one of the Governance Regulation, also systematically assess coherence between current legislation and new priorities. Likewise, one of the goals of the EGD is to ensure that climate, environmental, energy and other green policies are consistent with each other. More generally, a broad range of ambitious EU governance initiatives promote integrated solutions for environmental and climate challenges in Member States, such as the inclusion of the 8th EAP objectives in the European Semester, uptake of circularity in NECPs and the EU competitiveness strategy, uptake of nature-based solutions in national climate adaptation strategies, infrastructure and land use in urban greening plans.</p>
<p>23. The CoR considers that the revised Article 11 of the Governance Regulation should ensure the quality of the multilevel dialogues over time, starting upstream of the climate and energy policy negotiations and continuing during the implementation phase to facilitate exchanges on obstacles and levers.</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the necessity to ensure high quality multilevel dialogues in green policy making processes. The Commission recalls that the Governance Regulation requires Member States, when preparing policies needed to meet their respective climate and energy objectives for 2030, to consult and draw on contributions from local and regional authorities (Article 11 of the Governance Regulation). On 18 December 2023, the Commission published its EU-wide assessment of the draft updated NECPs¹⁸, which highlights that very few Member States demonstrate concrete evidence of how they involve local and regional authorities in the process of preparing the draft updated NECP, and even fewer are building on an established multilevel dialogue for this process. The</p>

¹⁸ COM(2023) 796 final.

	<p>Commission addressed recommendations to the Member States to improve this aspect in the final updated NECPs. In its review of the Regulation the Commission will therefore pay due attention to the functioning of multilevel dialogues organised in Member States, as a basis for a possible subsequent legislative proposal.</p>
<p>24. The CoR considers that, in compliance with the Aarhus Convention, the public participation provision in the Governance Regulation (Article 10) should be strengthened and better monitored to ensure that citizens take part to a greater extent in climate, energy and environmental policy design and implementation, which is essential to ensure structural changes in behaviour;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises that public consultations should play a key role in the development and implementation of climate, environmental and energy policies. The Commission recalls that the Governance Regulation obliges Member States, when preparing policies needed to meet their respective climate and energy objectives for 2030, to ensure that the public is given early and effective opportunities to participate in the preparation of both the draft and final integrated NECPs, as well of the long-term strategies referred to in Article 15 (see Article 10 of the Regulation). On 18 December 2023, the Commission published its EU-wide assessment of the draft updated NECPs, which highlights that, although most Member States have organised consultations with the public on the draft plans, the quality of the consultation processes varies, and many did not cover all obligations. Most draft plans contain few details on the communication channels used to reach the public, and on the methods used to involve a wide range of interest groups, including social partners and ordinary members of the public. Some plans lack reasonable timeframes to enable the public to express their views and most do not include a summary of the public’s views and how they were considered. The Commission addressed recommendations to the Member States to improve this aspect in the final updated NECPs. In its review of the Governance Regulation, the Commission will pay due attention to the functioning of public consultations in green policy making processes.</p>

<p>25. The CoR stresses that the EGD contains a number of new planning obligations and targets for LRAs. The revised Governance Regulation should therefore make it mandatory for the Member States to include a new chapter in the NECPs on "Support and resources provided to LRAs for implementation", in which the Member States should describe the technical and financial support available for implementation at all tiers of governance.</p>	<p>The Commission places great emphasis on the principle of direct access to technical assistance and climate funding for local and regional authorities (LRAs). Support is made available for instance through the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, Clean Energy for EU Islands, Energy Poverty Advisory Hub, European Urban Initiative, among others. The Commission takes note of the recommendation of the Committee regarding a new chapter in the NECPs on ‘Support and resources provided to LRAs for implementation’. The Commission stresses the need to make the most of the Governance Regulation’s existing provisions to support the implementation of all tiers of governance.</p>
<p>27. The CoR suggests that the Governance Regulation support the creation of Green Deal one-stop shops (OSSs) at the subnational level to enhance the roll-out of integrated sustainable policies at local and regional levels, with a cross-silo approach, by offering easily accessible information and guidance on the implementation of the new national legislative framework, as well as on where to find technical and financial assistance.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee’s recommendation. The Commission recalls that as noted in the Commission’s response to recommendation 25, subnational authorities are currently supported through various initiatives, underlining the importance the Commission attaches to supporting subnational authorities in their green transition.</p>
<p>29. The CoR suggests that the recast Governance Regulation require that Member States integrate and report on commitments, data, and measures relating to LRAs available in the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) developed by signatories of the European Covenant of Mayors, in the Climate City Contracts (CCCs) developed by cities under the "EU Mission Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities" and in the Local Green Deals, to ensure the highest level of ambition and also ensure that the NECPs fit with the local context.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the recommendation of the Committee for a potential revision of the Governance Regulation to require Member States to make enhanced use of information relating to LRAs. The Commission stresses that any additional reporting requirements need to be proportionate to their expected benefits.</p>

<p>30. The CoR calls on the European Commission to formally take stock of subnational climate action and report on it at UN level, in the framework of the revision of EU Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC);</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the engagement of the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA) constituency in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process.</p> <p>The Commission also welcomes the commitment to strengthening synergies and the promotion of subnational engagement. The Commission would like to recall that it calls for the recognition of local and regional government in accelerating and broadening climate action. In the context of the UNFCCC, the Commission stresses the need for involvement of local and regional government in the process of implementing nationally determined contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans (NAPS) and Long-term Climate Strategies (LTS).</p> <p>When it comes to the EU's Nationally Determined Contribution in particular, the Commission recalls that UNFCCC parties have agreed on a framework to report on NDCs under the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF)¹⁹.</p>
<p><i>The European Green Deal as overarching strategy: towards a European framework for a wellbeing economy</i></p>	
<p>33. The CoR considers that the EGD can be successfully implemented only if it is properly embedded in the economic governance of the EU, starting with the MFF and the European Semester cycle, and therefore recommends that the European Commission, in accordance with Article 7(2) of the European Climate Law, enhance its efforts in this direction; points out that all of the environmental priorities outlined in the 8th Environment Action Programme (8th EAP) need to be reflected to ensure that the EU stays within the planetary boundaries;</p>	<p>The EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) makes a crucial contribution to the fight against climate change. Over the course of the 2021-2027 period, the EU is set to spend at least 30% of its budget on climate-relevant objectives and a biodiversity spending target of 10% is set for the last two years of the MFF (and 7,5% in 2024). Climate and biodiversity mainstreaming requires EU programmes in all policy areas to consider green priorities in their design, implementation and evaluation phases. In addition, the Communication on the EU-wide assessment of the draft updated NECPs recognises that robust estimates of investment needs and of their macro-economic</p>

¹⁹ [Enhanced Transparency Framework | UNFCCC](#).

	<p>impacts in the NECPs have become even more important in the context of the reform of the EU’s economic governance rules, where national medium-term fiscal structural plans will have to be consistent with the updated NECPs. The European Semester now embeds the SDGs, the EU Resilience Dashboard and the 8th EAP objectives. It is structured around the competitive sustainability framework which addresses the social and employment dimension of the green transition as well as the transitions of key industries towards circularity and carbon neutrality, also reflecting nature protection, water resilience, the environmental investment gap, phase out of environmentally harmful subsidies and the polluter pays principle including taxes. This is reflected in the 2023 country specific recommendations. The 8th EAP progress report shows whether the EU stays within planetary boundaries.</p>
<p>37. The CoR highlights the fact that the European Court of Auditors in its <i>Special report on EU climate and energy targets</i>²⁰ notes that the NECPs lack sufficient precision on investment needs and funding sources to assess whether sufficient financing will be made available to reach the 2030 targets. The CoR therefore recommends reinforcing the investment needs assessments by Member States in their NECPs by adopting a common methodology to harmonise the analysis of investment needs: this analysis could be better connected with the framework of the European Semester and be aligned with the measures and objectives of the NECPs, as per Article 3 of the Governance Regulation, and of the LTSs, as set out in Article 15 of the Governance Regulation;</p>	<p>The recent assessment of the draft updated NECPs, revealed that, despite additional Commission guidance, most Member States still do not present an overview of the expected total investments needed for the 2020-2030 period. This partial outcome reveals some of the methodological difficulties to adequately assess ex-ante investment needs for policies and measures. The Commission addressed recommendations to the Member States to improve this aspect in the final updated NECPs. In its evaluation of the Governance Regulation, the Commission will assess to what extent the Regulation has resulted in reliable information on investment needs and sources of private and public finance.</p>

²⁰ European Court of Auditors, Special report 18/2023: *EU climate and energy targets – 2020 targets achieved, but little indication that actions to reach the 2030 targets will be sufficient*, available here <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/SR-2023-18>.

<p>38. The CoR considers that cohesion policy is a fundamental tool for the sustainable development of local and regional communities. In this regard, calls on the European Commission to further strengthen the inclusion of the EGD in this policy and reinforce the implementation of the DNSH principle and the concepts of just transitions, social and environmental fairness in this context as well;</p>	<p>The European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund are key contributors to the EGD, notably because they dedicate a minimum of respectively 30 % and 37 % of their expenditure to climate-related initiatives in the 2021-2027 programming period. During this period, 32 million m² of public buildings and 723,000 households are expected to benefit from energy performance improvements while 9,555 MW of additional renewable energy capacity will be installed, amongst other contributions. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), provides financial support of EUR 5.8 billion for green skills and green jobs. In addition, the Just Transition Fund provides targeted support to the regions most affected by the climate transition. Further, the Commission counts on the Member States to apply the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle to ensure that Cohesion Policy investments do not have a significant negative impact on the EU's climate and environmental objectives. Lastly, Member States need to ensure that investments in infrastructure which have an expected lifespan of at least 5 years are climate proofed.</p>
<p>31. The CoR considers that the structural inclusion of the EGD criteria in all EU economic governance and funding instruments is fundamental for a new European framework for sustainable wellbeing that goes beyond the consideration of GDP as the sole indicator of wellbeing for our societies;</p>	<p>The Commission notes the importance the Committee attaches to structural inclusion of EGD criteria in all EU economic governance and funding instruments for a new European framework for sustainable wellbeing of our society. The 8th Environmental Action Programme mandates a beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) scoreboard and a Commission working group is preparing a dashboard for sustainable and inclusive wellbeing indicators.</p>
<p><i>The social dimension of the Green Deal</i></p>	
<p>45. The CoR highlights the importance of peer-to-peer learning and best practice-sharing in speeding up the transition and calls on the European Commission and the relevant</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of sharing information, communicating and engaging with citizens on the green transition, as well as of further enhancing interinstitutional exchanges and</p>

<p>executive agencies to work with the CoR to facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge from EU projects and showcase to citizens the benefits of the transition in a tangible way.</p>	<p>cooperation in this area. Good cooperation is already established for instance between the European Climate Pact, the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform and the Committee's Green Deal Going Local initiative. In the context of the implementation of the Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality, Member States called on the Commission to strengthen the evidence base and promote an exchange of best practices for addressing the employment and social impacts of the transition. The Commission is currently assessing different paths to provide this support to Member States, including the set-up of a Just Transition Observatory in 2024.</p>
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N°9 Building a values-based, bottom-up European sports model: a vehicle for encouraging inclusion and social wellbeing among young Europeans
Own-initiative
COR-2023-02588 – SEDEC-VII/040
158th plenary session – November 2023
Rapporteur: Roberto PELLA (IT/EPP)
DG EAC – Commissioner IVANOVA

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>7. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) warns that there is an urgent need to address regional disparities, socio-economic inequalities, employment inequalities and skills mismatches in the EU, through policies based on an assessment of the social impact of sport. In order not to compromise the EU's as well as the Member States' achievement of economic growth, social cohesion and political stability, there is a significant need to focus on young people in precarious living conditions as well as cities and regions characterized by high unemployment and lacking of health, social and educational infrastructure;</p>	<p>In November 2017, the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights ('the Pillar')¹, setting out 20 principles and rights to support well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems.</p> <p>In March 2021, the Commission put forward the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan², establishing three EU headline targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction to be achieved by 2030. The Action Plan acknowledges the crucial role of regional and local authorities as well as civil society, to accelerate the implementation of the Pillar within their spheres of competence.</p> <p>The Commission agrees on the need to pay attention to the opportunities for young people, also in rural and remote areas. The basic principle of the reinforced Youth Guarantee recommendation³ is that schemes offer personalised services for unemployed and inactive young people, despite the different national, regional and local circumstances which have an</p>

¹ [European Pillar of Social Rights - Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

² [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

³ Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee 2020/C 372/01; OJ C 372, 4.11.2020, p. 1–9 ([The reinforced Youth Guarantee - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)).

impact on the opportunities for young people.

Every young person, upon leaving the initial education system, should have acquired the necessary skills to succeed in life. Skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. However, not everyone has had the opportunity to get the type of education and skills they need, or some may have faced circumstances restricting their possibilities in this regard. This is particularly the case with certain groups of young people not in education, employment, or training ('NEETs'), often in need of support to be able to overcome the difficulties they face. The EU initiative ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) specifically aims at empowering these vulnerable young people, providing them with opportunities for tailored training in their home country, a supervised work-based experience abroad and an appropriate follow-up back home. The sport community can be crucial both in reaching out to young people and steering them towards social integration, to which participation in ALMA and similar initiatives can provide an important contribution.

The European Year of Skills⁴ provides a fresh impetus to deliver on the principles of the Pillar promoting reskilling and upskilling. It thereby boosts the competitiveness of European companies, fostering skills policies and investments to ensure that nobody is left behind in the twin transition and the economic recovery.

Having the right skills, empowers individuals to successfully navigate labour market changes and fully engage in society and democracy, in line with the European Skills Agenda of 2020⁵.

⁴ [European Year of Skills \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/Pages/2022060101.aspx).

⁵ COM(2020) 274 final.

<p>15. The CoR considers that the following values-based aspects are complementary to the definition of the European Sport Model:</p>	<p>The Council articulated its understanding of a value-based organised sport in Europe in a Resolution on the key features of a European Sport Model in 2021⁶.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equal opportunities for access: given that sport, by its very nature, creates opportunities for people to come together, it must not fail to take into account the study and monitoring of underprivileged communities' access to sport and social inequalities, which are not just geographical and economic inequalities, but also cultural, religious, physical and psychological ones. European culture is based on inclusivity and must aim to make sport a core instrument, accessible to all - a "citizenship right" - given its nature and its potential to be of benefit to citizens; 	<p>The Erasmus+ Programme supports individual mobility and cooperation among partners across borders in Europe, including in the field of sport.</p> <p>The 11th Erasmus+ Sport Info Day⁷ took place on 30 January 2024 and provided workshops on how to apply for sports funding through Erasmus+. Guidance included application templates and award criteria. Speakers also shared successful examples of innovative projects and best practices.</p> <p>Social inclusion is one of the programme's horizontal priorities, and for sport actions, a further sectoral priority is inter alia placed on combating discrimination. Furthermore, the Commission recognises organisations whose work uses the power of sport to improve social inclusion for disadvantaged groups with the #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relationship between sport and work/school: this should be implemented as a driver for health and relational and mental well-being, including by ensuring that sport is fully incorporated into school systems practised in schools and, by introducing incentive schemes in welfare plans for employees; 	<p>As part of the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success⁸, the Commission set up an informal expert group on supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and promoting well-being at school. In line with the mandate of the expert group, a set of guidelines for policy makers and schools are expected to be published end of May 2024. The guidelines will include elements related to physical activity and sport as a driver for well-being and mental health.</p> <p>In addition, the Erasmus+ programme supports the</p>

⁶ Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the key features of a European Sport Model - [pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁷ [Erasmus+ Sport Info Day 2024 supports applicants in applying for funding | Sport \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁸ Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving; OJ C 469, 9.12.2022, p. 1–15.

	<p>Erasmus+ Teacher Academy, the PhysEd-Academy (which will directly address current challenges in school physical education (PE)), and PE teacher education, by improving four imperative quality factors: the purposes and content of physical education; school teaching; teacher education; and continuous professional development. By directly addressing the four quality factors and based on current evidence in physical education and teacher education research, practice, and theory, PhysEd-Academy will develop and test innovative strategies and programmes for PE teacher education and teachers' ongoing continuous professional development across Europe.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the culture of sport: strengthening the culture of physical activity and providing training and more information to create sport literacy that will convey positive values and principles to young people such as inclusion anti-discrimination or fair play. This also involves training those responsible for sport education⁹, especially in schools¹⁰, starting already in early childhood education and primary education. In increasingly intercultural and diverse societies such as societies in Europe, including sport in formal learning and education settings has proven to be an innovative tool for managing special educational needs (SEN). Here, sport enhances cognitive, linguistic and interpersonal skills, facilitates the integration of pupils into schools, and contributes to the achievement of SDG 4. Promoting physical activity as a tool for well-being, both individually and collectively, for current and future young generations, is a core mission for the EU and an opportunity to prevent prejudice and social stigma; 	<p>The Erasmus+ Programme supports individual mobility and cooperation among partners across borders in Europe, including in the field of sport.</p> <p>One of the sectoral priorities for the sport actions is education in and through sport.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the link between sport and sustainability, which covers a number of aspects related to practising sport, including transport to activities and the environmental impact of facilities (e.g. microplastics, chemicals and energy consumption): integrating the environmental component of ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) into the risk factors of an investment to turn sport into a lever for the sustainable growth of regions, in line with European and global objectives for a more sustainable planet; 	<p>Sport is in a unique position to be a driver of sustainability, as it reaches vast and diverse audiences. At the same time, the sport sector needs to lead by example and become more environmentally sustainable.</p> <p>The Green Sport Expert Group, established by the EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024⁹, has recently published a report on ‘Sport’s contribution to the European Green Deal – a sport sector playbook’¹⁰. It was compiled by representatives of ministries of sport and observers from the sport ecosystem. It provides guidance and recommendations to Member States and sport federations how to make sport more environmentally sustainable. The next stage will be to work on the implementation of the recommendations (e.g. develop a sustainability action plan for sport at national level; establish the sport related carbon footprint in Member States and per sport).</p> <p>A European community of practice aims to drive the implementation of these recommendations forward.¹¹.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the digital dimension: not just by considering how sport and physical activity is portrayed digitally, as well as how its image is distorted (through digital addiction, the infodemic etc.), but also taking into account how the sporting world, its public and market is shifting to the digital world (e-sports, videoplay, etc.). Understanding the dynamics of the network is essential for planning the future of European sports and understanding 	<p>Following the Sport and Innovation Summit on 30 May 2023, which had a specific session on digitalisation, a thematic community of practice on Innovation has been set up within the SHARE 2.0 initiative¹² to discuss the impact and potential of innovation in sport.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes the reference to the digital dimension in the context of promoting sport and recalls its support to the videogames sector in the context of the MEDIA strand of the Creative</p>

⁹ [Report on EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024 highlights potential topics for its successor | Sport \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Sport’s contribution to the European Green Deal – A sport sector playbook*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, (<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/809359>).

¹¹ For more information, consult the news and the full report on the European Commission’s sport website: [A sport sector playbook for the European Green Deal | Sport \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹² [SHARE 2.0 initiative | Sport \(europa.eu\)](#).

<p>developments among younger generations of digital natives. Moreover, the growing relevance of technological innovation platforms and start-ups strengthens new employment opportunities for youth, who need to be educated in an equal manner about these opportunities;</p>	<p>Europe programme.</p> <p>Under the Better internet for kids strategy (BIK+)¹³, the Commission - via the co-funded network of Safer Internet Centres and the Better internet for kids (BIK) platform - supports healthy and balanced use of digital technologies. Through providing trainings, resources in official languages, services raise awareness on online risks and opportunities e.g. on gaming.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the importance of streamlining the regulatory processes governing the European Sport Model: while recognising the need for oversight and consistency, it is of key importance that sports bodies and organisations at grassroots levels are not burdened by excessive bureaucracy, ensuring they can evolve, and prosper organically to serve the unique needs of their communities; 	<p>In accordance with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the principles of subsidiarity, the Commission has no regulatory powers in the field of sport governance. However, the EU acquis applies to sports organisations in areas such as the internal market, health or competition law.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the importance of a health-based approach: a European sports model should establish a framework of minimum training requirements for physical, sports or recreational educators and coaches, which they must satisfy before working with young users of sports services in order to ensure that sports activity is a determining factor for health 	<p>In accordance with Article 165 of the TFEU and the principles of subsidiarity, the Commission has no regulatory powers to set requirements for coaches and sport instructors.</p> <p>However, the Council Recommendation on Health Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA) from 2013¹⁴ recommends Member States to cooperate with the Commission and the World Health Organization (WHO) to monitor and enhance their performance to develop, implement and evaluate policies to increase levels of HEPA, based on 23 indicators. Recently, the Commission adopted a report on the progress on the indicators from the Council Recommendation on HEPA as Annex II to the Report on Implementation of the Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024¹⁵.</p>

¹³ [A European strategy for a better internet for kids \(BIK+\) | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁴ [Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹⁵ COM(2024) 73 final ([EUR-Lex - 52024DC0073 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CoR recalls that one of the Commission's political priorities for 2023 – in line with the Fourth EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024) – is to increase involvement and promote equitable access to sport and health-enhancing physical activity for all in all circumstances, in order to promote an active and environmentally-friendly lifestyle, social cohesion and active citizenship, without barriers. These objectives are in line with recent European Parliament resolutions and with the recommendations of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which focuses on the European approach to mental health, a major social issue that was highlighted and made even more evident during and due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These objectives are part of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 which seeks to further empower people with disabilities and ensure that they participate fully in society, promote their inclusion and full participation in the sporting community and sport activities. 	<p>The Commission acknowledges the value of equal access to sport and social inclusion for all.</p> <p>The EU's sport agenda and Erasmus+ programme continue to be implemented and developed as described in the EU Work Plan for Sport in respect of these goals and principles.</p>
<p>16. The CoR calls for a greater share of regional development funds, structural funds and EU cohesion policies to be coordinated, co-programmed and co-designed for small-scale activities and sports facilities, with the specific goal of promoting grassroots sport across the regions (grassroots approach). Particular emphasis should be given to outdoor infrastructure (parks, green areas, public spaces etc.), given that a large number of such facilities and spaces are owned by municipalities.</p> <p>The strong, natural alliance between those practising sports, competitors/non-competitors and local decision-makers is mainly created through self-organised sport: walking, running</p>	<p>The Cohesion policy funds and the Recovery and Resilience Fund are important potential funding source for sport-related projects.</p> <p>Regarding investments in sport infrastructure, the Recovery and Resilience Fund can provide support to local authorities for such projects e.g. sport centres, cycling facilities, courts and playgrounds to name a few.</p> <p>The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can support investments in sport infrastructure, provided that the main aim of the investments is to contribute to achieving the ERDF specific objective under which it is programmed (e.g. Policy Objective 4 ‘<i>A more social and inclusive Europe</i>’ or as part of sustainable territorial development strategies under Policy</p>

<p>and cycling are the easiest, most inclusive and accessible choices, including in terms of cost, that can foster a system of community welfare and bring people together in the regions, recognising that LRAs are key stakeholders in promoting grassroots sport and outdoor activities in their regions, and urging increased support and funding for outdoor infrastructure projects led by LRAs;</p>	<p>Objective 5 ‘A Europe closer to citizens’) and it complies with the relevant enabling conditions or minimum requirements established for the concerned policy objective. Sport-related investments could be supported through integrated territorial tools (Integrated Territorial Investments, Other Territorial Tools, Community Led Local Developments) or implemented within Policy Objective 5 as an element of integrated territorial development strategy.</p> <p>The ESF+ can be used to fund projects¹⁶ using sport as a way to reach better levels of social inclusion and equality, as lever for youth emancipation, active ageing or as part of education system modernisation for example (in line with specific objectives of its Regulation (Article 4.1)¹⁷. However, the ESF+ Regulation does not include specific objectives or secondary themes enabling targeted programming on sport.</p> <p>Finally, the ESF+ recognises the importance of locally based projects and partnerships to provide inclusive and accessible services.</p>
<p>25. The CoR calls for the European Social Fund to incorporate objectives for greater accessibility, inclusion, solidarity and social cohesion through sport, focusing in particular on ensuring more favourable conditions for the outermost regions, taking into account the specific characteristics of these regions;</p>	<p>Outermost regions receive specific additional allocation to support the achievement of the specific objectives set out in the ESF+ Regulation, as established in Article 5. Projects related to sport as a mean for inclusion, education, or employment policies, can be supported by this extra allocation.</p>
<p>26. The CoR supports the idea of European research to physically and digitally map all existing sporting facilities in order to make them easy to access and use for all citizens (city users, people who go to cities for work or studies and tourists) and to ensure that the planning of new or renovated facilities</p>	<p>The Erasmus+ programme supports cooperation among partners across borders in Europe, including in the field of sport.</p> <p>In accordance with the programme’s horizontal priorities on sustainability and greening and making the most of digital solutions, projects aimed at mapping of sport facilities could be</p>

¹⁶ Examples on funding of sports measures under ESF+ can be found on [Projects | European Social Fund Plus \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_projects_esfplus_en.pdf).

¹⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013; OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 21–59.

<p>complies with criteria of correct geographical distribution, environmentally responsible practices, the long-term sustainability of investments and the full efficiency of the European sports ecosystem;</p>	<p>supported in this context.</p> <p>The SHARE 2.0 initiative with thematic communities on sport innovation and greening of sport could allow interested parties to engage in sharing experience and good practices and potentially form partnerships for projects in this field.</p> <p>Some actions focused on energy-efficient facilities could be interesting for cooperation with Member States, cities and regions in the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission¹⁸ or other similar initiatives.</p> <p>The New European Bauhaus¹⁹ encourages a holistic, sustainable, and inclusive approach to architecture and design. This includes contributing to the creation of accessible and environmentally responsible sports infrastructure across Europe.</p>
<p>27. The CoR encourages raising awareness about the establishment of programmes to guide and strengthen the skills, of under-35s through sport, and about the possibilities for national priorities in this field, including general ones, in order to prevent and combat the phenomenon of NEETs and to reduce the mismatch between labour supply and demand;</p>	<p>The EU's main policy to combat the NEET phenomenon is the reinforced Youth Guarantee. Cross-sectoral cooperation, especially amongst various youth, social, health and employment services, plays an important role in its implementation.</p> <p>Skills development is at the centre of the Youth Guarantee and can therefore offer a tool to reduce skills shortages and mismatches, in particular, in growing occupations. It is therefore important to create more opportunities for developing relevant skills and competences for NEETs, to match skills to jobs and to address labour shortages.</p> <p>The reinforced Youth Guarantee recommendation highlights modern, youth-friendly and local information channels and outreach schemes for awareness-raising activities. These activities should have a focus on NEETs, in particular, those</p>

¹⁸ [Climate-neutral and smart cities - European Commission \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip18_1111)

¹⁹ [Inforegio - New European Bauhaus a major catalyst of the European Green Deal, funding to be scaled up further \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip18_1111)

	<p>belonging to vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The European Competence Centre for Social Innovation²⁰ has launched a new call for transnational projects dedicated to developing young people’s skills and helping them to integrate in the labour market. A total of EUR 9 million in ESF+ funding will be available to develop or scale up innovative methods and practices that have proven to be successful in other contexts, countries and regions.</p> <p>Projects should focus on vulnerable youth, and in particular NEETs. Activities should be designed with their needs in mind. They may require more intensive support to start with learning or training activities, or to make the transition to employment. They may address personal situations before they can consider learning, training and/or career prospects. Sports activities and sport clubs might have a role in reaching out to prospective learners and attracting them to learning activities or in setting up innovative learning environments, trusted places in which learners are more at ease than in the usual classrooms (including places learners would know through everyday activities and hobbies).</p> <p>For more than 30 years the Euroguidance network²¹, funded through Erasmus+, supports local guidance services to provide young people with information and advice on opportunities available through European programmes and actions.</p>
<p>28. The CoR proposes the adoption of a European assessment methodology for evaluating the return on investments, in line with carbon neutrality, environmental</p>	<p>The Commission, Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and Eurostat have set up a task force with Member States to elaborate harmonised definitions and</p>

²⁰ [European Competence Centre for Social Innovation.](#)

²¹ [Lifelong Guidance | Euroguidance Network.](#)

<p>sustainability and social objectives, together with subsequent reward mechanisms, specifically considering the attraction and retention of young talent in sports as one of the key social objectives in evaluating the return on investments, particularly in terms of providing opportunities for youth development and engagement;</p>	<p>methodologies on sports statistics based on the ‘Vilnius definition’²² and taking into account Sport Satellite Account (SSA) experiences²³.</p> <p>A contractor provides technical support to any Member State interested in developing SSAs. The task force will also assess methods to evaluate the social value of sport.</p>
<p>29. The CoR recommends the adoption of minimal environmental criteria and standards for Member States, regions and cities applying to host medium-sized and large sports events in Europe, with a focus on initiatives that attract and retain young athletes, promote youth engagement, and foster a sense of belonging through sports events;</p>	<p>As mentioned above under point 16, the Green sport expert group’s sport sector playbook for the European Green Deal, provides guidance and recommendations on sport and environmental sustainability. The organisation of sustainable sport events is covered in a dedicated chapter²⁴.</p>
<p>30. The CoR supports the extension of the European Solidarity Corps to include volunteers in sport, by extending the duration or renewal of their experience within the regions;</p>	<p>Sport organisations offering volunteering activities in a solidarity context can already take part in the European Solidarity Corps programme²⁵ provided that they meet the eligibility criteria defined in the Programme Guide.</p>
<p>32. The CoR calls for a stronger dialogue to be held through a permanent EU Forum and a Sports Observatory. These structures should aim to make the outcome of topical discussions more concrete and impactful; guide decisions and public policies by implementing an annual pan-European dataset, based on shared formats and frameworks; ensure that EU data is comparable; and involve all levels of local and regional authorities and stakeholders;</p>	<p>The Commission is working on several topics in this area including evidence-base work for sport and health, a task force on sport statistics for supporting Member States and cooperation with Eurobarometer (which includes surveys on sports periodically). The EU Sport Forum²⁶ organised by the Commission is the annual landmark for stakeholder dialogue in sport. The 2024 edition will take place on 16-17 April²⁷, with a theme ‘100 days to Paris 2024’.</p>
<p>33. The CoR hopes that the discussion on the new European Work Plan for Sport post-2024 and the new Erasmus+ programme can take</p>	<p>The European dimension of sport as well as the features and values of the European Sport Model are integral part of the cooperation between the</p>

²² [Methodology - Eurostat \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg-17-3-1)

²³ [Sport satellite accounts - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg-17-3-1)

²⁴ [A sport sector playbook for the European Green Deal | Sport \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg-17-3-1)

²⁵ [European Solidarity Corps - European Commission \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg-17-3-1)

²⁶ [EU Sport Forum | Sport \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg-17-3-1)

²⁷ <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/event/eu-sport-forum-2024>

into account the features and values of the European Sport Model set out by this opinion to the greatest extent possible, and that the European Committee of the Regions continues to be fully involved in this discussion, and emphasises the need for continuous collaboration between the European Commission, Member States and local and regional authorities in shaping and implementing sports policies at the grassroots level.

Commission and Member States in the context of the EU Work Plan for Sport (see the Council Resolution on the key features of a European Sport Model in 2021²⁸ and the study on the European Sport Model from 2022²⁹).

Following the Council and the Member States's invitation, the Commission produced a report on the evaluation and implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024³⁰. The report was adopted on 14 February 2024 and will serve as a basis for the renewal of the Work Plan in the Council.

²⁸ Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the key features of a European Sport Model - [pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

²⁹ [Study on the European sport model - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#).

³⁰ [Vista - Search \(europa.eu\)](#).

<p>N°10 Promoting cultural policies in rural areas within the framework of development and territorial cohesion strategies and the 2030 Agenda Council presidency referral COR-2023-03454 – SEDEC-VII/041 158th plenary session – November 2023 Rapporteur: Csaba BORBOLY (RO/EPP) DG EAC – Commissioner IVANOVA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>8. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) identifies the need to collect culture-specific data in Europe, presented at NUTS 3 level, in order to help local decision-making and planning, and to measure the multidimensional effects of cultural policies supporting rural areas, because a lack of these specific data may lead to a questioning of the efforts made in line with the new European rural cultural policy;</p>	<p>Culture statistics are mostly collected from survey data by Eurostat. Whether at NUTS 2 level some data can be available, statistical representativeness at NUTS 3 level is hardly achievable.</p> <p>For some domains, a break-down by ‘degree of urbanisation’ is available, describing the ‘distribution of particular indicators between cities, towns and suburbs, rural areas’. This level of analysis can support evidence-based policy making in absence of statistics at the detailed territorial level.</p>
<p>12. The CoR underlines that enhanced cooperation between rural areas should exceed the limits of agriculture, economy and rural governance, in order to realise the potential in culture-driven rural development, so that rural LRAs and other players can have access to European best practice and make the most out of their opportunities;</p>	<p>Under the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans 2023-2027¹, cooperation between rural stakeholders and rural areas is possible mainly through LEADER² local development strategies and smart-villages strategies with a view to achieving one of the objectives of the CAP for the local development of rural areas. Projects related to cultural resources and cultural heritage of rural areas have been always in the core of LEADER activities. Inspiring good practices are gathered in the context of EU and National CAP network activities.</p>

¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013; OJ L 435, 6.12.2021, p. 1–186.

² LEADER is a European programme, with the aim to involve local actors in rural areas in the development of their own regions by forming Local Actions Groups (LAGs) and designing and implementing strategies.

<p>14. The CoR calls for a supporting and promoting framework for the European rural area of culture, using the experience from the European capital of culture initiative;</p>	<p>The Commission points out that the current European Capital of Culture action already covers rural areas in Europe, as most title-holders associate their rural hinterland into their projects. The three cities holding the title in 2024, namely Bad Ischl in Austria, Tartu in Estonia and Bodo in Norway, are good examples of cities sharing their title-years with, and implementing many projects in their surrounding rural areas, respectively in Salzkammergut, Southern Estonia and Nordland.</p>
<p>17. The CoR calls on the Commission, acting in a harmonised way with the Member States and LRAs, to guarantee that the initiative on the long-term vision for rural areas includes feasible solutions and means of support to deal with the challenges that the CCSIs face in rural areas;</p>	<p>The Communication on the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas³ did not introduce new means of financing. Its objectives are to be met with existing EU funds and programmes. Several of these support culture and services in rural areas, in particular the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD), notably through LEADER, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).</p>
<p>18. Given their potential to curb depopulation and create social and economic opportunities linked to the Green Deal, the CoR is of the view that social and cultural vitality, as well as innovation in social and cultural services of general interest are among the most strategic areas in which local and regional cooperation should be developed under the Rural Pact;</p>	<p>Rural pact activities are chosen in interaction with rural pact community members and based on the analysis of their needs. Activities in the first year already addressed issues related to the social economy and enhancing access to health services. Social services were also addressed at the rural pact conference in 2022⁴. The Commission encourages the Committee to propose activities on culture in the context of the rural pact coordination group.</p>
<p>20. The CoR draws attention to the European Cultural Routes, which run both within countries and across borders and, with the involvement of the public and all relevant stakeholders, make an appreciable contribution to spreading local and regional cultural</p>	<p>The DiscoverEU Cultural Route⁵ is a collection of European destinations carefully curated to guide young Europeans on an adventure to learn about Europe's vast and diverse cultural heritage. Themed sub-routes cover different aspects of culture, including Ddsign, history, music,</p>

³ COM(2021) 345 final.

⁴ [Rural pact conference - European Union \(europa.eu\)](https://youth.europa.eu/discovereu/culture-routes_en)

⁵ https://youth.europa.eu/discovereu/culture-routes_en

<p>expressions, as well as promote lesser-known regions, support employment, job creation and business operations in rural areas;</p>	<p>architecture, literature, fashion, fine art, theatre, cinema, folk art and food. The latest one develops on the New European Bauhaus⁶ initiative. Destinations also include European Capitals of Culture, European Heritage Label holders, and UNESCO World-listed sites.</p> <p>The Commission recalls the cooperation with the Council of Europe, aiming to increase Europe’s visibility as a tourist destination and contribute to the touristic visibility and quality of European Cultural Routes. The Transition Pathway for Tourism⁷ highlights the importance of the cultural heritage in sustainable and innovative tourism development, as well as synergies with the 2040 EU vision for rural areas.</p>
<p>22. [...], the CoR reiterates that the future of rural areas is dependent on retaining young people in rural areas, and attracting other young people to those areas, to pursue their life goals there; in seeking solutions to the challenges faced by rural areas it is therefore vital to actively engage young people, develop forums and promote youth councils where they can share their ideas, and support youth initiatives in rural areas;</p>	<p>Supporting and retaining young people is both part of generational agricultural renewal and of having vibrant rural areas. However, living conditions are not always optimal for younger generations with a certain lack of public services, digital connectivity, and due to remoteness. To tackle those issues, Member States can benefit from different CAP 2023-2027 interventions, notably for rural development. Member States can also benefit from the initiatives launched by the Long-Term Vision for rural areas as well as from cohesion policy.</p>
<p>24. The CoR stresses that generational agricultural renewal remains urgent, and that, therefore, support for the inclusion of youth and rural women in agriculture and farm ownership is important; therefore, agrees with the Commission that special attention should be paid to the needs of young people and women, in order to encourage them to stay in rural areas;</p>	<p>Under CAP 2023-2027, generational renewal is a major stake for EU agriculture. Younger generations do not see positive aspects in staying or coming to rural areas. The special objective 7 aims at supporting young and new farmers in setting-up a farm. Member States can select various interventions in their CAP Strategic Plans to support generational renewal: the Complementary Income Support for young farmers (CIS-YF), the setting-up for young and</p>

⁶ https://youth.europa.eu/discovereu/new-european-bauhaus-routes_en

⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, *Transition pathway for tourism*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2873/344425>.

	<p>new farmers, a beneficial rate support up to 80% on investments for young farmers, cooperation, and knowledge measures to support farm and knowledge transfer between generations. Moreover, the specific objective on vibrant rural areas gives the opportunity to Member States to introduce interventions in favour of women, strengthening their place in agriculture.</p>
<p>30. The CoR points out that monuments and built heritage in general are not always protected and that their refurbishment and restoration might benefit both rural communities and local economies, while also reducing the carbon footprint, so rural development and strategic planning needs to be designed to focus also on heritage;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that monuments and built heritage should be protected, and their refurbishment and restoration should take into account current and future threats to their sustainability (e.g. climate change, as reported in recent Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change report⁸) and be in line with existing EU guidelines (such as the European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with Potential Impact upon Cultural Heritage⁹ or the EU-level technical guidance on adapting buildings to climate change¹⁰).</p>
<p>31. The CoR emphasises that cultural policies in rural areas should become an integral part of cohesion policy and create synergies with existing tools, such as CLLD; in this work, governments and institutions at all levels should include LAGs in their programming in a meaningful way;</p>	<p>EU cohesion policy, in particular through the ERDF, recognises the transformative role of the cultural sector in social, economic and territorial cohesion. Hence it has been supporting European regions in their efforts to add value to cultural sites. This recognition continues in the 2021-2027 period, as ERDF investments in culture can be programmed under all 5 policy objectives and with all territorial instruments (including CLLD).</p> <p>Member States and regions have taken advantage of the broad scope of support under ERDF to drive the cultural sector's digital and green transition, to strengthen its sustainability and resilience and to foster culture's role in addressing</p>

⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change – Where the European Green Deal meets cultural heritage*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022 (<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/44688>).

⁹ [European Quality Principles: new version and translations available - International Council on Monuments and Sites \(icomos.org\)](https://www.icomos.org/)

¹⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action, *EU-level technical guidance on adapting buildings to climate change*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023 (<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2834/558395>).

	<p>socio-economic challenges in the local, regional or national context. As a result, EU planned support for culture and cultural heritage under ERDF in 2021-2027 amounts to EUR 5 billion, mostly under an ERDF specific objective dedicated to culture and sustainable tourism and as part of integrated territorial strategies, also in rural areas, to be deployed through territorial instruments.</p>
<p>34. The CoR strongly advocates giving a central place to LRAs – as institutions closest to the citizens and local areas – in the implementation of cultural policies, and favours the construction of integrated management systems based on territorial networks and systems;</p>	<p>The Commission Recommendation¹¹ on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes calls on Member States to promote the participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policymaking. This includes cultural activities and engagement of cultural organisations which have been shown to strengthen civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion.</p>
<p>39. The CoR considers that, in the spirit of "leaving no one behind", specific tools are needed to develop "cultural innovation ecosystems" in rural areas that offer opportunities for entrepreneurs and rural micro-enterprises and SMEs, boosting these small rural businesses in the CCSIs;</p>	<p>The Commission encourages the promotion of research and innovation in cultural and creative industries (CCIs), within all territories where CCIs have competitive advantages, through their inclusion in the Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) adopted by national and regional governments.</p> <p>Also, the Commission supports the development of cultural innovation ecosystems through several initiatives. For example, the co-financed European Institute of Technology (EIT) Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC) Culture and Creativity¹² aims to improve the competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability of CCIs ecosystem and boost local deployment of innovation through the support of colocation centres.</p> <p>Besides, the European Digital Hubs (EDIH)</p>

¹¹ C(2023) 8627 final ([eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=PI_COM:C\(2023\)8627](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=PI_COM:C(2023)8627)).

¹² <https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/>

	<p>Network supports companies in EU territories regarding their innovation processes linked to the digitisation to enhance their competitiveness and improve their infrastructure.</p> <p>Regarding the promotion of rural businesses in CCIs, the Commission finances the Enterprise Europe Network which provides support to CCIs' entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing their businesses, including in rural areas. The Network offers trainings and advice on access to finance, innovation, digitalisation, market rules, partnerships and internationalisation, and sustainability. Up to now, the Network has supported over 11 000 SMEs related to the CCIs' ecosystem.</p> <p>The Commission supports transnational cooperation within CCIs clusters and SMEs through, among others, the Clusters Cooperation Platform¹³ and two Euroclusters co-financed projects linked to CCIs¹⁴ which bring together industrial clusters and other economic actors from all over EU and which, through networking, increase the CCIs' resilience and accelerate their twin transition.</p> <p>Furthermore, financial instruments available under Invest EU enable CCIs SMEs accessing finance and developing their activities, contributing to the development of local economies, the creation of jobs, and consequently, the retention of talent.</p>
<p>40. The CoR stresses the importance of expanding digital infrastructure in order to enable artists and other cultural workers to live and work in rural areas;</p>	<p>Given the difficulties in realising projects in rural and remote areas, it is important to take into account demand as a critical factor in the viability of projects. This calls for the careful selection of the models of investment, the appropriate selection of the areas to be covered and the mixture of</p>

¹³ <https://clustercollaboration.eu/>

¹⁴ CreathrivEU (<https://profile.clustercollaboration.eu/profile/cluster-partnership-initiative/7d9f2d5e-422a-41b5-a22e-4b69b0f37042>), Friend CCIs (<https://euroclusterfriendcci.eu/>)

	<p>technologies to be used, together with the aggregation of demand to provide anchor tenants to improve the financial viability of projects. Without a careful treatment of these issues, the viability of project in rural areas risk being gravely compromised.</p>
<p>44. The CoR urges the Commission to provide local and regional authorities with financial and technical support to raise awareness of the potential benefits of the CCSIs, including in connection with the social economy, for regional and local development;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that the role of social innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas should be strengthened. For this, using the expertise of the European Network for Rural Development¹⁵, included into the EU CAP Network¹⁶ can be useful.</p> <p>In the Rural Action plan¹⁷ of the long-term vision for EU's Rural Areas¹⁸, the Commission has developed a flagship initiative to promote social economy to support prosperous rural areas¹⁹. The Council recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions²⁰, adopted on 27 November 2023, encourages Member States to act in a wide range of areas. It recommends that Member States strengthen the support role played by social economy entities in promoting social innovation and key sectors of local development and employment, for instance by 'involving social economy entities in community-led local development, including by making use of the Union funding instruments available'.</p>
<p>46. The CoR calls for consideration to be given to sufficient technical support for capacity-building for LRAs in rural areas, which are in a weaker position in terms of their planning competences – particularly with regard to long-term strategies – and the accessing and spending of EU funds;</p>	<p>Under EU cohesion policy Member States have at their disposal technical assistance funding which can be used to support capacity building to help beneficiaries, for example local and regional authorities (LRAs), to apply for and implement cohesion policy funding.</p>

¹⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/index.html>

¹⁶ https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/index_en

¹⁷ https://rural-vision.europa.eu/action-plan_en

¹⁸ https://rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-vision_en

¹⁹ In this context, activities to foster social economy have been developed. See for instance: https://rural-vision.europa.eu/events/fostering-social-entrepreneurship-rural-areas-through-local-action-2023-05-11_en

²⁰ OJ C, C/2023/1344, 29.11.2023 ([EUR-Lex - 32023H01344 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eur-lex.do?uri=CELEX:32023H01344:EN:EUR-Lex)).

49. The CoR suggests that the creation of cultural opportunities in rural areas should be widely encouraged, including through the promotion of cultural events and the protection of rural historical and religious buildings (churches, castles, etc.);

The Commission agrees with the Committee. The Commission works with LRAs as well as local cultural stakeholders and initiatives (including local cultural spaces as well as, for instance, creative hubs), by facilitating peer-learning and mutual exchanges of good practices. A good example of EU's action in this field was the peer-learning project Cultural Heritage in Action (CHiA)²¹. As an action within the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, it was funded by Creative Europe. The project empowered villages, cities and regions to strengthen their cultural heritage policies and initiatives as well as develop innovative solutions to preserve cultural heritage assets. It produced a catalogue of 70 good practices²² from EU cities, regions, urban, non-urban and rural areas, organised 15 peer-learning visits and produced around 40 videos presenting practices from host cities and regions. One visit took place in an area where abandoned religious heritage was restored, preserved and reused as a socio-cultural centre²³.

To help cultural and creative sectors (CCS) stakeholders navigate through over 75 EU public funding opportunities, the Commission developed in 2022 the CulturEU²⁴ funding guide. CulturEU is available as an interactive online web tool and as a printable guidebook. It maps all funding available at EU level for the cultural and creative sectors, covering opportunities linked to around 20 EU funding instruments supporting projects with a cultural and creative dimension, from Creative Europe to LIFE, Digital Europe, InvestEU or EU Structural Funds. Stakeholders can filter relevant funding opportunities based on the type of organisation they represent, their sector and their needs. CulturEU is available in all official EU

²¹ <https://culturalheritageinaction.eu/>

²² <https://culturalheritageinaction.eu/case-studies/>

²³ <https://culturalheritageinaction.eu/cantabria-region-spain-domus-dei-to-domus-populi-a-1000-year-old-church-is-new-centre-for-cultural-life/>

²⁴ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/funding/cultureu-funding-guide/>

	languages.
<p>50. The CoR reiterates that the CCSIs mostly involve micro-enterprises, small and medium-sized businesses, and enterprises of self-employed workers, which require initiative and organisation at local level; this feature of localisation is a positive aspect for rural areas because it boosts local economies and the social fabric, but also helps retain talent and the corresponding jobs at local level;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that CCIs mostly involve micro-enterprises, small and medium-sized businesses, and entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Regarding the local economies' boosting under the EU Cohesion Policy, the inclusion of CCIs in the Smart Specialisation Strategies makes it possible to ensure greater investment in the cultural and creative sectors at local level and contribute positively to the creation of jobs and the talent retention in the regions.</p> <p>Also, under NextGenerationEU, sixteen out of twenty-two Member States²⁵ have included in their Recovery and Resilience Plans a series of reforms and investments to increase the resilience of CCIs and enable them to achieve their twin transition (approx. 2.3% of the estimated budget of the 22 plans adopted in 2021).</p> <p>Euroclusters on CCIs contribute also to the local economy by providing direct support to small businesses in CCIs, through for instance direct financing, and the skills improvement.</p> <p>The Commission as well is mobilising the CCIs stakeholders to upskill the CCI workforce. Under the EU Pact for Skills, it facilitated the setting-up of the large-scale skills partnership for the CCIs²⁶.</p> <p>It also co-finances under Erasmus+ Programme two Blueprints for skills projects²⁷.</p> <p>The Commission promotes the development of creative activities (e.g. locally rooted crafts) for regional development and for promoting European regions and cultural heritage. In this sense, the recently adopted Regulation on the protection of geographical indications for craft and industrial products²⁸ aims at enabling local artisans and</p>

²⁵ 22 of the 27 Member States had its Recovery and Resilience Plans adopted.

²⁶ https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/about/industrial-ecosystems-and-partnerships/creative-and-cultural-industries_en

²⁷ CHARTER (<https://charter-alliance.eu/>) – for cultural heritage, and CYANOTYPES (<https://cyanotypes.website/>) – for the CCIs ecosystem.

²⁸ Regulation (EU) 2023/2411 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023 on the protection of

	<p>producers (mainly SMEs) to promote and protect their craft and industrial products related to their place of origin. It will also contribute to retain craft skills and job opportunities within local territories.</p>
<p>51. The CoR welcomes the Commission's ambition of mainstreaming the rural perspective and enhancing the "do no harm to cohesion" principle in all EU policies by using the Territorial Impact Assessment toolbox and rural-proofing;</p>	<p>The Commission's Better Regulation guidelines²⁹ set out that impact assessments should analyse significant impact on territories, including rural areas, when relevant. Moreover, with the Commission Communication on a Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural areas (LTVRA), rural proofing will draw, among other things, on territorial impact assessments and a better monitoring of the situation in rural areas. Accordingly, the territorial and rural perspective is impact assessed when relevant and significant.</p> <p>The 'do no harm to cohesion' principle aims to enhance the coherence between cohesion policy and other EU policies. This principle is not a horizontal rule mainstreamed or applied to all EU policies.</p>
<p>57. The CoR would like to see the launching of EU calls for proposals that, among other things, provide more support for projects promoting the social role of culture, experimentation, and innovation in contemporary visual arts, aimed at the regeneration of rural areas;</p>	<p>Creative Europe programme, the only CCS dedicated EU funding scheme, allows for the funding of a wide diversity of projects. Some of the European Cooperation Projects have integrated the development of cultural projects in rural areas as part of their design for a transnational cultural action. It is interesting to note that the number of projects that integrate rurality in their design have increased in the recent years. For instance, the SPARSE plus (Supporting & Promoting Arts in Rural Settlements of Europe)³⁰ started its activities in 2023. It is a medium-sized cooperation project that will run until 2027 with the objective to expand and deepen the rural touring network, providing access to high quality professional arts</p>

geographical indications for craft and industrial products and amending Regulations (EU) 2017/1001 and (EU) 2019/1753; OJ L, 2023/2411, 27.10.2023 ([Protection of European craft and industrial products \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/l/2023/2411/oj)).

²⁹ [d0bbd77f-bee5-4ee5-b5c4-6110c7605476_en \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/1400/oj).

³⁰ <https://www.sparse.eu/>

	<p>events in rural communities. The project is a sequel of an original project, SPARSE, that ran from 2018 to 2021.</p>
<p>59. The CoR underlines that there is a need for specific, tailored research in the field of rural CCSIs and culture-based rural development, including in the context of Horizon Europe and ESPON, such as the RURITAGE Heritage for Rural Regeneration project.</p>	<p>The 2021-2022 Horizon Europe calls of Cluster 2 ‘Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society’ (CL2) supported nine projects with a budget of almost EUR 27 million, focusing on rural development, sustainability, and reducing regional inequalities. Notably, CL2 projects unlocked innovation in cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas, while addressing territorial inequalities and emphasizing sustainability.</p> <p>Looking ahead to 2023-2024, seven additional topics with a budget of EUR 58 million will fund projects concentrating on rural socioeconomic development. These projects aim to foster socioeconomic development through cultural tourism, address rural youth discontent in politics, examine the impact of remote working, and tackle inequalities in green and digital transitions, particularly in rural areas. The emphasis on science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) education aims to involve girls from socially disadvantaged and rural backgrounds.</p> <p>In the next programming period (2025-2027) Cluster 2 will continue supporting research in rural areas. Overall, the upcoming calls build on previous success, demonstrating a commitment to tailored research in culture-based rural development under Horizon Europe.</p>
<p>60. The CoR sees that it is now vitally important to create synergies between sustainable tourism strategies and local and regional cultural and creative industries, so as to support economic growth and job creation and facilitate access to culture, whilst promoting sustainable development;</p>	<p>Under the Transition Pathway for Tourism, the Commission, together with other tourism stakeholders, promotes synergies between the sustainable tourism and culture, emphasizing the potential of the cultural heritage in developing sustainable and innovative tourism products and services, for the tourists and the residents alike.</p>
<p>61. The CoR believes that cultural heritage is an important starting point for local and</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that cultural heritage is an important asset for sustainable tourism</p>

<p>regional development for the whole of the rural population, and creates significant tangible assets thanks to the promotion of sustainable, responsible, high-quality cultural tourism, the development of which is based on the tangible and intangible heritage of rural communities.</p>	<p>development in the Transition Pathway for Tourism.</p> <p>The Commission has been promoting outstanding achievements in smart tourism in the European cities, the competition which, among other categories, includes the category of cultural heritage, capitalising on local cultural potential and its creative assets. While the award promotes the efforts of cities, it can also be a source of inspiration for rural areas.</p>
<p>62. The CoR highlights the value of cultural heritage for economic development in rural areas, mainly through the tourism sector – given that 26% of all EU travellers name culture as a key factor when choosing their holiday destinations – but also as a soft location factor for boosting the attractiveness of jobs.</p>	<p>Eurobarometer 2021³¹ showed that 44% of European citizens say that cultural offerings are among the most important factors when they choose their destination.</p>
<p>63. The CoR points out that the geographically wide dispersal of cultural heritage offers an opportunity – through a more diversified range of tourist attractions – to redirect and better distribute the positive impact of cultural tourism, contributing to the sustainable development of marginal or remote areas;</p>	<p>The Commission promotes sharing of good practice through tourism stakeholders’ pledges to the Transition Pathway³². Stakeholders support cultural tourism and cultural heritage by, for example, developing sustainable mobility for reaching cultural sites, developing sustainable cultural offer, digitisation of cultural heritage, creating digital apps and destination strategies which guide visitors to find more hidden cultural gems in the destinations, promoting education and skills for cultural heritage management.</p>
<p>66. The CoR strongly suggests that the marketing of rural cultural produce, including gastronomic heritage, should be promoted and geographically-branded status protected, giving assurance on quality and traceability to citizens;</p>	<p>The EU has a unitary system of quality schemes for agricultural geographical indications (GI) for wines, spirit drinks and agri-food products. Geographical indications are names that identify products having characteristics or reputation linked to their geographical origin and notably to the natural or human factors in that place of origin. The GI system ensures that consumers</p>

³¹ [Eurobarometer - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/)

³² [Commitments and pledges for the transition of EU tourism \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/)

	<p>receive reliable information and necessary guarantee of the origin, authenticity, quality, reputation and other characteristics. It also contributes to maintaining high food quality and standards and ensuring that the EU’s cultural, gastronomic and local heritage is preserved and certified as authentic across the world.</p> <p>A similar protection is now regulated for craft and industrial products³³. This updated Craft and Industrial Geographical Indication (CIGI) Regulation³⁴ that entered into force in November 2023 provides the opportunity for rural and/or gastronomic heritage that rely on the originality and authenticity of traditional local skills to be protected. Member States, the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), the Commission and stakeholders have two years to prepare for the full application of the new system which is foreseen for December 2025.</p>
<p>67. The CoR supports the use of models of landscape conservation and governance to promote circular territorial ecosystems in historic rural landscapes, such as traditional land and soil management, traditional methods of irrigation, and through synergies between territorial players for the efficient use of water, energy, waste and materials, for example promoting waste-to-energy, organic fertilisers, and the recovery of heating from production processes. Traditional knowledge is part of intangible cultural heritage and a resource in biodiversity conservation efforts in line with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.</p>	<p>While acknowledging the important role of traditional knowledge as a part of intangible cultural heritage, elements as ‘traditional land and soil management, traditional methods of irrigation’ are not specific enough to be promoted as such and risk to include methods which are not sustainable under current conditions. Any promotion of local models of landscape conservation and improved resource management should reflect sustainable solutions most adapted to local conditions and integrate new environmental and climate concerns.</p>

³³ [Protection of European craft and industrial products \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

³⁴ Regulation (EU) 2023/2411 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023 on the protection of geographical indications for craft and industrial products and amending Regulations (EU) 2017/1001 and (EU) 2019/1753; OJ L, 2023/2411, 27.10.2023.

N°11 The Common Fisheries Policy on the ground: towards sustainable and resilient coastal communities in the EU
COM(2023) 100 final
COM(2023) 101 final
COM(2023) 102 final
COM(2023) 103 final
COR-2023-02953 – NAT-VII/035
158th plenary session – November 2023
Rapporteur: Jesús GAMALLO ALLER (ES/EPP)
DG MARE – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>2. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) calls for a balance to be maintained between the three sustainability pillars of the CFP (environmental, economic and social) to safeguard the long-term viability of the sector; recalls that a healthy marine environment provides the basis for thriving fish stocks and a profitable fishers and aquaculture sector; recalls that fisheries and environmental policy must be aligned but that environmental objectives must not prevail over those of the Common Fisheries Policy.</p>	<p>None of those three sustainability pillars can be achieved in isolation, as highlighted in the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation¹ (Article 2). Economic and social sustainability depend on the sustainability of the stocks and the marine environment. This overarching socio-economic objective is key to ensuring generational renewal in fisheries. It is also essential for strong and resilient coastal communities. The Commission is currently working with scientific bodies to develop further social indicators to assist informed fisheries management decisions.</p>
<p>4. given the need for balance between the EU's various policies, the CoR calls for the next Commission to have a separate maritime and fisheries portfolio not linked to the environment, as is currently the case. Sustainable development is a policy that cuts across sectors and should therefore not be organically linked to just one of these policies;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's call; however, it cannot take any stance on the matter and prejudge the decision on portfolios distribution under the next Commission.</p>

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC; OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22–61.

<p>5. The CoR calls for the CFP's general and specific objectives to be laid down in a fully implementable, clearer and more practical way, reflecting the role of the sea, can contribute to this; the strategic role of fishers and aquaculture farmers in the food value chain and in ensuring food security by providing high quality healthy food to consumers must not be overlooked;</p>	<p>The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Regulation already provides the tools for Member States and fishers to design fisheries measures best suited for their regional and local specificities via the regionalisation approach (Article 18 of the CFP Regulation) in the multiannual plans or via delegated acts. In addition to the recognition of the role of fishers/aquaculture farmers as stewards of the sea, as called for by the Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy², appropriate stakeholder involvement is key and this regionalised approach is emphasized in the principles of good governance (Article 3 of the CFP Regulation).</p>
<p>7. The CoR urges the European Commission to strengthen the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, including by increasingly applying multi-species approaches, in order to minimise the negative impacts of fishing activities and other factors such as climate change on marine ecosystems, fish populations and society and to ensure ocean resilience to climate change reiterates that fully documented fisheries and quality data is key to improving fisheries management.</p>	<p>The ecosystem-based approach is part of the principles and objectives of the CFP. The Communication on the functioning of the CFP emphasizes the need for strengthened implementation.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission, including the Joint Research Centre, recalls that it is working on the development of methodologies regarding marine Ecosystem Services Modelling.</p>
<p>8. The CoR considers that technological renewal of production structures, especially fishing vessels, is vital and should be carried out using the available margins of fishing capacity in the EU; moreover, deems it necessary to review the eligibility of new climate-friendly coastal fishing vessels (<24 m, <221 kW), without incentivising the development of additional fishing capacity so that support is in line with the provisions adopted under the CFP, with the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and with the UN Sustainable Development Goals; calls for</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of the renewal of the fishing vessels within the capacity ceilings and under the condition that any new fishing capacity entering the fleet is compensated by the same amount of capacity withdrawn in line with the Common Fisheries Policy, and that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements and the United Nations sustainable Development Goals are fully part of this framework.</p> <p>Preserving the marine habitats through sustainable fisheries is more important than ever, due to the economic, social and environmental impact of</p>

² COM(2021) 240 final.

<p>fishing capacity to be redefined to exclude the tonnage related to safety and health on board from the calculation;</p> <p>14. The CoR points out that, as a result of climate change, the behaviour and distribution of many species are changing, making it necessary to readjust the allocation of quotas to match fishing opportunities; calls on the Commission to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the concept of relative stability;</p>	<p>climate change.</p> <p>The CFP includes rules for managing fisheries to limit the impact of fisheries on the environment, which has a positive effect in terms of climate mitigation. It contains provisions towards adaptation, providing management tools to climate-proof fisheries management and improve ecosystem resilience, in particular by reducing fishing pressure and governing EU fleets. It provides tools to assist adaptation in response to shifts in stock distribution and adverse climate impacts through science-based management strategies, flexible quota management and targeted structural support.</p> <p>The Commission acknowledges the need to carefully monitor future developments and to take them into account in any future policy changes. New technologies, innovation and research are key for adaptation and mitigation towards climate change.</p>
<p>13. The CoR calls for steps to make the marine ecosystem management system based on total allowable catches (TAC) more effective, calls on the Commission and the Council to consider introducing multiannual ceilings and keeping them to an absolute minimum;</p>	<p>A multiannual approach to the system of setting total allowable catches (TAC) can be useful for stocks that have shown relatively stable trends because it would give more stability in managing stocks and would be more efficient when organising the Council decision making process. This approach is already implemented for deep-sea stocks (set for two years) and for the very first time, the December Council of 2023 also set the same approach extending the TACs for eight stocks for 2025 and for two, for 2026³. The Commission is exploring already the concept of setting multiannual total allowable catches with the scientific bodies. But there are still a number of methodological issues that need to be solved before a fully reliable multiannual advice can be provided.</p>

³ Council Regulation (EU) 2024/257 of 10 January 2024, fixing for 2024, 2025 and 2026 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters, and amending Regulation (EU) 2023/194; OJ L, 2024/257, 11.01.2024.

20. The CoR underlines the positive cooperation in the management of maritime and fisheries activity between regional authorities and organisations with a long-standing tradition such as fishers' associations, and therefore calls for them to be recognised as having the same status as producer organisations;

The Commission recognises that other collective bodies of producers than Producer Organisations (POs), which are recognised by their Member States within the meaning of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulation⁴, such as fishers' associations, play an important role in the collective management of their members' activities and in representing their interest at national level.

However, the CMO Regulation provides that POs must implement a series of tasks and fulfil mandatory objectives. These tasks and objectives are instrumental for the implementation of the CFP objectives.

The structure, modes of operation and specific market measures of the POs are designed to enable them to deliver on these tasks and objectives. Privileged access to EU funding, such as the support to their Production and Marketing Plans, is necessary to offset (part) of the expenditures encountered to meet the objectives and fulfil the obligations provided by the CMO Regulation.

Having common rules at EU level ensures a level-playing field between POs. For these reasons, only the professional organisations recognised as POs by their Member States should be entitled to implement the specific market measures and benefit from the specific financial support provided by the related Regulations. It is of course at the full discretion of any producers' collective body, such as a fishers' association, to adapt its functioning and operations with a view to applying for recognition as PO by its national competent authorities.

The Commission has always expressed its readiness to support concerned parties in that

⁴ Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 922/72, (EEC) No 234/79, (EC) No 1037/2001 and (EC) No 1234/2007; OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 671–854.

	process.
<p>36. The CoR calls for a renewed inter-regional commitment to establishing greener fleets, especially by promoting the use of alternative marine propulsion systems;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of promoting the use of alternative marine propulsion systems in fisheries and aquaculture among regions and support cooperation at regional, national and sector level to enable the establishment of a greener fleet. To improve involvement, willingness, coordination, and collaboration between stakeholders, including national and regional public authorities, in June 2023, the Commission launched the Energy Transition Partnership⁵. The partnership is a platform to contribute to the development of a roadmap for the energy transition in the sector. Some regions are already participating as members of the partnership and the Commission⁶ encourages all regions to participate actively in the energy transition through, amongst other activities, collaboration strategies or living labs. The Commission is also calling upon Member States to implement actions that could help energy transition through the Member States national European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) programmes. Moreover, the Commission supports regional engagement and cooperation through the creation of regional ‘lighthouse’ projects under the Mission Oceans and Waters⁷.</p> <p>Within Horizon Europe, the Commission also launched the Zero-Emission Waterborne Transport (ZEWT) Partnership⁸ in 2021. With an overall EU funding of EUR 530 million from the public side matched by EUR 3.3 billion from the private side during the period 2021-2027, this public-private partnership aims at demonstrating zero-emission solutions for all main ship types and services</p>

⁵ [ETIP SNET - BRIDGE - Clean Energy Transition Partnership: launch of the first call \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/press-room/en/infographic-100-days-of-action-plan-2023).

⁶ as mentioned in the COM(2023) 100 – Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector.

⁷ [Restore our Ocean and Waters - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/press-room/en/infographic-100-days-of-action-plan-2023).

⁸ [ec_rtd_bmr-2022-zero-emission-water-transport-fiche.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.rtd.bmr-2022-zero-emission-water-transport-fiche.pdf).

	<p>before 2030, which will enable zero-emission waterborne transport before 2050. A dedicated State Representative Group has been established within the governance of the ZEWT partnership with the objective to stimulate synergies between EU and national/regional relevant initiative in research and innovation (R&I) in waterborne.</p>
<p>38. The CoR welcomes the Commission's plan to launch a new multi-stakeholder energy transition partnership, with a view to joining forces to achieve climate neutrality by 2050;</p>	<p>Following the Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector⁹, the Commission launched the Energy transition Partnership in EU fisheries and aquaculture in June 2023. The Partnership is organising several workshops on topics identified as enablers in the Communication. A first workshop on finance of the Energy transition has been organised for all the members of the Partnership on 28 November 2023 and gathered around 80 stakeholders, including fishers and aquaculture industry, non-profit organisations (NGOs), regions, national administrations, amongst others. The results of this discussion on barriers and possible solutions will be used as input for the roadmap that the Commission needs to deliver by the end of 2024.</p>
<p>39. The CoR calls for more EU and Member States support for the renewal of the fisheries sector, its decarbonisation and improved safety standards, through increased funding opportunities and awareness-raising in the sector, in line with existing EMFAF and state aid rules;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises that the renewal of the fishing fleets towards decarbonisation must perform well in other essential areas, including improving safety standards. The Commission considers Member States' national programmes under the EMFAF fit for purpose to promote decarbonisation of relevant sectors. Although recognising that the EMFAF plays an important role in supporting the testing, dissemination, and adoption of new technologies for the energy transition, the Commission also recognises that EMFAF is not intended to fully finance the energy transition in the sector.</p> <p>To support the necessary investments in the fisheries sector, the Commission promotes the use</p>

⁹ COM(2023) 100 final.

	<p>of a much broader range of other, larger available EU funds and financing tools, including the regional funds and the European Investment Bank. As a first step, in November 2023, the Commission has published a guide¹⁰ on the available funding opportunities for the energy transition in the sector. Furthermore, the financing of the transition and the better understanding of the financial barriers for the energy transition are being tackled and developed together with the stakeholders under the Energy Transition Partnership. Finally, the Commission recognises that awareness-raising in the sector is key and will keep on working with initiatives such as BlueInvest¹¹ and other stakeholders to raise awareness on financing the energy transition. To this end, a BlueInvest webinar focusing on this topic was organised by the end of January 2024.</p>
<p>40. The CoR welcomes the Commission's plan to compile a study on the technologies available for the energy transition in the fisheries and aquaculture sector and its plan to design the "ship of the future";</p>	<p>As announced in the Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector, a study on the 'Techno-economic analysis for the energy transition of the fisheries and aquaculture sector' was published in February 2024. This study maps and provides information about innovative low-carbon technologies and energy efficiency solutions in fisheries and aquaculture.</p>
<p>41. The CoR supports the development of workers' skills to prepare them for the energy transition;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of a trained and skilled workforce, ready for the energy transition, to accelerate this transition. In this sense, the Commission will continue to encourage Member States and regions to further integrate knowledge and skills on the technologies into vocational training and education programmes in line with the 2020 Council Recommendation on vocational education and training¹², and will continue to explore the possibility of promoting</p>

¹⁰ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/49590638-8e76-11ee-8aa6-01aa75ed71a1>

¹¹ [BlueInvest - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://blueinvest.ec.europa.eu/).

¹² [celex_32020h120201_en_txt.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/celex/32020h120201/en/txt/pdf).

	<p>grants and virtual academy programs covering energy transition related topics. The EMFAF programmes in the Member States are fit for the purpose of promoting workers' skills while additional possibilities may be explored under other European structural and investment funds programmes.</p> <p>Under the Pact for Skills¹³ the Partnership for offshore renewable energy (ORE), represented by the industry, trade union, education, training and research organisations, has committed to support the qualification process for the new jobs in the sector (estimated between 20,000 and 54,000 new workers in the next five years) and contribute to improved upskilling opportunities for the current ORE workforce.</p>
<p>42. The CoR understands the need to phase out public support for fossil fuels and redirect these funds towards the decarbonisation of fleets, but warns of the difficulty of putting it into practice if there is no harmonised approach among Member States. It would also be desirable, in the context of the WTO, to promote harmonisation of taxation across all countries producing fishery products in order to avoid distortions of competition; calls on the EU and its Member States to be a forerunner on this topic;</p>	<p>Member States are currently discussing in the Council the revision of the Energy Taxation Directive. The Commission's proposal includes phasing out the current tax exemptions¹⁴.</p>
<p>45. The CoR calls for more precise common marketing standards for fishery products sold in the EU so as to ensure a transparent internal market that supplies high-quality products;</p>	<p>It is a priority for the Commission to ensure transparency on the quality of seafood products in order to ensure fair competition on the EU market. An evaluation of the marketing standards conducted in 2019 demonstrated that the current standards contribute to these objectives for quality aspects, but pointed to shortcomings in terms of ensuring transparency on sustainability aspects. The Commission agrees that standardised information for consumers on sustainability</p>

¹³ [Renewables \(europa.eu\)](https://renewables.europa.eu).

¹⁴ COM(2021) 563 final.

	<p>aspects could be useful and is currently considering how this could be achieved most efficiently.</p>
<p>49. The CoR calls for greater consumer awareness by creating a European label to ensure the sustainability of seafood products, along the lines of the CE marking for products such as toys, while respecting certain minimum criteria. In any case, the current FAP labels should comply with the same rules regardless of their origin. Strengthening the European Market Observatory for fisheries and aquaculture (EUMOFA) could be a key element in this regard;</p>	<p>As announced in the Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system¹⁵, the Commission is reflecting on a sustainability labelling framework. The aim of this framework would be to empower consumers to make sustainable, including healthy, food choices and stimulate consumer demand for sustainable foods, as well as to incentivise food business operators to improve progressively the sustainability of their food products. This framework would be established in synergy with the other relevant initiatives like the proposal by the Commission for a Directive on substantiation and communication of explicit environmental claims¹⁶. Preparatory work on the framework is ongoing.</p> <p>As regards fishery products, useful sustainability-related consumer information could, for example, be the sustainability of the stock. The Commission with the help of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STEFCEP) finalised a method to score the stock sustainability of a given EU or imported product and will consider how this could be reflected in policy instruments.</p> <p>The possibility to create an EU ecolabel has been assessed by the Commission in May 2016. Co-legislators eventually decided that it would not be a relevant tool. Furthermore, the above-mentioned recent proposal on explicit environmental claims introduces harmonised criteria for claims and labelling schemes.</p> <p>The European Market Observatory for fisheries and aquaculture products (EUMOFA) will be thoroughly revamped in 2024 in order to facilitate</p>

¹⁵ COM(2020)381 final (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0381>).

¹⁶ COM(2023) 166 final (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52023PC0166>).

access to analyses and data. In parallel, the Observatory continues its efforts to enlarge its geographical scope and data coverage.

In order to better understand trends on EU consumption of fishery and aquaculture products to adapt strategies to the changing needs of consumers and drive sustainable consumption, a Eurobarometer survey will be conducted in 2024 on EU consumers' habits regarding fishery and aquaculture products.

N°12 EU Cyber Solidarity Act and Digital resilience
Optional
COM(2023) 209 final
COR-2023-02191-00-01 – ECON-VII/034
158th plenary session – November 2023
Rapporteur: Pehr GRANFALK (SE/EPP)
DG CNECT – Commissioner BRETON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>Amendments 2, 3, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13 – include regional and local administration in the scope of the proposal.</p> <p>Policy recommendations 2. In order to avoid a situation where local authorities responsible for essential operations in some Member States fall outside the scope of the Cyber Solidarity Act, it should be made clear in the legal text that such authorities are considered to be included whether or not they are covered by NIS 2.</p> <p>4. The Committee of the Regions calls for greater clarity on how the support will be provided to the regions, not least in order to raise cybersecurity levels in small municipalities.</p> <p>8. The CoR finds it regrettable, however, that despite increasing cyber-attacks, local and regional authorities are not sufficiently covered by the current proposal.</p> <p>19. The CoR sees a risk that the Regulation will create more work, stretching already tight resources.</p>	<p>Concerning the critical role and importance of the local administrations, the Commission fully echoes the Committee’s position. The proposed actions of the Cyber Solidarity Act and in particular actions under the Cybersecurity Emergency Mechanism cover entities in scope of Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union¹. Article 2(2)(f) of this Directive provides that public administration entities at the regional level are subject to the Directive. Annex I lists public administration entities at regional level in a sector of high criticality. On the other hand, Article 2(5) of the Directive provides that Member States may take measures that this Directive applies to the public administration entities at the local level. Therefore, the participation of local authorities in the proposed actions of the Cyber Solidarity Act, would depend on whether Member States decide to include those in the transposition of the Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union into national law.</p> <p>On the Committee’s concern that the proposed Regulation would create more work for municipalities, it should be noted that the proposed Regulation is focusing on the conditions for funding from the Digital Europe Programme to</p>

¹ Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 and Directive (EU) 2018/1972, and repealing Directive (EU) 2016/1148 (NIS 2 Directive); OJ L 333, 27.12.2022, p. 80–152.

	<p>support Member States in the area of threat detection and preparedness and response to cybersecurity incidents. The proposed Regulation does not impose additional security measures or obligations.</p>
<p>Amendment 7 – national SOCs shall also collect information at subnational level.</p> <p>Policy recommendations 5. In order obtain a comprehensive picture of the current state of cybersecurity in the EU, information, risk scenarios, threats and incidents also need to be aggregated from local and national system providers.</p> <p>10. Information sharing should not be limited to large-scale incidents, but also include potential risks.</p>	<p>The proposal does not preclude Member States’ decision on the cooperation formats at the national level, including the interaction between various entities performing detection activities established in the concerned Member State with the National Cyber Hub.</p> <p>Member States that are part of a Hosting Consortium shall conclude a written consortium agreement which sets out their internal arrangements, including the details regarding the type of data and the commitment to share significant amounts of data. The Cross-border Cyber Hubs may exchange information between them based on cooperation agreements, which would also develop on the type of data to be shared.</p>
<p>Policy recommendations 6. The new network of national and cross-border SOCs is liable to overlap with the tasks assigned to the computer security incident response teams (CSIRTs) network.</p> <p>16. As the proposal stands, a new organisation and structure will be put in place for sharing information, but the CoR would highlight the importance of using and refining existing information channels such as CyCLONe and CSIRT.</p>	<p>On the Committee’s point on creating a new organisation and structure for sharing information, it should be noted that the proposed Cyber Solidarity Act does not change the current governance of the cybersecurity ecosystem, but rather fits into and strengthens the current one. When designating their National Cyber Hub, Member States are free to designate an existing body, such as their national computer security incident response teams (CSIRTs) or create a new entity. The aim of the proposal is to define the roles and tasks required to achieve the objectives of this action, rather than codifying new structures. The pan-European network of Cyber Hubs would serve to increase detection of cybersecurity threats and incidents by leveraging state-of-the-art technology for advanced data collection and providing real-time situational awareness. This network would more effectively support prevention, assessment and response to cyber threats and incidents.</p>

	<p>Therefore, the role of the European Cybersecurity Alert System is to build and enhance common detection and situational awareness capabilities in the Union, which goes beyond the mandate of the security incident response teams (CSIRTs). It is important to mention that our partner countries also invest in similar threat detection capabilities.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation 9. Within the framework of the European Cyber Shield, indicators should be developed to determine how development and maturity are increasing in connection with the introduction of the Regulation.</p>	<p>The Annex II to the Regulation establishing the Digital Europe Programme²) includes an indicator of performance on the number of cybersecurity infrastructure, or tools, or both jointly procured, including in the context of the European Cybersecurity Alert System'. This measurement will indicate the speed and the degree of cybersecurity development with implementing the proposed actions.</p>
<p>Policy recommendations 12. The Committee considers that the selection criteria for the EU Cybersecurity Reserve only favours a few very large operators that can meet the requirements imposed on providers of security services.</p> <p>14. When establishing a Cybersecurity Reserve, it is also important to ensure that it does not impede competition or exclude providers that only operate in parts of the EU.</p>	<p>The EU Cybersecurity Reserve will consist of services from a selected pool of trusted private companies providing managed security services, such as incident analysis or incident response coordination. The services included in the EU Cybersecurity Reserve, taken as a whole, are such that the Reserve may be deployed in all Member States. The service providers do not necessarily need to be able to provide services in all Member States. Therefore, this provision does not limit the participation of service providers operating in one or two Member States or a region.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation 20. The CoR wonders why review reports cannot be shared within the network of national and cross-border SOCs.</p>	<p>As proposed in the Cyber Solidarity Act, the European Cybersecurity Alert System would have the role in supporting Member States in anticipating and protecting against cyber threats.</p> <p>On the other hand, the reports prepared by European Union Agency for Cybersecurity under the Cybersecurity Incident Review Mechanism have the primary role of providing lessons learned from incidents, the incident handling procedures</p>

² Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme and repealing Decision (EU) 2015/2240; OJ L 166, 11.5.2021, p. 1–34.

	<p>and prevention recommendations. Therefore, the report will be shared with entities and institutions that have an operational and legislative role in cybersecurity and in particular cybersecurity incident response. The Cyber Hubs have a different role as proposed under this Regulation, namely threat detection and sharing relevant information with relevant stakeholders.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation 21. The CoR would like to see a much clearer description of how the funds are intended to be spent and what proportion is targeted directly at regions and municipalities.</p>	<p>On the Committee’s request for clearer description of how the funds are intended to be spent and what proportion is targeted directly at regions and municipalities, the legislative financial statement accompanying the proposal includes an overview of the budget proposed to support the implementation of the proposed actions. More precisely, the actions of the Cyber Solidarity Act are proposed to be funded from the Digital Europe Programme and its Specific Objective 3 – Cybersecurity and Trust. The total budget includes an increase of EUR 87 million that this Regulation proposes to re-allocate from other Specific Objectives of the Digital Europe Programme.</p> <p>From the additional EUR 87 million, EUR 61 million will be transferred to the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre budget, bringing its total budget to EUR 353 million for 2025-2027. This additional funding will serve to further support relevant actions related to the European Cybersecurity Alert System (Cyber Hubs), and to the Cybersecurity Emergency Mechanism (preparedness actions and mutual assistance). The exact amounts dedicated to particular actions will be determined in the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre Work Programme by the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre in accordance with the Regulation establishing the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres³. It is a task of the</p>

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/887 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination

	<p>European Cybersecurity Competence Centre to establish and implement the annual work programme for the cybersecurity parts of the Digital Europe Programme and determine the amounts dedicated to particular actions.</p> <p>An addition of EUR 26 million transferred from the other Digital Europe Programme Specific Objectives will support the establishment of the EU Cybersecurity Reserve. This will reinforce the budget already available for this purpose. Similarly, here, the amounts dedicated to the EU Cybersecurity Reserve will be specified in the Digital Europe Programme Work Programme, in accordance with the Digital Europe Programme Regulation. In preparation of the work programmes, the Commission is assisted by the Digital Europe Programme Coordination Committee gathering Member States' representatives.</p> <p>Concerning the Committee's inquiry on the proportion targeted directly at regions and municipalities, the exact budget will be determined in the Digital Europe Programme Work Programme, for which the majority of the actions proposed by the regulation, will be determined by the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre in accordance with the Regulation establishing the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres. The allocation of budget will also depend on whether Member States decide to include local administrations in the transposition of the Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union into national law.</p>
<p>Amendment 10 – The Commission to draw up an annual report on how the Mechanism is working and any need for additional cooperation or training requirements.</p>	<p>In the case of the EU Cybersecurity Reserve, the Cyber Solidarity Act provides that the contracting authority should report to the Directive on measures for a high common level of</p>

	<p>cybersecurity across the Union Cooperation Group, on a regular basis and at least twice per year, about the use and the results of the support. On the overall Act, the Commission should submit after two years from the date of application of the Regulation, and at least every four years thereafter, an evaluation of the functioning of the measures laid down in that Regulation. It will submit a report to the European Parliament and to the Council. This report will also include details on the use and effectiveness of actions under the Cybersecurity Emergency Mechanism.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation 6. The Committee therefore considers it important for the Regulation to aim to reduce the differences between countries' degree of maturity regarding protection and the security measures taken and to ensure that all players involved have relatively equal abilities and ambitions.</p>	<p>On Committee's request to reduce differences between countries' degree of maturity, it should be highlighted that the Cyber Solidarity Act is not a proposal that entails harmonisation or new regulatory obligations but about directing EU funding for cybersecurity towards high-impact actions and reinforcing the collective ability to defend against cyber threats which are becoming more acute.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation 17. The CoR welcomes the Commission's establishment of a cybersecurity skills academy and calls for a clear strategy to specifically strengthen smaller municipalities and regions with fewer resources, given that there is a skills shortage in the EU.</p>	<p>In the communication on a Cybersecurity Skills Academy⁴, the Commission encourages Member States to mobilise EU funds they directly manage to support cybersecurity skills and jobs. The cohesion policy funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) carry important potential for synergies in this regard. The scope of actions under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and InvestEU include further key complementarities in delivering the objectives of the Academy. Actions undertaken by the Academy or financed by other EU programmes, such as the Digital Europe Programme, will entail the development of training programmes or information on cybersecurity trainings and certifications, which can also benefit small and medium enterprises and the public sector, including</p>

⁴ COM(2023) 207 final.

	municipalities and regions.
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N°13 2022 Annual Report on Competition Policy
COM(2023) 184 final
COR-2023-02190 – ECON-VII/033
158th Plenary Session – November 2023
Rapporteur: Antonio MAZZEO (IT/PES)
DG COMP – Executive Vice-President VESTAGER

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>On the Temporary Crisis Framework and the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework:</p> <p>20. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) highlights the fact that the temporary frameworks have not just sustained Europe's productive fabric, but have also been used by the Member States to deal with domestic inequalities between regions. According to several studies, while regional disparities have decreased overall across the EU, they have however increased within certain Member States, particularly those with low growth such as Mediterranean regions, and those with a low per capita income, for example Eastern European regions.</p> <p>21. The CoR stresses, however, that the implementation of the two temporary frameworks has resulted in an overall relaxation of the normal State aid rules, competition distortions in the single market and negative effects on trade between states. This is due to an imbalanced geographical distribution of State aid in the EU, as mentioned in the report on competition policy</p>	<p>The Commission sends regular surveys to Member States to assess the impact of the Temporary Frameworks on competition in the internal Market. The Commission refers to the Competition State Aid Brief (2022¹ and 2023² editions). For the now expired COVID-19 Temporary Framework, the Commission's analysis shows that State aid measures implemented by Member States are proportionate to the economic damage suffered during the crisis in terms of GDP loss. This is reassuring as this finding addresses concerns about aid approved under the COVID-19 Temporary Framework having unduly distorted competition in the internal Market.</p> <p>The Commission notes the concerns raised that the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework (TCTF) may possibly impact the level playing field in the internal Market because Member States have diverging financial capacity to subsidise companies negatively affected by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. However, the Commission only approves measures when they are considered necessary, appropriate, and proportionate, after careful analysis.</p> <p>Different financial capacities of Member States should be tackled in other ways than through State</p>

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Competition, Mathieu Collin, A., Cannas, G., Castele, K. et al., *The use of COVID-19 related state aid measures by EU Member States – First semester 2021 update*, European Commission, 2022 ([The use of COVID-19 related state aid measures by EU Member States - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/competition/publications/state-aid/state-aid-measures-by-eu-member-states-2022)).

² European Commission, Directorate-General for Competition, Cannas, G., Ferraro, S., Castele, K., *The use of crisis state aid measures in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine*, European Commission, 2023 ([The use of crisis state aid measures in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/competition/publications/state-aid/state-aid-measures-in-response-to-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-2023)).

<p>[...]. This report indicates that, in 2022, 53% of the approved aid had been notified by Germany, 24% by France and the remaining 23% by the other 25 Member States; underlines that this imbalanced possibility to give State aid disrupts level playing field.</p> <p>22. [...] the CoR points out that governments with greater financial capacity can provide more support to companies based in their territory than Member States with less capacity, meaning that there is not a level playing field, which undoubtedly leads to a disadvantage in the single market for companies in these Member States.</p> <p>23. The CoR alerts the Commission to the fact that prolonging the relaxation of the competition rules could therefore continue to widen the disparity between Europe's regions, leaving behind those that, because of natural or demographic characteristics, or because they are rural areas or areas experiencing industrial transition, risk missing out on public support, particularly during crises. [...]</p>	<p>aid control. In this regard, the Commission has proposed the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform ('STEP')³. The STEP will allow directing existing funding towards technology fields that are crucial for Europe's leadership, thus contributing to a level playing field for investments throughout the internal Market.</p>
<p>On reviewing the competition rules:</p> <p>11. [...] the CoR calls on the Commission to apply the principles of better regulation in the field of competition policy and involve the CoR at an early stage of the review of competition rules so as to better assess their territorial impact. [...].</p>	<p>All revisions of the competition rules are done according to the Better Regulation rules, after carefully considering relevant aspects, including the regional dimension and the effects on small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).</p>
<p>On the Foreign Subsidies Regulation:</p> <p>15. The CoR welcomes in that respect the implementation of the [Foreign Subsidies] Regulation which fosters the protection of European companies in the internal market, and, at the same time, it invites the</p>	<p>The Foreign Subsidies Regulation⁴ aims to ensure a level playing field for all companies active in the internal market, by empowering the Commission to take action against subsidies from third countries that distort competition on the internal market.</p> <p>The Foreign Subsidies Regulation, however, does</p>

³ [Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu).

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2022/2560 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on foreign subsidies distorting the internal market; OJ L 330, 23.12.2022, p. 1–45.

<p>Commission to enhance protection for European undertakings competing against companies based in third countries, through the use of EU competition policies.</p>	<p>not address subsidisation that is covered by the World Trade Organisation Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM)⁵, and no action shall be taken under the Foreign Subsidies Regulation that would be contrary to the Union's obligations under the ASCM. In the World Trade Organisation, as well as in bilateral relations, the EU engages in cooperation and policy dialogue on subsidy issues.</p>
<p>On Important Projects of Common European Interest:</p> <p>27. The CoR recommends however that the Commission strengthen both the initiative and the coordination of these projects, from the planning to the implementation phase, and build the engagement with local and regional players, given that these transnational industrial projects also need to be anchored regionally to ensure a more effective implementation and less bureaucracy.</p>	<p>Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI) can play an important role contributing to the achievement of EU objectives, for example the green and digital transitions.</p> <p>IPCEI are, by nature, large, complex projects requiring extensive coordination at the design and implementation phases and involving substantial amounts of aid. The Commission assesses them as a matter of utmost priority and has assigned additional resources to accomplish this task. However, the speed of the assessment highly depends on the quality of the information it receives.</p> <p>In October 2023, following the request of several Member States, the Joint European Forum for Important Projects of Common European Interest (JEF-IPCEI) was established. The JEF-IPCEI is an initiative to gather the Commission and Member States representatives to increase the effectiveness of the IPCEI procedure by improving its speed, coordination and monitoring processes, as well as the design and governance of IPCEI. Moreover, the forum has set up a common screening scheme which will make it easier to identify areas of strategic interest for potential future IPCEI. Thus, the JEF-IPCEI covers the entire lifecycle of the IPCEI process.</p> <p>The IPCEI rules allow for a more flexible approach for SMEs to encourage their participation. For example, for SMEs, the Commission may consider that aid is justified even in the absence of important</p>

⁵ [24-scm.wpf \(wto.org\)](https://www.wto.org/).

	<p>co-financing by the beneficiary and, in principle, no claw-back for higher profitability applies to SME projects. The average SME participation rate in IPCEI so far has reached 17%. Additionally, up to now, approximately 70% of the major socio-economic regions (NUTS 1) in Europe are represented in IPCEIs.</p> <p>The 2021 IPCEI Communication⁶ mentions as a positive indicator the involvement of undertakings of different sizes and, in particular, cooperation between large enterprises and SMEs, including start-ups, in different Member States and supports the development of more disadvantaged regions.</p> <p>In March 2023, the Commission introduced an important amendment to the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)⁷ which simplifies the assessment framework by facilitating smaller IPCEI-related projects. Innovative IPCEI-related projects can receive aid up to EUR 50 million without requiring notification to and approval by the Commission. At the same time, these projects are still recognised as part of the ecosystem created by the IPCEI. This amendment was explicitly designed to encourage the participation of SMEs in IPCEIs.</p> <p>The Commission has also published a Code of Good Practices and a standardised IPCEI Project Portfolio Template⁸ to assist Member States when designing IPCEI. Furthermore, the Commission will publish a new standardised funding gap template to further support Member States and companies in the pre-notification phase.</p>
<p>On de minimis State aid:</p> <p>32. The CoR suggests raising the <i>de minimis</i> aid threshold in both the general de minimis Regulation and the de minimis Regulation for</p>	<p>In December 2023, the Commission adopted the new General de minimis Regulation⁹ after the previous de minimis regulation expired on 31 December 2023. The Regulation exempts small amounts from</p>

⁶ C(2021) 8481; OJ C 528, 30.12.2021, p. 10–18 final ([EUR-Lex - 52021XC1230\(02\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁷ Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty; OJ L 187, 26.6.2014, p. 1–78.

⁸ [Practical information - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁹ Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid; OJ L 352, 24.12.2013, p. 1–8.

<p>services of general economic interest (SGEIs), which expires at the end of 2023, to make it proportionate to the inflation rates of the last 10 years in Europe and, above all, to an altered economic context resulting from macroeconomic development, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in building and energy costs due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, thereby going beyond adjustment based solely on inflation.</p>	<p>the scope of EU State aid control because they are deemed not to have any effect on trade between Member States and not to distort or threaten to distort competition. The Regulation significantly reduces the administrative burden for companies – in particular SMEs – and Member States because no prior notification to the Commission is needed for measures falling under its scope.</p> <p>The main changes are an increased ceiling of EUR 300 000 over three years to adjust to inflation and the introduction of a mandatory <i>de minimis</i> register at national or EU level to increase transparency, thereby it will relieve companies from the obligation to keep record of the <i>de minimis</i> aid they received.</p> <p>In December 2023, the Commission adopted a Regulation on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to <i>de minimis</i> aid granted to undertakings providing services of general economic interest (SGEI)¹⁰. This Regulation entered into force on 1 January 2024¹¹. The Commission decided to increase the SGEI <i>de minimis</i> aid threshold to EUR 750 000 per SGEI provider over a three-year period to adjust to inflation, and to make mandatory a <i>de minimis</i> register at national or EU level to increase transparency, thereby relieving companies from the obligation to keep record of the <i>de minimis</i> aid they received.</p>
<p>On the “do no harm to cohesion” principle and the use of cohesion funds:</p> <p>9. The CoR calls therefore for the "do no harm to cohesion" principle to apply to all EU policies and initiatives, including the implementation of internal market-related policies, in particular those regarding the</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee’s position on the 'do no harm to cohesion' principle. The Commission takes cohesion policy principles fully into account when amending existing, or adopting new, compatibility rules, for example the Regional Aid Guidelines and the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework.</p>

¹⁰ Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2832 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to *de minimis* aid granted to undertakings providing services of general economic interest; OJ L, 2023/2832, 15.12.2023.

¹¹ The regulation replaces Regulation (EC) No 360/2012 which expired on 31 December 2023.

<p>State aid rules.</p> <p>36. The CoR recommends that the Commission first uses alternative financing mechanisms to reallocate the funds already earmarked for cohesion, given the importance of economic, territorial and social cohesion in maintaining the balance of the single market and achieving a uniform economy and level of welfare in all European regions, and then confirm that there is no centralisation of resources that could undermine the achievement of cohesion objectives.</p>	
<p>On new developments in competition and industrial policy</p> <p>35. The CoR points out that, despite its intention to boost the competitiveness of European companies in international markets, STEP risks failing to provide adequate support for the numerous local and regional consequences of the twin green and digital transitions, and also risks relying, to a large extent, on funds already earmarked or on the budgets of the individual Member States;</p>	<p>STEP, while less ambitious than initially envisaged, could still mobilise up to EUR 50bn of investments in strategic areas. While the STEP relies on the reprogramming of, and creating synergies between, existing programmes for supporting strategic investments, it is also an important testing ground for the future Multiannual Financial Framework.. STEP will offer the possibility, but not the requirement, to local authorities to contribute to strategic investments, and will respect cohesion principles in the process.</p>