

**FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
**TO THE OPINIONS OF THE**  
**EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**  
**PLENARY SESSION OF MARCH 2023**  
**106<sup>th</sup> REPORT**

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
<b>DG CNECT</b>		
1.	<a href="#">European Media Freedom Act</a> Rapporteur: <b>Mark SPEICH</b> (DE/EPP)	Own-initiative COM(2022) 457 final COR-2022-05388-00-00-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/020
<b>DG NEAR</b>		
2.	<a href="#">The Future of the Eastern Partnership from a local and regional perspective</a> Rapporteur: <b>Alin-Adrian NICA</b> (RO/EPP)	Council presidency referral COR-2022-05113-00-00-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/019
<b>DG EMPL</b>		
3.	<a href="#">Amending the Directive on Asbestos</a> Rapporteur general: <b>Hanna ZDANOWSKA</b> (PL/EPP)	Mandatory COM(2022) 489 final COR-2022-05655-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/034
<b>DG SANTE</b>		
4.	<a href="#">Sustainable use of pesticides</a> Rapporteur: <b>Heinz-Joachim HÖFER</b> (DE/PES)	Mandatory COM(2022) 305 final COR-2022-04989-00-01-AC-TRA NAT-VII/031
<b>DG AGRI</b>		
5.	<a href="#">Targets and tools for a Smart Rural Europe</a> Rapporteur: <b>Radim SRŠEŇ</b> (CZ/EPP)	Own-initiative COR-2022-04320-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/030
<b>DG GROW</b>		
6.	<a href="#">Short-term accommodation rental services: balancing the needs of local communities, entrepreneurs and travellers</a> Rapporteur <b>Roberto CIAMBETTI</b> (IT/ECR)	Council presidency referral COM(2022) 571 final COR-2022-04144-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/029

\*\*\*OPINION ADOPTED DURING PREVIOUS PLENARY SESSION\*\*\*

**DG ENV**

<p><b>7.</b> Opinion adopted during the plenary session of February 2023</p>	<p><a href="#"><u>EU Nature Restoration Law</u></a> Rapporteur: <b>Roby BIWER</b> (LU/PES)</p>	<p>Mandatory COM(2022) 304 final COR-2022-04206-00-01-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/030</p>
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<b>N°1 European Media Freedom Act</b> <b>Own-initiative</b> <b>COM(2022) 457 final</b> <b>COR-2022-05388 – CIVEX-VII/020</b> <b>154<sup>th</sup> plenary session – March 2023</b> <b>Rapporteur: Mark SPEICH (DE/EPP)</b> <b>DG CNECT – Commissioner BRETON</b>	
<b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b>	<b>European Commission position</b>
The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.	

<p><b>N°2 The Future of the Eastern Partnership from a local and regional perspective</b>  <b>Council presidency referral</b>  <b>COR-2022-05113 – CIVEX-VII/019</b>  <b>154<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – March 2023</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Alin-Adrian NICA (RO/EPP)</b>  <b>DG NEAR – Commissioner VÁRHELYI</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>10. The European Committee of Regions (CoR) stresses, nevertheless, that a redefinition of the Eastern Partnership's policy objectives and its multilateral architecture is needed to keep the Partnership prospering.</p> <p>11. The CoR recognises that, after more than a decade of EaP cooperation, the country-specific priorities among the Eastern partner countries are now diverging due to their different development needs, national priorities, and integrational aspirations, but also due to Russia's policy of aggression, destabilising tactics and disinformation. The CoR therefore awaits eagerly the Commission's proposal to assess the future of the Eastern Partnership.</p>	<p>The Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have been discussing with Member States, partners and other stakeholders the implementation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), especially against the background of the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine as well as the EU accession perspective of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. At the EaP Foreign Ministers meeting on 12 December 2022, partners and Member States agreed on the continued relevance of the EaP<sup>1</sup> and its Recovery, Resilience, and Reform agenda<sup>2</sup> albeit in a streamlined, focused, strategic form.</p>
<p>14. The CoR calls for both the Commission and the partner governments to involve regional and local authorities in the setting of cooperation priorities with territorial impact (e.g. on energy efficiency, environment and climate adaptation, transport connectivity, decentralisation and public administration reform, support for civil society), and to engage them in the relevant EaP platforms and panels, which should be enlarged to representatives of CORLEAP.</p>	<p>The Commission will continue to consult with local authorities during the different stages of the programming process while taking into account the new and changing reality in the region.</p> <p>During the EaP Ministerial meeting on 12 December 2022, Member States and partners expressed their preference for a more streamlined institutional framework which is tailor made to the current and evolving priorities and which focuses on tangible benefits for citizens.</p>
<p>17. The CoR favours adopting a tailor-made approach to the Eastern Partnership objectives</p>	<p>The Joint Communication 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 - Reinforcing Resilience - an</p>

<sup>1</sup> Joint Communication of 18.03.2020 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all' (JOIN(2020) 7 final).

<sup>2</sup> Joint Staff Working Document of 2.7.2021 'Recovery, resilience, and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities' (SWD(2021) 186 final).

<p>to reflect the different needs of the EU candidates, potential candidates and other partners, as the one-size-fits-all approach is no longer justified; the country-specific needs should be designed in a way that also takes into account the specific interests of regional and local communities.</p>	<p>Eastern Partnership that delivers for all’ explicitly refers to a tailor-made approach for the EaP that responds to the interests, ambitions and progress of each partner country.</p> <p>This approach was confirmed at the 2021 Summit and it has been reinforced at the December 2022 EaP Ministerial.</p>
<p>18. The CoR recommends a more flexible geographical scope for the EaP opening up the possibility of cooperating more closely with countries such as certain countries in Central Asia, as well as identifying areas for cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans.</p>	<p>Member States and partners have expressed an interest in cooperation between the EaP and Central Asia, the wider Black Sea region and the Western Balkans in areas of common interest such as enlargement and connectivity. As a result, a number of events have already taken place in 2023 that bring together these regions with the aim of intensifying dialogue and cooperation.</p>
<p>22. The CoR suggests creating an Eastern Partnership Joint Secretariat, in which the EU and each partner are duly represented, including representatives of the local and regional level, and aimed at leveraging funds, and identifying and shaping projects in accordance with the main political objectives of the Partnership; considers that a joint secretariat would enhance members' ownership of the project, and increase transparency, coordination and visibility.</p>	<p>The Commission is always looking for flexible solutions to address the significant challenges in the neighbourhood and beyond. Against this background, the aim is to focus the scarce resources on actions on the ground rather than on additional structures. That approach was also supported at the EaP Ministerial meeting on 12 December 2022.</p>
<p>23. The CoR recommends implementing without further delay the project for a virtual Academy for Local and Regional Public Administration in order to strengthen the capacity-building of local and regional authorities in the Eastern Partnership, promote transparency and good governance, fight corruption, and assist partner members in conducting decentralisation reforms.</p>	<p>Following the start of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, the limited resources had to be repurposed to provide emergency assistance to Ukraine. The new and evolving geopolitical reality in the region, including the EU membership perspectives of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, will need to be considered in any future programming.</p> <p>A workshop on Public Administration Reform in the framework of the EaP is currently under preparation and will tentatively take place during the last quarter of 2023.</p>
<p>24. The CoR advocates the extension of the</p>	<p>The Commission is already discussing with the</p>

<p>TAIEX and Twinning programmes to regional and local authorities in the EaP countries in order to improve their administrative capacities; the extension of the network of stakeholders for twinning projects to regional and local authorities will have a trickle-down effect and will contribute to the easier implementation of project objectives.</p>	<p>Committee how to engage local administrations and their expertise in TAIEX activities more effectively. Even though so far, TAIEX local activities have taken place in the Western Balkans, the Commission intends to respond positively to the increasing demand by Eastern Partnership countries. The Commission encourages the Committee to regularly inform the Commission about their available expertise and on the needs of their partner local authorities.</p> <p>Twinning concerns cooperation between public administrations regardless of the level. At the same time, the entry point for Twinning is always the central authorities (the National Contact Point), and the process needs to fit inside the bilateral programming between the EU and the specific Partner Country. When these conditions are met, Twinning for local authorities can take place. A past example of this cooperation is a project to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of housing and municipal economy of Ukraine to streamline the water service management at municipal level.</p>
<p>25. The CoR believes that dedicated financial allocations addressed to local and regional authorities of the EU and the Eastern Partnership, to be identified within the € 17 billion Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership, would help the proliferation of cross-border and territorial cooperation, including through the use of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), thus stimulating the sharing of best practices and the implementation of projects tailored to the needs of identified territorial goals.</p>	<p>Support to local authorities is an important feature of the Economic and Investment Plan<sup>3</sup>, which is notably catered for through the Covenant of Mayors programme III and the Mayors for Economic Growth programme. In the context of the Neighbourhood Investment Platform, the Commission is also encouraging its partner financial institutions to design new programmes in support of investments at municipal or regional levels. In that context, a follow-up programme to the Municipal Project Support Facility (which ended in 2022) is being discussed with partner banks.</p> <p>Regional and municipal development is also taken into account in the bilateral cooperation, with a focus on regions that are lagging behind. Eastern</p>

<sup>3</sup> Joint Staff Working Document of 2.7.2021 ‘Recovery, resilience, and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities’ (SWD(2021) 186 final).

	<p>partnership countries are also actively involved in Interreg NEXT (territorial cooperation) programmes. Interreg NEXT programmes provide a unique opportunity for joint projects implemented between organisations from Member States and partner countries. This includes local and regional authorities.</p> <p>Interreg NEXT programmes are implemented under shared management (by authorities in Member States), which enables partner countries to gain knowledge about the implementation of EU cohesion policy. The total allocation for 2021-2027 Interreg programmes involving Eastern partnership countries is € 660 million.</p>
<p>26. The CoR considers that the EaP could focus more on practical projects and initiatives for increasing the connectivity of the EaP partners with the EU, in particular in the area of physical infrastructure (road and rail transport, electricity and digital cables, sea routes, energy interconnections etc.), as well as for integrating them into the EU digital and telecoms market (e.g. eliminating roaming charges); suggests, therefore, offering immediate economic sectoral integration opportunities, including steps towards integration into the EU internal market, and financial assistance at unprecedented levels and pace, also by boosting local and regional entrepreneurship, particularly among SMEs in the Trio countries.</p>	<p>An important component of the EaP is ensuring stronger connectivity between the EU and its Eastern partners. Through the Economic Investment Plan and the different regional programmes, the Commission is supporting initiatives to promote green transport and energy interconnections. Some examples include the Black Sea Digital Cable, a Black Sea Energy Cable or ensuring the extension of the Trans-European Transport Network to the East. The Commission will continue to support these and other important connectivity projects together with European and International Financial Institutions, Member States, local authorities, and with the private sector.</p>
<p>27. The CoR calls for the creation of an investment platform under the Eastern Partnership which would link the efforts of the international financial institutions and put local and regional authorities in a position to facilitate projects within the Eastern Partnership in terms of capacity-building, technical assistance, and good governance, as a way to stimulate sustainable territorial development, prevent social and economic disparities, and support the localisation and achievement of the</p>	<p>An investment instrument for the Eastern Partnership region already exists: the Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP) which aims at mobilising investments in infrastructure of transport, energy, environment, with a particular focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to support social and private sector development in the European Neighbourhood Partner Countries. It does this by pooling grant resources from the EU budget and EU Member States and using the funds to leverage loans from</p>



<p>Sustainable Development Goals in the area.</p> <p>28. The CoR suggests, therefore, developing a model for local investments in the Eastern Partnership, following the experience of the Development Bank of the Council of Europe, with a view to financing a wide range of social and economic projects implemented by governmental, local, and regional stakeholders as well as public institutions.</p>	<p>the European Investment Bank and other eligible partners. The NIP also supports the private sector, mainly through operations targeting small businesses.</p> <p>The Eastern Partnership’s agenda for Recovery, Resilience and Reform is underpinned by the Economic and Investment Plan. From 2021 until 2027 this plan is mobilising € 2.3 billion from the EU budget in grants, blending and guarantees, to stimulate jobs and growth, support connectivity and the green and digital transition. The plan combines actions to be implemented at local, national and regional level, and will be adapted to the specific needs of each partner country.</p>
<p>29. The CoR considers that the partnership countries should be given flexibility in choosing programmes that are the most relevant for them, and, at the same time, in prioritising programmes directed towards local and regional bodies, which would give the CoR a key role in identifying European partners ready to further engage with their counterparts.</p>	<p>The Commission will continue to identify regional and bilateral programmes jointly with the partner countries, taking into account their own priorities, needs and ambitions.</p>
<p>30. The CoR recommends prioritising measures and projects aimed at addressing in particular the green and digital transitions and boosting socio-economic recovery, and calls for an agenda for recovery, resilience and reform to be adopted at the forthcoming EaP summit of heads of state.</p>	<p>Boosting resilience in the Eastern Neighbourhood and the overarching agenda of Recovery, Resilience, and Reform remain an EU priority in line with the Joint Communication on the EaP policy beyond 2020 and the Joint Declaration adopted at the EaP 2021 Summit<sup>4</sup>. In this context, the Commission will continue supporting socio-economic recovery as well as the green and digital transition. The continued implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan will be key for supporting these priorities across the region.</p>

<sup>4</sup> [Eastern Partnership summit – joint declaration - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#).



<p>the same time adequate protection of workers at Union level and <i>taking into consideration what is already being implemented in some EU Member States, which confirms the feasibility of implementation of the new OEL</i>, a revised OEL equal to 0.01 fibres/ cm<sup>3</sup> as an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) should be established, <i>with an OEL of equal to 0.002 fibres/ cm<sup>3</sup>, to be implemented within 3 years of the entry into force of this directive</i>. This balanced approach is underpinned by a public health objective aiming at the safe removal of asbestos. Consideration has also been given to proposing <i>a gradual OEL reduction</i> that takes into account economic and technical considerations to allow an effective removal.</p> <p>Amendment 8, Article 1(4)</p> <p>[...] Fibre counting shall be carried out <i>during the transition period</i> by phase-contrast microscope (PCM) in accordance with the method recommended in 1997 by the World Health Organization (WHO)*, <i>while the implementation of the OEL of equal to 0.002 fibres/ cm<sup>3</sup> will require</i> electron microscopy (EM).</p> <p>Amendment 10, Article 1(5)</p> <p>[...] Employers shall ensure that no worker is exposed to an airborne concentration of asbestos in excess of 0.01 fibres per cm<sup>3</sup> as an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) <i>with an OEL of equal to 0.002 fibres/ cm<sup>3</sup>, to be implemented within 3 years of the entry into force of this directive</i>.</p>	<p>Directive, the Commission proposed to lower the current occupational exposure limits (OELs) for asbestos by 10 times, from 0.1 to 0.01 fibres/cm<sup>3</sup>. This will significantly improve the protection of workers at the EU level, while avoiding closures and severe disadvantages for businesses, especially micro and small enterprises.</p> <p>The Commission based its proposal on the well-established and transparent procedure used in the area of occupational safety and health (OSH), involving the scientific opinion of the Risk Assessment Committee of the European Chemicals Agency, the opinion of the tripartite Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH), a two-stage social partner consultation, a call for evidence and a thorough impact assessment.</p> <p>The value proposed by the Commission is measurable with phase contrast microscopy, a widely available and used technique in the Member States. It is therefore implementable by employers and compliance can be monitored.</p> <p>To measure smaller fibres, on the contrary, the best currently available electron microscopy measurement technique would be necessary. Even using that technology, it would be very challenging to measure such low exposure level in dusty contexts, such as building works.</p> <p>The Commission's proposal is currently in the hands of the co-legislators and the Commission stands ready to support the Council and the Parliament in their role.</p>
<p>Amendment 5, recital 11</p> <p>Optical microscopy does not allow a counting of the smallest fibres detrimental to health <i>and it is not possible to measure an OEL lower than</i> 0.01 f/cm<sup>3</sup> with phase-contrast microscope (PCM). In line with the opinion of the ACSH, a more modern and sensitive</p>	<p>Phase contrast microscopy is the technology to measure asbestos fibres that is currently predominantly used and most widely available across Member States. It is also the method recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).</p> <p>Therefore, the Commission did not include in its</p>

<p>methodology based on electron microscopy should be <i>gradually introduced</i>, while taking into account the need for adaptation and for more EU level harmonisation of different electron microscopy methodologies.</p> <p>Recommendation N. 4</p> <p>recommends a two-step approach, whereby three years after the introduction of the binding limit value of 0.01 f/cm<sup>3</sup>, a more ambitious OEL of 0.002 f/cm<sup>3</sup> is introduced. The Committee urges by the same token that optical microscopy is gradually replaced by the more accurate electron microscopy, suitable for the detection of asbestos when OELs lower than 0.01 f/cm<sup>3</sup> apply.</p>	<p>proposal a provision for the mandatory shift to electron microscopy, as not all Member States would be able to implement it reasonably and this could entail considerable costs, which could then jeopardise the appropriate measurement of asbestos fibres every time it is necessary.</p> <p>The Commission acknowledges the benefits that electron microscopy could bring and does not prevent any Member State to gradually transit to it. Moreover, the Commission recommends that it is used wherever possible, as an option amongst methods other than phase contrast microscopy.</p>
<p>Amendment 7, recital 16 (new)</p> <p><i>Because asbestos-related diseases have a long latency period and there is little awareness of the risks relating to exposure to asbestos, immediately after the directive comes into force the European Commission, together with the Member States, will carry out periodic, intensive and targeted information and education campaigns on the risks of exposure to asbestos and appropriate forms of protection. These actions should be aimed at:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>– workers and their families;</i></li> <li><i>– employers;</i></li> <li><i>– building owners and administrators;</i></li> <li><i>– local and regional authorities;</i></li> <li><i>– inhabitants of areas where old buildings are predominant;</i></li> <li><i>– health services, to increase the awareness and skills of radiologists and general practitioners in recognising and treating asbestos-related diseases.</i></li> </ul>	<p>In the Communication on an asbestos-free future adopted on 28 September 2022, together with the proposal to amend the Asbestos at Work Directive, the Commission announced that it will develop guidelines on the implementation of the Directive, once the text is adopted by the Parliament and the Council, in order to help employers, workers and national authorities to apply its provisions on the ground. These will be complemented with an awareness-raising campaign to be put in place by the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee. These two actions together will help familiarise relevant stakeholders with the risks associated with exposure to asbestos at work and how to ensure an adequate protection.</p> <p>The legislative proposal on the screening, registration and monitoring of asbestos in EU buildings that is planned to be adopted by the Commission in 2023 would, amongst others, contribute to raising awareness amongst building owners, residents and the broader population, on the presence of asbestos and its risks. Member States will also be asked to develop national asbestos strategies, which could also contribute to this objective.</p>

<p>Amendment 11, Article 1(6)</p> <p><b>Article 15 is replaced by the following:</b></p> <p><b>Article 15</b></p> <p><b><i>Before carrying out demolition or asbestos removal work, firms must provide evidence of their and their workers' formally verified competence in this field (connected also with periodic training), which shall be established in accordance with national laws and/or practice, and in line with EU guidelines, to be developed by the European Commission in cooperation with the tripartite Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH).</i></b></p>	<p>Both the evidence that companies must provide before carrying out demolition or asbestos-removal work and worker training are stipulated under the Asbestos at Work Directive.</p> <p>The Commission services will develop guidelines after the amended Directive is adopted by the co-legislators, to assist Member States, employers and workers with its practical implementation, which could include training. As is common practice for actions on occupational safety and health, representatives of the tripartite ACSH would be involved in the development of the guidelines, in an appropriate manner, to benefit from their practical expertise.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation No. 6</p> <p>The Directive should also address the need to protect emergency services (including firefighters, police, doctors and rescue workers) from the risks associated with exposure to asbestos by creating an up-to-date and accessible database containing reliable data on infrastructure with confirmed or likely presence of asbestos.</p>	<p>Firefighters and other emergency service workers are already covered by the general provisions of the Asbestos at Work Directive.</p> <p>The proposal that the Commission plans to put forward in 2023 on the screening, registration and monitoring of asbestos in EU buildings could be useful in order to provide emergency services with access to the information of asbestos in buildings they need to act in, therefore further improve their protection.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation No. 7</p> <p>Urges for the development of European guidelines on the certification of skills required from workers for the safe removal of asbestos-containing components.</p>	<p>Training requirements are already covered by the Asbestos at Work Directive. However, to further assist Member States, employers and workers with the practical implementation of the provisions of the amended text, the Commission services will develop guidelines, which would include training.</p>
<p>Policy recommendation No. 10</p> <p>Calls on the Commission to create mechanisms to safely speed up the eradication of asbestos by raising awareness, more effective education and protection for workers and inhabitants through effective, attractive and targeted education and information programmes (including among local and regional authority</p>	<p>A number of planned actions will contribute to this objective:</p> <p>Concerning information campaigns to protect workers, the aforementioned guidelines that the Commission services will develop could help increase awareness amongst workers, employers and national authorities of the risks associated with occupational exposure to asbestos, and the</p>

and health service staff).

measures to take to prevent it and mitigate the health hazards. Besides, the Commission services will work with the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee to launch a dedicated awareness-raising campaign.

The Commission proposal on the screening, registration and monitoring of asbestos in EU buildings, planned for adoption in 2023, would contribute to raising awareness of the presence of asbestos in buildings and the risks associated to it, targeting not just workers who could be directly exposed to asbestos, but all citizens.

<p><b>N°4 Sustainable use of pesticides</b>  <b>COM(2022) 305 final</b>  <b>COR-2022-04989 – NAT-VII/031</b>  <b>154<sup>th</sup> plenary session – March 2023</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Heinz-Joachim HÖFER (DE/PES)</b>  <b>DG SANTE – Commissioner KYRIAKIDES</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1. [...] care should be taken to ensure that the obligations laid down in the legislation do not result in an excessive administrative burden.</p>	<p>The Commission’s published non-paper of November 2022<sup>1</sup> states that constructive discussions with Member States should continue on key issues covered by the proposal, such as administrative burden, for which appropriate solutions can be found. Member States can also reduce the burden on farms, including smaller farms, by using Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) management systems, such as the Land Parcel Identification or the declarations systems, when implementing these new reduction rules.</p> <p>The Commission response to the request of the Council for a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal includes possible options for the co-legislator to consider potential ways to reduce administrative burden such as possible exemptions for small and medium-sized farms and reducing the detail or frequency of reporting, record-keeping and advisory services.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p>3. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) considers that the European Commission should work, by means of delegated acts and in accordance with Article 35 of this Regulation, towards carrying out an ongoing and orderly review of the indicators.</p>	<p>Under Article 35 of the proposal the Commission commits to further developing and improving these harmonised risk indicators based on scientific research of the Commission’s Joint Research Centre and in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The Regulation on statistics on agricultural input and output<sup>3</sup> was adopted on</p>

<sup>1</sup> [https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/pesticides\\_sud\\_sur-non-paper\\_en.pdf](https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/pesticides_sud_sur-non-paper_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Commission Response to Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572 of 19 December 2022 requesting that the Commission submit a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable use of plant protection products amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 published on 5 July 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2379 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on statistics on agricultural input and output, amending Commission Regulation (EC) No 617/2008 and repealing Regulations (EC)

<p>8. The CoR calls on the EU to significantly revise the HRI approach...; calls on the European Commission to carry out an orderly revision so that reliable results can be ensured from the existing indicators.</p>	<p>23 November 2022 to improve the data collected by Member States on the use of plant protection products that will help with informing and supporting future decision and with better monitoring of pesticide use. The data on the use of pesticides will be representative at national level and the comparability across the EU will also be improved.</p>
<p>6. The CoR calls on the EU to fund research projects on the cocktail effects of pesticides on human health and biodiversity, which are currently unknown.</p>	<p>Over the past years the Commission has been working with experts from Member States and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on the cocktail effects of pesticide residues. So far EFSA has delivered its first reports on the cumulative effects from the dietary exposure of humans to (multiple) pesticide residues, specifically for the nervous system, the thyroid and craniofacial alterations<sup>4,5</sup>. Work is on-going<sup>6</sup> for other target organs of the human body, such as kidneys and liver, but also for prospective scenarios setting Maximum Residue Levels, aiming to the gradual implementation of the methodology in regulatory practice.</p> <p>The Commission allocates funding through Horizon Europe for the promotion of new low-risk pesticides to be used in agriculture with the aim of reducing risks to the environment and human health. The Horizon 2020 project SPRINT<sup>7</sup> is developing a global health risk assessment toolbox integrating the impacts on ecosystems, plant, animal and human health.</p>
<p>7. The CoR notes that the private and public research efforts on biological and integrated pest management have made significant progress over the last decade and now offer</p>	<p>The EU Research Framework Programmes, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, support actions to develop a wide range of tools for prevention, early detection, monitoring, control</p>

No 1165/2008, (EC) No 543/2009 and (EC) No 1185/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 96/16/EC; OJ L 315, 7.12.2022, p. 1–29.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/news/pesticides-first-cumulative-risk-reports-published>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/7550>

<sup>6</sup> [https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-03/pesticides\\_mrl\\_cum-risk-ass\\_action-plan.pdf](https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-03/pesticides_mrl_cum-risk-ass_action-plan.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/862568>



alternatives to 40% of synthetic pesticide uses; would like the EU research programme to place more emphasis on support for these programmes in order to achieve, at least, the objective of halving the use of pesticides by 2030.

and management of plant pests and diseases. Horizon 2020<sup>8</sup> had financed 30 projects with over €160 million to protect plant health and promote integrated pest management. Over € 100 million were dedicated to plant health and plant protection in the first four years of Horizon Europe<sup>9</sup>. Innovative solutions and practical knowledge are made available to advisors and farmers through Thematic Networks funded by EU research and innovation (R&I) programmes as well as disseminated via EU CAP Network<sup>10</sup>.

Soil pollution by pesticides is a major concern both in the EU and globally, posing threats to ecosystems and human health. The Horizon Europe Mission ‘A Soil Deal for Europe’ will establish 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030. The Soil Deal Mission will contribute to meeting the Green Deal ambitions, and innovations in soil pollution from pesticides and restoration will be given special attention. Activities will help to progress towards the Soil Deal Mission specific objective 4 ‘Reduce soil pollution and enhance restoration’ to contribute to meeting objective of halving the use of pesticides by 2030.

In order to support the Member States in the development of crop-specific rules for pest management that should be fully in line with integrated pest management principles, the Commission launched a call for proposals<sup>11</sup> under the LIFE programme on 18 April 2023. The Commission has also made public a database of IPM practices under the ‘IPM Toolbox’ project<sup>12</sup>.

The Commission response to the request of the Council for a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal includes possible options for the co-legislator to consider in order to

<sup>8</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/factsheet-agri-plant-health\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/factsheet-agri-plant-health_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/horizon>

<sup>10</sup> [https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/about-european-cap-network\\_en](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/about-european-cap-network_en)

<sup>11</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/life/wp-call/2021-2024/call-fiche\\_life-2023-plp\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/life/wp-call/2021-2024/call-fiche_life-2023-plp_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://datam.jrc.ec.europa.eu/datam/mashup/IPM/index.html>

	<p>increase the availability of alternatives, such as simplifying data requirements for more active substances, provisional authorisations for biological control and unlimited approvals for low-risk biological control active substances.<sup>13</sup></p>
<p>9. The CoR calls for the EU to fund experimental studies on the long-term toxicity of pesticides in their full formulation prior to their authorisation on the European market, in accordance with the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 1 October 2019.</p>	<p>The Commission has initiated a series of workshops in collaboration with EFSA, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), and the Member States to identify challenges concerning the assessment of formulated plant protection products with focus on co-formulants and long-term toxicity, and to address them in view of strengthening the evaluation process and increasing transparency. If warranted, based on the findings and outcome of this initiative, the Commission will consider funding future research projects on this topic, also respecting the need to reduce testing on vertebrate animals as far as possible.</p>
<p>10. The CoR points out that food security must not be jeopardised by an overly rapid adjustment process, given the current crisis context.</p> <p>11. The CoR points out, on the contrary, that reducing the use of pesticides and reducing toxicity improves the resilience of farms to economic, energy and environmental crises.</p>	<p>The Commission published in January 2023 an analysis on the drivers of food security<sup>14</sup> in the context of the current energy crisis and the war in Ukraine. It looks at short and longer-term horizons and at the linkages between drivers that support or threaten the viability and resilience of the EU food production. It confirms that implementing the European Green Deal, including the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies, will help to secure resilient food system in the EU. This conclusion is also confirmed by the analysis of the implications of the proposal for food security carried out as part of the Commission response to the request of the Council for a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal.<sup>15</sup></p>

<sup>13</sup> See Commission Response to Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572 of 19 December 2022 requesting that the Commission submit a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable use of plant protection products amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 published on 5 July 2023.

<sup>14</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/analysis-main-drivers-food-security\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/analysis-main-drivers-food-security_en)

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 1 (economic issues) of the Commission Response to Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572 of 19 December 2022 requesting that the Commission submit a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable use of plant protection products amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 published on 5 July 2023.

<p>14. The CoR regrets that the Commission proposes that the necessary funding will come from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for a period of five years but without any new money being added to the fund.</p> <p>15. The CoR regrets the fact that the national strategic plans, which have been validated by the Commission, lack ambition when it comes to reducing the quantities of pesticides and, above all, their risks, and will therefore not achieve the objectives that Europe has set itself.</p>	<p>Based on the financial envelopes foreseen in the multiannual financial framework for the period 2021-2027 and the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation<sup>16</sup>, the Commission has approved 28 CAP Strategic Plans for the period 2023-2027. These plans will not only support farm income and competitiveness, but also adapting farming practices, including the transition to organic farming and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices, thus contributing to the ongoing transition to sustainable farming and the development of sustainable food systems. The CAP includes statutory requirements relevant for this purpose in the system of conditionality (including the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (SUD) and relevant Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) standards). Moreover, the CAP may finance farming practices beyond legal requirements and relevant for this purpose, such as crop rotation of biodiversity areas. In this respect 26% of the agricultural area is directly associated to CAP funding targeting specifically the sustainable use of pesticide practices.</p> <p>Approval of these Strategic Plans is not conditional on Member State plans to reshape the food environment. However, the food environment is a key topic for the preparation of a forthcoming proposal for a legislative framework for sustainable food systems.</p>
<p>16. The CoR calls on the EU to ban the import of foodstuffs treated with pesticides that have not been authorised in Europe and that pose a risk to public health or the environment, in order to create fair competition for our producers.</p>	<p>The EU acts when necessary to address global environmental and ethical concerns<sup>17</sup>. Any EU unilateral measures on process and production methods for imported products must be done in full respect of World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and other international commitments and</p>

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0226>

	<p>requires case-by-case analysis, which needs to take into account the technical and economic feasibility of import controls. Therefore, the Commission's focus is on building alliances with partners who share its ambitions, thereby encouraging others to raise global standards.</p>
<p>17. The CoR calls on the Commission, to ensure consistency with Regulation 1107/2009, to ban the export of unauthorised pesticides or active substances in pesticides from Europe to third countries.</p>	<p>In order to identify the most appropriate approach to ensure that non-EU countries are adequately protected from hazardous chemicals banned in the EU but still exported, the Commission will, in line with the Better Regulation guidelines, shortly launch consultations to gather information from the public and stakeholders to be used for the impact assessment that will guide in the preparations of appropriate proposals.</p>
<p>18. The CoR reminds the EU institutions that, in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, citizens called on the EU institutions to take decisive action to promote and ensure greener, more climate-friendly agriculture.</p>	<p>The Commission has published a formal response<sup>18</sup> to the proposals set out in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- where the Commission is already implementing initiatives which directly responds to the proposals;</li> <li>- where proposals have been made by the Commission and the co-legislators are currently working;</li> <li>- those areas where the Commission is already planning to make proposals and will take into account the suggestions made by the Conference;</li> <li>- and where proposals made by the Conference are partly or wholly new and require new initiatives or proposals to be made by the Commission.</li> </ul>
<p>21. The CoR calls for a ban on the sale of the most dangerous chemical plant protection products to non-commercial customers.</p> <p>22. The CoR calls for a ban on the use of chemical plant protection products by non-commercial customers.</p>	<p>Article 17 of the Commission proposal provides that a plant protection product authorised for professional use may only be used by a professional user who has been issued with a training certificate for following courses for professional users in accordance with Article 25, or has a proof of entry in a central electronic</p>

<sup>18</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/communication\\_1.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/communication_1.pdf)

	<p>register for following such courses in accordance with Article 25(5), and uses the services of an independent advisor in accordance with Article 26(3). Article 17 of the Commission proposal also states that more hazardous plant protection products may only be used and purchased by professional users.</p>
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<p><b>N°5 Targets and tools for smart rural Europe</b>  <b>Own-initiative</b>  <b>COR-2022-04320 – NAT-VII/030</b>  <b>154<sup>th</sup> plenary session – March 2023</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Radim SRŠEŇ (CZ/EPP)</b>  <b>DG AGRI – Commissioner WOJCIECHOWSKI</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) reiterates its support for the Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas 2040 (LTVRA), which will support territorial cohesion and create new opportunities to attract innovative businesses, ensure access to quality jobs, promote new and better skills, ensure better infrastructure and services and strengthen the role of sustainable agriculture and diversified economic activities.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's opinion on 'Targets and tools for smart rural Europe'. The Commission shares most of the analysis of the challenges that rural areas face and the solutions to boost, and build on, development opportunities in rural areas and is available to continue cooperating with the Committee in this area.</p>
<p>18. The CoR calls therefore on the Commission and the co-legislators to adopt a holistic view of EU development which acknowledges that the development of rural areas is vital for all EU citizens.</p>	<p>In its Long-term vision for the EU's rural areas (LTVRA)<sup>1</sup>, the Commission acknowledges that the development of rural areas is vital for the EU and uses a holistic approach.</p>
<p>19. The CoR invites the EU institutions, Member States and regions to harness the full potential of the smart village concept as a new, innovative tool for the European policy and for the development of rural areas; digital and technological transformations provide new challenges and opportunities to also bring a higher quality of life and services to rural areas. They create new opportunities for a diversified rural economy and access to the job market. As a result, they can help to address current demographic challenges, keep young people in rural areas and reverse the tides of depopulation and brain drain.</p>	<p>The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 promotes the concept of smart villages and provides funding opportunities to support the preparation and implementation of smart villages Strategies. Member States can design and develop interventions, mainly within cooperation interventions, including LEADER, and investments interventions, for supporting smart villages and promoting solutions of digital, technological and social innovation in rural communities. Moreover, smart villages can also be supported by Cohesion Policy programmes. Working with the local communities, cohesion policy seeks with smart villages to, inter alia,</p>

<sup>1</sup> COM(2021) 345 final.

	<p>improve access to services, and develop short food supply chains and renewable energy sources.</p>
<p>20. The CoR calls for more support of rural areas at the European and Member State levels in order to enable the development of smart villages and functioning urban-rural linkages – with special focus on mountainous, border, outermost, economically, socially and demographically endangered rural areas and islands, which are all to be treated as particularly vulnerable – where the conditions for life are as much as possible comparable to those in urban areas, and rural areas are considered as a cultural territory managed from smart villages with a diversified economy, an integral and non-negligible part of which is agriculture.</p>	<p>Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 introduced the new cross-cutting policy objective 5 ‘Europe closer to citizens’, which fosters place based, cross-sectoral and holistic investment responses to local challenges through integrated and sustainable territorial development strategies. It offers an important opportunity to all territories covered by Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) to rethink development patterns, define the policy mix which is the most suitable to them according to their diversities.</p> <p>Under the specific objective (h) ‘Promoting employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry’ of the CAP 2023-2027, support may be granted for activities strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas and developing of smart villages across the European countryside. Member States can focus their interventions on those rural areas with specific territorial characteristics.</p> <p>The Commission stocktaking exercise, which provides more information about how these opportunities are foreseen to be used, is not yet published. Some of the outcomes will be announced at the High-level Rural Policy Forum<sup>2</sup> on ‘Shaping the future rural areas’ to be held on 28 September 2023 in Sigüenza, Spain.</p>
<p>21. The CoR insists that all EU policies should promote the attractiveness of these areas and protect their quality of life and the rural population by ensuring equal access to basic services and opportunities. This concerns not just cohesion policy but also the EU's agricultural, single market, competition,</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the request to ensure equal access to essential and social support services and opportunities in rural areas through all relevant EU policies.</p> <p>More specifically under the CAP 2023-2027, specific objective (h) will provide Member States with the opportunity to: invest in the provision of</p>

<sup>2</sup> [Shaping the future of rural areas \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

<p>environmental and energy policies and should take account of the changing technological possibilities and changes in society, triggered by efforts to achieve pan-European goals.</p>	<p>social support services that will accelerate the social inclusion of rural population; support investments in essential services and infrastructure in rural areas, including broadband; design and develop rural development interventions or State aid measures that address challenges, opportunities, and specific local conditions of rural territories; and invest in the roll out of broadband infrastructure, including in remote areas. In this way, the CAP complements other EU, national, regional, and private funding to reach EU connectivity targets, thus enabling other social support services in rural areas, such as education, health, and remote working.</p> <p>In addition, through the LTVRA, the Commission is committed to apply rural proofing and to mainstream the needs and concerns of the EU's rural areas in all the EU policies, which may impact directly or indirectly rural areas.</p> <p>The Commission reiterates Principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>3</sup> which states that everyone in the EU shall have access to essential services (water, sanitation, transport, financial services and digital communications) and that support for access should be provided to those in need. In the second quarter of 2023, the Commission will publish a first report on access to essential services, which will assess the state of play, with a particular focus on barriers faced by people at risk of poverty and social exclusion.</p>
<p>25. The CoR requests that the infrastructure should be built compliant with this criterion, taking into account that the development of road and rail transport infrastructure is as important as the development of 5G networks and related digital infrastructure.</p>	<p>Through its TEN-T policy<sup>4</sup> the Commission has set clear objectives and deadlines for the development of key transport infrastructures and links within the EU in all transport modes. While the TEN-T core network, which captures the major transport flows, shall be completed by 2030, the comprehensive network that ensures accessibility to all EU regions shall be completed</p>

<sup>3</sup> COM(2017) 250 final.

<sup>4</sup> [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/infrastructure-and-investment/trans-european-transport-network-ten-t\\_en#:~:text=The%20EU's%20trans%2DEuropean%20transport,transport%20infrastructure%20across%20the%20EU.](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/infrastructure-and-investment/trans-european-transport-network-ten-t_en#:~:text=The%20EU's%20trans%2DEuropean%20transport,transport%20infrastructure%20across%20the%20EU.)



	<p>by 2050. The ongoing revision of the TEN-T Regulation strengthens the role of urban nodes as key transport hubs and connection points to local transport services that also serve rural areas.</p>
<p>26. The CoR requests intensive support for rural areas to fulfil the 2030 policy program I, especially strengthening digital skills and education, secure and sustainable digital infrastructures, the digital transformation of businesses and digitalisation of public services. Welcomes the inclusion of rural areas in the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade.</p>	<p>Under the CAP 2023-2027 cross-cutting objective on modernisation, knowledge sharing, innovation and digitalisation, Member States have elaborated digital strategies and have the possibility to support training on digital skills and investments to enable not only farmers but also rural communities to install digital technologies in agriculture, forestry and rural areas, including investments in precision farming, smart villages, rural businesses and digital infrastructures. In addition, Member States may support preparation of the European innovation partnership (EIP) operational groups, LEADER or smart villages that may facilitate the establishment and deployment of data and digital infrastructure and technologies and contribute to human capacity building. Member States can also use other programmes, such as the Recovery Resilience Facility (RRF) or the Digital Europe Programme (DEP) to foster the digital transition in rural areas.</p> <p>Moreover, with the adoption of the EU Strategy for Data<sup>5</sup>, the Commission provides a clear framework for the digital transformation of all sectors, empowering users of digital tools and services, including farmers and rural communities. These horizontal initiatives together with the DEP will create an EU data and digital economy and infrastructure, promoting at the same time innovation and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) growth.</p> <p>Under Horizon Europe Cluster 6 'Food, Bioeconomy, natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment' the Commission will fund two projects (FUTURAL and RURACTIVE<sup>6</sup>) for a total of € 14 million to enhance rural capacities to innovate for change, thanks to an enlarged set of</p>

<sup>5</sup> COM(2020) 66 final.

<sup>6</sup> [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_funding_tenders_en.pdf)

	<p>smart solutions, upgraded methods, tools and skills to design, implement, monitor and evaluate community-led innovations, and a strengthened human capital.</p> <p>Under the pillar for connected rural areas of the Commission Rural Action Plan<sup>7</sup>, connectivity and digital inclusion have been considered in the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flagship ‘Develop sustainable multimodal mobility and digital mobility services’;</li> <li>• flagship ‘Rural Digital Futures’;</li> <li>• action ‘Rolling out of broadband in rural areas’;</li> <li>• action ‘Promoting the digitalisation of agriculture’;</li> <li>• action ‘Enhancing rural areas accessibility through the use of drones’.</li> </ul> <p>The Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training<sup>8</sup>, adopted on 18 April 2023, calls on Member States to ensure universal access to inclusive and high-quality digital education and training, including by closing territorial gaps in accessibility and connectivity, in line with the Union-level targets for the Digital Decade Policy Programme.</p>
<p>28. The CoR requests that all realistically available RES (renewable energy sources) potentially existing in the territory should be used and the localisation of energy production and consumption be supported massively (development of ‘prosumers’).</p>	<p>Under the CAP, Member States may provide support for investments for the production of renewable energy. Farmers in particular might use by-products, manure or biomass to produce energy for their own use or diversify their business.</p> <p>However, the Commission considers that it is important to ensure that energy deployment is done without hampering food security. Therefore, the promotion of multi-use of land in order to combine both food and energy production should</p>

<sup>7</sup> COM(2021) 345 final.

<sup>8</sup> COM(2023) 205 final/2.

	<p>be promoted (e.g., agro-photovoltaic).</p> <p>Prosumers are not mentioned in the Renewable Energy Directive (RED)<sup>9</sup>, but ‘self-consumers’ are (Article 21; for the definitions see Article 2(14) and (15) of RED).</p> <p>In that sense, the Commission encourages self-consumption of renewable electricity in the territory of its origin, bearing in mind that self-consumers are mainly limited to &lt;30 kW grid connection.</p>
<p>29. The CoR requests that energy-efficient construction and renovation of housing in rural areas should be supported in order to create good conditions for existing residents and the arrival of new people.</p>	<p>Under the CAP, Member States have the possibility to provide support for investments for energy-efficiency on farms but also for buildings in rural areas.</p>
<p>30. The CoR calls for better conditions to be created for the development of diversified small and medium-sized businesses and for start-ups to become a natural part of the development of smart municipalities in rural areas.</p>	<p>Under the CAP, Member States have the possibility to provide support for investments for non-agricultural activities as stand-alone interventions and/or within LEADER local development strategies, and/or within smart village strategies. In addition, Member States may grant support to the start-up of rural businesses linked to agriculture or forestry, or farm household income diversification into non-agricultural activities or the business start-up of non-agricultural activities in rural areas related to the LEADER Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) strategies, including support to social economy.</p> <p>In addition, under the Single Market Programme (SMP) there are additional funding calls aimed at SMEs. The SMP supports the competitiveness of industry, in particular of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. It has a budget of € 4208 billion for the period of 2021-2027 (€ 2 billion are allocated under the InvestEU Fund, in particular through its Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Window). Start-ups</p>

<sup>9</sup> Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources (recast); OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 82–209.

	<p>should benefit also of some private-public partnership activities linked to companies operating in rural areas, some of those are materialised through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)-Food partnerships or the Circular Biobased Europe joint undertaking, supported under the Horizon Europe programme.</p> <p>The Commission highlights the role of food processing (and other industries linked to agriculture) in rural areas, particularly SMEs, which adds value to agricultural produce and creates jobs.</p>
<p>34. The CoR calls for education to be accessible to all ages, both physically on-site and through remote access, as well as for the development of community centres with a range of services from libraries to social work.</p>	<p>Under the CAP, Member States can support investments in essential and social support services in rural areas, for example the construction of centres for social services, facilities for the provision of care and education, investments in premises supporting leisure activities for the establishment, extension and modernisation of essential and social support services provision facilities (e.g., local markets, community centres for social activities, etc.).</p> <p>Under Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, Policy Objective 4, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) contributes to improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and life-long learning by developing accessible infrastructure and equipment, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training. Furthermore, the ERDF can also provide for a broader access to culture including through supporting cultural sites and initiatives (such as libraries or community centres).</p>
<p>35. The CoR calls for quality healthcare and social care to be decentralised, interconnected and organised so that people can live in their homes throughout their lives.</p>	<p>To safeguard the health of the EU population, including the rural population, the Commission continues to work towards building a strong European Health Union and published the Communication ‘A comprehensive approach to</p>

	<p>mental health’ on 6 June 2023<sup>10</sup>.</p> <p>In September 2022, the Commission presented the European Care Strategy<sup>11</sup> to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services across the EU and improve the situation for both care receivers and the people caring for them, professionally or informally. The Strategy is accompanied by two Recommendations for Member States on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care, and on access to affordable high-quality long-term care, the latter calling on Member States to improve access to affordable, high-quality long-term care for all, including in rural areas.</p>
<p>38. The CoR requests support for the development of modern agriculture and the bioeconomy (in coastal areas of the blue economy), for the responsible management of raw materials and materials in the sense of the circular economy [...].</p>	<p>Under the CAP, Member States may provide support promoting the bioeconomy, which would allow additional incomes for primary producers and the sustainable use of biomass following the cascading principle.</p>
<p>39. The CoR asks that an expected increase in the number of people working in qualified jobs regardless of location (e.g. people in creative fields) and making rural areas their home should be taken into account.</p>	<p>The CAP 2023-2027 and Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 provide the opportunity for Member States and regions to invest in interventions to boost quality jobs creation and enhance employment opportunities including for those active in the creative fields. Diversifying rural economies and strengthening value chains in manufacturing and in cultural and creative industries are an integral part of the EU Rural Action Plan flagship initiative on entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Horizon Europe, Cluster 2 ‘Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society’ has funded the IN SITU<sup>12</sup> project that examines the potential of cultural and creative industries actors in non-urban environments. Moreover, the Horizon Europe work programme 2023-2024 under the topic ‘HORIZON-CL2-2023-HERITAGE-01-05:</p>

<sup>10</sup> COM(2023) 298 final.

<sup>11</sup> COM(2022) 440 final.

<sup>12</sup> [Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas | IN SITU Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

	Fostering socio-economic development and job creation in rural and remote areas through cultural tourism' <sup>13</sup> invests € 9 million in research on cultural tourism to develop business models for rural and remote areas.
40. The CoR requests that new solutions in the area should be supported with the understanding that the New European Bauhaus does not only apply to cities, but also to the creation of a landscape whose diversity is taken into account, remembering the necessity of preserving and developing biodiversity.	The Commission agrees on the importance of accelerating the new European Bauhaus in rural areas and commits to explore all the possibilities for improvement in the future, as mentioned in the EU Rural Action Plan.
41. The CoR requests that financial consideration should be given to the fact that the ability to adapt to climate change, the maintaining of biodiversity and of the quality of forests primarily depend on the smart development of rural areas. Points out the potential of decentralised water treatment in small municipalities for improving water retention in the landscape.	As committed in the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 <sup>14</sup> , the Commission promoted forest-related interventions in the CAP Strategic Plans, paying attention to the interventions which have strong synergies with the EU's climate and biodiversity objectives. The Commission has also set up a Thematic Group on forest-dominant rural areas and municipalities to explore the needs of forest-dominant areas and municipalities and lay the groundwork for a network, as committed in the EU forestry strategy and in the LTVRA.
42. The CoR calls for the creation of conditions for active mobility (infrastructure for non-motorised transport) to enable the strengthening of the healthy lifestyle of local residents and the further development of sustainable tourism.	Active mobility is an important element of EU mobility policy, which aims to increase the support for, and share of, sustainable transport modes (in particular public transport and active mobility such as walking and cycling). An interinstitutional declaration on cycling is under preparation.  The two-year European Parliament-funded pilot project SMARTA-NET <sup>15</sup> , launched in December 2022 to promote sustainable and resilient mobility connections in rural areas, will look into sustainable rural mobility solutions which support the viability of rural tourist destinations contributing to reducing the negative transport-

<sup>13</sup> [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_funding_tenders_europa.eu)

<sup>14</sup> COM(2021) 572 final.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.smarta-net.eu/>

	related consequences of tourism while promoting sustainable mobility alternatives for rural people.
<p>44. The CoR asks that it be ensured that the support of community work will be conducted in such a way as to protect vulnerable groups of the population, especially women. Social work leads to the improvement of the living conditions of marginalised groups of the population in rural areas and to the improvement of life perspectives of children from excluded communities.</p>	<p>For the first time, the CAP 2023-2027 includes a specific reference to the need to enhance the position of women in farming and accelerate the social inclusion of rural women. Under specific objective (h), Member States can design interventions that will enhance social inclusion of people in difficult situations including women and children.</p> <p>The EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation<sup>16</sup> invites Member States with significant Roma populations to strengthen their National Roma Contact Points, in order to ensure that public policies and universal services reach out to Roma effectively, including those living in remote rural areas.</p> <p>European Funds are supporting the Member States in their efforts to promote women employment and gender equality. Both the ERDF and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) support marginalised communities and individuals, applying a multi-dimensional, integrated approach combining investments in employment, education and training, healthcare and housing. The ESF+ includes a specific objective on promoting gender balanced labour market participation and equal working conditions. By investing in inclusive social care community facilities and early childhood education and care facilities, the ERDF contributes to addressing the specific challenges of women living in rural areas.</p>
<p>45. The CoR emphasises that smart villages should become an integral part of regional development policy and create synergies with existing tools, e.g. LEADER/CLLD. In this work, governments and institutions at all levels</p>	<p>Member States are encouraged to support smart villages under the ERDF Regulation<sup>17</sup>. Within their Partnership Agreement under Cohesion Policy, Member States can notably consider using the ERDF and the ESF+ to support smart villages</p>

<sup>16</sup> COM(2020) 620 final.

<sup>17</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund; OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60–93.

<p>should include Local Action Groups (LAGs) in their programming in a more holistic manner. Smart villages, potentially managed by LAGs, have the potential to increase economic, social and territorial cohesion.</p>	<p>(broadband investments, support to small and medium sized enterprises outside the farming sector, IT training etc.). The smart villages concept also concerns a wide range of EU and national policies and investments for sustainable mobility, renewable energy, the bio- and circular economy, social innovation and others. The Commission encouraged Member States to implement smart villages under both LEADER under the CAP and CLLD under Cohesion policy.</p>
<p>47. The CoR points out that the magnitude of the challenges requires a strong concentration of financial resources and all activities in rural areas, including for the development of urban-rural linkages; considers it necessary to connect development tools, reduce their fragmentation and strengthen synergies between LEADER/CLLD, smart villages initiatives and LAGs, multi-funded through all European funds, including the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, CAP plans or Next Generation EU funds. All of these tools are key to promoting the cohesive development of rural areas.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that synergies and coordination between EU funding instruments to finance activities in rural areas should be further improved.</p> <p>The Commission considers that the need and feasibility of an extension of the multi-fund approach and alternatives to it should be considered based on experiences in the implementation of shared management funds in the current programming period. Since there are changes in the regulatory framework for the funding in the present programming period compared to the previous one, it is important to analyse the first results of the implementation and the needs that arise before taking further legislative initiatives in this regard.</p> <p>Consideration will be given to all options aimed at improving the synergies, coordination and simplification, including through the ‘lead fund’ approach, between EU funding instruments for rural areas in the context of the post 2027 multi-annual financial framework (MFF).</p> <p>In the framework of the LTVRA, the rural toolkit (expected in September 2023) will help rural stakeholders to identify EU funding opportunities that match their needs and to understand how it is possible to combine them.</p>
<p>48. The CoR calls for a gradual change in the criteria for the distribution of support from EU sources so that the territorial share of rural</p>	<p>Consideration will be given to all options aimed at improving the synergies, coordination and distribution of resources between EU funding</p>



<p>areas in the EU and the number of municipalities in them are taken into account.</p>	<p>instruments for rural areas in the context of the post 2027 MFF. Allocation methodology and criteria will be set up, for the EU funding instruments in the next MFF, to echo the corresponding priorities and challenges.</p>
<p>49. The CoR calls for post-2027 Cohesion Policy to include specific EU-level regional targeting and earmarking for rural areas, with a minimum aid threshold in Partnership Agreements. In the perspective of Rural Proofing and in line with the "do no harm to cohesion" principle, this should also apply to other policies in the EU budget that have a territorial dimension, including any successor to Next Generation EU.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that in line with Article 174 TFEU, Cohesion Policy, alongside the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, plays a central role in ensuring the prosperity and territorial development of rural areas and rural communities.</p> <p>In the context of the next MFF preparatory discussions and drawing on the positive experience of such earmarking in the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the Commission will consider the proposal on earmarking for CLLD under the relevant funds with regard to the afferent costs and benefits, also taking into account the lessons from the recent crisis, which demonstrated the need for higher flexibility and adaptability of the policies, together with complexity in the management of EU funds.</p>
<p>51. The CoR draws attention to the urgent need to go beyond the new Territorial Agenda 2030 and the LTVRA in order to put in place a European Rural Agenda that can mobilise specific indicators to verify the use of structural funds in Article 174 regions. Indicators should be established both as basic indicators for the entire territory of rural areas, e.g., in the field of digital infrastructure, and then as specific indicators, taking into account the specific situation in individual territories – with specific data on mountainous regions, islands, rural areas, areas experiencing demographic and industrial decline, etc. These indicators should be defined at sub-regional level (such as NUTS 3 and LAU), where the greatest disparities in development are to be</p>	<p>The Commission highlights that the existing EU rural action plan, including the rural proofing mechanism, the rural observatory, the Rural Pact, and funding available under the various funds, already include the main building blocks of a strategy and a holistic view to rural areas. Further consideration of the Committee’s proposal will be given within the Rural Pact process.</p> <p>With regard to indicators, the Commission agrees on the need to achieve concrete results from the rural action plan and has established a baseline in the Staff Working Document (SWD) accompanying the Communication on the vision to monitor evolutions of the situation in rural areas<sup>18</sup>. More specifically, the SWD provides a list of indicators in twelve thematic areas.</p>

<sup>18</sup> SWD(2021) 166 final.

<p>found, and should be used when rural-proofing all EU policies.</p>	
<p>52. The CoR invites the Commission to include proposals for targets and indicators in its evaluation report on the implementation of the LTVRA. Invites the Commission to propose how to integrate these targets in existing EU monitoring systems (e.g. the European Semester).</p>	<p>The Staff Working Document accompanying the LTVRA provides a list of indicators in twelve thematic areas. It highlights the various types of statistical typologies available to single out values for rural areas, which are relevant to describe and monitor the specific situation of rural areas across Europe. These include demographic, economic, social and environmental indicators.</p> <p>The Commission stresses that existing European targets, which have been set in various policy domains (i.e., farm to fork, EU pillar of social rights, digital decade, renewable energy and energy efficiency, etc.), are valid also for rural areas. In addition, the CAP Strategic Plans Regulation set outs relevant result indicators including jobs supported, the LEADER coverage as percentage of the population, the number of rural businesses, the number of smart villages, the infrastructure projects and the social inclusion projects. The Commission is open to consider how to apply such indicators and targets to rural areas.</p> <p>In view of the complexity of target-setting for very diverse rural areas in Europe, some period of observation of the existing indicators, including through the Rural Observatory, would be needed, before considering a possible introduction of specific targets for rural areas.</p>
<p>55. The CoR is aware that quality of life cannot be assessed only quantitatively; therefore asks for EU support for research projects that will lead to the creation of other, especially qualitative indicators and methods that allow for analysing the state and dynamics of development in rural areas, which will enable a holistic view of this development and the</p>	<p>Under Horizon Europe Cluster 6 ‘Food, Bioeconomy, natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment’, the Commission is funding two projects (GRANULAR<sup>19</sup> and RUSTIK<sup>20</sup>) for a total of € 15 million, to identify qualitative and quantitative indicators that can better grasp rural diversity and provide knowledge to develop</p>

<sup>19</sup> [Giving Rural Actors Novel data and re-Useable tools to Lead public Action in Rural areas | GRANULAR Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge for improved policy processes | RUSTIK Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<p>support of the most effective interventions in the further development of the EU's territory and society.</p>	<p>policies tailored to the various rural contexts.</p> <p>Under Horizon Europe Cluster 2 ‘Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society’, it funds three projects (MOBI-TWIN<sup>21</sup>, PREMIUM_EU<sup>22</sup> and Re-Place) to create new indicators and methods to analyse the state and dynamics of development in rural areas.</p>
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<sup>21</sup> [Twin transition and changing patterns of spatial mobility: a regional approach | MOBI-TWIN Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Policy REcommendations to Maximise the beneficial Impact of Unexplored Mobilities in and beyond the European Union | PREMIUM\\_EU Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<p><b>N°6 Short-term accommodation rental services: balancing the needs of local communities, entrepreneurs and travellers</b>  <b>Council presidency referral</b>  <b>COM(2022) 571 final</b>  <b>CoR-2022-04144 – NAT-VII/029</b>  <b>154<sup>th</sup> plenary session – March 2023</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Roberto CIAMBETTI (IT/ECR)</b>  <b>DG GROW – Commissioner BRETON</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>Recital 16: Article 31 of the Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 lays down certain due diligence requirements for providers of online platforms allowing consumers to conclude distance contracts with traders. Those requirements apply to online short-term rental platforms with respect to short-term accommodation rental services offered by hosts that qualify as traders. However, the short-term accommodation rental sector is characterised by the fact that hosts are often private individuals offering short-term accommodation rental services on an occasional peer-to-peer basis, who do not necessarily meet the conditions to be categorised as ‘traders’ under Union law. Therefore, in line with the concept and objective of ‘compliance by design’ under Article 31 of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065, and in order to enable competent authorities to verify whether applicable registration obligations are complied with, it is appropriate to apply specific conditions for compliance by design in the context of short-term accommodation rental services, including those offered by hosts that do not qualify as traders pursuant to Union law. Online short-term rental platforms should ensure that services are not offered where no registration number has been provided, in cases where a host</p>	<p>The Commission’s proposal (Article 7) takes up the content and rationale of Article 31 of the Digital Services Act<sup>1</sup> (DSA) and applies to all hosts and not only to those who would qualify as traders (the DSA only applies to ‘traders’).</p> <p>According to the proposal, online platforms will have to carry out proportionate ex-post random checks, which could become automated and therefore facilitated through the Single Digital Entry Point that Member States will have to set up. However, Article 31 of the DSA prevents the imposition of general monitoring obligation on intermediaries, such as online platforms. This does not allow setting an obligation on platforms to perform general fact-finding activities hence ensuring, as repeatedly stressed by the Court of Justice of the Union, a balance between different fundamental rights laid down in the Charter<sup>2</sup> and proportionality<sup>3</sup>. Imposing general fact-finding obligations, including verification of the validity of the registration number provided by the host, would contradict these principles.</p> <p>Furthermore, in line with the Digital Services Act and the provisions on liability of providers of intermediary services, online short-term rental platforms should not, as a general rule, be held</p>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> See, inter alia, Case C-70/01 paragraph 46.

<sup>3</sup> See, inter alia, Case C-324/09 paragraph 139.

<p>declares that such a registration number applies. This should <b>oblige</b> online short-term rental platforms to a general fact-finding obligation aimed at assessing the accuracy of the registration number prior to the publication of the offer of short-term accommodation rental services.</p>	<p>responsible for the content of the offer that is listed at the request of a provider of short-term rental services.</p> <p>Taking this general framework into account, the Commission’s proposal includes the following additional elements, which will facilitate enforcement activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- online short-term rental platforms are required to ensure that their online interface is designed and organised in a way that enables hosts to comply with applicable requirements, notably registration obligations, where they apply;</li> <li>- online short-term rental platforms are required to include, in a specific section of the online interface that is directly and easily accessible, a reference to the information on rules governing the provision of short-term accommodation rental services made available by Member States via the Single Digital Gateway.</li> </ul>
<p>Article 6(5): Where a competent authority, after verification pursuant to paragraph 1, finds that applicable rules of the Member State concerning the access to an provision of short-term accommodation stand against the offering of short term accommodation in a specific unit, it shall have the power to suspend the validity of the affected registration numbers and to issue an order requesting online short-term rental platforms to remove or disable access to any listing relating to the unit or units in question without undue delay.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that the right to be heard has to be respected and therefore the host has to be heard before suspending the validity of the registration number.</p> <p>Furthermore, the drafting of Article 6(5) as suggested, would introduce into the Proposal obligations to act in case of violations of existing authorisation schemes under national law. The Commission considers this would be outside the scope of application of this Proposal which deals with transparency and sharing of information. Cases where a registration number has been delivered for unit which cannot be rented according to the national legislation, should be dealt outside this Proposal. These cases may have broader consequences than the simple suspension of the validity of the registration number. The DSA and the Services Directive<sup>4</sup> should be taken</p>

<sup>4</sup> Directive 2006/123/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market; OJ L 376, 27.12.2006, p. 36–68.

	into consideration.
Article 7: Compliance by design 1. Online short-term rental platforms shall: (a) design, organise <i>and constantly update</i> their online interface in a way that <i>entering the registration number is obligatory in cases where the address of a specific</i> unit is located in an area where a registration procedure has been established or applies ( <i>list in Article 13</i> ).	The suggested drafting of Article 7 eliminates the self-declaration of the host. The Commission considers that the self-declaration of the host is an important element in the architecture of the proposal and necessary for its alignment with the DSA. In particular, the Commission considers that the self-declaration is the most appropriate solution to remain in compliance with the DSA: the platforms cannot be obliged to monitor the correctness of the declarations made by the host when listing a unit. The self-declaration, therefore, puts the burden on the host and avoids the imposition of a general monitoring obligation.
Article 7: (...) the platforms should also perform additional ad hoc checks at the request of competent authorities.	The Commission considers, as a general rule, that ‘should’ is not appropriate for enacting terms. Furthermore, the wording seems to be not sufficiently defined concerning the checks to be performed by the platforms. In any case such checks should be compliant with the Digital Services Act and the prohibition of general monitoring obligations.
Article 13(2) lett. (c) for use in verifying compliance with other national regulations and to the extent necessary, in complete, non-anonymous form to the respective authorities responsible for the enforcement of those regulations (e.g. country planning or building standards).	The Commission considers that the reference to ‘other national regulation’ is too broad and possibly non-compliant with the principle of data minimisation enshrined in the General Data Protection Regulation <sup>5</sup> .
Article 13 (1) lett. c) list of areas where an authorisation scheme applies in their territory.	Information on authorisation schemes and other rules applicable at local level is provided by the obligation laid down on public authorities under Article 17 of the Commission’s Proposal.  The Commission considers that the obligation to have a list of areas where authorisation schemes are in place could go outside the scope of application of the Proposal as referred to in its

<sup>5</sup> 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.

	<p>Article 1. By contrast, a list of registration procedures is needed for online platforms to carry out their checks on registration number and their display.</p>
<p>Point 16. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) considers that it is a good thing that travellers have turned to smaller towns and rural communities, and is pleased that visitors are increasingly getting off the beaten paths; in this respect, strongly supports the objective of the EU smart mobility strategy<sup>6</sup> to double high-speed rail traffic across Europe; firmly believes that modern, sustainable models for travel will give a further boost to rural tourism.</p> <p>Point 17. The CoR emphasises that, while the EU portrays itself as the world's number one tourism destination, in the last two years EU tourism has recovered largely thanks to domestic and European tourists. With a view to assisting Europeans travelling in the EU, the CoR calls for further efforts to improve existing cross-border rail links (149 of the 265 links are not operational<sup>7</sup>). This will promote zero-emission transport, spur on the development of the EU's rail network and make it fit for the challenges of</p>	<p>Sustainable mobility is one of the core topics addressed in the Tourism transition pathway<sup>8</sup> and will certainly benefit communities and visitors in rural and remote areas. Tourism transition pathway calls for the promotion of sustainable modes of transport for passengers, including smaller and remote destinations, in particular improving the appeal of the railway travel. Furthermore, the pathway calls for regulatory support for multimodal travelling, which would also increase opportunities both for visitors and for local communities by making door-to-door travel more accessible. Council Conclusions, adopting European Agenda for Tourism 2030<sup>9</sup>, also invite Member States to contribute to the green transition of tourism ecosystem by developing multimodal travel and increased attractiveness of sustainable modes of transport, with particular attention to the needs of the peripheries, less accessible areas, islands and outermost regions.</p> <p>The Commission supports the demand for development of sustainable travel and mobility. With the TEN-T policy and with the Connecting Europe Facility, support is provided to the development of a performant rail network. With the 2021 Action plan to boost long-distance and cross-border passenger rail<sup>10</sup>, and the pilot services following from it, the Commission has developed additional instruments to by addressing the obstacles that hinder the uptake and operation of cross-border passenger rail</p>

<sup>6</sup> [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/mobility-strategy\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/mobility-strategy_en)

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2018/comprehensive-analysis-of-the-existing-cross-border-rail-transport-connections-and-missing-links-on-the-internal-eu-borders](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2018/comprehensive-analysis-of-the-existing-cross-border-rail-transport-connections-and-missing-links-on-the-internal-eu-borders)

<sup>8</sup> [Tourism transition pathway cocreation \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/en/tourism-transition-pathway-cocreation)

<sup>9</sup> [New European agenda for tourism - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/en/new-european-agenda-for-tourism)

<sup>10</sup> COM(2021) 810 final.

<p>the 21st century by making the best possible use of cutting-edge rail technologies.</p>	<p>services.</p>
<p>Point 22. The CoR emphasises that, while granting opportunities for platforms, it is central to respect public policy objectives like available and affordable housing and protecting urban centres, especially when economic conditions in Europe are deteriorating. Short-term accommodation rental services via platforms and their impact shall not undermine the high acceptance of tourism in Europe's regions and cities and degrade the liveability of neighbourhoods.</p>	<p>This proposal aims to provide competent authorities with more and better data. This data should allow public authorities – in compliance with relevant EU Law and in particular with the Services Directive – to design better regulatory framework that combine the development of tourism with affordable housing and liveability of touristic destinations.</p> <p>As regards short-term rental contribution to sustainable tourism ecosystem, the EU Transition pathway for tourism highlights that the implementation of short-term rental policies should support balanced, fair and transparent short-term rental services.</p>
<p>Point 33. The CoR is concerned that the maximum period for retaining data, as defined by Article 12(3) of the proposal for a regulation and set at "no longer than 1 year", could prove to be inadequate, and calls for an extension to a minimum of two years.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that the limit of 1 year takes into consideration the principle of minimisation enshrined in the General Data Protection Regulation and seems sufficient to allow competent authorities to ensure compliance with rules and regulations applicable to hosts or concerning units rented and for policy development.</p>
<p>Point 36. The CoR warns that any measures taken must not distort the market or favour one type of accommodation over another; they must allow for the diversity of tourist accommodation markets and not focus solely on towns and cities, given that platforms are also active in rural areas and in sun and sea holiday destinations;</p>	<p>As far as the exchange of data is concerned, the proposal helps to bring nearer the regime for short-term rental with the regime existing for other touristic accommodations such as hotels. These accommodations markets are already subject to a transparency framework and data-sharing obligations. Furthermore, this proposed EU framework for transparency is open to all types of areas including rural ones.</p>
<p>Point 47. The CoR emphasizes the fact that it remains up to the Member States (national, regional or local) to set the rules concerning the access to and the provision of short-term accommodation. Setting up authorization schemes concerning the access to and the provision of short-term accommodation is still</p>	<p>This Proposal does not deal with authorisation schemes and does not affect the competences of national, regional or local authorities to regulate the access to and the provision of short-term rental according to the local situation. Access and provision of short-term rental fall under other instruments of national and EU Law, not least the</p>



possible;	Services Directive.
<p>Point 54. The CoR calls for clarification as to whether the decision to set up a registration scheme (along with the Single Digital Gateway) should be exclusively a national competence, or whether the local and regional governments of the Member State in question could decide should they so wish.</p>	<p>The Commission's Proposal envisages, in Article 4, a registration scheme which can be set at national, regional or local level. It could happen that a Member States has several registration schemes.</p> <p>By contrast, the Single Digital Entry Point that Member States will have to set up for data sharing between online platforms and public authorities, has to be single and established at national level.</p>
<p>Point 56. The CoR is concerned that the rules proposed stipulate that hosts are automatically and immediately issued a registration number and allowed to start operating; understands that registration does not imply verification but does expect more details on how the competent authorities can limit the issuing of registration numbers in areas or units covered by local rules and regulations forbidding STR activities; at least a proof of the right to dispose of the unit should be demanded already when registering;</p>	<p>The Commission's Proposal envisages the possibility for the Member State – according to Article 5(3) – to ask for further documentation, including documentation related to rules on the access to and provision of short-term accommodation. This is, though, without prejudice to the issuance of the registration number. The Commission considers that Member States are provided, through this proposal, with the necessary information to identify possible violation of such rules. A specific authorisation requirement imposed as a condition for the issuance of the registration number could be contrary to the Services Directive.</p>
<p>Point 57. The CoR expects greater clarity in Article 6 as regards penalties should the platforms fail to comply with the suspension or removal of illegal listings. Considers that the regulation should explicitly state that the competent authorities in each Member State have the power to penalise platforms who do not comply with the applicable rules.</p>	<p>As far as the failure of platforms to comply with the suspension or removal of illegal listings is concerned, the Commission considers that the issue is outside the scope of application of its proposal. This will rather need to be regulated by the national legal basis underpinning the order and, to the extent that the obligation of the platform to provide feedback on the follow-up given to such order is at stake, by the DSA.</p>

<p>N°7      <b>EU Nature Restoration Law</b>  <b>COM(2021) 304 final</b>  <b>COR-2022-04206 – ENVE-VII/030</b>  <b>153<sup>rd</sup> plenary session – February 2023</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Roby BIWER (LU/PES)</b>  <b>DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
	<p>The Commission welcomes the support of the Committee for an ambitious Nature Restoration Regulation and its commitment to fight against biodiversity loss and the impacts of climate change, in the overall context of an ambitious Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.</p> <p>The Commission has focused its replies on key amendments tabled.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 7</b></p> <p>(13) <i>a. Urban area means the land area of territorial units classified as urban centres and urban clusters using the grid-based typology established in accordance with Article 4b (2) of Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003;</i></p> <p><i>b. "urban green space" means all green urban areas; broad-leaved forests; coniferous forests; mixed forests; natural grasslands; moors and heathlands; transitional woodland-shrubs and sparsely vegetated areas; <b>green space integrated into the built structures</b> - as found within <b>the urban centres and urban clusters with its vicinity</b>, calculated on the basis of data provided by the Copernicus Land Monitoring Service as established by Regulation (EU) 2021/696 of the European Parliament and of the Council. <b>Urban green spaces entail all green urban areas with the potential to foster biodiversity and the</b></i></p>	<p>The Committee's proposal to limit the scope of the urban targets to urban centres and urban clusters would cause significant implementation problems, setting up new artificial administrative boundaries within existing municipality boundaries. Moreover, the proposal would mean a displacement of new (non-green) development into the peri-urban area.</p> <p>Setting legal targets on quality (rather than quantity) of green space is not practical since every city is different in terms of climate, layout, history, and therefore in terms of needs. Promoting higher quality urban green space is better done using other tools such as with guidance, knowledge sharing, research for example, in combination with the urban targets proposed by the Commission.</p>

<p><i>provision of ecosystem services, and to address ecological connectivity and diversity, and avoiding any harmful practices to biodiversity in their design, management and maintenance along the provisions of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. The aim is to develop data measurement tools for a more detailed individual assessment of green spaces, where green roofs, green walls and individual trees, for example, can also be taken into account. The elements of the definition of "urban green space" listed should therefore be interpreted in line with the respective land use types in the Copernicus Urban Atlas (in particular 14100, 3100 and 32000).</i></p>	
<p><b>Amendment 8</b></p> <p>14) "urban tree canopy cover" means the total area of tree cover within cities and towns and suburbs, calculated on the basis of the Tree Cover Density data provided by the Copernicus Land Monitoring Service as established by Regulation (EU) 2021/696 of the European Parliament and of the Council. <i>In a Member State or a region, basic green space data that is more detailed than the Copernicus dataset can also be used.</i></p> <p><i>Tree species to expand tree canopy should be selected at the discretion of the relevant urban authority according to the following criteria: potential to foster biodiversity; native, climate resilient species over non-native species; invasive alien species must be forbidden; tree species diversity over monoculture that must be avoided, where possible.</i></p> <p><i>Criteria selection for quality urban tree canopy cover should take into account the potential ecosystem services these canopies and their</i></p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges the idea that where a Member State has better data, this could be used to complement Copernicus data. However, the criteria proposed by the Committee related to tree quality would be very difficult to implement. It is not practically feasible to define, then measure and monitor (often subjective opinions of) which trees are of better quality – this is very much a locally specific area of expertise, more suitable for a guidance document, such as the guidelines on biodiversity-friendly afforestation, reforestation and tree planting, which the Commission published on 17 March 2023<sup>1</sup>.</p>

<sup>1</sup> SWD(2023) 61 final.

<p><i>surroundings could offer, including absorbing water intrushes from storms, reducing adverse extreme weather events and effects, and facilitating the migration of birds and other species.</i></p>	
<p><b>Amendment 11</b></p> <p>8. Outside Natura 2000 sites, the non-fulfilment of the obligations set out in paragraphs 6 and 7 <b><i>may only be justified if Member States provide compelling evidence that</i></b> it is caused by: (a) force majeure; (b) unavoidable habitat transformations which are directly caused by climate change; or (c) <b><i>an ongoing or future</i></b> project of overriding public interest for which no less damaging alternative solutions are available, to be determined on a case by case basis, <b><i>provided that the Member State concerned has adopted adequate compensatory measures, and taking into account national and area-specific environmental challenges.</i></b></p>	<p>The Committee suggests adding a requirement for the Member States to take compensatory measures also in the case of projects of overriding public interest resulting in deterioration of habitat types listed in Annex I. This would mean that the regime applicable outside Natura 2000 (paragraph 8) will become very similar to the one for Natura 2000 (paragraph 9). The Commission considers this an important change of its proposal which would need to be duly justified.</p> <p>The Committee also suggests that the exception concerning projects of overriding public interest also covers ongoing projects (presumably from the entry into force of the Regulation). This poses problems in terms of implementation, as it is unclear how ongoing projects (therefore already authorised projects) would be re-assessed in order to check the fulfilment of the conditions that they are of overriding public interest and that there are no less damaging alternatives. Such a retroactive effect on authorised projects would undermine legal certainty.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 13</b></p> <p>8. Outside Natura 2000 sites, the non-fulfilment of the obligations set out in paragraphs 6 and 7 <b><i>may only be justified if Member States provide compelling evidence that it is</i></b> caused by: (a) force majeure; (b) unavoidable habitat transformations which are directly caused by climate change; or (c) <b><i>an ongoing or future</i></b> project of overriding public interest for which no</p>	<p>See amendment 11.</p>

<p>less damaging alternative solutions are available, to be determined on a case by case basis, <i>provided that the Member State concerned has adopted adequate compensatory measures, and taking into account national and area-specific environmental challenges.</i></p>	
<p><b>Amendment 14</b></p> <p>1. Member States shall ensure that there is no net loss of urban green space, including urban tree canopy cover by 2030, compared to <b>2024</b>, in <i>urban green space in accordance with the article 3</i> in cities, towns and suburbs. <i>Member States shall closely cooperate with local and regional authorities, as well as managing authorities for achieving this.</i></p> <p><i>The measures to reach a better ecological quality of habitats and connectivity must be initiated, considering the complementarity of the measures with local land use plans and urban planning.</i></p> <p>2. Member States shall ensure that there is an increase in <i>amount and quality in</i> the total national area of urban green space <i>in accordance with the article 3</i> in cities, towns and suburbs of at least 3% of the total area of cities, towns and suburbs in <b>2024</b>, by 2040, and at least 5% by 2050. <i>The targets are set relative to the total urban space of LAUs in a Member State - not to existing urban green spaces in the reference year 2024 - to ensure a fair approach to restoration across cities, towns and suburbs, keeping into account national circumstances. Despite the administrative structures of LAUs, urban areas need to be tackled as functional entities.</i></p> <p>In addition, Member States shall ensure: (a) a minimum of <b>15</b> % urban tree canopy cover in all</p>	<p>The Commission notes that these drafting suggestions (notwithstanding the previous comments related to amendment 7) aim at dealing with concerns that have been raised in relation to a small minority of very large local administrative units which contain very high proportions of rural/forest land (the concern being that these municipalities might find it harder to meet the targets to increase green space than others). It should be noted, however, that the Commission’s proposal gives flexibility for the increase in green space to be implemented at national level, not at the level of individual local administrative units.</p> <p>The text on invasive alien species and on pollinators is noted.</p>

<p>cities and in towns and suburbs by 2050; (b) a net gain of urban green space that is integrated into existing and new buildings and infrastructure developments, including through renovations and renewals, in all cities and in towns and suburbs; and (c) <i>control of invasive alien species in urban green space, also favouring the biodiversity and amount of insects, which improves the well-functioning ecosystems in these spaces.</i></p>	
<p><b>Amendment 15</b></p> <p>1. Member States shall make an inventory of barriers to longitudinal and lateral connectivity of surface waters and identify the barriers that need to be removed to contribute to the achievement of the restoration targets set out in Article 4 of this Regulation and of the objective of restoring <i>15% of river length (178 000 km across the EU)</i> into free-flowing rivers in the Union by 2030, <i>improving biodiversity through barrier removal and the restoration of the related floodplains, while taking into account the renewable energy demand.</i></p> <p><i>This inventory shall include underground aquifers, as their saturation levels must be maintained because of their contribution to the longitudinal and lateral courses of surface waters, as well as to wetlands and springs.</i></p>	<p>The proposal to raise the objective of restoration into free-flowing rivers to 15% of river length (178 000 km across the EU) is not in line with the ambition of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030<sup>2</sup>. The ambition of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is that by 2030, at least 25 000 km of rivers is restored into free-flowing rivers. The target of 25 000 km is based on the Commission’s assessment of what is achievable in the EU by 2030.</p> <p>The Commission proposal makes references to the relevant articles of the Water Framework Directive<sup>3</sup>, which fully take into account the fact that some barriers serve a specific purpose (including energy production).</p> <p>Making an inventory of underground aquifers would move away from the approach of making an inventory of artificial structures hindering connectivity. Furthermore, the Water Framework Directive already requires Member States to delineate their water bodies, including groundwater bodies, and to reach good qualitative and quantitative status for such groundwater bodies.</p>

<sup>2</sup> COM(2020) 380 final.

<sup>3</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy; OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1–73.

<p><b>Amendment 16</b></p> <p>2. Member States shall remove the barriers to longitudinal and lateral connectivity of surface waters identified under paragraph 1 of this Article, in accordance with the plan for their removal referred to in Article 12(2), point (f). When removing barriers, Member States shall primarily address <i>(i) barriers which when removed deliver ecological benefits, and (ii) obsolete barriers, which are those that are no longer needed for renewable energy generation, inland navigation, water supply or other uses. Within this meaning, "obsolete barriers" shall not be understood to mean those that are part of historical and cultural heritage, the keeping of which would not leave insurmountable barriers and which have contributed to the creation of unique landscapes and biodiversity, or which help to recharge aquifers by slowing down the speed of water.</i></p>	<p>The removal of artificial barriers is indeed intended to deliver ecological benefits: Article 7(1) of the Commission's proposal requires the identification of barriers that need to be removed to deliver on the restoration targets set out in Article 4 of the proposal, besides contributing to achieve the target of 25 000 km of free-flowing rivers.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 19</b></p> <p><i>5. The Member States shall apply the measures laid down in Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides (OJ-L-2009-309) in order to achieve the sustainable use of plant protection products, reducing their risks to and effects on human health and the environment, and to promote integrated pest management and alternative methods and techniques, such as non-chemical control measures.</i></p>	<p>The proposal to require Member States to apply the measures included in the Directive on the sustainable use of pesticides<sup>4</sup> is not required because the Directive is to be applied also without such reference. The Commission has adopted a proposal for a Regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products<sup>5</sup>, which will repeal the Directive, and which provides an ambitious approach towards reducing the risk and use of pesticides. The proposal is currently discussed at the Council and European Parliament. The ENVI Committee started to vote its report on Thursday 15 June, but did not finish the voting, which will continue on 27 June 2023. If adopted, it will be voted in</p>

<sup>4</sup> Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides; OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 71–86.

<sup>5</sup> COM(2022) 305 final.

	<p>the July plenary. In Council, a possible General Approach is scheduled in the ENVI Council on 20 June 2023.</p>
<p><b>Amendment 22</b></p> <p>(2) Member States shall quantify the area that needs to be restored to reach the restoration targets set out in Articles 4 and 5 taking into account the condition of the habitat types referred to in Articles 4(1), 4(2), 5(1) and 5(2) and the quality and quantity of the habitats of the species referred to in Article 4(3) and Article 5(3) that are present on their territory. The quantification shall be based, amongst others, on the following information: (a) for each habitat type: (i) the total habitat area and a map of its current distribution; (ii) the habitat area not in good condition; (iii) the favourable reference area taking into account the documented losses over at least the last 70 years and the projected changes to environmental conditions due to climate change; (iv) the areas most suitable for the re-establishment of habitat types in view of ongoing and projected changes to environmental conditions due to climate change; (b) the sufficient quality and quantity of the habitats of the species required for achieving their favourable conservation status, taking into account the areas most suitable for re-establishment of those habitats, and the connectivity needed between habitats in order for the species populations to thrive, as well as ongoing and projected changes to environmental conditions due to climate change. (3) <i>When identifying the vicinity of urban centres and urban clusters, serving to define urban green space in accordance with Article 3, Member States shall include areas within at least 1 kilometre from the urban centres and urban clusters.</i></p>	<p>The Commission notes the proposed amendment that aims to include a peri-urban area. However, it is neither practical nor meaningful to define the peri-urban areas as 1 km from urban centres and urban clusters, because the peri-urban area is different for every urban area. Bigger towns and cities have proportionately bigger peri-urban areas, but in fact the reality is even more complex, depending on many factors related to the geography, history and nature of the urban area and its surroundings.</p> <p>The concept of urban centres and urban clusters was developed as a statistical analysis tool (setting up standardised 1 km grid square boundaries across the whole of the EU, overlaying true administrative boundaries) and is therefore not suitable for implementing a legally binding regulation, as it would create a new set of linear administrative boundaries within existing municipal boundaries. Defining a peri-urban area on top of this confounds the issue, as it would require setting new peri-urban lines 1 km from these 1 km linear grid squares.</p>



**Amendment 26**

***7. (i) the technical support tool used to help implement the Law. This tool shall include: capacity with regard to (cross-sectoral) decision-maker and stakeholder engagement mechanisms and integrated approaches to urban and municipal development, as well as multi-level governance instruments; attracting and streamlining public and private sector investment; tailored advice for technical, legal and financial expertise required for design, execution and monitoring of restoration measures; the setup of manageable and streamlined monitoring instruments and processes; guidance for the alignment of reporting instruments, standards and protocols across governance levels; and good practices in ecosystem restoration across different physical geographies and contexts.***

The Commission notes the call for a comprehensive technical support and capacity building system for local and regional administrations.

Under the Commission proposal, it would be for the Member States to design the appropriate structure to ensure the involvement of all concerned authorities and stakeholders at local, regional and national level in the preparation of the National Restoration Plans and the subsequent implementation of measures and monitoring of results. For this, existing structures and mechanisms under other EU environmental or other legislation should be involved as much as possible to avoid additional administrative burden.

At EU level, financial support can be available from EU funds to build capacity.