



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**COTER-VI/052**

**136th plenary session, 7-9 October 2019**

## **OPINION**

### **Recommendations for the successful design of regional development strategies beyond 2020**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS:

- points out that strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion of the European Union is one of the EU's main goals, based on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU);
- emphasises that strengthening cohesion, including across borders, at regional and local levels requires a bottom-up, place-based approach to develop appropriate solutions locally;
- stresses the importance of territorial strategies in focusing investment in an integrated and coordinated manner;
- recommends that cities and regions take SDGs into account as a guiding principle when developing regional or local development strategies;
- stresses that future trends should be taken into account in order to develop effective strategies for regional development. Long-term planning, forecasts and other strategic forecasting methods are therefore important tools for shaping regional policy in the future;
- recommends developing joint strategies for functional areas and adapting relevant strategies and programmes where possible;
- recommends to make full use of the opportunities provided by the Common Provisions Regulation with a view to programming interregional or cross-border cooperation projects to address cross-border functional areas, in close coordination with the relevant INTERREG programmes;
- underlines the added value of multi-fund programmes and encourages making full use of the potential of integrated tools such as Community-led Local Development (CLLD) and integrated territorial investment (ITI).

Rapporteur

Adam Struzik (PL/EPP), President of Mazovia Region

Reference document

NA

# **Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Recommendations for the successful design of regional development strategies beyond 2020**

## **I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

#### General comments

1. makes recommendations for effective planning of a post-2020 regional development strategy, drawing on the analysis of the specific strategic circumstances of regions, taking into account the challenges regions face and building on the existing experience of cohesion policy;
2. stresses that the recommendations include only priority investment areas and framework conditions for effective regional development strategies;
3. points out that in the light of actual needs, local and regional authorities must have clearly defined medium- and long-term development strategies based both on predicted trends and challenges and on the specific features of their territories;
4. notes that the essence of strategic planning of an area (region, province, district and municipality) is optimising its operation and development processes on the basis of sustainable transformation of regional factors and resources towards goods and services;
5. points out that development strategies are one of the core instruments for local and regional governance. They are documents outlining the direction of decisions and actions to define the goals and priorities in close connection with Europe's vision for development;
6. notes that in this respect regional development and smart specialisation strategies are an important tool ensuring that individual sectoral tools have synergies and complement each other and that stakeholders are adequately involved, in line with the place-based approach to economic, social and territorial development;
7. draws attention to the European Semester's mismatch with cohesion policy objectives. Cohesion policy is a standalone policy and the Treaty objective (economic, social and territorial cohesion) must be maintained at all times. This means paying attention to the degree of relevance between the country-specific recommendations and the cohesion programmes and the importance of cooperation between national, regional and local authorities in terms of both the national reform programmes (NRPs) and the cohesion programmes;

#### Recommendation 1: Strategic regional planning as a starting point for successful development

8. points out that strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion of the European Union is one of the EU's main goals, based on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU);

9. stresses that cohesion policy should combine the strategic objectives to address challenges at the European and global levels with long-term regional and local development strategies in Member States and implementation thereof on the ground;
10. stresses that many challenges facing cities and regions have a strong territorial dimension, as their impact extends beyond administrative areas and borders. The Committee therefore points out that the administration responsible for an individual area cannot meet development challenges alone, but that each administration has full autonomous responsibility for setting out the direction and vision of the development policy for their own community, in line with the principle of subsidiarity enshrined in Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU);
11. stresses the importance of territorial strategies in focusing investment in an integrated and coordinated manner – "integrated" meaning that all levels of governance, from local to European, work together to achieve the objectives of a territory, and "coordinated" meaning that different sources of funding contribute to the same agreed territorial objectives in a complementary way;
12. underlines that it is very important to base financial and strategic decisions on current socio-economic development indicators. The proposals for the 2021-2027 financial perspective are based on data for the 2014-2016 period, which significantly distorts the view of the current socio-economic situation in the regions. The indicators to be analysed should be taken from a period no earlier than the last three years preceding the financing period, i.e. from 2017-2019;
13. stresses the need to take into account the current statistical divisions when shaping future development policy, particularly with regard to the European Union's multiannual financial framework (MFF) for the 2021-2027 financial perspective and beyond. It therefore calls on the European Commission to thoroughly rethink its approach in this area when creating the MFF;
14. points out that the work on changing the approach and implementing recommendations should involve Eurostat, which should step up work on improving the system of collecting and processing data that help to adjust to new needs and improve cooperation, while also increasing the effectiveness of data collection;
15. points out that GDP is a way of measuring production and does not measure environmental sustainability, resource efficiency, social inclusion and social progress in general. In this context, the Committee points out the need for additional indicators to be included which will measure quality of life in a fairer and clearer way and act as a complement to GDP;
16. calls for the development of clear and measurable indicators that would take account of climate change, biodiversity, resource efficiency and social inclusion. It also calls for the development of indicators that would focus more closely on the situation of households and would reflect their income, level of consumption and wealth;

Recommendation 2: Sustainable development goals as a basis for long-term strategies of cities and regions

17. points out that both the Europe 2020 strategy and the Common Strategic Framework provided a framework and guiding principles for preparing partnership agreements and programmes in the 2014-2020 cohesion policy period, in particular, coordination between the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and other instruments;
18. points out the need to develop long-term policy frameworks at EU level that would replace the Europe 2020 strategy and allow for national and regional or local strategies to be developed that would contribute to achieving sustainable development goals, taking into account the benefits of also creating a cross-border partnership to address common challenges;
19. welcomes the EU reflection paper Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030 and calls on the Commission and the European Council to acknowledge the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 sustainable development goals as a priority of the political agenda and an overarching objective of the next EU strategic plan for 2019-2024 and beyond;
20. points out that the implementation of the SDGs and related political strategies should be determined in line with the principle of multi-level governance involving all levels of government and relevant stakeholders and generating a set of diverse goals at the national, regional and local levels;
21. points out that the 17 sustainable development goals do not contain a specific regional goal that would be connected with the TFEU goals on ensuring sustainable regional development in the European Union and decreasing the differences in the levels of regions' development so that no territory would be left behind;
22. recommends that cities and regions take SDGs into account as a guiding principle when developing regional or local development strategies, particularly in view of the fact that a strategy for a sustainable Europe by 2030 still needs to be developed. It also requires cities and regions, as the decision-makers closest to their citizens, businesses and local communities, to adapt SDGs to the specific characteristics of the area;

Recommendation 3: Cities and regions should base their regional development strategies on a thorough prospective evaluation

23. stresses that future trends should be taken into account in order to develop effective strategies for regional development. Long-term planning, forecasts and other strategic forecasting methods are therefore important tools for shaping regional policy in the future;
24. emphasises that in order to succeed across the EU, it is necessary to link post-2020 regional development strategies with the new territorial agenda;

25. notes that the key future development challenges to be addressed within the framework of regional strategies relate to mega-trends and environmental changes that will have significant consequences for economies and societies in all regions of the European Union;
26. stresses that technological changes will have a major impact on socio-economic development, given that automation and machine learning technologies may have a significant effect on labour markets. Furthermore, many emerging technologies can be beneficial for rural areas, reducing the problems they have surrounding low population density and long distances;
27. points out that, in order to use new technologies, the basic technical infrastructure must be created. However, many of the benefits of emerging technologies do not appear automatically, but require complementary policies to, for example, give people the relevant skills to use this technology;
28. stresses the need to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. While social progress can be seen in the EU, the principles of the Social Pillar must be implemented more effectively at all levels of governance. The Social Fund has an important role as a link between the ambitions of the Social Pillar and regional needs for actions and investment for the region's development, for example to ensure the availability of necessary skills;
29. notes new developments in the labour market in connection with digitalisation, and therefore calls for new business models that do not violate labour rights and for new forms of employment that guarantee decent wages, social security and protection against discrimination;
30. points out the need to make spatial planning more coherent, taking into account factors of adapting to climate change. It also notes that spatial planning is key to limiting the risks resulting from an increase in extreme weather events and natural disasters;
31. underlines the important role of green and blue infrastructure in mitigating and adapting to climate change and halting loss of biodiversity. The CoR also calls on Member States and regional and local authorities to take biodiversity into account in the decision-making process and strategic documents;
32. regrets that the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) has been removed from the Common Provisions Regulation. Together with diverging provisions in the sector regulations, this will hamper the coordination of measures related to adapting to climate change and biodiversity, as well as overall cross-fund strategies and cooperation structures at regional level;
33. highlights the need to consider the environmental impact from the initial stages of strategic planning of infrastructure and to apply appropriate environmental assessment strategies and environmental impact assessments properly, which will also lead to fewer problems later on in approving and implementing the project;
34. points out that regional and local identities must be taken into account in the territorial approach and that individual communities have a direct responsibility and remit when it comes to policy-

making, with due regard for their own specific local, social and cultural features. It is worth noting that each region has its own unique characteristics, which are an important factor in developing and coping with crises;

35. criticises the fact that the Europe 2020 strategy concerning further development of the European Union did not take culture into account. The CoR therefore calls for culture – along with its institutions and locations – to be considered a strategic area in the next strategy and policy planning. In this context, it calls on regions that see their cultural heritage as a particularly strong asset to take it into account in smart specialisation strategies;

#### Recommendation 4: Investing in institutional and administrative capacity building as a condition for effective public spending

36. stresses that successful integrated policy-making depends, to a significant extent, on the quality of national and regional administrations and that institutional and administrative capacity is a key factor in proper management of ESIF programmes, and an important factor contributing to economic prosperity as a whole;
37. stresses that many studies show that effectiveness of public spending is more closely linked to good governance and the performance of institutions than to macroeconomic factors. Therefore, return on investments directly correlates with level of investment, but also with the quality of management;
38. acknowledges that leadership (and management in general) is a key element for the successful implementation of regional and local development strategies. The CoR therefore notes that the European Union as well as cities and regions need leaders who are not afraid to set out visions for the development of their areas and to present them in development strategies. The activity of the regional authorities is a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of the region;
39. calls for adequate support for the development of digital skills and competences of citizens at all levels of education. It recognises that developing the digital skills of EU workers is essential in order to face the transformation of the labour market and avoid gaps or discrepancies in skills.

#### Recommendation 5: Promoting synergies between funds and other actors

40. points out that cohesion policy, like all EU policies, must contribute to achieving the key objectives outlined in the Treaties. Conversely, other EU policies must also contribute to the achievement of the Treaty goals on cohesion policy;
41. notes that despite the specific missions of individual ESIF that were inscribed in the Treaty and are still ongoing, they can jointly achieve the objectives of cohesion policy and each of these funds contributes to the mission of other funds;
42. emphasises that in order to create synergies and increase the impact and effectiveness of various instruments, it is essential to adapt strategies and types of measures, as well as cooperation between the different actors from the earliest stages of the programming process;

43. points to the importance of transparency and strategic use of public procurement at all levels of government, particularly with regard to clear and unambiguous rules. In this case, disparities between Member States, different levels of government, or Member States and the European Commission should be avoided and administrative burdens should be minimised;
44. believes that initiatives, strategies, action plans and private-public partnerships implemented in science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) at local and regional level can play an important role in reducing differences in development throughout Europe. Treating STEAM education as a local and regional priority and giving priority to cooperative initiatives and investments in developing them can have a significant impact in limiting the harmful effects of brain drain.

#### Recommendation 6: Territorial cooperation in functional areas

45. notes that administrative boundaries often do not correspond to economic links throughout a territory. For example, there can be important links between cities and their surrounding commuter areas, between rural and urban areas or between neighbouring regions in different countries;
46. stresses that the territorial impact goes beyond local areas and administrative boundaries in almost every issue of development and decisions must be made jointly at various levels. These decisions must be preceded by a joint dialogue from the very beginning when seeking answers to these questions;
47. points out that special attention should also be paid to the situation of remote, peripheral, sparsely populated and isolated regions, as well as border regions, and those facing particular challenges – particularly mountain and island regions – and whose development is in some cases lagging behind, particularly when it comes to improving the connectivity of these places and developing links between them;
48. recommends developing joint strategies for functional areas and adapting relevant strategies and programmes where possible.

#### Recommendation 7: Cooperation projects with neighbouring national or regional ESIF programmes

49. recommends that the managing authorities make full use of the opportunities provided by the regulation laying down common provisions for cohesion policy (Article 57(4) of the European Commission proposal) with a view to programming interregional or cross-border cooperation projects with regional ESIF programmes to address cross-border functional areas. Close coordination with the relevant INTERREG programmes is necessary when developing such projects to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication;
50. reiterates its support for the proposed European cross-border mechanism, which would be hugely significant for removing obstacles and bottlenecks in cross-border cooperation;

51. emphasises that it is important that the European Union launch a genuine strategy for cultural diplomacy. To this end, it is necessary to promote communication and artistic and cultural exchange between the EU's regions – particularly with the outermost regions – and third countries, including through measures to make it easier for artists to travel to third countries and present their work there, and vice-versa.

Recommendation 8: Promoting a territorial approach by making full use of the potential of integrated tools such as community-led local development (CLLD) and integrated territorial investment (ITI)

52. emphasises that strengthening cohesion, including across borders, at regional and local levels requires a bottom-up, place-based approach to develop appropriate solutions locally;
53. recommends developing territorial strategies within all programmes. In this context, the CoR underlines the added value of multi-fund programmes and encourages making greater use of territorial instruments in functional areas;
54. underlines the role of community-led local development (CLLD) as a specific tool for use at the sub-regional level and to complement other types of support at local level;
55. points out that participation, consultation and cooperation of local communities and all local public and private actors is a specific added value that CLLD brings, ensuring that local and specialised knowledge is used and the specific needs of areas are taken into account;
56. notes the important role of smart specialisation in enhancing regional innovation systems, exchanging knowledge between regions and increasing synergies, particularly with European research funding;

Brussels, 8 October 2019

The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The Secretary-General ad interim  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Pedro Cervilla

## II. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Recommendations for the successful design of regional development strategies beyond 2020
<b>Reference(s)</b>	N/A
<b>Legal basis</b>	Article 307 TFEU
<b>Procedural basis</b>	Rule 41(b)(ii) of the CoR's Rules of Procedure
<b>Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter</b>	N/A
<b>Date of Bureau/President's decision</b>	5 February 2019 (Bureau)
<b>Commission responsible</b>	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Adam STRUZIK (PL/EPP), President of Mazovia Region
<b>Analysis</b>	4 June 2019
<b>Discussed in commission</b>	26 March 2019 and 17 May 2019
<b>Date adopted by commission</b>	10 July 2019
<b>Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b>	unanimity
<b>Date adopted in plenary</b>	8 October 2019
<b>Previous Committee opinions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Opinion on The future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020<sup>1</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3): impact for regions and inter-regional cooperation<sup>2</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on Integrated territorial investments – a challenge for EU cohesion policy after 2020<sup>3</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on The cost and risk of non-cohesion: The strategic value of cohesion policy for pursuing the Treaty objectives and facing new challenges for European regions<sup>4</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on Common Provisions Regulation<sup>5</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund<sup>6</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on European Territorial Cooperation<sup>7</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on European Social Fund Plus<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> [OJ C 306, 15.9.2017, p. 8](#)

<sup>2</sup> [OJ C 272, 17.8.2017, p. 25](#)

<sup>3</sup> [OJ C 176, 23.5.2018, p. 40](#)

<sup>4</sup> [OJ C 247, 13.7.2018, p. 16](#)

<sup>5</sup> [OJ C 86, 7.3.2019, p. 41](#)

<sup>6</sup> [OJ C 86, 7.3.2019, p. 115](#)

<sup>7</sup> [OJ C 86, 7.3.2019, p. 137](#)

<sup>8</sup> [OJ C 86, 7.3.2019, p. 84](#)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Opinion on The European Semester and Cohesion Policy: aligning structural reforms with long-term investments<sup>9</sup></li> <li>– Opinion on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): a basis for a long-term EU strategy for a sustainable Europe by 2030<sup>10</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation</b>	N/A

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<sup>9</sup> [OJ C 275, 14.8.2019, p. 1](#)

<sup>10</sup> Not yet published in the Official Journal