

PRESS RELEASE

Cohesion Policy must also serve rural development

The debate on the future of Cohesion Policy is in full swing, just a few weeks before the European elections, with the publication of the conclusions of the Group of Specialists on the Future of Cohesion Policy, the European Parliament's resolution on the implementation of Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 and the publication of the 9th Cohesion Report.

In the various pieces of work on the Cohesion Policy cited above, in which Leader France participated in the framework of the presidency of the European network ELARD¹, the European Commission openly acknowledges the risk for marginalised regions to fall into the "development trap" and for increased disparities between metropolitan and rural areas. In the 9th Cohesion Report, the European Commission calls for a better tailored support to regional needs, faster implementation and for a simplification of procedures.

"As the European Union is looking at the future, it is indeed essential to recall the role that rural areas play in Europe and the core importance of their link with urban areas. Thus, Cohesion Policy must be more inclusive and adjustable to rural areas, and attentive to the urban-rural link. These calls for vigilance and attention to rural areas could reassure us. However, it is alarming to note that the share of the budget devoted to Cohesion Policy has decreased in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. However, the specific financial tools for the development of rural areas, which depend either on the Common Agricultural Policy (LEADER) or on their mobilisation by national managing authorities (ERDF OS 5), are already insufficiently funded." comments Thibaut Guignard, President of Leader France.

Insufficient resources to face new challenges in rural areas

As highlighted in the European Commission's latest report, *"the amount allocated to LEADER [total allocation of €7.7 billion for 2023-202] has not increased compared to the previous programming period. With a coverage of the rural population increasing from 61% to 65%, and declining contributions from other interventions, LEADER-CLLD (Community-Led-Local-Development) is expected to do more with fewer resources."* If the Cohesion budget is also reduced, rural areas will suffer twice as much.

"Leader France calls for the budgets to be protected in view of the enlargement of the EU to new countries and by ensuring that new challenges (security, defence, migration, etc.) are funded by new revenues and not drawn from the Cohesion Policy. Any reallocation of these funds risks jeopardising the development of rural areas and undermining efforts to ensure a harmonious territorial cohesion throughout the European Union" says Thibaut Guignard.

¹ European Leader Association for Rural Development

Expecting real simplification measures

The conclusions of the Group of high-level specialists on the Future of the Cohesion Policy underline the need for a simplification shock, especially for rural areas which often face complex administrative barriers. Coupled with a monitoring of "over-transposition" in the Member States as proposed in the 9th Cohesion Report, this real simplification would finally allow local actors to make full use of European funds and to implement their innovative projects for rural development.

"We would also like to warn that in addition to adjusting to regional needs, the Cohesion Policy must be adapted to the smallest scale: funds must be accessible to the smallest projects and project bearers. Their initiatives are often the most innovative and have a significant impact on rural development. It is therefore essential that these funds are accessible to all, regardless of their size or scope. Because it is also the actors on the ground and the inhabitants who will have the last word during the elections. To take up the call of the Cohesion Alliance, "For a post-2027 Cohesion Policy that leaves no one behind!" concludes Thibaut Guignard.

To find the reports in question:

- European Commission - Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (February 2024), *Forging a sustainable future together – Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe – Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy, February 2024*, Publications Office of the European Union, available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/974536>
- European Commission (27 March 2024). *Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion*
- European Parliament (14 March 2024). *Cohesion policy 2014-2020 – implementation and results in the Member States European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2024 on cohesion policy 2014-2020 – implementation and results in the Member States (2023/2121(INI))*

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