

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THINK TANK – TOPICAL DIGEST**October 2020**

Organised by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions from 5 to 22 October 2020, this year's [European Week of Regions and Cities](#) (EWRC) will be unique for a number of reasons. Not only will the event be taking place online, it will also extend over three consecutive weeks, providing even more opportunity for the EU's regional movers and shakers to touch base. Each week will focus on a different headline theme, covering in turn Empowering Citizens, Cohesion and Cooperation, and Green Europe, with this year's EWRC expected to attract the usual high number of local and regional stakeholders. As the negotiations on the post-2020 MFF and cohesion policy framework continue apace against the backdrop of the coronavirus crisis, this year's event provides a key opportunity for EU regions and cities to share their experiences on the front line and consider how the post-2020 MFF and recovery package can make a real difference on the ground. This Topical Digest contains a selection of research papers from the European Parliament on regional and cohesion policy.

Empowering citizens**Women in local and regional government: Still a long way from achieving parity**

Briefing by Vasileios Margaras, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2020

Local and regional institutions have direct impacts on the everyday lives of their citizens. They are vital for women's empowerment, being both the level of governance responsible for service delivery and a potential stepping-stone to a career in public office at national and European level. When their own decision-making bodies are fully representative, the interests and experiences of multiple groups are included. Therefore, the equal representation of women and men at all levels of local governance is a democratic imperative.

Digital democracy: Is the future of civic engagement online?

Briefing by Gianluca Sgueo, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2020

Digital innovation is radically transforming democratic decision-making. Public administrations are experimenting with mobile applications (apps) to provide citizens with real-time information, using online platforms to crowdsource ideas, and testing algorithms to engage communities in day-to-day administration. The key question is what technology breakthrough means for governance systems created long before digital disruption.

Cohesion and cooperation**European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) 2021-2027**

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, August 2020

Financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European territorial cooperation is the European Union's key instrument for supporting cooperation between partners across borders. In May 2018, the European Commission published legislative proposals aimed at defining the architecture of cohesion policy post-2020, one of which concerns the next generation of European territorial cooperation (ETC) programmes, better known as 'Interreg'.

Demography on the European agenda: Strategies for tackling demographic decline

Briefing by Vasileios Margaras, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2020

The EU faces a number of demographic challenges such as ageing, a declining birth rate and depopulation in some of its regions. The EU represents an ever-shrinking proportion of the world population. Demography matters. The economy, labour market, healthcare, pensions, regional development, and election results – all are driven by demography. EU Member States have their own strategies and policies in order to counteract demographic decline. The EU also has an auxiliary role when it comes to tackling demographic challenges. The coronavirus epidemic also has an impact on demography. Studies suggest it has a considerable impact on EU population trends (such as effects on the number of deaths per country, reduction of life expectancy and family planning).

EU tourism sector during the coronavirus crisis

Briefing by Maria Niestadt, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2020

Tourism in the European Union (EU) is one of the sectors hardest hit by the coronavirus crisis, with some parts of the sector and some regions more affected than others. Most tourist facilities were closed during the peak, and events cancelled or postponed. Tourism businesses are also among the last to resume activities, and even if they do, they still have to apply strict health protocols and containment measures, meaning that they can operate only at restricted capacity.

Implementation of macro-regional strategies

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2020

While each macro-regional strategy is unique in terms of the countries it brings together and the scope of its policies, they all share the same common aim: to ensure a coordinated approach to issues that are best tackled together. Building on the success of the pioneering 2009 European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea region, this form of cooperation has since become firmly embedded in the EU's institutional framework, with four strategies now in place, covering a total of 19 Member States and 8 third countries.

Cross-border regional healthcare cooperation to combat the coronavirus pandemic

'At a glance' note by Vasileios Margaras, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2020

The pandemic has led to a situation where the healthcare systems of many European regions have been heavily over-burdened, with more patients to treat than they have capacity for. Several healthcare projects between cross-border regions, funded by Interreg programmes, have contributed to the fight against the virus, in particular in regions of Germany, France, Italy and Spain, some of the worst affected EU Member States.

Outermost regions of the EU

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2020

The EU's outermost regions qualify for special treatment owing to structural difficulties, such as remoteness, difficult topography or economic dependence on a few products, which can severely hamper their development. Specific support mechanisms exist under cohesion, agricultural and fisheries policies, with the Commission outlining measures aimed at assisting outermost regions in its communications published in 2004, 2008, and 2012. With the outermost regions continuing to face numerous challenges in areas such as mobility, unemployment and climate change, discussions were launched on the formulation of a new strategy, published in October 2017. The shape of the EU's legislative and financial proposals will be of crucial importance for delivering the strategy post-2020.

European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, January 2020

The proposed new single regulation on the ERDF and CF (previously covered by two separate regulations) identifies the specific objectives and scope of support for both funds, including non-eligible activities, over the 2021-2027 period. In line with evidence regarding impact, investments will focus on activities with the highest added value, such as support for SMEs, smart specialisation, the low-carbon economy, sustainable urban development and regional cooperation. The ERDF will focus mainly on smart growth and the green economy, and the CF on environmental and transport infrastructure. A special approach is taken for territories such as urban areas and outermost regions.

Exceptional coronavirus support measures of benefit to EU regions

Briefing by Vasileios Margaras, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2020

Although it is too early to make concrete predictions, the economic impact of the pandemic could further impede the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the EU by increasing the existing disparities between regions. The European Commission has put forward a number of proposals to alleviate the impact on EU territories.

Linking the levels of governance in the EU

Briefing by Klemen Žumer and Yann-Sven Rittelmeyer, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2020

The coronavirus crisis has further underlined the need for a more cohesive European Union (EU). Previous ideas about how best to link the levels of the EU's system of multilevel governance have become even more important, while new paths of cooperation have been opened by changes triggered by the crisis itself. Every level of governance, from the EU to the local, via the national and regional levels, has been affected and all are involved in the response. This crisis has shown that coordination between the levels can and should be improved.

[Towards a renewed territorial agenda for the EU](#)

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2020

The main objective of the territorial agenda is to strengthen territorial cohesion, an EU principle that seeks to ensure the balanced development of the EU and reduce its regional disparities. Agreed in May 2011 and the culmination of a process begun many years earlier with the European Spatial Development Perspective, the Territorial Agenda 2020 is currently being revised with a view to establishing a continued role for this initiative within the EU's new cohesion policy framework beyond 2020.

Green Europe

[Just Transition Fund](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2020

The EU aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50-55 % by 2030, and achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This will require a socio-economic transformation in regions relying on fossil fuels and carbon intensive industries. As part of the European Green Deal, on 14 January 2020, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a regulation to create the Just Transition Fund, aimed at supporting EU regions most affected by the transition to a low carbon economy.

[European Green Deal Investment Plan: Main elements and possible impact of the coronavirus pandemic](#)

Briefing by Alessandro D'Alfonso, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2020

The Commission launched the European Green Deal in December 2019 as the new growth strategy of the European Union (EU) with a view to promoting the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050. Confirming the importance of financial resources for such a major objective, its investment pillar was the first initiative of the strategy to be presented. The European Green Deal Investment Plan, also known as the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, aims to contribute to financing a sustainable transition, while supporting the regions and communities most exposed to its impact.

[Sustainable and smart transport in Europe \(EPRS Ideas Paper\)](#)

Briefing by Jaan Soone, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2020

Innovation will be critical for economic recovery – and the transport sector offers many opportunities for innovation to help drive the post-pandemic economy forward. The European recovery plan, centred around the Green Deal, places great emphasis on the growth potential of transforming the economy to a greener model and taking advantage of technological advancements and digitalisation to bolster European industrial competitiveness. The strategy for sustainable and smart mobility to be tabled at the end of 2020, as part of the Green Deal initiatives, will play a significant role in defining the way ahead, as well as in addressing pandemic-related concerns, in the field of mobility.

['Farm to Fork' strategy: Striving for healthy and sustainable food](#)

'At a glance' note by Rachele Rossi, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2020

Launched on 20 May 2020, the 'Farm to Fork' strategy put forward the EU's ambition for making its food system a model of sustainability at all stages of the food value chain. Ahead of the desired engagement of institutions, stakeholders and citizens in a broad debate, the strategy is already high on the agri-food community's agenda.

Further reading:

[Linking cohesion policy and the European Semester: Partnership and multi-level governance to boost investment and structural reforms](#)

Study by Christian Scheinert and Christiaan Van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2019

[The blue economy: Overview and EU policy framework](#)

In-depth Analysis by Frederik Scholaert, European Parliamentary Research Service, January 2020

[EU agricultural policy and climate change](#)

Briefing by James McEldowney, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2020

[European research area \(ERA\) – Regional and cross-border perspectives](#)

Briefing by Cemal Karakas, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2019

[EU policies – Delivering for citizens: Regional policy](#)

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop and Vasileios Margaras, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2019

[Renewal of the Leipzig Charter](#)

'At a glance' note by Christiaan van Lierop with Albin Boström, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2020

[EU initiatives and funding to support sustainable urban mobility](#)

'At a glance' note by Jaan Soone, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2020

[Connecting Europe Facility](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Marketa Pape, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2020

[Implementing the Urban Agenda for the EU](#)

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, October 2019

[Research for REGI Committee –The Role of Evaluation in Cohesion Policy](#)

Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, May 2020

[Regional governance in the EU](#)

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2018

[Regional inequalities in the EU](#)

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2019

[Measuring social progress in EU regions](#)

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2018

[EU strategy for the Alpine region](#)

Briefing by Pernilla Jourde, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2019

[Transnational clusters and the Danube macro-regional strategy](#)

Briefing by Christiaan van Lierop, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2019

[Education in isolation in the pandemic, following the path of Isaac Newton](#)

Briefing by Denise Chircop, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2020

[Creative Europe programme](#)

'EU Legislation in Progress' briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, European Parliamentary Research Service, August 2020

[Cultural tourism out of confinement](#)

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, European Parliamentary Research Service, August 2020

[Better communication for cohesion policy](#)

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto and Pernilla Jourde, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2019

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