



PANORAMA

Focusing on European Regional and Urban Policy

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Hungary looks to a brighter future

COMMISSIONER
FERREIRA
RETURNS
TO THE REGIONS



INTERREG:
COOPERATING
ACROSS BORDERS



PANORAMA

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EDITORIAL

Despite social distancing, we must stick together: this is Cohesion, this is Europe

Europe – and the world – face the worst crisis in living memory, threatening our health and that of our loved ones. It threatens our economy and our cohesion and willingness to work together as Europeans to resolve the crisis.

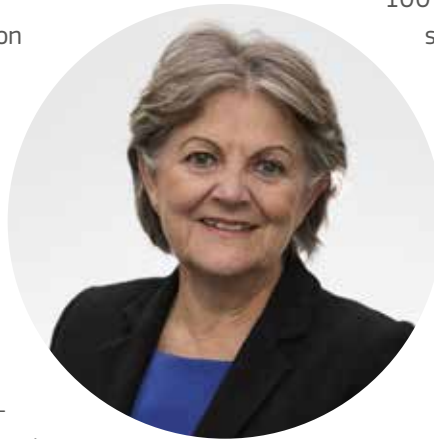
In this context, let me be very clear: Cohesion Policy must rise to the challenge. Our actions must be immediate: we cannot hide behind process and procedure while Europeans die.

I am proud to say that we are already rising to this challenge. The European Commission has prepared a set of emergency measures – the Corona Response Investment Initiative (CRII) – and the Council and European Parliament have approved them. All this was done in just three weeks.

The speedy preparation and adoption of the CRII is, in itself, a record. But let's focus on the measures themselves, which are groundbreaking. They release immediate funding from various forms of unspent Structural Funds (for example, this year's pre-financing). The money is already available for three urgent needs: lifesaving medical equipment; support to SMEs to maintain their activity; and support to workers to retain their salaries. At the same time, the scope of the Solidarity Fund has been widened to cover health crises.

These measures are already in force. A dedicated new task force and individual country teams are actively assisting Member States in their implementation. I urge all cohesion programmes to make immediate and maximum use of these facilities.

But we are not resting on our laurels. Having listened to the European Parliament and national and regional authorities, on 2 April, the Commission proposed a new set of measures, the CRII+. These enable the maximum possible flexibility: transfers between all cohesion funds, between regions and between policy objectives. To smooth the path to quick implementation, we are allowing for an EU co-financing rate of 100% and preparing maximal administrative simplification.



We live in unprecedented times requiring an unprecedented response. It may be daunting, but I am encouraged by Cohesion Policy's history. The ERDF was founded in response to the oil crisis and the pain of bankruptcies, industrial decline and unemployment. Cohesion rose to the challenge then – and we can do it again today.

This is our once-in-a-generation moment. Your professional training and experience have prepared us for this moment. Let us show Europe – and the world – what Cohesion Policy can do. Let us use every euro available in Cohesion Policy to make a real difference, to help manage the crisis now and to support the recovery over the coming years. Let us exemplify what it means to be European: no matter the crisis, we leave no person, no region behind.

We will meet again in person – I hope soon. In the meantime, success in your work – make no mistake, it is vital. And above all, safety and good health to you and your loved ones. ■

Elisa Ferreira

European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms



COMMISSIONER INTERVIEW

Returning to her regional development roots

Commissioner Ferreira shares her thoughts on her new role at DG REGIO with Simon Litton, editor of Panorama

After almost four years at Banco de Portugal – and the Supervisory Board of the ECB – incoming Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira is returning to her first love: development projects and meeting the people whose lives they aim to change.

What was your reaction when you were proposed as Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms?

I was very happy because, having done all sorts of other things, I felt I was coming back home, returning to something very dear to me. I started my professional life in academia and as a civil servant dealing with regional development

issues. I worked in one of the regions in a public agency – as vice-president of Portugal's Northern Region Coordination Commission from 1988-1992. Later, I became minister for environment then minister for planning. All these issues are very close to my heart.

Did it take time to settle in or did you feel you could hit the ground running?

I wouldn't say that, since I had been away from the subject for a long time. I was a member of both the Portuguese and European Parliaments, from 2002-2004 and 2004-2016, respectively. I was a member of the Board and later vice-governor of the Portuguese Central Bank from 2016. So I had moved into legislation and later into banking supervision, which are much more arid, abstract fields dealing with rules rather than with people or development on the ground.

I like to go to see what is happening on the ground, to understand, to try to change things. Regional development and cohesion and reforms allow me to be more hands-on and not so detached from the consequences of what we do. I like to see the impact of our work.

Now the issues have changed. But I can still see a line of continuity from the time when this was my main job.

You've come into the job at a challenging time, with ongoing budget negotiations, complicated by Brexit. Do you think stakeholders should be concerned about threats to the policy's future?

Yes, we must all be concerned because if we take Cohesion Policy for granted we are making a huge mistake. Cohesion Policy is absolutely essential to the functioning of the internal market and of all

“ *...if we take Cohesion Policy for granted we are making a huge mistake. Cohesion Policy is absolutely essential to the functioning of the internal market and the whole model that we have created.* ”

the whole model that we have created. This model is based on open competition. If weak regions compete against the most developed ones without any barriers, such as trade barriers, the possibility of currency devaluation, or mechanisms to protect themselves – as was the case before the EU was created – I mean, if it's open competition, then the winner takes it all. Therefore, the essence of this project is that while you want competition to be the rule, it comes with some support to stimulate the convergence of the weakest partners.

These principles are now being put into question. There is this awful discussion on who gains and who loses on 1% of the total wealth. We don't communicate to the citizens how much each country gains from being part of this common project, from being able to sell to all the other partners, being able to have a voice in a difficult globalised world. We forget to explain to the citizens the economic gains of this project.

A budget is, by definition, a mechanism for redistribution. This is essential to the functioning of any society. The budget is not an instrument where what you put in is what you receive. We have to better communicate the *raison d'être*, the reason why we have these mechanisms, and what we do with them.

When I was confirmed in the job, I asked DG REGIO services what the value of fraud is compared with all the funds we manage. They said it's 0.86%, which is not the idea people in the street have, because the media gives such important visibility to the subject of fraud.

Of course, we must be very strict with fraud, but we should not speak about it without mentioning its relative importance and without concentrating on the remaining 99%. I think we should not lose the context of what we are discussing, be it in the budget, or the dimension of fraud, I think we should be very careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater and

to avoid discussions that are on the margins of what we should be discussing.

President Ursula von der Leyen announced some headline ambitions when the Commission took office, notably the Green Deal and the Strategy for a Digital Europe. What will Cohesion Policy contribute to achieving these aims?

This is a major objective and a new growth model for Europe. The instruments we have to deliver are mainly Cohesion Funds, the 'old' funds that promote convergence. Indeed, Cohesion Policy is already delivering, and will go



Commissioner Ferreira with the Prime Minister of Portugal António Costa (left) and Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Budget during the 'Friends of Cohesion' summit held on 1 February 2020 in Beja, Portugal



The bridge spanning the River Minho links Tui in Spain with Valença do Minho in Portugal

on delivering, exactly these objectives in the projects that beneficiaries, regions and municipalities propose.

If you are going to organise your internal transport system, you cannot organise it on the basis of a polluting, past technology, even if you are working in a very backward region.

If you want to support SMEs you must look to the future, and to digital support. EUR 20 billion has already been spent on digital projects like taking broadband to the most remote regions so that we bridge differences in competitiveness between them and the big centres.

There are many examples of these two objectives – digital and green – already embedded in the existing financial framework. But in the next framework, they will be reinforced; the Commission has already proposed earmarking funds for such projects. Our concern is that the weakest partners, whether they are people, workers, SMEs, municipalities or regions, don't lag behind

in technology and in the necessary greater efficiency. And this requires them to be green.

We are also paying special attention to those regions going through a carbon-free transition or adopting a more environmentally friendly strategy. Some of them depend almost entirely on jobs and activities related to carbon or carbon-emitting industries. These regions have extra support on top of access to regional and social funds, through the Just Transition Fund, to help these specific, very serious cases.

Earlier in your career you were involved in implementing an Interreg project in Portugal, so you have some direct experience on the ground. How do you see your relationship as a Commissioner with different players at different levels?

As vice-president of Portugal's Northern Region Coordination Commission, I was part of one of the first cooperation projects financed and supported by Interreg. The project involved the north of

Portugal, a region with about 3.8 million inhabitants, and Galicia in Spain, which is roughly the same size.

They were, and still are, very young peripheral regions, with many SMEs and lots of very active people. Nevertheless, they were separated by an artificial border. But that was life before the EU – and with their accession many things changed. One was the relationship between the two countries and the two regions, and so we started working with the Xunta de Galicia.

We realised there were massive reasons to cooperate. We started with infrastructure, bridges, roads, and the environment.

I'm very pleased that borders are now places of projects, of communication, of lots of activity. Of course, I think we have to streamline it a bit because we have a lot of projects and programmes for cooperation. We must be more selective. But it is amazing that people now see neighbours as partners, as fellow citizens, and not as foreigners.

They know one another and can interact. I find this is absolutely essential for Europe to be Europe.

Can you tell us about your experience and your plans for visiting projects, and more generally about the importance of communication for this policy?

I want to visit projects and see things on the ground. All places are different, but there are lots of positive experiments we can share. It is completely different to go to the place rather than to see it described in a book, and also to see and feel the energy of the people you speak to, because development has to be bottom-up and supported top down. You've got to speak with your stakeholders, you've got to meet and understand them to help them define where they want to develop.

The places I've visited, as a priority, have been Silesia, Greece and eastern Germany, but I'll be visiting a lot of other regions. I'm very concerned about

– and very interested in – speaking to people, trying to find out their new vision and how we can help them to do the carbon transition

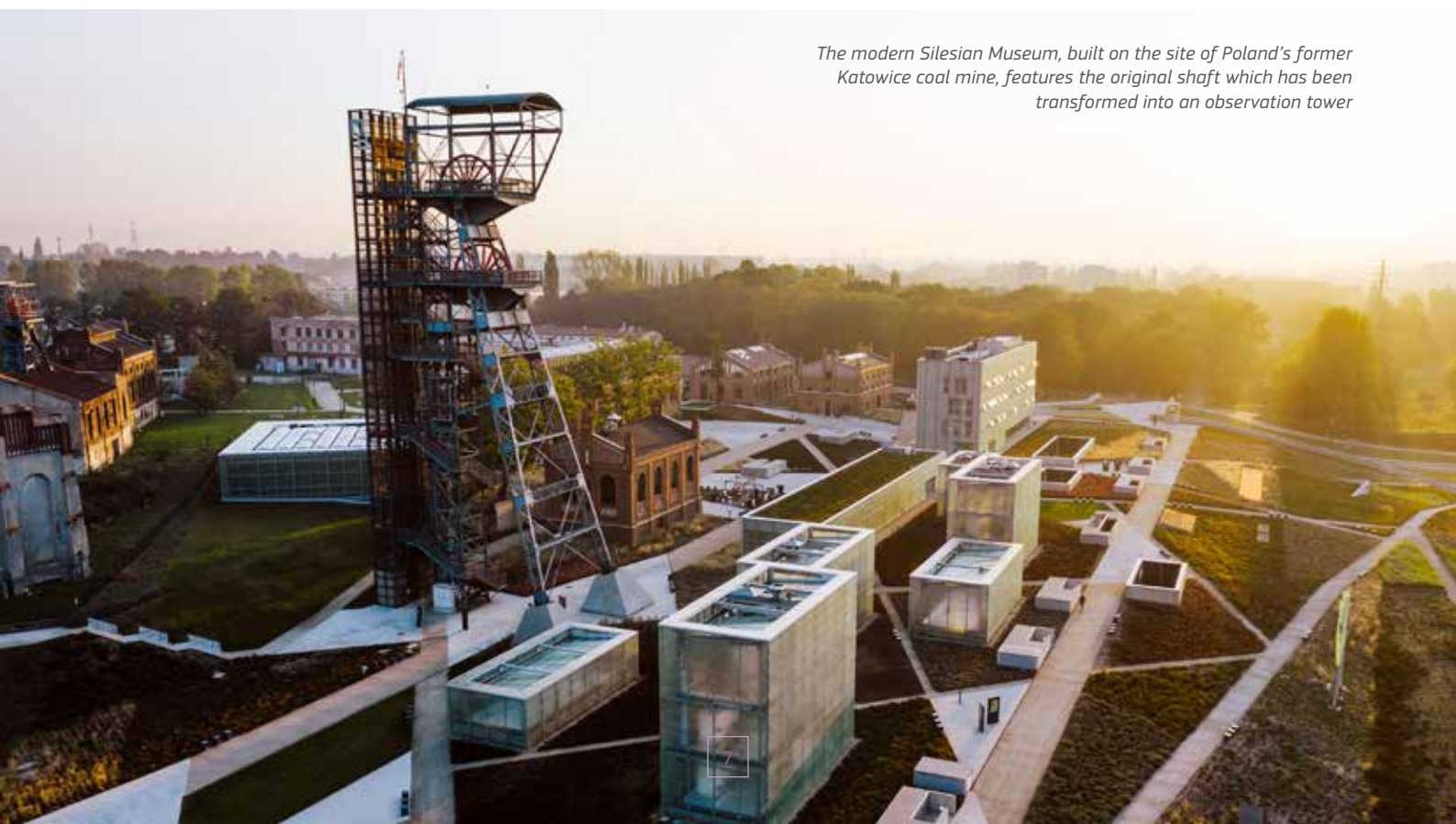
Naturally, this comes with financial support. We have negotiated – and that's the Commission's proposal – to have EUR 7.5 billion extra funds to support these transition actions. This money will be combined with other instruments into a potential EUR 100 billion investment envelope distributed indicatively by Member States, according to their regions' needs in terms of jobs and economic dependency.

We have already selected the regions we think should be the target of these interventions. Of course, we are negotiating and fine-tuning it with Member States, but it really is a special concern related directly to the Green Deal.

I hope by the end of my mandate I will have visited a sufficient number of diverse cases. Problems include those in cities, the outermost regions, peripheral

regions, mountainous areas, rural areas, the ageing population ... it's up to us not to leave any behind.

It's a big challenge but we have a fantastic group of very experienced people who have given me an incredible welcome and I have no words to thank them. They understand that my point is to deliver and not to create lots of mechanisms whereby the citizens on the ground cannot recognise what Europe is doing for their lives and those of their children. This is the purpose of our work. ■



The modern Silesian Museum, built on the site of Poland's former Katowice coal mine, features the original shaft which has been transformed into an observation tower



The theme park in St. Margarethen, Austria



Cité de la Mer in Cherbourg, France



Historical centre of Ioannina, Greece

COMMUNICATION: EU makes a difference on the ground



From November 2018 to December 2019, the communication campaign ‘EU delivers in the regions’ highlighted 34 local initiatives co-funded by the EU, through 34 regional campaigns in 5 Member States (Austria, France, Greece, Italy and Sweden).

The campaign focused on familiar, popular places which were making a difference to citizens’ lives and whose development and/or modernisation was being supported by EU regional funds.

In each region, a one-month campaign was run which aimed to show how the EU makes a difference locally. The initiatives included: a school in Guadeloupe (FR); a theatre in Peloponnese (EL); a ski station in Mellersta Norrland (SE); animal and biodiversity protection in Övre Norrland (SE) and Abruzzo (IT); a castle in Tirol (AT); a railway line in Sicily (IT); a museum in Normandy (FR); an amusement park in Burgenland (AT); and pedestrian streets in Epirus (EL) among many others.

Each regional campaign used a mix of communication:

- Advertising on urban displays, digital ads on local websites and social media; for example, in Florence (IT), the poster was displayed in the main railway station.
- Installation of an interactive photo booth giving locals an opportunity to take pictures on-site; for example, in Burgenland, where one photo booth was located.

- Partnerships with local media and/or local influencers: in Grand Est (FR), we partnered with a local influencer to produce a video of the project on-site, a blog post and social media posts.
- Visuals for social media (with the creation of a communication toolkit).
- Organising local events with region representatives, the European Commission and the project owner.

Good news!

In 2020, the campaign will be deployed in 16 new regions across 5 Member States (France, Greece, Italy, Ireland and the Netherlands).

Projects in this next phase are mainly orientated towards green issues. Several regional campaigns will highlight nature reserves which are playing an important role in animal and biodiversity protection, restoration of a coastal zone, a green university campus, and the promotion of ‘soft mobility’ via the restoration of cycle paths, eco-friendly buses and pedestrian zones. Other topics in 2020 will include, for instance, cultural heritage, culture, transport, etc.

Besides falling within the Commission’s proposals for a European Green Deal, the aim of the EU delivers in the regions campaign remains the same: to raise awareness of EU actions and outcomes at the regional level.

KEY FIGURES OF THE CAMPAIGN



475 000
visits

to the REGIO
WEBSITE



23 000
pictures

at the INTERACTIVE
PHOTO BOOTH



17
partnerships

with LOCAL MEDIA



26
partnerships

with LOCAL
INFLUENCERS

Impacting citizens' engagement

Tests conducted in the countries, before and after the campaigns, showed that:

- Localisation creates emotional bonds: using the campaign to communicate about local and regional places was key to engaging with audiences – for example, up to 71% in Sweden to 93% in Italy.
- Speaking locally enables the EU to convey messages transversally: local references and strategies produce almost the same level of engagement among both pro-European and Eurosceptic audiences. For example,

65% of Eurosceptics in one French region positively evaluated the campaign's capacity to provide information about the EU's participation.

- Furthermore, it was found that citizens show greater interest in information about the projects and places currently funded by the EU in their region. On average, 75% of the regional populations covered would favour a future campaign illustrating the latest attractions and locations in their region. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<https://europa.eu/!Qt64gt>
#EUinmyRegion!



Visitors to the Austrian theme park check out the interactive photo booth



A poster on display at the main railway station in Florence, Italy

DATA POINT

Evaluating Cohesion Policy in the Member States

Evaluation is a key dimension of cohesion policy-making as it supports policy design and implementation with robust evidence on the outcomes and impacts of the interventions.

The rules that govern the planning and implementation of Cohesion Policy have focused increasingly on assessing its impacts. In the period 2014-2020, the Member States have been obliged (for the first time) to carry out evaluations to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the objectives of each programme. Cohesion Policy rules apply to the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund.

Insights into the volume, focus and nature of the resulting national evaluations are presented below. They are based on this open dataset: Cohesion Policy programme evaluations (2015 to date) and are regularly updated.

What comes under the evaluation lens?

Most of the evaluations address implementation questions and examine progress towards achieving the targets. They focus on the coherence of projects and actions with the programmes' objectives and the effectiveness and efficiency of their implementation. They also explore whether the available funding is likely to be spent and if the targets set, especially those in the performance framework, are likely to be reached.

Impact evaluations are also carried out later in the programme cycle, when most actions are not only completed but have also produced results.

A large amount of evidence, with diverse approaches

Since 2015, more than 1 000 evaluations have been completed by the Member States, addressing different funds, themes and

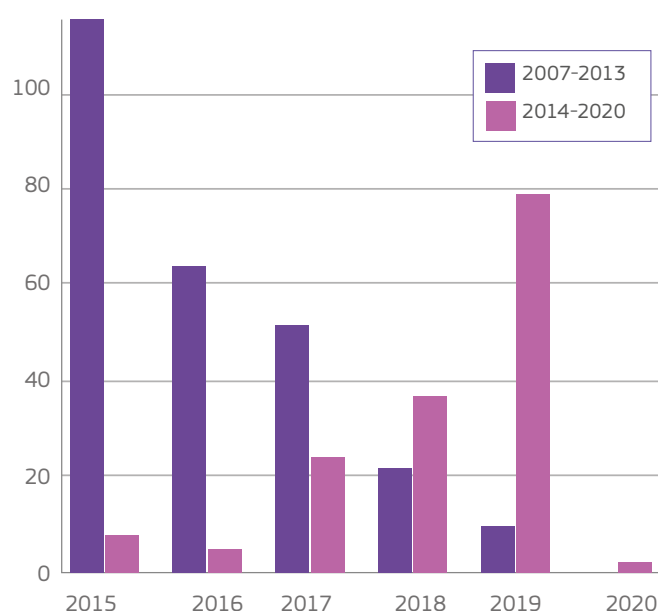
regions and monitoring progress of implementation and/or the impact of interventions. They refer to both the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods.

The number of evaluations in the Member States varies widely. This reflects significant differences in the volume and scope of investment financing, the number of programmes in a Member State, and the approach proposed in the evaluation plans. In addition, some countries prefer to undertake a larger number of smaller evaluations, while others aggregate.

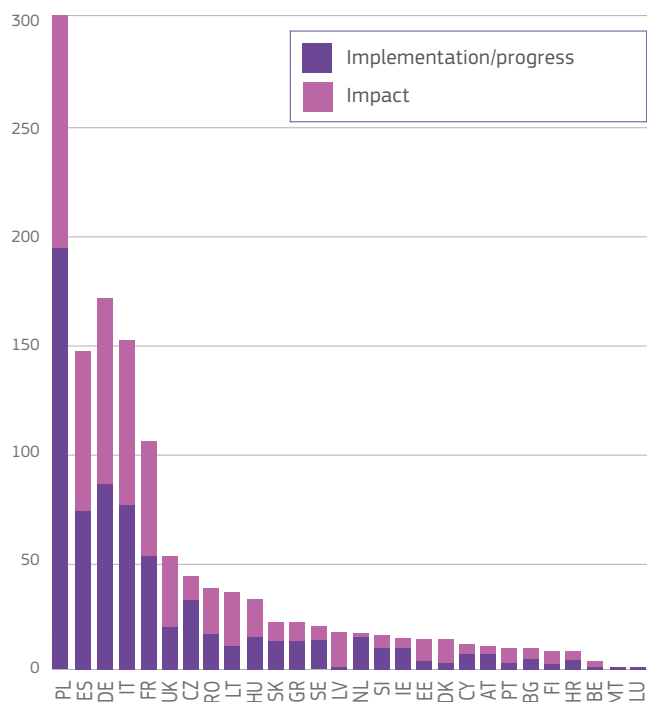
What themes have received most coverage in 2014-2020?

At the halfway point of the programming period, most of the evaluations focus on social themes, partly due to the requirement for Member States to undertake impact evaluations of the Youth Employment Initiative by the end of 2015 and 2018.

NUMBER OF IMPACT EVALUATIONS BY YEAR AND PROGRAMMING PERIOD



NUMBER OF EVALUATIONS BY COUNTRY AND TYPE (SINCE 2015)



Completed evaluations tend to concentrate on measures that are quicker to implement, such as the promotion of sustainable and quality employment which directly benefits people in the EU.

The distribution of evaluations across thematic objectives can be filtered by country and fund (some evaluations can cover multiple funds).

Focus on research and Innovation

Following the thematic concentration requirements, a large volume of ERDF investment resources is dedicated to strengthening research, technological development and innovation. The highest amounts planned for enhancing research and innovation (R&I) infrastructure, promoting business investment in R&I and developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centres and the higher education sector have been allocated in Poland, Spain and Germany. Poland also has the highest number of evaluations, although to date they focus mainly on process and monitoring.

What are the latest evaluations to be completed?

The final evaluation reports are available in the Evaluation Library where the evaluations completed by the Member States can be filtered and searched. In most cases, the reports are in national languages but are accompanied by a summary in English.

FIND OUT MORE

What the Commission is doing on Cohesion Policy evaluation:
<https://europa.eu/!XG63nD>

Annual syntheses of evaluations with the annual reports on the use of the funds:

<https://europa.eu/!MB77Fq>

For further information, please contact:

REGIO-EVAL@ec.europa.eu

Do you have an issue you would like discussed in future *Panorama* DATA POINT features?

Is there a dataset you would like us to put on the ESIF Open Data Platform?

If so, please e-mail: REGIO-EVAL@ec.europa.eu

Follow the discussion on TWITTER [#ESIFOpenData](https://twitter.com/ESIFOpenData)

or subscribe to our newsletter: http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/index.cfm?service_id=788

Sharing and caring across borders

Interreg



30 years together

Interreg, the EU's flagship scheme for cooperation across borders at the national and regional level, is celebrating 30 years of achievements while looking to do more together in the future. During 2020, we will focus on three main topics which highlight what Interreg is all about while responding to citizens' main concerns.

Since 1990, Interreg funding has supported cooperation programmes between regions, local authorities and citizens across borders. It has financed thousands of projects and initiatives that have helped reduce barriers and bring people closer together. Interreg, or European Territorial Cooperation as it is also known, is very much at the heart of the European ideal because it encourages regions and countries to tackle challenges that can only be solved through cooperation.

Celebrations throughout 2020 will provide opportunities to demonstrate Interreg's many achievements. They will also focus on the future by launching a debate on cooperation policy post-2020. While Interreg covers cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation, it also anchors cooperation in a more sustainable policy environment through, for example, Macro-Regional Strategies and the Border Focal Point.

Interreg is the embodiment of one of the EU's fundamental values: cooperation between people, regions, and countries close to us. At a time of growing introspection among some citizens, and with political dialogue tending to overlook Europe's achievements, Interreg has taken action to overcome such obstacles while helping to build a stronger and more cohesive Europe based on cooperation.

Interreg is already tackling climate change and contributing to a greener Europe. It encourages young people to work or study abroad and supports initiatives to learn their neighbours' language or volunteer in projects. It helps us all to commute from one country to another, to find jobs in Europe's border regions or outside the EU, or to access the closest public services to our homes.

We all need neighbours

We all have them – and they matter! We cooperate, we work together, we decide together, and together we create new opportunities for a better future in our common European space. Never before has cooperation been so crucial, because never before have challenges been so global. Forest fires know no borders – spreading from slopes to valleys, they never ask permission to cross a border. Neither do diseases, pollution or social unrest. If one side of the border is affected, the other will be, too.

However, we know that sharing borders is about more than finding solutions to common problems. It also means taking advantage of common opportunities, common interests, common lifestyles and cultural practices. Together, we create strong communities and build bridges between people across borders. Together, we ensure citizens have better access to education, healthcare or jobs. Together, we improve connectivity and accessibility across borders while preserving our safety and protecting heritage and nature.

We have a lot more in common with our neighbours than we think. Europe keeps us together. For 30 years, through Interreg, EU cooperation programmes have been helping neighbours work together to develop strong communities along both

internal and external borders. Thousands of EU-funded projects have been bringing concrete benefits to EU border regions and beyond, building trust and respect among those who share a common space.

THREE-PRONGED APPROACH

One of two Cohesion Policy goals for the 2014-2020 period, Interreg has a budget of EUR 10.1 billion funded by the European Development Fund which it has invested in several cooperation programmes responsible for managing project funding.

There are 60 cross-border cooperation programmes, 15 transnational cooperation programmes and 4 interregional programmes:

- › Cross-border cooperation supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them.
- › Transnational cooperation involves regions from several EU countries forming larger areas to promote better cooperation and regional development within the EU by jointly tackling common issues.
- › Interregional cooperation is geographically pan-European and covers more extensive areas.

Support for today's youth

Young people aged between 15 and 29 make up 17% of the EU population. They all face common challenges such as weak labour markets and a lack of education and training opportunities. Although young people are not immune to crises such as global warming, insecurity and the widespread lack of trust in public institutions, they share the desire for a better future. The EU provides a host of opportunities, including greater mobility, which is crucial to strengthening its position as a knowledge-based economy. >

NEW SKILLS FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION



In the Danube Region, the NewGenerationSkills project set out to use young people's potential for business and social innovation by equipping them with the skills to become changemakers in their local communities.

Starting at the local level, the project aimed to create an enabling environment in which the young people could grow their innovative ideas into ventures with high social added value. It upgraded cooperation mechanisms to develop innovative local support schemes in the form of innovation labs linked in a transnational network. Interweaving innovation and support for youth entrepreneurship will contribute to bridging the gap between education and the new generation skills needed for navigating the changing world of work.

It is hoped that this youth-focused innovation support process will ultimately lead to better economic performance, lower brain drain and will have a positive impact on the quality of the local working/living environment.

<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/newgenerationskills>

For 30 years, Interreg and cooperation policy have been finding solutions for young people. By working together, building partnerships and sharing knowledge to improve education levels and skills, Interreg has helped to provide job opportunities for young people, facilitating youth mobility via cross-border traineeships and cooperation between educational establishments.

One concrete example of this is the German-Denmark border project 'BELT' which has been enhancing young people's ability to work and learn on both sides of the border, thereby increasing their employability. Elsewhere, over 1 000 trainees participated in the 'euregio-Xperience' project to explore their future job opportunities in the labour market in the German-Dutch border region.

Interreg promotes transnational networks to help young entrepreneurs boost their skills. In the Danube Region, the 'NewGenerationSkills' project focused on unlocking young people's unexploited potential by developing their skills and creating an enabling environment to turn their innovative ideas into reality (see box). Interreg also educates young people to heighten their awareness of global warming.

The 'Youth-together' project between Hungary and Serbia has been helping young people adapt to a more sustainable way of life. Interreg builds trust and confidence across borders by establishing common public services easily accessible to young people. For example, young people in France and Spain can access the same medical care in the Cerdanya hospital – the first cross-border health establishment in Europe (see box).

BETTER CARE FOR YOUNG PATIENTS IN THE PYRENEES

An EU-funded project has improved access to healthcare for children living in the eastern Pyrenees, helping to ensure that the youngest patients get the best treatment possible in this largely mountainous, remote and rural cross-border region between France and Spain.

The Pediatric pole of Cerdanya tasked a team of professionals to develop strategies to provide optimal inpatient and outpatient care by merging resources and experience and creating partnerships to streamline costs.

The resulting facilities are run as non-profit units open to children and adolescents aged 0 to 17. They offer individual treatment plans and 24/7 medical care, while teams of experts – doctors, dieticians and therapists – help the patients and their parents learn to adapt and live well with their diagnosis.

<http://pediatrie-occitanie.alefpa.asso.fr/>



Developing a sense of community starts at a young age. Thanks to the Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY), launched in 2017, around 400 volunteers aged between 18 and 30 have participated in cooperation programmes and projects. IVY is also part of the European Solidarity Corps which provides opportunities for volunteering, traineeships and jobs, at home or abroad. >

SOUTH BALTIC YOUTH CORE GROUPS NETWORK

The value of youth participation in democratic processes has been recognised in local communities and at the international level. However, progress in the area of practical implementation has been slow. Young people are still marginal to most democratic processes. The Interreg project 'SB YCGN' enhances the capacity of local actors across borders to engage young citizens in the process of decision-making, thereby strengthening participatory democracy. As involving youth in political processes is a problem across borders, the project aims to increase the cross-border competence of the actors involved in order to strengthen European Integration by engaging citizens, authorities, political and social groups in partner countries. Thanks to Interreg, young citizens can experience participatory democracy not only at home but can also learn to understand their neighbouring countries better.

<https://southbaltic.eu/-/sb-ycgn>



A green and climate-neutral Europe

Although borders have been created to establish a sense of belonging and common identity, they do not prevent flora and fauna from crossing them. Air, water, land pollution and the overuse of common resources do not recognise national boundaries. To preserve our ecosystems for generations to come, Interreg has been fostering cooperation on environmental matters for over 30 years.

The 'LOS_DAMA!' project (see box) has been safeguarding green open spaces by creating a network of cities in the EU's Alpine Region, covering Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia. Thanks to this endeavour, a new Alpine City network will revitalise important green areas. The European Commission has just presented the Green Deal as Europe's new growth

strategy with the aim of creating a carbon-neutral Europe by 2050. One thing is crystal clear: a green and climate-neutral Europe can only be achieved if we work in cooperation. This is what Interreg stands for and has been doing for the past 30 years. ■

FIND OUT MORE

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/factsheet/interreg30_en.pdf

<https://interreg.eu/about-interreg/>

PROTECTING SPACES, CONNECTING PEOPLE

There is a coordinated effort within Alpine City-Regions to combat urban sprawl and endangered green spaces and landscapes in and around cities created by unprecedented urban growth. Areas for recreation or agriculture are being lost, important animal habitats destroyed, and bogs may dry up, all of which are contributing to climate change.

The EU-funded LOS_DAMA! project is bringing together city-regional stakeholders to protect liveable open spaces and connect people and green spaces throughout the region. The aim is to create greater awareness among citizens of the importance of protecting and managing the peri-urban and often agricultural landscapes in and around major Alpine metropolitan areas.

The project is developing a toolbox of methods to facilitate the joint implementation of plans to protect and manage peri-urban landscapes in a sustainable way, as well as several comprehensive landscape approaches.

It has also founded the Metropolitan Alpine City Network, a coalition of urban and metropolitan authorities committed to working with stakeholders to enhance their green areas and develop green infrastructure.

https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/los_dama/en/home





CREATING HEALTHIER, PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY CITIES

The CityWalk project is helping 10 cities in the Danube region to reduce pollution, noise and congestion by improving conditions for pedestrians and promoting environmentally friendly mobility.

Partner cities are running small-scale pilot actions to improve walkability, alongside the development of policy proposals. Although the emphasis is on walking, the project takes a holistic approach to enhancing urban mobility by seeking to effectively combine public and private transport.

Changes that encourage walking could include re-designing streets to give priority to walkers instead of cars. 'Soft' interventions have been examined to encourage people to leave their cars at home, such as awareness-raising schemes to promote walking and its health benefits.

<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/citywalk>

INTERREG CELEBRATES ITS 30TH BIRTHDAY WITH A NEW PODCAST: 'THIS IS EUROPE'

'This is Europe', the new Interreg podcast, brings you the personal stories of everyday Europeans whose lives are being transformed by cooperation across borders.

In this series, journalist Shahidha Bari takes you on a journey across Europe, from the Baltic Sea to the Balearic Islands and beyond.

In the first episode, you can hear how the Interreg community is creating a greener Europe. Shahidha Bari hops on her bike to tour around Steffen Nozon's hometown of Rostock in northern Germany. Steffen, an avid cyclist, is a mobility manager transforming his local area into green, car-free 'living streets'.

The first episode is available on all platforms: see <https://this-is-europe.simplecast.com/> <http://pediatrie-occitanie.alefpa.asso.fr/>



Enhancing Interreg projects with Enterprise Europe Network tools and services



Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) is the world's largest support network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It has over 600 members renowned among their regional/national

business and innovation ecosystems, such as regional development agencies, chambers of industry and commerce, research organisations, universities, trade organisations, and promotional and investment banks). Active in over 60 countries, the EEN offers regions an interesting service to support the internationalisation of their SMEs.

The entire EEN range, available to SMEs free of charge, can be grouped into three categories: business advisory services, including access-to-funding consultation; internationalisation/partnership services; and innovation services. Most of these are co-funded through the COSME programme which, as of 2021, will be part of the Single Market Programme under the new Multiannual Financial Framework.

At the same time, innovation services, such as innovation management capacity-building and the key account management services for SME-Instrument/European Innovation Council (EIC) pilot beneficiaries are co-funded through Horizon 2020.

Tools of the trade

EEN tools and services offer great potential for synergies, ranging from facilitating the transnational S3 entrepreneurial discovery process to embedding matching tools and advisory services in Interreg projects to enhance their successful implementation. The following examples demonstrate their achievements in recent projects.

The Interreg Alpine Space project 'S3-4AlpClusters'¹ introduced a transnational entrepreneurial discovery process in the Alpine region. The project capitalised on business links established through EEN activities by Veneto Innovazione and Business Upper Austria by organising cross-regional action development workshops to define ways to further develop transformative activities in the 'smart food ecosystem'.

The Interreg France-Switzerland 'Innovarc'² project united 250 enterprises and research organisations in the French-Swiss Jura mountains to increase cross-border cooperation

1) <https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/s3-4alpclusters/en/home>

2) <http://www.innovarc.eu/innovarc/presentation-du-projet>



on innovation projects. The team provided different consultation services on access to finance, innovation management and internationalisation.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Hungarian Győr-Moson-Sopron County is lead partner in the Interreg Austria-Hungary project 'Smart-up'³ which aims to boost cross-border business and innovation collaboration among start-ups in the border regions.

The 'AmiCE'⁴ and 'KETGATE'⁵ projects are both co-financed under the Interreg Central Europe priority on innovation and knowledge development. AMiCE is helping SMEs to introduce advanced manufacturing technologies, in particular 3D printing. KETGATE connects business support organisations with research and technology organisations from eight central

European countries, five of which host EEN teams. The goal is to facilitate SMEs' cross-border access to cutting-edge technology infrastructures for advanced materials, photonics, micro and nano-electronics in the transport, health and food sectors.

The Interreg North-West Europe 'Boost4Health'⁶ project developed financial and non-financial support services for the internationalisation of SMEs in life sciences and medtech.

Veneto Innovazione is member of the Italian EEN Friend Europe consortium which covers the Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Trentino Alto Adige regions. The business transfer project, supported by EEN tools, facilitated cross-border business transfer and matching between potential sellers and buyers. ■

3) <https://www.interreg-athu.eu/en/smartup>

4) <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/AMiCE.html>

5) <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/KETGATE.html>

6) <https://www.boost4health.eu>

Frontloading administrative capacities for post-2020



Kostas Raftopoulos, Administrative Capacity Building pilot action team leader at the Greek Managing Authority, explains the importance of good governance and capacity building for Cohesion Policy.

Tell us why you decided to join the pilot action on frontloading administrative capacity for 2021-2027

We decided to participate in this project because our Managing Authority experienced a great shock in 2015 after the merger of the three MAs which previously managed three different programmes – motorways, railways and environmental protection. From the start, we realised we had to take immediate action in relation to

our systems and people to homogenise the way we operated. We began with the information systems, replacing the fragmented ones with a new, single document management system. Then we moved forward by establishing cross-functional teams to identify sources of heterogeneity and distribute best practices across the three previous structures.

So, when we learned about the Commission's initiative, we had already convinced ourselves and our political leadership about the need to enhance our administrative capacity, especially for the future period. In my opinion, participation in this pilot action accelerated the process we had put in place from 2015. Without this project, developments would have been much slower and fragmented.

What were the most useful and innovative elements?

First of all, this pilot is a great opportunity to spend time rethinking what you take for granted. The pressure from day-to-day obligations and tight deadlines make us leave administrative capacity building for tomorrow. But the world is changing and we must respond. The structures and skills we once built may prove inadequate unless we invest in reviewing and rebuilding them.

Second, cooperation with DG REGIO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is in itself a very useful experience. Organising workshops and interviews to listen to what our first-line people, beneficiaries and other stakeholders suggest for the future may seem trivial to some

private organisations, but for the Greek public administration (and in my opinion for many public administrations) it is truly innovative.

Third, to implement the roadmap, we set up voluntary implementation teams of staff from all units and sectors, led by front-line colleagues who have proved they are capable but have so far lacked the opportunity. Our cooperation with the OECD team will be extended to implementing specific actions. This means the implementing teams will be able to work directly with the OECD as well as with the Human Resources Unit – an agency outside our MA – intermediate bodies, beneficiaries, and the National Coordination Authority, etc. In other words, a lot of communication channels will open to share best practice and know-how and further develop the teamwork culture.

What was the reaction and level of engagement of your colleagues?

When we organised the first workshop in Athens with more than 100 participants representing around 40 stakeholders, the OECD team asked me: ‘Why are all these people so enthusiastic?’ People had the opportunity to speak, meet with colleagues from all over Greece and share experiences, suggestions and concerns. And this enthusiasm is still with us during implementation. In fact, the teams cooperating with the

OECD from May 2020 were so impatient that they started to prepare material three months before the OECD’s first scheduled mission in Athens.

What are your expectations for the future, and will this work help to better manage future Cohesion Policy investments?

Four years after the merger and 18 months after joining this project, we now feel much more confident that our organisation will be well prepared for the coming programming period. Our roadmap includes 19 actions, 11 of which are linked to internal staffing issues, 6 concern our relations with our stakeholders and beneficiaries, and 2 relate to fighting red tape and establishing a communication channel with the Audit Authority, the Certifying Authority and the National Coordination Authority. I am quite sure that the readers (especially those working in the EU funds management system) fully understand the importance of the above-mentioned actions in administrative capacity building.

Would you recommend your peers in other managing authorities to invest in developing roadmaps for administrative capacity building?

We have had many opportunities to discuss with colleagues from Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland and Spain the main

challenges Managing Authorities face, and it is obvious that almost half of the issues are shared. However, there are problems specific to each individual case that need to be identified and dealt with. In my opinion, a systematic approach like that of the OECD methodology guarantees that each roadmap includes those actions most needed to enhance administrative capacity in every specific case. ■

FIND OUT MORE

The synthesis report of phase I of the joint pilot initiative:

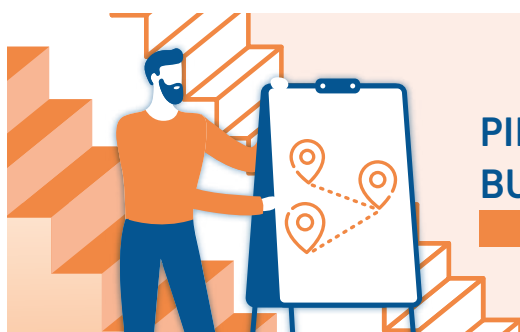
<https://europa.eu/!Gq44bp>

Good governance and administrative capacity – the new data story:

<https://europa.eu/!uM83XJ>

Practical toolkit - Roadmaps for administrative capacity building:

<https://europa.eu/!dv43qF>



PILOT ON GOOD GOVERNANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR COHESION POLICY

- PILOT ACTION IN COOPERATION WITH THE OECD -

Catching-up Regions Initiative takes a new approach to EU project implementation



The ‘Economic Challenges of Lagging Regions’ report, published jointly by the European Commission and the World Bank in 2017, analysed key challenges facing such regions and proposed strategies and policies to revive or sustain their long-term growth and competitiveness. It paved the way for the Catching-up Regions Initiative: a hands-on technical assistance programme aiming to identify barriers to competitiveness and improve delivery of Cohesion Policy funds in selected low-income regions across the EU.

The report also concludes that investment and support for such regions is required to ensure current trends of gradually improving skill levels, innovation activity, capital stock and labour productivity do not stagnate or reverse. Poland and Romania were the first countries to pilot the Catching-up Regions Initiative (CuRI) followed by Croatia and Slovakia.

The CuRI, implemented jointly by relevant national and regional authorities, the Commission and the World Bank, provides expertise to a number of low-income regions. Low-income regions cover all regions with a GDP per head in purchasing power standards below 50 % of the EU average. The EU’s Joint Research Centre participated in implementation of the pilot phase of the initiative in Romania.

Support is delivered in a wide gamut of policy sectors: from smart specialisation strategies, and business support to spatial planning, commercialisation of research and vocational

education and training. Assistance is tailored to the needs of each participating country or region, complementing existing strategies and programmes. The initiative also aims to respond to policy recommendations in an analysis of the structural issues under the European Semester.

A practical approach

The CuRI aims to achieve practical results that could accelerate the pace of structural reforms in the selected policy areas rather than simply proposing recommendations. It is providing political, legal and administrative advice combined with strong capacity-building and project design to help regions improve their productivity and competitiveness. It is also delivering new options for implementing Cohesion Policy, investment priorities and administrative procedures.

The cooperation model established through the initiative is making headway in tackling bottlenecks that traditionally hamper the implementation of EU funds. There is evidence that the delivery of funding from the European Investment and Structural Funds is quicker and more efficient, thanks to the CuRI. This has helped to improve project selection criteria and implementation of state-aid rules, increase administrative capacity, enhance project preparation and evaluation, and foster greater cooperation between the private and public sectors.

The CuRI has also blended various innovative approaches. For example, the TAIEX peer-to-peer reviews were used to explore and gain better knowledge of similar projects implemented in other European countries.

Finally, it is delivering a unique collaborative working environment where government agencies, regional and local authorities, the Commission, international financing institutions and others can share their strategic and operational expertise across organisational and territorial boundaries. These close relationships are helping to solve problems caused by knowledge fragmentation and complexity as well as weak administrative capacities in some territories implementing EU funds.

A catalyst for change

Following successes abroad, Slovakia's Prešov region joined the CuRI to tackle some of its specific challenges. Work began with targeted actions to stimulate economic development in the remote district of Snina, including boosting the tourism potential of Poloniny National Park. Other measures focused on improving energy efficiency in public buildings and creating

a new geodata platform (see box). The region also developed a new approach to strengthening its vocational, training and education system by reinforcing links between local businesses and secondary schools.

According to Mr Milan Majersky, president of the Prešov region: 'The cooperation of international experts with the region did not stop with analytical papers – this initiative was a catalyst for much-needed change.'

One year later, the CuRI was extended to the neighbouring Banská Bystrica region. Here the focus is on supporting sustainable mobility and developing integrated transport systems; boosting the R&D potential of local companies; and improving social care for the elderly. Following its neighbour's good practices, this region is also finding ways to match the skills needs of local employers with school graduates. ➤

“ It has been a privilege for the World Bank to partner with the European Commission on the Catching-up Regions Initiative. We especially value the systematic real-time knowledge exchange among regional peers on structural impediments and viable solutions. This initiative has also been a unique opportunity to advance global learning on space-based development policy, which we hope to use for the benefit of poorer countries worldwide. ”

Arup Benerji, regional director for the European Union countries, World Bank Group

PREŠOV LAUNCHES GEODATA PORTAL

The Prešov region now hosts a state-of-the-art geodata portal giving people online access to public information. The Regional Spatial and Open Data platform – developed with experts from the World Bank – supports the region's analytical and decision-making processes.

The GeoPresov portal (<https://geopresovregion.sk>) can be freely used by anyone. It provides information on regional and local services in, for example, healthcare, property, cultural heritage, business, emergency services and education.

A local team has been trained to input data and administer the portal, while representatives from Prešov learnt how a geoportal is operated and maintained during a study visit to Brittany, France. Thanks to this, other regional administration policy departments are supported with integrated datasets to inform decisions on the region's future investments.



Smart moves

In Romania, the first phase of CuRI focused mainly on innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) in the North-East and North-West regions. Key outcomes included:

- a comprehensive stocktake of the state-of-play of RIS3 development and implementation;
- drafting RIS3 strategies and action plans based on entrepreneurial discovery processes;
- developing specific RIS3 governance structures in both pilot regions;
- developing effective project pipelines.

Reflecting the success of these activities, EU financing has been reallocated to support several smart specialisation projects in the two regions – EUR 50 million from the country's Regional Operational Programme.

The CuRI is currently being extended to all Romanian regions, with a strong focus on RIS3.

To keep the momentum and build on the results, resources from various EU-funded programmes were pooled to allow for swift financing of initiative outcomes.

Croatia is at the early stages of introducing measures through the CuRI in five eastern counties: Vukovar-Srijem, Pozega-Slavonia, Osijek-Baranja, Slavonski Brod-Posavina and Virovitica-Podravina.

Finding more effective ways to use EU Structural and Investment Funds is a priority. To that end, the Croatian Ministry of Regional Development is working on a project lead by the World Bank. The aim is to maximise the impact of the current spending period for EU funds while bringing a strategic approach to spending between 2021 and 2027. It could spark initiatives in various sectors, including agriculture, food and metal processing, education, innovation, social inclusion, ICT, tourism and foreign direct investment.

COMMERCIALISING RESEARCH IN ROMANIA



Romanian higher education institutions and public research organisations need help to bring innovation to the marketplace. Through the CuRI, efforts are being made to build capacity for technology transfer and improve the technology readiness level of R&D projects in these organisations. For example, legal issues concerning intellectual property are being clarified. Application of state-aid regulations is also in the spotlight in relation to using public research infrastructure for commercial purposes.

Training sessions organised with research teams from the first two CuRI regions (North-East and North-West) have identified project applications with commercial potential. An additional EUR 10 million from the Regional Operational Programme have been allocated for a national roll-out of a programme supporting innovative SMEs to test and improve the commercial viability of their ideas (proof of concept).

In future, researchers are also likely to receive specialised coaching to help get their projects closer to the market.

UNLOCKING R&D POTENTIAL IN PODKARPACKIE

Developed through the CuRI, the Podkarpackie Centre for Innovation (PCI) is helping the region strengthen business-science cooperation and capitalise on its own research and entrepreneurial talent. It gives scientists and engineers based at three local universities access to top-quality research and development equipment – and professional expertise.



The PCI helps the most promising R&D projects in local universities to realise their technological and market potential. At PCI, researchers can work on prototype development assisted by scientific and commercial experts. The Centre also offers commercial R&D services to local companies and entrepreneurs needing extra support to turn their ideas into reality. During the CuRI, inventories of scientific infrastructure at local universities helped firms to better understand how to use it in commercial undertakings.

Furthermore, several study tours were organised to the Toulouse Tech Transfer in France, Aalto Design Factory in Finland and the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium to see how technology transfers function elsewhere.

PCI's long-term goal is to unlock the potential of Podkarpackie's R&D ecosystem and improve the relatively low levels of collaboration between local businesses and universities.

Other priorities for the CuRI in Croatia include building capacities in local and regional government and trying to halt depopulation in some eastern counties by creating new jobs and boosting the economy.

Thinking outside the box

Through its initial introduction in these four countries, CuRI has delivered many positive benefits. The extra support and technical assistance in project preparation have been well received by Managing Authorities and project beneficiaries. Lessons learned will help inform preparations for the post-2020 Cohesion Policy.

According to Marc Lemaître, the Director-General of Regional and Urban Policy, CuRI has allowed for creativity and innovation in policymaking and provides space for testing new approaches under Cohesion Policy, away from standard or business-as-usual options.

'In this respect, it requires from everyone concerned a lot of openness, determination and courage to think outside the box,' he explains. 'The most successful pilot projects are, to the fullest possible extent, embedded and implemented within national or regional programmes. More generally, the CuRI has proved we can succeed in overcoming obstacles to economic and social development through structural reforms at regional and local level.'

FIND OUT MORE

<https://europa.eu/!GW33Kn>

YOUTH4REGIONS MEDIA PROGRAMME

Here is another article submitted by a young journalist who participated in the YOUTH4REGIONS blogging competition.

The Youth4Regions media programme supports the development of the next generation of journalists specialised in regional policy. It encourages these young Europeans to communicate on EU-funded projects.



CITIES Forum 2020: local problems require local solutions

Iskra Tsankova selects the highlights of her visit to the CITIES Forum in Porto, Portugal, at the end of January 2020.

Sustainability means causing little or no damage to the environment and thus ensuring continuity for a long time. The recently concluded CITIES Forum showed how cities are changing in this direction thanks to Cohesion Policy.

The current edition of the biennial event, hosted by the City of Porto, was attended by almost 800 participants from across Europe. However, actually being there felt like being part of something far bigger – an event gathering people from all over Europe with the same goal: maintaining economic development in the Member States while meeting the needs of the different regions.

Moreover, it was an opportunity to see how the European Commission can work better with cities on issues such as climate change, digitalisation and the circular economy.

Being born and raised in the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, and working as a journalist for the past two years, I can definitely recall numerous problems in the country that have



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Previously, she was a reporter and is working as a media analyst. Iskra has

always been interested in international relations and more specifically in the EU and its policies.

needed development over time. One is the need for investment in and working towards an integrated infrastructure and urban transport. And that has not gone unnoticed by the European Commission.

During the CITIES Forum, there were a lot of examples of successful projects implemented thanks to funding from Cohesion Policy and the Urban Agenda for the EU. One was the second stage of Sofia's integrated urban transport which builds on the results achieved by stage one, thereby

providing the city with an integrated public transport system that is environmentally friendly and cost-effective. This shows how an everyday problem facing the citizens of Sofia was recognised as a priority by the EU and thus received funding.

The local problem in Sofia can be seen as an example of how Cohesion Policy and the EU's Urban Agenda really work and what is key to satisfying citizens' needs across all EU Member States.

During her participation in the CITIES Forum, the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, emphasised that local problems require local solutions. The European Union would like a less-fragmented and more coherent approach. Every strategy in the future must have a key objective. And the objectives of Sofia's integrated urban transport project are sustainable multimodal urban mobility, digital solutions and integrated development in urban areas.

According to the Commissioner, funding should go directly to cities for their regional development. But the most important thing is not just money – it is when it becomes a working method which delivers results, which is exactly what the CITIES Forum 2020 demonstrated.

Sustainability can also be defined as a socio-ecological process characterised by the pursuit of a common ideal. The CITIES Forum's ideal is shaping a sustainable urban future through the cities. Regional development is the core of global development, and events like this are a crucial step towards modernising EU Member States while preserving what is important – environment and historical culture. ■

FIND OUT MORE

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/conferences/cities_forum_pt/

Commissioner Elisa Ferreira joins panellists Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the CoR, and Jan Olbrycht, MEP, to answer questions from the audience during CITIES Forum 2020





Hungary: channelling a fairer, smarter future

Hungarian parliament, Budapest

Hungary has a rich landscape and a diverse cultural heritage. While EU investments look to protect these distinctive qualities, cohesion funding will also seek to modernise the country's digital innovation and energy mix.

With a land area of 93 011 square kilometres, Hungary lies landlocked in central Europe. It is bordered by Romania to the east, Croatia and Slovenia to the south-west, Austria to the west, and Slovakia to the north. It also borders the non-EU countries of Serbia to the south and Ukraine to the north-east.

The country's geography is defined by two major waterways, the Tisza and the Danube. Translated as 'beyond the Danube', Dunántúl is the hilly region covering west Hungary and includes the largest lake in central Europe, Lake Balaton. The east of Hungary is dominated by Europe's largest natural grasslands, the Great Hungarian Plain, and mountains in the north. The country's capital, Budapest, lies in Central Hungary.

Hungary has 10 national parks and 35 landscape protection areas. It boasts the largest thermal water cave system in the world and the second largest thermal bathing lake. Every year, millions of tourists flock to the country's famous spas.

Of the country's 9.77 million inhabitants, 7% are estimated to be Roma. Integrating these communities, which historically have been persecuted, is a priority for both Hungary and the EU.

The country's main industries include agriculture and food processing, pharmaceuticals, automotive, machinery, ICT and

electrical goods. Other important sectors cover wholesale and retail trade, transport and tourism. The country has its own currency, the Hungarian forint (HUF), but is currently preparing to adopt the euro.

Hungary has an export-oriented economy with a heavy emphasis on foreign trade. Internal trade within the EU accounts for 82% of Hungary's exports, almost a third of which is with Germany.

Hungary's GDP per capita grew by 57% between 2003 and 2017, and the country is successfully controlling unemployment, with an unemployment rate of 3.4%, well below the EU average of 6.2% in 2019.

Closing the regional gap

All regions, with the exception of Central Hungary, have a GDP per capita under 75% of the EU average, implying living standards outside of Hungary's major cities are low compared to rest of the EU. GDP and growth are particularly low in the south-west and east of the country.

As of 2013, over a third (34%) of the total population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion. It is important to integrate marginal communities, such as the Roma, and tackle the country's territorial inequalities.

Since 2004, EUR 55.2 billion has been invested in Hungary under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). The majority of Cohesion Policy funding has gone to less-developed regions. In parallel, European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds have been used to create jobs and reduce regional disparities.

By 2020, over 280 000 people – including low-skilled and marginalised people – are expected to have benefited from employment initiatives through ESI Funds. It is hoped that 7 000 migrants and minorities, including Roma, will have benefited from social development programmes.

Looking beyond 2020, Hungary's economy must adapt to globalisation and ensure a high quality of life for its citizens. The Commission has called on Hungary to focus investment policy on low-carbon energy and transport, research and innovation, waste infrastructure, and energy and resource efficiency.

Smart and green initiatives

Until now, Hungary has been a modest innovator. The Commission proposes to allocate 35% of the country's 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy budget to promote innovation and smart transformation. This funding will support the uptake of digital solutions and develop innovation-related skills. By increasing the number of pioneering Hungarian firms, more research results can be turned into new products and services.

Broadband coverage is already improving: 1 million additional households have received broadband access since 2013, thanks to ESI Funds. Special attention must be given to e-commerce as neither the country's consumers nor businesses exploit it fully, and more investment should go towards digitalisation.

The current economy is relatively energy intensive, so it is important to improve efficiency and transition to renewable energy. The Commission proposes to allocate 30% of Hungary's cohesion budget to support greener solutions – for example, the replacement of obsolete fossil-fuel boilers and the promotion of sustainable and accessible modes of transport, such as public transport, inland waterways and active transportation, like biking and walking.

The country is already making efforts to preserve its rich natural heritage and improve its environmental performance, but further support is needed. Enhanced cooperation activities with neighbouring countries should cultivate environmental conservation, particularly of Hungary's major rivers, while also fostering social and cultural development.

Cohesion funding will continue to provide more opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as children, marginalised Roma communities and people with disabilities. The Commission proposes to take a more holistic approach to territorial development and invest in new measures to overcome prejudices.

Hungary is well placed to take advantage of its links with surrounding countries through the Danube Region Strategy and its cross-border Interreg projects with Serbia. Although its history ties it to other central and eastern European countries, its future will connect it to the global market. ➤

Hungary's research-based pharmaceutical sector is a main player in driving medical progress and innovation across the country



Solid foundations support Hungary's ambitious plans

Hungarian Minister of Innovation and Technology, László Palkovics, looks ahead to the next programming period during which the country's main aim will be to improve its economic and social competitiveness.



What is Hungary hoping to achieve in the 2021-2027 period? And what are the most important investment areas for that period?

We are building on the results and experiences of the current programming period, bearing in mind major changes in the Hungarian economic and social landscape in recent years, to which EU funds have contributed significantly.

Our main objective for the 2021-2027 period is to increase Hungary's competitiveness in both economic and social terms. An ambitious Europe needs an ambitious budget.

Based on the government's strategies, there are six main objectives:

- To enhance the productivity and innovation capacity of Hungarian SMEs to become key players in international economic competition;
- To increase employment rates and improve productivity and employment conditions;

- To invest in infrastructure which contributes in particular to enhancing our competitiveness;
- To increase cross-border cooperation with neighbouring regions;
- To give research, development and innovation a central role;
- To facilitate the widespread use of renewable energy and encourage the transition to a greener, low-carbon industry leading to a circular economy to fight climate change.

What do you consider as missed development opportunities so far, and how will you address these, and persistent regional disparities, in the next period?

Hungary implemented a successful development policy in the 2014-2020 period. The government spent 60% of the funds on increasing competitiveness and supporting SMEs and the results are clearly visible: between 2010 and 2018, the productivity of SMEs in Hungary increased faster than in the rest of the

V4 countries. EU-funded investments are likely to be the main reason behind growth in productivity.

Many innovative methods have been introduced. Secure project implementation is being achieved by a new system of advanced funding allowing applicants to have more flexibility and to rely less on banks. The lack of obligation for financial collateral and the option of deferred own contribution can further help to improve applicants' liquidity.

Administrational duties have been simplified. The legislation, comprising 24 different laws, has been changed to one unified government decree while the entire support system has been re-regulated.

Hungary leads the V4 countries in terms of utilising EU funds, having already absorbed 43% of its total financial framework, which is above the EU average (39%).

Although Hungary's growth rates have been among the best in the EU, it is still the fifth least-developed Member

“...between 2010 and 2018, the productivity of SMEs in Hungary increased faster than in the rest of the V4 countries. EU-funded investments are likely to be the main reason behind growth in productivity.”

State with a development rate of 69% of the EU's average GDP/capita. Furthermore, it is one of only two Member States where most regions' level of development remains below 50% of the EU average. This is one reason why we stand by our view that the European Commission's proposal to reduce the Cohesion Fund in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework is unacceptable. Reducing regional disparities is a great challenge, where complex developments and significant investments are needed to achieve our goals.

What are the country's most important challenges regarding a carbon-neutral economy, clean energy and sustainable transport?

The government's goal is to provide clean, smart and affordable energy for consumers. In addition, its main objectives are to strengthen security of energy supply, transform the energy sector to become climate friendly, and stimulate innovation opportunities of economic development importance.

A further goal is that most of Hungary's electricity is produced from two sources: nuclear and renewable, primarily solar power plants. By using solar and nuclear energy together, by 2030, 90% of Hungary's electricity

production will be carbon-free. By 2040, Hungary's electricity imports will fall from the current average of over 30% to below 20%.

In addition, we aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. We also commit to increasing the current 14% share of renewable energy to at least 21% by 2030, greening and making district-heating more competitive.

Greening transport is key to achieving climate goals. Hungary is at the forefront of developing electric mobility in the region, with 672 charging stations nationwide and over 14 000 green licence plates on the roads.

How do you see the performance and embeddedness of the Hungarian economy in an international context?

As far as innovation performance is concerned, the European Commission's annual European Innovation Scoreboard has placed Hungary in the bottom section of 'moderate innovators', followed by Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland and Lithuania. All 4V countries fall under that category.

Hungary has enjoyed outstanding growth in the last couple of years, with GDP per capita at 70% of the EU average

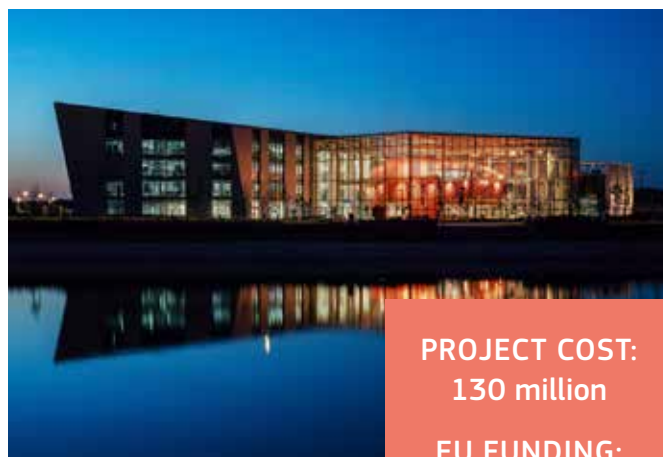
by 2018, and its growth averaging 4% a year. In its 2019 autumn forecast, the European Commission projected the headline deficit would decline from 2.3% of GDP in 2018 to 1.8% of GDP in 2019. The improvement is mainly driven by the moderate increase in current expenditure compared to GDP.

Finally, according to the latest data, net exports contributed positively to GDP growth (in the third quarter of 2019). The expansion in investments is attributable to capacity build-ups in construction and in the processing industry, while the continued positive contribution of net exports to GDP growth can also be observed. ■

Leading lights in laser science

The Extreme Light Infrastructure (ELI) is a cutting-edge project promoting national and European research by creating an internationally renowned research infrastructure, open to specialists from the academic and private scientific spheres as well as the business sector. In 2006, it was identified by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures as one of the top priority projects in research infrastructure for Europe. The project has contributed to reversing the brain drain, keeping local researchers by offering them top research jobs and attracting experts from other countries.

The ultimate objective of the ELI-ALPS Project – the Hungarian pillar of this pan-European laser infrastructure – is to ensure EU competitiveness and maintain the leading position of European laser science by putting in place cutting-edge laser research facilities. In this way, the project will ensure that Europe remains at the forefront of high-tech research.



PROJECT COST:
130 million

EU FUNDING:
EUR 120 million

(100% ERDF)

The project also demonstrates what cross-border cooperation can achieve, with Czechia, Romania and Hungary involved in the construction of ELI facilities. The ELI-ALPS project will establish a laser-based research facility in the city of Szeged where light pulses of a few tenths of an attosecond will be generated. These pulses are used for basic and applied research and are necessary for observing elementary processes in atoms and molecules, as well as for revealing physical events of light-matter interactions on the surface of solids.

<https://www.eli-alps.hu/>
<https://europa.eu/DG74NV>

Solar panels power regional energy efficiency



PROJECT COST:
EUR 377 000

EU FUNDING:
EUR 336 000

(89% ERDF)

Thanks to funding of nearly EUR 365 000, the Central-Tisza-Region Water Management Directorate deployed two small solar power plants at the Tisza II site in Kisköre and at the Érfű pumping station site in Abádszalók. The Directorate operates Hungary's largest water management facility, the Kisköre-reservoir (Tisza-tó). The hydropower plant bordering the reservoir generates electricity and is part of the country's critical infrastructure, which makes the smooth operation of the site essential. The solar power plants provide for the continuous operation of the two sites even when there is prolonged power outage. As a result of the development, 529 polycrystalline solar panels were installed on the roof of a warehouse in Kisköre. The energy capacity provided covers the annual electricity consumption of approximately 60 to 70 households.

In Abádszalók, the Central-Tisza-Region Water Management Directorate installed 286 solar panels with pile-driving technology, equivalent to the annual consumption of 30 to 40 households. The project is helping the region to increased renewable energy consumption and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Education and industry learning together

The University of Miskolc, in consortium with BorsodChem, EMI Public Company for Quality Control and Innovation in Building and Construction, Robert Bosch Energy and Body Systems, and Starters E-Components Generators Automotive Hungary, is one of eight Higher Education and Industry Collaboration Centres in Hungary.

These centres play a major role in establishing territorial cooperation between higher education institutions and local industry and business stakeholders in order to strengthen the Hungarian research, development and innovation sector and the economic use of innovations. Industry and business partners play an important part in the development of programme and course curricula to reflect the needs of the economy. The university, in turn, provides further training and education to industry professionals.

The University of Miskolc project, entitled 'Higher Education and Industry Collaboration – Research Infrastructure Development', costs EUR 17 million, of which EUR 14 million comes from EU funding. The centre supports regional industry development by strengthening research infrastructure in the field of modern materials technologies and smart control and automation systems. It will map the RDI needs of industry partners and develop a knowledge-sharing infrastructure to address those needs. The design of the project ensures that more partners will be able to join the centre in future.

<http://fiekprojekt.uni-miskolc.hu/> (only in HU)



PROJECT COST:
EUR 18 million

EU FUNDING:
EUR 12 million

(83% ERDF)

Artificial spawning nests for native fish

With EU support, the Balaton Fish Management Non-Profit Ltd has developed and is maintaining artificial spawning areas for endangered fish species in Lake Balaton. The lake's restored fauna also provides a location for freshwater fishing. The umbrella project includes additional research activities, such as the genetic mapping of native species and the creation of a gene bank.

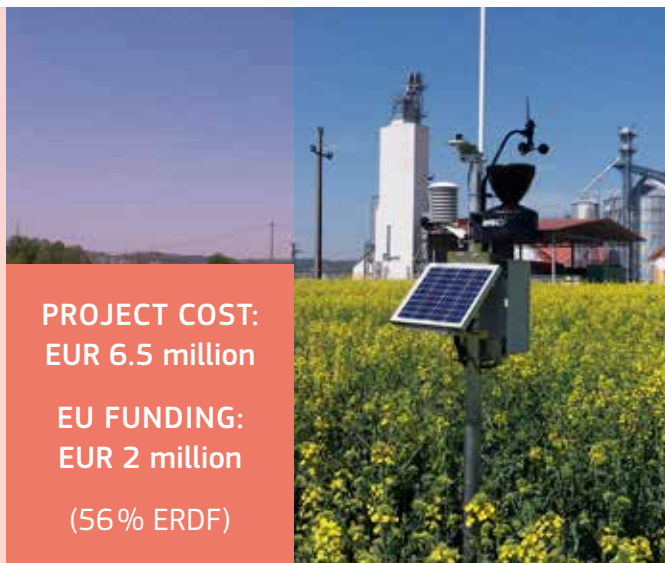
<http://balatonihal.hu/>



PROJECT COST:
EUR 4 524 000

EU FUNDING:
EUR 4 504 000

Growing expertise in precision farming



PROJECT COST:
EUR 6.5 million

EU FUNDING:
EUR 2 million
(56% ERDF)

KITE Agricultural Services, together with the University of Debrecen and Balogh Farm – an SME in the agricultural sector – were granted EUR 3.6 million to develop a precision-farming system that will be economically sustainable, easy to put in practice, and will increase farmers’ profits. Furthermore, the project will build an expert knowledge base and capacity for personalised consultancy in the field.

KITE, the lead project partner, is responsible for improving existing precision technologies in the agronomic and engineering fields, providing reliable data sources and automating the data-processing and analysis procedures. The University of Debrecen is conducting research on precision farming, more specifically on fertilisers, and developing a training methodology. Balogh Farm is providing land, expert knowledge and equipment in the research and testing processes.

To date, the project has laid down the scientific grounds of precision farming (determining several agricultural parameters) and, based on empirical research, the partners have compared the impact of traditional and precision farming on crops (wheat, corn, rape, sunflower and soya bean). Using the project results, the researchers have developed training methodology materials.

Environmental regeneration stimulates the local economy

The Libakert neighbourhood of Debrecen has undergone an environmental regeneration to support the district’s economic recovery. The environment and family-friendly renewal of the area involved infrastructure development focusing on living conditions and public security, as well as support to local businesses to stimulate economic activity in Libakert. The project is contributing to the broader objective – the region’s economic development – by retaining (young) residents and providing them with better living conditions and quality education/employment.



PROJECT COST:
EUR 710 000

EU FUNDING:
EUR 630 000
(88% ERDF)

Libakert used to be a poorly maintained, ageing area in Debrecen. However, the project has improved the district’s accessibility via a pedestrian zone and parking development. Furthermore, the local library is organising workshops and seminars for all residents on, for example, environmentally friendly practices, developing human resources, local identity, and public security.

As part of the project, local parks, play- and sports grounds have been renovated and surveillance cameras set up. Green spaces in the parks have been cleaned up, new trees and shrubs were planted, and new benches and drinking fountains have been installed.

Sustainable urban transport makes inroads in Szeged

This sustainable public transport project received EUR 3.3 million in EU funding to improve the local public transport in the region and to encourage Szeged's residents to choose this environmentally friendly option. The project is part of the city's Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan which is addressing the challenges of a growing population and corresponding mobility needs.

Several central nodes and 40 bus stops were restored in the city centre and in one of its housing estates, providing residents with quicker, more efficient and quality public transport. The project also focused on cyclist and pedestrian safety and comfort by refurbishing the landscape, public lighting infrastructure and pavements.

A new bus and bike lane were introduced in the centre to make public transport faster and more appealing. To improve safety and accessibility, the new stops were designed to accommodate residents with disabilities, as were the existing stops and pavements.



PROJECT COST:
EUR 3.4 million

EU FUNDING:
EUR 3 million

(88% ERDF)

Innovative dental care prepares for the global market

With support from a venture capital scheme, dicomLAB Dental Ltd has used innovative technologies to make dental operations more predictable, safer and quicker. The company is focused on creating computer-guided solutions that fit into dentists' daily clinical routine, using an intuitive workflow and an advanced level of user experience.

The firm is dedicated to making implants for prosthetic dentistry widely accessible. Thanks to the latest technology, patient-specific surgical planning and corresponding 3D printed equipment, prosthetics are becoming safer, more precise and more predictable.



Since entering the market in 2015, dicomLAB has launched its services in 15 countries. In 2018, the company was nominated for Startup of the Year at the Startup and Innovation Award Hungary, and in 2019, founder and CEO, Dr Endre Varga won the Founder of the Year award.

EU funding totalling EUR 1.5 million as venture capital was used to develop an artificial-intelligence-driven online platform bringing together all stakeholders in dental implantology. It offers dental professionals real solutions and guides them through the entire implantation procedure.

With plans for dicomLAB 2.0 to be market-ready by September 2020, the company is aiming to make dental implants more accessible and affordable to the wider global public. ■

https://www.dicomlab.com/SMART_Guide/

ESIF financial instruments double investments in projects

The European Commission has published its annual report summarising data on the use of European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds financial instruments for the period ending December 2018.

This year, reporting demonstrates that Member States have made considerable progress via loans, guarantees and equity. Implementation of the revolving funds investing in projects has accelerated significantly with an increase of 85% on previous years.

The report also reflects the diversity of national or regional programmes and the different areas supported. ESI Funds support revolving funds in all 10 thematic objectives. The largest share of funding went to SMEs (56%), low-carbon economy, i.e. mainly in energy efficiency and renewable energy (15.5%), and investments in innovation and research and development (15.4%).

By the end of 2018, total programme contributions committed to financial instruments were nearly EUR 22.1 billion of which EUR 16.9 billion came from ESI Funds. Hence, Member States have reached almost 90% of allocations for financial

instruments committed for the programming period 2020-2027, doubling the sum delivered via revolving funds in the 2007-2013 programming period.

The revolving funds supported investments in 100 000 SMEs and improved energy consumption in more than 25 000 households, resulting in an annual decrease in greenhouse gas emissions of over 54 000 tonnes.

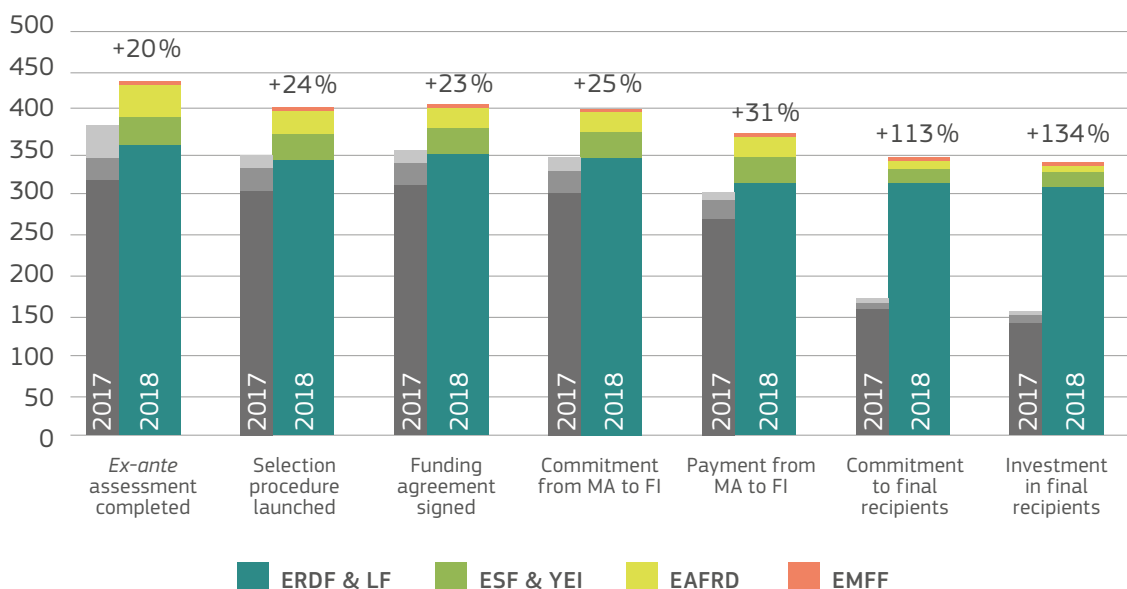
Nevertheless, there is still unexplored potential, with significant variations among Member States. Poland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Hungary, Portugal, Spain, Latvia and Lithuania allocate a relatively large share of ESI Funds to financial instruments, while only three Member States have no plans to set up any financial instruments.

Visit the fi-compass website to see the 2018 results. A first preview of the summary was presented by Jonathan Denness, Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, at the 2019 Financial Instrument Campus event in Brussels. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<https://bit.ly/39fn6dC>

PROGRESS IN SETTING UP OF FIs, BY NUMBERS OF FIs, AS OF END OF 2018 AND 2017 (ESIF)



NEWS [IN BRIEF]

COVID-19 INDUSTRIAL CLUSTERS RESPONSE PORTAL LAUNCHED

A new page on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) site aims to support the efforts of industrial clusters to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 epidemic in Europe. The portal has two objectives:

- To serve as a one-stop shop providing reliable information for industry, especially industrial clusters, on actions and decisions by the European Commission and EU Member States which impact on the functioning of the Internal Market.
- To support an open discussion forum where actors can share their experiences, solutions, requests and questions.

The Commission has already received over 1 100 offers of medical supplies, such as masks and ventilators, via clusters supported by the European Clusters Alliance. An open discussion forum has also been created to boost quick and easy exchange between cluster actors.

Demand from public authorities can be channelled to industrial actors through cluster organisations across the EU and beyond. For example, Italy's Lombardy Region has launched several international calls for tenders to purchase medical equipment to treat seriously ill patients in hospital and equipment to protect doctors and health personnel. ■

Public authorities can e-mail:
covid19response@clustercollaboration.eu

FIND OUT MORE

<https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/coronavirus>

EU FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES FIGHTING CORONAVIRUS

On 18 March 2020, Commissioners **Elisa Ferreira** responsible for Cohesion and Reforms and **Nicolas Schmit** responsible for Jobs and Social Rights sent letters to all EU Member States to inform them of the individual support available under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII).

The letters detail the amounts available for each country, the type of expenditure now eligible under the EU Structural and Solidarity Funds – for instance, to support health systems, procure medical equipment or ensure access to healthcare for vulnerable groups – and current opportunities to mobilise financing through **ERDF** and **ESF**.

Moreover, the Commission services provide integrated support to Member States through dedicated CRII country teams. The teams will ensure a good information flow and fast decision-making at the most practical level, as well as discussing state aid, financial regulation compliance issues and support from the European Investment Fund. ■

FIND OUT MORE

Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative:

<https://europa.eu/!uH33bD>

Cohesion Policy and EU Solidarity Fund contribute to the Coronavirus

Response Investment Initiative:

<https://europa.eu/!cq43qb>

REGIOSTARS AWARDS 2020: APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

The European Commission has announced the opening of the 13th edition of the REGIOSTARS competition to award the best EU Cohesion Policy projects in five thematic categories. The 2020 special topic is linked to celebrations around the 30th anniversary of Interreg, the EU's emblematic scheme for cooperation across borders, with a specific focus on 'youth empowerment for cooperation across borders':

- Industrial transition for a smart Europe (smart growth)
- Circular economy for a green Europe (sustainable growth)
- Skills and education for a digital Europe (inclusive growth)
- Citizens' engagement for cohesive European cities (urban development)
- 30 years of Interreg: youth empowerment for cooperation across borders (topic of the year).

The **online application platform** will be open until 17 May 2020. An independent jury of high-level academics will assess the project applications and crown the winners during the REGIOSTARS Awards ceremony taking place in Brussels in October 2020 during the European Week of Regions and Cities. The public can also choose a favourite project via an online public vote. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<https://regiostarsawards.eu/>





One for all, and all for one

Preparation for the next iteration of Interreg programmes is under way. In facing the new regulatory framework, these programmes are not alone. Interact's Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT) offer programme best-practice forms, templates and more.

Built on the collective knowledge of and direct input from the Interreg community, these tools will enable the new programmes to start up efficiently and effectively.

Interreg colleagues have developed each HIT tool through an intensive process, ensuring that each one awarded HIT status is a best-practice tool for the upcoming period. Existing Interreg practitioners from 26 programmes have dedicated their time to focusing, in detail, on each individual tool in a way that no single programme would be able to duplicate.

First created as an integrated package for the 2014-2020 period, HIT offers programmes shared best practice, as determined by the Interreg community. The tools provide support for programmes throughout the projects' entire life cycles.

For Interreg programmes, HIT also provides the foundations of a harmonised approach to management and tools. This enables programmes operating throughout Europe to meet collective challenges with shared solutions. Without this harmonised approach, one programme's solution may not be replicable by another.

What has HIT (2014-2020) achieved?

The previous HIT toolkit was employed by 66% of the Interreg programmes – some using it in full with few or no amendments while others used the tools for inspiration. For the programmes using Interact's specialist monitoring system, the eMS, it was necessary to adopt the core elements of HIT as, without a harmonised approach to programme management processes, it is not feasible to build one system efficiently to respond to 38 different programmes.

An independent impact assessment, conducted by the European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, Scotland, found that HIT offered programmes a number of benefits.

One of its most obvious impacts was the shift towards greater user-centricity, as each tool was specifically designed to increase the effectiveness of programme management while reducing the administrative burden for applicants and beneficiaries. Not only did this manifest in the tools themselves, but many programmes also adapted their programme management on the basis of the final toolkit.

Overall, 80% of programmes reported that HIT saved staff resources. For programmes first created in the 2014-2020 period, or which started late, HIT provided ready-made tools that could be implemented quickly.

Furthermore, the entire HIT process sparked a discussion within Interreg as to what the minimum requirements are to meet legal compliance and good programme-management

‘If we want cooperation projects to deliver results with lasting impact, we need tools such as HIT. They allow us to create a common framework which is instrumental for the smooth implementation of projects, a framework that helps them reach their goals.’

Monika Schönerklee-Grasser, Interreg Central Europe



practices. HIT promoted a debate on the data necessary for assessing, monitoring and controlling projects, enabling programmes to focus more on what works best.

What are the challenges in the next period?

The first challenge for developing HIT for the new period remains the same as for the previous period. It can only be built on a shared understanding of what individual tools are and what they are required to do. Without shared understanding of the purpose of each individual tool, its core elements and its value to Interreg programmes, it is impossible to create suitable support.

Finding such shared understanding matters not just internally within the Interreg community but to the beneficiaries, too. Interreg programmes with different interpretations can confuse applicants and beneficiaries who deal with multiple programmes, and may witness first-hand this lack of harmonisation.

That being said, HIT starts in a much stronger position when it faces the old challenges and takes on new ones. Programmes

‘Cooperation projects which work across borders require more effort to understand each other. Using harmonised documents helps us to speak the same words, with the same meaning. HIT has given us faith that simplification can work.’

Dr Csaba Horváth, Interreg Austria-Hungary

have seen how it can help them, offering either a finished product or a starting point for adapted versions of the tools. With the case for using HIT clear, the next big challenge is helping programmes to make only useful adaptations.

‘How far an individual tool can be adapted before it stops being a harmonised tool is a key question we want to tackle,’ says Interact’s Polona Frumen, who is leading the HIT process.



In HIT, Interreg's experts share their know-how when designing future tools for implementation, striving for quality and simplification. In using the same tools across Europe, we simplify the life of everyone who works with us.

Ioana Mantog, Interreg V-A Romania Bulgaria

'Programmes may need to adapt tools to meet national rules, but adding things often reduces their effectiveness. For the next period, more guidance is needed on how to adapt the tools and how to push back when unnecessary things are being suggested.

'There is also inevitable tension in seeking to harmonise programme management, when programmes are strongly connected to the way they work, which has often proved successful. Compromising, and seeing the benefits others have achieved, are important to finding the best solution which can work for all programmes.'

The first HIT product is coming soon!

The process to establish the first HIT product, the application form, demonstrates this tension.

'Programmes are often tempted to ask additional questions on the application form. But if these questions do not improve project selection or enable efficient monitoring later, they are likely to be an added burden for applicants to complete and programmes to compile,' adds Polona Frumen.

One of the most common complaints from our beneficiaries is that programmes have so far set different rules; this leads to errors and confusion. HIT, therefore, directly responds to the need of our beneficiaries.

Merike Niitepõld, Central Baltic Programme

Large transnational programmes with more resources may cope with a little more complexity for a minor improvement in project management, but for a smaller cross-border programme, a small increase in workload is a bigger challenge to meet.

HIT's application form will also serve as the foundation for Interact's future monitoring system, along with other such systems used by Interreg programmes in the next period. ■

DO YOU WANT TO USE HIT TO HELP YOU, BUT ARE NOT SURE HOW?

Interact can work with you to organise joint advice sessions covering the use of HIT in more detail. We can answer your questions and show you how to use the tools in your everyday work.

A HIT roadshow is being organised to help reach as many areas as possible via joint sessions.

Get in touch with the HIT team for more information:

<http://www.interact-eu.net/contact>

FIND OUT MORE

Interact-eu.net

#EUdatathon 2020: innovating for Europe with EU open data

The fourth edition of EU Datathon, the open data competition, was launched on 19 February, giving you a chance to demonstrate the potential of open data in society today and, of course, your creativity and talent!

The competition is also an opportunity for you to claim a share of the total prize fund of EUR 100000. To take part, you must propose how to develop an application that links and uses open datasets, at least one of which is among the thousands made available by the EU institutions, agencies and bodies. For more detailed information, see the competition rules: <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/eudatathon/2020-rules>

Your application will be expected to showcase opportunities for concrete business models or social enterprises. It must also identify suitable new approaches and solutions to help Europe achieve some of the important goals set by the European Commission through the use of open data. Thus, it should fit into one of the following thematic challenges:

- > Challenge 1: **A European Green Deal**
- > Challenge 2: **An economy that works for people**
- > Challenge 3: **A new push for European democracy**
- > Challenge 4: **A Europe fit for the digital age**

You must submit your proposal along with a short description on the EU Datathon website by **3 May 2020**.

Twelve winning teams (i.e. three teams per challenge) will be shortlisted. If you are among them, you will be invited to develop your application and present it during 13-15 October at the **18th European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels**, an event that attracts more than 9000 participants.

The final ranking of the winning teams for each challenge will be decided at this event and the teams will be presented with the following prizes (for each of the challenges): first place: EUR 12 000; second place: EUR 8 000; third place: EUR 5 000.

The EU Datathon 2020 is organised by the Publications Office of the European Union, in close collaboration with the European Commission Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<https://op.europa.eu/en/web/eudatathon>

@EU_opendata

@euinmyregion

#EUdatathon

#ideas4EU



IN YOUR OWN WORDS

PANORAMA
welcomes your
contributions!

In Your Own Words is the section in *Panorama* where stakeholders at local, regional, national and European level outline their achievements for the 2014-2020 period and share their views on the ongoing and crucial discussions

on Cohesion Policy post-2020. *Panorama* welcomes contributions in your own language, which we may feature in future editions. Please contact us at regio-panorama@ec.europa.eu for further information on guidelines and deadlines.

Cooperation around the Baltic Sea to strengthen Cohesion Policy

In recent years, the situation in world politics has been challenging for Cohesion Policy goals, and the Baltic Sea region has faced its share of the crisis, too.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is a multifunctional tool for Cohesion Policy. Despite the instability in the area, it has been able to promote development, resolve environmental problems and foster a culture of trust and cooperation among people.

The Centrum Balticum Foundation, promoting cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, has been working with the Strategy since 2013. The Foundation's responsibilities include communication tasks and establishing cooperation with non-EU countries. It manages the EUSBSR's communication point, developing communications for the Strategy and helping it to reach its goals. In addition, the Foundation is responsible for cooperating with neighbours on the Strategy, which has enabled it to involve new partners in developing the Baltic Sea region.

The Centrum Balticum is proud to be part of this network, contributing to the goals of the EU's Cohesion Policy by playing its part in bringing people together and helping them to understand one another.

Communicating regional impacts

The Foundation is also able to influence the realisation of Cohesion Policy goals via its projects. In the recently concluded 'Cohesion through EUSBSR' communication campaign, it highlighted the Policy's positive impacts on the Baltic Sea macro-region. The campaign, which ran on social media, focused on EU-funded projects and introduced the people who worked on these projects and had gained specific benefits from their results. By engaging a range of actors on a wide scale, the campaign presented the impacts of the EU policy and encouraged discussion. It communicated on and produced communication materials available to all about the benefits of Cohesion Policy. Thus, it has been able to communicate on Cohesion Policy even after the campaign ended.

The Centrum Balticum has also had the pleasure of participating in ECOPRODIGI, the clean shipping project, where digitalisation is being used to promote eco-efficient maritime traffic in the Baltic Sea. In this way, the project is also contributing to achieving the EU's climate goals and the Green Deal programme. The pilot solutions carried out by ECOPRODIGI have shown that digitalisation can be used to make savings in fuel and material consumption, cut



Kari Liuhto
*Director, professor,
The Centrum Balticum Foundation*

emissions and help utilise resources as efficiently as possible. The results will be presented in more detail in a seminar in May in Brussels.

The EU's Baltic Sea strategy is implementing Cohesion Policy by taking regional characteristics into account, while the Centrum Balticum, acting as an agile operator, also wants to promote cooperation and the Baltic Sea region's pioneering activities in the future. We are hoping to welcome everyone to Turku in mid-June when the city will be filled with Baltic-Sea-themed events! ■

FIND OUT MORE

<http://www.centrumbalticum.org/en>

PROJECTS

AN AMBITIOUS TRANSFORMATION OF A POST-INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE

Located in the eastern half of Czechia, over the years, the Moravian-Silesian region has been adversely affected by black coal mining. However, significant attention is now being paid to recultivating the mined-out terrain and successfully clearing the last remnants of mining activity.

The focus is currently on the Karvina region, an area particularly badly affected by heavy industry. The 'Post-Mining Landscape of the Karvina Region (POHO2030)' concept, currently implemented by the regional agency Moravskoslezské Investice a Development, a.s. (MSID), has become a beacon of hope for restoring the area.

The initiative has gradually changed into an independent regional programme called POHO2030 involving many people and organisations. Their collective vision is to transform the post-mining landscape of the Karvina region into a prosperous, vibrant and sustainable area. It should become a region where people enjoy active recreation, a region for intelligent solutions, attracting innovators and creative minds from all over the world, and a region for new energy using non-energy-intensive, coal-free technology and renewable resources.

POHO2030 evolved from the 'Concept of the Post-Mining Landscape of the Karvina Region by the Year 2030' which analysed the region from various expert perspectives. Based on these analyses, it proposed 10 regional development schemes, including examples of other successful landscape transformations from Czechia and abroad.

The concept was developed from 2018 to July 2019 and concluded with a Memorandum on Cooperation and Regional Development. At project launch in the Gabriela coal mine, 36 entities, including representatives of the Moravian-Silesian region, companies, universities, interest groups, regional institutes and local municipalities, signed the memorandum.

Phasing in ambitious changes

During its first phase, which will last until 2021, the project's main goal is to initiate changes, establish new forums of cooperation and organisations to consolidate the vision, disseminate information and make the region more attractive.

An official platform will be set up to coordinate the work and a marketing campaign is being rolled out to change the region's image while making it more accessible to the public.

During the second phase (2022-2026), the pilot and strategic projects will be fully implemented to improve the region's accessibility in line with climate change adaptation. The goal is to attract private resources and investments into the region, as well as multi-source financing opportunities among the public and private sectors.

The programme will culminate in the third phase, from 2027 to 2030, leading to the fulfilment of its vision and completion of those projects that have contributed to transforming the post-mining landscape into a prosperous, vibrant and sustainable region.

The aim is that extensive areas will undergo revitalisation, reconversion or repurposing to create sustainable new city districts, smart industrial parks, tourist centres, technology parks, creative centres, galleries, areas for presentations and exhibitions, etc. in what is a highly ambitious programme for the Moravian-Silesian region and for Czechia as a whole. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<http://www.poho2030.com/>

Facebook POHO2030



PROJECTS

CROSS-BORDER PROJECT IMPROVES PALLIATIVE CARE

**TOTAL INVESTMENT
EUR 921 708**

**EU CONTRIBUTION
EUR 783 454**

People in rural areas around the Serbian-Croatian border are receiving better care at the end of their lives, thanks to the cross-border Take Care! project funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

Take Care! has increased access to and improved palliative care for hundreds of vulnerable people in two neighbouring rural areas, Vukovar-Srijem county in Croatia and the Srem district in Serbia.

Like many countryside communities, these regions have ageing populations, poor infrastructure and unequal distribution of resources. Young people are emigrating to find opportunities elsewhere. Consequently, there are insufficient health and social services for the elderly, disabled people or those who are terminally ill.

Palliative care is essential for such people to experience the last stages of their life in comfort and dignity. Although this care was already provided, there was room to improve its quality and training for personnel across the entire border region.

In 20 months, TakeCare! produced seven mobile palliative-care support teams in Croatia, a new palliative care ward in Serbia, and a specialist course for health and social workers.

Sharing expertise

Five local organisations working closely with palliative-care patients in each region set up the project. These include the Bubamara Association of Persons with Disabilities and the Ilok Nursing Home in Croatia, and in Serbia, the Sremska

Mitrovica General Hospital, the Srem regional development agency and the humanitarian charity Caritas in Sremska Mitrovica. Input from local palliative-care receivers and their families helped the partners to identify priorities.

Thanks to the shared expertise, seven multidisciplinary teams now travel around Vukovar-Srijem county in special vans to provide palliative care. Sremska Mitrovica General Hospital has a new ward dedicated to the care of terminally ill patients.

With the School of Medicine at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, TakeCare! also created a course for 40 health and social workers. They learned how to meet patients' medical, psychiatric and psychological needs and to support colleagues, while creating a network to keep up to date on best practice.

Stronger foundation

The increased capacity has enabled 968 patients to receive care from the new teams during the project alone, and further improvements are planned. Take Care! partners and cooperating organisations are working more closely than before and have produced strategies for better services.

The project has also increased public awareness of the importance of a good quality of life for vulnerable groups and created a stronger sense of the region's shared identity. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<https://www.takecare-palliative.com>



PROJECTS

VIRTUAL RESEARCH NETWORK FOR SMARTER INDUSTRY

**TOTAL INVESTMENT
EUR 1 679 129**

**EU CONTRIBUTION
EUR 1 595 173**

The European Regional Development Fund has financed the SmartIC project, which connects 27 centres in Estonia researching Industry 4.0 – technology for digital manufacturing. The ‘virtual lab’ is driving innovation for the next generation of European industry.

The Core Smart Industry Center (Smart IC) project was set up in 2017 to enable scientists in Estonia to share infrastructure and better coordinate research for smart manufacturing. It aims to help industries across Europe’s transition to higher-skilled, higher-tech production so that they can become more productive and competitive.

Key applications include the quality control of prototypes, self-driving industrial vehicles, industrial robotics, virtual and augmented reality for manufacturing, sustainable energy use, and improved maintenance and production.

Two universities, 25 research laboratories and around 70 researchers are connected via the Smart IC virtual research network. All coordination between the participants takes place online, so there is no need for expensive offices or management facilities.

Their combined capabilities boost capacity in Estonia for research and development for smart manufacturing. Universities can also more easily partner businesses to develop technology for the economy of the future.

Connected evolution

Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech) and the University of Life Sciences (ULS) in Tartu, Estonia are the backbone of SmartIC.

The ERDF support has helped TalTech to develop a 3D metal and composite prototype printing lab. This has a laser melting machine that uses patented technology for faster printing. Meanwhile, ULS has a new computed tomography lab with an advanced high-resolution 3D scanner, which provides cross-sectional images of objects.

The combination can be very useful for manufacturers who want to improve products or for developers creating new objects.

For example, the laboratories worked together to produce metal bees for a memorial for victims of communism in Estonia. The lab at ULS scanned a bumblebee from the Estonian Museum of Natural History and digitally modified the scans to produce bees of different sizes. The TalTech lab then printed 20 000 stainless-steel bees using metal powder.

The process was straightforward because TalTech, ULS and the other laboratories can operate equipment, design products and carry out tests remotely. In 2018 alone, the virtual centre completed over 100 R&D projects in industrial digitisation, which is testament to the power of cooperation. ■

FIND OUT MORE
<http://smartic.ee>



PROJECTS

DRIVING A LOW-CARBON TRANSPORT NETWORK IN KARLSRUHE, GERMANY

TOTAL INVESTMENT
EUR 7 221 576

EU CONTRIBUTION
EUR 3 529 423

The regiomove project is developing an integrated mobility network in Karlsruhe, supported by the European Regional Development Fund. Travellers switch seamlessly between various types of low-carbon transport in an accessible alternative to private cars.

Public- and shared-transport providers are linked across the network, which covers Karlsruhe city and surrounding towns and villages. People can reach their destination by bus, train, shared car or bicycle or a combination of transportation.

Regiomove makes it easier to plan and pay for journeys using public and shared transport, helping to reduce carbon emissions. Because the city and its wider region are in the same transport network, it also improves mobility to and from rural communities.

Routes in the public transport system provide the core services. Private transport businesses offer additional connections under their own branding, which gives companies independence within the system while accessing new customers as part of the network.

Travellers do not need accounts or subscriptions with the different providers. An app developed in regiomove covers the entire network.

The app simplifies journey planning. People log in on their smartphone or PC, enter their start and end points and choose their preferred route. They then book and pay for the whole trip at once, no matter how many companies operate transport for the different parts of the journey.

Flexible choice

There are already around 20 bus and train companies providing services in Karlsruhe's metropolitan public transport network. New providers can be added to the regiomove network at any time, along with bike- and car-sharing services, to give even more travel options.

To enhance the network's flexibility, mobility hubs – called 'regio-move ports' – will offer passengers several modes of transportation at one location, such as a bike stand, bus station and shared cars. The project aims to build seven of these ports across the Karlsruhe region by 2021, both in cities and small communities to maximise connectivity across the region.

Transport services will remain accountable to local people and businesses. Because the Karlsruhe public transport authority operates the platform for the network, residents have a voice in making sure that it meets their needs.

The network will make sustainable transport a more realistic option and the shift away from car use will help to reduce congestion and air pollution in cities. Better connections with urban areas will also improve work and leisure opportunities for residents in rural communities, especially those who cannot drive or do not have access to a car.

Above all, improved access to low-carbon transport can help Karlsruhe to become a more climate-friendly region. ■

FIND OUT MORE

<https://www.regiomove.de/>

AGENDA

12-15 OCTOBER

Brussels (BE)

18th European Week of Regions and Cities

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