

Green, Digital, Inclusive and Fair: How can Cohesion Policy rise to the new territorial challenges?

Third Joint EU Cohesion Policy Conference

14th- 16th November 2022, Zagreb, Croatia

Jointly organised by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, the Croatian Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds Government and RSA Europe

Extended Abstract submission deadline 1st September 2022

Since the outbreak of the pandemic in Europe, Cohesion Policy has been at the forefront of the European response to the crisis, contributing to the economic recovery of the EU, in complementarity with other instruments, such as the new Recovery and Resilience Facility. Demonstrating its reactivity, current programmes from the 2014-2020 period have been reinforced (with REACT-EU) and amended to support sectors and regions critically affected by the crisis.

The 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework in turn was geared towards a swift and resilient recovery, reinforcing convergence among EU regions, given the uneven territorial impact of the crisis. In this context, the legislative Cohesion Policy package for the 2021-2027 programming period entered into force on 1 July 2021. The newly reformed rules have been designed to increase the focus of Cohesion Policy on a 'smarter' and 'greener' Europe and create favourable conditions for investment with simplified delivery mechanisms and closer links to structural reforms.

Cohesion Policy will thus contribute to implementing the EU political agenda and in particular fostering the green transition and digital transformation. The European Union is committed to becoming the first climate-neutral bloc in the world by 2050. A Just Transition Fund has been established within the framework of Cohesion Policy, to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaving no people and no region behind.

Against this background, the Third Joint EU Cohesion Policy Conference - organised by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy and RSA Europe together with the Croatian authorities - aims to take stock of the challenges and opportunities for Cohesion Policy. The timing of the Conference will allow critical assessment of research evidence and policy thinking on how cities and regions could best implement and reactively adapt their strategic funding priorities for the 2021-2027 programming period, in order to address development needs and opportunities effectively with the support of the Funds and in synergy with other EU instruments.

The Conference will bring together a limited number of participants from academia, the European Institutions and Member State authorities to debate where Cohesion Policy is going, the evidence for its performance to date, and how its contribution to sustainable growth and jobs can be maximised.

Papers are invited on the following questions and themes that will form the basis for workshop sessions, panel debates and discussion groups at the Conference.

1. **Facing the megatrends:** global megatrends such as climate change (including meeting COP26 commitments and the Green Deal), globalisation, demographic and technological change will unevenly impact regions and have the potential to increase disparities. What changes to the design and implementation of Cohesion Policy might be needed to address these global changes in a timely manner?
2. **Responding to crises.** What are the implications for Cohesion Policy from the emerging evidence of the territorial impacts of the pandemic on economies and societies in Europe? What are the lessons of crises in the EU for the use of Cohesion Policy as a tool in responding to the territorial effects of the crises?
3. **A policy that invests in all regions and cities:** what is the research evidence on effective use of Cohesion Policy resources to support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, twin transition, and improve citizens' quality of life in all territories of the EU (i.e. low income and low growth regions, regions facing development traps such as the middle-income trap, peripheral regions, small-medium sized cities, cross border regions, regions in industrial transition, urban and rural areas)? How can Cohesion Policy effectively respond to the 'geography of discontent' and (re)build trust in EU institutions?
4. **Performance and results:** how can evaluation and monitoring reports and results be best used to improve performance and results in a rapidly changing environment? Can Cohesion Policy resources be used more efficiently and effectively?
5. **Policy objectives:** what do we know about 'good practice' in programming the new policy objectives for 2021-27 (Smarter, Greener, more Connected and more Social Europe)? How can Cohesion Policy contribute further to a fair twin transition? How can we deliver optimal benefit for the people of the regions taking into account different challenges across Europe? What are the best practices?
6. **Policy synergies:** how can stronger linkages between Cohesion Policy and other policies/instruments be created and managed in practice, especially between Cohesion Policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility? How to ensure that other EU instruments also contribute to cohesion objectives?
7. **Institutions and governance:** what can Cohesion Policy do to strengthen public administration and the effective management of the Funds? And what are the implications of greater linkages between Cohesion Policy and the European Semester?

- 8. Financial Instruments:** when and where do they work best under Cohesion Policy? And how can their take-up be made more attractive?
- 9. A Europe closer to citizens:** what are the lessons of integrated local development instruments to date? How can Cohesion Policy be best communicated? What works for involving citizens in Cohesion Policy?

Submission of Papers

Please submit proposals for papers in the form of a 500-word abstract through the online portal by **1st September 2022**. Given the purpose and audience of the conference, the abstracts should be accessible to a wider audience and draw out policy implications or lessons insofar as possible. The organisers particularly welcome submission from Croatian researchers and policy practitioners.

Submission of Special Sessions

The organisers welcome proposals for Special Sessions. Special Sessions are an effective way to bring together presenters to discuss and highlight a particular topic and to develop or further extend networks. These sessions may take the form of presentations or panels reporting the results of significant recent research on cohesion policy, examples of best practice in cohesion policy implementation, book launches etc. This list is not exhaustive. Contact the organiser by email if you would like to discuss any ideas.

Event Fees (None apply)

There is no conference fee to attend this event. For clarity the event is free to attend. Attendees must cover the costs of their own travel, accommodation and subsistence.

Selection of Papers and Special Sessions

The number of places at this event will be restricted and a selective process will take place. Proposers will be notified of the selected papers and special sessions by 16th September 2022 and registration will open on the same day.

Conference Organisation

It should be noted that the organisation of the conference is being jointly managed and funded by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, the Croatian Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds and RSA Europe.

Academic Chair: Professor John Bachtler, European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, UK and Technical University of Delft, The Netherlands

Conference Organiser: Lesa Reynolds, lesa.reynolds@regionalstudies.org (for RSA Europe)