



European  
Commission

# PANORAMA

*Focusing on European Regional and Urban Policy*

SUMMER 2020 / No. 73

**Emilia-Romagna  
In line for a  
smarter future**

TAKING THE  
INITIATIVE  
AGAINST  
COVID-19



INTERREG'S ROLE  
IN EU GREEN DEAL



*Regional and  
Urban Policy*

# PANORAMA

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## EDITORIAL

## From first responder to green builder: Cohesion Policy throughout the recovery

The past few months have been difficult for us all. My sympathies go to all who have lost work or had to put life on 'hold' – and my deepest sympathies to those who have been sick or lost loved ones.

However, in these testing times, there are also reasons to be confident. Cohesion Policy is sometimes accused of being slow and heavy, but in this crisis we were quick and light. Through the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, we moved quickly to repurpose unallocated money in the current programmes. From April, ventilators and masks were already being provided. Firms and workers were already being supported. With up to EUR 50 billion rapidly mobilised, in the crisis, we became a European first responder.

So it is no surprise that we are a cornerstone of Europe's historic response to the pandemic. Through 'Next Generation EU', the Commission proposed an extra EUR 750 billion for the EU's long-term budget for 2021-2027. I have consistently argued that solidarity and convergence should be front and centre of this recovery. I am glad that Cohesion DNA can be found throughout the package, from goals to delivery methods.

The proposals include fresh funding for Cohesion Policy. REACT-EU will add EUR 55 billion to current Cohesion programmes, to be allocated based on the severity of the crisis in each country, as well as the country's relative prosperity. REACT-EU is a new thematic objective, focusing on crisis repair and kick-starting the recovery. This means

supporting sectors most affected – including health, tourism and culture – as well as helping the twin transition. This is not a new direction for the policy, but rather a bridge over the COVID-19 rocky patch so that we can get back to our long-term goal: territorial convergence through a green and digital transition for every region.



The proposals also include a fivefold increase for the new Just Transition Fund, from EUR 7.5 billion to 40 billion. We have also proposed amendments to longer-term Cohesion programmes to support the most affected sectors and to give Member States more flexibility to move money between different Cohesion funds.

Together, these changes inject almost EUR 100 billion of new money into current and future Cohesion programmes.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who has made these rapid changes possible. However, we must make sure they are properly implemented and will make a difference to our citizens.

And we walk the green talk ourselves. This will be the last printed issue of *Panorama* magazine as we move towards a fully digital publication.

Happy reading. Take care this summer – and stay safe. ■

**Elisa Ferreira**

*European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms*



# Cohesion Policy facing the challenge of COVID-19

Europe at the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic has presented the EU with an unprecedented challenge. While lockdowns are easing across the continent, the long-term implications of this global public health crisis have begun to unfold. Cohesion Policy and territorial cooperation are playing a crucial role in boosting Europe's ability to cope with the emergency and its dramatic effects.

The EU has taken extraordinary measures to preserve lives and livelihoods, deploying support in every possible area to help Member States to keep their citizens safe. This response has involved actions to cope with the immediate emergency alongside policies and plans to help Europe heal. Current support is as varied as providing assistance for the repatriation of citizens stranded abroad and introducing temporary measures to leverage the full flexibility of the EU's state aid rules.

In May 2020, the European Commission unveiled plans for a vast Recovery Plan for Europe under the umbrella of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This plan is designed to mobilise a staggering EUR 2.4 trillion to help Member

States repair the damage caused in the recent past and implement crucial changes for the future. More specifically, it will channel investment in reconstruction towards a fair, inclusive, digital, greener and more resilient Europe.

## Financing the future

The EU's next long-term budget for the years 2021 to 2027 is to be reinforced in support of the plan: the revised proposal presented by the European Commission covers a total of EUR 1 850 billion. It combines a prospective long-term budget of EUR 1 100 billion and an additional sum of EUR 750 billion to be injected by a new, temporary instrument: the emergency tool Next Generation EU, powered by funds raised on the financial markets.

The massive investment envisaged under the recovery plan is to be delivered through a variety of instruments, which notably include REACT-EU (Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe).

A budget of EUR 55 billion has been proposed for this new initiative, to be redistributed as additional funding to top up the budgets allocated to the ERDF, the ESF and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). This support

## EU Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative plus (CRII+)



### Flexibility for use of cap up Structural Funds

Between funds, regions and topics & 100% EU co-financing rate



### Better protect the most deprived

Delivering food aid and basic material assistance through electronic vouchers



### Support for vital sectors

Additional measures and flexibility to help farmers, fishermen and the food & seafood sectors

is intended for those regions and Member States most impacted by the pandemic. They also stand to benefit from changes proposed to Cohesion Policy in general as a way to facilitate their recovery – such as reinforced support to workers and to actions tackling youth unemployment and child poverty.

A wider scope for Member States to transfer resources among EU funds is another upgrade announced for post-2020 Cohesion Policy. This is shaped by the ongoing commitment to promote economic competitiveness powered by research and innovation, to pursue digital transition, implement the European Green Deal, and promote the European Pillar of Social Rights. Within this wider framework, the perspectives for Cohesion Policy under the revised long-term budget proposal also feature stronger support for the preparedness of health systems and a greater emphasis on tapping the potential of culture and tourism.

### Taking the initiative

Added flexibility to reassign funds has already been created under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+), which also encompasses a temporary change in the co-financing rules for Cohesion Policy programmes. This

adjustment enables the EU to provide full financing for Member States' crisis-related measures throughout the accounting year 2020-2021.

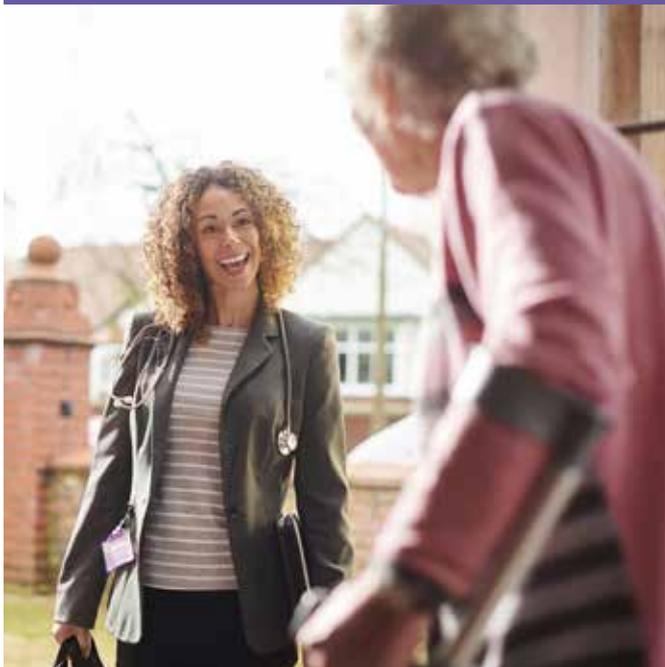
A similar exception applies to FEAD, for which a number of rules have been adapted to the changing circumstances. The CRII+ package also includes amendments to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

CRII+ was launched to complement the initial Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII), set up in March 2020. The CRII package activated EUR 37 billion of unallocated Cohesion Policy funding to support Member States.

It also created the possibility for Member States to use Cohesion Funding for expenditure related to COVID-19, for example to invest in their healthcare systems. REACT-EU will pursue and build on the measures introduced by these twin initiatives. >



## MOBILE HEALTH UNITS LEND A HELPING HAND



Residents of the Portuguese municipalities of Condeixa-a-Nova and Montemor-o-Velho, in the region of Coimbra, will soon be able to benefit from the support of mobile health units: a project back by the ERDF is equipping two vehicles for use by teams providing healthcare as well as psychological and social support.

The new multidisciplinary service dedicates particular attention to vulnerable individuals, families or groups. Its initial deployment is intended as a pilot phase, with roll-out across the wider area anticipated at a later stage.

<https://europa.eu/!br93KY>

A third change effected as part of the CRII package concerns the addition of public health crises to the list of emergencies within the remit of the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF). Created in 2002 in response to the severe floods that had affected Central Europe, the EUSF is designed to support European regions in the event of a natural disaster. To date, it has assisted 24 European countries with a total contribution exceeding EUR 5.5 billion.

The addition of major health emergencies as situations where EUSF assistance can be requested allows not just Member States, but also countries currently involved in negotiations to join the EU, to apply for a contribution to public expenditure related to the crisis.

Obviously, there are criteria to be met for EUSF support in the face of COVID-19: expenditure must exceed a 0.3% share of the country's gross national income or a total amount of EUR 1.5 billion (in 2011 prices) within four months of the introduction of the country's first public measure to address the crisis.

Countries requesting this assistance were invited to complete their applications by 24 June 2020. In total, EUSF support of up to EUR 800 million has been envisaged for 2020.

Finally, additional support is available through the new Emergency Support Instrument (ESI). This aid mechanism, with a budget of EUR 2.7 billion, is designed to complement the other EU instruments. It will boost the Union's capacity to respond to crisis situations directly – for example, by facilitating the cross-border transport of patients from particularly hard-hit areas to hospitals with free capacity.

### **Territorial cooperation, now more than ever**

The emergence of COVID-19 has put all aspects of our daily lives to the test – including territorial cooperation, which is facing its most challenging times in decades.

## BOOSTING HEALTH SECURITY

Personal protective equipment for the staff of five medical facilities receiving patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infections, and masks for the region's residents: a Polish project launched with financial support from the Cohesion Policy is helping to protect the inhabitants of Poland's Łódzkie province. Information on recommended mask use and hygiene has also been made available.

Another project supporting the area's health services involved the purchase of crucial medical equipment. In total, 79 ventilators and 34 ambulances were supplied as part of the project. Further acquisitions included X-ray, ECG, ultrasound and anaesthesia equipment, along with heart monitors, defibrillators, infusion pumps, pulse oximeters and spirometers, as well as decontamination equipment, mattresses and soap.



<https://europa.eu/Uh99MV>

## COMMUNITY CENTRES REACH OUT ONLINE



Linking up during the lockdown in Lille: a project launched in 2017 to connect eight community centres located in the French city has enabled them to pursue their activities despite closed doors. Services were provided online and over the phone, capitalising on the project's investment in digital solutions to amplify the centres' action to boost citizens' quality of life and civic engagement.

The centres promote social innovation and mediation, with the ultimate aim of strengthening social ties and fostering collective expression. As part of their joint activity in the project, they are also engaging with centres in the wider region to disseminate the approach. The project benefits from an ERDF contribution of EUR 210 000 to the total budget of EUR 350 000.

<https://europe-en-hautsdefrance.eu/mon-centre-social-a-la-maison/>

## LINKING UP SOURCES AND SUPPLIERS OF PPE

Do you produce fabrics for use in healthcare? Or are you looking for masks, medical aprons or similar equipment? There is now a database to bring makers and buyers of such products together. The initiative comes from the EU-funded TEX-MED ALLIANCES project, implemented as part of the ENI CBC MED programme.

The project was launched to create cross-border alliances among private companies in the textile sector. It is currently mapping industrial capacities (in Egypt, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Palestine, Spain and Tunisia) for the production of PPE items such as self-filtering masks and protective gloves.

The plan also involves mapping the different actors according to what they do best. 'Our regions hold expertise in different things,' say Monica Olmos, project manager. 'A solution could come from combining the resources: for example, to produce filtering masks in Tunisia using textiles manufactured in Spain or Italy.'

<http://www.enicbcmed.eu/projects/tex-med-alliances>



Interreg



30 years together

## JOINING FORCES IN THE NORTH

When nearly all of Europe suddenly found itself in lockdown, a group of experts from the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) area decided to work together to better understand what could be done to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

The NPA COVID-19 response group is an informal group of experts who have either participated in or led an NPP or NPA e-health project. The group quickly gathered 40 interested health experts (clinicians, health service managers and digital technology experts) from seven countries in the NPA area. It examines a variety of aspects where a joint response could be productive: clinical aspects, health and well-being, technological solutions, community response, and economic impact.

<http://www.interreg-npa.eu/covid-19/npa-covid-19-response-group/>



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30 years together

## CROSS-BORDER SUPPORT FOR FRENCH PATIENTS



Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland made more than 100 beds available for seriously ill patients from the Grand Est Region in France, which was particularly badly hit by the pandemic.

SHG-Kliniken Völklingen, in Germany, admitted COVID-19 patients from France who needed critical support. This hospital, based in the Greater Region spanning Germany, Belgium, France and Luxembourg, is a beneficiary of several EU-supported Interreg cross-border cooperation projects, such as SANTRANSFOR and COSAN.

The Luxembourg Hospital Federation, which currently counts 10 Luxembourg-based hospitals and specialised clinics, mobilised its members to receive patients from France and the Greater Region. The Cerdanya hospital, situated on the border between Spain and France, treated COVID-19 patients from both countries.

<https://bit.ly/2047UYO>

**Interreg**  **30** years together



## A COUNTY PREPARES

In Romania's Teleorman County, the Caritas Roşiorii de Vede Municipal Hospital was designated as a support hospital for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. To help it prepare for the eventuality of a large influx of critically ill patients, Zimnicea City Hospital lent Caritas hospital two injectomates, three vital function monitors and one general anaesthesia device.



This equipment has been entrusted to Caritas Hospital until all patients infected with COVID-19 have been treated. It was purchased through the project ROBG-174 'Your health matters! – Modernization of hospitals in Zimnicea and Svishtov', financed under the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

<https://bit.ly/3ghx0Eo>



Several Member States closed their borders from one day to the next. Although inspired by caution, such unprecedented decisions did generate complications for many sectors of the economy. In some areas, certain sectors found themselves on the brink of collapse.

EU citizens awoke to a world in which the freedoms they had taken for granted for so long – in particular European identity and freedom of movement – had been put on hold.

Reacting to this situation, the European Commission emphasised the importance of assuring the same treatment for cross-border workers and issued guidelines to ensure that public services in border areas could still be delivered. In addition, and despite the EU's very limited powers in the area of public health, the European Commission encouraged cooperation in healthcare between national, regional and local authorities.

This commitment to helping each other resonates with the EU's citizens. The response to the COVID-19 crisis reflects Europeans' impressive resourcefulness, ingenuity and solidarity, proving

once again that territorial cooperation is not an optional extra, but that it is welcomed by citizens, and in many cases is even essential to their livelihoods.

Spontaneously, Interreg-funded projects, such as those featured in this article, both within the EU and at its external borders, have helped to address the health and economic aspects of the pandemic.

### Stronger together

EU solidarity and the desire for cooperation have been very much in evidence throughout Europe and beyond. The recent Franco-German initiative for a European Health Union championed closer coordination in caring for intensive-care patients and supported joint research and development for vaccines and medicines. It also called for a protective European shield for medicines and medical products with a view to setting up a resource pool to ensure continuity of the supply chain, thereby eliminating restrictions across internal borders.

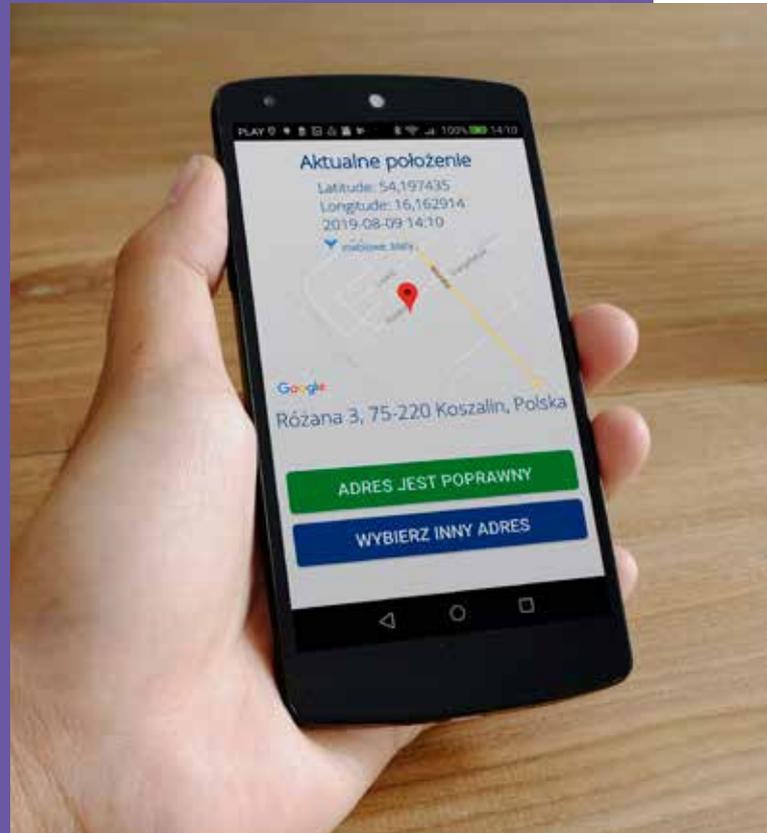
## IT-ENABLED SOLIDARITY

Connecting citizens looking for help with the network that provides it – the website and mobile application developed by the Polish ‘The Good Support Programme’ was designed for those requiring assistance and the services or individuals supporting them. In 2019, this system won the project the coveted REGIOSTARS award for the most innovative IT tool in social services. Good Support has four components:

- › Good Care, a tool for care services helping citizens at home to organise their work;
- › Good Carer, a mobile app enabling carers to find out when, where and by whom they are needed and mark tasks as completed;
- › Good Neighbour, a system where citizens can register to request or provide help with tasks such as buying medication or walking a dog;
- › Good Family, which places a virtual panic button on users’ smartphones – when the widget is activated, up to six designated individuals are alerted automatically.

This powerful application is available for free for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, in particular to support citizens in need of help because they are self-isolating.

<https://goodsupport.eu>



In addition, it advocated a cross-border pandemic strategy to be included as a priority in the Treaty of Aachen between the two countries. The declaration underlined that failure to work together to combat the virus would dilute the very essence of the European idea. Conversely, a successful joint response would demonstrate the real added value of cooperation and would be appreciated and recognised by citizens. ■

### FIND OUT MORE

The EU’s coronavirus response: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en)

# Italy and Slovenia cooperate to combat COVID-19 crisis

Over the last few months, the coronavirus pandemic has changed numerous aspects of people's everyday lives. Across the EU, restrictions have been imposed on many internal borders for health security reasons.

Nowhere is this more evident than along the border between Italy and Slovenia. After the Second World War, the territory around the city of Gorizia was split between Italy and Yugoslavia (now the Republic of Slovenia) with the old town remaining in Italy and the new town of Nova Gorica developing on the other side of the frontier.

These two cities, separated by a 'soft' iron curtain (Yugoslavia was a socialist country although not part of the Warsaw Pact) for 57 years, joined by the adjacent municipality of Šempeter-Vrtojba, prepared a joint strategy to develop their single urban area. Due to a lack of suitable legal tools to provide a common cross-border strategy and the need to pave the way for joint infrastructures and services, in 2011, Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba set up the EGTC-GO (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation).

The aim was to plan a single cross-border city and foster the idea that cooperation could provide a real development opportunity. Thanks to policymakers and skilled practitioners, the EGTC GO became an intermediate body and single beneficiary of the first and currently only Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) supported by Interreg.

On 29 February 2020, the mayors of Gorizia (Italy) and Nova Gorica (Slovenia) – Rodolfo Ziberna and Klemen Miklavič – celebrated together in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana, supporting the transition to the second phase of Nova Gorica and Gorizia's candidacy for the European Capital of Culture 2025 (ECOC 2025).

## Breaking down barriers

Subsequently, with a hastily built fence, the Slovenian city of Nova Gorica cut itself off from its Italian twin in a gesture which initially seemed to symbolise a return to a bitter and divisive past. Now, in the middle of the coronavirus emergency, the two mayors face each other daily, but at a distance.

The GO!2025 team brought them together during the inauguration of the 'Virtual Cafe with GO! 2025 Nova Gorica - Gorizia', one of the initiatives for the ECOC 2025 candidacy, coordinated by the EGTC GO, via live streaming on the Facebook Page GO! 2025 Nova Gorica-Gorizia. Although border controls have been temporarily restored, causing suffering and sadness, the two cities have continued to work closely together with a view to jointly confronting the common emergency.

'The number of infected in Nova Gorica is low compared to the rest of Slovenia, said Mayor Miklavič, and Nova Gorica has been able to move faster thanks to the almost daily updates on the Italian situation given by my friend and colleague Ziberna. The life of the two cities is deeply intertwined and this emergency situation has made us understand that it is necessary to identify a common management system to deal with such an emergency.'

Ziberna stressed that, thanks to the EGTC GO's role, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation established by Gorizia, Nova Gorica and the neighbouring Šempeter-Vrtojba, the cross-border territory can send Europe a strong signal. 'The EGTC GO is Europe,' stressed Ziberna. We represent the promotion of a Europe of possibilities, a model of collaboration to be exported to other countries.' The two mayors agreed to consider EGTC GO as a key player in accelerating the economic recovery and cross-border development process once the emergency ends.



## Uniting cities and citizens

During the pandemic, cross-border teams of doctors and patients have continued to work remotely, events are being organised via Facebook, including Slovenian and Italian language courses which have attracted hundreds of people. The city mayors have been in constant contact, urging their respective national governments to reopen the border as soon as possible, and coordinating mutual support in emergency-related issues. Locals play badminton and volleyball over the newly constructed fence, celebrate birthdays, and separated couples meet.

EGTC GO is very aware that the pandemic could quickly undo the progress made recently and are convinced that cooperation is more than ever rooted in the hearts and minds of most people living on both sides of the border who feel they belong to a unique and unified city.

The ECOC 2025 candidacy must be seen as a development opportunity for these cross-border territories, not only in the cultural sector. 'Our cross-border region has got a very important and impactful tool – the EGTC – which should now concentrate on the economic problems of our territory. It must be able to channel EU funds for economic and development projects to accelerate the economic recovery,' Miklavič concluded. ■

**Videos (produced for the European Capital of Culture 2025):**

**Short:** <https://youtu.be/ZfsOrRuGvhE>

**Long:** [https://youtu.be/ZOK-VoXmM\\_0](https://youtu.be/ZOK-VoXmM_0)

# EU funds help businesses survive the coronavirus pandemic

We are facing an unprecedented health, social and economic crisis. European businesses are worrying about the impact of COVID-19 on their employees, cash flows, business plans and their very survival. This crisis is halting activities in many countries and across entire value chains.

Projections of the impact on the labour market are equally dramatic, and the most vulnerable will be hardest hit. We cannot anticipate how long this crisis will last, but we can respond during the immediate 'survival' phase to alleviate economic hardships faced by European businesses.

Enterprises urgently need liquidity and affordable financing to enable them to stay alive. The European Commission is mobilising the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to respond to these emerging needs in a flexible way. The ESIF funds help Member States to address three priorities, in particular: **spending on healthcare, support for short-time work schemes, and providing working capital for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).**

The European Commission, in partnership with the European Investment Bank (EIB), wanted to shed light on the new flexibilities introduced under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII and CRII plus) and to discuss them with stakeholders.

Through *fi-compass*, it organised the first webinar on 'ESIF financial instruments under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative' which took place on 11 May. It attracted more than 500 participants from managing authorities, financial intermediaries, EU institutions and other stakeholders.

## Greater funding flexibility

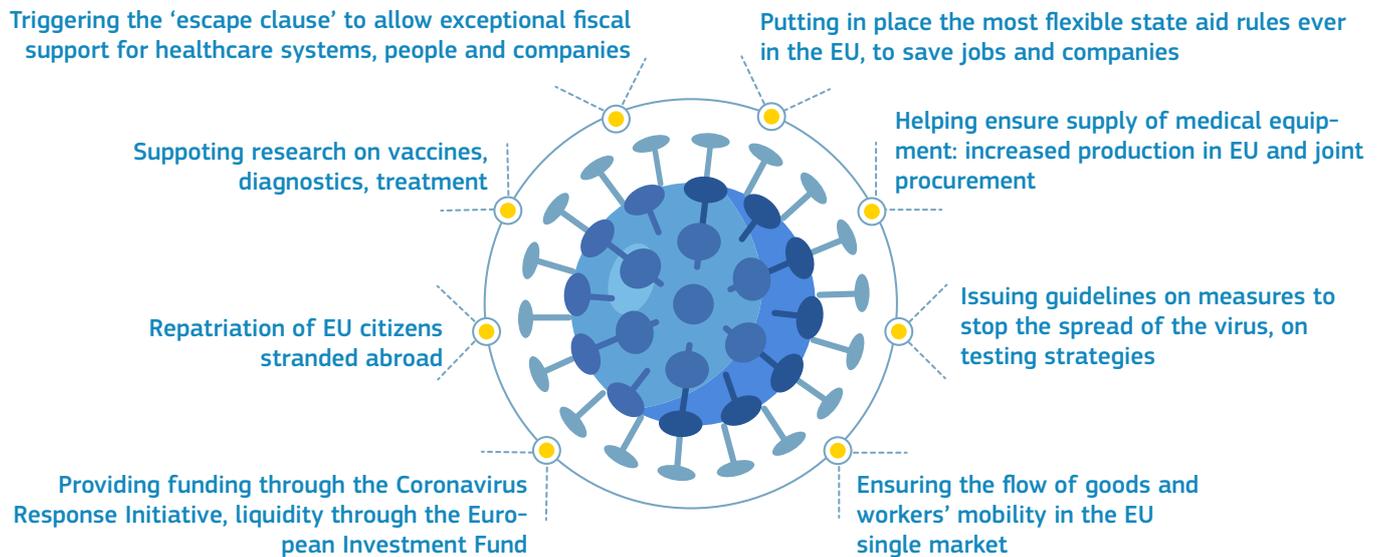
Jonathan Denness, Head of Financial Instruments and International Financial Institutions Relations Unit in the European Commission's DG REGIO opened the webinar. He set out the general context of the **two packages of measures for ESIF financial instruments: CRII and CRII Plus**. Some of the key flexibilities concern relaxation of the requirement to modify *ex-ante* assessments when adapting existing financial instruments to respond to the crisis.

The new flexible rules also relate to relaxing some of the requirements when the support is for working capital requirements. Managing authorities, National Promotional Banks and their partners can use these flexibilities to respond quickly to the needs of enterprises. The package of measures includes amendments to the Common Provisions Regulation 1303/2013 (CPR) and the State Aid Temporary Framework.

Loris Di Pietrantonio, Head of Unit of the European Commission's DG EMPL, explained that the CPR novelties also apply to the European Social Fund (ESF) financial instruments. Within the ESF, 17 Member States have already devised national schemes for short-time work arrangements. These deviations and rapid adaptation have helped to stem the COVID-19 fallout on the labour market. Furthermore, the ESF can support the costs of hiring health staff and the production of medical equipment, medicines and other related items.

Michael Pielke, Head of Unit, DG AGRI, European Commission, presented the agricultural aspect. In the current crisis, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development financial instruments will help farmers to face economic difficulties via standalone working capital.

## EU CORONA RESPONSE



Frank Lee, Head of Financial Instruments Advisory Division at the EIB, mentioned that *fi-compass* has produced a factsheet '[Responding to the COVID-19 crisis through financial instruments](#)'. This aims to help to mobilise ESIF financial instruments, including in combination with grants. The objective is to inspire managing authorities, National Promotional Banks and institutions and other stakeholders to use the ESIF financial instruments and to learn from the case examples which already exist.

Ieva Zālīte, Policy Officer, Financial Instruments and Relations with International Financial Institutions Unit, DG REGIO, European Commission, then explained the CRII and CRII Plus legislation and other regulatory initiatives, including state aid measures.

### Leading by example

Two examples of measures implemented to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak were presented during the webinar. Then Ivan Lesay, Chief Executive Officer, Slovak Investment Holding (SIH) explained how the 'SIH Anti-Corona Guarantee' financial instrument is helping SMEs in Slovakia.

Poland has also reacted quickly and adopted measures in response to the crisis. Aleksandra Kwiatkowska, Unit Director in the European Programmes Department, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego presented the adjustments to the Polish financial

instrument, the 'National Fund for Social Entrepreneurship'. Polish authorities have used the new flexibilities to improve the borrowing and repayment conditions for businesses.

Both examples highlight how financial instruments can be mobilised quickly to respond to the needs of businesses in Europe. As such, the European Commission would also like to inspire and support managing authorities, National Promotional Banks, and institutions in other Member States, too.

The webinar concluded with a questions and answers session during which experts from the European Commission and the EIB responded to questions from the attendees. ■

### FIND OUT MORE

**Webinar:** <https://bit.ly/2YLu204>

**Written responses:** <https://bit.ly/3g1gJyw>

**If you have further questions related to ESIF financial instruments, please contact our team in the European Commission at:**

REGIO-B3-FINANCIAL-INSTRUMENTS@ec.europa.eu.

## DATA POINT

# Boosting EU regions' health and well-being

Cohesion Policy continues to invest in health in a number of different areas, such as Europe's ageing population, healthcare infrastructure and sustainable systems, e-health, health coverage and health promotion programmes.

In light of the current COVID-19 crisis, the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) covers provisions to accelerate and enhance support to coronavirus-related expenditure. These include financing health equipment, medicines, testing and treatment facilities, medical equipment (such as ventilators and masks) and support to vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, accelerated procedures are now in place to support the reallocation of EU Cohesion Policy funding. Here, we examine the investments planned by the programmes, since 2014, under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

### What type of health improvements are prioritised?

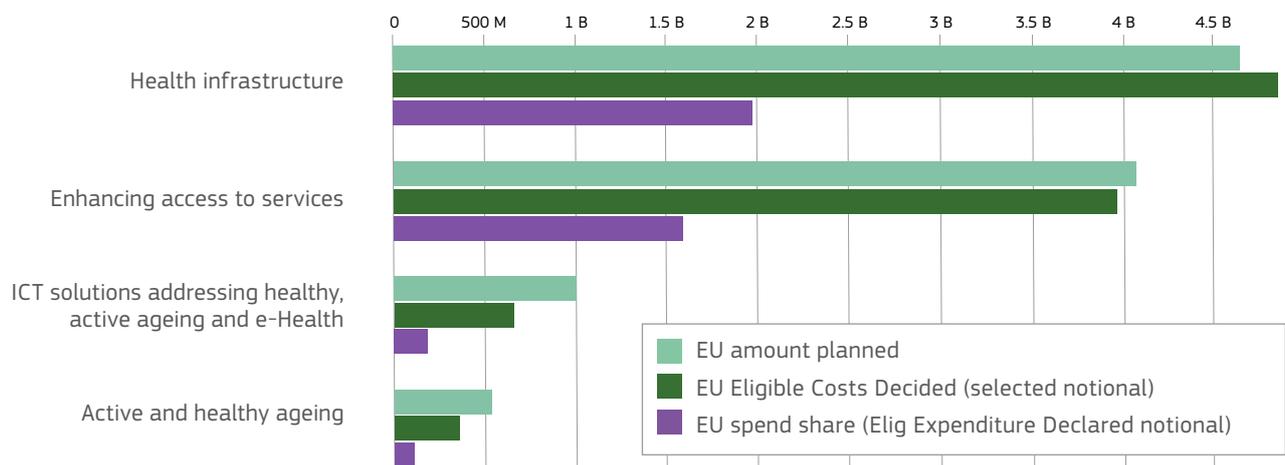
Many types of interventions can be financed by the ERDF. The Commission's guidance for 2014-2020 highlighted the following priorities:

- Investment in health and social infrastructure to improve access to health and social services and reduce health inequalities.
- Infrastructure investments that contribute to the modernisation, structural transformation and sustainability of health systems, leading to measurable improvements in health outcomes, including e-health measures.
- Targeted infrastructure investments to support the shift from institutional to community-based care.
- Support for infrastructure investments in childcare, elderly care and long-term care.

Investments in health in cross-border cooperation programmes respond to the needs and challenges identified in the border regions.

Initially, not all countries planned ERDF investment in these health objectives. In fact, only a small number of Member States have made significant allocations in health categories: Poland is the best example, leading in all categories. In general, ERDF health investments tend to be concentrated in the less-developed countries and regions.

### 2014-2020 PROGRESS IN EU COHESION POLICY (ERDF-ESF) INVESTMENTS IN HEALTH SERVICES



## 2014-2020 ERDF - POPULATION COVERED BY IMPROVED HEALTH SERVICES (CO36)



There are also variations in the speed of implementation, both in deciding which projects to finance and in the rate of investment spending by those selected. The less-developed regions and countries tend to mobilise EU funding for health-service modernisation. Richer countries have significant national budgets and, in any event, lower per-capita EU funding, which is prioritised in areas such as research and SME competitiveness.

### Progress in delivering investment outputs

For the period 2014-2020, one common indicator was defined to measure the ‘population covered by improved health services’. Common Indicator CO36 is defined as: ‘Population of a certain area expected to benefit from the health services supported by the project. It includes new or improved buildings, or new equipment for various types of health service (prevention, outpatient or inpatient care, aftercare).’

This indicator was designed to track in an aggregate way the population benefiting from EU-funded health-service improvements. The graph above compares the progress in tracking the combined improvement in European health services, as measured by CO36.

By comparing the common indicator targets and progress made, it appears that not all programmes investing in health are reporting on the common indicator. Indeed, CO36 does not capture all eligible actions, which have many other outputs covered by programme-specific indicators that cannot be aggregated.

The common indicator has thrown up challenges. For example, it was challenging for programmes to set accurate targets without knowing which projects would be selected – this is why programme targets have been increasing year on year. The values for the population benefiting are collected from each project. Where there are multiple projects, the populations covered may overlap, which can lead to overcounting at the programme level. Some programmes are remedying this by setting limits on the population covered. The robustness of the values reported is also likely to be addressed by impact evaluation. ■

### FIND OUT MORE

<https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/qyuv-h9j2>

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# Interreg, sustainable development and the European Green Deal

Throughout 2020, the EU is celebrating 30 years of Interreg and cooperation in all its forms. As the second pillar of Cohesion Policy, Interreg is at the heart of the European spirit because it encourages regions and countries to tackle challenges they can only solve by working together.

The establishment of Interreg in 1990 was a watershed in Cohesion Policy and followed a long and laborious debate which had begun several years earlier. Since the end of the 1970s, the integration of EU funds in targeted, multiannual programmes has been tested in Integrated Development Programmes and then in Integrated Mediterranean Programmes. Both marked a radical change in how the funds were normally earmarked – that is, reimbursing individual projects introduced by Member States on an annual basis, a system which was no longer considered convincing as it lacked a strategic approach.

Since then, Cohesion Policy, of which Interreg is an essential element, has framed the EU's interventions by using a programming approach at European, national and regional levels. It has adapted over time without losing sight of its core orientation, namely, to work towards the balanced and sustainable development of Europe's regions. It has made and continues to make it possible for national, regional and local governments to engage in overarching strategies and networks across policies and country borders.

Tackling climate and environmental-related challenges is very much part of this balanced and sustainable regional development. Interreg has been addressing climate change and contributing to a greener Europe for 30 years.

## Facing threats together

The challenges linked to climate change and the environment epitomise the benefits of cooperation. Forest fires do not distinguish between borders and often wreak havoc along their path. The sustainable development of floodplains in border areas requires close cooperation between all stakeholders. If the authorities on one side of the border allow drainage to take place, this will have an immediate and long-term impact on the quality of wetlands on the other side.

Pollution in rivers and seas, whether from plastics or other substances, has major impacts which determine the quality of life of citizens over a very wide geographical space. For 30 years, thousands of EU-funded projects have responded to these challenges, bringing concrete benefits to EU border regions and beyond and building trust and respect from communities sharing a common space.

The dramatic effects of climate change are currently being felt across the EU and worldwide. With each passing year, the atmosphere is warming and the climate is changing. Of the 8 million species on the planet, 1 million are at risk of being lost. Our ecosystems are being polluted and destroyed.

Interreg represents both an opportunity and a response to these challenges at the European level. As such, the Interreg community, through its network of collaborators built up over 30 years of close cooperation, has a major role to play in the European Green Deal.

## Strategic approach

This is the new EU-wide growth strategy that aims to transform the Union into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy in which there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.

This strategy also aims to protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts. The European Commission recognises that this transition must be just and inclusive. It must put people first and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges. The Interreg community, through its locally based and bottom-up approach, centred on people-to-people contact and inclusiveness, is ideally placed to make a real contribution to the European Green Deal.

TN: TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

## CLEANATLANTIC – INTERREG TN ATLANTIC AREA PROGRAMME

CleanAtlantic is working hard to raise awareness among a number of different target groups about the sources, impacts and solutions for marine litter and how they can actively contribute to preventing, monitoring and reducing this pollution. Several awareness-raising campaigns have taken place in Spain (Vigo, A Guarda, Illa de Arousa), Portugal (Madeira, Sesimbra), France (Pouldu) and Ireland (Castlebar), aimed at schools and fishermen communities.

The target groups have shown great interest and motivation, which are crucial to changing human behaviour, acting as multipliers and vectors of better practices. Students from primary and secondary schools have become involved in activities such as monitoring coastal areas, applying the Marine Strategy Framework Directive monitoring protocol and collecting, classifying and analysing marine litter found on the beach. For example, during a monitoring action held in Sesimbra (Portugal), 27 students picked up 934 items of marine litter, weighing 34.4 kilograms along a 700-metre stretch of beach. The 'Active Ocean Literacy' is another project initiative which will be carried out simultaneously in five Portuguese cities with fishing ports.

The EU contributed EUR 2 436 930 to the total budget of EUR 3 249 241.

[www.cleanatlantic.eu](http://www.cleanatlantic.eu)



In many cases, cooperation between regions and/or Member States can bring higher added value than facing the challenges at hand alone. Indeed, given the transboundary nature and scale of the challenges to be tackled by the European Green Deal, we all need to step up our efforts. In short, a green and climate-neutral Europe can only be achieved if we work in unison.

Since the European Green Deal will bring substantial change, active public participation and confidence in the transition is paramount if policies are to work and be accepted. The transition to a climate-neutral society is both a challenging task and an opportunity to build a better future for everyone. It is about people and their daily lives: how we produce, consume, move, heat or cool our houses, work and live together.

### Boosting cooperation

Alongside government policies and regulation, citizens, communities and organisations in all sectors of our society and economy have their part to play. To this end, as part of the European Green Deal, the Commission will launch a European Climate Pact which will encourage broad societal engagement on climate and environment through a range of activities. It aims to inform, inspire and foster cooperation between people and organisations. It will build on and amplify existing activities, trigger and embrace new ones, offering opportunities for learning, exchange, co-creation and collaboration.

Once again, the Interreg community can play a significant part in developing this new pact through its close contact with multilateral cooperation groupings around shared natural spaces, such as lakes or mountain ranges. Furthermore, it can use its long-standing experience with various forms of cooperation at different levels and involving different actors.

Given the international dimension of the European Green Deal, Interreg provides a framework for joint action between Member States as well as between Member States and third countries, to find common solutions to shared problems. It promotes transboundary exchanges of experience and facilitates acting together. While Interreg covers cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation, it also anchors cooperation in a more strategic policy environment through, *inter alia*, the EU's macro-regional strategies and the Border Focal Point.



The macro-regional strategies provide a cooperation framework for better coordination of EU, national and regional funds relevant for a specific geographical area and for the concentration of these funds in strategic projects and initiatives. Being cross-sectoral, inclusive and involving different levels of governance levels, they are of key importance in contributing to and enhancing the cooperation dimension of the European Green Deal.

## Tapping into the potential

Together with the EU macro-regional strategies, the Interreg programmes are key tools for addressing issues such as biodiversity conservation and clean energy, for which the importance of cooperation is explicitly recognised in the European Green Deal.

Moreover, as outlined in the Communication 'Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions', there is significant untapped potential in these regions. Here, further cooperation on energy, climate and environmental objectives, along with joint investments, can make a significant contribution to a sustainable recovery in general.

The Border Focal Point, established by DG REGIO, aims to support this process by helping to remove potential legal and administrative obstacles to cross-border cooperation and by promoting carbon-neutral activities along and across all EU borders.

### ENI CBC: EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD INSTRUMENT CROSS BORDER COOPERATION

#### ZERO WASTE: STRATEGY FOR GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS – INTERREG ENI CBC BLACK SEA BASIN PROGRAMME 2014-2020

This project aims to contribute to an overall reduction in the number of visible (> 2.5cm) litter items, including plastic, fishing and sanitary litter items on coastlines; the number of litter items per square metre on the seabed, including fishing-related litter items, to 2012 levels by 2020, in Odessa (Ukraine), Burgas (Bulgaria), Guria (Georgia) and Tekirdağ (Turkey). This will involve adequate collection, sorting, and environmentally sound disposal of a minimum of 1.5 tonnes of litter from the seabed and 0.5 tonnes of litter from coasts and beaches in these regions.

The project builds on the results of a previous project: Integrated Land-use Management Modelling of Black Sea Estuaries (ILMM-BSE) funded by the Operational Programme 'Black Sea Basin 2007-2013'. The first main activity envisaged is the collection and disposal of marine litter. A 'Fishing for litter' campaign is being organised in the four countries, targeting 330 local fishermen and encouraging them to collect a minimum of 1.5 tonnes of derelict fishing gear from the seabed.

There are also ongoing beach clean-up campaigns, with the help of children between 7 and 16 and their teachers. The project hopes to encourage at least 1 600 people to help clean the beaches around the Black Sea, while raising public awareness, which is key. Researchers are targeting 75 primary/secondary schools, 50 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 25 local media organisations as part of the so-called 'Ecosystem Education Programme', involving a total of 4 500 people, using multimedia tools and online games, too.



As before, in the 2021-2027 programming period, Interreg will continue to put a strong emphasis on supporting the achievement of the climate objectives and the transition towards a greener, climate-neutral and resilient Europe. To this effect, the Commission puts great emphasis on the importance of the environment, climate and energy and the need for sustainable development more generally as key considerations in the development of all Interreg programmes post 2020.

Moreover, cooperation across borders is supported in all the proposed Cohesion Policy regulations 2021-2027. In the new programming period, the Commission proposes to facilitate and strengthen cooperation between regions and the Member States within the 'mainstream' Cohesion Policy programmes. This will also facilitate further cooperation on energy, climate and environmental objectives. ➤

## IPA CBC: INSTRUMENT FOR THE PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE CROSS BORDER COOPERATION

### **PESCAR:** PESTICIDE CONTROL AND REDUCTION – INTERREG IPA CBC PROGRAMME CROATIA-BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA-MONTENEGRO 2014-2020



The PESCAR project seeks to protect and preserve the environment, encourage the sustainable use of natural resources and raise institutional capacity with regard to environment protection. In response to the continuously increasing use of pesticides in regions in the Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina cross-border area, the project designed a pest and disease warning and forecasting system, comprising a network of meteorological machines and visual pest-control stations that provide warnings about weather conditions and pest damage.

It also set up a joint database of agriculture producers who will be informed about the recommendations made using data from local weather conditions and development stages of disease and pests. Furthermore, a policy for sustainable prevention of pesticides pollution uses data from the forecasting system and includes an action plan and specific measures for preventing pesticide contamination in the project area.

This project has been very inclusive as partners, including a county administration, a ministry, a development agency, a university and an institute for agriculture, joined forces to limit damage done by pesticides, especially in conditions when climate change affects production and farmers do not have sufficient information to target and limit their use. Partners realised that contamination is not limited by national borders so the system they developed, as well as a series of educational workshops, publications on targeted use of pesticides and agricultural fairs organised across the project area, helped to protect the environment, the local community and the local economy.

The PESCAR project, which began in July 2017 and ended in December 2019, involved five partners from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was co-funded with EUR 511 393 35 from the ERDF and IPA II funds within Priority Axis 2: Protecting the environment and nature, improving risk prevention and promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina 2014-2020.

<https://www.agroprognoza.eu/>

<https://www.interreg-hr-ba-me2014-2020.eu/project/pescar/>

<https://keep.eu/projects/19741/>

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## CBC: CROSS BORDER COOPERATION

### SAPOLL: INTERREG FRANCE WALLONIE VLAANDEREN



Wild pollinators in the France-Wallonia-Flanders cross-border area are a valuable but highly threatened resource. To protect them, it is essential to set up a cross-border organisation that can facilitate coordinated actions and synergies between regions. Indeed, isolated actions on both sides of the border are unlikely to lead to the sustainable management of this essential resource. The stakes are high because wild pollinators, such as wild bees, hoverflies and butterflies, are essential for maintaining agriculture and ecosystems in our regions.

To meet this challenge, the SAPOLL project worked with stakeholders from Wallonia, Flanders and northern France to implement a cross-border action plan for wild pollinators. This plan initiated actions to support pollinators by providing the scientific, didactic and applied context necessary for everyone, including citizens, decision-makers, entrepreneurs and land managers. Co-constructed with the cross-border territory actors, the action plan defined the challenges and objectives for the cross-border region, as well as the actions and tasks to be implemented to safeguard pollinators.

The SAPOLL project also organised the implementation of activities complementary to the cross-border action plan and necessary for its implementation and success. In particular, these were aimed at the homogenisation and sharing of competences in the cross-border territory, where scientific knowledge, experience in awareness-raising and naturalist competences are highly disparate. Public awareness, communication, awareness-raising and participatory science activities were carried out to warn as many people as possible of the problems resulting from the decline of wild pollinators. Furthermore, the mobilisation of observer networks – the cross-border natural fabric is interconnected and homogenised through working groups and training courses; scientific monitoring of wild pollinators throughout the cross-border territory; and the delineation of areas of importance for pollinators and the pollination service were also carried out during the project.

[www.sapoll.eu](http://www.sapoll.eu)

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## A NEW EPISODE OF 'THIS IS EUROPE' PODCAST IS ONLINE

The latest episode of Interreg's 'This is Europe' podcast presents stories of collaboration, friendship, and neighbourliness from across the EU.

A new tramline connects the French city of Strasbourg to Kehl, its German neighbour. Cathy Gebhart-Levy, a mobility planner for Strasbourg, takes us on a trip over the River Rhine to explore how the new tram link has strengthened a relationship with a long and complex history. Andrej Medved is the head of Šmarje, a village in rural Slovenia, where he is turning the tide on a familiar story of depopulation with bold and innovative projects that bring Europe's opportunities directly into the heart of his small community. And finally, we head to a small coastal town in Spain where one fisherman has identified an opportunity where tradition and innovation meet.

Listen and subscribe here: <https://this-is-europe.simplecast.com/episodes/neighbours>



## CBC: CROSS BORDER COOPERATION



### EUROPEAN RESEARCH PROJECT ON BIO AND WASTE RESOURCES FOR CONSTRUCTION: FOSTERING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Supported by the Interreg VA France (Channel) England, with funding from the ERDF, the Sustainable Bio & Waste Resources for Construction (SB&WRC) project was a cross-border R&D collaboration between four universities, two associations, one small business, and one global corporation, to transform underutilised, non-valued agricultural co-products and waste into commercially viable low-carbon building insulation materials.

Successfully delivering what it set out to achieve, SB&WRC conceived and produced three innovative, low-carbon prototypes of thermal insulants for the construction industry, from common agricultural by-products (wheat straw and maize pith), and recycled waste (polyester duvets), all widely available across the Programme area.

In mobilising renewable resources to improve efficiency in buildings, the project enabled a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the preservation of natural resources such as the minerals used in the production of conventional building insulation materials.

Of equal importance was its ambition to raise the awareness of French and English construction stakeholders of the advantages of these new building materials, to encourage them to continue the development of prototypes after project end with a view to commercialisation, and to accelerate their adoption more generally. Over 19 000 building professionals engaged with the project through events, workshops, production and testing of mini-prototypes and operational deployment of the prototypes on pilot sites, conferences, two online communities – one in French and one in English, newsletters, and an online survey to understand perceptions and expectations.

At the scientific level, cross-border cooperation has made it possible to bring together all the rare technical skills essential for the scientific success of the project and to reach a critical mass of stakeholders able to influence market trends which a national partnership would find difficult to achieve.

The EU will finance 69 % of the overall project budget, estimated at around EUR 1.8 million (EUR 1.26 million from the ERDF).

<https://www.construction21.org/static/sbwrc-project.html>

<https://asbp.org.uk/sbwrc>

There is no one-size-fits-all recipe for regional development in general and for territorial cooperation in particular. However, principles such as partnership, transparency, subsidiarity and civil society participation combine to form an essential asset in development policies. They reinforce cooperation between the public and private sectors and have the potential to link efficiency with decentralisation and active involvement.

These principles are very much at the heart of what Interreg is about. In all its forms, through building trust and respect among people, Interreg is an instrument that not

only promotes cohesion within the EU but also projects European values beyond the territory of the Union in a very effective way. All of this is crucial to support delivery on the ground of the ambitious objectives of the European Green Deal. ■

# The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region welcomes North Macedonia

On 2 April 2020, EUSAIR, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, embraced the Republic of North Macedonia as its ninth participating country. This is very good news for regional cooperation within the whole Adriatic and Ionian Region. Below, Agneza Rusi Popovska, Ambassador of North Macedonia to the EU and Marc Lemaître, European Commission Director-General, welcome EUSAIR's latest member.



Agneza Rusi Popovska

North Macedonia has become the ninth participating country in EUSAIR, alongside Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. We are grateful for the support to join the EUSAIR family and look forward to contributing to strengthening regional cooperation and broadening the multi-level policy dialogue for a more integrated and sustainable Adriatic-Ionian macro-region.

Regional cooperation is essential for sustainable development and a prerequisite in the European integration process. As a landlocked country on the hinterland of the Adriatic and Ionian sea basin, North Macedonia is strongly motivated to deepen the partnerships and links that promote economic

growth and prosperity within the region, foster European values and advance its European integration.

## Making better connections

The responsibility to coordinate EUSAIR's connectivity pillar, together with Italy and Serbia, is a privilege entrusted to North Macedonia. We intend to justify this trust by proactively promoting the functional integration of the transport and energy networks both within the region and across the EU. Better transport and energy connections are pivotal for economic and social development, but tangible results can only be achieved with a cooperative and coordinated approach to address challenges and harness opportunities.

Following the EU's decision in March 2020 to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia, we hope our inclusion in EUSAIR will reinforce the strategy's political dimension, alongside the process of integrating the region's candidate and potential candidate countries into the EU. Deepening the experience of implementing EU policies can only reinforce the Union's transformative power in the region and enhance collective stability, security and prosperity.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted, in the most fundamental way, the importance of close cooperation, coordination and solidarity in confronting the crisis and its socio-economic consequences. As emphasised in the May 2020 EU-Western Balkans Zagreb Summit Declaration, having exited the the current containment measures, a new phase of close cooperation will follow to tackle the significant socio-economic impact of the crisis.

The European Commission will put forward a robust economic and investment plan to spur the region's long-term recovery while advancing its green and digital transformation, furthering connectivity and strengthening social development. EUSAIR member states and stakeholders should seize the opportunities arising from Europe's post-coronavirus recovery and the renewed dynamics of EU integration in the Western Balkans to mobilise themselves in result-oriented cooperation to stimulate sustainable development in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region.



Marc Lemaître

The inclusion of North Macedonia in the EUSAIR reinforces its political dimension and strengthens its role in the convergence and enlargement processes, setting it up as the 'enlargement' macro-regional strategy, covering five IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) countries and four EU Member States. Cooperation on an equal footing contributes to the mutual learning process and to extending relevant EU policies to North Macedonia, while supporting the priorities of the new Commission, with a special focus on a 'Stronger Europe in the World' and the 'European Green Deal'.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating in Europe and worldwide. While the EU itself has been heavily affected by coronavirus, it is providing essential and unparalleled support to the Western Balkans. It has secured over EUR 3,3 billion to address the region's immediate health and humanitarian needs and to support medium- and long-term socio-economic recovery plans.

### Sustainable and inclusive

Furthermore, on 27 May 2020, the Commission set out a bold and comprehensive plan for European recovery driven by three core values: solidarity, cohesion, and convergence. In this context, I am convinced that EUSAIR's cooperation framework can play a unique role, not only to better respond to the most urgent needs on the ground but also to establish the basis for more sustainable and inclusive growth in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

The inclusion of North Macedonia has come at the right moment, when the Commission, Member States and the IPA countries are engaged in the

programming of the 2021-2027 funding. The time is ripe to ensure that EUSAIR priorities are well reflected in all relevant EU funds and implemented through cooperation. I am sure that North Macedonia, supported by administrations in the other EUSAIR countries, can capitalise on the opportunities provided by macroregional cooperation.

I invite North Macedonia to participate actively in all EUSAIR governing structures, to bring its own experience as an EU candidate country in all relevant sectors and to use it together with all countries across the region. All positive energies will be required to help kick-start EUSAIR economies towards recovery, boost their twin digital and green transitions, and make them fairer, more resilient and more sustainable for future generations. ■

### FIND OUT MORE

<http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/>



# Emilia-Romagna: attracting talent and generating innovation

**An area of historic universities and avant-garde manufacturing, a high quality of life, European-level services and a powerful transport infrastructure system, Emilia-Romagna is a strategic hub within Italy and in Europe.**

Emilia-Romagna is among the most economically advanced Italian regions. Over the last 20 years, it has built a network of links between research and industry, between the world of work and education, generating a dynamism able to adapt and react to economic fluctuations while creating a context favourable to innovation and attractiveness.

Today, Emilia-Romagna is committed to fostering development and building a future for all, particularly young people and their offspring. They will be able to live and grow in a European region which, even in larger-scale transformations, has seized its potential to identify with the best expressions of change.

Situated in central-northern Italy, with almost 4.5 million inhabitants, Emilia-Romagna is at the heart of the most industrialised part of the country. It boasts an enviable

geographic position, connecting the north and south, and the Mediterranean, northern and central Europe to the countries across the Adriatic and Ionian. The region takes its name from the old Roman road, Via Emilia, which is an international tourist attraction, as is the densely populated coastline.

With a surface area of 22 452 km<sup>2</sup>, comprising plains, hilly regions and the Apennines mountain range, Emilia-Romagna extends over nine provinces. Among them is the capital, the Metropolitan city of Bologna, which boasts the oldest university in the Western world, founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

It is among the leading agricultural regions in the country, with farming contributing around 6% of GDP, thanks in part to the contribution from over 8 000 farming cooperatives. In an effort to enhance its competitiveness, the agricultural sector has embarked on structural reorganisation and producing high-quality products, including cereals, potatoes, maize, tomatoes, onions, fruit and grapes for wine production. Cattle and hog breeding are also well developed.

## Smart drivers

For a strong, open, sustainable and global economy, the region has recently committed to implementing the Smart Specialisation Strategy, the instrument used throughout Europe to improve the efficacy of public research and innovation (R&I) policies. Thus, it has invested in industries currently driving the regional economy – building and construction, agri-foods, mechatronic and mechanical engineering – as well as in the emerging areas of life sciences, big data and the creative economy.

To reinforce the drivers of change, the region is also developing ICT, the green economy, wellness and quality of life, and supporting innovation and the modernisation of services and environmental sustainability of manufacturing systems.

Over the last five years, the regional economy has continued to grow, consolidating its position as a leading Italian region. GDP per inhabitant has remained largely above the country's average, with annual variations between 0.5% and 1.5% and an estimated change between 2017 and 2021 of 4.1% over the national average of 2.3% (pre-COVID-19 estimates).

Export is traditionally a strength of the Emilia-Romagna economy, with the second Italian region by value of exports and among the leading European regions by export per capita. In 2019, the growth of regional exports compared to 2018 was 4.8%, well above the national figure (+2.5%), and above that of Lombardy (0.4%) and Veneto (1.1%). During the first nine months of 2019, exports from Emilia-Romagna surpassed EUR 49 billion, behind only Lombardy. The growth of the regional tourist industry has also been decidedly positive, closing the first 10 months of 2019 with more than 57.4 million visitors (+1.8% above 2018).

Lastly, in 2019, the employment rate reached 74.4%, with more than 2 million posts available, approaching the European target for 2020 of 75% and almost 11 percentage points above the national average.

This significant fact emerges over and above the regional economic assets, giving rise to a broader perspective. The Emilia-Romagna region is known for its distinctive historical characteristic, which is the concentration of organisations and businesses belonging to the same value chain in a specific geographical area. This is the result of a set of favourable conditions: the attitude and tendency towards sharing, even among competitors – with the associated social



impacts – the entrepreneurial spirit, social dialogue and continual exchanges between the education and business systems. The capacity to make these conditions a common factor is one of the key strengths of the entire regional ecosystem which has played a decisive role in various spheres, the first being digital transformation.

## The impact of Cohesion Policy

In the 2014-2020 programme, Emilia-Romagna has made the most of European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund support. Among the leading regions in both Italy and Europe for the efficient use of these resources and the number of projects financed, it has activated and connected a territorial system comprising local institutions, small, medium and large businesses, schools, universities, research institutions, and third-sector organisations. By financing technological innovation and promoting collaboration between research and business, Emilia-Romagna has reinforced its manufacturing excellence, improved energy efficiency and intrinsic digital culture, always building on territories' vocations and their capacity to set new development trajectories. This is why, along with supporting productivity, R&I, actions of social responsibility and innovation have also been encouraged.



Social harmony and cohesion are in Emilia-Romagna's DNA. Here again, the region has been able to make Cohesion Policy a reality in each segment. This is demonstrated by the dramatic earthquake of 2012 when the EU acted immediately to support the reconstruction of the numerous areas hit, enabling manufacturing activities to resume. Collaboration and cohesiveness among local businesses also helped to launch the reconstruction and allocate production. This willingness to work as a team is also being seen today in the face of the emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

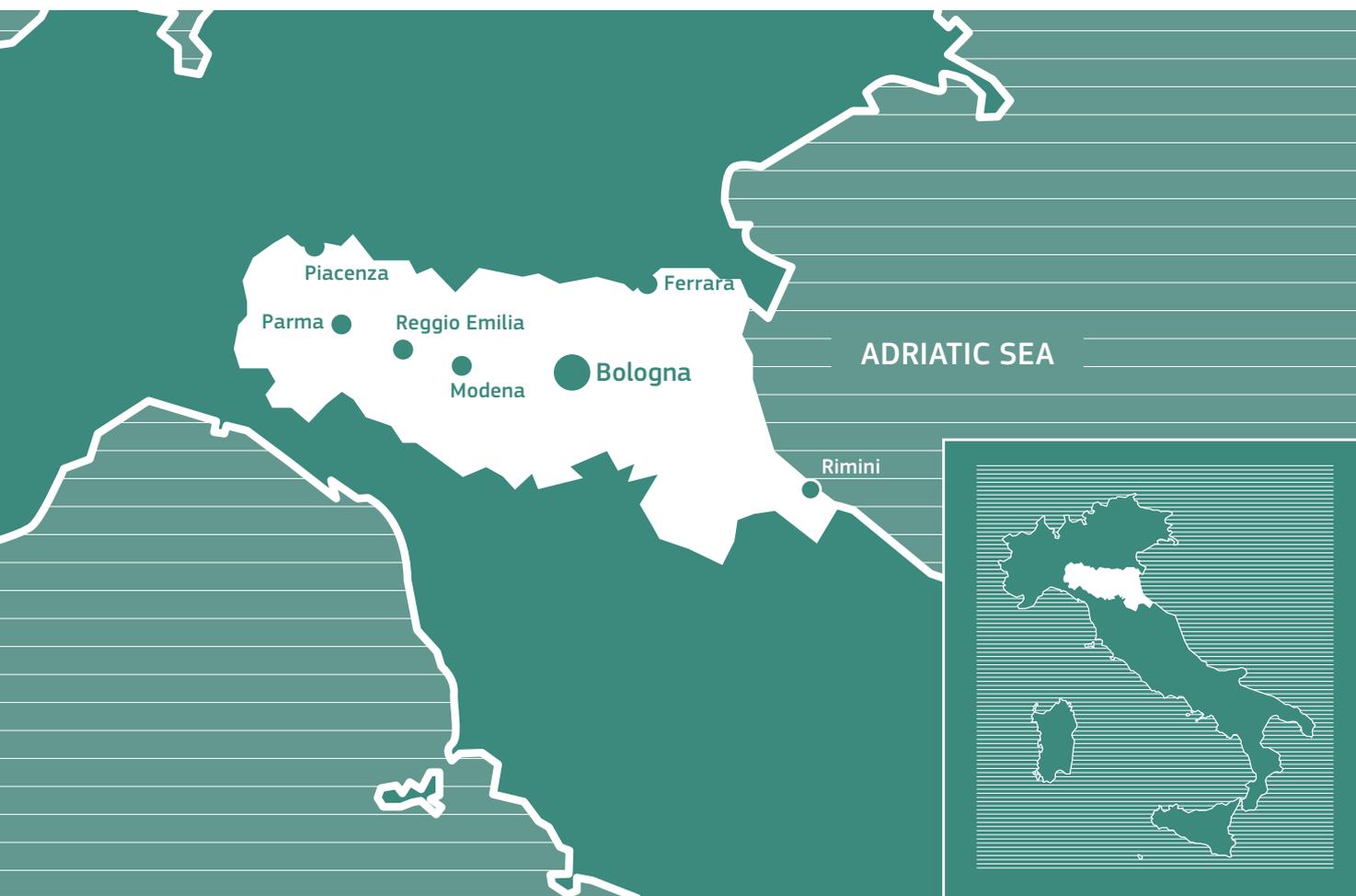
### Six economic priorities

The Regional Operational Programme (ROP) ERDF 2014-2020 was implemented as a pathway to intelligent and sustainable growth. Human and territorial capital were placed at the centre of regional policies to enhance the attraction of areas and cities. This created new opportunities for employment

and business development and reinforced the competitiveness of the economic system with a boost of EUR 481.8 million for 2014-2020 for national and regional funds.

The ROP defined six strategic priorities for developing the Emilia-Romagna economy: R&I for technological transfer to the entire manufacturing system; developing ICT to bring ultrafast broadband to the whole region; increasing business competitiveness and attractiveness to develop the economy and increase employment; a low-carbon economy to reduce the environmental impact of the regional economy; requalification and promotion of environmental and cultural resources to incentivise tourism and improve regional excellence; and attractive and participatory cities as places of opportunity, social interaction, potentially relaunching real participation in the community.

At the end of 2019, the funds available from ROP ERDF 2014-2020 had been accessed in full. EUR 480 million had been allocated, 99.6% of the total provision, and 3 460 projects



had been selected via application processes, of which 1 407 have already been completed, with an overall investment of EUR 832.4 million.

Each investment is part of the perspective for long-term regional growth, such as over EUR 23 million allocated for the requalification of cultural assets to drive future development in culture and tourism. Based on this, the region established the strategic nature of local communities' role to increase their competitiveness and the knowledge that global competition is based more on a territory's capacity to enhance its own identity, manufacturing, social and cultural capital, as well as attracting business, human capital, and innovative and high-added-value projects. Both objectives require synergies between public and private investment and between European, national, regional and local strategies aimed at fostering growth, creating jobs and improving the quality of life.

Another priority concerns support for R&I, where Emilia-Romagna's capacity to bring ideas, experiences and skills to fruition is evident. In previous EU-funded programmes, the region had already started to build its high-technology network to drive the regional innovation ecosystem. This network had a multiplier effect on industrial research, technological transfer and attractiveness in terms of innovation, establishing the basis for achieving results of international bearing. It has achieved this by focusing on two major issues, sustainability and digitalisation, demonstrating the region's capacity to take on significant Europe-level challenges, not least that of big data.

## International recognition

The consolidated ecosystem and integrated regional policies for R&I were a key strength behind two significant international awards in 2017 and 2019. First, was the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts; and second, Leonardo, the supercomputer with an extraordinary calculation capacity which, if it were currently in operation, would be the most powerful in the world. With this, Bologna would join Barcelona and Helsinki in the European High-Performance Computing network.

This major digital infrastructure relies on human intelligence. Consequently, the region has invested significantly in valuable skills in this sector via European Social Fund

operational programme funding, postgraduate training courses, doctorate and research grants, and by allocating over EUR 900 000 to the innovative higher education programme dedicated to big data. This aims to equip new graduates with knowledge and skills enabling them to transform big data into high-added-value information for the organisations they work for. Thanks to these actions and the international vocation of the regional innovation ecosystem, Emilia-Romagna is now a region that attracts young talents with high skills from abroad, inviting them to evaluate a career path in their own disciplines.

In implementing Cohesion Policy throughout its territory, the region remains committed to and focused on reinforcing the link between institutions, education and training, the research system and the economic-production system. Thanks to everything that has been achieved with European funds and a strategy able to anticipate today's challenges, Emilia-Romagna is now ready to become the European Data Valley and can play a leading role in the digital revolution transforming economies and societies.

In the same way, the region has been able to react to modern challenges, such as the COVID-19 epidemic. In just a few weeks, businesses and research laboratories proposed 190 research projects ranging from sanitisation methods, through distancing technologies and remote activities, to new medical devices. ■

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### FIND OUT MORE

<https://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/>

# Emilia-Romagna relaunches its commitment to building a better future

Stefano Bonaccini, Regional President of Emilia-Romagna, explains how his region is making the most of EU funding to invest in environmental, economic, and social sustainability.



*Emilia-Romagna has demonstrated its ability to use EU funds well.*

*In your opinion, what factors have influenced this ability?*

There are at least two essential factors. The first is the ability of administration to allocate funding based on the requirements and potential of a territory with pragmatism, promptness and the commitment to achieve. The second is the capacity of the territory itself – the municipalities, visitors and even individuals – to seize opportunities, be it a selection process for innovative production processes or a higher education course.

In Emilia-Romagna, these two aspects have grown together, programme after programme. But there is also a third vital factor: social dialogue. In 2015, immediately after the approval of the 2014-2020 ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes, we signed the Employment Pact with all entities in the region. More than 50 organisations, including employer and union associations, local administrations, the third

sector, universities and schools, systematically shared the planning of Emilia-Romagna development and Cohesion policies. They focused on priorities and actions to achieve a common objective: to increase the added value of the regional economy by creating quality employment. Today, the resources from the 2014-2020 programme have been entirely committed, and unemployment – before the pandemic – had fallen from 9% to 5% over five years. We use 100% of the European funds and I would always say that if it were possible to have more, we would spend more. These funds will form one of the pillars on which we will base the relaunch plan in the coming months.

*Work on the 2021-2027 programming has been ongoing for some time. What priorities have been set for Emilia-Romagna?*

Today's priority, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, is first and foremost relaunching the region. To do this, we very much welcome the approval of

our request to re-strategise the European Structural Funds which have already been allocated to the new needs created by the coronavirus crisis. Together with Tuscany, we are the first Italian region, and among the first in Europe, to have obtained authorisation to use the flexibility granted by the EU Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII). Therefore, after lockdown, we will use the first EUR 8.3 million to finance industrial projects and research centres for innovative solutions. Health safety will become a new area of industry in Emilia-Romagna. Recognition by the Commission further increases the certainty of being on the correct and virtuous road for definitively leaving behind the emergency that has affected our lives in recent months, by using additional resources.

Looking ahead to 2021-2027, we will have to tackle new social and territorial weaknesses and redouble our efforts to achieve a development model somewhat different from that of the past. The new European fund

*“ We will continue to work to make Bologna and Emilia-Romagna a huge incubator of new science, a European research hub for tackling the primary challenges of the new century. ”*

programming, and the new pact we will sign, will have at its heart environmental, economic, social sustainability alongside quality employment. Our goal is to transform production towards full sustainability via investment in human capital, territorial vocations, climate-change-resilient agriculture, renewable energies and the circular economy, digitalisation, new welfare and modernisation of our social services, as well as traditional industries facing innovative challenges. The idea of a Green New Deal in Europe is an opportunity we cannot miss, especially in this area which is one of the most polluted in the country.

*Emilia-Romagna Data Valley:  
how did this ambitious project start?*

Today, big data are the raw materials of new economic and social development. In Emilia-Romagna, we are working to create the most powerful infrastructure to serve both the region's and the country's growth, investing in the future perhaps as no other area in Italy and few others in Europe have

done. The Emilia-Romagna Data Valley project reinforces research institutions and the competences of our territory – Emilia-Romagna already hosts 70% of Italy's computing capacity – for planning the work, business and society of tomorrow. We believe in our capacity for excellence, the sharing of knowledge and networking in the scientific system to enhance our region's attraction. This has also been made possible through the support of the Italian government and seizing opportunities from Europe, projects and human capital of extraordinary value.

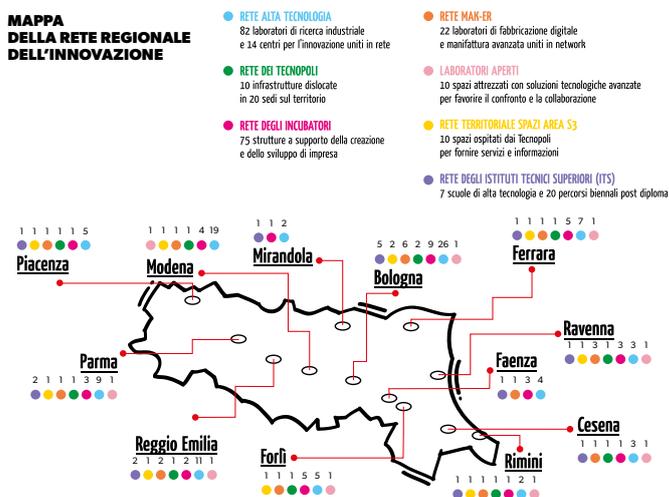
*And how will it evolve?*

We will continue to work to make Bologna and Emilia-Romagna a huge incubator of new science, a European research hub for tackling the primary challenges of the new century. The Bologna Tecnopolo construction sites never stopped operating, even during the peak of the pandemic. In a few weeks, we will be completing the first units to house the computers of the European Centre for Medium-Range

Weather Forecasts (ECMWF). And that's not all: the Leonardo supercomputer will be coming to Tecnopolo and we are working to accommodate around 250 researchers as part of the Copernicus project. Our strategy has two priorities: to reinforce these investments so that the region's community can fully benefit from this extraordinary competitive advantage, and to invest in its human resources. Data are extraordinary engines for development, but only if you have the people with the skills to use them optimally, in the interests of everyone. We are gearing ourselves up because the future starts here – and no less importantly – because change is oriented towards the well-being of communities and people. Therefore, European funds, and their integrated use, are an extraordinary regional policy instrument. ■

## The High Technology Network and Clust-ER associations

### MAPPA DELLA RETE REGIONALE DELL'INNOVAZIONE



With its 86 industrial research labs and 14 innovation centres across 20 Technopole sites, the Emilia-Romagna High Technology Network provides competences, instruments and resources for business development. Using synergies between public and private organisations, universities and research bodies, the Network links the worlds of research and production. A fundamental and key strength of the regional innovation ecosystem is its capacity to transfer the results of research to enterprises. In 2018, to reinforce the Network, Clust-ER Associations – communities of public and private organisations (research centres, businesses, training providers) – were created. Within the Clust-ERs, the Network's research and innovation centres integrate with businesses and higher education to provide a coordinating role and strategy for the sectors driving the regional economy: agri-foods, building and construction, energy and sustainability, culture and creativity, health and well-being, innovation in services, mechatronic engineering and automotive.

The Emilia-Romagna High Technology Network was supported with an investment of EUR 128 million, EUR 90 million of which came from the ERDF.

<https://www.retealtatecnologia.it/>

## SUPER performance based on regional data

At the core of the Bologna Big Data Technopole, in region's Data Valley, the digital infrastructure being developed by the SUPER project will process huge volumes of data and consolidating services to achieve high-level research and technological innovation with broad applications. The project will focus in particular on genomics, regenerative medicine, biobanking, advanced materials and innovative production systems. This will give the region, which is home to 70% of Italy's entire computing capacity and will shortly move from 19<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> in the world rankings, enormous potential to become an international focal point for big data and artificial intelligence.

The Supercomputing Unified Platform Emilia-Romagna project received around EUR 4 million from the ERDF to support research and innovation.

<https://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/datavalley>



## Modena opens laboratory space for cultural collaboration



Built in a former electricity plant in Modena, this open laboratory is part of the regional network which includes 10 similar sites in the regional capital. Every lab is dedicated to issues that are a priority for each urban area, giving citizens opportunities for digital participation and inclusion. In Modena, the focus is on culture, theatre and creativity, nurturing collaborations between freelancers, start-ups, institutions and citizens to develop advanced ICT services to make the city more attractive and encourage participation.

The ERDF provided EUR 3 million of the overall investment of EUR 3.9 million to requalify the industrial area and manage the Modena open lab.

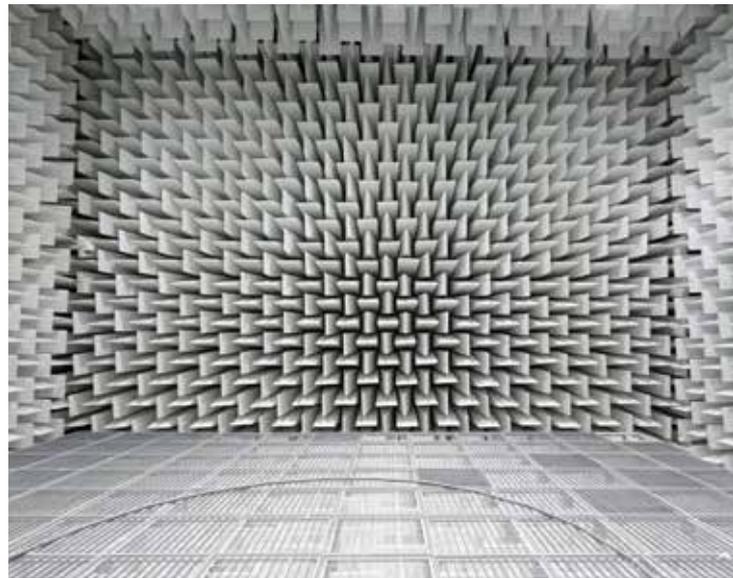
<http://www.laboratoriaperti.it/modena>

## Bringing research and innovation closer to production

The Technopole of Ferrara is a complex of industrial research laboratories and technological transfer in which even the smallest factories can find competent research and try out new production techniques, more efficient materials and innovative products.

This is an important step in closing the gap between research and innovation and production. It will enable factories to profit from cutting-edge scientific equipment and the skills of highly qualified researchers kept up to date through regular contact with the world of basic scientific research.

Supported by the ERDF, the Technopole hosts laboratories for biotechnologies applied to medicine; advanced mechanics; architectural and urban recovery and redevelopment and restoration of cultural assets; and the environment, water, land and habitats.



MechLav is an industrial research laboratory specialising in mechatronics and engines, innovation in services and digitalisation. It is part of the High Technology Network promoting the development of numerous research projects with local companies, at national and international level, to deliver real partnership agreements.

<http://www.unife.it/international/research/technopoles#null>

## Cesena focuses on the younger generation



Work is under way at the Malatestiana Library in Cesena to renew the cinema centre and expand the children's library, thanks to EUR 1.2 million from the ERDF. The total investment of EUR 2.95 million will be used to improve the region's artistic, cultural and environmental resources. The children's library will be transferred into the current non-fiction section, doubling the space available for the growing number of young readers – up 38% in the last 12 months. The cinema centre will be relocated on the ground floor, with new services including a 50-seat theatre and a new lecture hall and exhibition space.

This is one of 20 projects presented during the 2018. Diverse EnERgies week of culture which set out to redevelop the region's cultural assets.

<http://www.comune.cesena.fc.it/malatestiana/ragazzi>

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## The biomedical village: thriving in a healthy environment

Today, the Mirandola Tecnopolo, funded mainly by the ERDF, is part of an avant-garde integrated system, unique in Italy, serving local businesses and with a strong link to the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. The 'biomedical village' is able to catalyse investments and better respond to the demands of a health system which is increasingly oriented towards personalised and precision medicine. The Tecnopolo will be developed to include two new laboratories, co-working spaces, an area designed for creating prototypes as a service for companies, and a new incubator for start-ups, with dedicated offices and laboratories. So far, EUR 4 250 000 has been invested in the infrastructure, of which EUR 3 828 000 has come from the ERDF.



New Technopoles are offering post-diploma and postgraduate training courses, while the first Master's degree from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia began in 2019. Facilities for accelerating innovation processes, connections with the regional High Technology Network, and relations with national and international networks will enhance the local ecosystem. This, in turn, will accelerate the dynamics of development, improve the sector's competitiveness, and attract more young talent and high-profile scientific skills.

<http://www.distrettobiomedicale.it/il-tecnopolo-veronesi-di-mirandola/>

## Making the right moves towards sustainable mobility

To reach the EU goals for reducing climate change emissions, the Emilia-Romagna Region has supported targeted actions in public transport to incentivise sustainable mobility. The interventions include renewal of rolling stock, with the acquisition of low environmental impact, methane-, LPG-powered and hybrid buses and trolleybuses. By the end of 2020, 170 green local transport vehicles will take to the road, 125 of which are already in operation. Furthermore, a fleet of entirely electric vehicles and two pilot systems for distributing LPG to the new buses are under way.

Over EUR 18 million of ERDF funding was used to purchase the low-environmental-impact public vehicles. In total, EUR 28 million has been provided by the Fund for intelligent transport system interventions and sustainable mobility.

<https://url.emr.it/qd857h0v>



## Campovolo becomes the centre of attention

This project to redevelop the area of Campovolo, which began in 2018 with a grant from the EU, will be inaugurated on 12 September 2020 with a concert by the Italian singer and songwriter Luciano Ligabue.

The only facility of its kind in the world, it is equipped to host up to 100 000 people during major outside events, providing maximum security and ease of access around Campovolo airport in Reggio Emilia. The project also received EUR 1.7 million in public funding from the Emilia-Romagna region and the ERDF 2014-2020.

Over 20 hectares at the airport will be repurposed to enhance entertainment and social aggregation in the city by providing a venue for major national and international events. Using landscaping and environmental engineering, the access routes, a spacious reception area, the basin for large events, and the service and backstage spaces have all been designed to give audiences the best visibility and acoustics while ensuring the lowest acoustic impact on the city's residential areas.

<https://www.cvolo.it/>



# Every picture tells a story

#EUinmyregion is a co-created communication campaign that aims to increase the visibility of EU-funded projects across Europe. Using the communication tools and support, managing authorities and project beneficiaries are invited to show citizens what they are achieving together with the EU in the region.

In 2020, partners such as managing authorities and project beneficiaries are encouraged to submit photos to the postcard competition for the chance to receive 300 postcards and feature in DG REGIO communication activities. Here is a selection of winning photos.

# EU IN MY REGION





01 The **Acuinano** project partners in Spain and Portugal are developing methods to detect metallic nanoparticles and their impact on aquatic ecosystems and aquaculture products.

02 **Linking Alps**: innovative tools and strategies are being developed for linking mobility information services in a decarbonised Alpine space in Austria.

03 Culinary heritage experiences are shared across eight Mediterranean countries in the **Croatia Medfest** project focusing on sustainable tourism development.

04 **EUCycle** hopes to boost cycling across regions in Hungary, Belgium, Germany, Poland and Italy by implementing better policies and solutions to make an impact on decarbonising transport.

05 The **Our Way** project in Spain is promoting, preserving, protecting and developing cultural and natural heritage through the Greenways network in six regions.

06 EU funding is being used to develop new types of camelia sinensis tea in the **Goreana Tea Factory and Plantation** project in the Azores in Portugal.

07 **SOUTH BALTIC MANORS** is promoting historic cross-border monuments in Lithuania, Poland, Denmark and Germany to help protect and develop regional heritage and tourism.

08 The **TecnOlivo** project is applying precision agriculture to olive farming in Spain and Portugal to help growers monitor their crops and support producers in their decision-making.

09 The **IndieCade** project supported the first international independent games festival to be held since 2016. The event, held in Paris in October 2019, was co-funded by the ERDF in partnership with Paris Games Week. IndieCade Festival 2020 will take place online from 16-24 October.

10 The cultural heritage around Napoleon is the focus of the **NAPOCTEP** project which is developing a sustainable tourism product to generate economic activity in Spain and Portugal.

11 **River Promenade III** is developing an area in Estonia and Russia into an attractive cross-border region for tourism and business development.

12 **Medtech4Europe** partners in Hungary, France and the Netherlands are improving policies for research, development and innovation to better support medical technologies and EU healthcare.

09



10



11



12



## FIND OUT MORE

More information on how to participate: [www.euinmyregion.eu](http://www.euinmyregion.eu)

# #EURegionsWeek: three in one



**The 2020 European Week of Regions and Cities has two major challenges to address: organising a major event in the post-pandemic world and managing a record number of partner applications. The solution? Three weeks instead of one!**

The 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the EURegions Week, co-organised by DG REGIO and the Committee of Regions, should have taken place 'live' from 12 to 15 October 2020 in Brussels, Belgium. However, hosting 500 sessions and abiding by the social distancing rules would have been almost impossible within the one week previously allocated.

Consequently, the event will now be spread over three weeks, with most sessions provided online, key political events (such as Citizens Dialogues or REGIOSTARS Awards) in a hybrid – physical and online – format, while the exhibition and related presentations will be deployed on the ground.

**Under the motto 'Restart. Europe. Together', these three weeks will unroll in succession the three themes of the 2020 edition:**

- › 5-9 October : **Empowering citizens**
- › 12-15 October: **Cohesion and cooperation**
- › 19-22 October: **Green Europe**, in cooperation with Green Week.

The Week is the biggest annual Brussels-based gathering dedicated to Cohesion Policy. In 2019, it reached a record high of more than 9 300 participants: local and regional representatives, EU fund managing authorities, project promoters, experts, academics, etc.) as well as more than 300 representatives from the media.

Applications for this year's event were more than double those received last year, with 206 projects submitted for the 2020 REGIOSTARS – another record edition for the annual competition rewarding excellence and new approaches in regional development. This outstanding result confirms the rising trend in participation we are witnessing every year.

The competition is built on the following five categories: industrial transition; the circular economy; skills and education for a digital Europe; citizen engagement; and youth empowerment through 30 years of Interreg.

This year, short presentations by all the applicants are available on the competition platform used by participants: <https://regiostarsawards.eu/>

The independent jury have chosen up to five finalists per category, which were announced on 9 July. Any votes cast after this date will be counted further for the finalists competing for the REGIOSTARS 2020 public choice award. Good luck to all participants! ■

## 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](mailto:regio-panorama@ec.europa.eu) for further information on guidelines and deadlines.

# It is all happening in Europe's cities



Ivo Banek

*Communications Director, Eurocities*

**Municipal police are shopping for the elderly confined at home. Hotels are being turned into shelters for the homeless. Buses and metros keep running during the coronavirus lockdown, bringing health staff to work, often free of charge. Cultural events are going online – or coming home to the people, via cinema screens on the streets.**

All these images came to mind when I heard European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen say, 'This is Europe's moment', when she proposed the EUR 750 billion recovery fund to help the EU to 'repair and prepare for the next generation'.

Cities have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis but have responded quickly and with great creativity, protecting the most vulnerable people, adapting public services and supporting local businesses.

But the situation is urgent. City budgets have been stretched beyond limits. Without additional funding, they will be forced to implement service cuts. In Italy, I heard one desperate mayor say he was ready to pull out public lighting – before having to cut care for the elderly and disabled or contributions to families in need.

Nobody wants cities to have to turn off the lights. In fact, I think they can light the way for Europe's recovery. The many inspiring examples include: large areas of London becoming car-free as the lockdown is eased. The roads will be reserved for pedestrians, cyclists and buses – to 'repurpose London's streets for people', according to the mayor. The same thing is happening in other cities: Paris, Milan and Budapest, while many more are remodelling their public spaces for a greener, cleaner and healthier future.

Amsterdam has adopted a new framework for the city's economic recovery, the 'doughnut model'. It moves beyond traditional economic paradigms, putting the needs and well-being of all citizens and the environment first.

And cities are sharing their expertise and best practices, for example via Eurocities' COVIDnews platform, hoping to learn from others and support each other across borders – European solidarity in action.

Europe's moment happens in cities. However, it is unclear how much of the ambitious recovery fund will reach the local level. Currently, most measures are directed at Member States without clarification of how much say city governments will have. This must be changed.

The global coronavirus crisis is putting Europe to the test. It is in our cities where it will be decided whether or not we pass this test. To respond to the needs of citizens and businesses, cities' involvement must be stronger and more structured. We need a new collaboration between cities, regions, countries and the European Union.

This is Europe's moment. The time is now. ■



# Audit community provides assurance for ESIF

As a committed supporter of close dialogue between Member State auditors, Franck Sébert, DG REGIO's audit director since 2014, relates his personal experience of how the ESIF audit community cooperates and communicates.



**A**uditing the European Structural and Cohesion Funds (ESIF) means working in an environment with a highly developed level of technical rules and procedures and a multiplicity of stakeholders. The financial interests at stake and the range of investments and intervention areas is huge. Responsibilities for fund management are shared. Therefore, it is crucial that both the Commission and Member State auditors take a consistent approach and have a shared understanding of the assurance framework.

There are frequent and in-depth contacts between the Commission audit services, the audit authorities in the Member States, and the ESIF audit community. Topics can require both specific coordination with one Member State or audit authority or can be more horizontal and concern the authorities from all Member States.

## *Tell us how the ESIF audit community works together?*

First, there are daily direct contacts and exchanges between the Commission auditors and those Member State auditors who are also joining the Commission's audits to learn and share a common experience. The annual audit coordination meetings provide a very important opportunity for bilateral

exchanges: once a year, the Commission audit services meet the audit authorities in each Member State to coordinate their audit plans and methods. This is also an obligation under the CPR.

However, our cooperation with Member State auditors goes far beyond the limits of regulatory obligations. For nearly three decades, Commission audit services and Member State control bodies have organised annual plenary meetings in a Member State. In addition, two or three times a year, multilateral technical meetings take place in Brussels to discuss recent challenges to common audit approaches and methods and to interpret relevant legislation. These enable colleagues from the network to meet to exchange experience and good practice.

We have further developed the practice of creating informal ad hoc working groups between the Commission audit services and interested Member State auditors working together on specific topics and reporting back to the plenary for validation. These groups illustrate the practice of shared ownership for products, which are a result of joint reflection to develop and prepare audit methodologies or instructions.

The ESIF audit community is a network of colleagues exchanging best practices, learning from each other's

experience and developing into a group of professionals from different Member States but united in their efforts to protect the EU's financial interests and sound management of ESI funds.

## *Why is this cooperation important?*

For the Commission audit services, information about the challenges on the ground in the Member States and their regions is vital to help overcome or anticipate difficulties. The exchange is necessary to communicate with the audit community about methodological tools (audit approaches and assessment criteria, checklists, etc.) or important Commission initiatives, such as:

- follow-up on important recommendations by the High Level Group on simplification for beneficiaries of ESIF Funds concerning audit issues;
- enhanced proportionate audit approaches to give assurance in the 2021-2027 programming period;
- with respect to coordinating the approaches between audit authorities and the European Court of Auditors, to put into practice the single audit concept and avoid unnecessary burden for auditees.

As an example of this cooperation, in 2018, the audit community endorsed and issued a 'Charter of good practices when carrying out audits under Cohesion Policy, EMFF and FEAD' on the audit cycle and the need for enhanced communication with the auditees.

One working group recently published a reflection paper on audit documentation and audit trail. Another one is supporting the development of a future secondary legislation on audit samples. Previously, a working group supported the revision of the Commission Decision laying down guidelines for determining financial corrections to be made to expenditure financed by the Union for non-compliance with the applicable rules on public procurement. Another one worked on how best to use management verifications in audit work.

We know how important it is to openly share audit findings to ensure legal and regular spending of the funds. We advise on the use of a joint typology of errors for managing and audit authorities to provide coordinated feedback to the managing authorities and help them improve verifications. A report covering Commission audit findings from the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods will soon be available to inform managing authorities about recurrent errors and to share lessons learnt, good practices and consistent professional standards.

*What is your most valuable experience recently in the exchange between the Commission and Member State audit authorities?*

Providing assurance for such a significant financial envelope as the European Regional and Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, via shared management with some 300 programmes implemented in Europe concerning DG REGIO

funds, is indeed a complex, challenging but fascinating task. In fact, DG REGIO does not have so many auditors. Our main providers of assurance are the hundreds of auditors in around 80 audit authorities in the Member States. For me, good and daily communication and transparency with colleagues in the audit authorities are of great importance. Our role is to supervise the audit work reported by our audit partners and ensure high standards are implemented while showing our critical appreciation for the national and regional auditors' contribution to the assurance and compliant implementation of the policy. This means we can rely on the audit authorities while keeping overall responsibility for budget execution and assurance.

To this end, my most valuable experience is the professional contact with colleagues in the Member States. They face incredible complexities and deliver impressive work under difficult circumstances. Through the cooperation and expert support of the DG REGIO auditors, we show that the Commission is not a faceless institution. Behind all the guidance, instructions, interpretation notes, checklists and corrections, colleagues are available to help them.

*How would you advise the audit community, in particular against the background of recent challenges such as COVID-19?*

Auditors, both in Brussels and the Member States, are now under particular pressure. We are expected to respond flexibly to the work and travel restrictions imposed and to take into account the difficulties Member States and programme authorities are facing. Nevertheless, we cannot jeopardise the overarching obligation to respect the rules and the law. As soon as the crisis is over, or even before that, the budget authority will request assurance that all funds, including the

Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, have been used as intended and in respect of all applicable legal obligations. This is a challenge for us but even more so for Member State auditors who are even closer to implementation. The upcoming increase in funding under recent Commission proposals for the repair and recovery of our societies and economies will also put additional strain on implementation and will surely mean new types of inherent risks.

This is why I advise my colleagues in the audit community to look again at efficiency gains, to help eliminate gold plating and unnecessary red tape by advising programme authorities on the design of massive simplified cost options. The audit community should continue its professional audit work in line with our shared high standards to inspire trust in European citizens and stakeholders in the effective and compliant implementation of much-needed funds for the recovery of our economies and convergence of our territories.

*What is the greatest challenge for assurance in the 2021-2027 period?*

The ESIF audit community must continue to implement high standards of assurance while, at the same time, applying the greatest possible simplification and proportionality to alleviate the burden of controls for programme authorities and beneficiaries. ■

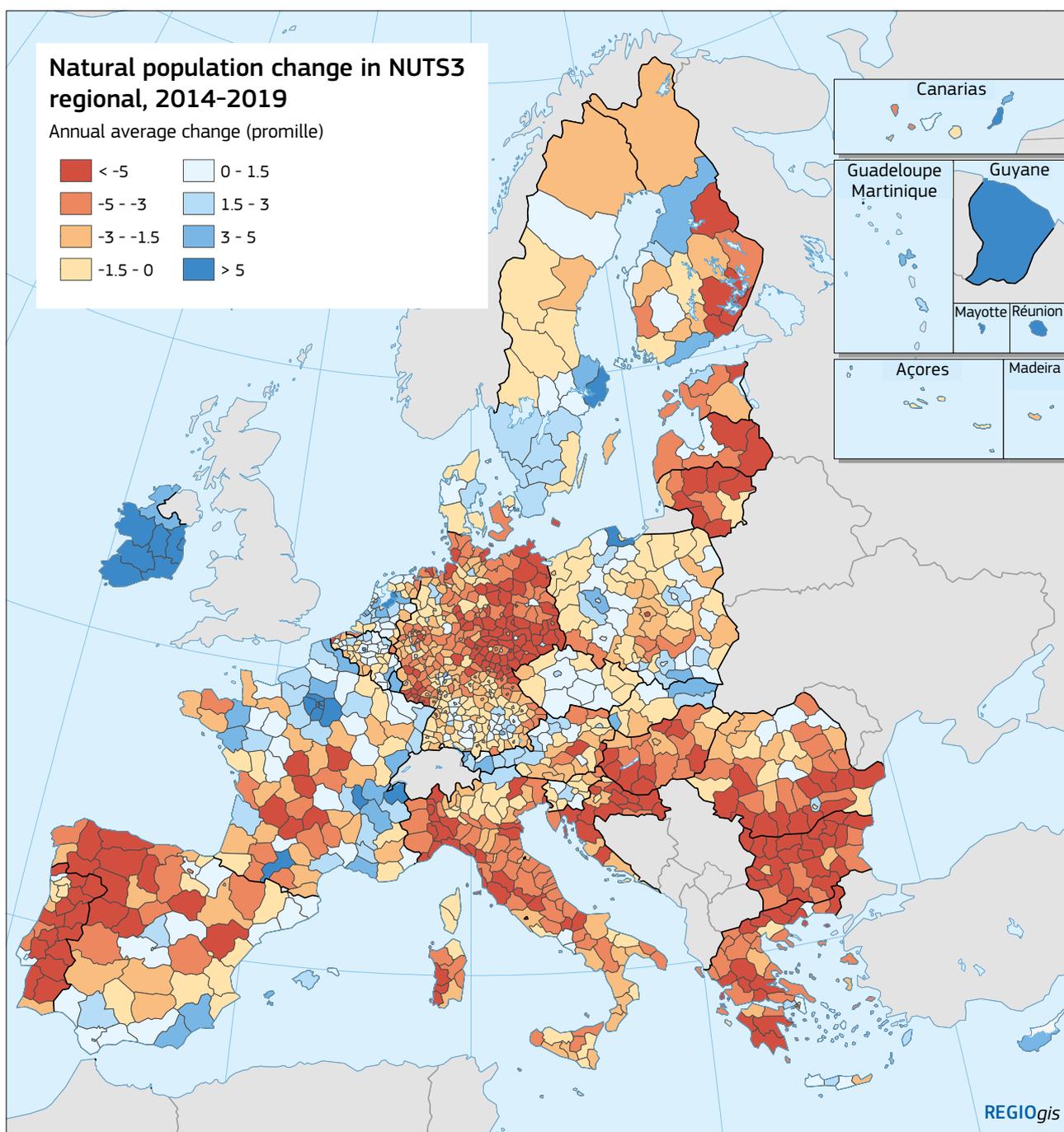
**FIND OUT MORE**

<https://europa.eu/!rP39yg>

# Population movements across the EU and regions

These two maps present the two sources of regional population change. The first shows natural change, which was negative at the EU level. Deaths in the EU exceeded births by 1.2 million during 2014-2019. In that same five-year period, three out of four regions experienced negative natural change. This was especially the case in rural regions with an average annual natural

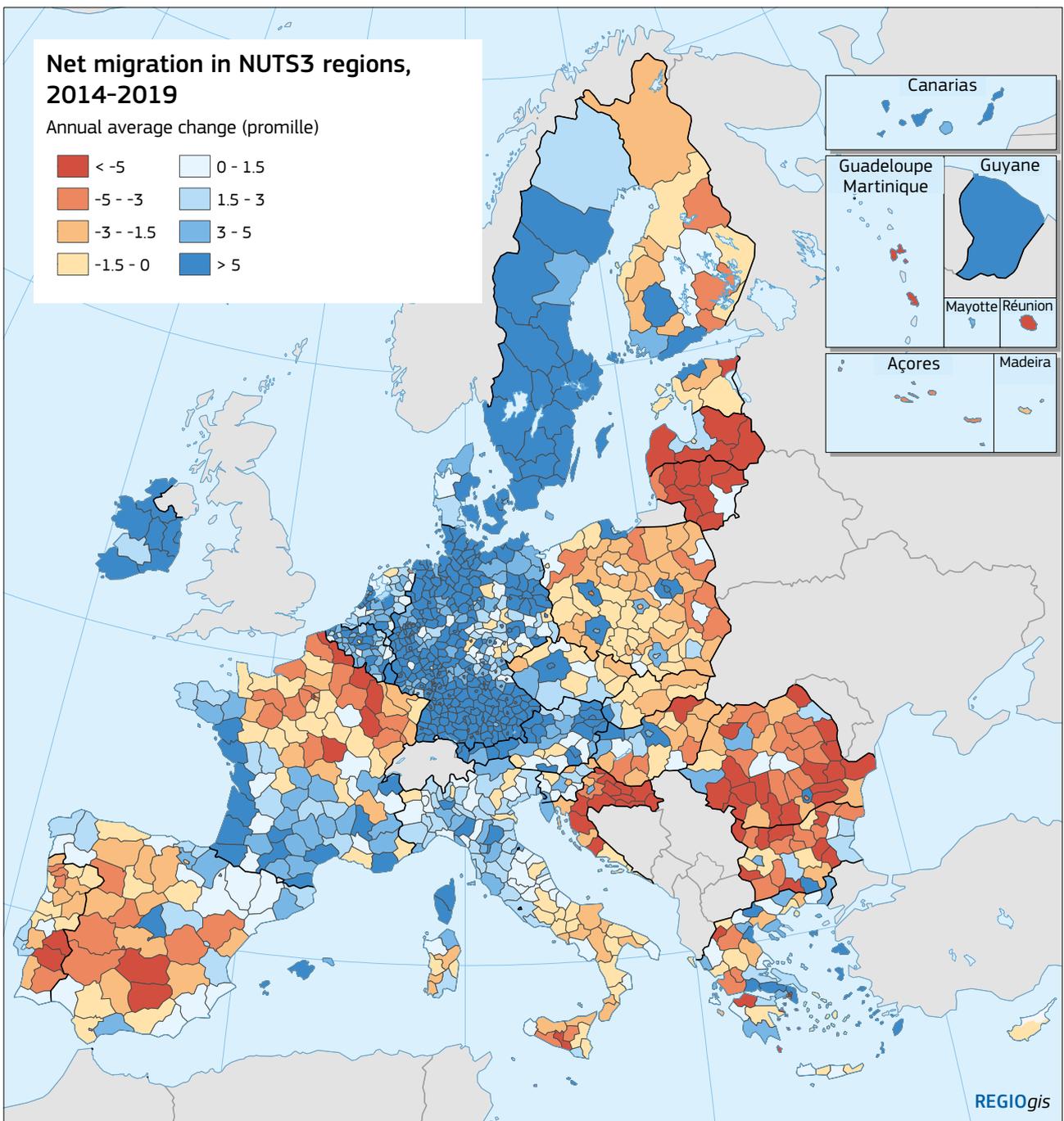
change of -2.3 per thousand, as compared to -1.2 in intermediate regions and 1.0 in urban regions. However, the negative natural growth rate in rural regions is not due to a lower fertility rate – in fact, rural regions have a slightly higher fertility rate. It is because rural regions have a slightly older population and fewer women of child-bearing age relative to men of the same age.



Change between 1/1/2014 and 1/1/2019  
Source: DG REGIO based on Eurostat data (demo\_r\_gind3)

Net migration is more positive at the EU level. During 2014-2019, 5 million more people moved to the EU than away from it. This includes the refugees who stayed in the EU after the 2016 crisis. Net migration at the regional level also factors in moves between regions within the EU or within a Member State. In contrast to natural growth,

net migration is positive in all three types of regions. It is highest in urban regions, with an average annual net-migration rate of 3.4 per thousand compared to 2.3 in intermediate regions and 0.6 in rural regions. Nevertheless, in two out of five regions, more people moved out than moved in.



Growth between 1/1/2014 and 1/1/2019  
Source: DG REGIO based on Eurostat data (demo\_r\_gind3)



## PROJECTS

# GREENING URBAN AREAS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

**TOTAL INVESTMENT  
EUR 2 391 300**

**EU CONTRIBUTION  
EUR 2 005 050**

**The Urban Green Belts project has generated new ways for residents and local authorities to co-manage green spaces in cities in seven central European countries. Local environments and quality of life have blossomed thanks to the ERDF-funded initiative.**

**P**arks, woodlands, and public gardens are the ‘green lungs’ of towns and cities. They provide space for inhabitants to relax in fresh air and improve the biodiversity, air quality, noise levels and appeal of their neighbourhoods.

In seven central European countries, a group of ten government authorities and research organisations were looking for new ways to achieve these desirable goals. The result was the Urban Green Belts project and a Smart Governance Manual, now available on the project website.

### **Smart strategy**

Over three years, partners explored three governance strategies based on smart technology and on cooperation between stakeholders and public authorities.

The first looked at the potential of geo-informatics. Researchers built a smart planning tool that uses satellite data to help regional planners to decide how to use green areas, maintain them and if they are sustainable or profitable.

The second strategy focused on engaging communities. Urban Green Belts produced an overview of techniques that encourage local people to generate ideas, management plans and awareness to support the green resources around them.

Finally, the third element – cooperation-based governance – examined different ways in which stakeholders and local government departments might communicate and work together on green spaces. This section included a local government training manual.

### **Lasting impact**

Project partners tested their strategies in eight local pilot actions designed with local authorities. Resulting insights have influenced regional green-action plans and many initiatives have continued beyond UGS.

For example, one programme in which residents cared for 26 green spaces in Budapest, Hungary is being extended to more sites in the city. In another, in Maribor, Slovenia, a stakeholder design for renovating an urban green area is being incorporated into a local revitalisation plan.

Regions involved in the project have also exchanged ideas and tools. The Polish city of Krakow is looking into developing its own residents’ stewardship programme. Meanwhile, a data-collection app from Padua, Italy has been adopted by the Croatian city of Zadar to expand its land records. ■

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### **FIND OUT MORE**

<https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/UGB.html>

## PROJECTS

WEARABLE MEDICAL DEVICE  
STREAMLINES PATIENT CARETOTAL INVESTMENT  
EUR 4 617 460EU CONTRIBUTION  
EUR 2 308 730

Scientists in Belgium and the Netherlands have created a wearable device that monitors hospital patients' vital signs in real time. Developed in the cross-border 'wearIT4health' project with ERDF funding, the monitor makes hospital stays more comfortable and frees busy nurses and doctors to focus on care.

The small wireless device improves monitoring and follow-up of patients in hospital who are not already under constant watch in emergency and intensive care.

Hospital patients are often connected to an array of different machines, each checking on a different vital sign. The wearIT4health device measures five signs at once – heart rate, oxygen saturation, respiratory rate, blood pressure variation and skin temperature. It then sends the readings straight to the hospital patient's records.

Because the device is portable and needs no cables, it is more comfortable and convenient than traditional monitoring. Staff can transfer people between departments without needing to disconnect and reconnect machines. Patients have more freedom to move around the hospital while remaining safely monitored.

### Supporting staff

Its convenience also extends to record-keeping. The device simplifies collection, logging and analysis of patient data.

Nurses no longer have to record readings from many different machines throughout the day, giving them more time for care and medical tasks. Doctors can quickly check the readings in the central records, add comments or edit the file to keep only the most important data.

Processing features organise the mass of data to help medical staff to make the best decisions for patients. The device calculates an early-warning score (EWS) from the readings to alert doctors if something is amiss. A more advanced predictive warning system is being developed to signal more specific risks of serious problems such as heart attacks.

### Commercial collaboration

The wearIT4health device has been designed to be compatible with the IT systems of different hospitals in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine region, which crosses parts of Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

Hospitals and technology companies in the region created the system, while doctors and nurses approved its specifications to make sure that it reflects the reality of healthcare work. Medical, business and legal experts also advised the project team.

Following lab tests to ensure that the device is secure and meets medical standards, it has been tested on around 60 patients in different hospitals in the Meuse-Rhine region.

Once wearIT4health partners are confident that the prototype is ready, they will transfer the technology to a company to carry out the final development for commercial production. SMEs and technology transfer offices throughout the cross-border region are helping here to ensure a smooth transition to market and patient care. ■

### FIND OUT MORE

<http://www.wearit4health.com/>



PROJECTS

# EQUALITY EDGES FORWARD IN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

TOTAL INVESTMENT  
EUR 1 453 220

EU CONTRIBUTION  
EUR 1 235 240

**Women on both sides of the Irish border have taken up leading roles in their communities thanks to an EU-funded peace-building project.**

For years, Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland have suffered from historical conflict. By empowering local women across both regions, the Next Chapter project aimed to tackle gender inequality and contribute to peace and reconciliation efforts.

The project set up 10 chapter hubs where local women could meet on a regular basis. The majority of the hubs were located in Northern Ireland, but Irish towns near to the border were also represented, such as Letterkenny and Cavan.

In total, around 310 women of different backgrounds and ages participated on a monthly basis. Networking events were organised so that the various chapters could meet one another and learn from visiting speakers.

Each chapter hub developed a community project that was designed to improve equality, and peace and reconciliation. In Louth, Ireland, its chapter members undertook a needs analysis of local women and published a report on the barriers they face. In Newtownabbey, the community project was based on a street mural designed to inspire the neighbourhood about its past, present and future.

The chapter hubs were independently run by the women themselves, with the members electing their chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The teams then recruited and mentored new members to continue the work.

## Inspiring involvement

Each hub received training to help its members become involved in public and political decision-making. Sessions covered public speaking and leadership skills, career development, conflict management, and cultural diversity. Participants also learnt how laws are created both north and south of the border.

Chapter members could also access one-to-one coaching. More than 670 coaching sessions were delivered to 167 women.

Furthermore, the project also helped women to enter politics and meet politicians in Ireland and Northern Ireland. More than 80 women attended guided visits to the Dáil Éireann (Assembly of Ireland) and the Northern Irish Assembly (Stormont)

Nine participants have now entered politics and 14 have secured appointments on public boards such as schools and NGOs. Furthermore, social cohesion and inclusivity are improving thanks to their contributions. ■

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## FIND OUT MORE

<https://www.thenextchapter.eu/>

# AGENDA

## 5-22 OCTOBER

Brussels (BE)

### 18 European Week of Regions and Cities

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## 12-13 OCTOBER

Brussels (BE)

### Outermost Regions Forum 2020 – Together for a Sustainable Future

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