



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

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## **RESOLUTION**

**The European Committee of the Regions' priorities for  
2020-2025**

***Europe closer to the people through its villages, cities and regions***

## **Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions - The European Committee of the Regions' priorities for 2020-2025 - Europe closer to the people through its villages, cities and regions**

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the political assembly enshrined in the EU Treaties, providing institutional representation for all territorial areas, regions, cities and municipalities.

A European Union that takes into account local and regional needs and concerns increases democratic legitimacy, improves ownership and achieves greater added value, both for the EU's policies and for their effectiveness on the ground, thus providing a benefit to citizens. To this end, the European Committee of the Regions works closely with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, as well as in the Member States at the various levels of government. The current state of the EU requires that this cooperation be continuously strengthened and the voice of regions, cities and municipalities be ever more present in EU policy and legislative development.

### **From crisis to recovery: towards a resilient, sustainable and cohesive European Union**

In recent years, the European Union has faced unprecedented challenges: a serious financial crisis and severe economic recessions, social and territorial challenges, the green and digital transitions, instability in its neighbourhood and in the global system, and migration. The COVID-19 pandemic is further testing the EU's solidarity and has put our ability to cope with emergencies that place considerable pressure on our health, social and public services under the magnifying glass. This most recent crisis has illustrated not only the need to adopt a coordinated response, backed by a far stronger EU budget, but also the need to further support Europe's one million local and regional authorities working on the frontline to protect citizens and local economies and respond to emergencies<sup>1</sup>.

***The EU must become more socially, economically and environmentally resilient in all its regions and cities.*** Backed by properly funded European investment, it needs to ensure that its policies and programmes meet the needs of local communities. Cities and regions are the engines of the European economy. The role of local and regional authorities is essential in the formulation and implementation of EU policies, which is why the EU must involve cities and towns and regions better and more strongly in European decision-making through a practical and well-organised multi-level government process. Europe needs to accelerate digitalisation and boost innovation capacity in cooperation with the Member States and local and regional authorities across the whole of the EU. A faster and fairer recovery requires greater European solidarity, responsibility and partnerships, driven by the EU's commitment to green, sustainable and territorially balanced growth that supports every region and city.

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration of the European Committee of the Regions on Local and regional authorities as actors of the European response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) will therefore focus on the following priorities with key measures during its current five-year term (2020-2025):

***Bringing Europe closer to its people: strengthening EU democracy and working together on the future of our Union***

*The CoR's mission is to bring Europe closer to its people and to reinforce European democracy at all levels, in order to meet people's needs more efficiently and regain their trust in the European Union and its institutions. The CoR will work to ensure that all regions, cities, towns and villages are supported by the EU in dealing with the short and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CoR will continue to improve the quality of EU legislation and to better anticipate its territorial impact and promote the principle of active subsidiarity. To deliver on this mission, the CoR will make use of the legislative, policy and political work of its members and stakeholders. In addition, the CoR will develop a communication campaign focused on the fundamental role of local and regional governments in European democracy, which will include preparing and contributing to the Conference on the Future of Europe. An Annual Local and Regional Barometer, which will be founded upon sound statistical evidence and on an inclusive approach involving its members and relevant stakeholders, and will feature a high-level political plenary debate, will form an annual point of reference and thus contribute to this objective.*

The CoR will prioritise the following key measures under this heading:

1. Promote awareness and action at local and regional level on the foundational EU values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, which must be protected and respected even in times of emergency. The CoR is committed to identifying the appropriate local and regional responses to the way the EU works and to engaging with citizens through its members, in order to bridge the gap between EU institutions and local communities;
2. Reiterate its call to fully participate and be fairly represented in all bodies of the Conference on the Future of Europe. As with the economic and climate crises, the pandemic has revealed that a deep reflection on European democracy and policies is more necessary than ever, and the Conference on the Future of Europe will be an essential opportunity to discuss the EU as a project with citizens and local and regional authorities, as well as to propose, before the next European Parliament elections, a new way of working for the EU, including revising the Treaties with a view to fully involving cities and regions in policy making;
3. Call on the EU Member States and its institutions to uphold, build and strengthen the commitments agreed in the 2007 Berlin Declaration and the 2017 Rome Declaration, namely recognising that tasks and cooperation should be shared among all levels of government,

including local and regional authorities, in order to make the European Union more effective, united, democratic and resilient. The final text of the joint position on the Conference on the Future of Europe should be adopted in the spirit of institutional cooperation;

4. Develop a model for a permanent and structured dialogue with citizens through local and regional authorities in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe and beyond, allowing a two-way process of communication between citizens and EU institutions. In this respect, the wealth of experience and existing best practices of deliberative democracy at local and regional level and the many networks of elected local and regional councillors are key assets, which the CoR will bring to the debate on the Future of Europe;
5. Support local and regional authorities in making the most of new digital technology instruments and ICT tools. Digital technologies have significant potential for innovative solutions to the economic, social and technological challenges of our time. In this way, they can improve public service delivery, facilitate communication between people, increase citizens' participation in new and different ways, enhance the transparency, inclusiveness, accountability and responsiveness of the decision-making process, improve local governance, and compliment and reinforce democracy. This is why the resilience and independence of digital systems and their providers must be significantly improved;
6. Promoting diversity, by advocating inclusivity and equality measures and by preventing and combating discrimination based on gender<sup>2</sup>, racial and ethnic origin<sup>3</sup>, religion, disability, age<sup>4</sup> and discrimination on any ground in decision-making at European, national, local and regional levels, both within the CoR and beyond;
7. Actively participate in the awareness and communication campaign combatting gender stereotypes that the European Commission will launch and serve as a platform for local and regional entities to exchange best practices on this topic;
8. Support and strengthen minorities in Europe, in particular through the Minority SafePack initiative;

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<sup>2</sup> Directive 2004/113/EC.

<sup>3</sup> Directive 2000/43/EC.

<sup>4</sup> COM(2008) 426: Proposal for a directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment between persons.

9. Become the reference point for all regional and local authorities in Europe, including outside of the CoR's membership, by strengthening the CoR's political identity and relations as well as strengthening the cooperation with the main political families, national governments, elected representatives at local and regional level, European and national associations of regional and local authorities, and regional offices in Brussels;
10. Support representative democracy through stronger interaction with parliaments at European, national, regional and local level, as well as through the exchange of best practices on tools for energising representative and participatory democracy, including participative budgets. The rule of law, democracy and good governance must be prerequisites for EU funding;
11. Use evidence-based analyses to monitor and promote the devolution of local and regional competences and sub-national finances, as well as the functioning of local democracy in the EU;
12. Create digital tools to map policy and financial competences, using synergies with the existing tools of EU, national and international organisations;
13. Support and promote the important work of local and regional authorities on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and social crises. The pandemic is demonstrating the importance of properly applying the active subsidiarity principle, as well as the essential role of local and regional authorities on the one hand, and the need for coordination and support at European level on the other;
14. Scrutinise new EU policy initiatives to ensure that they incorporate a territorial dimension and meet the EU added-value requirement, in line with the recommendations of the "Task force on subsidiarity, proportionality and doing less more efficiently" and the "Better Regulation Guidelines";
15. Cut administrative burdens and reduce implementation costs for regions and cities by insisting on the simplification of legislation and cautioning against the practice of so-called gold plating more generally;
16. Step up cooperation with the European Commission, European Parliament and European Council, including through the Regional Hubs network and the Fit for Future Platform, in order to improve the effectiveness of EU policymaking with evidence-based feedback from local and regional stakeholders;

17. Promote the importance of local self-government within the European Union, in the EU candidate and potential candidate countries and in the partner countries of the Eastern and the Mediterranean neighbourhoods;
18. Support the EU global action by promoting values and principles such as human rights, democracy, rule of law, sustainable development and social inclusiveness, among others, with close cooperation with its Mediterranean and Eastern partners;
19. Encourage regional parliaments to engage in the CoR-CALRE pilot project to generate political debates on key EU issues, such as the preparation of the European Commission Annual Work Programmes;
20. Ensure that the EU supports effective youth participation and engagement, including through structured cooperation with the EU Youth Coordinator, reinforcing measures such as the Youth Guarantee to improve prospects for high quality employment and education, and establishing a European Child Guarantee;
21. Continue cooperation with the Young Elected Politicians (YEPs) within the framework of the CoR YEP programme, in order to build links for future generations of elected local and regional politicians with European and national policymaking processes;
22. Promote the cultural diversity of our local, regional, national and European identities and the different languages and traditions that make up our European cultural heritage. Underline that the cultural and creative sectors, which have their place in the local economy as employers but also in the social life of communities, have been severely hit by the pandemic and need support. Contribute to a New European Agenda for Culture, including the mainstreaming of investment in culture in the different EU funds, as well as the strengthening of synergies between culture and other policies such as tourism, regional policy, education, youth, research and innovation.

***Understand and respond to the profound societal transformations that the digital, environmental and demographic challenges entail for building resilient regional and local communities***

*The current climate and digital transitions, the demographic transformations and the consequences of internal and external migration flows are having a profound impact on every European region, city, town and village. For this second priority, the CoR's mission will be to analyse and identify solutions that will enable regional and local authorities to address these societal transformations in the places where people live. The COVID-19 pandemic requires a reflection on the appropriate response to these challenges, as Europe and the Member States demonstrate how far they are ready to go to save lives and the economy. This crisis has increased the need for an in-depth reflection on the policies,*

*competences and overall functioning of the European Union. The CoR therefore looks forward to the important debate on all EU policies, in connection with the Conference on the Future of Europe, and to reviewing and assessing them more generally, in line with the subsidiarity principle. To deliver on this mission, the CoR will make use of the legislative, policy and political work of its members and stakeholders, while contributing to the European Green Deal and delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. This will be complemented by a CoR-led communication campaign. The Annual Local and Regional Barometer will also contribute to delivering on this priority.*

The CoR will prioritise the following key measures:

23. Promote a COVID-19 pandemic crisis plan based on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at local and regional level, as well as on the European Green Deal initiatives;
24. Contribute to the 2030 carbon reduction targets, with the aim of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, by encouraging ambitious and decisive local and regional action via the Climate Pact and other relevant local and regional sustainable development initiatives;
25. Promote using smart specialisation strategies and other instruments in increasing European partnerships and local public-private collaboration to improve professional competencies and qualification opportunities in fields, workplaces and technologies that are necessary to build more sustainability, added value and resilience at local and regional level;
26. Contribute to an ambitious EU environmental policy, ensuring policy integration in the framework of all Environment Action Programmes. Ensure that the local and regional dimension is adequately considered in the preparation and implementation of the three main environmental priorities of the European Green Deal: biodiversity, circular economy and zero pollution. Plan environment and climate policies that are appropriate for practical implementation in all kinds of communities;
27. Shape and support the development of the Climate Pact through coordinated and cross-cutting measures and initiatives, including through locally determined contributions and political commitments at the level of regions and cities, with the aim of ensuring that it builds on multilevel governance, effective dissemination of good practices, and that no person or region is left behind;
28. Anticipate how the energy, mobility and digital transformations will affect our communities. Formulate strategies and support their swift implementation to maximise their positive effects and reduce their negative local impacts;

29. Support local resilience through climate change adaptation, and augment local capacity to respond to extreme weather events that occur with both increased frequency and severity, in particular by providing the necessary resources to local and regional authorities to manage disasters through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, and making use of a strengthened EU Solidarity Fund;
30. Contribute to the preparation of the zero pollution goal for a toxic-free environment, and prepare and support regional and local authorities in implementing the EU's ambitious targets for a zero-pollution action plan for water, air and soil. Contribute to the review of the urban mobility package on the basis of the lessons learnt from the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans and prepare public transport authorities to respond to exogenous threats against the provision of safe and secure mobility services;
31. Ensure that the voice and contributions of local and regional authorities are duly taken into account in multi-level climate and energy dialogues in Member States when designing, evaluating and implementing the National Energy and Climate Plans, national long-term strategies and national long-term renovation strategies;
32. Support the European Commission in successfully shaping and delivering the Renovation Wave and putting it at the centre of the post-pandemic recovery strategy;
33. Support the European Commission in its ambition to establish deforestation-free labelling of products and to protect and restore forests worldwide;
34. Address the digital divide and promote increased digital learning and the digitalisation of local and regional public services, including with the support of the Digital Europe Programme 2021-2027, in order to reduce administrative burdens and boost the sustainable growth of local business and a resilient economy, as well as to contribute to a more sustainable and green Europe;
35. Support the provision of digital and media literacy skills for all at regional and local levels, and work to establish a European framework for the human-centric and trustworthy deployment of artificial intelligence;
36. Call for support from the European Commission, the EU's Member States and their regions and cities to accelerate the modernisation and digitalisation of education and training systems, including necessary investments in educational infrastructure equipment, and support for employment in the local economy. Contribute to efforts to resume activities under the Erasmus+ programme and European Solidarity Corps. The European Education Area and the



updated Skills Agenda for Europe constitute two important avenues for action and support, to be underpinned under the future Erasmus programme;

37. Improve broadband connectivity and 5G deployment at local and regional level in both urban and rural areas, and map future investment needs;
38. Ensure that regional and local authorities can contribute to and benefit from the future Farm to Fork strategy; initiate local food councils, connect local food producers and consumers, promote healthy diets and raise awareness about food waste; address the financial needs of farms in implementing the necessary measures on climate, environment and biodiversity;
39. Address the increased challenge of brain-drain and enhance regional innovation ecosystems by strengthening territorial cohesion, fostering an economy of well-being and promoting research and innovation, including through support from Horizon Europe, ESIF and different national funding instruments. Launch territorial foresight initiatives as well as activities aimed at reinforcing the social, economic and health-related resilience of regions and cities as soon as possible;
40. Contribute to an overarching European Strategy on demographic change which tackles all the demographic challenges with a broad, coordinated, joined-up EU response, as this is a cross-cutting issue that affects all EU policies;
41. Ensure that the EU develops a comprehensive, humanitarian and fair migration policy and does not leave its Member States, border regions, islands and outermost regions alone in dealing with the migration crisis, as this is both a national and a European issue; support the exchange of best practices between regional and local authorities on the integration of migrants;
42. Provide regional and local input into reforming the EU's migration policy, including integration, fair return procedures and asylum policies that should be able to respond adequately to current and future migration trends; address the root causes of migration, in cooperation with countries of origin and transit, for those in need of humanitarian protection; protect the EU's external borders; prevent irregular migration and fight against human trafficking;
43. Promote a culture of respect for the rule of law at local and regional level, as a precondition for the European integration process and as a fundamental value of the EU, enshrined in the Treaties and shared with the constitutional traditions of the Member States;

44. Call on the EU to safeguard jobs and ensure a recovery based on upward social economic convergence and improved social rights and working conditions for all, with consideration for the social partners and national systems, including for those who work in new forms of employment, such as platform work and the gig economy, as well as workers in the traditional economy, micro enterprises and the cultural sector. Recognise that two-thirds of all employment is generated by SMEs, the majority of whom are firmly rooted in local communities and so are a crucial part of Europe's social fabric. The CoR continues promoting EER and other European wide activities to develop and increase entrepreneurship, especially among youth;
45. Act as a facilitator for development cooperation between cities and regions and as a promoter of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in order to achieve forerunner role in contributing to tackle global challenges such as conflict and political instability, economic fragility, migration, and climate change;
46. Exchange good practice with local and regional authorities of the accession countries and partner countries from the EU neighbourhood as well as from the Global South, and facilitate their access to targeted EU support.

***Ensure that the European Union is permanently at the service of its people and the places they live based on social, economic and territorial cohesion as fundamental values***

*The CoR's mission will be to ensure that economic, social and territorial cohesion is respected through European Union policies that affect people and the places where they live (place-based policies). To deliver on this mission, the CoR will make use of the legislative, policy and political work of its members, partners and stakeholders. It will continue to build on the mobilisation of the "Cohesion Alliance", showcasing the added value of cohesion as a policy and as a fundamental value that underpins all EU policies. It will focus on the role of regions and cities in the economic recovery plan of the EU. The European Week of Regions and Cities and the Annual Local and Regional Barometer will also deliver on this mission.*

The CoR will prioritise the following key measures:

47. Advocate a Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) as a key tool of European solidarity that matches the EU's level of ambition to tackle all its priorities, provides added value, is more transparent and understandable for citizens and includes the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the new priorities set in the European Green Deal;

48. Contribute to the reinforcement of the Cohesion Policy, fundamental since the origins of the EU, through the smart implementation of European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund, ensuring a significant impact among all European regions;
49. Continue to promote a strong and effective EU cohesion policy for all EU regions, which is required not only to help cities and regions recover from the COVID-19 crisis, but also to tackle the other major challenges that have a strong territorial dimension and an uneven distribution of effects both within and between the various regions and cities across Europe, in particular climate change and the shift towards a carbon-neutral economy, digital transformation, demographic changes and migration;
50. Emphasise the need for adequate and stable financing of the EU's cohesion policy and Common Agricultural Policy to achieve their full objective; support local economies and local and regional authorities in the effective use of the resources currently allocated to the recovery of the European economy;
51. In view of the expected asymmetric territorial impact of the COVID-19 crisis, call for regional and local earmarking within the new Recovery Fund. Ensure that the new instrument is not set up at the expense of the cohesion policy budget, and that investments are coordinated with EU funding interventions in order to maximise leverage effects and avoid fragmentation and centralisation;
52. Stress that the COVID-19 pandemic requires the EU to strengthen health security and boost its own health resources and medical supplies, including personal protective equipment. This includes the creation of the legal means to be able, if necessary, to quickly and easily carry out procurement or initiate manufacturing. In addition, local and regional authorities must be supported in upgrading their emergency and disaster response capacities. As regional and local authorities have an important role to play in delivering public healthcare and social services for citizens, the CoR will advocate for coordinated EU action and support for national, regional and local disaster preparedness structures to respond to health threats and crisis situations in compliance with the subsidiarity principle;
53. Organise the resilience of economic cycles by strengthening the spatial convergence of the production chains in Europe;
54. Promote the use of sustainable urban development strategies to boost economic growth, job creation and decent work, and social inclusion, in line with the objectives of the renewed Leipzig Charter and the Urban Agenda for the EU;

55. Work towards a renewed Economic Governance Framework, including the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), building on the lessons learned from the crisis, in order to improve the EU's fiscal rules by introducing a golden rule for sustainable investments, including the co-funding of the Structural and Investment Funds within the overarching objective of sustainable financial planning;
56. Monitor the impact of the pandemic and its adverse effects on long-term employment in all of the EU's local and regional economies. Stress the importance of rethinking the EU's industrial and entrepreneurial strategies and focusing on the sustainability aspects of growth in order to bring about a rapid recovery. Promote innovative ecosystems, social economy and smart specialisation, and support place-based industrial policies;
57. Monitor the application of the Code of Conduct on Partnership to ensure the full involvement of local and regional authorities in the preparation of the Partnership Agreements and programmes for the 2021-2027 period. The principles of partnership and multilevel governance should also provide inspiration for the governance of the European Semester;
58. Call for direct access to EU funding for cities and regions to implement the European Green Deal and ensure that local and regional authorities are involved in preparing the just transition plans and implementing the Just Transition Fund;
59. Ensure that regions, cities and individuals can benefit from the simplification measures of the European Structural and Investment Funds. Support the fight against – and prevention of – EU fund mismanagement and fraud;
60. Contribute to strengthening and improving the functioning of the Single Market, not only by identifying barriers to the four freedoms at local and regional level and by encouraging administrative simplification, but also by insisting that local and regional authorities are an essential part of the implementation and enforcement of the Single Market rules. Underline, in this regard, the drastic effects that freedom of movement has on the Single Market and caution against any further fragmentation of the latter;
61. Broaden the Cohesion Alliance to mobilise public and private sector stakeholders in the promotion of the cohesion policy and showcase the EU's added value to every EU citizen as well as to democratic principles, by monitoring and communicating the impact of EU-funded investments;
62. Monitor the State Aid Temporary Framework and subsequent measures of similar intent, allowing for targeted support to save jobs in sectors and regions that are hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Highlight that, in this context, more flexible rules on State aid would aim to

"remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State", and that this reason will remain valid well beyond December 2020, the expiry date of the Temporary Framework; call on the Commission, therefore, to be ready to extend the Temporary Framework or allow similar flexibilities to help sectors and regions hit by the crisis to recover;

63. Support the gathering and dissemination of information linked to the flexibility of public procurement procedures, as under the current circumstances these open up the possibility for contracting authorities to use the negotiated procedure with reduced procedural requirements;
64. Support an EU Agenda for Rural Areas to redress depopulation and avert the risk of poverty in those regions, and to ensure a balanced and comprehensive approach to European territorial development;
65. Actively follow up on the CoR's activities on "Smart Villages" and promote the concept among the European institutions; promote innovation and modernisation initiatives for rural areas, and to adopt a strategy for sustainable and intelligent mobility under the Smart tourist destinations programme;
66. Insist that, in the event of a crisis situation in which borders should be temporarily closed or more closely monitored, the EU and its Member States should agree on common binding rules and procedures for guaranteeing the EU's freedom of movement; observe that cross-border economic and social areas are of great value to the EU;
67. Stress that during the COVID-19 crisis, local and regional actors have – despite the many closed borders and unprecedented restrictions – shown admirable resourcefulness in finding ways to continue cross-border and transnational cooperation, demonstrating true solidarity between European citizens. This crisis is a reminder that a border-free Europe is one of the key achievements of European integration, which needs to be safeguarded. Engaging in people-to-people and small-scale, cross-border projects, which create the fabric of cross-border networks and large-scale projects by building mutual trust between the participants, should remain a permanent priority of the European Union and its institutions;
68. Uphold the importance of and ensure necessary budget resources for European Territorial Cooperation, which has proven indispensable to many regional authorities, both for exchanging expertise and best practice on key challenges, but also for building human links between regional authorities across borders;

69. Encourage public investment in islands and sparsely populated and outermost regions by further adapting State Aid rules, increasing European co-financing under the cohesion policy and developing territorial cooperation with third countries;
70. Promote the updating of the cohesion policy's overall management system, in particular by simplifying administrative procedures at all levels of governance;
71. Call for the full territorial implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the implementation of a Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions;
72. Support the creation by the European Commission of the regional dimension of the European Social Scoreboard, in close cooperation with the Member States;
73. Render regional innovation ecosystems more resilient against the harmful effects of potential future emergencies by completing the European Research Area for the free movement of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology, promoting synergies between Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes and continuing the successful work of the Knowledge Exchange Platform and the inter-institutional Science meets Regions initiative;
74. Contribute to the revision of the TEN-T Regulation and its related funding and highlight the need to put in place the missing links in cross-border transport infrastructure to connect all the Union's cities and regions in central and peripheral areas, including the Outermost Regions;

The European Committee of the Regions will use all its resources and political influence to strengthen Europe. Through protecting the fundamental rights of its citizens, ensuring that the EU's policies and investments are efficient and effective, the Committee will endeavour to transform the EU to make it more competitive, sustainable and resilient, so that it meets the expectations of its citizens.

Brussels, 1 July 2020

The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Apostolos Tzitzikostas

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