



**Please provide a description of your special in the following page – this info will be posted on the Congress website.**

## Special Session Proposal

### Beyond Next Generation EU: Impact Assessment and Implications for Cohesion Policy

Fabio Mazzola, University of Palermo (Italy), [fabio.mazzola@unipa.it](mailto:fabio.mazzola@unipa.it) Corresponding

Debora Gambina, University of Palermo (Italy), [debora.gambina@unipa.it](mailto:debora.gambina@unipa.it)

#### Abstract

The Next Generation EU (NGEU) represents an unprecedented, temporary EU program of coordinated expansionary fiscal policy, introduced to support a rapid recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. Through its core instrument, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, NGEU finances public investments towards areas of long-term strategic relevance.

According to Bańkowski et al. (2024), the Plan should increase euro area GDP up to 1.2% by 2031, depending on the absorption capacity of the interventions and on its effect on productivity. Indeed, absorption capacity has been particularly relevant in the context of European cohesion policy (Santos et al., 2025), with EU countries exhibiting substantial heterogeneity in absorption rates (Bachtrögler-Unger, 2024). Our preliminary analyses show that regional context factors mediate the implementation speed of projects financed under the NGEU.

The institutional architecture of NGEU departs in several aspects from that of EU cohesion policy, especially in terms of the stronger centralization of decision-making process and the adoption of a results-based payment system.



At the same time, a growing body of literature highlights some points of contact between NGEU and cohesion policy which have already been exploited in empirical analyses (Arbolino et al., 2025).

Moreover, recent literature has raised concerns about a potential shift in political and financial focus toward NGEU within the 2021-27 programming period (Gambina and Mazzola, 2025).

This special session aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by fostering a stimulating discussion on the interactions between NGEU and EU cohesion policy, particularly in view of the 2028-34 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

We warmly invite theoretical and empirical contributions addressing the following topics (the list is not exhaustive):

- Analyses of NGEU's impact;
- Interactions between NGEU and EU cohesion policy;
- Potential displacement by NGEU for cohesion funds in different programming periods;
- Implications of NGEU's governance and implementation model for the 2028-2034 MFF.

## References

Arbolino, R., Boffardi, R., De Simone, L., Di Caro, P. (2025). Geopolitical risks and the effectiveness of the EU funds: Heterogeneity in country impact. *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics*, 75(C), 199-212.

Bachtrögler-Unger, J. (2024). The role of administrative capacity for an effective implementation of EU cohesion policy. *ZEW Discussion Papers*, 24.

Bańkowski, K., Benalal, N., Bouabdallah, O., De Stefani, R., Dorrucci, E., Huber, C., Jacquinot, P., Modery, W., Nerlich, C., Rodríguez-Vives, M., Szörfi, B., Zorell, N., Zwick, C., (2024). Four years into NextGenerationEU: what impact on the euro area economy. *Occasional Paper Series 362*, European Central Bank.

Gambina, D., Mazzola, F. (2025). The Determinants of the Implementation Speed of Cohesion Projects in Europe: A Regional and Project-level Analysis. *Open Economies Review*.



Santos, M. A., Conte, A., Molica, F. (2025). Financial Absorption of Cohesion Policy Funds: How Do Programmes and Territorial Characteristics Influence the Pace of Spending?. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 63, 227-245.