

Simplification in a Polycrisis: Balancing Flexibility and Cohesion (Alessandro Valenza, t33)

The polycrisis context of 2020–2023 prompted an unparalleled degree of simplification and flexibility within Cohesion Policy. Drawing on the 2014–2020 Ex Post Evaluation (Work Package 12), this paper analyses the efficiency implications and longer-term risks associated with crisis-driven simplification.

Evidence shows that rapid reprogramming and flexibilities, such as 100% co-financing, the increased use of financial instruments, simplified cost options and faster amendment procedures, enabled timely adjustments and supported emergency responses.

Building on established delivery systems enabled swift mobilisation while maintaining place-based governance structures. However, these measures also created administrative challenges and, in some cases, increased centralisation.

The evaluation identifies three dimensions of flexibility: executive, extraordinary, and extended. highlighting both opportunities and trade-offs. Although simplification improved responsiveness, concerns were raised regarding long-term strategic coherence and potential diversion from cohesion objectives. The lessons learned stress that flexibility is essential in crisis situations, but it must be balanced with preparedness, foresight, and

This paper discusses how simplification mechanisms could be institutionalised for future crises without undermining Cohesion Policy's long-term identity.