



Special Session Proposal

Navigating the future EU Cohesion Policy post-2027 in a transition era

Proposed by the Romanian Regional Science Association

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Abstract

The negotiations for the future of EU Cohesion Policy (post-2027) and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) find Europe navigating major challenges. The war in Ukraine and related threats (cyber, hybrid), together with the geopolitical shifts, have triggered serious consequences for regional stability, energy supply and European value chains. Major concerns rise as well from productivity stagnation and competitiveness deterioration against major global competitors. Social and demographic shifts are also threatening Europe's well-being, while climate change poses much more sustainability challenges than ever before. All these challenges, threats and risks have asymmetric territorial impacts that call for more targeted policy interventions and better place-based solutions.

The debate about Cohesion Policy post-2027 started in early 2024 and is now a full-fledged discussion focusing on allocations, priorities, delivery, implementation and governance. There is very large agreement, both in academia and in the policy-making world, that Cohesion Policy have succeeded in reducing disparities and promoting upward convergence for the less developed regions. Yet, with the new emerging priorities and pressures on the EU budget, the architecture of future Cohesion Policy seems to be deemed to changes. Key disputes over future EU Cohesion policy center on

balancing support for less developed regions with new priorities (like competitiveness, defence, enlargement) and increasing efficiency through simplification, performance measurement, linking allocations to reforms.

This Special Session invites to reflections on how post-2027 Cohesion Policy should be better tailored to respond more effectively to the very diverse and pressing challenges the EU regions face.

In relation to this context, the Special Session addresses, but is not restricted to, the following questions:

- *How to better tailor Cohesion Policy to unique territorial needs (e.g., rural, urban, border regions, coal regions, regions in development trap, regions affected by demographic decline etc.)?*
- *What should be the right balance between short-term reactivity and the long-term objectives of Cohesion Policy?*
- *How could the trade-offs between efficiency and equity be better addressed?*
- *Which specific challenges should the future Cohesion Policy prioritize: regional competitiveness and innovation, the green and digital transitions, demographic change, social exclusion, transport and energy poverty, health and education access etc.?*
- *How can the EU Cohesion Policy better fulfill the mission to close the regional divides?*

Submissions covering conceptual, empirical and methodological contributions to the topic are welcome.