

**FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE COMMISSION TO THE
OPINIONS OF THE**

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

PLENARY SESSION OF MARCH 2017

74th REPORT

N°	TITLE	REFERENCES
1.	<p>Towards a sustainable EU food policy that creates jobs and growth in Europe's Regions and Cities</p> <p>Rapporteur: Arno KOMPATSCHER (IT/EPP)</p>	<p>COR-2016-03170-00-02-PAC-TRA</p> <p>NAT-VI/014</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p>
2.	<p>Legislative proposals for an Effort-Sharing Regulation and a Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry Regulation (LULUCF)</p> <p>Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council</p> <p>Rapporteur: Juri GOTMANS (EE/PES)</p>	<p>COM (2016) 482 - final – 2016/0231 (COD)</p> <p>COM (2016) 479 - final – 2016/0230 (COD)</p> <p>COR-2016-05780-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>ENVE-VI/017</p>
3.	<p>Integration, cooperation and performance of health systems</p> <p>Rapporteur: Birgitta SACRÉDEUS (SE/EPP)</p>	<p>COR-2016-05493-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>NAT-VI/017</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p>
4.	<p>Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3): impact for regions and inter-regional cooperation</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mikel IRUJO AMEZAGA (ES/EA)</p>	<p>COR-2016-06963-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>SEDEC-VI/021</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p>
5.	<p>Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030</p> <p>Commission Staff Working Document</p> <p>Rapporteur: Adam BANASZAK (PL/ECR)</p>	<p>SWD (2016) 205 - final</p> <p>COR-2016-05035-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>NAT-VI/015</p> <p>Own-initiative opinion</p>

<p>N°1 Towards a sustainable European Union food policy that creates jobs and growth in Europe's Regions and Cities (own-initiative opinion) COR 2016/3170 - NAT-VI/014 122nd Plenary Session - March 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Arno KOMPATSCHER (IT/EPP) DG AGRI – Commissioner HOGAN</p>	
<p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>1., 4. The Committee of the Regions calls for the introduction of a common food policy, establishing a link across different policy areas.</p>	<p>The European Commission points out that food policy is cross-cutting, with the Common Agricultural Policy playing its role alongside legislation on food safety, labelling and initiatives to promote healthy diets, e.g. the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety Platform on Diet and Nutrition. Elements of nutrition have been introduced into the Common Agricultural Policy via schemes that directly encourage the setting of healthy dietary habits e.g. the school food scheme and appreciation for food produced under specific conditions under quality schemes.</p>
<p>6. The Committee of the Regions draws attention to the fact that ecosystem values are not accounted for in the price of food; the Committee of the Regions calls upon the European Commission to promote measures to allow the real price of food to be reflected.</p>	<p>The European Commission agrees with the need that ecosystem values should be accounted for in the price of food. The European Commission emphasizes the complexity of this issue and commits to work on it.</p> <p>The European Commission also considers that strengthening the position of farmers in the food supply chain is needed. The Agricultural Markets Task Force made detailed recommendations to achieve this objective which the European Commission is currently analysing.</p>

<p>10. The Committee of the Regions believes that renewable energy policy should encourage production of biofuels that do not compete with food crops.</p>	<p>The Clean Energy for All package¹ adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2016 proposes a further limit on biofuels based on food and feed crops, which will reduce potential competition. It also establishes a mandate for non-food renewable fuels (minimum of 6.8% of all energy consumption in road and rail transport by 2030) which will enhance the development of advanced biofuels.</p>
<p>11. The Committee of the Regions recommends developing Free Trade Agreements that are in line with European Union sustainability/ environmental criteria.</p>	<p>The European Commission highlights that the impact assessments carried out before the launch of the negotiations examine impacts of future Free Trade Agreements on all sustainable development dimensions. In addition, all major Free Trade Agreement negotiations are accompanied by a Sustainability Impact Assessment which complements the Impact Assessment by providing a more in-depth analysis of the potential economic, social, human rights and environmental impacts as well as a wide consultation of stakeholders. Sustainability Impact Assessments help to steer the negotiations by feeding them with evidence and making recommendations and proposals for flanking measures to maximise the benefits and prevent or minimise potential negative effects of the agreement.</p>
<p>13., 21. Preserving biodiversity and high animal welfare standards should be the flagship of sustainable European Union food policy.</p> <p>The Committee of the Regions calls upon the European Commission to support such</p>	<p>The European Commission shares the view that the preservation of biodiversity and high animal welfare standards are essential to provide for a sustainable food production.</p> <p>The European Commission recalls that</p>

¹<https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/news/commission-proposes-new-rules-consumer-centred-clean-energy-transition>.

<p>environmentally friendly systems.</p>	<p>the Common Agricultural Policy supports environmentally-friendly farming systems through a mix of instruments including cross compliance, mandatory greening practices, voluntary rural development measures and broad support from the Farm Advisory service and applied research.</p>
<p>15., 18. The Committee of the Regions considers that short and local supply chains should be promoted.</p>	<p>The Common Agricultural Policy explicitly provides funding under Rural Development for short supply chains and local markets. Other measures can also be used, for example investment-related measures.</p>
<p>17. The Committee of the Regions reiterates that supporting young farmers is a prerequisite for preserving agriculture across the European Union and for keeping rural areas alive.</p>	<p>The current Common Agricultural Policy provides support for young farmers through the top-up payment to the basic payment that is offered under Pillar I as well as the measures available under the rural development policy.</p> <p>It is too early for concrete proposals relating to future Common Agricultural Policy content.</p>
<p>19. The Committee of the Regions reiterates the call to implement a "protein plan" at European level.</p>	<p>The European Commission is well aware of the issue of the "European Union protein deficit" and accordingly, the European Union dependency on soy imports.</p> <p>In this context, the European Commission has recently developed a new monitoring tool regarding supply and demand of feed proteins in the European Union. On 10 April 2017 the first version of a "European Union Protein Balance Sheet" was published on the website of the Directorate-</p>

	<p>General for Agriculture and Rural Development². This new Balance Sheet aims to be a reliable source of quantitative information on supply and demand of proteins in the European Union and a solid basis for further policy discussions and decisions regarding proteins in the European Union.</p> <p>In the context of the Action Plan on Circular Economy³ and the fight against food waste, the European Commission is defining guidelines for the use of former foodstuffs as feed. This might also help in reducing our dependency on imported protein sources for feed use.</p>
<p>24. – 31. The Committee of the Regions stresses the need to establish long-term health programmes targeting obesity and food related diseases.</p>	<p>The European Commission has been supporting action on tackling obesity via the Strategy on Nutrition, Overweight, and Obesity-related Health Issues⁴, the Health Programme and through the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity and the European Union Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. The European Commission also supports Member States with the implementation of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity⁵, food reformulation initiatives, and the school fruit, vegetables and milk schemes, by encouraging physical activity and reinforcing the evidence base.</p> <p>A technical report on Public</p>

² https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cereals/balance-sheets_en.

³ COM(2015) 614 final.

⁴ COM(2007) 279 final.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/nutrition_physical_activity/docs/childhoodobesity_actionplan_2014_2020_en.pdf.

	<p>Procurement of Food for Health on the School Setting⁶ was finalised under the Maltese Presidency to offer best practice and operational guidance for translating existing healthy school food standards into procurement specifications.</p> <p>The mandatory European Union-wide nutrition labelling is applicable from December 2016 under Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011⁷ on food information to consumers. It brings more transparency on the nutritional content of foods and facilitates healthier food choices. It also requires the European Commission to adopt a report by the end of 2017 on the use in the European Union of additional forms of expression and presentation of the nutrition declaration, allowing its better understanding, and on the advisability of further harmonisation of those forms.</p> <p>Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 also requires the specific source of vegetable ingredients, including oils, to be indicated in the list of ingredients, enabling consumers to make informed choices also on the basis of their health and environmental concerns.</p> <p>However the social inequalities dimension in this area represents the main challenge for effective action by Member States and therefore attention should be paid to health inequalities as long term objectives.</p>
--	--

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/public-procurement-food-health-technical-report.pdf>.

⁷ Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, amending Regulations (EC) No 1924/2006 and (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Commission Directive 87/250/EEC, Council Directive 90/496/EEC, Commission Directive 1999/10/EC, Directive 2000/13/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, Commission Directives 2002/67/EC and 2008/5/EC and Commission Regulation (EC) No 608/2004 Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 304, 22.11.2011.

<p>32. -33. Green public procurement</p>	<p>European Union Procurement Directives do not forbid the procurement of regional products and services as long as these are procured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for above the thresholds procurement: in accordance with the provisions of the Directives and chosen because they feature in the economically most advantageous tender rather than because of their geographical origin; - for below the thresholds procurement: in accordance with rules and principles of the Treaty, including notably the freedom to provide services, non-discrimination and equal treatment and transparency; the only exception being when the contracts do not present a "certain cross-border interest", for instance "because of special circumstances, such as a very modest economic interest at stake". <p>In procurement under the Directives, greater consideration can be given to providers' proximity without breaching European Union legislation. Contracting authorities may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use "life-cycle costing" which encourages public authorities to consider the full life-cycle of products in their purchasing decisions. The life-cycle cost includes internal costs and costs imputed to environmental externalities (including the Carbon Dioxide footprint) linked to the product, service or works during its/their life cycle; - require that works, supplies or services bear specific labels certifying environmental, social or other characteristics, as long as only the criteria and characteristics of the label which are linked to the subject-matter of
---	--

	<p>the contract are required and that equivalent labels are accepted;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- require the provision of seasonal and fresh food. <p>The European Commission is currently revising European Union Green Public Procurement criteria for food and catering services. The final document is foreseen to be published in early 2018.</p>
--	---

<p>N°2 Legislative proposals for an Effort Sharing Regulation and a Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry Regulation (LULUCF) COM(2016) 479 final, COM(2016) 482 final – COR 2016/5780 - ENVE-VI/017 122nd Plenary Session – March 2017 Rapporteur: Mr Juri GOTMANS (EE/PES) DG CLIMA – Commissioner ARIAS CAÑETE</p>	
<p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>In its general comments, the Committee of the Regions welcomes the European Commission's legislative proposals and stresses the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in non-Emissions Trading System sectors by 2030 so that the long-term objectives of cutting emissions by 95% by 2050 can be achieved.</p>	<p>The European Commission welcomes the Committee of the Regions' opinion and will take into account its general and specific suggestions within subsequent negotiations with the other Institutions.</p> <p>The European Union 2030 target of at least 40% domestic greenhouse gas emission reductions is consistent with global emission projections (see COM(2011)112 final and SEC(2011)288 final) and are in line with the medium term ambition of the Paris Agreement. In the Road from Paris Communication⁸, the European Commission announced that it will prepare an in-depth analysis of the economic and social transformations in order to facilitate the political debate in the European Parliament, Council and with stakeholders on the mid-century strategy.</p>
<p>The Committee of the Regions highlights the role of cities and regions in implementing measures to achieve the European Union's climate and energy policies, as well as in providing the</p>	<p>The European Commission agrees with the Committee of the Regions on the important role of cities and regions in climate change mitigation. The European Commission is supporting</p>

⁸ COM(2016) 110 final.

<p>knowledge necessary for better policy implementation.</p>	<p>the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy which brings together European and other cities that are taking ambitious climate action.</p>
<p>In its general comments, the Committee of the Regions also stresses the need for sector-specific initiatives and targets in sectors covered by the Effort Sharing Regulation⁹.</p>	<p>Sector-specific targets for individual sectors under the Effort Sharing Regulation would go against the overall approach of the effort sharing legislation which gives the key responsibility to Member States for choosing measures to achieve their targets, which is fully in line with the subsidiarity principle. The European Commission is currently preparing proposals addressing Carbon Dioxide emissions from light-duty and heavy-duty road vehicles.</p>
<p>In amendment 3, concerning Article 4(3) of the European Commission's proposal, the Committee of the Regions suggests a later date for review of the most recent national greenhouse gas emission inventory data than indicated in the European Commission proposal for determining the annual emission allocations for the years 2021-2030.</p>	<p>A later date than in the European Commission's proposal is not possible as that would be too late for determining the annual emission allocations in time for the start of the compliance period.</p>
<p>In amendment 5, concerning Article 6(1) of the European Commission's proposal, the Committee of the Regions suggests to reduce the maximum limit of European Union Emissions Trading System allowances that can be taken into account for compliance under the Effort Sharing Regulation.</p>	<p>The one-off flexibility to allow a limited amount of European Union Emissions Trading System allowances that can be taken into account for compliance under the Effort Sharing Regulation in Article 6 of the European Commission's proposal is in line with the European Council conclusions of October 2014 and has been carefully restricted to ensure environmental integrity. Further limiting this flexibility would lead to an imbalanced proposal</p>

⁹ COM(2016) 482 final.

	for a number of Member States.
In amendment 11, the Committee of the Regions suggests that data collection and management, compliance checking and methodological principles should take into account local competencies and characteristics.	The reporting and methodological standards should be aligned as much as possible with internationally agreed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change guidelines in order to ensure harmonization.
In amendment 12, the Committee of the Regions suggests that the European Commission should provide funding for the improvement of data collection in the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector.	Through Horizon 2020 and the Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) projects, the European Commission finances numerous projects that, through different technologies, improve the estimation of greenhouse gas emissions and removals in the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector.
In amendment 18, the Committee of the Regions recommends that accounting should begin in 2021.	The accounting rules in Articles 6-8 specify that the first accounting period is 2021-2025 (as also indicated in Article 2 on the Scope of the Regulation). Reporting obligations, however, can only start in 2023 because data on greenhouse gas emissions are only available within a period of two years.

<p>N°3 Integration, cooperation and performance of health systems (own-initiative opinion) COR 2016/5493 - NAT-VI/017 122nd Plenary Session - March 2017 Rapporteur: Ms Birgitta SACRÉDEUS (SE/EPP) DG SANTE - Commissioner ANDRIUKAITIS</p>	
<p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>8. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the European Commission's State of Health in the European Union initiative of June 2016. Its aim is to bring together international expertise to improve country-specific and European Union-wide knowledge on health and to support Member States in their decision-making.</p>	<p>The European Commission is grateful to the Committee of the Regions for its support of the State of Health in the European Union initiative¹⁰.</p>
<p>12. The Committee of the Regions considers that in order to achieve health equality, it is essential that everyone has access to healthcare. Adequate and sustainable funding of care is of vital importance in guaranteeing good coverage, access and quality. Informal payments and other forms of corruption within healthcare must be combated, since they harm the accessibility and efficiency of care.</p>	<p>Access to good quality healthcare is part of the strategic agenda.</p> <p>Article 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognises that everyone has right of access to medical treatment and preventive healthcare under the conditions established by national laws and practices.</p> <p>While access to healthcare is primarily the responsibility of Member States, European Union level cooperation can support national policy making. The European Commission Communication on effective, accessible and resilient health systems¹¹ highlights a number of European Union initiatives and actions which aim at increasing the accessibility of healthcare: health work force planning, cost-effective use of</p>

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/health/state/summary_en.

¹¹ COM(2014) 215 final.

medicines and the optimal implementation of the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive¹².

The accessibility of healthcare services is one of the dimensions that the European Commission analyses in the context of the European Semester together with their effectiveness and sustainability as highlighted in the Annual Growth Survey.

Furthermore, access to healthcare is one of the 20 Principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights (Pillar)¹³, which was announced by the European Commission on 26 April 2017. The Pillar in its essence is a comprehensive framework based on the European social acquis to review the social performance and serve as a compass for convergence towards better working and living conditions.

The Pillar affirms the importance of access to healthcare services for citizens, emphasising timely, affordable and good quality services: everyone should have the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality. To give effect to this principle, the European Commission will use the available tools to address pertaining challenges, especially through policy guidance and recommendations in the European Semester and promotion of the targeted use of European funds. The Member States are invited to go beyond this framework.

Progress towards this principle will be measured through indicators included in the Social scoreboard accompanying the

¹² Directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, OJ L 88, 4.4.2011.

¹³ COM(2017) 250 final.

	<p>Pillar: self-reported unmet needs for medical care (distance, time, financial hardship); healthy life years and out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare.</p>
<p>13. The Committee of the Regions observes that chronic diseases dominate the burden of disease and generate the majority of costs for healthcare and other welfare systems. In order to remain sustainable over the long term, healthcare systems therefore need to be adapted to be better able to deal with chronic disease, and any unsustainable spiralling of costs must be prevented. Many chronic diseases can be prevented through lifestyle changes, and with the right approach the deterioration typical of these conditions can be held in check.</p>	<p>The European Commission agrees with this observation made by the Committee of the Regions.</p> <p>The European Commission supports Member States to reach the agreed voluntary global targets set out by the World Health Organization and the United Nations as well as Sustainable Development Goal 3.4, focusing on non-communicable diseases. A joint action, co-financed by the Health Programme, will pilot a multi-morbidity care model and the building-up of a resource centre which will include a collection of best practices.</p> <p>Reformulation removes excess sugars, salt and fat from food products that are bought every day in European supermarkets. The European Commission has supported Member States in measuring progress in this area and also supported national reformulation plans. The European Commission is also evaluating the possibility of setting legal limits for industrially produced trans fats.</p> <p>The Audiovisual and Media Services Directive¹⁴ is reaching its final discussion stage, and the final text should contribute to reducing the exposure of children to marketing of foods high in sugars, salt or fat, including in the digital sphere.</p>

¹⁴ Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive) (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 95, 15.4.2010.

	<p>A mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity (2014-2020)¹⁵ is ongoing. The aim of the Action Plan is to halt the rise in overweight and obesity in children and young people by 2020. A Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity (2015-2017)¹⁶ supported Member States in implementing this Action Plan.</p> <p>The European Union School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Schemes further contribute to establishing healthier eating habits among school children.</p> <p>On alcohol-related harm, the European Commission intends to launch a framework contract for the period 2017-2020 to support Member States action in this area, focusing on implementation of identified best practices.</p>
<p>14. The Committee of the Regions wishes to draw particular attention to mental health problems. Mental health must be given the same priority as physical health. Mental illness is often best treated with outpatient care. Good mental health is generally based on good relationships with family, friends and others, a good home and work environment and a sense of belonging and purpose in life.</p>	<p>The European Commission agrees with this observation and emphasizes mental health and physical health equally in its actions and documents. The European Commission has established the European Union Compass on Mental Health and Wellbeing to monitor progress in mental health policies.</p>
<p>19. The Committee of the Regions shares the view expressed in Health at a Glance: Europe 2016, that greater efforts are needed to prevent chronic diseases among the working-age population. Chronic diseases lead to lower employment, lower productivity, earlier</p>	<p>Synergies are effectively sought between employment and health policies to tackle the burden of non-communicable diseases at national and European Union level in the context of a new approach on chronic diseases, focused on the implementation of best</p>

¹⁵https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/nutrition_physical_activity/docs/childhoodobesity_actionplan_2014_2020_en.pdf.

¹⁶http://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/social_determinants/docs/ev_20141022_co06_en.pdf.

<p>retirement, lower income and premature death. A physically and psychologically healthy work environment is crucial in managing occupational diseases and injuries and reducing sick leave and health-related unemployment. Greater synergy is therefore needed between health and labour market policies, and the social partners need to be involved in the process. It is important to view health-related initiatives as investments rather than costs</p>	<p>practices.</p> <p>The European Union Health Policy Platform enables non-governmental organisations to work together and prepare, through a collaborative process over a number of months, coordinated position statements (“Joint Statements”) on agreed health issues. In 2017, new Joint Statements will be prepared on “Employment of Persons with Chronic Diseases”.</p>
<p>23. The Committee of the Regions considers that there should also be a greater focus on quality of care and clinical results. The collection of big data, transparency and open comparisons based on common indicators can be used to stimulate improvements and map the effects of health investments.</p>	<p>For many years now, the European Commission has been working towards strengthening Member States' ability to measure quality of care and clinical outcomes and to align indicator definitions in these fields to facilitate cross-European Union comparisons and benchmarking in order to promote mutual learning and the identification of European Union best practice. For example, the European Commission has been working closely with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on the Healthcare Quality Indicator project, one of the key areas for cooperation in the overall strategic agreement between the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Commission. Among other things, the Health Programme supports the Patient Reported Indicators Survey (PaRIS) project to develop patient reported experience and outcome measures through a grant in the 2017 work programme.</p>
<p>24. The Committee of the Regions finds that, in order to guarantee access to well-trained healthcare and social care professionals, planning and coordination</p>	<p>The European Commission agrees with the Committee of Regions about the importance of retention of health professionals. Continuing professional</p>

<p>between health sectors is needed, as well as an education system offering good opportunities to develop skills. There are currently shortages in several occupational groups, uneven geographic distribution and imbalances between different occupations. One of the issues is the need to train more primary care doctors¹⁷. In order to recruit and retain staff, employers should offer a good working environment and good conditions. To improve their operations, employers should develop multi-professional teams and use task shifting in order to strengthen the roles of nurses and other occupational groups. The Committee of the Regions hopes that the European Commission's efforts to establish a European Solidarity Corps can help get more young people interested in working in the health sector;</p>	<p>development is also a key element in retention, and the European Commission held a workshop in February 2016 on this issue. Under the Health Programme, a Joint Action of Member States on Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting was carried out from 2013-2016. As a follow-up to this Joint Action, the European Commission will continue to promote the networking of experts via a tender with the aim of cooperation in the area of health workforce planning and policy, through a three year contract funded under the Health Programme. The Contractor will provide tailored advice and support to Member States in the area of health workforce planning and forecasting including exchanges and networking opportunities.</p> <p>The European Solidarity Corps is indeed an opportunity for young people to experience and work on solidarity-related projects including health which could in turn galvanise more young people into taking up health and social care professions.</p>
<p>26. The Committee of the Regions considers that the most important tool for making healthcare more effective is new digital technology, which offers new opportunities for prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, provision of information and communication. Innovation is moving quickly in this field. Although there are often justified reasons to consider data protection and privacy, the healthcare sector has nevertheless been all too slow in taking advantage of the latest advances in information technology. Data</p>	<p>In its Communication on the Mid-Term Review of the Digital Single Market Strategy adopted on 10 May 2017¹⁸, the European Commission identified data economy, cybersecurity and online platforms as the three key areas where further action is needed. Many of these have direct or indirect influence on healthcare.</p> <p>In addition, in the area of health, the Digital Single Market review proposes the following actions:</p>

¹⁷ Health at a Glance: Europe 2016.

¹⁸ COM(2017) 228 final.

<p>protection law must be drafted in such a way that it does not hinder effective health care, monitoring and research, while at the same time respecting people's privacy.</p> <p>27. The Committee of the Regions believes that digitalisation also means that the approach to and organisation of care will undergo profound change. The power relationship between different groups of staff will be affected, as will the balance of power between patients and staff. eHealth and mHealth systems can give people more influence over – and opportunities to take greater responsibility for – their own health and care. Greater recourse to self-care will enable patients to cut back on the number of visits to healthcare providers, often increasing patient satisfaction whilst also reducing costs for the health authorities. Greater digitalisation can also help to improve services in peripheral and sparsely populated areas.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supporting Member States to ensure that citizens can access and share their full electronic health record securely when receiving health and care services abroad, in full respect of their data protection rights. This should give effect to the right of citizens to access and transfer their personal data related to health. 2. Supporting the development at European Union level of a secure data infrastructure to advance research, disease prevention and personalised health and care by the pooling of health data in compliance with data protection legislation. 3. Working with Member States and regions to deploy solutions that support user feedback and interaction between patients and healthcare providers, to advance preventive medicine and quality and patient-centred care. The deployment programme will notably engage citizens in the prevention and management of chronic diseases (notably through integrated care, mobile health, telemedicine and connected care). <p>A Commission Communication on Digital Transformation in Health and Care to further elaborate these issues is expected by the end of 2017.</p>
<p>28. The Committee of the Regions points out that new medicinal products play a major role in the development of healthcare. New and improved diagnostic methods make it possible to use personalised treatments and medicines with fewer adverse effects and better clinical results. In order to make healthcare more cost-effective, it is however important to</p>	<p>An important tool that contributes to the sustainability of health systems is Health Technology Assessment. Health Technology Assessment informs decision makers on how new health technologies perform in relation to existing ones, which includes economic domains such as cost effectiveness.</p> <p>The European Commission has for</p>

<p>address high pharmaceutical prices and over-prescribing of medicinal products. The Committee of the Regions therefore supports the initiatives taken for voluntary cooperation between Member States on procurement, pricing and access to medicines.</p>	<p>many years facilitated voluntary cooperation between Member States on Health Technology Assessment through notably the Health Technology Assessment Network and the European Network for Health Technology Assessment (EUnetHTA) Joint Actions.</p> <p>The European Commission is currently exploring possible options on the way forward beyond 2020 when the current Joint Action ends, whilst at the same time addressing identified shortcomings. An impact assessment is ongoing and an initiative is planned for the end of 2017.</p> <p>It should be noted that any future proposal will not affect national prerogatives such as pricing and reimbursement and the overall management of health systems.</p>
<p>32. The Committee of the Regions stresses that local and regional authorities play a decisive role in protection from environmental risk factors and related health promotion. Local authorities often have primary responsibility for environmental protection, air quality, refuse collection, town planning, public transport, water and sanitation, green spaces for recreation, food safety and so on. Healthcare and social care can also contribute, for example by using safe, environmentally friendly products, ensuring efficient waste management and reducing energy and water consumption.</p>	<p>European Union chemicals legislation (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) and Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP)) aims at protecting health and the environment. Under REACH for example, substances of very high concern are identified (including substances such as endocrine disruptors which can lead to chronic diseases such as diabetes or obesity), and placed on a candidate list with the aim of phasing out the uses of these substances.</p>
<p>37. In this context, the Committee of the Regions proposes that the European</p>	<p>The European Commission notes that cooperation between health systems is</p>

<p>Commission establish an Erasmus-like programme for healthcare professionals.</p>	<p>framed by the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive¹⁹. In highly specialised healthcare, the European Reference Networks, launched in March 2017, provide an opportunity for mutual learning and exchange. Training and knowledge sharing among medical specialists will become an integrated part of research cooperation in the European Reference Networks. Finally, the Erasmus+ Programme 2014-2020 can support individual mobility of post-graduate students and teaching/training staff, and set up "strategic partnerships" to design innovative education programmes. However, the European Commission is not envisaging a specific Erasmus+ Programme for healthcare professionals or any new exchange scheme as it would be too cumbersome to operate it separately for one sector, and its added value seems to be limited.</p>
<p>38. The Committee of the Regions regards the priority areas chosen by the Expert Group on Health Systems Performance Assessment (integrated care; access to health care and equity; primary care; health outcomes/effectiveness; chronic diseases and quality of care) as equally valid for the subnational level and expresses its readiness to collaborate with the group in view of bringing local and regional expertise to the fore.</p> <p>39. In that context, the Committee of the Regions requests an observer seat within the Expert Group on Health Systems Performance Assessment, established in September 2014 by the European Commission and the Member States, upon</p>	<p>The European Commission takes note of the position expressed by the Committee of the Regions and acknowledges that the assessment of the performance of health systems may be relevant in the regional and sub-national context, according to Member States' specific situations.</p> <p>The European Commission brought this request from the Committee of the Regions to the attention of the Expert Group on Health Systems Performance Assessment, which approved it and agreed to grant an observer seat to the Committee of Regions.</p>

¹⁹ Directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, OJ L 88, 4.4.2011.

invitation from the Council.	
<p>43. The Committee of the Regions calls on the European Union, in its work on the State of Health in the European Union, to showcase good examples of effective, high-quality healthcare, identify forms of health service organisation that make a particular contribution to effective, high-quality healthcare, and demonstrate how high-quality healthcare can reduce the need for social services. In this context, the Committee of the Regions would underline the importance of identifying local and regional organisational models that have proved to work effectively.</p>	<p>The European Commission takes note of the positive, constructive position of the Committee of the Regions. The State of Health in the European Union cycle comprises various cross-European Union comparative and country-specific analytical products. Its country health profiles and accompanying European Commission paper (due November 2017) will feature best practice examples (whether at national or regional level) along with the identified challenges. These examples will be identified by experts from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (particularly when it comes to the country health profiles) and by European Commission staff (as regards the European Commission paper), the latter based on the findings of various expert groups, Joint Actions, etc. Reflecting on the medium- to long-term objectives, the European Commission is very much open to further discussions with the Committee of the Regions in the context of developing a more permanent infrastructure to meaningfully identify best practice examples for future iterations of the State of Health in the European Union cycle.</p>

<p>N°4 Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3): impact for regions and inter-regional cooperation (own-initiative opinion) CoR 2016/6963 - SEDEC-VI-021 122nd Plenary Session – March 2017 Rapporteur: Mr MIKEL IRUJO AMEZAGA (ES/EA) DG REGIO – Commissioner CREȚU</p>	
<p>Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>55. The Committee of the Regions recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reform of the current regulatory framework, before the end of the 2014-2020 period, giving new impetus both to synergies between the European Structural and Investment Funds and programmes and to interregional cooperation. This reform must require simplification and greater flexibility in the management of the European Structural and Investment Funds, by applying simplified justification methods based for example on achievement of objectives, use of unit costs and other measures better suited to the efficient application of funds to smart specialisation. 	<p>This should be reached through building on the measures for simplification and focussing on results that were introduced for 2014-2020 through the European Commission's recent modifying proposal – the 'Omnibus Regulation'²⁰.</p> <p>In that context, the European Commission is carrying out a series of studies to collect evidence about the implementation of the different reform elements during the programming and the early implementation stages and to provide analysis for different policy options.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strengthening the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) objectives on inclusive and sustainable growth and job creation. 	<p>The European Commission agrees. This requires concerted effort at European Union, national and regional level to broaden the base for innovation, better target resources, improve the alignment of Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) priorities with (European Union/national/regional) societal challenges, and further facilitate synergies and complementarities</p>

²⁰ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (COM(2016) 605 final – 14 September 2016): http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mff/lib/COM-2016-603/COM-2016-605_en.pdf.

	<p>between European Union policies and instruments. In this context, the European Commission proposed on 18 July 2017²¹ a new set of actions to further help Europe's regions invest in their niche areas of competitive strength ("smart specialisation") and generate the innovation, resilience and growth needed.</p>
<p>- an indicative, flexible common framework in the form of a recommendation, on the Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3), filling the current gap and the lack of coordination in the design, drafting, implementation, monitoring and follow-up of Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3). Based on the principle of subsidiarity, the document must be flexible, living and open-ended, leaving room for the arrival of new specialisation niches that did not previously exist.</p>	<p>The European Commission addressed this issue by publishing the Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisations²² which provided the common methodological framework, followed by the Handbook on Smart Specialisation in 2016²³ with good examples, and by the introduction of an ex-ante conditionality on smart specialisation in the European Structural and Investment Funds Common Provisions Regulation 2014-2020²⁴ which provided the common regulatory framework. The European Commission will continue to provide support through access to independent experts, the TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER instrument²⁵ and the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) Platform²⁶. This would help regions to better coordinate its efforts in the design,</p>

²¹ European Commission, Communication 'Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth', COM(2017)376 of 18 July 2017, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0376>.

²² <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/20182/84453/RIS3+Guide.pdf/fceb8c58-73a9-4863-8107-752aef77e7b4>.

²³ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/20182/154972/Implementing+Smart+Specialisation+Strategies+A+Handbook/2a0c4f81-3d67-4ef7-97e1-dcbad00e1cc9>.

²⁴ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013.

²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/policy/how/improving-investment/taix-regio-peer-2-peer/

²⁶ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>.

	<p>drafting, implementation, monitoring and follow-up of Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) through adapting best practice, benchmarking their mechanisms against world-class standards, getting a mapping of the Research and Innovation diversity in European Union regions, and addressing their weaknesses.</p>
<p>- making urgent provision for appropriate ad hoc financing instruments to foster interregional cooperation. These instruments may take the form of combinations of financing (including blends of grants and loans, and public and private funding at different levels) with the innovative use of funds to support pilot projects for interregional cooperation networks forging direct contact with industry and having a market impact.</p>	<p>The European Commission would explore the possibility of extending the forms of financing available to support interregional cooperation.</p>
<p>- learning lessons from the pilot projects carried out by the Directorate-General for Regional Policy with lagging regions, in order to effectively support these regions in reducing the innovation gap in the European Union.</p>	<p>The European Commission published the lagging regions Report on 10 April 2017²⁷. This report analyses the investment needs, growth determinants, macro-economic framework and need for structural reforms. Moreover, it already presents concrete ideas to address the obstacles to growth in the pilot regions of Poland and Romania.</p>
<p>- urgent allocation of resources to Interreg Europe, with which the regions are already familiar, will for the coming years be the best-suited tool for supporting Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3)-related networking.</p>	<p>The European Regional Development Fund allocated EUR 500 million to the interregional cooperation programme, Interreg Europe, and three networking programmes (Urbact III, Interact III and the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion). They provide a framework for exchanging experience between</p>

²⁷http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2017/competitiveness-in-low-income-and-low-growth-regions-the-lagging-regions-report.

	<p>regional and local bodies in different countries in all 28 Member States of the European Union.</p>
<p>56. The Committee of the Regions recommends that the European Commission set up a working group with the active involvement of the Committee of the Regions, addressing all aspects that can provide the above-mentioned Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) ex-ante conditionality with greater precision and with objectives and instruments.</p>	<p>All aspects regarding development of smart specialisation are discussed at the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) Platform Steering Committee meetings, which is a working group consisting of representatives of Directorates-General and which meets regularly on a bi-annual basis. The Committee of the Regions participates in the work of this group.</p>

**N°5 Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030
SWD(2016)205 final – COR 2016/5035 - NAT-VI/015
122nd Plenary Session – March 2017
Rapporteur: Mr Adam BANASZAK (PL/ECR)
DG ECHO – Commissioner STYLIANIDES**

Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>The Committee of the Regions stresses that all European Union projects relating to construction of new infrastructure (whether they be implemented through regional policy funds or through the European Fund for Strategic Investments) should be resilient to disasters; it calls for this principle to be mentioned explicitly in rules on how funds are used.</p>	<p>According to Article 8 of the Common Provisions Regulation²⁸, Member States and the European Commission shall ensure that disaster resilience and risk prevention and management are promoted in the preparation and implementation of the European Union's programmes.</p>
<p>The Committee of the Regions strongly supports the European Commission's proposal of 30 November 2016 (COM(2016) 778), which would enable a stronger show of European Union solidarity in response to major or regional natural disasters; it calls for a review of the definition of major or regional natural disasters under Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund²⁹, cited in the European Commission proposal; the Committee of the Regions points out that the thresholds for major disasters set out in the definition – damage over EUR 3 billion or more than 0.6% of the Gross Domestic Product of the state</p>	<p>The eligibility criteria for major and regional disasters have been adjusted in the context of the 2014 revision of the European Union Solidarity Fund Regulation³⁰. While the first results are encouraging, the European Commission considers that further experience with the new provisions should be awaited before further revising the eligibility criteria which would require the agreement of the co-legislators. In this context the budgetary consequences of lower thresholds would also have to be considered.</p>

²⁸ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013.

²⁹ OJ L 311, 14.11.2002.

³⁰ Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002, OJ L 189, 27.6.2014.

<p>concerned – are too high and constitute an obstacle, especially for the smaller and less developed regions that most often need to get financial support.</p>	
<p>The Committee of the Regions recognises that the issue of natural disasters forms an integral part of activities aimed at dealing with the impact of climate change, and both areas should be examined together; it suggests that the new Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy increases its activity in this area and provides further support for climate adaptation that also builds resilience at local level; the Committee of the Regions reiterates its support to the Covenant and also to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's "Making Cities Resilient" campaign. In order to help attract the attention of cities and regions to the "Making Cities Resilient" campaign, the Committee of the Regions suggests appointing Resilient Cities Ambassadors, who would benefit from the support of the Committee of the Regions.</p>	<p>There is widespread recognition of the benefits of linking and integrating the knowledge base, as well as policies and practices, for addressing Climate Change Adaptation, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, and sustainable development. At local level, this integrated approach becomes a necessity as citizens understand and deal with climate change and disasters in a more holistic way to develop more resilient answers. Building the resilience of urban settings and creating a risk-informed urban development paradigm is therefore critical for resilient and sustainable socio-economic development.</p> <p>This integrated approach is well defined in the 2013 European Union adaptation strategy, which recognizes the importance of linking Climate Change Adaptation to Disaster Risk Reduction and the need to implement adaptation policies in synergy and full coordination with the disaster risk management policies that the European Union and Member States are developing.</p> <p>The Covenant of Mayors promotes a multi-level governance, cross-sector and holistic territorial approach as well as the engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Cities signed up to the Covenant of Mayors initiative commit to increasing their resilience. Moreover, the Covenant of Mayors seeks synergies with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's "Making Cities Resilient" campaign.</p> <p>As signatories to the Covenant of Mayors,</p>

	<p>cities have access to an extensive city network, both in Europe and globally, informational and awareness-raising events, workshops and bilateral exchange between practitioners, as well as information sharing through an extensive framework for monitoring and reporting.</p> <p>The European Commission is currently working on assessing its work on adaptation in the European Union in view of its objectives and actions, and new international developments, in particular the Paris Agreement. The process and its outcome will also provide information on the possible scope and options for revising the 2013 Adaptation Strategy³¹.</p>
<p>The Committee of the Regions welcomes that in line with the Committee of the Regions' recommendations, the Fund can be used to build disaster resilience into effected infrastructure. [...]</p>	<p>It is important to point out that the European Union Solidarity Fund may not be used for financing prevention infrastructure. It is only about disaster response and essential recovery operations.</p>
<p>The Committee of the Regions recommends drawing up action plans in accordance with other international agreements and processes concluded or implemented in 2015 and 2016, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda financing for development, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the World Humanitarian Summit and the New Urban Agenda.</p>	<p>According to the European Commission Communication on Next Steps for a Sustainable European Future³², the European Union's answer to the 2030 Agenda will include two work streams, one of which will "fully integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in the European policy framework and current European Commission priorities, assessing where we stand and identifying the most relevant sustainability concerns".</p> <p>In the new European Consensus on Development³³, the European Commission proposes a new way of working with partner countries and together with</p>

³¹ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/docs/eu_strategy_en.pdf.

³² COM(2016) 739 final.

³³ COM(2016) 740 final.

	<p>Member States – from joint programming to joint actions – to ensure greater coherence, complementarity and effectiveness. There is also a clear need to foster more differentiated partnerships in accordance with our partners' development paths and needs – keeping the focus on the poorest and most vulnerable, while also recognising the importance of more advanced developing countries for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Communication on the future relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States concerning a post-Cotonou framework³⁴, adopted together with the Communication on a new European Consensus on Development, is a key example of this tailored partnerships approach.</p> <p>In the area of energy and climate, Sustainable Development Goal 7 ("Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all") and Sustainable Development Goal 13 ("Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts"), the European Union has set ambitious 2030 targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve energy efficiency and increase the share of renewable energy. In addition, there is a political commitment of devoting at least 20% of the European Union budget to climate action.</p>
<p>The Committee of the Regions points out that local and regional authorities have often demonstrated a tremendous commitment to reducing disaster risks, for instance by helping to draw up risk assessments and risk management plans, as pointed out in the Committee of the Region's opinion on the</p>	<p>The role of competent sub-national authorities in undertaking risk assessments and disaster risk management planning is recognised and addressed in Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism³⁶.</p>

³⁴ JOIN(2016) 52 final.

<p>European Union Civil Protection Mechanism³⁵.</p>	<p>According to Article 6 of the Decision, Member States shall develop risk assessments, and develop and refine disaster risk management plans, at national or at the appropriate sub-national level.</p>
<p>The Committee of the Regions calls for steps to be taken to raise public awareness, <i>inter alia</i>, by carrying out research into disaster risk management. It is recommended to make the residents of the endangered areas aware of the necessity to show solidarity with the residents of the areas prone to disasters. There is currently little understanding of how risks can escalate.</p>	<p>According to Article 3 of Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, the Union Mechanism is set to support, complement and facilitate coordination of Member States' action in pursuit of, <i>inter alia</i>, increasing public awareness and preparedness for disasters.</p>

³⁶ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013.

³⁵ OJ C 277, 13.9.2012.