



Declaration of the #CohesionAlliance for a cohesive, sustainable and resilient Europe

*The #CohesionAlliance renews its political engagement in the post-COVID-19 Europe to affirm cohesion as a fundamental value of the European Union and a key objective for all its policies and investment. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that solidarity, responsibility and cohesion are needed now more than ever to ensure that **no one and no region is left behind**.*

Europe's regions, cities and municipalities of all sizes already provide many essential services such as medical care and social welfare to citizens. This has been key to overcoming the effects of the COVID pandemic but the cost has been huge. Regional and local investment capacity is now severely reduced.

Our ambition is to ensure that strong financial EU support is offered to Member States, regions, cities and municipalities. They are on the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis and the EU 2021-2027 budget and the post-pandemic recovery plan must help them protect citizens, support local economies, make local communities resilient to crises and create a sustainable future. As the emergency risks deepening disparities between and within Member States, the absence of coordinated and timely EU action will increase the gaps between more and less developed communities.

In view of the adoption of the EU's Recovery Plan and of the Multiannual Financial Framework beyond 2020, we reiterate the key principles of the #CohesionAlliance and call upon all leaders at European, national, regional and local level, from businesses and civil society, to support this Declaration.

As the #CohesionAlliance, we declare that:

1. the EU's **Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF)** is an essential tool to promote cohesion, convergence and competitiveness for all citizens in the European Union, wherever they live; the proposed **Recovery Plan** should be channelled through a bottom-up approach, making use of grants and of the leverage effect of financial instruments and respecting the partnership principle;
2. a **strong, visible and effective Cohesion Policy that is accessible for all regions, cities and municipalities of all sizes** is vital to reduce the gap between the levels of development, to help them to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and to pursue major policies and challenges such as the European Green Deal, the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as the digital transformation; attention should be paid both to urban areas as the drivers of green and digital transformation and to regions that suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps;
3. all EU policies need to support the Cohesion objective in order to **strengthen the resilience of our regions, cities and municipalities of all sizes**, to rebuild the economy, to foster sustainability and the territorial and social fabric of our Union; the success of the proposed Recovery Plan depends on their full involvement, as most of the competencies for health services, social care and resilience are at local and/or regional level;
4. **the temporary nature of some of the proposed reinforcements of Cohesion Policy should not undermine the Policy's long-term approach**, which must continue to be **an investment policy based on additional resources** that meet the needs of all regions over the whole programming period;
5. the principles of **partnership, multilevel governance and the place-based approach, and the involvement of social and economic partners in the design and implementation of Cohesion Policy**, are decisive, not only to delivering the objectives of Cohesion Policy but also to developing the national recovery and resilience plans; local and regional authorities are best placed to assess the investment needs at territorial level and need to be fully associated with decisions on [re]programming investment under REACT-EU and the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility;
6. the recent **measures to increase flexibility and to further simplify Cohesion Policy should be preserved as part of a crisis mechanism and reactivated during the next programming period only in the case of a new crisis**. The minimum allocation earmarked for sustainable urban development must be maintained as a vital investment in more resilient cities in the future. **The simplification of Cohesion Policy alongside the new Next Generation EU will also be decisive** for the recovery effort without leading to more centralisation;
7. it is crucial that the recovery instruments that will address the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis reinforce Cohesion Policy and **are complementary and well-coordinated with the structural funds, EU competition policy and other EU funding programmes**, without leading to any reduction of the cohesion support initially foreseen for all Member States and regions;

COR-2020-02262-00-03-WEB-TRA (EN) 1/2

8. a stronger **European territorial cooperation** must help people, communities and businesses, cooperate across borders and overcome the detrimental effects of the crisis and speed up the economic recovery. Existing and new EU programmes, such as the new instrument for interregional innovation investments, will be critical to supporting the development of European industrial and innovation value chains based on smart specialisation strategies; in this respect, the **European Cross-Border Mechanism** must be revitalised;
9. a **timely start of 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy programmes** and an **extended system of phasing out for 2014-2020 programmes** are needed to respond to the current crisis and to prepare the **long-term development strategies**; in case of delays, transitional arrangements with additional means must be foreseen to avoid a funding gap between the two programming periods;
10. EU and Member State leaders are urged to **assume their responsibilities towards citizens and agree upon the next Multiannual Financial Framework** and the **Recovery Strategy** to secure the timely start of Cohesion Policy programmes as of **1 January 2021**.