

5th Workshop Network of Regional Hubs for EU Policy Implementation Review *SUMMARY*

The RegHub logo is a central white circle with the text "RegHub" in blue. It is surrounded by a complex network of grey and blue nodes connected by thin lines, set against a light blue background with a subtle grid pattern.

RegHub

JULY 2020

RegHub Secretariat

Contents

Introduction..... 1

Presentation of the Fit for Future decision and the role of RegHub in the future
Better Regulation 1

Presentation of the public procurement follow-up 2

Presentation of the COVID-19 flash consultation on State aid and public
procurement..... 3

Presentation of the first results from the RegHub evaluation survey..... 3

Presentation of the state of play of the Cross-Border Healthcare and CAP
consultations 4

Outlook and Q&A..... 5

Conclusion..... 5

Virtual Workshop

16 June 2020, 10.30 - 12.30, Virtual Workshop

Introduction

Rainer Steffens, Project Coordinator of the Network of Regional Hubs (RegHub) and moderator of the session, opened the fifth workshop of the Network of Regional Hubs. He thanked the Contact Points for their relentless work during the COVID-19 crisis and their participation in the network's consultations. Mr Steffens emphasised that their work contributed to both the success and recognition of the network, which will be part of the European Commission (EC) Fit for Future platform (*F4F*). Finally, he introduced a new flash consultation on COVID-19 related measures, which was launched on the demand of the CoR President.

Presentation of the Fit for Future decision and the role of RegHub in the future Better Regulation, by Rainer Steffens and Rafael Mondelaers (ECON Secretariat of the CoR, RegHub)

Mr Steffens highlighted the great success and recognition of the Hubs' work that the EC Fit for Future decision on May 11 is. He informed the Hubs that the RegHub secretariat is in constant exchange with the Commission about the determination of the future role of RegHub.

Mr Mondelaers presented the decision and the first assessment in detail. The platform will be made of *two* groups: (1) the Stakeholder group and (2) the Government group. The second group is composed of 27 representatives from national, regional and local authorities from all EU countries and three CoR representatives. By identifying and analysing policy topics, the platform will decide which review items become part of the EC annual work programme. Moreover, he pointed out the important role the RegHub subgroup will play as a key actor for the platform's work programme. More concretely, RegHub will have the chance to influence the platform's agenda setting and opinions by organising consultations, which are tailor-made to those topics mentioned in the annual work programme. Consequently, RegHub will have the opportunity to directly feed into the Commission work programme. Moreover, Mr Mondelaers announced that all Contact Points, participating in RegHub 2.0, will be asked to join the subgroup and that the work will mostly take place on a virtual platform. He concluded his presentation by reminding that the RegHub secretariat is still discussing with the EC the detailed role of RegHub and that the outcome will also depend on the structure of the network in the mainstreaming phase.

Presentation of the public procurement follow-up, by David Blanchard (Head of Unit, DG GROW, European Commission)

Stating that the current COVID-19 crisis has a huge impact on all sectors, **Mr Blanchard** explained that public procurement has definitely been at the front-line of the crisis - especially concerning the purchase of medical supplies such as personal equipment and masks. Mr Blanchard presented the reaction and the role of the EC in this context. On 31 March, the Commission had issued a guidance on how to use the flexibility offered by the public procurement framework in emergencies related to the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, he reminded that member states and the Commission signed a joint procurement agreement and that the Commission has set up a clearinghouse for medical equipment for a period of six months in order to facilitate the identification of available supplies and to match the demands of member states.

Mr Blanchard identified the lessons learnt regarding public procurement: According to him, a lot of information has been collected and many actors have rediscovered the essentiality of public procurement. He listed some of the issues faced during the crisis: public demands were deeply disorganised and public buyers suffered from an insufficient knowledge about the industrial landscape. Generally, extreme urgency circumstances have prevailed and led to the application of the most flexible public procurement rules. Noticing the lack of transparency and the little use of digital tools and systems, Mr Blanchard pointed out that the crisis will most likely lead to new digitization measures from the Commission and in all member states.

Considering this, he highlighted the necessity to reflect on the current public procurement policy and shared some ideas to overcome the mentioned issues. First, by expressing the need for policies and actions to address structural weaknesses, Mr Blanchard emphasised that cooperation between buyers and investments in public procurement and network structures is essential and required. A strong coordination of public procurement policies should thus be encouraged and digital tools should be re-developed. Second, he explained that policies should help turning public buyers into critical investors, since investments will be essential for a green, digital and resilient economic recovery. He encouraged the regions to actively participate in this recovery and to see public buyers not just as purchasers but also as investors that can be important regional actors. Finally, Mr Blanchard concluded his presentation by acknowledging that the Commission will have to accompany this development.

Presentation of the COVID-19 flash consultation on State aid and public procurement, by Bert Kuby (Head of Unit, ECON Secretariat of the CoR)

Mr Kuby gave an overview of the flash consultation on the temporary State aid and public procurement regime. He explained that the consultation was part of a broader initiative, encompassing a COVID-19 exchange platform, in which the regions and cities can both contribute and retrieve contacts, ideas, cases and other information on EU measures and enter into dialogue with players from all different levels. Regarding RegHub, he focussed on the CoR's COVID-19 action plan, which is composed of five individual pillars. One of the pillars is based on the idea that the CoR will do reality checks of EU measures 'on the ground' to fight the pandemic - RegHub would be one of the envisaged instruments.

Mr Kuby reported that the CoR President has recognised that Europe is strongly hit by the pandemic and that consequently the European Union has to develop tools to support its recovery. Moreover, he acknowledged the effectiveness of RegHub as a tool for collecting feedback. Therefore, the President has announced the launch of this exceptional consultation on the EU's COVID-19 related state aid and public procurement measures. Mr Kuby explained that mainly *two* measures are in the focus of the questionnaire: (1) the EC temporary framework for state aid measures and (2) the EC guidance on public procurement. The former was adopted on 19 March to support the economy in the current COVID-19 outbreak until the end of 2020. The latter was published on 1 April to help public authorities to purchase urgently needed medical supplies and personal protective equipment for hospitals and healthcare professionals.

Mr Kuby presented the questionnaire, which is relevant for all stakeholders but shorter than usual. The questionnaire will help to identify the usefulness of the measures and to make suggestions for adaptations. The deadline is 10 August. Finally, Mr Kuby pointed out that the report will not only be published on the exchange platform but that it will also be the base of the President's State of the Regions (SOTREG) speech in October.

Presentation of the first results from the RegHub evaluation survey, by Teresa Geyer (ECON Secretariat of the CoR, RegHub)

Ms Geyer introduced the first results of the evaluation survey and described again the four evaluation steps, which will feed into to the final evaluation report. (1) the group discussions during the 4th RegHub workshop, (2) the evaluation survey that was sent to the Contact Points of the RegHub network, (3) the evaluation interviews with partners in the European Commission and CoR colleagues and (4) finally the evaluation report.

She explained the results of the four main evaluation questions: (1) methods and communication, (2) inter-institutional and stakeholder relations, (3) identification and selection of policy areas for assessment and (4) future challenges.

Regarding working **methods and communication** Ms Geyer analysed that, over all, the working method is considered adequate but communication and transparency towards the network members offer opportunities for further improvement.

With regard to the second question about the **inter-institutional and stakeholder relations**, she pointed out that the Contact Points' responses were positive and most of them reported an increase of awareness about EU policy-making in general and the CoR's role in it in particular. Furthermore, some of them reported that the project enabled them to create better and closer links with other Regional Hubs. Moreover, some of the Hubs have mentioned that they deem F4F an opportunity to timely feed into the Commission's review process and that the decision is a recognition of both RegHub and CoR. However, many flagged the necessity to make the project better visible, for example through the translation of implementation reports.

Concerning the third question about the **identification and selection of policy areas for assessment**, Ms Geyer explained that the responses were more diverse but still generally positive. In the view of many Contact Points, timing and topic selection have to be fully in line with the Commission's work programme and the Fit for Future process.

For the fourth question regarding the **future challenges**, the Hubs made numerous suggestions and cherished the status quo, which means that they would not be in favour of having more consultations than currently, and that the size and that they preferred it if the activity of the network would remain at about the same level. Moreover, many Contact Points emphasised that the implementation reports should remain as technical as possible.

Presentation of the state of play of the Cross-Border Healthcare and CAP consultations, by Rafael Mondelaers (ECON Secretariat of the CoR, RegHub)

Mr Mondelaers appreciated that almost all of the Hubs are continuing with normal consultations during the COVID-19 crisis. For the Cross-Border Healthcare consultation, he noted a stable level of participation with 27 Hubs replying to the first and 25 to the second consultation on the CAP. According to him, this relentless engagement revealed the robustness of the network.

Mr Mondelaers continued by highlighting the results of the consultation. He pointed out that the level of awareness of the Directive is generally low and that cross-

border patient flows are rarely monitored. He mentioned the difficulty to analyse the current state of the actual number of people, crossing borders for healthcare purposes. He noted that the respondents received prior authorisation and support for prior notifications – which are both part of the Directive - positively. Moreover, financial compensation arrangements were evaluated as positive by the Hubs since they facilitate the financial management related to cross-border projects. He added that another important point frequently mentioned was the need for accessible information.

Mr Mondelaers listed the important factors for cross-border healthcare cooperation according to the Hubs: (1) legal and administrative issues, (2) language and cultural issues when it comes to organise cross-border healthcare and (3) the transport of people as well as their financial interest. According to him, there is a lot of eagerness from the side of the Hubs in setting up cross-border healthcare cooperation in the near future. Furthermore, seems to be an ambition to make this kind of cooperation work and Hubs have pointed to the role of the CoR in promoting such initiatives. He announced that, as soon as the final report has been reviewed, it will be taken to the EC and the topic might be added to the annual work programme of the Fit for Future platform. Finally, the report will be communicated to the European Parliament and it will feed into the opinion-work of the CoR.

Outlook and Q&A, by Rainer Steffens (Project Coordinator of the Network of Regional Hubs, ECON Secretariat of the CoR)

Mr Steffens presented the next RegHub workshop, which will take place on 10 and 11 September in Düsseldorf, Germany. Due to the current situation, it is not yet clear if the workshop will be of virtual, hybrid or physical nature. He explained that the 'ordinary' part of the workshop will be held on 10 September and combined with the external meeting of the CoR Bureau. Within this Bureau meeting, a conference will be organised on 11 September to which the Hubs will be invited to come. Furthermore, the outcome of the evaluation report will be discussed during the two days. Mr Steffens further expressed the hope to organise a study visit on 10 September together with the Hubs and members of the CoR Bureau.

Conclusion, by Thomas Wobben (Director for Legislative Work at the CoR)

Thomas Wobben, Director for Legislative Work at the European Committee of the Regions, concluded the virtual workshop. He emphasised the importance to seize the political momentum of RegHub. According to him, the Fit for Future decision is a strong recognition of the work already done and he reminded of the importance of the Düsseldorf event, where the evaluation report will be presented. Mr Wobben informed the participants about the meetings between the Commission, the RegHub team and the Secretariat-General, which are currently taking place and discuss RegHub 2.0.

Mr Wobben acknowledged that due to the Fit for Future decision, the CoR has been identified as a reliable partner. He announced that the President is encouraged to continue his contacts with Commissioners in order to secure additional support for RegHub in the future. This will be included in the resolution, which we will be adopted in the July plenary session on the proposal for the Commission.

Finally, Mr Wobben thanked the Contact Points for their flexibility and their input during the crisis and their contributions to the Covid-19 flash consultation. He showed his confidence that RegHub will provide very useful feedback because cities and regions are key drivers for recovery and crucial voices to find locally adapted responses to the crisis. According to Mr Wobben, RegHub is clearly seen as an effective machine, able to provide evidence and allow CoR members and other institutions to draw political conclusions. He further expressed the need to maintain this scheme in order for RegHub to become an institutionalised part of the EC consultation system.