



European Committee
of the Regions



Young Elected
Politicians

Cohesion as a value

Benefits and costs for young people of transitioning to a post-Covid world

#CohesionAlliance

23 September 2021 | 14:00-16:00 | online

#YoungLocalLeaders

Event type

Hybrid YEPs event

Date

23 September 2021

Audience

Around 50 participants (39 YEPs) and 70 live views on Youtube

Organisers

European Committee of the Regions

Themes

Cohesion Policy, COVID-19 Recovery, Online social rights, Youth employment needs



Speakers

- **Apostolos Tzitzikostas**, President of the European Committee of the Regions
- **Monika Kirbiš Rojs** (SL), State Secretary, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy
- **Pavel Branda** (CZ/ECR), Deputy Mayor of Rádló Municipality, CoR Member
- **Franck Conrad**, Recovery and Resilience Task Force EC
- **Biliana Sirakova**, EU youth coordinator of the EC
- **Jasna Gabrič** (SI/RE), Mayor of the Municipality of Trbovlje, CoR Member
- **Irene Mandl**, European Labour Authority
- **Anne Karjalainen** (FI/PES), Leader of Kerava City Council, CoR Member



Key messages

1. Regions and cities have a lot of potential especially if there are cross border opportunities
2. Cohesion policy helps improve the lives of citizens directly
3. Digital inequalities serve as barriers for EU integration and cohesion and need to be tackled with a universal right to connectivity
4. The transition from student to young worker has been made even more difficult with the COVID crisis. A focus should be put on communities at risk of exclusion to be helped with this process.

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, President of the CoR:

"Regions and cities all have a lot of potential, especially if they act together, learn together and build together. As we recover from the pandemic, our challenge is to build resilient communities."

Anne Karjalainen (FI/PES), Leader of Kerava City Council, CoR member:

"[Connectivity] has gradually become a public good. The pandemic has shown its importance because it has further deepened the digital divide. This is why I have always called for the promotion of digital cohesion as an important additional dimension of the traditional concept of economic, social and territorial cohesion defined in the EU treaty"



Press/Social media coverage

Media coverage

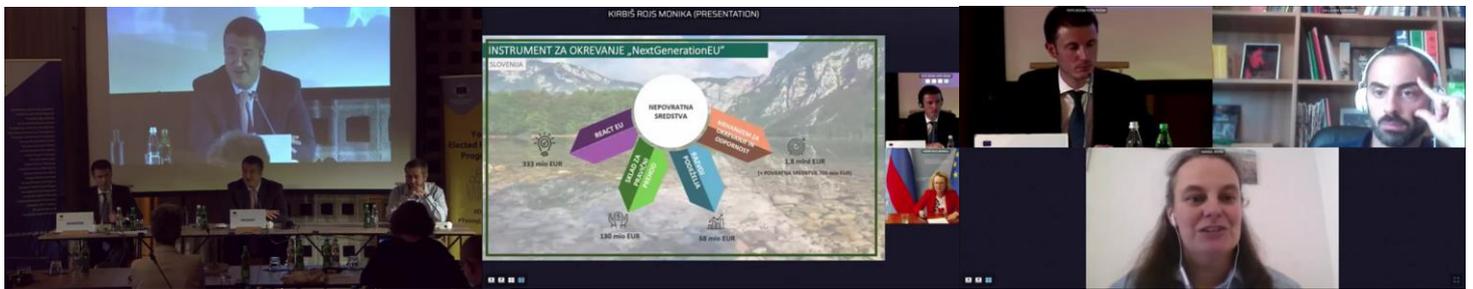
[CoR Press Release](#)
[YEP program and recording](#)

Website

[CoR webpage](#)
[YEP program events](#)

Social Media

[CoR Twitter](#)



Context

This event was a hybrid debate about cohesion policy in a post-COVID world.. Speakers stressed the importance of cohesion as a pillar to European society and demonstrated both positive personal experiences and some room for improvement. The new [Cohesion Policy 2021-2027](#) has made it easier and more customizable for regions and local authorities to access financial aid. 19 of the national cohesion policy plans from Member States have already been accepted by the European Commission, and 13 of these countries have already received their first pre-payment.

1. COHESION AS A VALUE

Cohesion is one of the main pillars of the EU's vision, and measures how firmly member States holds together. Slovenia has invested heavily in the healthcare sector and has approved grants for digital education as part of the [ReactEU](#) funding. It is extremely important that local authorities take this opportunity of a wide range of funds through the EU's Cohesion Policy to ensure strong benefits to the citizens. This is a unique possibility because the EU has opened up almost [1/3 of its budget](#) to Cohesion Policy, which is unique in the world.

To be successful, cohesion policy need to be flexible enough to tailor to the regions' needs and be simple to process for the final beneficiaries, otherwise local authorities might turn to other external investors. This is especially important for projects like [Interreg](#), which is one of the most visible EU policies for citizens.

2. COVID-19 RECOVERY: WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE NEED?

Young people have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are two main areas that need focusing: education and employment. A large majority of youth don't believe their academic track prepares them for the future work place. This causes difficulties during the transition period from leaving full time education to starting a first job. However, these problems have existed for some time and were only exasperated during the pandemic. [Young people need to be included](#) in the decision making process to consult on the best implementation of policies, especially after the success of the [EU Youth Dialogue](#) which started its 8th cycle in July 2021. It is important to focus on socially and economically vulnerable youth as it is easier for this category to feel excluded and unaware of opportunities open for them. Scholarships in education can provide a good stepping stone to create a more financially stable life.

3. HOW TO MAKE SURE THAT SOCIAL RIGHTS ARE RESPECTED IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY?

[Platform work](#) is relatively new in the labor market, but this new form of online work supply has been rapidly growing over the past two decades. The flexible balance between supply and demand can open opportunities for a less discriminatory working environment, but this will only thrive if the appropriate measures are put in place. It is extremely important that the EU supports the right to connectivity because the internet has proven to be a lot more than just a social entertainment platform, but has instead become a necessity nowadays. To make sure social rights are respected in an online setting, a single European digital market with clear workers' rights is needed. It is important to stress that this development should reach all corners of the EU, urban and rural.

Conclusions

The COVID pandemic has put pressure on all sectors and might still push people to adapt to an online work environment. The EU has to make sure it is ahead of the curve and provide young workers with understandable and strong social rights in a digital economy. The COVID crises brought to light inequalities and this is why effective local cohesion policies are needed to help people. The future can be seen with optimism, as possibilities for young citizens continues to increase.