

FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
TO THE OPINIONS OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
PLENARY SESSION OF MAY 2021
96th REPORT¹

¹ Including the follow-up to one opinion adopted during the March 2021 plenary session.

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
DG JUST		
1.	<u>A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025</u> Rapporteur: Yoomi RENSTRÖM (SE/PES)	COM(2020) 565 final COR-2020-04617-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/009
DG SANTE		
2.	<u>European Health Union: Reinforcing the EU's resilience</u> Rapporteur: Roberto CIAMBETTI (IT/ECR)	COM(2020) 724 final COR-2020-05487-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/013
3.	<u>Cross-border health threats and the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control</u> Rapporteur: Olgierd GEBLEWICZ (PL/EPP)	Mandatory referral COM(2020) 726 final COM(2020) 727 final COR-2020-05624-00-02-AC-TRA NAT-VII/014
4.	<u>A pharmaceutical strategy for Europe and legislative proposal for changing the mandate of the European Medicines Agency (EMA)</u> Rapporteur: Birgitta SACRÉDEUS (SE/EPP)	Mandatory referral COM(2020) 725 final COM(2020) 761 final COR-2020-05525-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/015
DG ENER		
5.	<u>Powering a climate-neutral economy: An EU Strategy for Energy System Integration</u> Rapporteur: Gunārs ANSIŅŠ (LV/RENEW E.)	COM(2020) 299 final COR-2020-04014-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/011
6. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of March 2021	<u>A Renovation Wave for Europe - greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives</u> Rapporteur: Enrico ROSSI (IT/PES)	COM(2020) 662 final COR-2020-02786-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/008

DG ENV		
7.	<u>Safe and sustainable chemicals for a toxic-free environment in Europe's cities and regions</u> Rapporteur: Adam STRUZIK (PL/EPP)	COM(2020) 667 final COR-2020-05137-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/014
DG ENV		
8.	<u>Local and regional authorities protecting the marine environment</u> Rapporteur: Emma NOHRÈN (SE/GREENS)	Council presidency referral COR-2021-00292-00-01-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/015
DG EMPL		
9.	<u>The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights from a local and regional perspective</u> Rapporteur-General: Anne KARJALAINEN (FI/PES)	Council presidency referral COM(2021) 102 final COR-2021-01127-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/019
10.	<u>Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</u> Rapporteur-General: Daniela BALLICO (IT/ECR)	COM(2020) 101 final COR-2021-01679-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/020
DG REGIO		
11.	<u>Experiences and lessons learned by regions and cities during the COVID-19 crisis</u> Rapporteur: Joke SCHAUVLIEGE (BE/EPP)	Outlook opinion COR-2020-04155-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/011
DG CNECT		
12.	<u>Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan</u> Rapporteur: Jan TREI (EE/EPP)	COM(2020) 784 final COR-2021- 00051-00-01-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/018

DG EAC		
13.	<u>Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027</u> Rapporteur-General: Gillian COUGHLAN (IE/RENEW E.)	COM(2020) 624 final COR-2020-04769-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/011
DG NEAR		
14.	<u>Enlargement Package 2020</u> Rapporteur: Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ (HR/EPP)	COM(2020) 641 final COM(2020) 660 final COR-2020-05059-00-00-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/004

<p>N°1 A Union of equality: EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 COM(2020) 565 final COR-2020-04617 – SEDEC-VII/009 144th plenary session – May 2021 Rapporteur: Yoomi RENSTRÖM (SE/PES) DG JUST – Commissioner DALLI</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>12. urges the Commission to consider the anti-racism action plan from a broader perspective and in conjunction with EU immigration policy and the common European asylum policy.</p>	<p>The Commission will ensure full synergies between the EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025 and the action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027, which is part of the new approach to migration proposed in the new Pact on Migration and Asylum. Both action plans endorse an intersectional approach and take into account the combination of personal characteristics, such as the racial or ethnic origin and migrant background.</p> <p>The action plan on integration and inclusion promotes an integrated approach to migrants' inclusion and aims to create close synergies with EU strategies to foster equality, including the EU anti-racism action plan. As a concrete illustration, the action plan on integration and inclusion encourages Member States to align national integration strategies with national action plans against racism and racial discrimination.</p> <p>EU asylum rules, in line with Geneva Convention, already provide protection from persecution including based on reasons such as racial origin or membership to a particular social group. The Pact on Asylum and Migration and its accompanying legislative proposals will help maintain such a system of protection for those in genuine need.</p>
<p>13. highlights the need for comprehensive data on discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin in Europe (...).</p> <p>14. takes the view that equality data provides insight into the extent of structural racism and how it can be combated, but that there is a</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of data disaggregated by ethnic and racial origin and works closely on that matter with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. The latter includes statistical cooperation between the agency and the Commission (Eurostat).</p>

<p>need for new methods of collecting data on discrimination and equality.</p>	<p>Since 2017, the Commission is working closely with Member States through the subgroup on equality data of the High-level group on non-discrimination and diversity. The subgroup issued guidelines on the collection and use of equality data and is working on specific guidelines for data disaggregated by ethnic and racial origin. The Commission presented the new guidelines during the Equality data round table on 30 September 2021. The guidelines focusing specifically on ethnic and racial data will support the common guiding principles of the national action plans against racism in the Member States. Data disaggregated by racial or ethnic origin will respect the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation such as anonymity.</p>
<p>21. reiterates its call for "robust measures to defend civil liberties and democracy in an increasingly digitalised era, including steps to reduce the risks of a 'digital big brother' and to fight fake news, disinformation campaigns, hate speech and discrimination, particularly racism, in the digital realm, regardless of whether these negative phenomena originate within or outside the EU".</p>	<p>The Commission uses all the tools at its disposal to foster proper implementation of the 2008 Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia. There are currently seven infringement proceedings ongoing against Member States to ensure that the criminalisation of hate speech, including when occurring online, as well to ensure that hate crime is correctly transposed into national law.</p> <p>To complement the Commission's efforts to ensure the correct transposition of the Framework Decision and, as recognised by the Anti-racism action plan, the Commission has put in place a policy response to racist and xenophobic hate speech online, in particular through the 2016 EU Code of conduct agreed with the major IT platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Tik Tok and LinkedIn). The Code of conduct has contributed to obtain quick and substantial progress in particular on the response by the IT platforms to hate speech notifications.</p> <p>The Commission also adopted on 15 December 2020 the Digital Services Act (DSA) proposal, which looks at the platforms' liability, and sets out a comprehensive approach towards all</p>

	<p>forms of illegal content online. The DSA reinforces some aspects, which are already part of the Code of conduct, such as putting in place notice-and-action mechanisms and the cooperation with trusted flaggers on content moderation. It completes the Code insofar as it establishes clear provisions in terms of transparency and feedback to users, which emerged as weaker points in the evaluations on the implementation of the Code of conduct.</p> <p>In addition, and given the continuum between certain forms of extremism (in particular far right violent extremism) and hate speech and hate crime, synergies have been also established with the Commission’s work on countering extremism online under the EU Internet Forum. As an example, the Commission launched a joint study on right wing extremist groups and the manifestations in terms of hate speech online.</p>
<p>24. considers it essential, in those Member States where local and regional authorities have responsibility for policing, to take action to combat and prevent racism in law enforcement, to scrutinise policing practices, to invest in the training and development of these authorities, and to process data relating to racial profiling in a transparent way</p>	<p>The action plan foresees that the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) will work on comprehensive training packages on human rights, ethics and racism. In this respect, an Expert Group on fundamental rights consisting of experts from the Member States has been set up by CEPOL. The group is mandated to propose how to better address fundamental rights and related topics via the CEPOL portfolio and how to best support the Member States in strengthening the inclusion of fundamental rights issues as a horizontal topic in law enforcement training. The first meeting of the group took place on 26 March 2021 and the group is expected to report on its work early 2022.</p> <p>Under the umbrella of the High Level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, the Working Group on hate crime training and capacity building for national law enforcement has been established to support Member States to develop comprehensive hate crime training strategies.</p>

<p>30. believes that, in addition to adopting anti-racism action plans at national level, it may be useful to have local and regional action plans.</p> <p>32. underlines the importance of involving national, regional and local authorities, as well as civil society, in order to give the national anti-racism action plans legitimacy and to combat racism in Europe more effectively.</p>	<p>The Commission is working with Member States to identify common guiding principles for national action plans by the end of 2021. To that end, a new joint subgroup¹ has been created and met for the first time on 19 March 2021. For this first meeting, the Commission also invited around 20 European-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in the fight against racism, including the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR).</p> <p>While work is in progress, the Commission would like to mention that the action plan foresees that the common guiding principles could include the involvement of regional and local authorities, as well as civil society and equality bodies in the design, implementation and evaluation of national action plans.</p> <p>The national action plans are a successful way for Member States to offer an effective response to racism and racial discrimination, while at the same time adapting concrete actions to their own circumstances. It is for the Member States to decide on whether this adaption to their own circumstances calls for regional and local action plans.</p>
<p>36. urges the Commission to formally involve the Committee each year when it designates one or more "European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity".</p>	<p>The Commission will work closely with the Committee in preparing for the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity awards.</p>
<p>41. looks forward to being involved and cooperating with the future coordinator for anti-racism.</p>	<p>The new anti-racism coordinator, Michaela Moua, appointed on 16 May 2021, has joined forces within the Commission to implement the Commission's policy on preventing and combating racism. Her task is, among others, to interact with Member States, and other European institutions, civil society and academia to strengthen policy responses in the field of antiracism.</p>

¹ Composed of experts from the High Level group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and the High-level group on non-discrimination.

N°2 European Health Union: Reinforcing the EU's resilience
COM(2020) 724 final
COR-2020-05487–NAT-VII-013
144st plenary session – May 2021
Rapporteur: Roberto CIAMBETTI (IT/ECR)
DG SANTE – Commissioner KYRIAKIDES

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>8. urges the European Commission to re-establish the European Network for Highly Infectious Diseases (EuroNHID), a co-funded network of experts in the management of highly infectious diseases from national or regional centres set up to care for patients suffering from such diseases;</p>	<p>The European Network for Highly Infectious Diseases (EuroNHID), co-funded under the first Health Programme until 2009, contributed substantially to reinforcing hospital preparedness across the participating EU Member States. The EuroNHID hospital checklist² became a worldwide reference for biosecurity assessment.</p> <p>In 2019, a new Joint Action with Member States aimed to strengthen international health regulations and preparedness in the EU (SHARP)³ was put in place. It drew inspiration from the EuroNHID hospital checklist and one of the work packages aimed to improve clinical and bio-risk management, hospital preparedness and response to high-consequence infectious diseases.</p> <p>Expected deliverables include the assessment of existing facilities, assessment of country hospital preparedness, inventory and mapping of isolation clinical centres with negative-pressure isolation rooms and a feasibility study for an expert clinical support service for such diseases.</p> <p>The recently adopted EU4Health Programme⁴ (2021-2027) aims to better prepare and protect the European Union from future health threats. This programme will contribute to the upscaling of networking through the European Reference Networks (ERNs) and other transnational networks. It will also consider the extension of ERNs beyond rare diseases to communicable and non-</p>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1198743X14604560>

³ <https://sharpja.eu/>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/health/funding/eu4health_en

	communicable disease.
9. notes that there is a need to set up databases in cross-border areas, shared between the neighbouring countries and regions, that identify available stocks of medical supplies and PPE;	The Commission believes that the European Health Union proposals ⁵ will provide useful input to and synergies to the EU digital single market agenda and the planned future European health data space ⁶ , by encouraging innovation and research, facilitating the sharing of information (including of real world evidence), and supporting the development of a Union-level IT infrastructure for epidemiological surveillance.
13. notes that, although health policy remains a primary competence of the Member States, it is necessary to launch a reflection on how to improve coordination in the field of health and how to strengthen the EU's response to serious cross-border health threats during the debate on the future of Europe, while taking into account the different subnational structures in the field of health and the different competences of the health authorities in individual Member States. These improvements could, among other things, enable the EU Member States to jointly recognise a public health emergency at macroregional or Union level. They could also make it possible to increase the capacity of rescEU, including the capacity to organise stockpiles and emergency medical teams;	<p>As underlined in the Communication on Drawing the early lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic⁷, many of the initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were characterised by unilateral decisions and a lack of coordination. This cost valuable time in the early stages of the pandemic and shows that the right structures were not in place. Lacking a robust EU system to declare an emergency situation and trigger the coordination required, it proved difficult to bring together a consistent and effective early response.</p> <p>As a first step to improve the coordination of public health measures across the EU, the Commission made in November 2020 a set of proposals on building a European Health Union. Many of the actions suggested by the Committee are reflected in European Health Union proposals. For example, Chapter V of the proposed Regulation on cross-border health threats focuses on the recognition of a public health emergency at Union level.</p> <p>The Commission would like to underline that a process to strengthen rescEU⁸ is ongoing. In particular, the Commission is supporting through funding and coordination the development of an Emergency Medical Team (EMT) type 3 field hospital. Moreover, within the framework of the</p>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union_en#documents

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/health/ehealth/dataspace_en

⁷ COM(2021) 380 final (EUR-Lex - 52021DC0380 - EN- EUR-Lex (europa.eu)).

⁸ [rescueEU | European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/civil-protection/humanitarian-aid/rescue_en).

	<p>Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), the Commission is also developing MEDEVAC capacities for both disaster victims and highly infectious disease (HID) patients, with a MEDEVAC for HID provisionally available in 2022.</p> <p>At the same time, the Commission is further developing the stockpile of medical countermeasures (e.g. vaccines and therapeutics) and personal protective equipment (PPE). Moreover, the recently adopted UCPM Regulation 2021/836 amending Decision 2013/1313⁹ enables the Commission to directly procure rescEU capacities¹⁰ in duly justified cases of urgency where national capacities are overwhelmed. These can be rescEU capacities that are already defined as such and/or urgently needed critical assets that are still to be defined under rescEU and then to be procured as such.</p> <p>The Commission recalls that rescEU is an additional layer of protection that has the objective of enhancing both the protection of citizens from disasters and the management of emerging risks.</p>
<p>18. regrets that the Communication does not, unfortunately, specifically refer to the regional and local levels as essential elements in health policy, but confines itself to noting the role of border regions in cross-border cooperation on health;</p> <p>19. believes, furthermore, that greater coordination between all levels of government is needed in order to avert a situation in which the essential autonomy of each local area or region results in inequalities in patient treatment;</p>	<p>The European Health Union package recognises the importance of European solidarity in the protection of public health. It highlights the need to foster Union-wide and cross-sectoral crisis prevention, preparedness, surveillance, management and response capacity of actors at the Union, national, regional and local level, including preparedness exercises.</p> <p>For example, the proposed Union preparedness and response plan is envisaged to include interregional preparedness elements. Moreover, Member States would be requested to report, where relevant, on the implementation of national response plans at</p>

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2021/836 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism; OJ L 185, 26.5.2021, p. 1–22 (EUR-Lex - L:2021:185:TOC - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)).

¹⁰ Limited to ‘material means’ and ‘enabling support services’ (e.g. PPE or vaccines but no modules/civil protection teams) during an emergency as well as in as a preparedness measure (only) for logistical and transport services (not limited to material means in this case).

	the regional and local levels.
20. notes that Member States' health systems exhibited varying degrees of crisis preparedness. In some cases they were not ready to deal with a crisis on such a scale because of under-investment in public health and shortages of medical staff, whereas in others they displayed greater resilience. This demonstrates a need for the European Commission to be able, in close cooperation with each Member State, to regularly assess its epidemic preparedness	The Commission shares the view of the Committee that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that national-level preparedness and response capacities were suboptimal. One of the lessons learned from the pandemic is that the current peer review and mutual learning system was not fully effective, and that there is a need to have minimum preparedness in all Member States and to compare plans in a uniform manner through the use of agreed EU baseline indicators. The Commission believes that the European Health Union proposals address the aforementioned problems. Moreover, the recently adopted UCPM Regulation provides concrete improvements in prevention and preparedness through the definition of Union-wide resilience goals and scenario plans and improved disaster loss data collection to support evidence-based scenario building.
21. notes that the pandemic has hit the most fragile sections of society (the elderly, the sick, children and young people) particularly hard, sometimes throwing into relief the fragility of the global socio-economic system and vulnerability in relation to technology (smart working, remote schooling, etc.); underscores the fact that these sectors therefore require more targeted support, including from the EU;	The Commission shares the view of the Committee that one of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis is that pandemics have heterogeneous effects on the population and have higher negative impact on the most vulnerable. As regards more targeted support to protect the most fragile sections of society, it relates to competencies of the Member States, and therefore, it is up to the Member States to initiate actions in this area.
23. calls to ensure the continuous development of the digital platforms and applications, including the platform for surveillance established under Article 14 of the regulation on serious cross-border threats to health; furthermore, calls for local and regional authorities to be involved in the preparation, auditing and stress-testing of the proposed binding health crisis preparedness and response plans to be drawn up at national and EU levels;	<p>The Commission fully respects the responsibilities of Member States in the definition of their health policy and organisation and delivery of health services. It is therefore for Member States to decide whether and how to involve local and regional authorities in the preparation, auditing and stress-testing of health crisis preparedness and response plans to be drawn up at national level.</p> <p>The Commission agrees on the need for developing digital platforms and applications, including for epidemiological surveillance purposes. The planned common European Health Data Space (EHDS) is</p>

	intended to aim at providing access to health data for the purposes of research, policy-making and regulatory activities, from which the European Medicines Agency and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) could also benefit.
28. calls for joint EU procurement to be used to purchase COVID-19 vaccines and medicines and for these to be used more systematically to avoid competition between Member States. It calls, furthermore, for it to be used to ensure equal and affordable access to other important medicines and medical devices, especially for new innovative antibiotics, new vaccines and curative medicines, and medicines for rare diseases;	The Commission envisages many of the actions called upon by the Committee, for example Article 12 of the proposed Regulation on cross-border health threats focuses on strengthening the Joint Procurement mechanism to improve the purchasing power of participating countries and ensure high transparency standards and equitable access to medical countermeasures.
29. points out that, in terms of investment in health systems, the Communication mentions support to Member States to improve the resilience, accessibility and effectiveness of their health systems, linked to the European Semester, the Social Scoreboard and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and national plans; maintains that the involvement of local and regional authorities in all these instruments and processes needs to be ensured and/or strengthened, following the subsidiarity principle;	<p>The Commission underlines that regional and local authorities can be important partners in the implementation of reforms and investments. In that regard as related to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, they should be appropriately consulted and involved, in accordance with the national legal framework.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility¹¹, sets out a legal requirement on Member States, in Article 4 (q), to include in the recovery and resilience plans a summary of the consultation process, conducted in accordance with the national legal framework, and how the input of stakeholders, including that of local and regional authorities, is reflected in the recovery and resilience plan.</p>
30. identifies as a strategic priority the promotion of remote basic telehealth services by integrated teams of professionals for the treatment and monitoring of home-based patients with chronic and multi-morbidity	<p>The Commission recognises the potential of eHealth solutions to improve the delivery of healthcare.</p> <p>Accordingly, this point was stressed in</p>

¹¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility; OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17–75 ([EUR-Lex - 32021R0241 – EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

conditions; stresses that telemedicine can increasingly transform the home into a place of care, with evident economic and social savings and high efficiency in treatment, prevention and healing;

Commission Staff Working Documents describing health system reform challenges in various editions of the European Semester Process¹².

Further, the Commission has encouraged Member States to make use of current mechanisms at their disposal, such as funding through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, to promote the deployment of telehealth services across their healthcare systems. The Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (Article 3) lists 'health, and economic and social resilience' as one of the six pillars defining the scope of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. At least 20% of the financial allocation of each national Recovery and Resilience Plan also must contribute to the digital transition, including e-health services and applications. Moreover, through EU Health Programme action support is given to Member States in a 'joint action' to address important aspects of health system transformation, in particular the transition to digitally-enabled, integrated, person-centred care in the EU¹³.

The cross-border setting is particularly complex as it is the interface between different regulatory and technical frameworks. Several Member States, with the support of the Commission, have rolled out the cross-border digital health infrastructure MyHealth@EU¹⁴ to enable the cross-border exchange of patient summaries and ePrescriptions. The Commission is preparing a legislative proposal on the creation of a common European Health Data Space (EHDS), which would among others aim at strengthening the exchange of and access to health data for healthcare provision.

In view of the need to strengthen cross-border digital health services, the Commission encourages Member States to continue to make progress in the rollout of MyHealth@EU.

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en

¹³ <https://jadecare.eu/>

¹⁴ ['MyHealth@EU'- Flyer addressed to patients and health professionals | Public Health \(europa.eu\)](#).

40. Strategy for fighting health disinformation. Calls for coordinated measures to be taken by all Member States to monitor and fight health disinformation. As local and regional authorities are in the front line when it comes to tackling health challenges in most Member States, it is these authorities that are most directly affected by the – often deliberate – spread of health misinformation. It is imperative for local and regional authorities to receive unified, coordinated support so that they can combat this issue effectively.

The Commission shares the view of the Committee in relation to the importance of fighting health disinformation and would like to recall that the ECDC has launched projects countering vaccine misinformation¹⁵. In its Communication on the early lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁶, The Commission has committed to developing a more coordinated and sophisticated approach to tackling misinformation and disinformation.

¹⁵ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/about-us/procurement-and-grants/countering-online-vaccine-misinformation-eueea-case-study-project>

¹⁶ COM(2021) 380 final (https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/communication-early-lessons-covid-19-pandemic_en).

<p>N°3 Cross-border health threats and the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control COM(2020) 726 final COM(2020) 727 final COR-2020-05624 – NAT-VII-014 144st plenary session – May 2021 Rapporteur: Olgierd GEBLEWICZ (PL/EPP) DG SANTE – Commissioner KYRIAKIDES</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>Amendment 1</p> <p>1. The Commission, in cooperation with Member States and the relevant Union agencies, shall establish a Union health crisis and pandemic plan (‘the Union preparedness and response plan’) to promote effective and coordinated response to cross-border health threats at Union level.</p> <p>2. The Union preparedness and response plan shall complement the national preparedness and response plans established in accordance with Article 6. [...]</p> <p>4. The Union preparedness and response plan shall include interregional preparedness elements to establish coherent, multi-sectoral, cross-border public health measures, in particular considering capacities for testing, contact tracing, laboratories, and specialised treatment or intensive care across neighbouring regions. Regions shall be fully involved at political level in drawing up and implementing these plans. The plans shall include preparedness and response means to address the situation of those citizens with higher risks. [...]</p> <p>Amendment 2</p> <p>1. When preparing national preparedness and response plans each Member State shall coordinate with the Commission in order to reach consistency with the Union preparedness</p>	<p>The Commission fully respects the responsibilities of Member States in the definition of their health policy and organisation and delivery of health services. Specifically, the decision to set up subnational preparedness and response plans and the way to involve local and regional authorities in the implementation of national preparedness and response plans falls within the competencies of the Member States. It is therefore for Member States to decide whether to initiate actions in this area.</p>

<p>and response plan, also inform without delay the Commission and the HSC of any substantial revision of the national plan.</p> <p>If applicable, where local and regional authorities have significant public health responsibilities in the national health system, national plans should include subnational preparedness and response plans.</p> <p>2. National preparedness and response plans should specify that inter-regional, cross-border contact groups can or should be set up in border areas to prepare and coordinate actions in regions on both sides of the border in the event of a health threat emerging.</p>	
<p>8. points out that, in addition to fighting the pandemic, the EU is faced with the serious problem of health system inequalities and permanent shortage of medical personnel in some parts, which require also our attention;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view of the Committee in relation to health system inequalities and shortage of medical personnel. The Commission believes that the European Health Union proposals¹ address the aforementioned problems. For example, the proposed revised European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control's (ECDC) mandate envisages monitoring health system indicators, such as intensive care capacity or medical staff availability, to spot and mitigate potential shortages early and make sure treatment remains available to people (Article 3(2)(e)).</p>
<p>9. is concerned that the local and regional level is not properly taken into account in the proposal, and that cross-border issues are treated from the perspective of national borders rather than the specific needs of border regions;</p>	<p>The Commission does not share the view of the Committee that cross-border issues are not treated from the specific needs of border regions. Within the proposal for a Regulation on serious cross-border threats to health², Article 5(4) envisages that the Union preparedness and response plan shall include interregional preparedness elements. Moreover, Member States are requested to report relevant implementation of epidemic response at regional and local level (Article 7(1)(c)).</p>
<p>20. points out that the current crisis has revealed</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the view</p>

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union_en

² COM(2020) 727 final ([EUR-Lex - 52020PC0727 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

<p>the existing threats to the cross-border healthcare system and has created additional barriers to cooperation between regions. Differences in competences and administrative difficulties arising from different legal provisions have become major challenges in achieving more effective and improved healthcare management in border regions;</p>	<p>expressed by the Committee that one of the lessons learned from the pandemic is that coordination of health measures and cooperation are essential to achieve an effective practical response. The European Health Union proposals aim to strengthen coordination to be able to more effectively respond to cross-border health threats.</p>
<p>21. calls for the swift adoption of appropriate legal solutions, a system of incentives and the promotion of good practices to secure lasting improvements to healthcare cooperation between border regions, in particular by taking into account the possibility or necessity of setting up, within the framework of national preparedness and response plans, interregional, cross-border contact groups, which would prepare and coordinate actions in the regions on both sides of the border in the event of a health threat emerging;</p>	<p>The pandemic showed that viruses do not stop at borders, and that the strongest response and crisis management takes place via regional and international solidarity and cooperation. Within the proposal for a Regulation on serious cross-border threats to health, the Commission proposes to couple the Union health crisis and pandemic preparedness plan with updates to Member States' preparedness and response plans so as to ensure they are compatible within the regional level structures (Recital 7).</p>
<p>24. calls, therefore, on the Commission to put forward a proposal to ensure a minimum level of permeability of borders and related cross-border cooperation in the field of health in order to maintain or, where necessary, improve the provision of services in this area, including in crisis situations, as has been the case with the COVID-19 pandemic;</p>	<p>As outlined in the Communication on a European Health Union of 11 November 2020³, the Commission recommends a reinforced framework for cross-border cooperation against all health threats in order to better protect lives and the internal market, as well as to maintain the highest standards in the protection of human rights and civil liberties.</p>
<p>25. suggests promoting the conclusion of permanent health cooperation agreements between the competent authorities of the appropriate levels in various countries in order to ensure the exchange of patients in crisis situations. These agreements must also take account of the fact that the EU has common borders with third countries;</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's position. The Commission believes that the pandemic has shown many areas in which an EU preparedness and response plan could bring value added at the EU level, including transferring intensive-care patients between Member States.</p>
<p>31. underlines the importance of capacity to mobilise and deploy the EU Health Task Force</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view of the Committee.</p>

³ [COM\(2020\) 724 final](#).

to assist local response in Member States;	
35. believes that the ECDC can ensure epidemiological surveillance via integrated systems enabling real-time surveillance by deploying modern technologies and available artificial intelligence modelling applications.	As underlined in the Communication on Drawing the early lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic ⁴ , the Commission considers that a new European pandemic information gathering system, building on the existing Early Warning and Response System and an upgrade of the European Surveillance System ⁵ , should be set up at European level, to manage and exchange data in real time. This should focus on Member States providing timely information, ranging from early signals of potential threats to concrete data on cases, exposures, risk factors, health outcomes and healthcare capacity.

⁴ [COM\(2021\) 380 final](#).

⁵ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/european-surveillance-system-tessy>

<p>N°4 A pharmaceutical strategy for Europe and legislative proposal for changing the mandate of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) COM(2020) 725 final COM(2020) 761 final COR-2020-05525 – NAT-VII-015 144st plenary session – May 2021 Rapporteur: Birgitta SACRÉDEUS (SE/EPP) DG SANTE – Commissioner KYRIAKIDES</p>	
Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>Art 3(5). the working party shall, where appropriate, maintain contact with local and regional authorities with responsibility for healthcare.</p> <p>Art 19(5). the Medical Devices Steering Group shall be supported in its work by a working party comprised of single points of contact from national competent authorities for medical devices established in accordance with</p> <p>Article 23(1). the working party shall, where appropriate, maintain contact with local and regional authorities with responsibility for healthcare.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee that local and regional levels should be involved as much as possible.</p>
<p>Art 14 (5). the Chair may invite representatives of Member States and local and regional authorities, members of scientific committees of the Agency and working parties, and third parties, including representatives of medicinal product interest groups, marketing authorisation holders, developers of medicinal products, clinical trial sponsors, representatives of clinical trial networks, and interest groups representing patients and healthcare professionals to attend its meetings.</p>	<p>The scope of the Emergency Task Force¹ is entirely scientific. Member States’ representatives in the area of medicinal products (e.g. Heads of Medicines Agencies) are better suited to communicate to their regional and local authorities any relevant information stemming out from the work of the Emergency Task Force.</p>
<p>Art 18 (c). as part of its regulatory tasks, make use of digital infrastructures or tools, to facilitate the rapid access to or analysis of</p>	<p>Any processing of personal health data must ensure respect of the fundamental rights to privacy and data protection, and be compliant with the EU</p>

¹ [Mandate, objectives and rules of procedure of the COVID-19 EMA pandemic Task Force \(COVID-ETF\) \(europa.eu\).](https://ec.europa.eu/health/ema/rapid-response/rapid-response-2020-05-14_en)

<p>available electronic health data generated outside the scope of clinical studies, and the exchange of such data between Member States, the Agency, and other Union bodies, in accordance with applicable Union legislation on the protection of personal data;</p> <p>7. stresses that, while access to and exchange of health data and other information related to crisis preparedness in healthcare is essential in order to effectively deal with crises and other major events, it is important to handle sensitive information with great care and to ensure privacy and data security;</p>	<p>data protection regulatory framework. The pharmaceutical strategy for Europe² adopted in November 2020 and the legislative proposals foreseen in the Commission Communication for a pharmaceutical strategy for Europe³, notably the legislative proposal on a European Health Data Space⁴, enabling better healthcare, health research, innovation and evidence-based decisions, will fully take those requirements into account.</p>
<p>18. notes that the pharmaceuticals market is currently dysfunctional, with secret price agreements and a lack of transparency. Companies may choose not to market their medicines in certain countries. It is therefore positive that the strategy seeks to promote competition in the pharmaceutical market in various ways, including through a review of competition law. In this context, measures to stimulate access to generic and biosimilar medicines are urgently needed;</p>	<p>The sound functioning of the internal market as established in Article 114 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union is a pillar of the EU pharmaceuticals system. Reducing obstacles to access to medicines across the EU Member States is an objective of the pharmaceutical strategy for Europe.</p> <p>Affordability of medicines is another key objective. Sound competition can lead to a reduction on prices of medicines. The Commission plans to continue to work, including through the exchange of best practices, on the uptake of biosimilars, in order to stimulate competition. It should be clarified that this is not a review of the rules on competition as such, but a review of the general pharmaceutical legislation to address aspects that impede the competitive functioning of the markets and to take into account of market effects impacting on affordability.</p> <p>As stated in the roadmap/inception impact assessment⁵ for the revision of the general pharmaceuticals acts, the revision of the system of regulatory incentives (data exclusivity, market protection) will include options to improve the</p>

² COM(2020) 761 final ([EUR-Lex - 52020DC0761 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

³ [A pharmaceutical strategy for Europe | Public Health \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁴ [Digital health data and services – the European health data space \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12963-Revision-of-the-EU-general-pharmaceuticals-legislation_en

	<p>provisions relevant to competition considerations. This would be relevant for aspects that impact the generic/biosimilar competition and faster market entry of competitor products, which should lead to improved affordability. In addition, the Commission will monitor the compliance of pharmaceutical companies with EU competition law using existing enforcement mechanisms.</p>
<p>19. considers it vital to promote cooperation between Member States on the evaluation of medicinal products, pricing and procurement, and stresses the importance of ensuring that the local and regional level, which in many countries is responsible for and funds healthcare, is represented in such forms of cooperation;</p>	<p>The evaluation of medicinal products is conducted both centrally by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and its committees as well as by the Member States through the decentralised, mutual recognition and national procedures. As members of the EMA committees, the Member States' experts cooperate and play an essential part in the activities of the EMA. In addition, the national competent authorities cooperate through structures such as the Co-ordination Group for Mutual Recognition and Decentralised procedures - Human (CMDh) and meetings of the heads of the national competent authorities responsible for the regulation of medicinal products for human and veterinary use in the European Economic Area.</p> <p>Even though pricing and procurement is a national competence, the strategy aims to foster cooperation in a group of representatives of Member States' competent authorities for pricing and reimbursement, based on mutual learning and best practice exchange on pricing, payment and procurement policies to improve affordability and cost effectiveness of medicines and health systems sustainability.</p>
<p>23. points out that medicine shortages have long been a problem in healthcare, and that this has become even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CoR is therefore in favour of an in-depth mapping of the causes of medicine shortages and welcomes the Commission's intention to revise pharmaceutical legislation to</p>	<p>Securing the supply of medicines across the EU is an important objective of the strategy. The strategy recognises that the root causes of shortages are complex and that diversification of supply must be part of the solution. The Commission is conducting a study⁶ on the characteristics of medicinal products in shortage</p>

⁶ Future-proofing pharmaceutical legislation — study on medicine shortages. Final report expected in September 2021. See: [Third programme for EU action in the field of health 2020 work programme](#) (p.54).

<p>enhance security of supply. The Committee notes that the proposals in the pharmaceutical strategy are not particularly concrete, and looks forward to seeing robust proposals for measures to ensure the EU's strategic autonomy in order to safeguard access to medicines both in normal circumstances and in a crisis;</p>	<p>and their root causes, which will feed into the analysis of measures to ensure security of supply.</p> <p>The concept of ‘open strategic autonomy’ is key when it comes to resilience of supply as it encompasses the need to secure the supply and production of critical medicines, as well as their raw materials and active pharmaceutical ingredients. On the other hand, it recognises that the EU will never be self-sufficient and therefore this goal can only be achieved in combination with the EU’s commitment to open trade and international partnerships. The strategy launched a ‘structured dialogue’ with the actors in the pharmaceuticals manufacturing value chain, public authorities, patient and health non-governmental organisations and the research community. The , first phase of this process which is completed, provides a better understanding of the functioning of global supply chains and identifies the precise causes and drivers of different potential vulnerabilities, including potential dependencies threatening the supply of critical medicines, active pharmaceutical ingredients and raw materials based on data collection and analysis. In a second phase, which is ongoing, the structured dialogue will serve to present a set of possible measures to address the identified vulnerabilities and formulate policy options by the Commission to ensure the security of supply and the availability of critical medicines, active pharmaceutical ingredients and raw materials.</p>
<p>27. welcomes the fact that the Commission is proposing to revise pharmaceutical legislation to strengthen the environmental risk assessment requirements for medicines. It is important for this to cover both the manufacture and the use of medicines. The CoR is very much in favour of international efforts to address environmental risks related to pharmaceutical emissions from</p>	<p>In addition to the international dimension of the pharmaceutical strategy, the Commission is implementing, together with the Member States, the EU strategic approach to pharmaceuticals in the environment⁷ that also includes the following action: encourage, through dialogue and cooperation as part of the Union external policies, action in third countries where pharmaceutical</p>

⁷ [COM\(2019\)128 final \(EUR-Lex - 52019DC0128 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)\)](#).

manufacturing in non-EU countries;	emissions from manufacturing and other sources are suspected of contributing to the global spread of antimicrobial resistance. There are regular bilateral dialogues with representatives of third countries and multilateral dialogues, such as the International Pharmaceutical Regulators Programme ⁸ , where also the aspects related to the environmental risk assessment of pharmaceuticals are discussed.
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⁸ <http://www.iprp.global/home>

N°5 Powering a climate-neutral economy: An EU Strategy for Energy System Integration
COM(2020) 299 final
COR-2020-04014 – ENVE-VII/011
144th plenary session – May 2021
Rapporteur: Gunārs ANSIŅŠ (LV/RE)
DG ENER – Commissioner SIMSON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>15. calls on the Commission to provide maximum support for research into the renovation of buildings subject to traditional landscape or historical constraints so as to ensure a respectful integration of renewable energies, and calls for this issue to be made one of the cornerstones of the new European Bauhaus</p>	<p>On the 14 October 2020, the Commission adopted the strategy on the Renovation Wave¹. The Strategy promotes an encompassing and integrated approach to buildings renovations. Going beyond ‘energy efficiency first’ which is a horizontal guiding principle, it makes the respect for aesthetics and architectural quality one of the key principles for building renovation towards 2030 and 2050, and stresses that renovation must respect design, craftsmanship, heritage and public space conservation principles. This includes a respectful integration of renewable energies in and on buildings.</p> <p>The Commission takes note of the call from the Committee to make research into the renovation of buildings subject to traditional landscape or historical constraints one of the cornerstones of the new European Bauhaus.</p>
<p>17. considers that account should be taken of the additional efforts required in the outermost regions to overcome technical barriers faced by systems that are not interconnected, without access to the internal energy market and without their own provision. This requires huge investments in energy infrastructure (back-up capacity, transmission networks including inter-island submarine cables, energy storage systems, smart grids and logistics for access, transport and storage of less polluting</p>	<p>In the context of the ‘Clean energy for the EU islands’ initiative², the Commission is supporting islands, including the outermost regions, to develop strategies and projects on clean energy transition.</p> <p>Several outermost regions are very prominent partners of the initiative, benefiting from the targeted support and capacity building, but also – bringing in their unique experiences and solutions. As part of the Initiative, the outermost regions of La Palma, Azores and Marie-Galante developed</p>

¹ COM(2020) 662 final.

² https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/markets-and-consumers/clean-energy-eu-islands_en

<p>fuels) which taken together can guarantee the security and quality of energy supply COR-2020-04014-00-01-AC-TRA (EN) 6/11 and the integration of the regions' local energy sources, especially renewable energy of a variable nature;</p>	<p>their clean energy transition agendas and prepared pilot projects linked to smart grids, wind and solar energy. Four outermost region islands (La Palma, La Reunion, Porto Santo (Madeira) and Saint Martin (FR)) have been further selected for support in the most recent call, completed in May 2021.</p> <p>In 2019, the Commission put in place a facility, NESOI - New Energy Solutions Optimized for Islands supported by Horizon 2020, to mobilise at least €100 million in sustainable energy projects in European islands, including the outermost regions.</p> <p>The Resilience and Recovery Facility is another important source of funding for green recovery and energy transition in the outermost regions. For example, Portugal has earmarked €116 million to support clean energy transition strategy of Azores in its Resilience and Recovery Plan.</p>
<p>19. stresses that when developing any energy system, it should be assessed whether it would lead to lower costs for businesses and people. The energy-efficiency-first principle should aim to reduce the climate impact and increase the resource efficiency of integrated energy supply systems as well as improving efficiency for end-users. At the same time, however, care must be taken to ensure that the transition does not go against the interests of consumers, namely that efforts to improve energy efficiency do not lead to higher energy tariffs or other costs for people and businesses without appropriate compensation;</p>	<p>As part of the Better Regulations guidelines, all legislative proposals adopted by the Commission undergo a careful analysis of impacts, including social impacts. The energy efficiency first principle aims at proper assessment of costs and benefits primarily from the societal, but also investor's and final user perspective. Energy efficiency often offers cost-effective solutions to reduce energy bills and the costs of this transition.</p>
<p>28. calls for clear and practical conditions for the use of offshore renewable energy sources in terms of biodiversity considerations. Green energy and biodiversity objectives should not be pitted against each other, but practical ways should be found to achieve them, thereby</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges the importance of ensuring the compatibility of offshore renewables and the EU Biodiversity strategy³ in its offshore renewables strategy.</p> <p>The Commission therefore calls for maritime spatial planning and National Energy and Climate</p>

³ COM(2020) 380 final.

<p>making it easier to realise the offshore energy potential more quickly in practice and ensuring concrete maritime spatial planning, not only in line with the biodiversity requirements, with less disruption for marine life, but also taking into account people's desire to preserve the marine landscape, the growing potential of eco-tourism and demands to preserve the attractiveness of natural surroundings;</p>	<p>Plans to be aligned. They need to ensure that designated sea spaces for offshore energy exploitation are compatible with biodiversity protection, and take into account socio-economic consequences for sectors relying on good health of marine ecosystems and integrate as much as possible other uses of the sea.</p>
<p>31. calls for a special role to be played by ports in the EU's offshore renewable energy strategy through modernising them and ensuring that they take advantage of the new business opportunities for the assembly, production and maintenance of offshore energy installations;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises in its Offshore Renewables strategy⁴ the importance of ports for offshore renewables, and the need for additional investments for upgrading port infrastructure and vessels.</p>
<p>33. notes that according to the EU strategy to reduce methane emissions, the EU accounts for only 5% of global methane emissions. It can therefore be concluded that even the most ambitious EU plans to reduce methane emissions will have little impact on reducing the planet's greenhouse gas emissions. Imports of goods into the EU's single market should only be allowed from countries (or parts thereof) that provide the same standards for greenhouse gas reduction as the EU. Only in this way will it be possible to ensure that the climate targets set by the EU will not adversely affect the competitiveness of the EU and its businesses at global level;</p>	<p>The Commission has made clear in the EU Methane Strategy⁵ that reducing only methane emissions from fossil energy produced in the EU would be insufficient to properly address methane emissions linked to EU energy consumption. The Commission has therefore started promoting emission reductions in its international dialogues. Furthermore, the Commission is currently working on a proposal for a legislative act to reduce methane emissions in the oil, gas and coal sectors and, within this framework, the Commission is assessing possible measures, which include in their scope methane emissions also occurring outside of the EU's borders.⁶</p>
<p>34. calls for the faster detection of methane leaks both through the Copernicus programme and through other tools where the Copernicus programme is not able to provide sufficient data. It is essential to identify areas with significant methane leaks outside the EU and to make this information public, thus enabling</p>	<p>The Commission is assessing options to implement the following actions outlined in the Strategy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. on compulsory measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) for all energy-related methane emissions at company-level, building on the methodology of the existing global

⁴ COM(2020) 741 final.

⁵ COM(2020) 663 final.

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12581-Climate-change-new-rules-to-prevent-methane-leakage-in-the-energy-sector>

<p>EU citizens to make informed choices as to whether to purchase goods produced in such locations. According to the International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook, there are significant differences between oil and gas plants in various countries throughout the world in terms of methane emissions, which shows the potential for significant reductions in methane emissions. The CoR therefore calls both for the avoidance of methane leakage along the production, transport and utilisation chains within the EU and for the prevention of imports of fossil fuels with input from methane leakage during extraction, processing and transport;</p>	<p>voluntary initiative called the Oil and Gas Methane Partnership⁷;</p> <p>2. on requirements to improve leak detection and repair of leaks on all fossil gas infrastructure, as well as any other production, transport or use of fossil gas, including as a feedstock.</p> <p>As regards fugitive emissions from leaks occurring outside the EU but linked to the consumption of fossil energy in the EU, the Commission is promoting action in its international dialogues and assessing various instruments dedicated to improving information on methane emission sources from countries exporting fossil energy to the EU as well as incentives for those countries to voluntarily abate their methane emissions or binding measures to achieve those.</p>
<p>36. calls, at the same time, for ensuring that methane reduction targets do not adversely affect the convergence of European regions or increase socio-economic disparities between them;</p>	<p>The Commission's proposals will be submitted together with an impact assessment in line with the Commission's Better Regulation agenda, which aims to design EU policies and laws so that they achieve their objectives in the most efficient and effective way⁸.</p>
<p>37. calls for the CAP to include effective measures to cut methane emissions from agriculture. Low input systems such as grazing, together with soil protection measures, can make an important contribution to this as part of the new eco-schemes;</p>	<p>The Commission made recommendations in this respect to Member States in the context of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) National Strategic Plans in December 2020.</p> <p>Already under the current CAP, there is a possibility to support extensive animal farming, recognising its role for remote rural areas, while having basic requirements on grassland protection and management. In addition, the Methane strategy advocates for decoupling emissions reduction from overall animal numbers. Also, these aspects are identified among mitigation technologies and practices and will be addressed during discussions with experts in the framework of group set up by the Commission and surely be</p>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/oil-and-gas-industry-commits-new-framework-monitor-report-and-reduce-methane-emissions-2020-nov-23_en

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how_en

	<p>part of the inventory to be developed by the end of the year.</p>
<p>38. calls for greater attention to be paid to European producers in developing technologies and making them available, so that the methane reduction targets do not lead to additional costs for people and businesses, in particular arable and livestock farmers. At the same time, when reducing methane emissions in agriculture and livestock, it is important to ensure there is no rise in food prices</p>	<p>The Commission's proposals will be submitted together with an impact assessment in line with the Commission's Better Regulation agenda, which aims to design EU policies and laws so that they achieve their objectives in the most efficient and effective way⁹.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission recalls that the EU greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction target is based on an economy wide approach and does not aim to target single sectors. No EU economic sector has a specific emission reduction target. This approach allows for the necessary flexibility for all actors across the supply chain.</p>
<p>44. stresses that, given the importance of citizen participation, it should be unthinkable that the EU Energy System Integration Strategy could be implemented successfully without initiatives that promote a bottom-up flow of information and foster information exchange and education at local level; notes that proper stakeholder involvement not only facilitates public support for policy measures, but also promotes a comprehensive and transparent assessment of progress</p>	<p>The Commission runs a number of local initiatives to support the roll-out of sustainable energy solutions through bottom-up approach and community-based action. Examples include the Covenant of Mayors, Coal Regions in Transition, Smart Cities Market Place, Energy Poverty Observatory, Clean Energy for EU Islands Initiative, and the upcoming Energy Community Repository.</p> <p>All these initiatives seek to engage local stakeholders and citizens to facilitate, support and monitor the transition process and empower them to play an increased role in clean energy transition. Through these platforms, tailored support is provided to cities, communities and regions across the EU to develop their sustainable energy and transition plans in close cooperation with the relevant national, regional and local stakeholders.</p>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how_en

N°6 A Renovation Wave for Europe – greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives
COM(2020) 662 final
COR-2020-02786 – ENVE-VII/008
143rd plenary session – March 2021
Rapporteur: Enrico ROSSI (IT/PES)
DG ENER – Commissioner SIMSON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>2. considers that the Renovation Wave can only be deployed fully if it is supported by a complete overhaul of the Clean Energy Package, starting with the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union, along with timely and accurate transposition at national level;</p>	<p>The ‘Fit for 55’ package involves a high number of interlinked legislative initiatives underpinned by individual impact assessments. The revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), as announced in the Renovation Wave strategy, is part of it and in the Commission Work Programme is scheduled for adoption in quarter 4 2021.</p> <p>Strengthening the legal framework of the EPBD is necessary to the goals of the Renovation Wave and to contribute to the increased climate ambition for 2030. The Renovation Wave identified certain areas for regulatory reinforcement in the EPBD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - phased introduction of mandatory minimum energy performance standards for all types of buildings; - update of the framework for Energy Performance Certificates, including considering a uniform EU machine-readable data format for certificates and more stringent provisions on availability and accessibility of databases and digital repositories for EPCs; - proposal on Building Renovation Passports; - possible introduction of a ‘deep renovation’ standard; and - strengthening informative tools and metrics to better address the decarbonisation of building emissions.
<p>1. considers that it is essential that this policy be incorporated into the recovery and</p>	<p>The Commission, in its guidance to Member States, indicated energy renovations in buildings</p>

<p>resilience programmes as well as under the European Structural and Investment Funds so that efforts are coordinated, avoiding separate and inefficient measures;</p>	<p>as a flagship priority under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. This was also reinforced by the publication of an example component for investments and reforms on the Renovation Wave. At this stage, a great majority of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans submitted to the Commission address building renovations.</p> <p>Member States and regions can also draw on the significant funding available under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), especially for investments supporting the transition to a zero carbon economy and resilient Europe. It includes support to energy efficiency and building renovation along the objectives of the renovation wave. Under the 2014-2020 ESIF about €13 billion were invested into energy efficiency in buildings.</p>
<p>8. calls on the Commission to support the development of life-cycle assessments of the climate impact of buildings, together with corresponding standards, environmental product declarations, databases for building materials and products, and to assess the possibility of introducing a synthetic indicator on life-cycle performances of buildings as a voluntary scheme;</p>	<p>Level(s) has been developed in close collaboration with the sector since 2015 and was published in 2020. This common language is a framework for building sustainability and consists of core indicators covering the full life cycle, including whole life carbon, resilience to climate change and thermal comfort. This voluntary framework is based on existing standards, and is ready to be used. Some Member States are including whole life carbon in their building regulations, and the Commission is now looking at how to bring this concept into legislation by developing a roadmap for the reduction of whole life carbon. This roadmap was also announced in the Renovation Wave communication.</p>
<p>16. calls on the Commission to build upon the EPBD framework to develop a mechanism to be devised which can categorise buildings using criteria geared to the areas of intervention identified by the Renovation Wave.</p>	<p>The EU Building Stock Observatory (BSO) can assist Member States in taking stock and identifying segments in need, and in linking renovation strategies to social indicators and policies to address energy poverty.</p> <p>The Commission is working to revamp the EU BSO aiming to restructure and rationalise the list of indicators and collect more data. This will make the BSO more user friendly and create links</p>

	with ongoing initiatives including the EU Energy Poverty Observatory, Horizon2020 projects, EUROSTAT, national data sources studies, etc.
<p>17. calls for ambitious efforts to decarbonise residential heating and cooling which is responsible for more than 80% of the overall energy consumption of buildings in the EU; to this aim, reiterates how important it is to promote the decarbonisation of the energy sources used, and urges the prompt and consistent expansion of renewable, and where possible local, energy sources in order to significantly reduce Europe's CO2 emissions;</p>	<p>Under Horizon Europe, the co-funded Clean Energy Transition European Partnership will support the development of efficient zero-emission heating and cooling solutions and their integration in the built environment.</p> <p>The different legislative revisions under the ‘Fit for 55 Package’, and in particular the revision of the Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy and Energy Performance of Buildings Directives, will step up EU efforts toward the decarbonisation of heating and cooling in the residential sector.</p>
<p>24. asks the Commission to provide maximum support for research into the renovation of buildings in areas subject to landscape-based or historical constraints and thus to ensure a respectful integration of renewable energies. Likewise calls for this issue to be made one of the cornerstones of the New European Bauhaus initiative.</p>	<p>Under Horizon Europe, the co-programmed Built4People partnership will fund cross-cutting demonstration projects addressing the challenge of built environment transformation towards sustainable living, fully in line with the New European Bauhaus spirit and relevant guidelines (Davos Quality Tool, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) quality principles, work of the Architects’ Council of Europe) to ensure as well the safeguarding of the historical environment and the architectural values of the building stock.</p> <p>A set of eight topics will be opened in 2021-2022 for a total EU funding of €124 million, which are relevant for the National Enforcement Bodies (NEB) and specifically the Research and Innovation Action HORIZON-CL5-2022-D4-02-03 on <i>sustainable and resource-efficient solutions for an open, accessible, inclusive, resilient and low-emission cultural heritage: prevention, monitoring, management, maintenance, and renovation</i> with €20 million total budget. There will also be an ambitious Coordination and Support Action (CSA) to pull, coordinate and advertise Bauhaus-relevant innovation across the aforementioned actions. That CSA will maximise the impacts and visibility of the demonstration</p>

	<p>projects funded with the innovation actions and will ensure the best coordination with the other components and initiatives of NEB.</p> <p>Moreover, the European Mission on Climate Neutral and Smart Cities will address, as a new research and innovation mission under Horizon Europe proposes to support 100 European cities in their systemic transformation towards climate-neutrality by 2030.</p>
<p>37. urges the Commission to step up the promotion and exchange of best practices in the field of combating energy poverty, the linking up of existing observatories and to support the set-up of observatories in those Member States that do not have one yet;</p>	<p>The Commission has kick-started the service contract that will build on the work of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory. The Observatory will turn into an ‘Advisory Hub’ that will assist, coordinate and promote successful local actions for energy poverty alleviation involving both public and private stakeholders. The new platform will offer the full contents of its upcoming trainings and its updated indicator dashboard as of January 2022. In the meantime, calls for projects to receive direct technical assistance are being prepared.</p> <p>Importantly, the new platform will make it easier for practitioners to identify good practices by regional specificities, type of measure and source of financial support. Such a classification will allow for a better understanding of existing solutions in the EU and consequently a better EU, national, regional and local assessment of the energy poverty dimension and its evolution over time.</p> <p>The Commission is paving the way for more synergies across local energy transition initiatives. One of the priorities is to strengthen the cooperation on the Covenant of Mayors and the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub. The upcoming reedition of the EU Building Stock Observatory and the soon to be established Energy Communities Repository will also contribute to the Advisory Hub’s main objectives.</p>
<p>32. with a view to speeding up the deployment</p>	<p>The demand-driven project development</p>

of the Renovation Wave, urges the Commission and Member States to establish financing mechanisms to assist local and regional authorities with preparing feasibility plans for the energy renovation of inefficient districts, starting with scaling up the European City Facility, Urban Innovative Actions and the European Urban Initiative as well as creating new instruments, further developing the proposals outlined in the Staff Working Document accompanying the Strategy;

assistance facilities, like the European Local Energy Assistance (ELENA)¹, have the potential to further push a faster and more effective roll-out of funds, and therefore support the achievement of the milestones and targets and scale up building renovation in the EU. As stated in the draft Advisory Hub Agreement, the total EU budget contribution to ELENA for 2021-2024 is €78 million from InvestEU programme, including €60 million for energy efficiency.

The Clean Energy Transition (CET)² sub-programme under LIFE programme will dedicate support to delivering public sector investments with the continuation of the successful support schemes like the European City Facility, the Project Development Assistance. LIFE-CET will also fund projects with innovative approaches to integrated buildings renovation services, including testing and replicating promising concepts of one-stop-shops or other type of comprehensive assistance to building owners covering all the steps of building renovation journey. Finally, LIFE-CET will fund projects delivering capacity building in public authorities at local/regional level including in developing their strategies and plans for buildings renovation.

In the framework of the cohesion policy, the development of financial instruments for investments in energy efficiency is encouraged and the FI-compass platform with the European Investment Bank provides advisory services to authorities. Content is also developed by the Energy Efficiency Financial Institutions Group, which in one of their working groups, covers the benefits of renovation for the well-being and health of people and for mitigating energy poverty.

Past actions have already tackled this need and have proven useful experience for local and regional authorities to draw on. These actions

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/sustainable/news/2018-06-28-elena_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/life/wp-call/2021-2024/call-fiche_life-2021-cet_en.pdf

	include, inter alia, Horizon2020 projects on financings, such as the Multiple benefits of energy efficiency (mbenefits.eu) ³ project, and the Informed Cities MICAT project ⁴ .
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³ <https://www.mbenefits.eu/>

⁴ <https://informedcities.eu/home/>

<p>N°7 Safe and sustainable chemicals for a toxic-free environment in Europe’s cities and regions COM(2020) 667 final COR-2020-05137 – ENVE-VII/014 144th plenary session – May 2021 Rapporteur: Adam STRUZIK (PL/EPP) DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS</p>	
Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>1. strongly welcomes and supports the steps leading to the implementation of the chemicals strategy.[...]</p>	<p>The Commission would like to thank the Committee for its strong support to the Strategy’s ambition and vision. The Commission is fully committed to ensure timely implementation of the actions announced.</p>
<p>5. calls for recognition of the importance of multilevel governance in order to effectively link the goals and objectives of the chemicals strategy to the green recovery of the European economy; [...]</p> <p>6. underlines that National Recovery and Resilience Plans represent an opportunity to use the potential of multilevel governance, including in implementing the chemicals strategy. [...]</p> <p>13. notes that local and regional authorities have an important role to play in implementing the chemicals strategy. [...]</p> <p>11. expresses the keen interest and willingness of regions and local authorities to take action to improve the safe production and sustainable use of chemicals. [...]</p> <p>12. [...] highlights the possibility of preparing and conducting campaigns to raise public awareness of the principles and objectives of the chemicals strategy. [...]</p> <p>21. [...] encourages the European Commission</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of the role of the regional and local levels in achieving the societal transition defined in the Chemicals strategy¹. The Commission welcomes the interest by the Committee in supporting the objectives of the Strategy and in mobilising all societal actors at regional and local levels.</p> <p>The Commission would be interested in learning more from the experience gained through the Committee's network of regional hubs on how support the transition to safe and sustainable chemicals. Synergies shall be ensured in particular through the work of the upcoming Zero Pollution Stakeholders Platform.</p> <p>The Commission also recognises the importance of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans and is providing recommendations to Member States on how to best integrate the objectives of the Chemicals strategy.</p>

¹ COM(2020) 667 final.

<p>to draw on the experience gained through the CoR's network of regional hubs.</p>	
<p>7. draws attention to a number of legal, financial and technical barriers faced by local and regional authorities in the handling of chemicals. A coherent, predictable and simplified legal framework will contribute to a uniform approach to the assessment and management of chemicals in all EU countries. This will limit the emergence of further legal gaps between the EU and other regions. In addition, grants and technical assistance will enable local and regional authorities to support investments related to the development, commercialisation, implementation and uptake of safe and sustainable substances, materials and products.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note and is willing to further explore with the Committee how to ensure that regional and local authorities support investments related to the transition to safe and sustainable chemicals.</p>
<p>10. calls for a clear and coherent policy to ensure, at both local and regional and global levels, tools and resources to promote the circular industry, from designing solutions to implementing sustainable production, distribution, use, recycling, recovery and disposal of chemicals, while respecting the environment and the health of the population. [...]</p>	<p>The Chemicals strategy takes a holistic approach to chemicals, integrating safety with other sustainability dimensions, including climate neutrality, circular economy, biodiversity protection and zero pollution. This approach is reflected in several actions, including the ongoing development of criteria for safe and sustainable chemicals, the actions to promote non-toxic material cycles, as well as the ongoing assessment of how to revise REACH registration requirements in order to ensure information on the overall environmental footprint of chemicals.</p>
<p>15. stresses the particular importance of SME innovation and investment capacity to safe and sustainable production and use of materials, the potential of which can be effectively harnessed through support and dialogue at local and regional level. SMEs in particular offer specific chemicals for innovative speciality and niche products and adaptation to the needs of these. [...]</p> <p>56. [...] calls on the European Union to provide direct access to funding for projects supporting</p>	<p>Innovation and competitiveness of the European industry are key objectives of the Chemicals strategy.</p> <p>The Commission is aware that industry, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), need to be supported in the transition and that workers will need to be reskilled. A number of EU financial instruments will support this transition, some steered by the Commission and others under the responsibility of Member States. In particular, the Recovery and Resilience</p>

<p>sustainable chemicals. The EU should also provide additional support to regions in transition.</p> <p>57. stresses the need to provide legal and financial instruments to promote and support, at local and regional level, innovative solutions that contribute to the emergence of a new generation of chemicals and the green transition of the chemical industry.</p>	<p>Facility, InvestEU, Cohesion funds, the Life Programme, Horizon Europe, the Just Transition Fund, the Digital Europe programme and Erasmus+ will promote actions on safe and sustainable chemicals, materials and products; sorting and decontamination of waste streams; low environmental impact production processes; innovative business models; promoting adequate skills at all levels, access to risk finance, in particular for SMEs, and interregional collaboration along sustainable chemicals value chains.</p> <p>The cohesion funds and the national recovery and resilience plans, in particular, will allow to target interventions according to geographical specificities.</p>
<p>22. [...] calls on the Commission to ensure that changes to European legislation resulting from this strategy always comply with the Commission's Better Regulation agenda, and are therefore always subject to a corresponding impact assessment. This is particularly necessary in impact assessments and in the identification and definition of "essential societal uses", [...]</p> <p>27. it is necessary to review and strengthen the REACH and CLP regulations, and their interface with OSH (Occupational Safety and Health) legislation, as well as to simplify procedures; draws attention to the need for the European Commission to consult the national authorities responsible for implementing the REACH regulation and OSH legislation before introducing new legislation. [...]</p> <p>36. recommends that, when introducing changes</p>	<p>The Chemicals strategy aims at consolidating and strengthening the legal framework on chemicals, and announces that the REACH² and Classification, Labelling Packaging³ regulations will be revised in a targeted way in order to achieve the objectives of the strategy.</p> <p>All the legal proposals announced in the strategy are being drafted by the Commission in line with the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines and will include impact assessments and consultations of relevant stakeholders. The impact assessments will look at the socio, economic and environmental impacts and support the Commission in the definition of its policy proposals.</p> <p>On the definition of essential uses, the Commission will launch a supporting contract for a study, where all relevant stakeholders will be consulted and information will be gathered. The</p>

² Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), establishing a European Chemicals Agency, amending Directive 1999/45/EC and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 793/93 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1488/94 as well as Council Directive 76/769/EEC and Commission Directives 91/155/EEC, 93/67/EEC, 93/105/EC and 2000/21/EC; OJ L 396, 30.12.2006, p. 1–854.

³ Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures, amending and repealing Directives 67/548/EEC and 1999/45/EC, and amending Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 (Text with EEA relevance); OJ L 353, 31.12.2008, p. 1–1355.

<p>relating to implementing the chemicals strategy, account should be taken of the time needed to adapt/convert facilities [...]</p>	<p>contract will feed into the impact assessment for the revision of REACH.</p>
<p>23. recognises the great potential of the agriculture, textiles, electronic and construction sectors in implementing the chemicals strategy. [...]</p> <p>24. points out that the agricultural industry is an important recipient of chemicals, including plant protection products and fertilisers, which directly impact human health and the state of the environment. [...]</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of those sectors for achieving the objectives of the Chemicals strategy. More targeted actions to lower the impacts of agriculture on the environment have been announced by the Commission in the Biodiversity Strategy 2030⁴ and in the Farm to Fork Strategy⁵.</p>
<p>26. draws attention to the fact that the changes that are being implemented give regional and local authorities real legal means to be able to protect areas and their inhabitants from the risks associated with both the use of chemicals and the risks associated with the management of hazardous chemicals during the transformation of the chemicals sector.</p>	<p>The Commission would like to recall that the regulation of chemicals is harmonized at the EU level, so directly applicable in all EU Member States. However, the regional and local authorities have a key role to play in protecting people and the environment from hazardous chemicals, for instance when granting permits for industrial production, for the management of waste, and the remediation and decontamination of polluted soils and waters.</p>
<p>29. stresses the need to use a single instrument to coordinate public action. This will ensure access to an updated set of information about planned and ongoing initiatives relating to chemicals by authorities in all areas of legislation.</p> <p>16. calls for requirements for local authorities and SMEs to be comprehensible, transparent and reasonably administratively manageable [...]</p> <p>22. encourages the Commission and the chemicals regulation authorities (ECHA, Member State authorities) and expert panels (e.g. RAC) to facilitate greater procedural transparency and scientific exchanges with the</p>	<p>The ‘One substance, one assessment’ process will ensure that the initiation and priority setting of the safety assessments are done in a coordinated and transparent manner, and that a single tool will provide an up-to-date overview of all planned and ongoing initiatives on chemicals by authorities across legislation. The Commission will also make a proposal in 2023 to remove legislative obstacles for re-use of data, to streamline the data flow across legislation and to extend the open data and transparency principles from the EU food safety sector to other pieces of chemical legislation.</p>

⁴ [Biodiversity strategy for 2030 \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_biodiversity_strategy_2030.pdf)

⁵ [Farm to Fork Strategy \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_farm_to_fork_strategy_2020.pdf)

<p>companies and regions concerned in the interests of practical and sustainable solutions, [...]</p>	
<p>30. notes that Europe needs a strong and coordinated enforcement policy, particularly for imports, including through online sales, which account for the majority of cases of non-compliance with rules on substances in products;</p> <p>32. stresses the need to strengthen monitoring and implementation of existing legislation. Consistent and simplified legislation covering the EU market will have an impact on a unified and coordinated policy of monitoring and enforcing it.</p> <p>33. [...] The strategy should [...] focus on creating a level playing field for all stakeholders. [...]</p>	<p>To ensure a level playing field between EU and non-EU players, the Commission is fully committed to support Member States in order to step up enforcement of its rules on chemicals both internally and at its borders, as well as to promote them as a gold standard worldwide. Commission services have started the implementation of the actions announced in the Chemicals strategy, as well as the enforcement of chemicals legislation through an integrated framework. Two legal proposals are envisaged: implementing act under the Market Surveillance Regulation to set uniform conditions and frequency of checks for certain products (2022-2023) and actions to improve the enforcement as part of the REACH revision (2022).</p>
<p>38. stresses the importance of measures aiming to develop scientific knowledge on the presence of hazardous chemicals in the environment. [...]</p>	<p>The Commission fully agrees with the statement, and, as announced in the Chemicals strategy, is fully committed to implement actions to improve knowledge and information on chemicals, their properties, their uses and their impacts on the environment.</p>
<p>39. stresses the need to support the efforts of different sectors and businesses to substitute potentially hazardous substances by promoting research and development, investing in sustainable chemicals and technological innovation.</p> <p>40. points to the need to disseminate and introduce new standards and certifications related to sustainable chemicals. The application of environmental criteria by regional and local authorities would influence the motivation to use, and promotion of, sustainable products.</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of supporting industries to move towards safe and sustainable chemicals. The Commission will develop criteria on ‘Safe and sustainable by design’ chemicals in order to promote research and facilitate the development and uptake of safer and more sustainable chemicals and materials. The criteria shall also support the application of sustainability criteria on chemicals, materials and products by all relevant actors, including regional and local authorities.</p>
<p>42. points out that the implementation of the chemicals strategy will depend to a large extent on achieving the objectives of the circular</p>	<p>The strategy puts a strong focus on the links between the sound management of chemicals and the circular economy, and aims to achieve non-</p>

<p>economy. [...]</p> <p>43. [...] On these issues, the EU should support both regional and local authorities as well as businesses upgrading their facilities or changing how they work, as well as investing in sustainable innovation that will clean up waste streams, increase recycling and reduce landfilling, particularly of plastics and textiles.</p>	<p>toxic material cycles to ensure that secondary raw materials are as safe as primary raw materials. The Commission is also committed to promote waste decontamination solutions and technologies through EU funding instruments, in particular through Horizon Europe.</p>
<p>44. stresses the importance of interregional cooperation in order to create a consistent policy for the promotion of safe chemicals [...]</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the importance of interregional collaboration and, within the EU's cohesion policy, is committed to promote such collaboration along sustainable chemicals value chains in particular through smart specialisation.</p>
<p>46. [...] draws attention to the right to information in order to enable consumers to make informed choices; points out that this can be done by introducing effective information requirements and ensuring that the presence of hazardous substances can be traced from the point of manufacture of the product, including, inter alia, through the SCIP database maintained by ECHA, as well as the introduction of product passports.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the statement and will ensure availability of information on the chemical content of products by proposing information requirements within the upcoming Sustainable Products Initiative and the development of the Digital Product Passport, building on ongoing initiatives and tools⁶.</p>
<p>47. stresses the need to create a fully connected and interdisciplinary EU database on chemical safety, to be set up by the European Chemicals Agency; these actions will ensure the establishment of a uniform and transparent approach to chemicals as well as to the risk assessment of chemicals. [...]</p>	<p>Several efforts are already in place by the Commission and the relevant agencies in order to address the shortcomings in the interoperability and accessibility of chemical data. As announced in the strategy, the Commission and all the partners are currently developing a common open data platform on chemicals to facilitate the sharing, access and re-use of information on chemicals coming from all sources.</p>
<p>48. assessment of the sustainability of a product must take into account the full life cycle and include the highest possible level of circularity, including resource efficiency, energy, water and land use, as well as reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants. In addition, it</p>	<p>The concept and criteria for 'safe and sustainable by design' chemicals will allow to integrate all environmental policy goals in a holistic vision, in line with the European Green Deal's 'do no harm' principle. The goal is that the production and use of chemicals gradually moves to become less</p>

⁶ Building on ECHA's SCIP database, ongoing work on REACH review (action 3); COM(2018)0116 final.

<p>should build on the methodologies for assessing product sustainability that European chemical companies have already started to prepare; points out that this assessment can also be a primary source of information when making decisions on substitutions;</p>	<p>toxic, more circular, climate neutral (and energy efficient) and less polluting. The criteria will be defined in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The Commission has set up a community of stakeholders who are invited to provide feedback during the different steps of the process⁷.</p>
<p>49. draws attention to the importance of cooperation between the industrial and agricultural sectors. The agricultural sector is an important source of information for the creation and use of bio-based substances, while particular attention should be paid to the potential of biomass as a raw material for chemical production; At the same time significant reduction of pesticides, insecticides and other agrochemicals [...]</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of the links between the industrial and agriculture sectors, and will pay attention to this link during the implementation of the relevant actions announces in the strategy.</p>
<p>50. stresses the role of hydrogen in improving energy efficiency and developing innovation. Hydrogen technologies are a priority for achieving the European Green Deal and a key element in the transformation of the chemicals industry, and their deployment requires the development of coherent and simplified legislation and financial support.</p>	<p>The Chemicals strategy recognises the importance of hydrogen for improving the energy efficiency of the chemicals sector and therefore reducing its impact on climate. More specific actions to support the uptake of renewable hydrogen in specific end-use sectors – such as the chemical sector – have been announced by the Commission in the hydrogen strategy for a climate-neutral Europe⁸.</p>
<p>52. human capital is an important area in the implementation of the chemicals strategy; draws attention to the need to ensure continuity of staff in connection with the digital and green transitions, as well as with the transformation/redesign of the area. It is also important to provide the time for workers to be properly trained in chemical management. Upskilling and reskilling of workers is key to ensuring competitiveness.</p> <p>53. welcomes the possibility of financial support from EU funds for the upskilling and reskilling</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that the right skills need to be in place at all levels. The Commission has announced that, together with relevant partners, it will map the competence gaps in Europe and define ways to address them, to also ensure a just transition and provide adequate funding for the upskilling and reskilling of workers.</p>

⁷ [EUSurvey - Survey \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/index.cfm?id=688)

⁸ [EUR-Lex - 52020DC0301 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/1056/oj)

<p>of workers involved in the production and use of chemicals⁹. [...]</p>	
<p>54. points out that proper risk assessment, the prioritisation of measures, the search for safe and sustainable substances and materials and the discussion of advantages and disadvantages in any particular instance require very complex knowledge, specialist expertise and investment of time on the part of companies and authorities, and that there is a constant need for information, advice and further training.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that support and advice on the transition to safe and sustainable chemicals will be key. To that purpose, the Commission is establishing – under Horizon Europe – an EU led international community on safe-and sustainable-by-design to support embedding sustainability criteria over the life cycle of chemicals, materials and process. This community will promote cooperation and sharing of information across sectors and the value chain and provide technical expertise on alternatives.</p>

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions *Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability - Towards a Toxic-Free Environment*.

<p>N°8 Local and regional authorities protecting the marine environment COR-2021-00292 – ENVE-VII/015 144th plenary session – May 2021 Rapporteur: Emma NOHRÈN (SE/GREENS) DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1. it is deeply concerned that the EU's marine environment did not achieve Good Environmental Status by 2020, as required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and in line with the EU commitment to the 2017 UN Ocean Conference;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the concern of the Committee and has outlined the various reasons as to why Good environmental Status was likely not achieved in its report on the implementation of the all Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)¹. It includes its reliance on other policy areas such as the Water Framework Directive² and, where relevant the Common Fisheries Policy³ among others.</p> <p>The Commission believes that the various initiatives of the European Green Deal will further contribute to the achievement of this objective. It moreover embarked on the review of the MSFD, and set this as a deliverable of Zero Pollution Action Plan⁴, as a demonstration of its commitment to marine environmental protection.</p>
<p>6. supports the goals and targets to protect biodiversity in the EU Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030; emphasises that oceans' vital role for the EU must be better visualised and highlighted; urges the Commission to include clear, measurable targets with accompanying deadlines in its action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems in line with the UN CBD COP15's post-2020 global biodiversity policy framework, which is to be published by 2021⁵;</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to deliver on the ambitions of the European Green Deal, and more particularly in the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and in the Sustainable Blue Economy Communication⁶. The Action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems will be an important deliverable in this respect proposing concrete actions under the environmental legislation and the common fisheries policy.</p>

¹ COM(2020)259 final.

² Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy; OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1–73.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/policy/common-fisheries-policy-cfp_en

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en

⁵ [COM\(2020\) 380 final](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/com(2020)380).

<p>recalls that the key role of our oceans and coasts in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies should be adequately factored into the solutions proposed</p>	<p>The Commission is deepening the analysis and will be consulting stakeholders as a basis to define the actions and, where possible and appropriate, to set precise targets and corresponding deadlines.</p>
<p>11. believes that it is time to act, by both correcting structural problems regarding MSFD implementation and, at the same time, kick-starting actions that can unleash local and subnational authorities' untapped potential to protect the EU's marine environment;</p>	<p>The Commission has started its review of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, as outlined in its Roadmap on the initiative. Structural issues of the MSFD will be assessed and, where necessary, corrected.</p>
<p>15. stresses the need to recognise the role of local and subnational authorities in the implementation of the MSFD; calls on the Commission to propose rules for Member States on how to integrate these authorities into the consultation procedure and into the process of identifying, designing and planning measures, clarifying responsibilities and fostering more engagement and ownership from LRAs;</p>	<p>Article 19 of the MSFD already requires national authorities to publicly consult when devising their marine strategies. Within the ongoing review of the Directive, the Commission will more particularly assess the way in which this provision has been implemented so far. It will also encourage Member States to further engage with local authorities when implementing their strategies, in line with the subsidiarity principle.</p>
<p>18. supports further cooperation with the Regional Sea Conventions; underscores that a shared regional understanding of what constitutes GES is crucial; firmly believes that a harmonised approach and synchronised reporting will ultimately create synergies and save resources; calls on the Member States to support and commit to this pursuit of a harmonised and robust data collection system;</p>	<p>The Commission, in its role as representative of the Union in Regional Sea Conventions, will continue to promote a regional understanding of good environmental status for the marine region or subregion concerned and in the context of the MSFD Common implementation strategy, pushing for more regional coordination as required through Commission Decision (EU)2017/848⁷. In this context, the proper implementation of the Commission Decision by Member States is crucial.</p>
<p>21. compliments the Commission for its publically available WISE Marine web portal⁸ which, among other things, contains information on the status of each descriptor as reported by Member States; the latter should, without further delay, improve electronic reporting;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee on the advantages of electronic reporting and continues to encourage Member States to report electronically and timely in the MSFD Common implementation strategy.</p>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/ocean/blue-economy/sustainable-blue-economy_en

⁷ Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 of 17 May 2017 laying down criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters and specifications and standardised methods for monitoring and assessment, and repealing Decision 2010/477/EU; C/2017/2901; OJ L 125, 18.5.2017, p. 43–74.

⁸ <https://water.europa.eu/marine>

<p>23. stresses that the achievement of the MSFD is totally dependent on successful implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the Urban Waste Water Directive; therefore asks the Commission to investigate how to improve coordination and coherence between the Directives and propose guidance for Member States on how to coordinate the implementation of the Directives;</p>	<p>The coherence between these policies was recently analysed in the MSFD Article 20 implementation report⁹ and is now being considered in the context of the review of the MSFD. The Commission will assess, among the possible options for enhanced coherence, whether further guidance is necessary, mindful also of the needs to build a better integrated tracking and monitoring framework under the 8th Environmental Action Programme.</p>
<p>24. sees a need for coherent management of maritime space between different stakeholders; underlines that the ecosystem-based approach is the basis for the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, with the aim of enforcing management decisions that help to achieve GES;</p>	<p>Article 5 of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive¹⁰ calls for applying an ecosystem-based approach, and to promote the coexistence of relevant activities and uses.</p> <p>The ecosystem-based approach, as referred to for the first time in Article 1(3) of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, should ensure that the collective pressure of all activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of good environmental status and that the capacity of marine ecosystems to respond to human-induced changes is not compromised, while contributing to the sustainable use of marine goods and services by present and future generations.</p> <p>Implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive by all Member States is on-going. The Commission will then report on its implementation in 2022, notably for what concerns the integration of an ecosystem-based approach in Member States' plans, in the light of the EU Green Deal.</p> <p>The Commission is running a study since 2019 on the ecosystem-based approach in maritime spatial planning, in order to guide Member States in integrating this approach in their maritime spatial plans and when revising them, several workshops, case studies and exchanges of good practice were</p>

⁹ COM(2020) 259 final:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1593613439738&uri=CELEX:52020DC0259>

¹⁰ Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning; OJ L 257, 28.8.2014, p. 135–145.

	<p>also organised in the framework of this study.</p> <p>The Marine Strategy Framework Directive also specifies that Member States shall take into account land-sea interactions. Member States may use other formal or informal processes, such as integrated coastal management when their maritime spatial planning does not cover coastal area but the outcome shall be reflected by Member States in their maritime spatial plans (articles 4, 6 and 7).</p>
<p>25. suggests that coastal communities and regions seize the opportunity to boost the local economy, create new jobs and at the same time improve the state of their coastal waters by using the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, LIFE and other EU funds for measures and projects that contribute to the objectives of the MSFD;</p>	<p>The development of a sustainable blue economy plays a key role in the vitality of local coastal communities. In this respect, the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) can support local partnerships across maritime sectors to empower communities to exploit their environmental, cultural, social and human resources with a view to tap the opportunities offered by the blue economy in their specific context.</p> <p>These local strategies are implemented under a tool called ‘community led local development’. They are developed directly by local stakeholders organised in ‘local action groups’. They foster small-scale collective initiatives, enhance capacity building and showcase innovation of interest for the local blue economy and the protection of the marine environment.</p> <p>The local partnerships ensure a balanced involvement and representation of the relevant stakeholders across sectors. They can focus on traditional sectors (e.g. fishing, aquaculture, tourism) and/or foster economic diversification through synergies with emerging maritime sectors (e.g. blue bio-economy).</p>
<p>27. notes that tourism is one of the major economic sectors in coastal regions; stresses that sustainable tourism needs to take a holistic view by also taking into account the well-being of local residents and "life below the surface";</p>	<p>A pillar of the blue economy and deeply interconnected to many of its other sectors, maritime and coastal tourism has suffered severe effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdowns have affected jobs and livelihoods and significantly reduced the sector’s capacity to invest</p>

	in developing more resilient and sustainable services and supply chains. Investments are needed to bring about social resilience and stimulate job creation and economic opportunities for coastal communities. Against this background, the Commission has set a framework to re-enable safe tourism and pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable sector ¹¹ .
29. notes that environmentally differentiated port fees can be an efficient way for coastal regions to improve the environment, and reduce emissions to air and water, as well as waste and noise;	The possibility for ports to set environmentally differentiated port fees is foreseen by the Regulation establishing a framework for the provision of port services and common rules on the financial transparency of ports ¹² . Its Article 13(4) notably stipulates that port infrastructure charges may vary, in accordance with the port's own economic strategy and its spatial planning policy, in relation to, inter alia, certain categories of users, or in order to promote a more efficient use of port infrastructure, short sea shipping or a high environmental performance, energy efficiency or carbon efficiency of transport operations.
30. calls for coastal municipalities and regions to be consulted on decisions regarding ship routing;	The Commission considers that Member States in their role as coastal states should consult concerned local stakeholders and local authorities as appropriate when proposing ship routing measures (such as traffic separation schemes, deep-water routes or mandatory ship reporting schemes) to the International Maritime Organisation.
37. suggests using relevant EU funds and creating an outreaching "EU Ocean Academy" consisting of young scholars from all Member States with good communication skills who, in cooperation with universities, inspire and continuously disseminate new knowledge and	The European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) can support the collection and management of data to underpin the sustainable management of the marine environment. For this purpose, the EMFAF finances the 'European marine observation and data network' (EMODnet)

¹¹ Notably, with the Communication on tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond, the EU vaccination strategy, the safe reopening communication, the digital green certificate, and the re-open EU platform and app.

¹² Regulation (EU) 2017/352 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2017 establishing a framework for the provision of port services and common rules on the financial transparency of ports (Text with EEA relevance); OJ L 57, 3.3.2017, p. 1–18.

<p>information about the importance of healthy oceans, the links between the marine environment and other policies, possible measures and best practices;</p>	<p>established by the EU to make marine data more available and usable by public and private users.</p>
<p>38. calls on the Commission to put subsidiarity into action and create a 2030 European Marine Biodiversity Task Force consisting of a pool of operational environmental project managers who will be at the disposal of subnational authorities to enable them to launch voluntary projects and measures to address a particular problem in a specific marine subdivision or land-based area; suggests that this task force could help the co-managing regions acquire the right skills by contracting experts, as well as providing operational support with planning and organisation, and advising on projects and how to apply for EU funding;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the need for the availability of expertise to subnational authorities. The European Green Deal also provides initiatives in this respect. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 highlights the key role of skills in the transition to a green economy as well as the setting up of a Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity that among other things aims to foster scientific cooperation and partnership. Initiatives developed under Mission Ocean and Waters, will help stakeholders and citizens co-design sustainable management of aquatic resources and co-implement transformative solutions supporting the restoration of EU waters. In addition, the Sustainable Blue Economy Communication¹³ announced the creation a Blue Forum for users of the sea, as well as the promotion and support of local participatory initiatives.</p> <p>In full respect of the principle of subsidiarity, it would however encourage Member States to create national or regional networks of experts, as local issues often require local solutions. The Commission remains available to assist potential entities applying for funds, in the context of its calls for funding.</p>
<p>41. understands that nitrogen and phosphorus as nutrients are vital raw materials and that phosphorus is included in the EU's list of critical raw materials; has been informed that nutrients can be efficiently recycled from waste water treatment and can replace virgin raw material from mining; calls on the Commission to propose EU rules on quota obligations for</p>	<p>The Commission recently will adopt rules on the recovery of nutrients out of certain waste streams, including waste water. According to these delegated regulations, these materials can be used in EU fertilising products as of 16 July 2022, when Regulation (EU) 2019/1009¹⁴ will start applying. For the moment, there are no requirements regarding the minimum quota of</p>

¹³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0240&from=EN>

¹⁴ Regulation (EU) 2019/1009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 laying down rules on the making available on the market of EU fertilising products and amending Regulations (EC) No 1069/2009 and (EC) No 1107/2009 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 2003/2003; OJ L 170, 25.6.2019, p. 1–114.

<p>recycled nutrients in fertilisers marketed in the EU;</p>	<p>nutrients to be out of recovered waste. The Commission intends to consider the issue in its first report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the application of the Regulation.</p> <p>The Commission will develop with Member States an integrated nutrient management action plan to address nutrient pollution at source and increase the sustainability of the livestock sector. This will include the recycling of organic waste into renewable fertilisers and may stimulate the markets for recovered nutrients.</p>
<p>45. points out that large parts of EU environmental legislation such as the MSFD and the Nature Directives have not been sufficiently implemented according to a report by the Court of Auditors¹⁵ and that, given the state of the marine environment, stricter conservation measures are needed; urges the Commission and Member States to increase efforts to implement the respective measures with a view to enabling more efficient protection of the marine environment;</p>	<p>The Commission accepted the recommendations of the Court of Auditors and is working to address them.</p>
<p>46. underlines that, since 2013 and the CFP reform, we have become acutely aware of how climate change and ocean acidification affects the oceans and how rapidly these changes occur; believes that we can no longer focus solely on maximising fisheries yields as the core objective of EU fisheries management; firmly believes that the objective must be to allow fish populations to be restored to levels above those that allow them to fulfil their crucial role in marine ecosystems to include a buffer for the increasing impact of stressors such as climate change and biodiversity decline so that those ecosystems can continue to provide critical services such as oxygen production, climate regulation, carbon storage and food provision;</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges that, while there is clear scientific advice that large-scale changes in marine ecosystems are likely to stem from climate change, such changes are incremental and difficult to forecast. The EU has financed research on how climate change impacts will affect the fishing and aquaculture sectors.</p> <p>The common fisheries policy provides management tools for the climate-proofing of fisheries management to improve ecosystem resilience, in particular by reducing fishing pressure and governing EU fleets. One of the core objectives of the common fisheries policy is indeed the reduction of exploitation rates to those just needed to catch the highest long-term yields (maximum sustainable yield – MSY).</p> <p>In addition to MSY, which is an important step</p>

¹⁵ [Court of Auditors' special report 26/2020: Marine environment: EU protection is wide but not deep.](#)

	<p>towards sustainability of fish stocks, the Commission also set out a wider set of ambitions for the protection and restoration of marine habitats (including nature restoration targets and a coherent network of marine protected areas).</p> <p>Member States are also required under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive to set threshold values for spawning stock biomass to achieve good environmental status.</p> <p>In 2022, the Commission will report on the implementation of the common fisheries policy. As part of that reporting process, it will consider how its implementation can further contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this framework, the Commission has launched two studies to assess possible impacts of climate change and how can the common fisheries policy be made more resilient to forthcoming impacts while mitigating the climate footprint of fishing and sea farming.</p>
<p>47. strongly believes that all kinds of harmful subsidies in fisheries that contribute to excess fishing capacity, overfishing, climate change and ocean acidification must end; calls for greater support for research and innovation to help reduce the environmental footprint of Europe's shipping fleet, in particular by developing alternative fuels that could be used in existing boats; as well as by removing the exemption for fuel used in fishing in the Energy Taxation Directive;</p>	<p>‘Harmful fisheries subsidies’ are described in Sustainable Development Goal 14.6 of the United Nations: <i>‘fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and (...) that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing’</i>. The EU’s aim to reach ambitious multilateral rules is in the on-going negotiations on fisheries subsidies at the World Trade Organization.</p> <p>There are no harmful fisheries subsidies in the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), in particular subsidies for the construction of fishing vessels and for the increase of power or size of fishing vessels. To avoid these subsidies, the EMFAF includes a list of ineligible operations (e.g. the construction of new fishing vessels) and a set of conditions framing fisheries subsidies with the necessary safeguards to prevent harmful effects, including indirect effects.</p> <p>Amongst others, the EMFAF can be used to reduce the carbon footprint of fisheries and</p>

	<p>aquaculture. Possible actions include innovation in CO²-efficient technology for the propulsion of fishing vessels (e.g. trials on lower-carbon fuels such as liquefied natural gas, liquefied biogas or hybrid-electrical propulsion; preparatory research on hydrogen fuelling); replacing or modernising engines of fishing vessels to reduce their CO² emissions (under specific conditions to avoid an increase of power, and thus of fishing capacity); improving the energy efficiency of fishing vessels (e.g. through a better hydrodynamic); developing aquaculture feed sources with lower impact; shifting to energy-efficient aquaculture production (e.g. use of renewable energy).</p> <p>In July 2021, the Commission has proposed a recast of the Energy Tax Directive, which includes, among others, a proposal to lift the current exemption for waterborne navigation and fishing.</p>
<p>48. draws the attention to the slow recovery of vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems and therefore the need to effectively implement the EU Deep Sea Regulation; recalls the requirement to cease fishing with bottom-contacting gear below 400 metres in areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) are known to exist or are likely to occur; urges the bottom fisheries footprint be delineated in areas between 400 and 800 metres' depth, and close to areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known or likely to occur;</p>	<p>The Commission shares the concerns of the Committee and is actively working on the finalisation of the implementation of the Deep-sea Access Regulation¹⁶, based on the International Conference on Environmental Systems (ICES) advice that was issued at the beginning of 2021¹⁷.</p>
<p>49. urges the Commission to strengthen the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, including by increasingly applying multi-species approaches, in order to minimise the negative impacts of fishing activities and other factors, such as</p>	<p>Sustainable fisheries, delivered through the common fisheries policy, are necessary for increasing resilience and delivering on the commitments under the European Green Deal, in particular the Farm-to-Fork and EU Biodiversity Strategies. The common fisheries policy</p>

¹⁶ Regulation (EU) 2016/2336 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2016 establishing specific conditions for fishing for deep-sea stocks in the north-east Atlantic and provisions for fishing in international waters of the north-east Atlantic and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 2347/2002; OJ L 354, 23.12.2016, p. 1–19.

¹⁷ https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2021/Special_Requests/eu.2021.01.pdf

climate change, on marine ecosystems, fish populations and society and to ensure ocean resilience to climate change; reiterates that fully documented fisheries and quality data is key to improving fisheries management; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take the necessary steps in order to improve data collection on recreational fisheries, considering their environmental impact and socio-economic value;

contributes to the protection of the marine environment, to the sustainable management of all commercially exploited species, and in particular to the achievement of good environmental status under the MSFD. In addition to the work on (new) marine protected areas for safeguarding biodiversity and the health of marine ecosystems, the full implementation of the common fisheries policy will lead to sustainable fisheries and sustainable food supplies for coastal communities.

The upcoming action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems will aim at bridging the gaps between the fisheries and environmental legislations, in particular those identified by the report on the implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation¹⁸ published on 23 September 2021. It will also look more specifically into the issue of seabed integrity and the implementation of the MSFD and the Birds and Habitats Directives.

The Commission agrees that sound scientific advice is the basis for fisheries management and policy. The common fisheries policy is guided by principles of good governance, including decision-making based on the best available scientific advice. It also recognises the impact that recreational fisheries can have – and underlines that when having a significant impact on fish resources, Member States should ensure that they are conducted in line with the objectives of the common fisheries policy. EU Member States have to provide data on recreational fisheries for specific stocks under the Data collection Framework.

Still it remains a challenge to control recreational fisheries and to obtain reliable and uniform data on these activities, which make it difficult to assess the impact of recreational fishing on specific stocks. In

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006, (EC) No 1224/2009 and Regulations (EU) No 1380/2013, (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2018/973, (EU) 2019/472 and (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 894/97, (EC) No 850/98, (EC) No 2549/2000, (EC) No 254/2002, (EC) No 812/2004 and (EC) No 2187/2005; OJ L 198, 25.7.2019, p. 105–201.

	<p>that spirit, in its proposal to amend the Control Regulation¹⁹, the Commission proposed a licensing- or registration system for recreational fishers to improve control and monitoring, as well as for a catch registration system to be in place for all catches.</p>
<p>50. welcomes the Commission's EU Climate Law proposal; highlights the key role the oceans play in regulating the Earth's climate and in providing us with life-supporting functions; stresses that oceans are being put under severe pressure and that they are fast deteriorating; therefore calls on the Commission to propose an ocean law, in the same spirit as the climate law;</p>	<p>Whilst strongly agreeing to the need of fully recognising the role of the oceans as major climate regulator, the Commission considers that the holistic approach of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive already provides an umbrella for action under all policy areas adaptation. However, in the context of its review, the Commission will seek ways to improve coherence across policies and their implementation, with special attention to tackle also climate mitigation and adaptation aspects.</p> <p>The report on the implementation of the common fisheries policy by end of 2022 will consider, among other aspects, how to contribute and cater for the large-scale changes in marine ecosystems that are likely to stem from climate change, looking at both mitigation and adaptation needs.</p>
<p>52. urges the Commission to intensify efforts to achieve balance between fishing fleet capacity and fish stocks, using the tools in the CFP and the EMFAF regulations in a more coordinated and active way;</p>	<p>The Commission examines the annual fleet reports submitted by the Member States with the help of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries to ensure that the analysis presented in the reports is robust and conforming the Commission guidelines²⁰. During the programming and implementation process of the EMFAF, the Commission ensures that planned measures concerning the fleet are aligned with the findings of the most recent annual report (and possibly action plan) presented by the concerned Member State.</p>

¹⁹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 of 20 November 2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy, amending Regulations (EC) No 847/96, (EC) No 2371/2002, (EC) No 811/2004, (EC) No 768/2005, (EC) No 2115/2005, (EC) No 2166/2005, (EC) No 388/2006, (EC) No 509/2007, (EC) No 676/2007, (EC) No 1098/2007, (EC) No 1300/2008, (EC) No 1342/2008 and repealing Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1627/94 and (EC) No 1966/2006; OJ L 343, 22.12.2009, p. 1–50.

²⁰ COM(2014) 545 final.

<p>53. is deeply concerned by the growing use of scrubbers by ships as a way to meet the reduced sulphur emission limits; points to the fact that the discharge water from scrubbers contains highly toxic substances with long-term impact on the marine environment, causing bioaccumulation, acidification and eutrophication, calls on the Commission to propose a ban on the discharge of scrubber water within the EU, as well as measures to incentivise the use of alternatives to heavy fuels in shipping;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the need to take action. Its recently adopted Zero Pollution action plan reiterates the Commission’s resolve to address this issue through the International Maritime Organization (IMO). In this respect, the EU is steering developments in the IMO with the view to set a global framework to regulate discharges from ships equipped with exhaust gas cleaning systems, given the highly international dimension of shipping. While awareness on the issue has meanwhile increased, the Commission remains ready to consider other measures should this approach not yield the desired results.</p>
<p>54. calls on the Commission to establish an Ocean Fund, as proposed by the European Parliament in its report on Global data collection system for ship fuel oil consumption data, amending Regulation (EU) 2015/757²¹, with the aim of improving the energy efficiency of ships and supporting investments in innovative technologies and infrastructures to decarbonise the maritime transport sector and the deployment of sustainable alternative fuels that are produced from renewables and of zero-emission propulsion technologies; supports that the proposal to use 20% of the revenues under the Fund to contribute to the protection, restoration and better management of marine ecosystems impacted by global warming, such as marine protected areas;</p>	<p>The main objective of the Ocean Fund proposed by the European Parliament was to limit the administrative burden for small and medium-sized companies. The Fund was to serve as a pooling mechanism to which eligible maritime transport companies would pay an annual membership contribution and this entity would then buy and surrender allowances collectively on behalf of member companies. From the Commission’s perspective, the advantages of such mechanism are not self-evident and can be questioned from the perspective of reduction of administrative burden, practical and legal challenges as well as the compatibility with the current EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) legislation.</p> <p>Having said that, the Commission agrees on the need to use higher ETS revenues in support for climate, environment and energy-related actions. For this purpose, the Commission carried out a thorough assessment of how to improve support for low-carbon investment and innovation, including in the maritime sector, through the existing Innovation Fund. The results were embedded in the Commission’s proposal to extend EU ETS to maritime transport, which are part of the ‘Fit for 55 package’.</p>

²¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2015/757/oj>

<p>55. calls on the Commission in its review of the Directive of recreational craft and personal watercraft to adopt ambitious limits for exhaust and noise emissions, including emissions both above and below surface; urges the Commission to include electrically driven engines in the scope of the Directive;</p>	<p>The Commission is running an external study gathering the information for the report to the European Parliament and the Council on technical and economic feasibility to further exhaust emission produced by recreational boats' engines. The report is due by January 2022.</p> <p>Electrically driven engines have not been included into the scope of directive as the technology produce exhaust and sound emissions being far beyond the current limits. Nevertheless, the Commission will re-discuss the option to include these engines into the scope of the Recreational Craft Directive during the next revision of the directive.</p>
<p>56. is deeply concerned by the irreversible environmental pollution caused by the release of microplastics into the environment; points to the fact that the costs of cleaning microplastics from water are borne by local authorities, water treatment plants and water supply companies; therefore calls on the Commission to adopt strict mandatory regulatory measures to reduce the unintentional release of all microplastics at source and a general phase-out of intentionally added microplastics, including nanoplastics and biodegradable and soluble polymers;</p>	<p>Regarding unintentional release of microplastics into the environment, the Commission has launched an Impact Assessment study on measures to reduce microplastic pollution from major source categories (especially textiles, tyres and plastic pellets). As a follow-up action of the new Circular Economy Action Plan, the study will explore labelling, standardisation, certification and regulatory measures, as well as methods for measuring intentionally released microplastics; it will also seek to close gaps on scientific knowledge on risk and occurrence of microplastics in the environment, drinking water and foods. Consultation will take place according to Better Regulation Guidelines.</p> <p>The Commission launched a restriction process for intentional microplastics under REACH, which is now in its final stage. The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) sent its opinion to the Commission and a legal draft to restrict intentionally used microplastics is being prepared. However, the ECHA's opinion foresees a derogation for microplastics that comply with specific biodegradability and solubility criteria. The Commission is now considering this technical opinion.</p>

<p>57. highlights that sports pitches are one of the largest contributors of intentionally added microplastics released into the environment and that it is mainly local communities and municipalities who carry the costs for measures to mitigate such leakage; underlines that several natural alternatives to rubber granules exist and therefore calls on the Commission to adopt a ban to all new granular infill for sport pitches, with a six-year transition period;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the threat posed by artificial infill used in sport pitches. This is why it is included the microplastics REACH restriction. ECHA proposed two options in its opinion, leaving the choice to policy makers: either a full ban with a 6-year transitional period, or putting risk management measures to reduce the emissions. The Commission is considering these options as a follow-up to ECHA’s opinion.</p>
<p>58. recognises deposit return schemes as efficient tools to reach the mandatory target of a 90% collection rate of plastic beverage containers by 2029, as set in the EU Single Use Plastics Directive; calls on Members States that do not yet have a deposit return scheme for plastic beverage containers to establish one and suggests that they draw on successful experiences from neighbouring Member States; calls on the Commission to guide Member States to use compatible national deposit return schemes, as a step towards a single market for packaging.</p>	<p>While the Single Use Plastics (SUP) Directive²² remains ‘technology neutral’, the Commission fully recognises the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of deposit return schemes. Member States should therefore seriously consider deposit return schemes as an efficient and effective way of achieving high collection rates and high quality materials to be able to ‘close the loop’ towards a circular economy.</p>

²² Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment; OJ L 155, 12.6.2019, p. 1–19.

N°9 The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights from a local and regional perspective
COM (2021)102final
COR-2021-01127 – SEDEC-VII/019
144th plenary session – May 2021
Rapporteur-General: Anne KARJALAINEN (FI/PES)
DG EMPL – Commissioner SCHMIT

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>12. [...] Regrets by the same token that, beyond the evaluation of the experience of the European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE), the Action Plan does not consider a debate on a permanent European unemployment insurance scheme;</p>	<p>The Commission is currently concentrating its efforts on the response to the COVID-19 crisis, including through the deployment of Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which represent major policy and financial innovations. The Commission has begun to take stock of the performance of SURE with the first two bi-annual reports, published on 22 March 2021 and 22 September 2021 respectively.¹ The Commission has set up a careful monitoring of SURE implementation, in accordance with Regulation 2020/672² and based on Member States' regular reporting. In particular, the Commission looks at absorption issues, at the implementation of planned measures, as well as at the impact of SURE, as reflected in its first two bi-annual reports.</p>
<p>14. draws attention to existing social responsibility criteria in public procurement and their contribution towards preventing social dumping. Therefore suggests making public contracts more strongly conditional on the application of fair wages and other conditions of employment laid down by law</p>	<p>The Commission proactively promotes the use of social considerations in public procurement, including those related to fair working conditions. The recently published guide 'Buying Social – a guide to taking account of social considerations in public procurement'³ provides useful indications on this specific issue and on compliance with</p>

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_21_1209/IP_21_1209_EN.pdf [Second report on the implementation of SURE | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

² Council Regulation (EU) 2020/672 of 19 May 2020 on the establishment of a European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE) following the COVID-19 outbreak ST/7917/2020/INIT OJ L 159, 20.5.2020, p. 1–7.

³ [Buying Social – a guide to taking account of social considerations in public procurement](#)

<p>and/or collective agreements, including in subcontracting chains;</p>	<p>labour rules. Some good practices can also be found in the report ‘Making socially responsible procurement work – 71 good practice cases European Commission’⁴.</p>
<p>16. recommends implementing the Youth Guarantee as soon as possible and paying particular attention to measures to improve the situation of young people aged 15-29 who are not in employment, education or training. Modernising apprenticeships and improving internship programmes will enhance young people's chances to find work in growth sectors, which is important when youth unemployment has risen steeply across Europe during the COVID-19 crisis. Also calls for measures to be taken to ensure that schemes promoting youth employment do not favour precarious forms of employment;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that particular attention should be paid to young people, who have been impacted disproportionately by the crisis - in their studies, in their social lives and in their attempts to find a job. A swift implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee⁵ will help enhance young people’s chances to find work in growth sectors. The Youth Guarantee has already resulted in about 31 million offers of employment, continued education, traineeships or apprenticeships since 2013. As part of the Youth Employment Support⁶ package adopted in 2020, the reinforced Youth Guarantee supports young people in school-to-work and early job-to-job transitions. Linked to this, the European Skills Agenda⁷ proposes concrete action to give added impetus to the green and digital transitions.</p> <p>The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan⁸ and its 2030 headline targets, focuses on jobs and skills for the future and paves the way for a fair, inclusive and resilient recovery. It also introduces the ambition to decrease the rate of 15 to 29 year-old youngs not in employment, education or training (NEET) to 9% by improving their employment prospects. The Recommendation on Effective Active Support to Employment⁹</p>

⁴ [Making socially responsible procurement work - 71 good practice cases | European Commission](#)

⁵ Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee; 2020/C 372/01; OJ C 372, 4.11.2020, p. 1–9.

⁶ COM(2020) 274 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation COM(2020) 274 final.

⁷ COM(2020) 274 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

⁸ COM(2021) 102 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

⁹ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/402 of 4 March 2021 on an effective active support to employment following the COVID-19 crisis (EASE); C/2021/1372; OJ L 80, 8.3.2021, p. 1–8.

	<p>provides guidance to move from crisis response to recovery and support job-to-job transitions towards expanding sectors. This can be done through a combination of incentives, for example through focusing on hiring young people or upskilling and reskilling them, and through support for young (aspiring) entrepreneurs.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that schemes promoting youth employment should favour quality employment. Through the Apprenticeship Support Services, and in particular the Benchlearning process for apprenticeships, the Commission is notably providing tailored support to Member States to develop and improve apprenticeship schemes. The Commission published a report on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships in August 2021¹⁰. The report shows that the implementation of the Framework is advancing well, in particular as regards the 7 learning and working conditions, while there is still room for improvement in terms of the 7 framework conditions. Nevertheless, the Framework remains the key EU level instrument to promote the quality of apprenticeships.</p> <p>The Commission has made a proposal for a Directive on adequate minimum wages¹¹ and will seek to improve the working conditions of people working through platforms, as announced in the Commission Work Programme 2021.¹² Moreover, it will review the Council Recommendation on the Quality Framework for Traineeships, notably as regards working conditions in 2022.</p> <p>The Commission urges Member States to make use of the significant funding available under NextGenerationEU (such as the Recovery and</p>
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¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24714&langId=en>

¹¹ COM(2020) 682 final: Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on adequate minimum wages in the European Union.

¹² COM(2020)690 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Commission Work Programme 2021 A Union Of Vitality In A World Of Fragility.

	<p>Resilience Facility), and the long-term EU budget (such as the European Social Fund Plus). At least €22 billion should be spent on youth employment directly¹³, with a vast array of EU funding available to support young people more broadly.</p>
<p>26. [...] Homelessness must be tackled in an integrated and holistic way by focusing on improving the health and social support networks of homeless people. An example here is the "Housing First" approach, which has been successful in reducing long-term homelessness. Local and regional authorities should therefore be part of the "European Platform on Homelessness". The Committee regrets in this regard that the Action Plan sets no quantitative target for the fight against homelessness;</p>	<p>The primary responsibility for tackling homelessness lies with the Member States, regional and local authorities.</p> <p>On 21 June 2021, at the High-level Conference in Lisbon on Combatting Homelessness, national ministers, representatives of EU institutions, civil society organisations, social partners and cities signed the 'Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness'¹⁴.</p> <p>The platform launch is the beginning of a process to establish a common understanding and commitment and ensure concrete progress in Member States in the fight against homelessness. In particular, the Platform will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support mutual learning for policy-makers and practitioners; - contribute to harness EU funding possibilities; - strengthen evidence and monitoring on homelessness; - disseminate and promote good practices, including through a European Prize; and - review progress towards the eradication of homelessness by 2030.
<p>28. notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has further deepened the digital divide. The CoR proposes promoting "digital cohesion" as an objective of the European Union so that</p>	<p>Under the Web Accessibility Directive (EU) 2016/2102,¹⁵ all public sector websites must now be accessible to persons with disabilities; the deadline for mobile apps to be accessible was</p>

¹³ COM(2020)276 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Youth Employment Support: A Bridge To Jobs For The Next Generation.

¹⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24120&langId=en>

¹⁵ Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 October 2016 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies; OJ L 327, 2.12.2016, p. 1–15.

<p>suitable digital infrastructure is in place to ensure that e-services and digital education are accessible to everyone. Particular attention should be paid to access to digital tools for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups;</p>	<p>23 June 2021. The European Accessibility Act Directive (EU) 2019/882¹⁶ defines a further set of key digital products and services including their websites and mobile device based services to be accessible by June 2025.</p> <p>In addition, as a result of European Commission mandates, the European Standardisation Organisations have developed a standard EN 301549 that contains further detail on how information and communication technologies (ICT) accessibility can be achieved.</p>
<p>29. points out that national averages of social indicators do not reflect all social challenges in the European Union. This can lead to misleading results by covering up the social and regional disparities that often exist within Member States. A regional social scoreboard can help establish a strong regional monitoring policy, ensuring that the Social Pillar is implemented at all levels and that regional investments are geared towards achieving the principles of the Pillar. Regional monitoring should make use of data already collected and not impose an administrative burden on regions;</p>	<p>Since 2020, the Joint Employment Report integrates a regional dimension to the Social Scoreboard. In particular, a series of maps showing regional breakdowns by Member State are presented in its Annex for the headline indicators for which data at a regional level (NUTS 2) is available. Furthermore, the analysis in Chapter 3 of the Joint Employment Report indicates, where relevant, findings at the regional level for the Member States where large disparities exist between NUTS 2 regions.</p> <p>The data and findings make it possible to better understand differences in regions in a country as regards some key dimensions of the Social Pillar and helps monitor convergence within countries, assess the impact of regional policies and shape regional policy-making.</p> <p>As part of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the Commission has proposed a revised Social Scoreboard¹⁷ that will be used in the next Joint Employment Report. Regional breakdowns for the new headline indicators will be presented if available.</p>
<p>31. notes the importance of adding more</p>	<p>As indicated in the European Pillar of Social</p>

¹⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services; PE/81/2018/REV/1; OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, p. 70–115.

¹⁷ Following the endorsement by the EPSCO Council of 14 June 2021 of the opinion of the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee for a revised Social Scoreboard, setting new headline indicators <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9314-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

<p>indicators and of using instruments promoted by the European Union itself, such as the Regional Social Progress Index, which must broadly cover all 20 principles of the Social Pillar. Presentation of figures in all indicators should be broken down by areas of interest, including gender, since gender equality is an overarching principle of the European Pillar. The CoR underlines the need to further develop the knowledge base and indicators of the country-specific recommendations so that the objectives of the Pillar can be achieved more effectively. Local and regional authorities should actively contribute to the debate on improving the Social Scoreboard;</p>	<p>Rights Action Plan, the Commission considers lowering inequalities, in particular those related to gender, among its key priorities. In particular, ‘breakdowns to the Social Scoreboard indicators by age group, gender, country of birth, and disability status will be used to complement the analysis where relevant’. Further work will be conducted to develop indicators on the principles that remain only partly covered and for which stronger indicators are currently unavailable.</p> <p>Benchmarking frameworks, both already available or under development, will contribute to monitoring the Pillar principles, especially in cases where specific indicators are currently unavailable. The existing monitoring tools developed with Member States (the Joint Assessment Framework, the Employment Performance Monitor and the Social Protection Performance Monitor) are also used to provide a thorough monitoring in the respective policy areas.</p>
<p>32. notes that the European semester and the Recovery and Resilience Facility are currently the most important legislative tools available to encourage, support and guide national governments in making the EPSR principles a reality in the European Union. The CoR calls for the EPSR to be prioritised under the European semester so that the recovery from the current crisis is truly inclusive and tackles social exclusion, poverty and inequality;</p>	<p>The Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility indicates (in paragraph (4)) that ‘At Union level, the European Semester for economic policy coordination (European Semester), including the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, is the framework to identify national reform priorities and monitor their implementation.’ In the Porto Declaration of 8 May 2021¹⁸, EU leaders confirmed their commitment to the Pillar and welcomed ‘the new EU headline targets on jobs, skills and poverty reduction and the revised Social Scoreboard proposed in the Action Plan that will help to monitor progress towards the implementation of the Social Pillar principles, taking into account different national circumstances, and as part of the policy coordination framework in the context of the European Semester.’</p>

¹⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/05/08/the-porto-declaration/>

<p>34. calls for the establishment, within the context of sustainable finance, of a "social taxonomy" as an enabling tool to increase investments in social infrastructure, such as healthcare, education, or housing. Such tool could help address challenges in the accessibility of essential services by rewarding the use of new technologies and efforts to foster a skilled workforce and tackle staff shortages, while helping social infrastructure investments to be better recognised as valuable investment assets;</p>	<p>The Platform on Sustainable Finance will present its recommendations on the merits and feasibility of extending the EU Taxonomy framework to include a social taxonomy in autumn 2021, considering both social objectives and governance aspects. The Commission will publish a report on a social taxonomy, as required by the Taxonomy Regulation, by the end of 2021.</p>
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N°10 Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030
COM(2021) 101 final
COR-2021-01679 – SEDEC-VII/020
144th plenary session – May 2021
Rapporteur-General: Daniela BALLICO (IT/ECR)
DG EMPL – Commissioner DALLI

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential

European Commission position

53. is of the view that local and regional governments need to be recognised as strategic partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of the strategy because of their responsibilities and the work they do in carrying out those responsibilities;

54. calls for greater recognition of local and regional authorities, as many policies on the inclusion of persons with disabilities must be carried out and implemented on the ground, working closely with the person with a disability. To ensure full ownership, we need adapted national, regional and local policies and resources, as well as sufficient additional resources from the European funds to implement a fair transition to independent living and participation in the community for people with disabilities;

The Commission considers that the objectives of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030¹ (here after the ‘Strategy’) can only be reached through coordinated action at both national and EU level, with a strong commitment from Member States and regional and local authorities to deliver on the actions proposed by the Commission.

Member States are key players to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The strategy calls on Member States to adopt ambitious national initiatives to implement it at national, regional and local level and to support the implementation of the UNCRPD.

The EU will continue to promote the use of EU funding by the Member States as provided for in the Multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 and by new funding opportunities under NextGenerationEU. EU funding supports areas such as deinstitutionalization and independent living, the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities, accessibility, access to services, inclusive education, healthcare and culture. The Commission calls on the Member States to ensure partnership with regional, local authorities, representative organisations of persons with disabilities, civil society, fundamental rights bodies and other stakeholders in the design and

¹ COM(2021) 101 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

	<p>implementation of EU funds.</p> <p>Recognising the role of local and regional authorities, the Commission envisages to establish a dialogue on disability with existing networks such as for example Eurocities and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE).</p>
<p>8. supports the launch of the Disability Platform in 2021 and asks to be part of this platform – to be set up by the European Commission – as an observer, in order to ensure that persons with disabilities are effectively included in all programmes and policies. Stresses the need to involve local and regional authorities fully, given that they are key players in managing policies directly concerning people with disabilities in their local areas;</p> <p>9. calls for enhanced cooperation with the representative European institutions and therefore highlights that the CoR could contribute to the work of the platform by harnessing local and regional authorities and raising their awareness of the challenges associated with the new strategy. These include countering stereotypes and discrimination against persons with disabilities and promoting appropriate and equal treatment of them in everyday life;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s willingness to contribute to awareness raising efforts in the field of disability.</p> <p>The new Disability Platform, established by the Commission on 27 October 2021, will bring together national UNCRPD focal points, organisations of persons with disabilities and the Commission to support the implementation of this strategy as well as of national disability strategies. The online presence of the Platform will offer information on its activities.</p> <p>The Commission will also invest in strengthening coordination at EU level to implement the UNCRPD, notably by arranging an annual exchange of views with the Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.</p>
<p>10. reiterates the importance of adopting a holistic intersectional approach; calls for the inclusion of specific actions relating to vulnerable groups of persons with disabilities facing barriers based on the intersection of multiple grounds, such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, age, religion and belief, or a difficult socioeconomic or other vulnerable situation. Recommends therefore that the European Commission extend this intersectional approach and develop initiatives that will have an impact on the planning, management and assessment of public policies;</p>	<p>The Strategy promotes an intersectional perspective, addressing specific barriers faced by persons with disabilities at the intersection of identities (gender, race or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion or belief) or due to the socioeconomic or other vulnerable situation. This intersectional approach is complemented by the other EU Equality Strategies, which, together with the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, will contribute to building a Union of Equality.</p>

<p>12. reiterates the need to adopt the principle that public administrations should set an example of how to structure social inclusion and how to guarantee rights and equal opportunities for people with disabilities, both in terms of employment opportunities on the open labour market and in producing accessible services. To this end, the CoR, as an employer and institutional player, should follow this principle of leading by example and establish a timeline for this;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's intention to lead by example, which is in line with the Commission's call to other EU institutions, bodies and agencies mentioned in the Strategy.</p> <p>In this sense, the Commission will put in place Human Resources Strategy. It relevant, the Committee should adopt similar approaches to promote diversity and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in its internal policies. In addition, it could share good practices among its Members to promote progress in public administration across the EU.</p> <p>As regards staff selection and recruitment, the Strategy encourages the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) to step up the efforts it is making, in cooperation with EU institutions.</p>
<p>14. notes that the strategy considers the pandemic only in terms of independent living and briefly inclusion in education. Moreover, notes the lack of proper recognition for informal care, which predominantly concerns women and has re-emerged as a key issue during the pandemic as services to family members have been scaled back. [...]</p>	<p>The Strategy acknowledges that persons with disabilities still face considerable barriers in access to healthcare, education and employment, and the Covid-19 pandemic has amplified obstacles and inequalities. It recognises that insufficient labour market participation, insufficient social protection and extra costs related to disability, are the main reasons for higher risk of monetary poverty.</p> <p>Informal care, mainly provided by women, has negative impacts on their employment as well as health and well-being of carers. Therefore, it is important to expand formal care provision, especially at home and community level, and to make it affordable and of high quality. The Commission will present an initiative on long-term care in 2022, as part of the European Care Strategy. It will guide the development of sustainable long-term care that ensures better access to quality services.</p> <p>A more gender-equal sharing of care</p>

	<p>responsibilities is promoted by the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025² as well as the Directive on Work-life balance³ adopted in 2019.</p>
<p>15. urges the European Commission to consider accessibility as a binding criterion when carrying out the planned revision in 2021 of the legislative framework on energy in buildings in order to make them more accessible to people with disabilities.</p>	<p>The revision of Directive 2010/31/EU on the energy performance of buildings⁴, scheduled for the end of 2021, is an opportunity to further address and improve the existing framework for accessibility. The Commission’s recommendations for buildings renovation point out that for new buildings and those undergoing major renovations, efforts should be undertaken to avoid the creation of accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities and, where possible, remove existing accessibility barriers.</p> <p>One of the key principles of the Renovation Wave strategy⁵, published on 14 October 2020, highlights the need to ensure accessibility in buildings to achieve equal access for Europe’s population and use renovation as a lever to address energy poverty and access to healthy housing for all households.</p>
<p>25. calls on the Commission to envisage a European agreement on the right to vote of persons with disabilities, so as to remove the barriers of all types and to reaffirm the full right of persons with disabilities to express their political preference in the same way as any other European citizen. Points out that as things stand, the Commission has adopted a programme of consultations on inclusive European elections which does not include the topic of disability. Recommends that this programme include persons with disabilities,</p>	<p>Fostering the participation of persons with disabilities in the democratic process is one of the action areas of the Strategy.</p> <p>In its 2020, EU citizenship report⁶ and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Commission reaffirmed its determination to work with the Member States – who bear the responsibility for organising elections – and the European Parliament to guarantee the political rights of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others and to ensure that this right is enjoyed</p>

² COM(2020) 152 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions a Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

³ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU PE/20/2019/REV/1; OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79–93.

⁴ Directive 2010/31/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 on the energy performance of buildings; OJ L 153, 18.6.2010, p. 13–35.

⁵ COM(2020) 662 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A Renovation Wave for Europe -greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_20_2395/IP_20_2395_EN.pdf

<p>and all areas where elections are conducted, as soon as possible;</p>	<p>in the European elections in 2024. This follows the Commission’s Report on the 2019 Elections to the European Parliament⁷ which included best practices to support citizens with a disability and announced a specific focus on people with disabilities (among other groups) for the 2024 European elections.</p> <p>The Commission’s work on promoting inclusive European elections addresses persons with disabilities and is discussed at the European Cooperation Network on Elections and the expert group on electoral matters. This will help the Commission establish in 2023 a guide of good electoral practice regarding persons with disabilities.</p>
<p>30. calls on the Commission to systematically tackle the lack of information regarding persons with disabilities, especially in the rural areas. As called for by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and reaffirmed by the UN Human Rights Committee, this information gap must not only be filled using disaggregated data, but also with inclusion indicators that monitor policies and the fulfilment of the rights of persons with disabilities;</p>	<p>In relation to data collection, in the EU there are already indicators, disaggregated by age and disability addressing poverty risk, education and employment levels. The Commission aims to reinforce data on disability where gaps have been identified by the United Nations, including data on those living in institutions, and research on disability under the EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme Horizon Europe (2021-2027), integrating an intersectional approach.</p> <p>Based on more comprehensive data collection, the Commission will strengthen the monitoring in the context of the European Semester. The renewed Social Scoreboard - proposed by the Commission in March 2021 and endorsed at the Porto Social Summit of 7 May 2021 – includes the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities as one of its headline indicators.</p> <p>The Strategy envisages the development of new disability indicators by 2023. These should include indicators for children and the situation of persons with disabilities in employment, education, social protection, poverty and social</p>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_20_1123/IP_20_1123_EN.pdf

	<p>exclusion, living conditions, health, the use of new communication technologies, supporting the indicators for the Social Scoreboard, the European Semester and the Sustainable Development Goals.</p>
<p>32. stresses the need for specific provisions enabling the upskilling and reskilling for persons with disabilities in order to harness the potential of the digital transition in particular. On this basis, welcomes the use of apprenticeships as a tool for social inclusion in the Youth Guarantee Programme;</p>	<p>The Strategy recognises that the accelerated digital transformation and the green transition offer opportunities, using information and communication technology, artificial intelligence and robotics to design on-site and remote services tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities. The effective use of these technologies requires removing accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities and investing in their digital skills. As announced in the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027⁸, Member States will be supported in securing assistive technologies and in providing an accessible digital learning environment and content.</p> <p>In addition, the Skills Agenda for Europe⁹ addresses digital skills at all levels, while providing equal access for all regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.</p>
<p>33. believes that the issue of combating violence against persons with disabilities – in particular women, children and adolescents with disabilities – must be addressed, along with the issue of people with intellectual and relational disabilities. Points out that there is a need to step up action in this regard in the new strategy. For example, sheltered residential facilities should be better monitored, and all counselling centres and shelters for women should be made fully accessible;</p>	<p>The Strategy reaffirms that persons with disabilities have the right to protection from any form of discrimination and violence. Among the action points to ensure safety and protection, the Commission invites the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights to examine the situation of persons with disabilities living in institutions in relation to violence, abuse and torture.</p>

⁸ COM(2020) 624 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age.

⁹ COM(2016) 381 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness.

<p>N°11 Experiences and lessons learned by regions and cities during the COVID-19 crisis Outlook opinion COR-2020-04155 – NAT-VII/011 145st plenary session – May 2021 Rapporteur: Joke SCHAUVLIEGE (BE/EPP) DG REGIO – Commissioner FERREIRA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>11. calls on the European institutions and national governments to involve local and regional authorities in the preparation of the national and EU-level Recovery and Resilience plans in the context of COVID-19 and possible future pandemics; is convinced that these measures need a local and regional dimension to be effective;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of social dialogue, which is reflected in the Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility¹⁰. When preparing their national recovery and resilience plans, Member States are required to involve stakeholders as well as local and regional authorities and explain how their inputs are reflected in the national plans. This will ensure transparency and ownership.</p> <p>During the preparation process of the recovery and resilience plans, the Commission itself was involved in outreach activities and assisted Member States authorities with their consultation efforts, for instance by organising information events. The Commission underlines the key role of local and regional stakeholders also during the implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans.</p>
<p>16. calls for a strong and reinforced EU vaccine strategy that demonstrates solidarity. It is important for quality and safety reasons to maintain the common EU supply process for COVID-19 vaccines. Highlights that EU should maintain and defend the common market for vaccines and protective equipment. No country should be able to stop deliveries or sign its own contracts with vaccine manufacturers. It is important that the agreements signed at EU level are transparent</p>	<p>In response to the lack of industrial manufacturing and supply capacities due to the surge in demand for particular products, the Commission allocated resources to repurpose manufacturing for medical supplies and equipment. With regard to the industrial upscale of vaccines production, the Commission set up a Task Force for Industrial Scale-up of COVID-19 vaccines to work on capacity and supply chain issues. In this context, the Task Force also hosted the first pan-European online matchmaking event, with over 300</p>

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility; OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17–75.

and impose clear requirements on the delivery of vaccines, as the EU spends large sums on development and production facilities;

participating companies, to accelerate additional vaccine production capacities across Europe.

The EU Vaccines Strategy is an example of the power of European collaboration and of European solidarity in action: within a year, the EU secured a broad portfolio of almost 4.4 billion vaccine doses, for the European citizens and the neighbouring and third countries, if all vaccine candidates are successful. The vaccines are available for all EU countries, at the same time, on the same conditions.

The Commission is committed to transparency and accountability and after consultations with vaccines manufacturers has published both advance purchase agreements (APAs) and purchase agreements concluded for COVID-19 vaccines (namely the agreements with Janssen Pharmaceutica NV¹¹, CureVac AG¹², Sanofi Pasteur SA & GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals SA¹³, AstraZeneca¹⁴, BioNTech/Pfizer^{15 16} and Moderna¹⁷).

The Commission decided on 16 September 2021 the creation of a European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). HERA will be a central element for strengthening the European Health Union with better EU preparedness and response to serious cross-border health threats, by enabling rapid availability and access to critical medical countermeasures (such as vaccines, medicinal products, protective equipment, diagnostics) in the event of a health emergency.

On 17 February 2021, the Commission adopted a European bio-defence preparedness plan against COVID-19 variants called 'HERA Incubator' to detect new variants, provide incentives to develop new and adapted vaccines, speed up the approval process for these vaccines, and ensure scaling up of

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jj_apa_202005071550.pdf

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/curevac-redacted-advance-purchase-agreement_en

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/sanofi-gsk-redacted-advance-purchase-agreement_en

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/apa_astrazeneca.pdf

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/redacted_advance_purchase_agreement_biontech-pfizer_0.pdf

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/redacted_purchase_agreement_biontech-pfizer_0.pdf

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/redacted_advance_purchase_agreement_moderna_0.pdf

	manufacturing capacities.
<p>24. stresses that, in general, policy is made from the perspective of cities and urban areas. This policy is not always well adapted to the different context, needs and opportunities of rural areas; urges the European Commission to take measures to better consider the rural context. In the current context, identifies the risk that, due to the emergency nature of the crisis, the recovery plan and other EU policies could be implemented in a way more favourable to cities and urban areas. If the recovery plan does not involve regions in its drafting and implementation, some needs and opportunities for rural areas will not be taken into account. Furthermore, it is important to stress that rural policy goes beyond agricultural policy and includes social policy and policy on the management of services in rural areas; these areas are often marginal in terms of production but are central as regards the environment, landscape and protection of biodiversity. More attention must be paid to business development, services, innovation, wildlife and landscape protection and accessibility in rural areas;</p>	<p>The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) has since many years a territorial focus and funds not only agriculture and forestry-related objectives but also initiatives benefitting rural areas in a broader sense. When planning the implementation of EU funds, the Member States are to ensure synergy, coordination, complementarity and demarcation between the different funds, such as the EAFRD and cohesion policy funds (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund (CF), European Social Fund+) in order to maximise the added value of support.</p> <p>Cohesion policy needs to ensure that all regions receive tailored support, building on the local strengths.</p> <p>Around €80 billion out of the €200 billion of the 2021-2027 ERDF envelope will be concentrated on the policy objective ‘A Smarter and competitive Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation’. In that context, smart specialisation strategies are further developed.</p> <p>The key element is the adoption of a broad understanding of innovation, beyond the traditional technological view. Via smart specialisation, rural regions can find their own ways to innovation-led growth trajectories, including non-tech innovation potentials (e.g. social innovation, service innovation, frugal innovation, etc.) and supporting incremental innovation adding up to the region's technology endowment, supporting digital and green transition.</p>
<p>43. considers that rural development policy must be recognised as a discrete policy area alongside agricultural policy, and should be explicitly coordinated with and integrated into regional policy. The development of rural areas does not just concern agricultural businesses</p>	<p>Several EU funds may support rural development. Under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the territorial approach of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development appreciates the important role of agriculture in EU</p>

<p>and farmland management, but also involves measures to support broader business development, tourism, services in rural areas, broadband roll-out, accessibility and communications, which must be central to rural development policy;</p>	<p>rural areas, but also funds such initiatives not directly linked to agriculture, together with other EU funds, notably under cohesion policy. Member States are to ensure the synergy, coordination, complementarity and demarcation between the different funds supporting rural areas in order to maximise the added value.</p>
<p>47. advocates that there should be a mechanism in place to engage policy dialogues within Member States among all the relevant stakeholders (including, but not limited to, regional authorities, the business community and civil society). For LRAs in particular, it is essential that their investment needs, including for rural areas, be fully reflected in Member States' recovery plans;</p>	<p>The principle of partnership is a key feature in the implementation of the cohesion policy funds, building on the multi-level governance approach and ensuring the involvement of regional, local, urban and other public authorities, civil society, economic and social partners and, where appropriate, research institutions and universities.</p> <p>For the Partnership Agreement and each programme, each Member State shall organise and implement a comprehensive partnership in accordance with its institutional and legal framework and taking into account the specificities of the Funds. That partnership shall include at least the following partners: (a) regional, local, urban and other public authorities; (b) economic and social partners; (c) relevant bodies representing civil society, such as environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination, (ca) research institutions and universities, where appropriate.</p> <p>Partnership is also a principle for the preparation of CAP Strategic Plans.</p>
<p>48. recommends investment in strengthening the resilience of agri-food supply chains, both local and global. From a resilience perspective, it is necessary to regulate markets, strengthen the position of farmers vis-à-vis other stakeholders in the sector, change the international agricultural trade rules so as to encourage greater fairness and solidarity in trade relations and develop territorial food</p>	<p>The future CAP will include, among its core specific objectives, both the resilience of the agricultural sector across the Union and the improvement of the farmers' position in the value chain.</p> <p>The CAP already addresses challenges linked to market regulation, the position of farmers in the chain of territorial development, including for food</p>

<p>systems;</p>	<p>systems. The future CAP has among its core specific objectives both the resilience of the agricultural sector across the Union and the improvement of the farmers' position in the value chain.</p> <p>The Farm-to-Fork strategy also recognises such elements and includes pertinent actions such as the development of legislation on sustainable food systems, a contingency plan to ensure food supply and food security in times of crises and more actions to favour producer cooperation. In addition, both the Farm-to-Fork strategy and the Trade Policy Review contemplate actions to improve the functioning of the trade framework, in view of the growing need for more sustainable food systems.</p>
<p>50. calls for more resources for local and regional authorities from central governments and the European Union to boost their health and care systems and emergency preparedness now and in the long term;</p>	<p>To address the needs emerging from the COVID-19 crisis, the Cohesion policy funds have already provided flexible and fast way in support of health systems, including reinforcing health sector labour force, through CRII and CRII+ initiatives¹⁸. Additional resources have been allocated through the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) to Cohesion policy programmes extending the options for Member States to finance crisis response and crisis repair measures including for regional and local authorities.</p> <p>In 2021-2027, cohesion policy will continue to support modernisation, structural transformation and sustainability of health systems by investing in strengthening primary care and supporting the transition away from institutional care towards community-based and integrated care structures and making more use of digitalisation of health services, telemedicine and mobile health solutions. European Regional Development Fund will also contribute with financing health promotion and disease prevention facilities and equipment to ensure person centred care in case of</p>

¹⁸ [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative \(CRII\)](#) and [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus \(CRII+\)](#),

	future crisis.
<p>51. points out that that businesses in rural areas must have access to credit and capital. Banks are abandoning the countryside just as physical offices are being transformed into virtual offices. By investing in venture capital, the EU can ensure accessibility so that businesses in rural areas can have the same opportunities to develop as those in more densely populated areas;</p>	<p>In addition to the funding available at national level, additional tools will be provided to support local and regional authorities through territorial instruments, such as the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) tools providing linkages to centrally financed projects and ensuring strategic consistency with local needs and challenges, including in health and care systems.</p> <p>The ERDF and the EAFRD may support businesses in rural areas including through financial instruments.</p>
<p>52. calls on the European institutions to ensure that there is sufficient clarity with regard to the interplay between the different new financing and funding mechanisms, including the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and existing national and EU schemes, to avoid additional complexity and potentially low absorption rates at the local and regional levels . Encourage Member states and the European Commission to better involve local and regional levels in the overall recovery effort. Their role at the frontline of the pandemic, in public investment, and in these twin transitions, must be part of the core recovery plan;</p>	<p>The Commission has been engaging with the Member States and the regions ahead of the formal submission of programmes and plans to ensure the best possible use of the different instruments. Such an upstream process allows for the EU support to be distributed in an efficient way that is complementary and mutually reinforcing rather than competing.</p> <p>In addition, the timespan, scope and objectives of the instruments allows for a somewhat different focus. Cohesion policy aims at unlocking the long-term growth potential of regions supporting the green and digital transitions. In that framework, REACT-EU targets medium-term crisis repair actions related to labour markets, healthcare and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (liquidity and solvency support) with a view of the green and digital transitions. The Recovery and Resilience Facility will also address the medium and longer-term consequences of the coronavirus crisis. The Facility may also finance structural reforms to increase competitiveness of the Member States' economies in line with country specific recommendations as well as activities outside the scope of cohesion policy (for example support to larger enterprises, etc.).</p>

<p>55. emphasises that the EU recovery plan should be directed towards environmentally friendly and sustainable development, which is so important for both people and the environment, and which will lead to a new normal recovery. The pandemic showed us the need for more green infrastructure, climate-friendly mobility and sustainable tourism;</p>	<p>The EU Recovery plan is designed to promote a fair socio-economic recovery, repair and revitalise the Single Market, to guarantee a level playing field, and support the urgent investments. There is a significant emphasis on the green and digital transitions, which are key to Europe's future prosperity and resilience.</p> <p>In the next programming period 2021-2027, specific climate targets are established for the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund with a minimum support of 30% and 37% respectively. This will be accompanied by a special adjustment mechanism that will help in monitoring and achieving them.</p> <p>The national recovery and resilience plans must also fulfil the ‘Do no significant harm’ principle, where Member States need to provide sufficient information to justify how no reform and no investment makes significant harm to any of the six environmental objectives as defined in Article 17 of the EU Taxonomy Regulation¹⁹. Thus, the Recovery and Resilience Facility not only guarantees that no harm will be done to the environment, but it also boosts the EU’s readiness to achieve to become the first continent to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.</p> <p>Additionally, the Just Transition Fund (JTF) will support the adjustment to the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050, including the goal of 55% Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction by 2030, as established in the European Green Deal.</p>
<p>59. stresses the need to adapt various rules. It is noted, for instance, that on top of the recent amendment of the GBER in relation to companies in difficulty, a more flexible criterion for companies in difficulty is needed,</p>	<p>The Commission has swiftly put in place a State aid Temporary Framework²⁰ to enable Member States to use the full flexibility under State aid rules in the context of the pandemic. It has prolonged and adjusted it several times, to address</p>

¹⁹ Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/2088; OJ L 198, 22.6.2020, p. 13–43.

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/competition-policy/state-aid/coronavirus/temporary-framework_fr

<p>especially for the start-ups and scale-ups sector, which often have regular funding rounds and thus become technically companies in difficulty, even when they are intrinsically sound and fast-growing companies. Accordingly, more flexibility in relation to the <i>de minimis</i> regime is urgent, while it would be desirable to complement the scope of Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 by providing, in addition to aid to compensate the damage caused by natural disasters (Article 50), also aid to make good the damage caused by pandemic events. An "adaptation" of the rules on accumulating would be useful as in circumstances such as the existing ones, accumulation between aid under <i>de minimis</i> or under GBER with aid granted under the TF must be allowed, taking into account the intensity thereof, also on those eligible costs;</p>	<p>as much as possible the needs of undertakings in these difficult times. The prolongation of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) and of several guidelines for the year 2021 also gave the opportunity to introduce some changes with regards to the treatment of firms in difficulties during this crisis period. Cumulation rules have been designed under the Temporary Framework to allow the combination of support under <i>de minimis</i> and the GBER with those of the Temporary Framework. Furthermore, a number of State aid guidelines are currently under review to ensure they are fully fit for purpose to address the needs of the twin green and digital transitions.</p> <p>At the same time, the purpose of State aid control is to limit potential unfair competition in the internal market: in this perspective, supporting firms in structural difficulty cannot be the ‘new normal’, and should be done in line with the rescue and restructuring guidelines in order to limit negative impact on competitors. Conversely, for start-ups with regard the definition of undertakings in difficulty, article 1 (4) (c) of the GBER already provides some flexibility for start-up schemes to address the specific needs of these undertakings.</p>
<p>62. warns that the regional aid maps to be adopted before the end of 2021, which will be drawn up on the basis of statistical data from before 2020, may hinder the economic recovery of the most disadvantaged regions until the 2024 mid-term review is adopted. In effect, as they use statistical data from before 2020, these maps will not accurately reflect the economic situation of regions which are 'a' or 'c' areas and may cause difficulties when it comes to the economic recovery of these regions, by reducing the maximum aid intensity applicable or by laying down particular restrictions on the granting of aid to large enterprises following the change in the status of certain regions. The Committee of the</p>	<p>When adopting the Regional aid Guidelines, it was essential to make use of reliable and homogeneous Eurostat data to build the regional aid maps. This indeed means the use of Eurostat Gross Domestic Product data for 2016-2018 and unemployment data for 2017-2019, as those were the most recent data currently available for the preparation and the adoption of the Guidelines, which could not be further postponed in order to give enough time to Member States to prepare and notify their new maps. Using data available later in 2021 would only have delayed the process without reflecting, or only marginally, the effects of the Covid-19 crisis. This is why the Commission has proposed in the Guidelines to advance the mid-term review initially planned for</p>

<p>Regions therefore calls on the European Commission to take account of this situation and to adopt measures going beyond a mid-term review in 2024 to ensure that the most disadvantaged regions which are 'a' or 'c' areas are not adversely affected by changes in their status making it difficult for them to recover;</p>	<p>2024 by one year (to 2023) to take the economic effects on regional development caused by the COVID-19 outbreak into account as soon as possible.</p>
<p>68. calls for policies and funding that support high digital connectivity for all EU regions and local authorities – including rural areas – to ensure that people and companies can adapt to the crisis and the changing world of work; observes that an increased use of teleworking may cause demographic and economic shifts from the cities towards intermediate or rural areas. Notes, nevertheless, that such a shift would only be possible with the development of sustainable mobility linkages between rural, intermediate and urban areas;</p>	<p>Developing broadband infrastructure is primarily for market actors. Targeted grant support is available from the European Regional and Development Fund and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development to areas where the market cannot provide, specifically in grey and white areas, as defined by the broadband State aid guidelines. These are mostly rural, remote and sparsely populated areas, where the returns on investment are too low for market players to invest on their own.</p> <p>Enhancing digital connectivity will be supported as a Specific Objective by ERDF in the 2021-2027 period. Within the framework of the European Semester exercise (2019 Country Reports), the Commission identified broadband as key priority for ERDF investments in 12 Member States. It will bring up this issue in the negotiations on the future Partnership Agreements with these Member States.</p> <p>More flexible working arrangements (e.g. through teleworking) offer opportunities to facilitate the transition to sustainable mobility. This will be especially beneficial to urban areas, which are under normal circumstances heavily congested during rush hours. Integrated and place-based regional initiatives can improve access to digital services and infrastructure, and hence business environment.</p>
<p>69. calls for investment in the provision of high-speed internet everywhere, with specific attention to rural and less developed areas. Next to that, it will be important to develop strategies for providing (rural) households with</p>	<p>Full coverage of high-speed broadband networks that includes in particular rural and remote areas is a prerequisite to make such areas attractive and to make inclusive digitalisation possible. Enhancing effective access to the required hardware could be</p>

<p>the necessary affordable and decent hardware. A very specific action could be for Europe to give incentives to companies to donate hardware to people. Setting specific targets for rural areas in terms of provision of rural broadband, hardware and skills is necessary. The current DESI report (Digital Economy and Society Index) should provide this information;</p>	<p>part of a holistic strategy that should also include upskilling the corresponding age groups. Considering targets that reflect adequately the situation of rural areas, including Digital Economy and Society Index report, will facilitate monitoring effective progress.</p> <p>The ERDF investments into broadband infrastructure will focus on developing Very High Connectivity (VHC) networks, in particular in grey and white areas. Those regions should be targeted where the current broadband coverage rate is low and speeds are significantly lower than required to address the needs of homes and businesses, and where the market is not evolving on its own towards ensuring that the gigabit objectives are achieved.</p> <p>The Digital Economy and Society Index and Broadband Coverage Studies published annually by the Commission offer a good starting point for the country-specific analysis on digital connectivity and digital skills.</p>
<p>71. asks that the Digital Europe Programme, with its network of European Digital Innovation Hubs, pay specific attention to the needs of rural areas and offer adapted services through platforms that have a thorough understanding of their specific needs, with a close link to local communities;</p>	<p>Through the Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL), the Commission will support the establishment of an EU-wide network of over 200 European Digital Innovation Hubs to provide support services to small and medium -sized enterprises (SMEs) throughout Europe to digitalise their businesses. The goal is to have at least one hub per region so that there will be a hub in working distance from all SMEs in Europe wherever they may be.</p> <p>Hubs will be specialized and will provide services that take into account the specialization needs of the local economy and that will build on the local strengths of the region. Being local, they will also have specific local knowledge and can provide their services in the local language, understanding the local context. Through the network, businesses will also have access to the expertise of other hubs around Europe and can benefit from these, with the support of their local hub, if need be. The</p>

	<p>network should also ensure that a broad range of sectors and technologies are covered.</p>
<p>82. highlights that social investment should be strengthened as a key priority for a fair and inclusive recovery. [...] We should make sure all Europeans have access to affordable healthcare of good quality. We should create more quality jobs with fair working conditions, more inclusive education paths and skills training, ensure decent and affordable housing, provide active support for the most vulnerable and equal opportunities for all people. To achieve this, we need strong investment in social infrastructure and social services at local and regional level, with the right policy mix and financial resources for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and the SDG agenda;</p>	<p>In the upcoming programming period 2021-2027, the European Social Fund + and the European Regional Development Fund will continue supporting Member States and regions to achieve a fair and inclusive recovery.</p> <p>The European Social Fund + will support Member States and regions to achieve high employment levels, fair social protection and a skilled and resilient workforce ready for the future world of work, as well as inclusive and cohesive societies aiming to eradicating poverty and delivering on the principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p> <p>The European Regional Development Fund will complement these efforts by supporting investments in educational infrastructure, e-learning equipment and e-learning applications and platforms for schools, supporting services to build inclusive education and creating incentives for educational reforms in the Member States. It also aims to address inequalities in accessing education, considering territorial disparities and the urban-rural divide. The ERDF also supports housing investments by building and renovating social housing, e.g., individual apartments for families in the community and supporting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care.</p> <p>Moreover, the Recovery and Resilience Facility will also represent an opportunity for investments and reform in social services sector. Social infrastructure is one of the priority areas under the Social Investment and Skills Window of the InvestEU Programme. The InvestEU Programme will cover both financial as well as advisory services.</p>

<p>N°12 Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan COM(2020) 784 final COR-2021-00051 – SEDEC-VII/018 144th plenary session - May 2021 Rapporteur: Jan TREI (EE/EPP) DG CNECT – Commissioner BRETON</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>2. seeks dialogue with the Commission's DG CNECT on the implementation measures envisaged to follow up on the action plan on a practical level; in this regard highlights the need for synergies between funds and regulations at European, national, regional and local level;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the request of the Committee to have a dialogue on measures implementing the ‘Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan’. Progress in implementing concrete measures will be regularly communicated.</p> <p>The action plan is intended precisely to facilitate synergies and complementarities by clarifying the objectives and instruments at the EU level, in full respect of subsidiarity. In particular, as regards the news media, the mechanisms to fund media pluralism and support innovation, freelance journalists and local media have changed in the new Multiannual Financial Framework.</p> <p>A dedicated budget will be available for news media under Creative Europe to support partnerships between media organisations, including local media.</p>
<p>16. finds it regrettable that the policy towards local news media has to date been to manage their decline, rather than facilitating change and opening up new avenues;</p>	<p>The ‘Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan’, together with the Recovery Plan and the other support and regulatory instruments, form an ambitious comprehensive strategy facilitating transformation and opening up new avenues for the sector, including local news.</p> <p>The Commission is co-financing a portfolio of projects, including 11 projects supporting media pluralism, representing nearly €7 million in EU funding. Some of these projects focus on supporting local news media and local journalists, as for example the project ‘Exchange of media rising stars’ and ‘internship opportunities for</p>

	<p>minority languages’.</p> <p>The new Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027 will provide a stable source of funding for the media freedom and pluralism projects under the cross-sectoral strand. Furthermore, under InvestEU, access to finance for the news media will continue to be supported through the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility.</p>
<p>23. stresses that local and regional media are often disadvantaged in comparison with international online platforms. The CoR is convinced that more detailed EU regulation is needed to solve a number of issues (including asymmetry of information and access to data), as the vertical integration of online platforms, together with their gatekeeper function, seriously hampers effective access and choice of services and content. Platforms giving priority to their own services (self-preferencing) poses a serious threat to pluralism and fair competition;</p>	<p>The Commission adopted in December 2020 the Digital Markets Act, which aims to ensure fair, open and contestable market environment. To this end, it lays down obligations and prohibitions addressed to designated gatekeepers, which aim to tackle certain unfair practices and practices that could undermine contestability of markets in the digital sector, such as self-preferencing or unfair data related practices by such gatekeepers.</p> <p>In addition, the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) aims at creating a level playing field between traditional and on-demand services and video-sharing platforms, and for that it extends certain audiovisual rules to video-sharing platforms.</p> <p>As regards self-preferencing, the revised AVMSD allows Member States to take measures to ensure the appropriate prominence of audiovisual content of general interest.</p>
<p>56. reiterates that EU audiovisual media policy should be based on a holistic vision of the remaining room for manoeuvre in all media-related areas such as competition, copyright, data, etc. EU policy-making needs to take a more horizontal approach to the audiovisual and media sectors; calls for a more detailed long-term vision for the audiovisual sector and the whole of Europe's media industry;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that a well-functioning EU media market requires a comprehensive combination of actions across different policies based on a holistic vision. The ‘Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan’, based on analysis of the media sectors and gathering a set of 10 actions of different natures, goes precisely into this direction.</p>

N°13 Digital Education Action Plan 2021 – 2027
COM(2020) 624 final
COR-2020-04769 – SEDEC-VII/011
144th plenary session – May 2021
Rapporteur-General: Gillian COUGHLAN (IE/Renew E.)
DG EAC – Commissioner GABRIEL

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>7. welcomes the efforts done by the European Union to increase the digital skills of European citizens in the last two decades, culminating in the Digital Education Action Plan 2021 – 2027 and the objective of facilitating the delivery of high quality, inclusive, accessible, effective, engaging education while integrating distance, online and blended methodologies;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the adoption of the opinion on the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 and the Committee’s support for the Action Plan’s two priorities to foster the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem and to enhance digital skills and competences.</p>
<p>8. emphasises the importance of the concept of digital cohesion, as outlined in the Digital Europe for All opinion , as an important additional dimension of the traditional concept of economic, social and territorial cohesion defined in the EU Treaty. Calls for it to be extended to the educational sphere and to be taken into account in the next Treaty changes. This is a necessary step in order to address societal challenges in light of ever-growing digitalisation needs, while making sure not to leave any person or region behind;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that ‘digital cohesion’ is an important dimension of economic, social and territorial cohesion defined in the EU Treaty.</p> <p>Extending digital cohesion to education is addressed through several actions, in line with the priorities and actions of the Digital Education Action Plan.</p> <p>Under the Resilience and Recovery Facility, Member States can benefit of the opportunities to invest in the digital transformation of education through digital technologies and connectivity, particularly to enhance network quality in rural areas.</p> <p>In accordance with the priorities of the EU gigabit policy, the expansion of high speed connectivity to all schools and to households throughout Europe and with special attention to rural and underserved areas is supported under the European Structural funds and via financial instruments (European Investment Bank or the Connected Europe Broadband Fund), and an ambitious Connectivity Programme for the next multiannual programming period called</p>

	<p>Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) DIGITAL.</p> <p>Under the Horizon Europe Programme, the digital transformation of education and training systems will be supported, through research and innovation activities.</p> <p>The Digital Europe Programme will support actions to foster cooperation and work towards a European Education Technologies ecosystem promoting European excellence in educational innovation, including ways to combine local, regional, national and European efforts.</p>
<p>13. calls on the European Commission to promote actively the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive digital education and urges the Commission and the Member States to identify, invest in and share digital education features that are designed for and adapted to people with disabilities; the education and skills needs of vulnerable groups must also be taken into account and addressed by ensuring they have equal access to high-quality basic education;</p>	<p>The Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) acknowledges that the type and design of technological tools and platforms as well as the digital pedagogy used impact directly on whether individuals are included or excluded from learning. Students with disabilities need tools that are fully accessible if they are to benefit from digital transformation.</p> <p>The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030¹ highlights how confinement measures during the COVID-19 pandemic added urgency to develop measures making inclusive and accessible remote learning a reality for all. As stated in the DEAP, persons with disabilities reported difficulties in relation to accessibility of technology and digital educational material, availability of assistive technology, technical support and teacher competence.</p> <p>Under its Strategic Priority 1 – Fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem, the DEAP will support Member States in improving connectivity of schools, purchase of digital equipment and e-learning applications and platforms, in particular for students from disadvantaged groups and for students and educators with disabilities. It will do so through the Connecting Europe Facility Programme and the Recovery and Resilience</p>

¹ COM(2021) 101 final.

	<p>Facility.</p> <p>Under its Strategic Priority 2 – Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation, the DEAP recognises that all learners, including those with disabilities, should acquire a basic understanding of new and emerging technologies including artificial intelligence (AI).</p> <p>The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 will enhance cooperation for national reforms for inclusive education and exploit opportunities for synergies between the DEAP, the European Education Area, the European Skills Agenda and the European Research Area, as well as between the Erasmus+ and other EU funding instruments. In the Strategy, the Commission also calls on Member States to support the development of inclusive schools that can become a reference in inclusive and innovative teaching and learning across the EU along the objectives of the European Education Area and the DEAP.</p>
<p>17. is deeply concerned about the fact that there is a clear basic digital skills divide between employed and unemployed, older people and adults with a lower level of education² and a clear increase in the digital education gap between women and men. Encouraging girls to pursue studies in STE(A)M subjects (to reduce the digital gender gap) will be a step in the right direction; calls on the European Commission and the Member States to utilise the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Digital Europe Programme, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and the European Social Fund to promote participation of women in STE(A)M and to</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the importance of closing the digital skills gap and has put forward an ambitious EU digital skills strategy outlined in the ‘2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade’³ and the European Skills Agenda⁴. The Digital Education Action Plan contributes to these policies and its objective of enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation.</p> <p>Through its actions, it will support the objectives of the Skills Agenda of ensuring that 70% of 16 to 74 year olds should have at least basic digital skills by 2025, and of the Europe’s Digital Decade targets⁵ of reaching a minimum 80% of the population with basic digital skills, by 2030.</p>

² Ibid.

³ COM(2021) 118 final.

⁴ [European Skills Agenda - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_skills_agenda_en.pdf)

⁵ [Europe’s Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030 | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_digital_decade_en.pdf)

<p>ensure that funding decreases this gap through support for digital education providers;</p>	<p>With Action 13 of the Digital Education Action Plan, the Commission presents a dedicated action to increase women’s participation and career development in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and information and communication technologies (ICT). Funded by both Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe this action is divided in two parts: the first one consists in a series of trainings activities on digital and entrepreneurial skills for sustainability for girls at primary, secondary and tertiary education. The objective of this first strand is to engage 8,000 schools girls in 2021 and then further extend the activities in 2022-2025 to reach 40,000 girls and women along the entire education chain.</p> <p>The second strand of the action focuses on developing new higher education programmes for engineering and information and communications technology based on the STEM education while integrating the arts (STEAM) approach. This will be done by setting STEM as a priority for cooperation projects in higher education in the Erasmus+ 2021 Work Programme, by building on the EU STEM Coalition to support the establishment of national STEM platforms, and by disseminating the results from the Erasmus+ funded forward-looking cooperation projects launched in February 2020 and good practices available within the European Universities alliances.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission is also developing the European Strategy for Universities, that will bring to the universities of the future. As emerged from the consultations, openness, inclusiveness, and the digital dimension, will certainly be key aspects of the Strategy.</p>
<p>18. also expresses concern at the clear digital divide in rural areas throughout the education community (teachers, pupils and families). Calls</p>	<p>The Commission shares the Committee’s view on the importance of reducing the digital social and geographic divide. The Commission called for</p>

<p>on the European Commission and the Member States to use the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Social Fund to ensure that funding reduces this gap through targeted investments in those regions that face demographic challenges and suffer from an ongoing, significant lack of investment, defining stable, sustainable projects that have an impact on the education community as a whole;</p>	<p>action on this in the 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy⁶, notably through ensuring equal access to digital infrastructure, equipment and skills. This is why the Commission set, in the Recovery and Resilience Facility⁷, the flagships on digital education and skills, and on widest possible access to broadband services.</p> <p>In addition, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) remains the EU’s main funding instrument for investing in jobs, social inclusion, education and training measures in all EU regions, including rural areas. Member States can and are encouraged to use their ESF+ resources to provide targeted financial support schemes for disadvantaged schools, families and pupils including those located in rural and remote areas that suffer from structural disadvantage.</p>
<p>20. recommends furthermore that all training and apprenticeship programmes incorporate a digital element, going beyond the Digital Opportunity traineeship and regardless of the skill being taught, and that the proposed European Exchange Platform create content for these courses akin to an International Computer Driving License – ICDL – in addition to the European Digital Skills Certificate that will be based on a self-assessment approach;</p>	<p>The Commission would like to clarify that the feasibility of creating a European Exchange Platform and the scope of its activities will depend on the results of the feasibility study. The feasibility study is part of Action 3 of the Digital Education Action Plan. It will provide the Commission with reliable knowledge, evidence, analysis and guidance on the possible creation of a European exchange platform.</p> <p>Amongst the goals of the possible Platform would be to share certified online resources and link existing education platforms. The study will take into account the needs of providers, learners, educators and all relevant education and training stakeholders. A decision on the creation of such platform is expected in fourth quarter of 2021.</p> <p>Furthermore, the current EU strategy documents on Vocational Education and Training (VET), such as the Council Recommendation on vocational</p>

⁶ COM(2020) 575 final.

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility; OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17–75.

	<p>education and training (the Osnabrück Declaration⁸) emphasise both the digitalisation of VET and apprenticeships and supporting learners to acquire the digital competences required for most occupations.</p> <p>The Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, launched on 20 April 2021 will also host such digital training resources. The European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC), which will follow a commonly agreed set of quality requirements, aims at enhancing the transparency and the mutual recognition of digital skills certification by governments, employers and other stakeholders across Europe. It should allow people to indicate their level of digital competence corresponding to the DigComp proficiency levels⁹. While the EDSC will be based on an objective testing approach, the complementary digital competence self-assessment tool, was launched in summer 2021. The self-reflection tool MyDigSkills, based on DigCompSat, provides a first entry level tool to get acquainted with the depth and breath of digital competences as described in the Digital Competence Framework, and to enable users to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses the Digital Competence framework for citizens has also been used, for instance, to embed digital competences in curricula in schools, including VET schools.</p>
<p>24. calls for more ethical use of artificial intelligence and data in education and training for educators and for research and innovation related activities to be supported through the Horizon Europe programme;</p>	<p>The Commission recognises that artificial intelligence (AI) and data usage are playing an increasingly important role in education and training. It also agrees that this trend comes with ethical implications and that there is a growing need for researchers, educators and students to have a basic understanding of AI and data usage, be able to engage positively, critically and ethically with AI and exploit its full potential.</p> <p>In this context, the Digital Education Action Plan includes an action dedicated to promoting better</p>

⁸ https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/osnabrueck_declaration_eu2020.pdf

⁹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bc52328b-294e-11e6-b616-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>

	<p>understanding of the impact of emerging technologies such as AI in education and training. As part of this action, the Commission is setting up an expert group that will develop ethical guidelines on AI and data in education and training for teachers and educators. The selection of the expert group member is ongoing and the first meeting hosted by Commissioner Gabriel took place on 8 July 2021. The development of ethical guidelines for teachers, will promote the ethical use of artificial intelligence and data usage for teaching and learning.</p> <p>Within the same action, the Commission will also support relevant activities under Horizon Europe, including a call for proposals for training ‘Ensuring reliability and trust in quality of Research Ethics expertise in the context of new/emerging technologies’. The call will contribute to the enhancement of skills and knowledge of ‘ethics by design for AI’ among university students and researchers and already includes a target of 45% of female participation in the training activities.</p> <p>Finally, the Commission will support a call on extended reality in education and training.</p>
<p>26. offers its help in the dissemination of the Connectivity4schools awareness-raising campaign;</p> <p>29. is alerted by frustration regarding inadequate connectivity and equipment that was voiced by many pupils and teachers throughout European cities and regions over the last year; restates, on the one hand, its message that priorities in local educational infrastructure development need to be changed, and that LRAs will support the switch to modern, functional, digital and green education infrastructure in their communities; calls on the other hand for national governments, through either EU, national funding or partnership schemes with local businesses, to provide all teachers and pupils with a suitable digital</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the support to promote the Connectivity4Schools campaign, outlined in Digital Education Action Plan. It also values that the issue of connectivity is tackled in different points of the opinion, in view of divides and investments.</p> <p>The Commission would like to underline that the Connectivity4Schools campaign is funded by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) 2 Programme which has a proposed total budget of €33.7 billion. The digital strand of CEF 2 will help fund connectivity infrastructure for socio-economic drivers and will pay attention to education institutions and research centres. In the meantime, Member States have the opportunity to address their high-speed connectivity needs in their Recovery and Resilience Plans and in</p>

<p>educational device, along with free access to digital communication and education apps and platforms;</p>	<p>particular through the flagship area ‘Connected’.</p>
<p>33. suggests that teacher training models across the European Union become more aligned through enhanced co-operation among our universities and among continuing teacher training centres, and urges for the creation of physical "hubs" in university cities so that teachers across the education system can avail of in-service and quality continuing professional development; in addition, suggests that the content of continuing teacher training courses be made openly available so that it can be reused in day-to-day teaching;</p>	<p>The Commission has launched a call for proposal within the new Erasmus+ Programme for Erasmus+ Teacher Academies. These projects will bring together teacher education institutions with other key stakeholders to develop teacher education in Europe further, work on common European topics such as digital learning, equity or environmental sustainability and provide teachers with learning opportunities on these matters. These academies are expected to lead to sustainable networks and cooperation among teacher education providers.</p> <p>The eTwinning and School Education Gateway have provided – and continue to provide - teachers with courses, learning materials and opportunities for professional networking and ‘learning by doing’ on effective use of digital learning.</p> <p>European Universities such as the ‘FORTHEM’ alliance¹⁰ of seven higher education institutions in Spain, Finland, France, Italy, Poland, Latvia and Germany are also developing good practice through actions e.g. the school internship network. Participants can experience the influence of different cultures to enable pupils to experience the European idea at home in their classroom. Teachers participating in the FORTHEM European Summer School for Teachers have the opportunity to share best practices with schoolteachers from other European countries.</p> <p>Training content produced by European Universities will be Open Education Resource.</p>
<p>34. embraces the idea of Digital Education Content Frameworks; however, would like to be reassured that funding will be provided at regional level to ensure that all teachers feel part of the hub and that regional languages are</p>	<p>The Commission would like to clarify that the Digital Education Content Framework and the Digital Education Hub are two different initiatives under the Digital Education Action Plan.</p>

¹⁰ <https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/fit-forthem/>

<p>supported with the adaptation of resources for all;</p>	<p>The Framework, part of Action 3, will address the changing nature of education content and resources, their provision and delivery as affected by the digital transformation. It will furthermore build on European cultural and creative diversity and include guiding principles regarding digital content for specific sectors of education and their needs such as high-quality instructional design, accessibility, recognition and multilingualism while reflecting the need for the interoperability, certification, verification and transferability of content.</p> <p>The Digital Education Hub is action 14 of the Digital Education Action Plan. Its main goal is to support better cooperation and exchange on digital education at EU level. It will do so inter alia by creating a community on EU-level where those working in different sectors of education can exchange timely, relevant information on the creation, use, distribution, mainstreaming and regulation of digital education. The regional dimension within the work of the Hub will be supported by the Network of national advisory services (NAS) on digital education. The NASs could be defined as national or regional bodies active in the implementation of digital education policies and the network could contribute to the work of the community of practice of the Digital Education Hub by reaching out to experts, stakeholders, and organisations at national and regional level. An important element of the Hub will be its cross-sectoral nature and the openness to engage with various stakeholders, including the private sector and the civil society.</p>
<p>35. advocates that the European Digital Education Content Framework have its own technology incubator to create content which is standardised according to the Shareable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) and of high quality, in line with the Open Education Resources (OER) model, and support teachers and other professionals in the</p>	<p>The Commission would like to underline that the scope of the European Digital Education Content Framework is still under development and that its main objective will be to identify the areas where EU action would have an added value in relation to digital education content and work closely with all stakeholders to find the best solutions. The initiative includes the launch of an in-depth study</p>

<p>creation of content, study programmes and resources in line with the above criteria. It is essential that cooperation be strengthened and educational materials and good practices shared; recommends that this unit support national education departments in assessing technological applications so that money is spent on the best technology, rigorous scrutiny is undertaken and any data harvested is used appropriately;</p>	<p>to analyse the supply and demand sides of digital education content in 2022 as well as intensive dialogue with relevant stakeholders throughout this year and 2022.</p> <p>The Commission will take into account the Committee point on the the importance of data protection when developing the framework.</p>
<p>36. calls on the Commission, through suitable measures, as part of the Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and InvestEU programmes, inter alia, to support the creation of pan-European platforms for the broad dissemination of educational content and tools in an inclusive and multilingual way, taking into account regional languages;</p>	<p>The Commission is happy to confirm that such platform already exists through the Learning Corner website¹¹ launched in March 2019.</p> <p>Targeted mainly at primary and secondary school pupils, their teachers and parents, the Learning Corner gathers in one place games, quizzes, learning and teaching materials, developed by the Commission and the other EU institutions, and focusing on the EU and its benefits for European citizens.</p> <p>The Learning Corner also acts as a central entry point towards relevant information of direct interest to (i) teachers such as e-Twinning, Erasmus+, etc. and to (ii) young people such as work, traineeship, volunteering, visit to the EU institutions, etc.</p> <p>The educational content is available in all EU official languages and easily accessible, per age groups and/or per topics. Although managed by the Commission, the website has consciously been created at the inter-institutional (europa.eu) level on Europa. The website is also being developed on a continuous level.</p>
<p>37. highlights the EU's investment in digital culture, singling out the example of Europeana, which in providing digital content on European history and culture has helped to diversify teaching in schools across the European Union;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee's recognition of the importance of digital content on EU history and culture for teachers across the EU.</p> <p>While Europeana is part of the learning materials available on Learning Corner, the latter offers</p>

¹¹ [Learning Corner | Learning Corner \(europa.eu\)](https://learningcorner.europa.eu/)

	<p>many more digital content about the EU history and culture, in various online formats (game, booklet, websites, etc.) developed by the Commission and the other EU institutions, and aimed at primary and secondary school pupils, their teachers and parents.</p>
<p>38. supports and calls for multiplying initiatives such as the Joint Research Centre's digital school project, allowing for free and accessible Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs);</p>	<p>The Joint Research Centre (JRC) focuses on MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), with a learning design adapted to secondary schools. The goal is to empower teachers and give them the opportunity to use the content produced by the JRC in a blended learning approach. The MOOCs will accompany the students in their learning experiences complementing their work, and allowing them to work in autonomy online.</p> <p>A project-based and co-designed approach will be favoured, that contributes to trust-building and ensures that final content fits teachers needs and interest.</p> <p>The dissemination channel for these MOOCs will be the EU Academy¹², an online learning platform, which the JRC has developed. It aims to build a single e-learning EU inter-institutional platform focusing on EU policies and their implementation.</p>
<p>42. calls on the Commission to address the specific nature of educational data and the risk posed by the lack of regulation on their exchange and storage; also calls on the Commission to involve the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) in reflection on the creation of specific status for data relating to pupils and learners, and to raise awareness among all involved parties in the digital education (teachers, students, pupils, learners and parents) about the importance of cyber security and also to find ways to continuously enhance cyber security in this field.</p>	<p>The Commission recognises that data usage in education and training comes with specific ethical, data protection and privacy concerns as well as major risks connected to fundamental rights such as the right to non-discrimination.</p> <p>Action 6 under the first priority of the Digital Education Action Plan aims to ensure all involved parties have a sufficient understanding of data usage and are able engage positively, critically and ethically with technologies such as artificial intelligence. As part of the Action 6, the Commission will set-up an expert group that will develop ethical guidelines on AI and data in education and training for teachers and educators.</p>

¹² [EU Academy \(europa.eu\)](http://europa.eu)

	<p>The guidelines will help raise awareness about the ethical implication of data usage in education and training as well as support educators with practical guidance.</p> <p>In addition, Action 8, under priority 2, envisages updating the European Digital Competences Framework for Citizens and Educators, to include also AI and data-related competences. Currently the Joint Research Centre is working with the Community of practice with the objective to have the Framework updated in first quarter of 2022.</p>
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<p>N°14 Enlargement package 2020 COM(2020) 660 final; COM(2020) 641 final COR-2020-05059 – CIVEX-VII/004 144th plenary session – May 2021 Rapporteur: Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ (HR/EPP), DG NEAR – Commissioner VÁRHELYI</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.3. calls on the European Commission to remain committed to high standards of openness, inclusiveness and responsiveness when drawing up the enlargement package, and to indicate in its report how stakeholders from enlargement countries – in particular local and regional authorities – were involved in drafting this document and the progress report, as well as the extent to which the stakeholders consulted were provided with feedback on the results of the consultation;</p> <p>1.10. calls on the European Commission to put forward proposals for involving representatives of the national, regional and local levels in the Western Balkans in the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe, with a view to creating a better framework for local and regional authorities; suggests to hold a series of citizens' dialogues in the Western Balkans to give citizens the opportunity to express their concerns and raise their expectations about membership to the European Union;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee that the involvement of local actors in the fundamental reforms is vital; they are the ones closest to the citizens. The Commission consults local civil society in the preparation of the enlargement package but it has also continued support to local actors with several projects. For instance, the extension of the ‘TAIEX Strategic Support to Local Authorities’ to all Western Balkans partners as well as a new intervention to promote good governance and administration at local level with OECD-SIGMA as implementing partner.</p> <p>Knowledge transfer between the EU and the Western Balkans is already taking place in the context of the Covenant of Mayors. A number of Western Balkans cities are already associated to this initiative and more should be encouraged to join. The Commission takes note and remains open to the involvement of citizens and organisations from the Western Balkans in the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE). CoFE’s Executive Board has been assigned responsibility for taking decisions by consensus of the three institutions, regarding the works of the Conference, its processes and events.</p>
<p>1.15. calls on the Commission to encourage Montenegro to step up its efforts to ensure transparent and inclusive policy-making, including greater centralised control over the</p>	<p>The Commission indeed encourages progress in this respect, as stated in the annual report: ‘the existing legal and institutional framework needs to be further improved to strengthen the consultation and cooperation mechanisms</p>

<p>quality of public stakeholder consultations;</p>	<p>between state institutions and the civil society in the context of the EU accession process’.</p>
<p>1.19. calls on the Commission to persevere in finding solutions regarding the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo (with the European Committee of the Regions offering concrete support and cooperation based on its role and expertise) and the further normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo;</p> <p>1.20. calls on the Commission, in line with its own recommendations and the positive recommendations of the European Parliament, which the CoR strongly supports, to call once more on the Council to address the issue of visa liberalisation for Kosovo;</p>	<p>The Commission fully supports efforts of the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues to work with the parties towards a comprehensive normalisation of the relations between Kosovo¹ and Serbia, and on the implementation of all past agreements reached in the Dialogue, including as regards the establishment of an Association/ Community of Serb majority municipalities.</p> <p>The Commission continues to assess that Kosovo has fulfilled all visa liberalisation benchmarks and to call on the Council to treat as a matter of urgency the proposal for visa liberalisation for Kosovo citizens</p>
<p>1.33. welcomes the efforts of the European Commission to evaluate the financial support provided by the EU to local authorities in the enlargement countries and neighbourhood policy countries between 2010 and 2018, and calls for the invaluable evaluation results to be widely publicised;</p>	<p>The Commission has done so with several stakeholder discussions and dissemination workshops.²</p>
<p>1.34. calls on the European Commission to develop practical tools to support effective capacity building for local and regional authorities in the Western Balkans, including through specific thematic support programmes and regional technical assistance projects, as well as via ongoing exchanges, mentoring and networking;</p>	<p>IPA III assistance provided under Window 2 will contribute to improving governance at sub-national levels. The capacity for inclusive and evidence-based policy development, merit-based human resources management, e-Governance, public financial management, transparency and accountability towards citizens and efficient service delivery will be among key priorities. The priority will be to support those administrations at sub-national levels that are committed to improving the quality of their governance, and develop or</p>

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

² The evaluation report and all annexes are published on the DG NEAR website, see: [la_eval - final_report.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

	<p>upgrade relevant governance reform plans that can be monitored over time. Interoperable, trusted and inclusive digital public services are a major change vector at local government level. In addition, support will be provided to decentralisation processes, in line with the beneficiaries' constitutions and policies, including the development of credible and relevant strategic frameworks and their implementation.</p>
<p>1.35. urges the Commission to extend the Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA) initiative to sub-national levels of administration in candidate and potential candidate countries, in order to define decentralised models for public administration COR-2020-05059-00-00-AC-TRA (EN) 8/13 reforms, and to support improvements in local governance and local public management, with a view to applying the acquis;</p>	<p>The Commission has included such a component as part of the next Support for Improvement in Governance and Management contract, as a pilot phase for the Western Balkans, starting in July 2021.</p>
<p>1.36. calls again on the European Commission to put in place ad hoc operational methods so that the TAIEX and Twinning mechanisms can be used for cooperation between local and regional governments of the Member States and those of the candidate and potential candidate countries;</p>	<p>The Commission has recently decided to expand the scheme 'TAIEX Strategic Support to Local Authorities' to cover all six Western Balkans partners, building on the successful outcome of the 2018-2020 pilot, which provided support to local authorities in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Serbia. The Commission is aligning the activities of this initiative with the priorities of the Economic Investment Plan (EIP). In this way, the EIP priorities can be taken forward also at the municipal level. This initiative is to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • capacity building in areas relevant to the local government mandate to advance good governance and socio-economic development; • effective delivery of local services to citizens, accountability and transparency, co-operation with local communities and businesses.

	<p>The EU Delegations and beneficiary partners in the six Western Balkans partners have been invited to draw up an indicative country activity plan to identify and submit proposals for the first activities to be supported by this initiative by 1 July 2021.</p> <p>Twinning is a European Union instrument for institutional cooperation between Public Administrations of EU Member States and of beneficiary or partner countries. Twinning projects bring together public sector expertise from EU Member States and beneficiary countries with the aim of achieving concrete operational results through peer-to-peer activities. The Twinning projects are programmed in the context of the bilateral programmes between the Commission and the Partner Countries. As a consequence, Twinning projects are mainly targeting central government administrations rather than local and regional authorities. It is possible to support and work with Ministries responsible for regional development and, in this context, support the sub national levels.</p>
<p>1.38. calls on the Commission to refine the indicators for measuring the progress made in public administration reforms in relation to the involvement of local and regional authorities in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of public policies, and to take additional steps to strengthen them and to effectively consult local and regional authorities in shaping policies that affect their work and the quality of local services to the public.</p>	<p>This will be part of the revision of the Support for Improvement in Governance and Management principles of public administration, and will be part of the above-mentioned contract.</p>
<p>1.39. welcomes the Commission's support to date in strengthening youth cooperation in the Western Balkans, which is of great importance in maintaining and further developing good neighbourly relations, including support for initiatives such as the Regional Youth Cooperation Office; calls on the Commission, in</p>	<p>The Commission fully endorses the importance of youth cooperation in the Western Balkans and is providing support to initiatives such as the Regional Youth Cooperation Office. With regard to the involvement of local and regional authorities as key partners for local youth associations and educational institutions.</p>

<p>future initiatives to foster young people's involvement, to ensure greater involvement of local and regional authorities as key partners for local youth associations and educational institutions when carrying out youth projects that help strengthen good neighbourly relations</p>	<p>The Commission has introduced a youth component in the second phase of the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans³. Youth activism will be promoted through partnerships among local governments, CSOs, youth clubs, schools, etc. The programme will also involve local governments and CSOs to create opportunities for young people to obtain skills and experience necessary for their first employment.</p> <p>The involvement of local and regional authorities is also addressed in the School Exchange Scheme (as of January 2021), which aims to contribute to increasing skills and knowledge of young people by improving the capacity of schools and other formal education structures to actively participate and develop quality cross-border projects.</p> <p>The Commission plans to increasingly involve local and regional authorities in projects targeting youth, and is currently programming a follow-up action for young civil servants in the Western Balkans, who will not only be selected from the central administration units, but also from local authorities and independent institutions.</p> <p>Cross Border cooperation programmes in the Western Balkans also promote cooperation of youth and authorities at local levels.</p>
<p>1.43. recommends that the Commission consistently apply conditionality in relation to compliance with EU rules in the use of EU funds and the Economic and Investment Plan, in particular in public procurement procedures and in terms of transparency, and that it set clear indicators in this regard;</p>	<p>The Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) is an integral part of the support to the Western Balkans on the path towards the EU. Economic development and implementation of fundamental reforms should be mutually reinforcing and contribute to the efforts of partner countries in meeting the requirements of the accession process.</p> <p>The EIP does not introduce any new conditionality; it is funded through the</p>

³ ReLOaD2, 2021-2024.

	<p>Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) and therefore will be subject to the conditions that will govern the new instrument. Those conditions will be related to progress on implementing reforms, particularly in the areas of rule of law and fundamental rights, the strengthening of democratic institutions and public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness.</p> <p>In case of significant regression or persistent lack of progress by a beneficiary in the areas of democracy, rule of law and human rights, the scope and intensity of financial assistance shall be modulated accordingly.</p> <p>In relation to the above, the revised enlargement methodology adopted by the Commission in February 2020 also provides that, in case serious issues arise in the course of negotiations, ‘the scope and intensity of EU funding could be adjusted downward, with the exception of support to civil society’.</p>
<p>1.46. calls on the Commission to continue to support local and regional authorities in the candidate countries and potential candidate countries in order to improve standards for involving interested members of the public in the design and implementation of local policies, including participatory budget planning models and local budget preparation.</p> <p>1.48. invites the European Commission to better assess the role of local and regional governments in addressing fundamental issues at local level, to make it easier for them to build up their capacities and skills in the areas of the rule of law and fundamental rights and to support them by providing concrete tools and instruments to carry out these tasks, while acknowledging the respective role and contributions of national and international associations of local and regional</p>	<p>The EU has supported strengthening consultation mechanisms at local level already during the implementation of IPA II, for instance through the Civil Society Facility. Enhancing governance, citizen engagement, transparency and accountability at regional and local levels in compliance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government will be also a key area of intervention under IPA III⁴.</p>

⁴ See also replies below in particular under point 1.52.

<p>authorities.</p>	
<p>1.52. supports the principle of making investment under the Economic and Investment Plan conditional on reforms, and calls on the European Commission to accompany each investment with an appropriate notification of expected reforms at local and regional level.</p>	<p>While the EIP is focused on flagship actions related to connectivity and socio-economic development, the rule of law, public administration reform and good governance have been highlighted as cross-cutting priority areas, of relevance for the successful implementation of the EIP.</p> <p>Public administration reform and overall institutional support to steer reforms including to improve the business environment are therefore key building blocks of the EIP.</p> <p>One of the key areas of engagement across all flagships will be building administrative capacities for investment planning and management, to ensure that the use of funds in the EIP is maximised and based on objective criteria in the best interest of the beneficiaries.</p> <p>In this context, the Commission maintains that well-structured territorial organisation of partner countries, with clear allocation of responsibilities and corresponding capacities and resources, is critical for delivering services, facilitating investments at the national, regional and local levels, and creating a good business and investment environment.</p> <p>Implementation of the EIP will be supported by related reform actions on sector level. In addition, the EIP is complemented by comprehensive Public Financial Management reform and capacity building actions.</p>
<p>1.55. calls on the European Commission to develop guidelines for EU support to local and regional authorities in the enlargement countries in the new financial period 2021-2027, with clear objectives, expected results and indicators to monitor progress, modelled on similar guidelines developed by the Commission to support civil society and independent media in the countries</p>	<p>The work of the pilot action on local and regional authorities, as part of Western Balkan partners' wider multi-level governance system, will help the coordination of bilateral country measures and approaches. This will contribute to building a coherent policy approach with corresponding monitoring system.</p>

<p>of the region.</p>	
<p>1.56. calls on the European Commission to set up an independent regional committee to monitor the implementation of the IPA III programme and Economic and Investment Plan, involving representatives of local and regional authorities, civil society and the media from enlargement countries, selected on the basis of a public call for interest, in accordance with pre-established transparent criteria.</p>	<p>The procedures and mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of IPA III programme, including the Economic and Investment Plan, are defined in the IPA III Regulation, IPA III Implementing Regulation as well as in the IPA III Financial Framework Partnership Agreement which will be signed with IPA III beneficiaries.</p> <p>The involvement of representatives of local and regional authorities in the monitoring and implementation of IPA III programme is a key principle of programming of pre-accession assistance, which remains a prerogative of the Commission as per the Treaty. The Regional Cooperation Council is already playing an active role in the coordination of pre-accession assistance in the Western Balkans.</p>
<p>1.57. stresses that proactive transparency and openness of data contributes to public confidence in the appropriateness of the use of public funds and calls on the Commission to set up an open data portal with detailed, publicly available and searchable information on all beneficiaries of the IPA III programme and Economic and Investment Plan.</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to transparency, openness and availability of information of use of public funds.</p> <p>The EU Aid Explorer⁵ displays information on programmes funded by the Commission and the EU Member States. Such information can be easily accessed by the public and the system was developed to be user-friendly and it provides complete information about EU external financial assistance.</p> <p>In accordance with the procedures set out in the Financial Regulation, the Commission has been systematically publishing all calls for tender and all calls for proposals resulting from the implementation of external financing instruments on the Europa website.</p>

⁵ <https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/>