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100th REPORT

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
DG CLIMA		
1.	<u>Gender equality and climate change: towards mainstreaming the gender perspective in the European Green Deal</u> Rapporteur: Kata TÜTTŐ (HU/PES)	Own-initiative COR-2021-02509-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/018
DG ENV		
2.	<u>EU Action Plan: Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil</u> Rapporteur: Marieke SCHOUTEN (NL/GREENS)	COM(2021) 400 final COR-2021-03178-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/019
3.	<u>Local and regional authorities accelerating the implementation of the EU Pollinators Initiative</u> Rapporteur: Frida NILSSON (SE/RENEW E.)	COM(2021) 261 final COR-2021-03508-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/020
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4. assoc. CLIMA	<u>Towards zero emission road transport: Deploying alternative fuels infrastructure and strengthening CO₂ emission performance standards</u> Rapporteur: Adrian Ovidiu TEBAN (RO/EPP)	COM(2021) 556 final COM(2021) 559 final COM(2021) 560 final COR-2021-04913-00-00-AC-TRA COTER-VII/015
DG AGRI		
5.	<u>A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas</u> Rapporteur: Juan Manuel MORENO BONILLA (ES/EPP)	COM(2021) 345 final COR-2021-03533-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/021
DG EMPL		
6.	<u>EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027</u> Rapporteur: Sergio CACI (IT/EPP)	COM(2021) 323 final SWD(2021) 148 final SWD(2021) 149 final COR-2021-05555-00-00-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/024

<p>N°1 Gender equality and climate change: towards mainstreaming the gender perspective in the European Green Deal Own-initiative COR-2021-02509 – ENVE-VII/018 148th plenary session – January 2022 Rapporteur: Kata TÜTTŐ (HU/PES) DG CLIMA – Executive Vice-President TIMMERMANS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>8. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) stresses that gender mainstreaming, understood as the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, is a valuable tool for realising gender equality, and deplors its disuse.</p>	<p>The Commission considers the last sentence of this para. inaccurate as it does not reflect the fact that the Commission systematically applies gender mainstreaming, i.e. by increasingly including the gender equality perspective in all stages of EU action, in conjunction with specific targeted measures to address persistent inequalities, including within relevant EU funding programmes.</p>
<p>10. [...] The CoR calls on the Commission to apply the EIGE's Guide to Gender Impact Assessment¹; stresses that data collected across the EU Member States should include more comprehensive gender indicators without increasing the administrative burden for local and regional authorities.</p>	<p>The Commission underlines that, in line with the Interinstitutional agreement of 16 December 2020 on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources, the 2021 revised Better Regulation guidelines and toolbox provide a strengthened framework to the Commission services to identify, assess and report gender impacts, in evaluations and impact assessments. The Better Regulation Framework puts emphasis on proportionality with respect to the scope and depth of the analysis in impact assessments. This means that only the most relevant and significant impacts are analysed. The principle of proportionality in an integrated and balanced analysis is fully in line with the Interinstitutional agreement for Better Law-Making of 13 April 2016.</p> <p>Under the better regulation framework, the Commission highlights that impact assessment is an integrated exercise, which analyses significant environmental, social and economic impacts of policy options analysed. Impact assessments need</p>

¹ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-impact-assessment/guide-gender-impact-assessment>.

	<p>to cover all significant impacts in relation to a proposal under preparation, including gender impacts.</p> <p>The Commission agrees with the Committee' position that data collection needs to be done with attention to the administrative burden for local and regional authorities. The Commission also recalls the important role of Member States in providing timely, reliable and cost-effective information on gender indicators. Under the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making of 13 April 2016, the three institutions agreed to, as appropriate, establish reporting, monitoring and evaluation requirements in legislation, while avoiding overregulation and administrative burdens, in particular on Member States. Where appropriate, such requirements can include measurable indicators as a basis on which to collect evidence of the effects of legislation on the ground.</p>
<p>11. The CoR welcomes the creation of a Task Force for Equality² to ensure the mainstreaming of equality, including gender equality and gender diversity, in all EU policies, from their design to their implementation and calls on the EU to facilitate the exchange of best practices among national, regional and local authorities avoiding a top-down approach.</p>	<p>The Gender Equality Strategy highlights the European Green Deal as an important policy vehicle for gender mainstreaming particularly in follow-up instruments such as the Renovation Wave and the Strategy on Climate Adaptation. This work is supported by the Commission's internal Task Force on Equality, which plays a key role to integrate an equality perspective in all EU policies and major initiatives, from their design to their implementation. The mandate of the Task Force includes the six grounds of discrimination of Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and it pursues an intersectional approach to ensure that the different aspects of people's personal characteristics/identities are duly considered. The work of the Task Force and of its Secretariat includes providing guidance and building knowledge, organising trainings and facilitating the work on equality undertaken by different services within the Commission. The Commission will continue to facilitate the</p>

² [Union of equality: the first year of actions and achievements | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/equality/union-of-equality-the-first-year-of-actions-and-achievements).

	sharing of good practices at all levels.
<p>12. [...] The CoR calls for women's participation to be boosted in actions across the EU institutions, government bodies and public authorities at all governance levels; calls on the Council to unblock the “Women on Boards” Directive.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of women's participation in climate change decision-making for more gender responsive and efficient climate change policies and programmes. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 included a number of actions to support women’s participation in public life, to increase their participation in the labour market and to lead equally throughout society. Among these actions, there was a commitment to push for the adoption of the 2012 proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance on corporate boards. Member states adopted a general approach on the proposal on 14 March 2022.</p>
<p>13. The CoR encourages the use of gender mainstreaming tools to implement the Recovery and Resilience Plans, given that they should be the basis not only for recovery, but for a sustainable, fair and equal society.</p>	<p>The Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility³ (RRF) requires Member States to explain how their respective recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) contribute to gender equality and equal opportunities for all, in line with the principles of the Pillar of Social Rights, and the SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) 5 on gender equality.</p> <p>Furthermore, a majority of Member States had received country-specific recommendations directly or indirectly linked to the objective of improving gender equality and equal opportunities for all. The RRFs were required to address all or a significant subset of the challenges identified in the relevant country-specific recommendations.</p> <p>During the preparation of the plans, the Commission consistently called on Member States to reflect equality considerations in their national plans. In line with the dual approach of the Union of Equality strategies, the Commission encouraged Member States both 1) to include targeted measures to promote equality and 2) to mainstream equality considerations throughout the plans.</p>

³ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility](#)

	<p>As a result of this joint preparatory work, many plans include measures to support women’s labour market participation, by promoting better access to childcare and long-term care facilities or reducing the female employment, pay or pension gaps.</p> <p>Equality is also mainstreamed in different parts of the plans. A contribution to gender equality, for example, can be found in measures contributing to all six pillars of the RRF, including the green and digital transitions.</p> <p>Ultimately, the RRF contribution to gender equality and equal opportunities for all will greatly depend on how the plans will be implemented. The Commission will continue to support an inclusive monitoring process in all Member States, to ensure that measures are implemented in a way that promotes equality. In particular, we expect Member States to involve civil society, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and equality bodies active in the fields of non-discrimination and fundamental rights.</p>
<p>14. The CoR calls for enhanced research in order to identify barriers to participation in decision-making, as well as to explore how gender stereotypes affect people's consumption and lifestyles; encourages the use of models like GAMMA (Gender Assessment Method for Mitigation and Adaptation) in order to obtain better data.</p>	<p>The integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content is a requirement by default in the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, including under Cluster 5 on Climate, Energy and Mobility. Moreover, Cluster 2 on Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society has as a broad line of intervention to develop advanced strategies and innovative methods for gender equality in all social, economic and cultural domains, including at decision-making level, and to deal with gender stereotypes and biases. The draft 2023-24 Cluster 2 work programme, currently under development, foresees tackling inequalities in the green and digital transitions, including gender inequalities. Furthermore, the Expert Report entitled ‘Gendered Innovations 2: How inclusive analysis contributes to research and innovation’ published by the Commission’s Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (RTD) in November 2020 – on which Horizon Europe</p>

	<p>builds – underlined the importance of integrating a gender dimension in climate-related research and innovation, and included case studies on gender and intersectional differences in smart energy consumption behaviours, as well as in waste management, and smart mobility. In addition, DG RTD has launched a study on assessing and improving women’s participation in the Research and Innovation field regarding clean energy transition and producing a foresight analysis on how to reduce the gender gap in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and meet the demand for new skills in the energy sector.</p> <p>Regarding EU international action, the EU Gender Action Plan III, in its part 4 ‘The EU leads by example’ aims at improving gender knowledge and expertise within all sectors and will devote resources specifically for research, analysis and expertise in order to improve gender mainstreaming.</p>
<p>16. The CoR calls for the European Climate Pact to reflect this gendered approach to influence climate actions and policies, through the inclusion of specific outreach activities focused on awareness raising, education and knowledge-sharing about gender perspectives.</p>	<p>As established in the European Climate Law⁴ (Article 9), the Commission will foster the diffusion of science-based information about the social and gender equality aspects of climate change, including through the Climate Pact. This information will help the Commission reflect a gendered approach in its policies on climate action. In addition, the Climate Pact will also contribute to the integration of a gender approach as part of its commitment to mainstreaming equality at large by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – committing to diversity and inclusiveness, as one of the six values of the Pact. This commitment includes bringing down barriers resulting from personal characteristics, such as gender, age and disabilities; – encouraging actions that consider social sustainability, social well-being, inclusion, equality, diversity, accessibility and

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 (‘European Climate Law’) (OJ L 243 9.7.2021 p. 1).

	<p>affordability for all and that aim to reach the most vulnerable individuals and areas;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – striving for gender balance amongst the Climate Pact’s volunteer Ambassadors; – making green skills development programmes and initiatives equally available to everyone and made accessible to persons with disabilities; – promoting green mobility that leaves no one behind, by addressing specific transport needs of women, the accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities and older persons.
<p>21. The CoR calls on the Commission and the Member States to incorporate gender equality as an important element of the digital transition, including the gender perspective in the development of digital education policies, promoting mentoring schemes with female role models in ICT, eliminating conscious and unconscious gender discriminatory bias from algorithms, preventing cyber-violence, using the efforts and programmes of ERASMUS+, boosting the concept of a life-long learning approach in adult education, particularly in remote areas, and preventing digital exclusion.</p>	<p>In its Communication on ‘2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade’ and the related Digital Decade Policy Programme, the Commission identified a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals as one of the four ‘cardinal points’ of a ‘Digital Compass’ to translate the EU’s digital ambitions for 2030 into concrete targets and to ensure that these objectives are met. The Communication recalls the objective of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan to increase the share of adults with basic digital skills to 80% by 2030, and includes the target to increase the number of employed ICT specialists to 20 million by the same year, with convergence between women and men...: The Commission also proposed a European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles, with the objective of promoting and upholding EU values in the digital space and ensure that digitalisation delivers benefits to all Europeans. The Communication includes, among others, a section on interaction with algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) systems and states that ‘everyone should be empowered to benefit from the advantages of artificial intelligence by making their own, informed choices in the digital environment, while being protected against risks and harm to one’s health, safety and fundamental rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – in this context, it should be highlighted that the proposal for a Regulation on AI⁵ aims specifically to address the problems of gender

⁵ COM(2021) 206 final.

	<p>bias and discrimination with mandatory requirements for certain high-risk artificial intelligence systems used in the area of employment, education, law enforcement, essential public and private services. AI systems must be technically robust to guarantee that the technology is fit for purpose and results are not affecting protected groups in a discriminatory way. Data-driven AI systems should also be trained and tested with sufficiently representative and relevant datasets to minimise the risk of discrimination and be subject to appropriate bias detection, correction and other mitigating measures before the system is placed on the market and during its use;</p> <p>– furthermore, as per the EU Gender Equality Strategy, the Commission strives to incorporate equal opportunities for men and women in all its policies within the remit of the digital economy and transition portfolio. The focus is on education and qualification, guaranteeing equal opportunities, non-discrimination in the labour market and collecting sex-disaggregated data. Integrating this focus into national strategies will help reach this goal by, inter alia, motivating girls to explore tech studies; stimulate the re-skilling or upskilling of women from the existing work force; mentoring schemes; support for digital skills for unemployed women and women from vulnerable groups; and as a general approach, improving digital skills across the board.</p>
<p>26. The CoR urges the Commission to plan how to link cities with remote areas, as well as how to ensure accessibility and connectivity, and greater use of clean vehicles, trains and electric-hybrid buses for longer distances; believes in digital solutions for ticketing routes on different apps; acknowledges the efforts of the new EU Urban Agenda.</p>	<p>The new EU Urban Mobility Framework⁶ aims, among others, to support an improved connectivity between urban and rural areas, in particular through the following elements:</p> <p>– recommendation to Member States on the national programme to support regions and cities in the roll-out of effective sustainable urban mobility plans (planned for 2022) will</p>

⁶ COM(2021) 811.

	<p>include linkages with surrounding rural areas and proper integration of public transport planning to also address connections with the suburbs and rural areas beyond the city;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – support to public transport that promotes territorial accessibility and social inclusion and is key for connectivity with remote, rural and peri-urban areas. In some cases, shared and on-demand mobility could become part of public transport, in particular in rural and remote areas, integrated under Mobility as a Service models; – the reformed Expert Group on urban Mobility will work in particular on public transport, shared and active mobility, zero-emission fleets, urban logistics and first and last-mile delivery, including in urban cross-border areas, and urban-rural linkages. <p>The minimum shares for the public procurement of clean vehicles set in the Clean Vehicles Directive⁷ for the period 2021-2025 will help ensure a greater use of clean and zero-emission buses in public transport.</p> <p>Additionally, in 2022 the Commission will propose a revision of the Regulation on CO₂ emission performance standards for heavy-duty road transport vehicles.⁸</p> <p>The Commission is currently preparing an initiative on Multimodal Digital Mobility services, integrating all mobility offers and facilitating booking a payment. The objective is to untap the potential of digital solutions to enhance multimodality.</p>
<p>27. The CoR is deeply worried about the soaring of prices for electricity and gas to their highest levels in decades in all Member States, which pushes many women and men into energy and</p>	<p>Over the past months, the Commission has been monitoring closely the energy price increases across the EU, mainly driven by our dependence on imported fossil fuels from international</p>

⁷ Directive (EU) 2019/1161 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Directive 2009/33/EC on the promotion of clean and energy-efficient road transport vehicles; OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 116–130.

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2019/1242 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 setting CO₂ emission performance standards for new heavy-duty vehicles and amending Regulations (EC) No 595/2009 and (EU) 2018/956 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 96/53/EC; OJ L 198, 25.7.2019, p. 202–240.

<p>mobility poverty; calls on the EU to take long-term countermeasures including investigating the reasons for the increase in energy prices.</p>	<p>suppliers. The Commission's 'Energy Prices Toolbox' from October 2021 has helped Member States to take immediate measures to mitigate the impact of high prices on vulnerable consumers and businesses, taking into account national circumstances and priorities.</p> <p>As stated in the recent REPower EU Communication⁹, the new geopolitical and energy market reality requires the EU to drastically accelerate the clean energy transition, to fully implement the structural and long lasting solutions foreseen in the Fit for 55 proposals as well as increase Europe's energy independence from unreliable suppliers and volatile fossil fuels.</p> <p>The Commission will continue to look into all possible options for emergency measures to limit the contagion effect of gas prices in electricity prices. It will also assess options to optimise the electricity market design taking into account the final report of the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) and other contributions on benefits and drawbacks of alternative pricing mechanisms to keep electricity affordable, without disrupting supply and further investment in the green transition.</p>
<p>37. The CoR calls on the Commission and the Council to commit to gender budgeting, to ensure it is applied to the whole EU budget and that the recommendations from the European Court of Auditors are fully implemented, including into the mid-term review of the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.</p>	<p>The Commission applies a dual approach to gender equality. It promotes gender equality (i) through gender mainstreaming, i.e. by increasingly including the gender equality perspective in all stages of EU action i.e. policies, legislative measures and funding programmes; and (ii) through specific targeted measures to address persistent inequalities, including within relevant EU funding programmes.</p> <p>The Commission has also undertaken significant initiatives that are crucial for the integration of the gender dimension in the EU budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the EU budget gender expenditure tracking methodology that will be applied in a pilot phase in the context of Draft Budget is an

⁹ COM(2022) 230 final.

	<p>indispensable component of gender budgeting;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– the recently established network of gender equality coordinators in all Commission services has been assigned the task to screen all policy initiatives for relevance with gender equality;– the better regulation guidelines have been updated to clarify that any significant impacts on gender equality must be transparently assessed and presented. <p>As far as the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors' (ECA) <i>Special report on gender mainstreaming in the EU budget</i> are concerned, the Commission notes that it shares the same vision with ECA concerning the promotion of gender equality and is fully committed to advancing it, including through the EU budget. The reasons for the Commission's inability to accept some of the Court's recommendations have to do with differences on how best to implement some of the necessary steps within the constraints of the existing legal framework or to the fact that the Commission cannot commit today to the content of legislative proposals in a far future.</p>
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<p>N°2 EU Action Plan: Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil COM(2021) 400 final COR 2021-03178 – ENVE-VII/019 148th plenary session – January 2022 Rapporteur: Marieke SCHOUTEN (NL/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>5. The CoR welcomes the six main 2030 targets as a start but regrets that most of the targets are not new. The CoR feels that more ambition and additional action is needed and encourages the Commission to start a continuous process of reviewing and adjusting targets towards the 2050 vision and to include the CoR in this process.</p>	<p>The 2030 targets in the Zero Pollution Action Plan aim to define ambitious but realistic milestones towards the 2050 vision for zero pollution. The Commission will monitor the progress towards each target, starting with the first Zero Pollution Monitoring and Outlook report planned for December 2022. Policy initiatives related to the targets will take into account the latest available information when defining ambition levels.</p>
<p>9. The CoR points out that the post-pandemic recovery should focus on "One Health", acknowledging the interconnectedness between human, environmental and animal health. One Health needs to play a leading role in goals and legislation if we are to achieve sustainability and healthy regions.</p>	<p>The Zero Pollution Action Plan recognises from the outset that climate change, environmental pollution, biodiversity loss and an unsustainable use of natural resources pose multiple risks to human, animal and ecosystem health. The Action Plan addresses pollution with a specific focus on health and environmental impacts, as is exemplified in the 2030 targets, the 2050 vision and the policy initiatives outlined.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission recognizes indeed the importance of the ‘One Health’ approach. Given its multifaceted aspects, the Commission is working towards applying it to the different relevant policies and initiatives, e.g. reducing the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) by strengthening actions on human, animal, plant and environmental health to boost the ‘One Health’ approach, including a joint surveillance programme and introducing several references to the need for applying the ‘One Health’ approach in the Health Union package.</p>
<p>10. The CoR welcomes the new zero pollution hierarchy based on a "reverse pyramid" but regrets that "remediating and offsetting</p>	<p>The Commission does not consider remediating pollution as a minimal part of the Zero Pollution Action Plan. It features repeatedly, notably in the</p>

<p>pollution-related damage" is given minimal consideration.</p>	<p>context of soil pollution and industrial emissions.</p>
<p>11. The CoR stresses that LRAs have a key role to play in translating this action plan into action on the ground but they can only fulfil their role if a preventive approach with effective source-based policies is put in place at EU level;</p> <p>13. reiterates that emission rules are a particularly effective approach; therefore recommends that more attention be paid to tightening them, as a better way of reducing emissions at source.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of local and regional authorities (LRAs) (cf. response to point 27), and that, as outlined in the zero pollution hierarchy, preventive action should be taken, and environmental damage should, as a priority, be rectified at source. Consequently, the Zero Pollution Action Plan addresses multiple sources of pollution, including with reference to legislative action.</p>
<p>12. [...] The IED should contribute to achieving the objectives of the circular economy;</p>	<p>The ongoing revision of the Directive on industrial emissions (IED)¹ is considering in detail how to improve the directive's contribution to the circular economy, be it to decrease resource or water use (or stipulate efficiency levels), or to promote the use of less hazardous chemicals.</p>
<p>14. The CoR supports international work on best available techniques (BAT), including emerging technologies, to reduce industrial emissions whereby the range of emission levels is narrowed, so that a level playing field is created at international level.</p>	<p>The Commission is actively engaged in, and helps to fund the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s expert group on the use of Best Available Techniques (BAT) to Prevent and Control Industrial Pollution², and has promoted a wider audience for IED BAT conclusions by translating Implementing Decisions into Arabic, Chinese and Russian³.</p>
<p>15. The CoR calls for the review and enforcement of BAT reference document (BREF) requirements to be sped up for various industrial polluters and for more stringent emission requirements to be applied as part of the review of the Integrated Pollution and Prevention Control (IPPC) process.</p>	<p>The ongoing revision of the IED is considering options to enhance the effectiveness of applying BAT conclusions to their full extent for existing BAT reference documents (BREFs) on a plant-by-plant basis, and in subsequent reviews. Ways to potentially speed up the compilation of BREFs, as well as inputs into BREF reviews with regard to emerging techniques, are also being considered.</p>

¹ Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control); OJ L 334, 17.12.2010, p. 17–119.

² https://www.oecd.org/chemicalsafety/risk-management/best-available-techniques.htm?utm_source=Adestra&utm_medium=email&utm_content=More%20on%20the%20BAT%20project&utm_campaign=November%202017%20Chemical%20Safety%20News&utm_term=demo

³ <https://eippcb.jrc.ec.europa.eu/translation/index.html>

<p>16. The CoR [...]believes that the potential contribution of the SPI to the Action Plan could be specified in more concrete terms.</p>	<p>The Sustainable Products Initiative (SPI) will mainly consist in a proposal revising the Ecodesign Directive⁴, to widen its scope, better cover circularity aspects and reduce environmental impacts throughout the whole product life cycle. The SPI proposal(s) were published on 30 March 2022.⁵</p>
<p>17. The CoR stresses that governments should not be left to act alone: all sectors have an important role to play in controlling pollution and rectifying environmental damage at the source.</p>	<p>The Commission recognises the role of stakeholders in the Zero Pollution Action Plan, and welcomes that the Committee is co-chairing the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform.</p>
<p>18. The CoR calls for products and goods entering the EU to comply with the same environmental standards in place in the EU. Failing this, the European principle of "the polluter pays" should be applied.</p>	<p>The Commission is stepping up efforts ensuring that products entering the EU market comply with the environmental requirements set by the acquis⁶. The Union Customs Code is being reviewed. A number of initiatives are being lined up on customs risk management and compliance with EU legislation.</p> <p>The Commission also proposed a Carbon Boarder Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) in line with the polluter pays principle on certain categories of products imported into the European Union, to ensure that the same level of carbon pricing applies to those products as to domestic production.</p> <p>All products placed on the EU market will need to comply with the future Sustainable Products Initiative (SPI) rules, regardless of their origin, and the principle of non-discrimination will fully apply.</p>
<p>21. The CoR calls for the PPP to be better integrated into environmental legislation, in particular by lowering emissions limits to further reduce residual pollution and dealing with diffuse pollution from all sources, including agriculture.</p>	<p>The Zero Pollution Action Plan recognises the importance of the Pollution Action Plan (PPP). Ongoing revisions of pollution-related legislation consider the PPP in its different forms. The Fit for 55 package targets emissions from different sources and by different instruments, and The</p>

⁴ Directive 2009/125/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for the setting of ecodesign requirements for energy-related products; OJ L 285, 31.10.2009, p. 10–35.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2013

⁶ Cf. Communication on Taking the Customs Union to the Next Level (COM(2020)581).

	<p>revised Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox encourage to consider the application of the PPP when assessing environmental impacts of legislative proposals, including beyond environmental legislation.</p> <p>Under the current directive on the sustainable use of pesticides⁷, Member States had to establish frameworks to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides by reducing the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment, and by promoting the use of integrated pest management and/or alternative approaches or techniques such as non-chemical alternatives to pesticides. The new Commission proposal on the sustainable use of pesticides will help to ensure that farmers only use chemical plant protection products as a last resort by strengthening the system on controls on integrated pest management (IPM). These measures should ensure that the use of chemical plant protection products, and therefore the risk of diffuse pollution, further declines.</p>
<p>22. The CoR stresses that producers must be made legally and financially responsible for the mitigation measures needed to tackle pollution throughout the entire value chain through extended producer responsibility (EPR) for the environmental and disposal costs of all consumer goods and packaging materials.</p>	<p>Directive on waste⁸ sets clear requirements for Member States to ensure that the producer of waste or its holder is responsible for waste management costs (see Articles 13 and 14). This principle is made operational through a variety of regulatory and economic instruments, including extended producer responsibility (EPR), which has been applied to several products at EU and national level. The Commission is considering the introduction of EPR for other products in the future, in particular for textiles.</p>
<p>24. The CoR highlights that not all pollutants are equally damaging to human health and the environment and therefore a risk-based analysis may enable ecological and economic aspects to be better coordinated.</p>	<p>The EU chemicals legislation is a combination of a generic and a specific approach to risks. The Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability⁹ calls for extending the generic approach to risk, already applied to ban CMR substances¹⁰ in consumer</p>

⁷ Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides; OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 71–86.

⁸ Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste and repealing certain Directives; OJ L 312, 22.11.2008, p. 3–30.

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/chemicals-strategy_en

¹⁰ Substances classified as carcinogenic, mutagenic, or toxic for reproduction.

	<p>products, to also other categories of very harmful substances, in order to become more preventive. The impacts of extending the generic approach to risks are currently being comprehensively assessed to inform the ongoing revisions of relevant legislation.</p>
<p>27. The CoR regrets that section 3.1 of this action plan does not mention the local and regional dimension, calls for the role of LRAs to be included more prominently and reiterates that LRAs need financial and technical support to implement the objectives on the ground.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that local and regional authorities (LRAs) have a key role to play in implementing pollution-related policies. The Zero Pollution Action Plan states clearly that cities and regions are at the forefront of implementing pollution-relevant laws, policies and programmes. Following on from this, the Action Plan includes dedicated Flagship initiatives on supporting urban zero pollution action (Flagship 2) and promoting zero pollution across regions (Flagship 3), as well as links to relevant initiatives such as the Green City Accord, the Horizon Europe Cities Mission and engagement with LRAs on green digital solutions and smart zero pollution as well as on the use of Local Digital Twins. Regional cooperation and fora also feature prominently in the Action Plan. The cooperation with the Committee of the Regions in setting up and co-chairing the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform bears further witness to the recognition of the role of LRAs in the Action Plan.</p>
<p>29. The CoR stresses that EU initiatives such as the Urban Agenda Partnerships can be used and that actively setting up new environmental partnerships to support implementation should be considered.</p>	<p>The recently endorsed Ljubljana agreement¹¹ sets up the next steps of the Urban Agenda, identifying new themes for ex-ante assessment (including the greening cities theme).</p>
<p>30. The CoR welcomes the development of an integrated Zero Pollution Monitoring and Outlook Framework (ZPMOF) and calls for all relevant data to be collected, harmonised and made available to all. The CoR underlines the importance of making the ZPMOF coherent with the new monitoring framework planned by the Environment Action Programme.</p>	<p>The Zero Pollution Monitoring and Outlook Framework is indeed contributing to and underpinning the new monitoring framework by the 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP). They will be complementary and coherent. It is the intention of the Commission (including the Joint Research Centre) and the European Environment Agency to make all data used</p>

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2021/ljubljana-agreement

	available to all.
34. The CoR stresses the relevance of Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) since they can provide sustainable, cost-effective solutions that create economic opportunities, employment and public health and well-being benefits. Technical support, knowledge exchange and capacity building should be offered to LRAs to enable them to consider the co-benefits in their public procurements.	To meet the needs of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy (incl. Natura 2000 and green infrastructure) at least € 20 billion a year should be unlocked for nature. A significant proportion (30%) of the EU budget dedicated to climate action will be invested in biodiversity and Nature-Based Solutions (NBSs). The biodiversity spending in the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) shall increase to 7.5% by 2024 and to 10% by 2026, while considering overlaps between climate and biodiversity goals.
37. The CoR calls for the European data space to include the exchange of data on sustainability so that value chains can contribute to the greening of industries. Moreover, setting up standards at EU level for data storage and exchange will ensure the availability of data that can be used for transitions towards zero pollution.	Building on the existing rules, e.g. the INSPIRE Directive ¹² , the Commission intends to promote data exchange, interoperability and setting of appropriate standards for the benefit of creating the European Dataspaces, as necessary.
42. The CoR suggests using the 2021 WHO target values as a goal to achieve by 2050, but not using the recommended values as limit values since many Member States do not yet meet the current ones 43. The CoR recommends taking into account the conclusions of the CoR Regional Hubs consultation, which investigated the implementation of the EU Ambient Air Quality (AAQ) and the National Emission reduction Commitments (NEC) Directives and the European Parliament's implementation report, which describes the AAQ Directives as "a partially effective tool that needs to be improved".	The Commission is continuing its work on the revision of ambient air quality legislation ¹³ , including to align air quality standards more closely to World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations as announced in the European Green Deal. The proposed standards and timelines will be based on the ongoing thorough impact assessment. The Commission will also take into account the findings of the previous Fitness Check ¹⁴ , including the indication that the EU Ambient Air Quality (AAQ) Directives have been at least partially, but not fully effective in achieving the EU air quality standards and thus reducing the impacts of air pollution. Finally, the Commission will take into account all relevant input from other EU institutions, including the Committee, as well as from citizens and other

¹² Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2007 establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE); OJ L 108, 25.4.2007, p. 1–14. (<https://inspire.ec.europa.eu/inspire-directive/2>).

¹³ <https://europa.eu/!JJuV4N>.

¹⁴ SWD(2019) 427 final.

	stakeholders.
<p>45. The CoR points out that additional efforts are needed to reduce the levels of odour pollution and sees the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED) as the main tool to combat odour pollution since it covers all forms of emissions. The CoR underlines the importance of citizen science and public participation for tackling odour pollution challenges. A multi-level approach including different inputs of various stakeholders can empower citizens to participate in decisions made about their environment and can support policy-makers and odour emitting activities to make informed decisions and better manage the issue of odour pollution.</p>	<p>Odour is addressed in a systematic way in Best Available Techniques (BAT) conclusions, including the elaboration of odour management plans (including the resolution of complaints); the use of techniques to reduce odour emission levels for sectors such as waste treatment, slaughterhouses and treatment of animal by-products (the latter still being drafted).</p> <p>Public information and participation is mandatory under the IED for the granting or updating of permits. The Commission recognises that citizen science initiatives contribute to the monitoring of odour, and encourages the use of digital tools for collecting and reporting data.</p> <p>BAT Conclusions for intensive rearing of poultry or pigs ¹⁵ contain provisions related to odours.</p> <p>The ongoing IED revision considers options to further reduce pollution from rearing of cattle, pigs and poultry.</p>
<p>46. The CoR welcomes the target of reducing microplastics released into the environment by 30% and encourages the Commission to set clear definitions of microplastics, but also to work on preventing the release of microplastics and non-wovens at source by proposing stricter measures on intentionally released microplastics.</p>	<p>The recent letter of intent of the Commission to the European Parliament provides for a Legislative proposal to reduce the release of microplastics in the environment and to restrict the addition of microplastics to product by the end of 2022.</p>
<p>47. The CoR welcomes the revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and supports the initiative to use this Directive to work towards recovering valuable nutrients and the initiative to look at emerging substances such as pharmaceutical residues and microplastics.</p> <p>48. The CoR recommends assessing the effectiveness of these measures and considering what investments are required regarding pharmaceuticals and microplastics,</p>	<p>The Commission has taken emerging substances issue into account in the process of the revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. The Impact Assessment should address pharmaceuticals and personal care products as well as microplastics. The impact assessment will address costs deriving from implementing the polluter pays principle to handle this issue. Costs and benefits of nutrient management/nutrient removal will also be presented.</p>

¹⁵ <https://europa.eu/!qyMbDx>

<p>targeting hotspots, where there are risks to the ecology or drinking-water sources.</p>	
<p>49. The CoR advocates monitoring substances in the surface and groundwater using innovative monitoring and evaluation techniques and including this in the revision of the Priority Substances Directive and the Groundwater Directive. Points out the need for exchanges of information on discharges in catchment areas because emissions of pollutants have an effect downstream.</p>	<p>The Commission supports the development and use of innovating monitoring and evaluation techniques and considers, as part of the revision of the Environmental Quality Standards Directive and the Groundwater Directive, encouraging their use.</p>
<p>50. The CoR expresses concern that water reuse in the EU is still limited and believes it could be supported through widening the scope of the EU regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse to include the use of water for the irrigation of green spaces in urban areas, parks, gardens and grounds for public use (e.g. recreation, sport).</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the usefulness of water reuse for purposes other than agricultural irrigation. The Regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse focuses on the sector taking up the largest share of reclaimed water and on the use with clear implications for the internal market (agricultural produce), where EU action is justified and needed. Nevertheless, the Regulation recognises explicitly the possibility for Member States to use reclaimed water for further purposes, such as industrial water reuse and amenity-related and environmental purposes. The evaluation of the Regulation, scheduled in June 2028, will assess the feasibility of expanding its scope.</p>
<p>52. The CoR argues that action is needed at European level to support local and regional efforts to reduce noise pollution from roads, rail and airports by ensuring better implementation and enforcement of the mapping and reporting requirements under the Environmental Noise Directive (END).</p>	<p>The Commission has taken infringement action on the Environmental Noise Directive (END) against 14 Member States. In the majority of cases, this lead to full compliance. As of 1 January 2022, the END imposes a digital mandatory reporting mechanism allowing precise, complete and real-time collection, integration and reuse of the noise mapping and information on action plans, including health effects, to support effective noise reduction.</p>
<p>53. The CoR encourages the Commission to assess the opportunity to revise the END to set ambitious mandatory targets for noise reduction in order to move closer to the WHO recommended limits and calls for a roadmap for action from all stakeholders.</p>	<p>As outlined in the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the Commission will assess the need for targets in 2022, as part of the END implementation report.</p>

<p>54. The CoR argues for a shift in the focus from measures that mitigate excessive noise to those that prevent noise altogether, such as supporting sustainable modes of transport like walking and cycling, is crucial to realise a significant and long-term noise reduction.</p>	<p>While cycling and walking cause less noise than motorised traffic, an effective noise policy needs to rely on a package of different measures. Improving road surfaces, reducing speed, and improving rail systems and flight procedures have been shown to be most effective and immediately implementable in the majority of local circumstances.</p>
<p>55. The CoR stresses the importance of effective enforceability on quality and origin of soil. In this light, uniform proof of origin and quality of soil across the EU member states is crucial for local and regional authorities to stop the transport and use of contaminated soil across regions, which prevents the polluter from being held accountable.</p>	<p>As part of the development of the Soil Health Law, the Commission will assess the need and potential for legally binding provisions for a passport for excavated soil, and provide guidance, based on Member States' experiences, to put this in place. The passport should reflect the quantity and quality of the excavated soil to ensure that it is transported, treated or reused safely elsewhere.</p>
<p>56. The CoR stresses the vital importance of healthy soil for well-being and prosperity and is in favour of a preventive and risk-based approach to soil contamination. The focus should not only be on chemical quality, but also on physical and biological soil condition;</p>	<p>The new Soil Strategy states indeed that soils are healthy when they are in good chemical, biological and physical condition, and thus able to continuously provide as many ecosystem services as possible. The Commission will engage in a broad and inclusive stakeholder consultation to apply a proportionate and risk-based approach in its legislative proposal for the Soil Health Law.</p>
<p>57. The CoR considers that when disposed of in landfills, plastics leach toxic chemicals into the soil and groundwater. When mismanaged, plastics pollute land, waterways and the oceans. Toxic additives and microplastics contained in rain, soil, waterways, oceans and on mountaintops cannot be eliminated by recycling, landfilling or incineration. Only legally binding limits on global plastics production for essential uses can make a difference.</p>	<p>Directive on landfill of waste¹⁶ established requirements for the environmentally sound landfilling of waste, including waste acceptance criteria for landfills as well as requirements on the permeability of landfill floor and leachate collection to prevent soil pollution. EU waste legislation tackles pollution resulting from illegal waste disposal, requiring Member States to adopt anti-littering and dumping strategies as well as to take appropriate enforcement measures and sanctions. In 2019, the EU also adopted the Single-Use Plastics Directive¹⁷ to tackle pollution of EU marine and land environment from these products, including through product design changes, waste collection targets and extended producer responsibility (EPR) requirements for clean-ups. In</p>

¹⁶ Council Directive 1999/31/EC of 26 April 1999 on the landfill of waste; OJ L 182, 16.7.1999, p. 1–19.

¹⁷ 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.

	<p>2022, the Commission will propose to review the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive¹⁸ with a view to reducing (over)packaging and packaging waste and driving design for reuse and recyclability of packaging. In addition, the Commission will adopt a policy framework on biobased, biodegradable and compostable plastics to clarify their role to deliver on the commitments on low carbon and circular economy and promote those plastics that result in genuine environmental benefits.</p> <p>The Commission expects the negotiations for a new global instrument to combat plastic pollution to formally start in November 2022, following United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 5/14.</p>
<p>58. The CoR welcomes the EU Soil Strategy and the announcement of the EU Soil Health Law, [...]. Argues at the same time for flexibility in the national implementation of actions under the action plan and the new Soil Strategy because there are major regional differences in terms of spatial planning, landscape, soil (composition) and soil use.</p>	<p>Member States are involved in the implementation of the Soil Strategy through the EU expert group on soil protection. The legislative proposal on soil will fully respect the subsidiarity principle and Better Regulation rules to ensure that national and regional solutions can be applied where they make most sense.</p>
<p>59. The CoR welcomes the Commission's efforts to advise farmers to adopt less polluting practices, reducing ammonia and nitrate emissions. Other emissions from the agricultural sector, such as phosphates, metals, pesticides and pharmaceuticals, are also important.</p>	<p>In the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Regulation, farm advisory services shall cover (among others) sustainable management of: nutrient (including nitrogen and phosphorous), plant protection products and practices preventing the development of antimicrobial resistance.</p> <p>The existing regulation about fertilising products¹⁹ sets limit values for contaminants like e.g. heavy metals in fertilising products placed in the market.</p> <p>Under the current directive on the sustainable use of pesticides²⁰ farmers are obliged to apply integrated pest management that keeps the use of plant protection products to levels that are</p>

¹⁸ European Parliament and Council Directive 94/62/EC of 20 December 1994 on packaging and packaging waste; OJ L 365, 31.12.1994, p. 10–23.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides; OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 71–86.

	<p>economically and ecologically justified and reduce or minimise risks to human health and the environment. The new Commission proposal on the sustainable use of pesticides will strengthen the system on controls on integrated pest management (IPM) to ensure that farmers only use chemical plant protection products as a last resort.</p>
<p>60. The CoR calls for special attention to be paid to historical diffuse emissions. New standards are sometimes impossible to achieve, which results in restrictions on the use of polluted areas. Therefore, a source-based approach needs to be combined with a strategy for eliminating these existing sources of pollution.</p>	<p>The zero pollution hierarchy recognises that pollution should be prevented as much as possible at the source. If this is not possible, pollution should be minimised. In case of risks, pollution should be remediated and reduced to levels no longer considered harmful to human health and the environment. All forms of pollution have to be addressed, including historical and new pollution, from both diffuse and point sources.</p>
<p>61. The CoR advocates proactive measures to limit chemicals before they enter the chain; this also includes regulations for the safe use of substances that are placed on the market. The EU should regulate chemical substances based on their intrinsic harmful properties to humans and the environment even in case of scientific uncertainty, also taking into account the exposure risk and their benefit for society and identify and exclude specific, unacceptable risks.</p>	<p>EU chemicals legislation regulates substances on the basis of their intrinsic hazard properties and exposure. The legal framework on chemicals is currently being revised in order to become more preventive, and in particular ensure that the most harmful substances are not present in consumer products.</p>
<p>62. [...]. It is essential that the REACH authorisation and restriction processes are used more and that more substances of very high concern are identified for the candidate list.</p>	<p>The ongoing revision of the REACH regulation is also looking at ways to improve the authorisation and restriction processes in order to make them faster and ensure better protection of citizens and the environment.</p>
<p>63. The CoR calls for restrictions at EU level on problematic uses of dangerous per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and their emissions. Many of these are of great concern as they are extremely persistent and have an adverse effect on human health and the environment.</p>	<p>The Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability announces an action plan on polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in order to ensure that their use is allowed only if essential to society. Those substances are currently addressed under various pieces of chemicals and environmental legislation, where they are being regulated.</p>
<p>64. The CoR points out there is currently a lack of knowledge of the (eco)-toxicological effects</p>	<p>The Chemicals Strategy recognises the need to further increase knowledge on chemicals, including</p>

for many hazardous substances to or via the environment. Scientific evidence on ecological and health impacts of chemical substances should be updated and considered continuously, and be made accessible, especially concerning risks to humans and the environment.

their properties and their impact on health and the environment. The Strategy announces a number of actions in this sense, in particular to increase information requirements on chemicals (properties, environmental footprint, tracking in products) and to strengthen the science-policy interface in particular to take early action on chemical risks.

N°3 Local and regional authorities accelerating the implementation of the EU Pollinators Initiative
COM(2021) 261 final
COR-2021-03508 – ENVE-VII/020
148th plenary session – January 2022
Rapporteur: Frida NILSSON (SE/RENEW E.)
DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>8. The CoR calls for legally binding targets whose scope covers pollinators, as part of the upcoming European Commission initiative on nature restoration targets under the EU biodiversity strategy; In this light, offers to support the implementation of a new EU Pollinators Initiative, in particular regarding the implementation and monitoring activities.</p>	<p>As indicated in the inception impact assessment, the Commission is considering a target on pollinator species as one of the possible legally binding targets in the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law. The Commission is also considering restoration targets on habitats, which are important for pollinating insects.</p>
<p>13. The CoR calls for special attention to be paid to conventional farmers in their efforts to reduce their impact on pollinators, as organic agriculture and agroecological practices in many ways already protects and nourishes pollinators. Research, innovation and a flexible system for implementation is key to solving the challenges but also to allowing a diverse agricultural sector.</p>	<p>In the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plans, Member States will have to demonstrate their contribution to the CAP specific objective on the protection of biodiversity, ecosystem services, habitats and landscapes. They will outline the chosen interventions designed specifically for their farmers, based on local conditions and needs including sustainable practices such as agro-ecology, agro-forestry and other biodiversity-friendly production systems, such as organic farming, precision agriculture, biological pest-control and climate adaptation, which can be also beneficial for pollinators.</p> <p>The Commission will continue supporting farmers through research and innovation to reduce the negative impact of some of their practices on pollinators.</p> <p>Research and innovation funded by Horizon 2020 in relevant areas such as organic agriculture, crop diversification, crop rotation, mixed farming, agroforestry, integrated pest management, and reduced use of chemical pesticides provide solutions and promote the uptake of pollinator-</p>

	<p>friendly practices. Several research projects related to beekeeping have also contributed to the progress made – among others – in the knowledge about the role of bees on delivering pollination services.</p> <p>The Commission through the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) fosters innovation in organic agriculture, agroecology and pollinator-friendly practices, via different actions. Activities also cover the analysis of the socioeconomic and environmental benefits of these agriculture practices.</p> <p>The Commission will continue promoting research and innovation on organic agriculture, agroecology and overall pollinator-friendly practices through the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme.</p> <p>A partnership with the Member States and Associated Countries on agroecology is being developed under Horizon Europe. If successful, the partnership will constitute a powerful tool to accelerate the transition towards agroecology throughout Europe.</p>
<p>14. The CoR emphasises the need to examine the full extent of and to tackle environmental pollutants that go beyond pesticides, such as light pollution, for example, which is proven to affect pollinators to a large extent but still remains unaddressed.</p>	<p>In the context of the ongoing revision of the EU Pollinators Initiative¹, the Commission is planning expert consultation workshops, which will investigate impacts of various environmental pollutants, including light pollution, with regard to pollinator conservation and possible policy actions. Moreover, the first Zero Pollution Monitoring and Outlook Report planned for 2022 will help translate ‘early warnings’ into recommendations on pollutants of increasing concern based on the latest research findings (e.g. on light pollution), and Horizon Europe will continue supporting research on pollutants and types of pollution of emerging concern such as light pollution and its impacts on biodiversity.</p>
<p>18. The CoR calls on the Commission, the</p>	<p>Within the framework of the European Green</p>

¹ COM(2018) 395 final.

<p>European Parliament and the EU Member States to ensure that post-pandemic recovery policies, programmes and plans contribute to the sustainable management of biodiversity, including stopping the worrying decline of wild and domestic pollinators.</p>	<p>Deal and one of its key flagship Initiatives – the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030² – the Commission will continue to mainstream biodiversity and pollinator conservation objectives into the relevant programmes, including the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the EU common agricultural policy and the EU cohesion policy.</p>
<p>19. The CoR calls for support at local and regional level for an eco-scheme for pollinators that would include: the use of annual crops that are attractive to pollinators in at least 10% of agricultural land; in addition to the flowering period of perennial crops, planting of at least two plant species that are of interest to pollinators between rows of plants in production, with flowering at different times of the year to guarantee to a maximum the availability of resources for pollinators; training for farmers on beneficial insects and integrated pest management practices; and measures to be taken in favour of farms that ensure the presence of pollinators in areas lacking biodiversity.</p>	<p>The competence for setting up eco-schemes under the Common Agricultural Policy lies with the Member States. The Commission will assess the interventions and management practices proposed by Member States in their CAP Strategic Plans against the general and specific objectives. In the context of the specific objective on biodiversity, the Commission will assess the plans with regard to pollinator conservation needs. Member States have flexibility in setting the interventions, and their choice and design is based on the analysis of the environmental situation in a given territory.</p> <p>The Commission will continue to support these approaches under Horizon Europe, including research on organic agriculture, agroecology, crop diversification, crop rotation, mixed farming, agroforestry, integrated pest management, and reducing the use of chemical pesticides.</p> <p>The planned partnership on agroecology would provide a key contribution to these objectives by promoting biodiversity and pollinator friendly practices in agriculture and by involving farmers alongside researchers, advisors and other key stakeholders, in the co-creation of solutions to context-specific problems.</p> <p>Several Operational Groups funded under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) work on farming practices to guarantee a pollinator friendly environment.</p>
<p>22. The CoR calls on the Commission to actively support awareness-raising campaigns on national, regional and local levels, industry sectors and public through already existing and</p>	<p>The Commission will continue to raise awareness and encourage the public to act for pollinator conservation, through existing channels such as the EU Pollinator Week and the UN World Bee</p>

² COM(2020) 380 final.

<p>new channels.</p>	<p>Day events as well as through new citizen engagement activities. The Commission also plans to explore further the utilisation of emerging technologies such as virtual reality in stepping up education on nature and pollinators (via its Pollinator Park product) and further development of educational material.</p>
<p>23. The CoR regrets that platforms that were built for knowledge building and the sharing of best practices as part of the Pollinators Initiative, such as the EU Pollinator-information hive, have not been able to reach all actors and are still insufficiently well known. Calls therefore for funding, knowledge and capacity building, as well as best practices, as part of the upcoming Commission initiatives to be designed and communicated in a transparent way, so that citizens are not only inspired but also know how to contribute to the task of creating sustainable habitats for pollinators.</p>	<p>The Commission's online EU Pollinator Information Hive³ is a key platform for facilitating access to information and engaging the public and other stakeholders. The platform has been fully operational since 2021, and the Commission is currently developing a communication strategy to increase its outreach.</p>
<p>24. The CoR urges that the revised Pollinators Initiative investigate how existing networks and organisations can be used to share knowledge and best practices with local and regional authorities inside and outside the EU.</p>	<p>The Commission will investigate how existing platforms and networks could be better utilised to support local and regional authorities with knowledge and best practices on pollinator conservation, including in the framework of the Interreg programme.</p>
<p>26. The CoR reiterates that monitoring and reporting on the development of pollinators plays an important part in analysing the efficiency of any measures that are implemented. Calls, therefore, on the Commission to share a reporting and monitoring framework that could be used by subnational authorities to this end. To ensure straightforward implementation and support in establishing standardised pollinator monitoring programmes at the local and regional levels, efforts should follow existing best practices.</p>	<p>The Commission will develop the monitoring and reporting framework, share it with local and regional authorities and facilitate its uptake.</p>
<p>27. The CoR notes the close link between native species of flowers and native species or variations of pollinators and calls, therefore, for investment in knowledge, preservation and production of these species as a way of supporting pollinators.</p>	<p>The Commission will continue promoting research on native plant and pollinator species, and their conservation, including through the Horizon Europe and the LIFE programme.</p>

³ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/EU+Pollinator+Information+Hive>

<p>28. The CoR therefore calls on the Commission to evaluate how the commitment to plant at least three billion additional trees in urban areas in the EU by 2030 could be expanded and linked to include more planting of native flower species.</p>	<p>The 3 billion additional trees pledge will target urban, as well as agricultural and forest lands. The Commission will promote the planting of native flowering trees in this initiative to help reverse the decline of pollinators in the EU.</p>
<p>29. The CoR would like efforts to secure healthy populations of wild pollinators and effective biosecurity measures relevant for pollinators, as well as encouragements to use local plants to be included as an objective in the national CAP strategic plans to be approved in 2022, to push for further action. For easy and correct implementation, this responsibility should lie with the Member States.</p>	<p>The competence to use local plants to be included in the CAP strategic plans lies with the Member States. In the context of the specific objective on biodiversity, the Commission will assess the plans with regard to pollinator conservation needs.</p>
<p>43. The CoR calls on the Commission to address the decline of pollinators internationally and to advocate strong measures to protect pollinators and their habitats during the second part of the CBD COP15, that took place from 25 April to 8 May 2022 in Kunming, China.</p>	<p>The Commission will continue promoting a strong international response to pollinator decline in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.</p>

N°4 Towards zero emission road transport: Deploying alternative fuels infrastructure and strengthening CO₂ emission performance standards

COM(2021) 556 final

COM(2021) 559 final

COM(2021) 560 final

COR-2021-04913 – COTER-VII/015

148th plenary session – January 2022

Rapporteur: Adrian Ovidiu TEBAN (RO/EPP)

DG MOVE – Commissioner VĂLEAN

DG CLIMA – Executive Vice-President TIMMERMANS

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential

European Commission position

2. The CoR stresses that the transformation of the European automotive industry towards zero-emission vehicles is the most comprehensive structural change in the sector to date, with a multitude of impacts on workers, suppliers and car manufacturing groups in Europe. In view of this major transformation of one of the key European sectors, the CoR calls on the Commission to initiate a holistic and long-term strategic dialogue on the transformation of the automotive sector in the EU with all relevant stakeholders (OEMs, suppliers, trade unions, academia, environmental associations, NGOs, civil society, regions and cities, etc.) in order to provide political support for the structural change of the sector and to analyse and support its needs. Supports the existing forms of cooperation at the EU level, involving regional and local authorities, such as the Automotive Skills Alliance focused on the re-skilling and up-skilling of workers in the automotive sector, developing intelligence and fostering dialogue among all relevant partners and stakeholders in the sector.

3. The CoR supports the elaboration of specific plans for re- and upskilling, training and

The Commission recognises the important transformation of the automotive industry due to the twin green and digital transition, with increased automation in the supply chain.

The CO₂ standards proposal¹ foresees that by 31 December 2025, and every two years thereafter, the Commission shall report on the progress towards zero-emission road mobility, including on employment aspects, and to take stock of the progress made on the comprehensive pathway for the mobility ecosystem. The Commission shall propose any other additional action to facilitate that transition. This proposal is now with Parliament and Council.

The transition towards zero-emission mobility will require a transformation along the entire value chain of the automotive sector, including of its employment.

Several EU funding opportunities are already available to support the transformation, as well as the need to reskill and upskill part of workforce in the automotive industry to secure a workforce fit for the zero-emission mobility era. The ‘Pact for Skills’² will help mobilise the private sector and other stakeholders to upskill and reskill Europe’s

¹ COM(2021) 556 final.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1517&langId=en>

<p>reallocation of workers in the EU automotive sector, in particular in the regions most affected by the transition.</p> <p>4. The CoR supports public resources being made available for a Just Transition Programme for the automotive ecosystem. Its model should be the current Just Transition Platform. Funding for regional plans via the Just Transition Mechanism serve today millions of workers in carbon intensive industrial areas such as coal mining, including a dedicated Just Transition Fund.</p>	<p>workforce.</p> <p>In addition, the updated New Industrial Strategy³ foresees the co-creation of green and digital transition pathways in partnership with industry, public authorities, social partners and other stakeholders.</p> <p>In this context, a transition pathway should be developed for the mobility ecosystem to accompany the transition of the automotive value chain, taking particular heed of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the automotive supply chain. As a first step, the Commission prepared a Staff Working Document⁴ launching a public consultation on the transition pathway for the mobility ecosystem, which includes the automotive sector. The pathway is aimed to gain a better bottom-up understanding of the scale, cost and conditions of the required action to accompany the twin - green and digital - transition for the mobility ecosystem, leading to an actionable plan that supports sustainable competitiveness.</p> <p>The transition pathway will build upon the strengths of the sector and the key enablers to support the transition and overcome the challenges related to it (e.g. technology, skills, research and innovation, funding, etc.).</p>
<p>10. The CoR considers the rollout of charging and refuelling infrastructure for alternative drive systems, in conjunction with the new CO2 emission standards, and in particular the ramping up of electro-mobility, to be a key condition for achieving the climate targets at European, national and regional level. The EU's existing obligations relating to recharging and refuelling infrastructure requirements are not sufficient for this purpose.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee assessment on the importance of the rollout of recharging and refuelling infrastructure and that the European legislation in place is not sufficient to fully deliver on establishing a sufficiently dense network of alternative fuels infrastructure. In that respect, a thorough assessment has been carried out by the Commission as documented in the Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of Directive 2014/94/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure accompanying the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on</p>

³ COM(2021) 350 final.

⁴ SWD(2022) 16 final.

	the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure, and repealing Directive 2014/94/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁵ ..
11. The CoR welcomes the fact that, by transforming the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive (AFID) into a regulation (AFIR), the Commission is proposing, for the first time, mandatory EU-wide, uniform and, above all, cross-modal minimum requirements for this infrastructure in the Member States.	The Commission welcomes the Committee support for the proposal for a Regulation on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure ⁶ and for the setting of binding deployment targets.
12. The CoR supports full decarbonisation of the road transport sector by 2050.	The Commission welcomes the Committee support for a full decarbonisation of the road sector by 2050.
13. The CoR stresses that, in principle, openness is required for manufacturers regarding different types of propulsion and technical solutions in order to achieve the objective of registering only zero-emission vehicles in the EU from 2035.	<p>The CO₂ standards proposal setting higher emission reduction targets for new cars and vans from 2030 onwards and a 100% reduction target from 2035 onwards applies a technology neutral approach. The condition of zero tailpipe emissions for the new vehicles can be met by applying different technological solutions. It will be for manufacturers to decide which technologies they use to achieve this target.</p> <p>Vehicle manufacturers are already actively preparing for the switch to zero-emission vehicles, as illustrated by the surge in battery electric car registrations in 2020 and 2021 and their recent ambitious pledges on zero-emission vehicle sales.</p>
14. Following the principle of technological neutrality, the Commission must ensure technology competition, as well as alternatives for rural and remote areas, such as advanced biofuels (see sustainability criteria for biofuels in Annex IX of the Renewable Energy Directive).	The Commission would like to point out that blended biofuels and e-fuels do not need a specific infrastructure but can be used in the existing refuelling infrastructure. Therefore, no specific provisions on biofuels infrastructure were included in the proposal, and the proposal for a revision of the Renewable Energy Directive ⁷ foresees a strongly increased ambition for the use of renewable transport fuels in transport.

⁵ SWD(2021) 637 final.

⁶ COM(2021) 559 final.

⁷ COM(2021) 557 final.

<p>15. The CoR calls for an assessment of biofuels' emission intensity; this assessment must consider the whole biofuel lifecycle and its impacts on land-use change, indirect land-use change factors, biodiversity, and food security.</p>	<p>Aspects related to determining emission intensity of biofuels do not fall inside the scope of the regulation on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure. These aspects are addressed by the revision of the Renewable Energy Directive aiming to decarbonise all transport fuels, by introducing an ambitious greenhouse gas intensity reduction target of 13% by 2030, calculation based on a life cycle approach and in compliance with the sustainability criteria.</p>
<p>16. Special attention should be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public charging points in urban areas where an increasing number of electric vehicles will not have access to private parking • public charging points in remote and rural areas 	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee that urban and rural areas need specific attention.</p> <p>The Commission proposes national fleet-based target, which leaves freedom to Member States, regional authorities and local authorities to develop implementation strategies addressing the national, regional, urban and rural needs.</p> <p>What concerns urban areas, the Commission would like to point out that situations throughout the EU are very different and common targets applicable to all urban areas in the EU risk to lead to sub-optimal solutions in many cities.</p> <p>In rural areas, investments in recharging infrastructure are more difficult to realise and car dependency is higher. This is why the Commission proposes distance based targets for both electric recharging and hydrogen refuelling stations across the whole TEN-T core and comprehensive network to ensure that such infrastructure is available everywhere and no regions are left behind.</p>
<p>17. The CoR calls for measures to promote development of the use of hydrogen technology in transport, which is currently going through a dynamic phase, and for conditions to be put in place for a sufficiently comprehensive network of hydrogen refuelling points as soon as the necessary technological solutions are available and the demand is known. The years 2027 and 2035 are natural staging posts in a roadmap with corresponding measures. These measures also include the</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee on the important role hydrogen can play in particular in the heavy duty segments. To that end, the Commission proposal includes binding deployment targets by 2030 along the TEN-T core and comprehensive network as well as in all urban nodes.</p> <p>The provisions shall enable the needed minimum infrastructure along the TEN-T core and comprehensive network to ensure that hydrogen</p>

<p>preparation of the necessary legal acts and related decisions. However, it must be possible to grant derogations in duly justified cases where regions' specific characteristics (such as geographical location or population density) make it difficult to justify the established requirements from a socioeconomic point of view.</p>	<p>fuel-cell vehicle users can circulate without problems. Derogations impact the full cross-border connectivity, which might also impact on investment of manufacturers and infrastructure operators.</p>
<p>18. The CoR underlines the need for dedicated infrastructure for heavy-duty vehicles, particularly public transport.</p>	<p>The Commission's proposal includes mandatory targets for publicly accessible infrastructure dedicated to heavy-duty vehicles. The Commission also agrees on the need to provide recharging infrastructure for public transport fleets. Financing for such infrastructure is available on European level for example through the Connecting Europe Facility and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. However, this infrastructure is typically located in the private depots or on dedicated parking areas for public transport vehicle and is therefore not publicly accessible. Not publicly accessible infrastructure is outside the scope of Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR)⁸ but is inside the scope of the proposed revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive⁹ of December 2021.</p>
<p>19. Easy access to smart and fast charging, as well as information on the availability of charging stations, payment solutions, charging tariffs (price transparency), etc. is essential.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee that access to smart and fast charging as well as to all relevant information is crucial. To that end, the Commission proposal includes provisions in Art 5 and Art 18 on the functionalities of recharging stations, universal payment solutions, price transparency and information provision.</p>
<p>20. The CoR calls for priority to be given to measures to shift freight transport to rail when considering investments in alternative road propulsion systems;</p>	<p>The proposed regulation addresses the deployment of recharging and refuelling infrastructure. Aspects related to modal shift are outside the scope of AFIR. For example, they are inside the scope of the proposed revised guidelines for the</p>

⁸ COM(2021) 559 final.

⁹ COM(2021) 802 final.

	<p>Transeuropean Transport Network (TEN-T) proposal of December 2021¹⁰, which includes strong provisions on improving railway infrastructure and performance requirements to allow for quicker and better rail services.</p>
<p>21. The CoR welcomes the intention to address vehicle emissions standards in order to achieve the objective of carbon neutrality. Cars and vans represent the biggest share of CO₂ emissions in transport in absolute terms, and average emissions from internal combustion engine cars are rising.</p>	<p>All sectors of the economy need to contribute to reaching EU's climate targets for 2030 and 2050. To reach climate neutrality by 2050, transport emissions need to be reduced by 90% until then. For this to happen, nearly all cars and vans on EU's roads need to be zero emissions by 2050. Therefore, the Commission proposes¹¹ to strengthen the CO₂ standards for cars and vans from 2030 onwards, and sets 100% CO₂ emission reduction targets for new cars and vans from 2035 onwards.</p> <p>Ambitious targets for charging infrastructure will go hand in hand with the ambition of the CO₂ standards. In this sense, the key measures feature in the proposal for an Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation, which would ensure the necessary deployment of public charging infrastructure, and the proposal for a revised Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, which strengthens the existing requirements for recharging infrastructure in private residential and non-residential.</p>
<p>22. The CoR underlines the problem of second-hand car markets of polluting cars in Eastern and Central European Member States, shifting the toxic pollution and 'carbon leakage' problems to less-developed regions. This is impeding EU cohesion and works against the core value that all EU citizens have an equal right to clean air. The Commission should therefore ensure limits on the flow of old polluting vehicles in a way that protects the environment and public health, and is aligned with the Single Market.</p>	<p>The strengthened CO₂ emission standards will drive the penetration of zero-emission vehicles in the European market, to ensure a clear pathway towards zero-emission mobility. Stronger CO₂ standards will enable, not delay, the decarbonisation of second hand markets and the transition to zero-emission mobility. The sooner zero-emission vehicles are deployed on the EU market thanks to the strengthened CO₂ standards, the sooner they will also become available on second hand markets. This will allow second and third users to reap the benefits of zero-emission vehicles faster. A similar effect would be expected</p>

¹⁰ COM(2021) 812 final.

¹¹ COM(2021) 556 final.

	<p>for other pollutants as the Commission's work on Euro 7/VII norm should bring the cleaner cars that are newly registered in Member States, start making their way to the second-hand market after.</p> <p>Member States also had the full option to include measures to make cleaner cars available and affordable to all in their Recovery and Resilience Facility plans, including support for the leasing of cleaner cars and for the electrification of corporate car fleets, which also tend to come to the second-hand market far earlier than privately owned cars.</p>
<p>23. The CoR suggests that a new Euro 7/VII norm be designed in a way that is adapted to existing technical possibilities for reducing pollution. In principle, the requirements of the Euro 7/VII norm should not counteract the inevitable high costs of innovating new propulsion systems in the sector to achieve the climate objectives.</p>	<p>Aspects related to a new Euro 7/VII norm are outside the scope of AFIR and CO₂ standards.</p> <p>In view of the EU's commitment to accelerate the shift to sustainable and smart mobility and to further reduce air pollutants emission from road transport towards zero-pollution, as required by the Zero Pollution Action Plan¹², the Commission is currently preparing stricter emissions standards (Euro 7) for cars, vans, lorries and buses.</p> <p>Euro 7 will promote cost-effective solutions to achieve better emission performance of vehicles, building on current emission control systems, using state-of-the-art technology.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission is taking into account the proposed CO₂ emission standards and will weigh the environmental and health benefits against the cumulative costs for automotive industry.</p>
<p>25. The CoR considers that both draft regulations comply with the requirements of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles. The added value of EU action in this field and the appropriateness of the legal bases chosen by the Commission are clear and consistent. It regrets however that contrary to other proposals put forward within the "Fit for 55 package", the draft regulation on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure (COM(2021)559) was not accompanied by a</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee assessment that the draft regulations comply with requirements of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles.</p>

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en

<p>subsidiarity assessment grid and notes that two national parliaments issued a reasoned opinion on non-compliance with the principle of subsidiarity by the deadline for submissions, set at 8 November 2021.</p>	
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N°5 A long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas
COM(2021) 345 final
COR-2021-03533 – NAT-VII-021
148th plenary session – January 2022
Rapporteur: Juan Manuel MORENO BONILLA (ES/EPP)
DG AGRI – Commissioner WOJCIECHOWSKI

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>2. The CoR regrets, in this regard, that the instruments for convergence between Cohesion Policy and rural development policy were discarded during the recent reform of the CAP and is particularly disappointed that moves to integrate the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) into the Common Provisions Regulation for Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 were dropped.</p>	<p>The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) financing is implemented from 2023 as part of a Member State Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan along with other CAP instruments. Including such a Plan under the Common Provisions Regulation was not possible. Certain parts of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) will nevertheless apply to the EAFRD, as specified in the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation (SPR)¹. Article 110 of SPR provides that Member States shall describe the coordination and consistency of the CAP Plan with other EU funds and funding instruments. Furthermore, the Plans should contain the relevant details on how the identified needs are covered using the CAP, other EU funding or national funds. Similarly, Member States have to provide in their Partnership Agreements and operational programmes under Cohesion Policy the coordination arrangements with other funds and programmes.</p> <p>Coherent development in rural areas will therefore be ensured thanks to the regulatory requirements for close coordination and complementarity in the programming and implementation of Cohesion Policy (e.g. partnership agreements) and the EAFRD (e.g. CAP strategic plans). In the new period, the Directorate General for Agriculture (DG AGRI) representatives will continue to be present in the Stock-Taking Group of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).</p>
<p>3. The CoR highlights the need for the Conference on the Future of Europe to take</p>	<p>The Communication on a long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas has the ambition to create a new</p>

¹ COM(2018) 392 final.

<p>people in rural areas into account in order to reflect their ideas, needs and potential and ensure their ownership of the European project; recommends incorporating communication and advertising techniques aimed at improving the collective image of rural ways of life, highlighting the cultural and social advantages of rural life.</p>	<p>momentum for rural areas by changing the way they are perceived and by building new opportunities, with a stronger voice for rural communities, which are an integral part of building the future of Europe. Rural areas are also part of the Conference on the Future of Europe, as citizens participating in its citizens panels reflect the EU's diversity also from the geographical point of view, not only by their nationalities, but also by their rural or urban origin. Furthermore, a number of citizens' recommendations put forward proposals of direct concern for rural areas. Finally, the upcoming Rural Pact will be a place for all levels of the governance to interact and will engage the local level and rural citizens in working towards the common goals of the Vision.</p>
<p>5. The CoR recommends that the current region-city-based territorial model be changed to one based on a shared and balanced rural-urban relationship. This model should include compensation mechanisms to allow mutual synergies and rebalance the rural-urban relationship. A common urban-rural model will also improve protection of biodiversity and promote biocultural diversity of rural areas.</p>	<p>The EAFRD, included in the CAP Strategic Plans, caters specifically to rural needs. The Cohesion Policy also contributes to strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in both urban and rural areas, and art. 10 and 11 of the Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund² pay specific attention to disadvantaged areas and sustainable urban development, including functional urban areas and cooperation between urban and rural areas.</p>
<p>6. The CoR regrets that guidelines for enhanced support action and financing for rural areas at EU level will only be prepared for the 2028-2034 programming period.</p>	<p>Vice-president Šuica, together with Commissioner Wojciechowski and Commissioner Ferreira have written to the ministers of Agriculture and Cohesion Policy of the 27 Member States to make certain that the necessary funds will be invested in a coordinated way for the benefit of rural areas in 2021-2027.</p> <p>In addition, the Communication on the long-term vision for EU's rural areas foresees that by mid-2023, the Commission will take stock of what actions have been carried out and programmed in support schemes for rural areas financed by the EU and Member States in the 2021-2027 programming period for the CAP and Cohesion Policy Funds,</p>

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1058>.

	and will highlight gaps where necessary.
7. The CoR highlights the urgency of putting in place a European Rural Agenda that sets out concrete proposals for immediate action to support the long-term vision and recommends that these concrete proposals be accompanied by resources, financial instruments and quantitative targets to ensure the effective implementation of the long-term vision.	The Commission committed to implement a Rural action plan including actions under their responsibility, funded through the various instruments available in the current framework. One of these actions is the Rural Pact. The Commission is currently building a community around the Pact and designing its governance in cooperation with other EU institutions and EU stakeholder organisations. The results of this work will be presented at a Rural Pact conference on 15 and 16 June 2022.
8. The CoR calls, in this respect, for a minimum earmarking of European funds for non-agricultural projects in rural areas to be introduced in both Cohesion Policy operational programmes and other European direct intervention programmes (Horizon Europe, the Connecting Europe Facility or Creative Europe).	<p>The EU Cohesion Policy and the EU Recovery and Resilience Plans create new economic activities and job opportunities in rural areas, while fostering synergies with urban areas. Cohesion Policy is under shared management and Member states and regions have a big share of the responsibility to use all available funds in a coordinated and integrated way. National and regional programmes focus on key challenges and potentials, including the potential of rural areas. The Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund states that the ERDF shall pay special attention to addressing the challenges of disadvantaged regions and areas, notably rural areas and areas, which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.</p> <p>The Horizon Europe framework programme finances research dedicated to rural areas. Considerable amounts of Research and Innovation funding have been invested in projects that address key transitions in rural areas, such as, socio-economic, climate change and environmental, and digital.</p> <p>The mission ‘A Soil Deal for Europe’³ mentioned in the Rural Action Plan, has the goal of creating ‘100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030’.</p> <p>As far as the EAFRD is concerned, the obligatory</p>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/soil-health-and-food_en

	<p>minimum of 5% of the envelope for LEADER ('Links between activities for the development of rural economy') funding remains for the new programming period.</p>
<p>10. The CoR underlines the importance of ensuring adequate funding for the implementation of the vision for the EU's rural areas. EU rural policy should, as far as possible, be integrated into Cohesion Policy in order to achieve a coherent development policy. Rural development affects more industries than just agriculture, and funding should therefore not be limited to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Specific local circumstances and needs should be the starting point for EU rural policy, just as in Cohesion Policy.</p>	<p>By the first quarter of 2024, the Commission will issue a public report on funds dedicated to rural areas in the current programming period. Discussions on this report will feed the reflection on the preparation of the proposals for the post 2027 programming period.</p>
<p>13. The CoR reiterates the importance of dialogue between all parties who have a stake in the future of rural areas, from the various levels of government and administration to the main economic sectors, companies, citizens and the academic world; initiatives such as forums, councils or round tables, where all actors participate, are excellent tools for discussing the main challenges faced by rural areas and finding solutions that take everyone's voice into account.</p>	<p>The EU Rural Pact aims to be the framework for interaction between these stakeholders.</p>
<p>16. The CoR considers that further progress is needed on utilising natural ecosystem services (water, nutrients, aquifers, temperature regulation, biodiversity, etc.), the benefits of which could be allocated in part to rural municipalities, to support the organisation and development of their local areas.</p>	<p>Biodiverse ecosystems such as wetland, freshwater, forest, agricultural, sparsely vegetated, marine, coastal and urban ecosystems and their components (including species populations, habitat types and habitats of species) deliver, if in good condition, a range of essential ecosystem services, and the benefits of restoring degraded ecosystems to good condition in all land and sea areas far outweigh the costs of restoration. To unlock these benefits, the Commission will propose a Nature Restoration Law before summer 2022.</p>
<p>17. The CoR urges the Commission to make it easier for public funding for rural areas to supplement private initiatives where the</p>	<p>The ongoing revision of the State aid rules will facilitate using General Block Exemption Regulations, Agricultural State aid rules and, more</p>

	<p>mentioned, where relevant, in the forthcoming country reports and their annexes, as will demographic considerations be taken on board. These aspects can be also taken into consideration in the identification of Member States' main policy challenges.</p>
<p>22. The CoR stresses that for the rural agenda to be successful, it cannot be built on a one-size-fits-all approach; considers, therefore, that there is a need for precise categorisation of local areas and recognition of local specificities, underpinned by transparent and objective parameters and indicators that give real value to rural development.</p>	<p>Eurostat publishes more than 100 indicators by Degree of Urbanisation, including poverty, employment, education, etc., capturing the situation in rural areas and allowing to assess how many issues have been changing over time such as access to basic services and to broadband.</p> <p>Where necessary, the urban-rural regional typology, at NUTS-3 level, will be used. Regional accounts, which include extensive economic data such as data on the gross domestic product (GDP), the gross value added (GVA), and employment by sector, innovation and business demography, are only available at the regional level. As a result, discussions of the rural economy will have to be done using this definition. Demographic data is only available at NUTS-3 level, but it is planned to downscale these data to the local level to use it by Degree of Urbanisation.</p> <p>The Commission will deliver a new population grid with reference year 2021, at which point the definition of rural areas and rural regions will be redeployed and the list of rural areas and rural regions updated.</p> <p>The Commission is working on the concept of 'functional rural areas', which should allow for more precise and granular data.</p>
<p>24. The CoR stresses, in this regard, that special support should be given to NUTS level 3 areas or very sparsely populated areas, or those with an average population decrease of more than 1% between 2007 and 2017.</p>	<p>The CAP Strategic Plan Regulation allows Member States to develop interventions for a certain region or for a group of territories facing similar socio-economic or agronomic conditions.</p> <p>The ERDF regulation for 2021-2027 states that the ERDF should pay particular attention to certain areas, including rural areas suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, including demographic decline, in accessing basic</p>

	<p>services, including digital services, enhancing attractiveness for investment, including through business investments and connectivity to large markets.</p> <p>The Rural Pact process will further address the policy towards the remote and sparsely populated areas.</p>
<p>25. The CoR calls on the Commission, in agreement with the Member States and local and regional authorities, to guarantee that the initiative on the long-term vision for rural areas includes practical solutions and means of support to deal with demographic changes faced by rural areas, and reiterates the need to implement integrated projects based on the operational programmes under Cohesion Policy, the CAP national strategic plans and instruments laid down in the national strategic recovery plans. Lastly, European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) projects are developing cross-border best practices to come up with innovative approaches and pilot projects for the integrated territorial development of urban-rural functional areas.</p>	<p>In line with the commitments made under its rural action plan, the Commission will publish a toolkit on access to and combination of EU funds for rural areas. A rural revitalisation platform will also be set-up for stakeholders to exchange best practices and solutions to deal with depopulation trends, building on experience developed under the LEADER, the Community Led Local Development (CLLD), the INTERREG, the smart villages etc. Demographic trends will also be in the centre of the attention of the future Rural Observatory.</p> <p>Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 provides an enabling framework to help Member States regions and local authorities to respond to challenges (including depopulation). Integrated local strategies and projects are both encouraged under mainstream as well as the INTERREG programmes. The INTERREG programmes also tackle legal and administrative border obstacles, improve the lives of the population living in cross-border regions. This is particularly relevant for rural areas where relations with neighbouring regions across the border are frequent.</p>
<p>26. The CoR calls for simpler implementing rules for European funds and State aid in rural areas, improvements in the way that they are combined and a shift to multi-fund model that ensures rural areas are integrated into all policies.</p>	<p>In particular, the ongoing revision of State aid General Block Exemption Rules will substantially simplify and speed up granting State aid, also in rural areas, and combining State aid with support from the EU funds. Member States and regions can choose to combine – or not – various funds available to them to support rural areas. The Cohesion Policy legislative framework introduced over 70 significant simplifications in terms of programming, management and monitoring, which will facilitate the implementation of cohesion</p>

	funding.
28. The CoR draws the Commission's attention to the need to incorporate system methodologies in the future design of rural areas, to ensure systemic rather than partial or linear visions of development.	The Commission will take this feedback into account when it starts developing the review of programming for rural areas. The Commission also funds a portfolio of rural research under its Horizon Europe programme to improve knowledge on rural areas and the complex dynamics at play on a variety of issues.
30. The CoR, in terms of opportunities, considers that there is insufficient mention of and only an indirect reference to sectors such as sustainable rural tourism or leisure and cultural activities, despite the fact that they play a very important role in building diversified strong and sustainable rural economies. There are many potential additional activities linked to rural areas other than the agricultural sector, such as cycling tourism, hunting, hiking, mycology, wellness tourism, gastronomy, community-based arts or arts workshops and exhibition centres, etc..	While the Commission's Communication tried to cover as many potential opportunities as possible, it was not possible to cover all potential economic opportunities in the text itself. However, Commission's services are ready to work on the suggestions mentioned by the Committee for future actions under the Commission Rural Action Plan or the Rural Pact.
34. The CoR urges the Commission to consider among its proposals in this area the contribution that distributed service delivery systems can make, in areas such as childcare, care centres for older people, schools and after-schools, shops, and health and social care (an area in which technologies such as telemedicine and telecare can make key contributions) and calls on the Commission in that regard to set targets for the Member States in order to improve accessibility to services in general and basic public services in particular in rural areas.	<p>The Commission takes note of the importance attached to distributed service delivery systems by the Committee and will continue to encourage Member States to improve accessibility to services in rural areas.</p> <p>The Commission supports Member States in implementing the 2019 Council recommendation for high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems⁶ by promoting ways to develop them in the toolkit for inclusive ECEC.</p> <p>The Postal Services Directive aims at ensuring affordable, high quality and efficient basic postal services throughout the EU. The evaluation on the Postal Services Directive, adopted on 8 November 2021⁷, confirmed the importance of the EU postal services for all, including for vulnerable users and citizens in rural remote areas.</p>

⁶ Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems; OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4–14.

⁷ COM(2021) 674 final.

<p>38. The CoR urges that this positive effect be properly reflected in the per capita investment calculations per type of region (urban, intermediate, rural) and therefore calls for a review of the mechanisms for establishing profit indicators for these investments, with particular focus on small towns and villages in rural areas.</p>	<p>The Commission will continue to investigate the role of small towns and villages as service providers for the wider region.</p> <p>Further analysis will be done on the per capita investment calculation concept within the framework of the Rural Pact.</p>
<p>39. The CoR stresses that renewable energy production is an opportunity for rural areas to combat energy poverty and generate energy self-sufficiency in functional areas (including rural-urban areas in their sphere of influence). Furthermore, the Committee stresses that greater acceptance of renewable energy production facilities can be achieved by keeping part of the revenues generated within rural communities.</p>	<p>Following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the case for a rapid clean energy transition has never been stronger and clearer. In its Communication REPower EU of 8 March 2022⁸, the Commission pointed out that doubling the objective of Fit for 55 for biomethane would lead to the production of 35 billion cubic metres per year by 2030. To do so, Member States' CAP strategic plans should channel funding to biomethane produced from sustainable biomass sources, including in particular agricultural wastes and residues.</p> <p>The Renewable Energy Directive⁹ introduces a supportive framework for self-consumption and renewable energy communities to allow citizens to produce, store, share and sell their own renewable energy. These have the potential to foster acceptance and engagement by citizens and communities and ensure that communities reap the socio-economic benefits of renewable energy.</p> <p>The Commission presented on 19 May 2022 a communication on solar energy with the aim of helping unlock solar energy's potential as a major renewable energy source in the EU.</p>
<p>40. The CoR proposes to consider, where appropriate, the possibilities for promotion of reshoring, which creates opportunities for rural synergies between agriculture, manufacturing and commerce, therefore help strengthen local economy by creating jobs and reducing unemployment.</p>	<p>Regarding reshoring, the Joint Research Center's 2021 Science for Policy Report¹⁰ observed that the cost differential between offshoring and reshoring has been closing in recent years. Reshoring could indeed be a tool to strengthen local and rural economy.</p>
<p>43. The CoR points out that particular attention</p>	<p>Cross-border programmes financed under</p>

⁸ COM(2022) 108 final.

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018L2001>

¹⁰ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c707e646-99b7-11ea-aac4-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<p>should be paid to infrastructure and cross-border cooperation in rural border regions; emphasises the need to improve the public transport infrastructure and service system in rural areas, ensuring the development of sustainable mobility solutions that reduce travel times and of the number of connections between urban and peri-urban and rural areas.</p>	<p>Cohesion Policy support rural areas since a great part of cross border areas in the EU are rural. Sustainable public transport infrastructure and services are eligible for funding if the member states and regions cooperating chose so. The Directorate General for Regional Policy (DG REGIO) also supports border regions in finding solutions for border obstacles, namely with the <i>b-solutions</i> initiative. Furthermore the Commission has just published a study ‘Providing public transport in cross-border regions – mapping of existing services and legal obstacles’¹¹ that provides tools to support deployment of new or better cross-border public transport services.</p>
<p>44. The CoR stresses that the primary objective of spatial and transport policy should be maximising the possibilities to meet needs, with a minimum of transport; rationalisation is important in this regard.</p>	<p>In the area of logistics, the Commission is working on improving the logistics flows of goods and services in urban as well as in rural areas.</p>
<p>45. The CoR recommends that multimodal mobility solutions should also take into account the contribution that ‘mobility as a service’ (MaaS) models can make in transitioning towards more energy and climate sustainable physical connectivity; for example, on-demand services and shared mobility connecting rural communities with transport hubs, particularly bus and rail stations, can boost the use of sustainable transport.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the important role digital mobility services can play to make mobility more sustainable and multimodal. This will be precisely the focus of the upcoming multimodal digital mobility services initiative¹².</p>
<p>48. The CoR stresses that investment in digital infrastructure is not sufficient if it is not accompanied by sufficient digital training and up-skilling, especially in rural areas. This is also very important in the light of increasing global cybercrime and, in particular, in view of the need to ensure that local businesses that are part of the food chain are sufficiently cyber-secure;</p>	<p>Insufficient digital education and training are the main bottlenecks on the way to a digitally skilled population, which is a prerequisite to meet the challenges and successfully achieve the digital and green transformations of the European society and economy. The Commission’s ‘Digital Compass’ Communication¹³ and more recently the proposed Decision on a ‘Path to the Digital Decade’¹⁴ 2030 Policy Programme set a clear target for a digitally</p>

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2022/providing-public-transport-in-cross-border-regions-mapping-of-existing-services-and-legal-obstacles

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13133-Multimodal-digital-mobility-services_en

¹³ COM(2021) 118 final.

¹⁴ COM(2021) 574 final.

	<p>skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 80% of those aged 16-74 have at least basic digital skills;¹⁵ – 20 million employed Information and Communication Technologies specialists, with convergence between women and men. <p>Achieving the target will require significant reforms and investments at both European and national level in order to support the development of high-performing digital education ecosystems across Europe.</p> <p>Furthermore, the proposed EU Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles recalls the importance for everyone able to acquire all basic and advanced digital skills as well as the importance of being protected from cybercrime.</p>
<p>51. The CoR calls for the inclusion of the contribution made by cultural heritage and cultural, artistic and creative professionals to building a sustainable and prosperous future and to improve the touristic attractiveness of rural areas, that will also improve the economic well-being of these settlements.</p>	<p>In accordance with the 2019-2022 Work-plan for Culture¹⁶, a working group composed of Member States’ experts (Open Method of Coordination working group - OMC) started meeting in 2021 under the title of the mandate ‘<i>Strengthening Cultural Heritage Resilience for Climate Change</i>’. The final report, its recommendations and best practice case studies (which will include rural) will be published at the end of 2022.</p> <p>Sustainable Cultural Tourism was highlighted as one of ten initiatives for the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018. A Sustainable Cultural Tourism OMC working group prepared 27 case studies outlining good practices, covering the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in both urban and rural environments. Sustainable tourism activities have a great potential in offering not only growth and jobs, but also in valorising natural and cultural resources in rural</p>

¹⁵ [COM\(2021\)102 final](#).

¹⁶ Council conclusions on the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022; OJ C 460, 21.12.2018, p. 12–25.

	areas.
<p>55. The CoR considers that agriculture should be able to keep playing a central role in rural areas; calls on the Commission to ensure that the strategic plans that each Member State will have to develop under the new common agricultural policy (CAP) are properly drawn up, with the aim of ensuring that the European primary sector heads in the direction indicated in the Green Deal, the Farm-to-Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, and that they allow for local strategies based on the characteristics of each region and the promotion of typical local products.</p>	<p>Recital 122 of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation¹⁷ states that ‘When assessing the proposed CAP Strategic Plans, the Commission should assess the consistency and contribution of the proposed CAP Strategic Plans to the Union’s environmental and climate legislation and commitments and, in particular, to the Union targets for 2030 set out in the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’ (‘Farm to Fork Strategy’)¹⁸ and the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives’ (‘EU Biodiversity Strategy’)¹⁹.’</p> <p>Recital 125 of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation²⁰ further states that the Commission should assess the operation of the new delivery model and contribution of the interventions set out in the CAP Strategic Plans’ to achieving the environmental and climate-related commitments of the Union, in particular those emerging from the European Green Deal.</p> <p>The Commission is carrying out this assessment and will publish a summary report of Member States’ CAP Strategic Plans due by 31 December 2023, including the analysis of efforts and ambition of Member States to address the environmental and climate objectives of the CAP. The Commission will also publish a report due by 31 December 2025 to assess the operation of the new delivery model by the Member States and the consistency and combined contribution of the interventions in the CAP Strategic Plans to achieving environmental and climate-related commitments of the Union.</p>
59. The CoR considers fair prices and incomes	The EU agriculture and the CAP are market-

¹⁷ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#).

¹⁸ COM(2020) 381 final.

¹⁹ COM(2020) 380 final.

²⁰ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#)

<p>for those working in agriculture to be essential. Any market development that is ruinous for businesses should therefore be counteracted. The EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) should counteract this in times of crisis with tools such as the general adaptation of production volumes to market needs and rules on qualified market access.</p>	<p>oriented, allowing farmers to receive costs and price signals for them to take the necessary production and investment decisions to deliver quality and affordable food required by consumers. In times of crisis, beyond direct payments that stabilise farm income, farmers can develop risk management tools and benefit from the market safety nets, like public storage and private storage aid, and from exceptional measures provided for by the Common Market Organisation (CMO). Such CAP instruments allowed to efficiently mitigate the negative impacts of recent crises like COVID-19 or the Russian embargo on food imports.</p>
<p>60. The CoR notes that a significant proportion of work in the EU's agricultural and food sector is carried out by migrant workers. This population group often lives in vulnerable conditions. The EU's social agenda therefore needs to be strengthened to achieve higher minimum wages, good working conditions and social integration.</p>	<p>For the first time in the history, 2023-2027 CAP legislation enshrined the rights of workers, including migrant workers, to decent working conditions via a social conditionality mechanism. The social conditionality ensures that farmers who do not provide their workers with a written description of the agreed working conditions, and who do not ensure a safe and healthy working environment will see their CAP payments reduced. In addition, under specific objective (h) as put forward by the Strategic Plan Regulation (SPR)²¹, <i>Promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry</i>; Member States will have the opportunity to invest into enhancing social inclusion of people in vulnerable situations, including migrants.</p> <p>The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out principles and rights essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan²² turns them into concrete actions to benefit citizens, including those most vulnerable</p>

²¹ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#)

²² <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

	<p>ones. Moreover, the Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027²³ sets out targeted actions to foster labour integration of migrant in labour market, education and training, housing and healthcare and support their social inclusion in society, including in rural areas. Migrants' integration in rural areas can be discussed within the partnership launched with the Committee in March 2021 as a follow up of the Action plan on integration and inclusion. With regards to irregular migrant workers, the Employers Sanctions Directive²⁴ sets out minimum standards for sanctioning employers and measures to protect the rights of the irregular migrant workers. The Commission's recent Communication on the Employers Sanctions Directive²⁵ proposes further actions to strengthen the implementation of this Directive.</p>
<p>63. The CoR notes that the increasing prevalence of large predators and the associated increase in the killing of farm animals on mountain pastures are causing growing problems for mountain farming, and that in many cases mountain pasture farming is being abandoned, which in mountainous regions plays an important role in ensuring that entire regions do not become overrun with forests and thus makes a significant contribution to environmental protection and erosion control and to the priceless capital of landscape protection in rural areas; therefore calls on the Commission to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establish a common European wolf and large carnivores, especially bears management system; 	<p>Measures to prevent livestock damage by large carnivores have proved to be effective when well implemented and tailored to the specific context in which they are applied. EU funds are available to support better livestock management and protection practices aimed at reducing vulnerability to predation. These practices include fencing as well as the provision and training of guarding dogs.</p> <p>Damage can therefore be prevented or greatly reduced. In addition, Member States may establish national State aid schemes to compensate up to 100% of direct or indirect damages caused by protected species in accordance with the applicable guidelines²⁶.</p> <p>The Commission is currently not planning to revise the annexes of the Habitats Directive²⁷ in</p>

²³ COM(2020) 758 final.

²⁴ Directive 2009/52/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 providing for minimum standards on sanctions and measures against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals; OJ L 168, 30.6.2009, p. 24–32.

²⁵ COM(2021) 592 final.

²⁶ In particular, Section 1.2.1.5. 'Aid to compensate for the damage caused by protected animals' in the 2014 European Union Guidelines on state aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas, OJ C 204 of 1.7.2014, p.1, and amended by Commission Notices published in OJ C 390 of 24.11.2015, p.4, in OJ C139 of 20.4.2018, p.3, in OJ C 403 of 9.11.2018, p.10, and in OJ C 424 of 8.12.2020, p.30.

²⁷ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7-50.

<p>- explore an amendment to the annexes to the Habitats Directive in order to adapt more rapidly to the development of particular populations and to relax or strengthen the protection status by country or territorial unit where justified by a positive or negative development of the populations of the protected species and the threat to pastoral activities;</p> <p>- broaden the scope for adapting European legislation and the necessary measures to local conditions so that populations of predators, in particular those of wolves and bears, can be better managed.</p>	<p>order to change the legal status of the wolf. Protecting large carnivores such as the wolf is important as they play a key role in maintaining the health of natural ecosystems.</p> <p>The Commission is of the view that Member States have the necessary tools under the existing EU legislation to allow both the conservation of large carnivores and the continuation of livestock grazing in European landscapes. The available tools also include the possibility of derogations under the Habitats Directive to capture or kill wolf specimens in order to prevent serious damage to livestock, provided all the conditions set out in Article 16 of the Directive are fulfilled²⁸.</p>
<p>64. The CoR stresses the important role played by agricultural infrastructure in the organisation and cohesion of rural areas; calls on the Commission to include in its proposals measures to ensure that this infrastructure is preserved and that it remains largely as permeable (unpaved) roads.</p>	<p>According to Strategic Plan Regulation (SPR)²⁹, Member States may include in their Strategic Plans rural development interventions related to agricultural and rural infrastructure, based on a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and identified needs, and synergies with other funds active in rural areas.</p> <p>The new delivery model of the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 gives more flexibility to Member States to set up national rules, such as technical requirements, for the implementation of their Strategic Plans.</p>
<p>66. The CoR stresses that a long-term vision for rural areas should strengthen the regions' role in identifying their priorities; is of the view, in this regard, that when drawing up the legislation on the CAP, its national strategic plans and the national recovery plans an opportunity was missed to ensure future investment projects in rural areas are genuinely anchored in the needs of each local area, as identified by its own stakeholders.</p>	<p>Article 106 (3) of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation³⁰ specifies that for preparation and implementation of the strategic plan, 'Each Member State shall organise a partnership with the competent regional and local authorities'.</p> <p>The Commission repeatedly highlighted its conviction that the implementation of the plans will only be successful with strong regional and local ownership, as well as support from social partners and civil society at every stage of the process. The regions will be key partners when it</p>

²⁸ Relevant interpretation, clarifications and advice are provided in the Commission's guidance on animal species protected under the Habitats Directive:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/guidance/index_en.htm

²⁹ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#)

³⁰ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#)

comes to translating the ambitious objectives for the green and digital transition into concrete measures, with tangible impact on the ground for people and businesses. Member States needed to explain how their plans contribute to enhancing cohesion, taking into account local, regional and national disparities.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility has significantly invested in projects that will benefit rural areas and reduce the rural-metropolitan divide. The most pronounced investments target the modernisation of technological infrastructure by digitalizing local public services, rolling out ultra-fast broadband connections, installing 5G mobile networks and many other objectives that will enhance connectivity in rural areas. On another note, the recovery and resilience plans also aim to ameliorate the quality and availability of social, and health services, which are notoriously less attainable in remote areas. Other distinct measures will also take aim at sustainable tourism, water management, biodiversity, sustainable farming and other crucial elements that form the backbone of the rural economy and wellbeing.

The regional authorities will be invited to take active role and possible commitments in the Rural Pact process.

N°6 EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 - Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work COM(2021) 323 final COR-2021-05555 – SEDEC-VII/024 148th plenary session – January 2022 Rapporteur: Sergio CACI (IT/EPP) DG EMPL – Commissioner SCHMIT

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>6. The CoR (...) recommends, furthermore, that the Commission lose no time in designing and implementing, in cooperation with the social partners, an EU-wide initiative on mental health at work to assess the emerging issues in this area. The initiative must be able to provide inspiration where needed in individual Member States/sectors/workplaces.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s opinion and recommendations.</p> <p>The Commission shares the views of the Committee on the relevance of addressing mental health at work. The EU Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Strategic Framework 2021-2027¹ announced that the Commission would prepare a non-legislative EU-level initiative related to mental health at work that assesses emerging issues and puts forward guidance for action. This will be done in cooperation with Member States and social partners.</p> <p>The issue of psychosocial risks and mental health should also be an important issue at the planned OSH Summit in the first half of 2023.</p> <p>Several relevant specific actions will be carried out by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) during the period 2022-2024², such as an in-depth comparative research on the overall situation related to psychosocial risks and workers’ mental health in European workplaces, taking into consideration national differences, sectoral and company size specificities, gender, age and vulnerable groups. It will explore new research and statistics, investigating the effectiveness of EU and national policies, strategies, approaches to prevention and workplace practices. The research will allow the policy makers to have a better understanding of</p>

¹ COM(2021) 323 final.

² EU-OSHA’s Single Programming Document 2022-2024, available at <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/single-programming-document-2022-2024>

	<p>the potential impact of different policies, such as strengthening regulation and enforcement, sectoral and social partner agreements, and the key success factors.</p> <p>In addition, in 2024, EU-OSHA will finalise an OSH overview on digitalisation, which will provide information to policy makers and researchers on the OSH issues at stake in relation to the increasing use of automation, robotics, artificial intelligence and monitoring technology. The digitalisation overview will be the research basis for the 2023-2025 Healthy Workplaces Campaign ‘Safe and Healthy Work in the Digital Age’, which will help raise awareness of risks and opportunities.</p>
<p>30. (...) Vision Zero should not be limited to deaths, but should also cover workplace accidents and illnesses, as well as risk prevention and elimination, in line with the principles of the Framework Directive .</p>	<p>The EU OSH Strategic Framework 2021-2027 states that nobody should suffer from job related diseases or accidents. The Vision Zero approach to work-related deaths strengthens, in general, the prevention culture, including the proper and effective application of the general principles of prevention laid down in the Framework Directive³, for all occupational risks. This is confirmed by the OSH Strategic Framework 2021-2027, which underlines that all accidents, injuries and diseases must be analysed and prevented (section 2.2).</p>
<p>33. (...) The Committee eagerly awaits further work to set binding evidence-based and scientifically up-to-date occupational exposure limits covering all 50 priority carcinogens (compared to the current 27) and to include substances toxic to reproduction, and to hazardous medicinal products.</p>	<p>In 2016, the Commission initiated a first revision of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive (CMD)⁴, with the aim of setting occupational exposure limits for additional substances in its Annex III. To date and by means of four revisions, 29 substances have been addressed.</p> <p>On 16 December 2021, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on the fourth revision of the CMD, setting new or revised limit values for three carcinogens: acrylonitrile, nickel compounds and benzene. This</p>

³ Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work OJ L 183, 29.6.1989, p. 1–8.

⁴ Directive 2004/37/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work (Sixth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Council Directive 89/391/EEC); OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 50–76.

provisional agreement was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 17 February 2022 and 3 March 2022, respectively.

The revised Directive will provide for, among others:

- the enlargement of the scope of the CMD to reprotoxic substances;
- reinforced training measures for workers handling hazardous medicinal products and the preparation of Union guidelines for the preparation, administration, and disposal of hazardous medicinal products at the place of work;
- where appropriate, the development of a definition and the establishment of an indicative list of hazardous medicinal products (or the substances contained therein) which fall within the scope of the CMD; and
- where appropriate, the presentation of the planned actions in view of scientifically evaluating new or revised occupational limit values for at least 25 substances.

Furthermore, in the new EU OSH strategic framework 2021-2027, the Commission committed to launching a social partner consultation on reduced limit values for welding fumes, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, isoprene, and 1,4-dioxane under the CMD in 2023. The Commission also committed to setting a limit value in the CMD for cobalt by 2024.

The Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work adopted a tripartite opinion on priority chemicals for new or revised occupational exposure limit values under EU OSH legislation, including the CMD. The Commission will take account of this opinion when prioritising the next chemicals to be addressed in the CMD.

Finally, as part of its 2022 Work Programme⁵, the Commission is also preparing a legislative proposal to further reduce worker's occupational

⁵ [2022 Commission Work Programme – key documents | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

	<p>exposure to asbestos.</p> <p>In parallel, the European Parliament adopted on 20 October 2021 a resolution under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on protecting workers and citizens from asbestos⁶ to which the Commission responded by letter on 19 January 2022. As a follow-up, the Commission will also present a Communication setting out possible measures under existing and new instruments in view of addressing the risks from asbestos.</p>
<p>37. The CoR calls for the Artificial Intelligence Act to include OSH since the studies carried out by individual Member States contain an in-depth assessment of work organisation, as well as physical and mental health and the safety of workers.</p>	<p>The proposed artificial intelligence (AI) Act is a horizontal internal market Regulation, which lays down a uniform legal framework for the development, marketing and use of AI systems in conformity with Union values, notably a high level of protection of health, safety and fundamental rights. It provides, inter alia, for mandatory requirements with respect to ‘high-risk’ AI systems, i.e. systems intended to be used in certain ways in specific predefined areas. This includes the area of employment, workers management and access to self-employment, and notably, ‘AI systems intended to be used for making decisions on promotion and termination of work-related contractual relationships, for task allocation and for monitoring and evaluating performance and behaviour of persons in such relationships’. Existing OSH provisions at EU level are complemented by additional protections for workers vis-à-vis the use of automated monitoring and decision-making systems in the Commission’s proposal for a Directive to improve working conditions in platform work. The proposed Directive’s personal scope is limited to people working through digital labour platforms, since available evidence indicates that this particular type of companies uses automated monitoring and decision-making systems to an extent that is not observable in other sectors. This poses specific challenges to the working conditions of platform workers, including on</p>

⁶ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0427_EN.html

	<p>health and safety. The Commission will continue examining the phenomenon of algorithmic management and will keep an eye on the potential future need to regulate the use of algorithms in the wider world of work.</p>
<p>38. The CoR believes that the Strategic Framework for Health and Safety at work should cover everyone in the world of work; notes that the scope of application of the OSH strategic framework excludes self-employed workers (including atypical workers and platform workers) and believes that the EU initiative on improving the working conditions of platform workers could also include a reference to OSH.</p>	<p>As regards to the self-employed, it is worth clarifying that while in general the EU OSH rules do not apply, not all self-employed workers fall outside this legislation. For instance, the Directive on temporary or mobile construction⁷ sites contains provisions applicable to self-employed as their actions/omissions could place others (whether employed or self-employed) at risk at work.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that all self-employed must have a safe and healthy work environment and has been working together with the Member States, social partners, and EU-OSHA to raise awareness on issues associated with the working conditions of the self-employed. EU-OSHA conducted a review of methods used across Europe to estimate work-related accidents and illnesses among the self-employed. Moreover, the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) also addressed the issue in its opinion of May 2014⁸.</p> <p>The Council Recommendation on improving the protection of the self-employed⁹ recommends, among others, that EU Member States promote the safety and health of self-employed workers, through the measures they deem most appropriate. This could be legislation, incentives, information campaigns and/or encouragement of relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>In the particular case of platform workers, the Commission would like to stress that they are fully covered by the strategic framework,</p>

⁷ Council Directive 92/57/EEC of 24 June 1992 on the implementation of minimum safety and health requirements at temporary or mobile construction sites; OJ L 245, 26.8.1992, p. 6–22.

⁸ ACSH opinion ‘Improvement of the protection of the health and safety at work of self-employed workers’ adopted on 22/05/2014.

⁹ Council recommendation 2003/134/EC of 18 February 2003 concerning the improvement of the protection of the health and safety at work of self-employed workers OJ L 53, 28.2.2003, p. 45–46.

	<p>provided that they are classified as ‘workers’. The recent Commission proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work¹⁰ aims at ensuring the correct determination of the employment status of people working through digital labour platforms. When adopted, this new framework will enable platform workers (classified as ‘workers’) to benefit from EU legislation in the field of occupational safety and health.</p>
<p>40. The CoR (...) urges the Commission to review the working conditions for teleworking, covering physical and mental health as well as safety. This should be done in cooperation with the European social partners, who are currently involved in negotiations on digitalisation. This is a matter of urgency given the unprecedented rise of this form of work in "the new normal".</p>	<p>As indicated in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and in response to the European Parliament’s Resolution of 21 January 2021 on the right to disconnect¹¹, the Commission invites social partners to find commonly agreed solutions to address the challenges raised by digitalisation and telework.</p> <p>The Commission acknowledges the importance of social dialogue in dealing with telework and will proactively support social partners in their endeavour, facilitating discussions and the identification of best practices.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission will implement a number of actions with a view to exchange good practices between Member States, social partners and other relevant stakeholders on the various aspects of telework and the digitalisation of the world of work. On 15 March 2022, the Commission co-hosted a conference with the European Parliament debating the challenges and opportunities of telework and the right to disconnect, including issues related to occupational safety and health in a teleworking environment¹².</p> <p>Moreover, the Commission will continue to collect evidence on the context of telework and the right to disconnect. The Commission has launched an exploratory study on the current and future opportunities and challenges of telework</p>

¹⁰ COM(2021) 762 final.

¹¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0021_EN.html

¹² <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/conference-on-the-right-to-disconnect-an/product-details/20220310EOT06362>

	and the right to disconnect, including those linked to working conditions and health and safety, in the broader context of the future of work and digitalisation.
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