

FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
TO THE OPINIONS OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
PLENARY SESSION OF JUNE 2024
113th REPORT¹

¹ Including the follow-up to five opinions adopted during the April 2024 plenary session

N°	TITLE / LEAD DG	REFERENCES
SG.A2		
1.	<u>Active subsidiarity: a fundamental principle in the EU Better regulation agenda</u> Rapporteur: Mark SPEICH (DE/EPP)	Own-initiative COR-2023-05624-00-01-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/029
DG HOME		
2.	<u>EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime</u> Rapporteur: Matteo Luigi BIANCHI (IT/ECR)	Own-initiative COM(2023) 641 final COR-2023-05442-00-01-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/026
DG REFORM		
3.	<u>Enhancing the European Administrative Space (ComPact)</u> Rapporteur: Tom JUNGEN (LU/PES)	Own initiative COM(2023) 667 final COR-2024-00028-00-00-AC-TRA ECON-VII/036
DG CLIMA		
4.	<u>Towards a Global Green Deal: harmonising global frameworks for climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development</u> Rapporteurs: Rafał Kazimierz TRZASKOWSKI (PL/EPP) and Kata TÚTTÓ (HU/PES)	Own-initiative COR-2023-05586-00-01-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/048
DG ENV		
5.	<u>Soil Monitoring and Resilience (Soil Monitoring Law)</u> Rapporteur: Frida NILSSON (SE/RENEW E.)	Mandatory COM(2023) 416 final COR-2023-03680-00-02-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/042
6.	<u>The role of local and regional authorities in the transition towards a circular economy</u> Rapporteur: Loredana CAPONE (IT/PES)	Council Presidency referral COR-2024-00709-00-01-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/049
7.	<u>Towards a resilient water management to fight climate crisis within an EU Blue Deal</u> Rapporteur: André VIOLA (FR/PES)	Own-initiative COR-2023-05587-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/047

DG AGRI		
8.	<u>The Future of the Common Agricultural Policy</u> Rapporteurs: Piotr CALBECKI (PL/EPP) and Isilda Maria PRAZERES GOMES (PT/PES)	Own-initiative COR-2023-05512-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/042
9.	<u>Creating an EU Blue deal from an agriculture and rural development perspective across EU Regions</u> Rapporteur: Karl VANLOUWE (BE/EA)	Own-initiative COR-2023-05513-00-01-AC-TRA NAT-VII/041
DG HERA		
10.	<u>Addressing medicine shortages</u> Rapporteur: Erika VON KALBEN (DE/GREENS)	Own-initiative COM(2023) 672 final COR-2023-05498-00-00-AC-TRA NAT-VII/040
OPINIONS ADOPTED DURING PREVIOUS PLENARY SESSIONS		
DG NEAR		
11. adopted during the plenary session of April 2024	<u>Enlargement package 2023 – Western Balkans and Türkiye</u> Rapporteur: Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ (HR/EPP)	Own-initiative COM(2023) 690 final, COM(2023) 691 final, SWD(2023) 690 final, SWD(2023) 691 final, SWD(2023) 692 final, SWD(2023) 693 final, SWD(2023) 694 final, SWD(2023) 695 final, SWD(2023) 696 final COR-2023-05623-00-00-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/027
12. adopted during the plenary session of April 2024	<u>Enlargement package 2023 – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia</u> Rapporteur: Antje GROTHEER (DE/PES)	Own-initiative COM(2023) 690 final, SWD(2023) 697 final, SWD(2023) 698 final, SWD(2023) 699 final COR-2023-05426-00-01-AC-TRA CIVEX-VII/028

DG EAC		
<p>13. adopted during the plenary session of April 2024</p>	<p><u>Skills and talent mobility</u> Rapporteur: François DECOSTER (FR/renew E.)</p>	<p>Council Presidency referral COM(2023) 715 final, COM(2023) 719 final COR-2023-05840-00-01-AC-TRA SEDEC-VII/046</p>
DG ENER		
<p>14. adopted during the plenary session of April 2024</p>	<p><u>Localising energy production: the role of geothermal energy</u> Rapporteur: József RIBÁNYI (HU/ECR)</p>	<p>Own-initiative COR-2023-04406-00-00-AC-TRA ENVE-VII/043</p>
DG GROW		
<p>15. adopted during the plenary session of April 2024</p>	<p><u>Smart, sustainable and affordable housing as a tool for local authorities to face multiple challenges</u> Rapporteur: Andres JAADLA (EE/renew E.)</p>	<p>Own-initiative COR-2023-04562-00-00-AC-TRA COTER-VII/034</p>

N°1

Active subsidiarity: a fundamental principle in the EU better regulation agenda

Own-initiative opinion

COR-2023-05624 – CIVEX-VII/029

161st plenary session – June 2024

Rapporteur: Marc SPEICH (DE/EPP)

SG – Executive Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ

European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered as essential

The Commission welcomes the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), which comes in the current challenging geopolitical situation, during which the European Union needs to drive forward the twin transition in tandem with a focus on competitiveness and resilience. In this context, the engagement of every governance level - and the efficient interplay between these levels -, as well as the efficient implementation of ‘active subsidiarity’ are crucial for effectively tackling key strategic, political and institutional challenges. Although the scale of these challenges is European and global, their impacts are in most cases felt locally. Besides, the measures to address them have to be implemented at all levels, including the local and regional.

The Commission welcomes the revised cooperation agreement with the Committee and the joint commitment to collaboratively strive to create a culture of active subsidiarity. Local and regional authorities and the CoR have a crucial role to help the EU institutions target their policies and tailor their laws so that they fit the local conditions across the Member States. In this respect, the CoR’s cooperation with the Commission is of major importance, and the Commission highly values the cooperation with the Committee, its opinions and the many other outreach, communication and consultation activities conducted by the CoR.

The Commission takes note of the CoR’s opinion as regards the potential that strengthening active subsidiarity and better involvement of the sub-national level would have in the prospect of enlargement. A close involvement of the sub-national level can facilitate the preparation for an enlarged Union. The Commission will carry out pre-enlargement policy reviews in the beginning of 2025 for this purpose.

The Commission fully agrees with the CoR on the importance of subsidiarity and proportionality. The better regulation guidelines and the accompanying toolbox require the Commission to carry out a subsidiarity analysis when assessing the continued relevance and European added value of existing measures and when considering new initiatives. The Commission assessment includes whether action at national, regional or local level would be sufficient to achieve the objectives pursued, and whether action at EU level can deliver on the objectives without going further than is necessary. All Commission impact assessments, evaluations and fitness checks carry out such analysis.

The Commission agrees on the systematic use of the subsidiarity grid by the EU institutions. The subsidiarity grid, advocated by the Task force on subsidiarity, is being implemented by the Commission and the importance of subsidiarity was reiterated in the better regulation Communication

of April 2021. The grid is attached to all politically sensitive and important proposals accompanied by an impact assessment.

The Commission takes note of the CoR's proposal for the establishment of an interinstitutional subsidiarity platform. The Commission has developed a comprehensive way to assess subsidiarity and to ensure that it is embedded in its policymaking and will continue to implement it to ensure that the voice of local and regional authorities is fully heard and considered in our policy making. The recent changes to the cooperation agreement with the CoR further enhance this aspect and show the commitment of the Commission to uphold this principle. For this reason, a continued implementation of the system in place is needed, rather than new structures.

The Commission has developed a top-class system of stakeholder engagement, feedback and consultations, which is highly praised internationally. The Commission will further involve the CoR and local and regional authorities in its consultations processes, taking into account the latter's specific role in implementing EU legislation. The Commission welcomes a better engagement with the CoR, to raise awareness of the possibilities to contribute to policymaking across the policy cycle and to facilitate an even more active role for the local and regional authorities. The CoR has stepped up its engagement in the better regulation system and it is now an active partner in several areas. Increasing the CoR's role and making full use of the expertise from the local and regional levels it can provide for European legislation, can be achieved by better collaborating in the implementation of existing competencies. The new cooperation agreement between the Commission and the CoR can serve that purpose.

The Commission concurs with the CoR on the importance of identifying relevant territorial impacts. According to the Commission's better regulation system, the identification and assessment of the most significant impacts, including territorial impacts, is a core task of every Commission impact assessment, through a well-defined structured methodology. Territorial impact assessments, including rural impacts, are carried out when there are indications of potentially significant territorial impacts. The CoR can also help identify initiatives with potential asymmetric impacts, which the Commission would assess, according to its better regulation rules, when carrying out impact assessments and evaluations. The Commission welcomes early input by the CoR in that respect, which can help focus the assessment on potential asymmetric impacts of initiatives. The cooperation agreement also encourages mutual participation in territorial impact assessment workshops. An issue for further reflection and development, including by the CoR, is the limited availability of data of sufficient granularity at local and regional level to support the assessment of potential asymmetric impacts. At the same time, the need for sufficient data should be balanced against any additional administrative and reporting burden for citizens, businesses and administrations. To ensure their quality, the Commission's assessments are subject to an independent quality control by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board. The Board's members apply the rules developed in the better regulation guidelines and toolbox, which include territorial impacts. Members are chosen for their knowledge of better regulation, experience and analytical skills. They collectively ensure the highest quality of analysis underpinning policy decisions, including on territorial aspects.

The Commission recognises the CoR's and RegHub's contribution to the work of the Fit for Future (F4F) Platform. The work of the platform is valued by all parties involved and acknowledged by

stakeholders. RegHub contributes to the evaluative work, providing the perspective of regional and local levels on the actual implementation of EU laws. RegHub's input both for evaluative work and in the F4F Platform is very valuable.

The Commission welcomes the CoR's recognition that the 'One In, One Out' approach contributes to positive changes in the legislative and administrative culture. The Commission considers that the involvement of local and regional authorities in burden reduction is key. First, to ensure efficient implementation of legislation that does not add additional costs to businesses and second, by pointing to inefficiencies, particularly in reporting requirements, that can be corrected. The 'One In, One Out' approach already delivered significant savings in 2022 up to EUR 7,3 billion and results for 2023 are similarly very positive.

The Commission takes note of the CoR's position in view of any future revision of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making. The Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029¹ propose to renew it, so that each institution assesses the impact and cost of its amendments in the same way. The Commission is of the view that this should be based on a joint assessment of the implementation of the existing agreement and a strong commitment by all institutions and bodies that can result in better, simpler and more effective laws. The Commission stresses in that regard that any review of the Interinstitutional Agreement would have to respect the provisions in the Treaties and the prerogatives of each institution.

As to the suggestion that the Commission should request more outlook opinions from the CoR, the Renewed Protocol on Cooperation envisages a mechanism of jointly identifying topics for outlook opinions in the areas of mutual interest, with regard to initiatives publicly announced by the Commission. The envisaged mechanism, providing for early identification of such topics and precise Commission steer as to the timing and focus of the upcoming initiative, will better allow the CoR to collect the timely and targeted feedback from the local and regional level. It will optimise the utility of the CoR's outlook opinions for the design of Commission initiatives.

The Commission also supports a strong role of regional Parliaments with legislative powers in the subsidiarity control of Commission initiatives, via the national Parliaments, as suggested in the Treaty. However, it is for the national and regional Parliaments to explore the possibilities to implement this stipulation in the national context. The Commission encourages regional Parliaments' early and active involvement in discussions and public consultations on EU policy proposals and initiatives which have a particular relevance for the local and regional level. The Commission takes direct contributions of regional Parliaments into account and replies to them in substance. This includes suggestions for future EU action.

As regards participation as observer in the trilogue negotiations, the Commission would like to point out that it is up to the co-legislators, the European Parliament and the Council, to decide on the modalities of trilogue negotiations.

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

N°2

EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime

Own-initiative opinion

COM(2023) 641 final

COR-2023-05442 – CIVEX-VII/026

161st plenary session – June 2024

Rapporteur: Matteo Luigi BIANCHI (IT/ECR)

DG HOME – Commissioner JOHANSSON

European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered as essential

As a general remark, the Commission would like to thank the Committee for its support to the EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime, including actions such as the European Ports Alliance.

Resilience of ports

Innovative technologies can play a crucial role in increasing the resilience of logistical hubs against misuse by organised crime networks for drug trafficking. One of the four priority areas ('clusters') identified in the workplan of the European Ports Alliance is specifically dedicated to this question, which has been further explored in a technical workshop on 12 July 2024 with members of the European Ports Alliance.

The EU has already been funding the development of various innovative solutions in this context, for example through Horizon Europe – Cluster 3, some of which were presented to the members of the European Ports Alliance during the workshop on 12 July.¹

The Commission has encouraged the designated national points of contact for the European Ports Alliance in the Member States to involve regional and local authorities in the internal dissemination of information and consultation processes.

Drug trafficking online

Moreover, the Commission has been addressing drug trafficking online via the development of the Darknet Monitoring Tool aimed at enhancing the capabilities for monitoring and investigating darknet drug markets within the EU, and the EU Internet Forum, by developing a Knowledge Package on Combating Drug Sales Online which aims to support social media companies in better moderating drug trafficking content on their platforms.

¹ Example of relevant EU-funded projects: [UNDERSEC \(Underwater Security\)](#), [SMAUG \(Smart Maritime and Underwater Guardian\)](#), [FALCON \(Fight Against Large-scale Corruption and Organised Crime Networks\)](#), [ARIEN \(ARtificial IntelligencE in fighting illicit drugs production and trafficking\)](#), [PROMENADE \(imPROved Maritime awarENess by means of AI and BD mEthods\)](#), [SilentBorder \(Cosmic Ray Tomograph for Identification of Hazardous and Illegal Goods hidden in Trucks and Sea Container\)](#).

Mapping the most threatening criminal networks

The mapping report ‘Decoding the EU’s most threatening criminal networks’², published by Europol in April 2024, is a key action under the EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime.

For the first time, the report provides a unique overview of the most threatening criminal networks (821), with extensive information on their activities, nationalities of members, modus operandi, their use of legal business structures, connections to other criminal networks and relations to other countries.

This analysis is the first step aimed to steer and target EU joint strategic, tactical and, more urgent of all, operational response to disrupt criminal activities.

On 13 June 2024 the Justice and Home Affairs Council has adopted dedicated Council Conclusions³ that will guide the follow up to the mapping. This includes regular biennial updates and efforts by Europol and Member States ‘to promote and support pro-active and all-encompassing investigations regarding priority criminal networks with a view to further supporting the investigation and prosecution of key members of the most threatening criminal networks’.

Fight against corruption and infiltration

Addressing the issue of corruption and criminal infiltration in logistical hubs is also one of the four priority areas (‘clusters’) identified in the workplan of the European Ports Alliance. The Commission will organise a dedicated technical workshop to address what can be done in this context in autumn 2024.

Moreover, the Commission will develop practical guidance in 2024 on the use of administrative tools in the fight against criminal infiltration, the so-called administrative approach, whereby local authorities are empowered to use administrative tools to prevent the criminal infiltration of legal businesses and administrative infrastructure.

In addition, as announced in the joint Communication on the fight against corruption of 3 June 2023⁴, the Commission is working to identify areas and sectors with high risks of corruption. This is part of broader efforts to fight corruption, which include support for national anti-corruption reforms through the Rule of Law Report cycle and the reinforcement of our legal toolbox against corruption through the proposal for a Directive on fighting corruption⁵.

Crime prevention

The Commission shares the concerns about recruitment by criminal organisations and remains committed to deliver policies in protection of young people from falling into drug use or drug related

² [Decoding the EU’s most threatening criminal networks | Europol \(europa.eu\)](#).

³ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11153-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

⁴ JOIN(2023) 12 final, Brussels, 3.5.2023.

⁵ Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on combating corruption, replacing Council Framework Decision 2003/568/JHA and the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union and amending Directive (EU) 2017/1371 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

crime. The Commission remains committed to the implementation of the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025⁶. Its Action Plan⁷ addresses health-related aspects of drug use, including healthy and safe development of children and young people and to a reduction of the use of illicit drugs. Increasing the availability of evidence-based targeted prevention interventions for young people is a priority area under the Strategy, as well as tackling accessibility to illicit drugs through social media platforms. In this context, the Commission has set up the EU Internet Forum which supports the monitoring of drug content in social media platforms. The EU Roadmap against drug trafficking and organised crime also includes prevention actions against the recruitment of young and children by organised criminal groups in collaboration with the EU Crime Prevention Network.

The Commission attaches great importance to crime prevention. In the context of the implementation of the EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime, the Commission aims to address the growing concern of drug-related violence affecting the security and health of local communities and vulnerable people. The EU Drugs Agency (EUDA) will host a conference on drugs related violence in November 2024 to discuss among key stakeholders, including law enforcement, health practitioners and local authorities, and to explore ways for increased collaboration at EU, national and local levels.

Fight against all forms of crime, including trafficking in human beings

As stressed in the EU Security Union Strategy 2020⁸, the EU Organised Crime Strategy 2021 – 2025 and the EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime, the Commission considers it essential to address transnational organised crime in all its forms, to understand the modus operandi and the links between the organised crime networks active in the EU and beyond, and to take action to disrupt and dismantle criminal networks.

Organised crime groups that traffic people are often involved in other crime areas as well, such as drugs, that support their core activities. Often trafficking victims are fighting with drug addiction, which is caused or further exploited by the traffickers. Therefore, Member States must have adequate support measures in place to assist and protect such victims in order to reduce their re-victimisation caused by the addiction.

In line with the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025, it is crucial to advance cooperation and partnerships by making best use of policy instruments and cooperation tools, in order to share information and criminal intelligence on trafficking and related crimes and criminal networks.

⁶ EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025, ([Official Journal C 102I/2021 \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁷ EU Drugs Action Plan 2021-2025, ([EUR-Lex - 52021XG0708\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁸ EU Security Union Strategy, COM(2020) 605, 24.07.2020.

N°3

Enhancing the European Administrative Space (ComPact)

COM(2023) 667 final

COR-2024-00028 – ECON-VII/036

161st plenary session – June 2024

Rapporteur: Tom JUNGEN (LU/PES)

DG REFORM – Commissioner FERREIRA

European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered as essential

The Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee (CoR), which provides an important perspective of local and regional administration.

Member States share a set of values, tasks and understanding of good administration. With ComPact¹, the Commission promotes this common set of shared principles² and reinforces its support for the administrative modernisation of the Member States contributing to the consolidation of a European Administrative Space. ComPact respects and does not affect the competence and specific characteristics Member States' public administration. The concept of the European Administrative Space is not to converge towards a common model, but to promote good practices and work across borders. The EU vision is to have a high quality of policies and services across all Member States, including at subnational level. It is a means leading to the strengthening of the Union's economic, social, territorial cohesion.

The Commission agrees with the CoR that public administrations at regional and local level should better benefit from the opportunities offered under the Technical Support Instrument (TSI)³ and be closely involved in the implementation of ComPact. The Commission has already launched several awareness-raising activities since the adoption of ComPact, for example a dedicated roll-out event of TSI 2025 flagships for regional and local administration, the involvement of the Committee as an observer in the Expert Group on Public Administration and Governance as well as active participation in the ComPact High-level Conference 'A growth enhancing public administrative space'⁴. Further actions like an annual local public administration day on the occasion of the European Week of Regions and Cities will follow. National TSI coordinating authorities are encouraged by the Commission to coordinate and communicate with regional and local level authorities to maximise benefits for all levels of administration.

¹ Enhancing the European Administrative Space (ComPact) - COM/2023/667 final, available at: [Enhancing the European Administrative Space \(ComPact\) - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

² Based on the Principles of Public Administration, SIGMA (EU – OECD collaboration), November 2023.

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 February 2021 establishing a Technical Support Instrument, ([Regulation - 2021/240 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁴ [ComPact High-level conference: 'A growth enhancing public administrative space' - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

The Commission agrees that sufficient funding is necessary. The modernisation of public administrations features prominently in several Recovery and Resilience Plans for Member States for an estimated budget of EUR 1.8 billion.

The Commission agrees that while the target is to have 100% of key public services available online by 2030, in line with the aims of the digital decade, digital service delivery needs to be combined with multi-channel, accessible, fair and universal delivery of services that takes into account specific needs (e.g. of people with disabilities or with low digital skills) as outlined in its 2021 Staff Working Document ‘Supporting public administrations in EU Member States to deliver reforms and prepare for the future’.⁵

The Commission would like to clarify that the Strasbourg declaration by the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), is a Member States-led process in which the Commission participates. The Commission works closely with EUPAN while respecting the competence of Member States in the area of public administration.

The Commission welcomes the suggestion by the CoR to prioritise the mobility of civil servants across the Member States, as provided for in Article 197(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. The Public Administration Cooperation Exchange (PACE)⁶ already provides this dedicated support to public administrations and the Commission will scale up this exchange to an annual programme, including for regional and local public administration.

On the interaction between ComPact and the EU interoperability act and other related acts, the Commission would like to clarify, that the Technical Support Instrument aims to support the implementation of Union law. Under the 2025 Technical Support Instrument, the Commission established a flagship on ComPact pillar II ‘Capacity for Europe’s Digital Decade’ with the implementation of EU legislation in the digital realm and specifically the EU Interoperability Act at its centre.

The Commission would like to clarify that in preparation of ComPact, the Commission followed the Better regulation toolbox. The Commission launched a call for evidence published on the EC ‘Have your say’ portal from 14 June until 12 July 2023 and received 14 replies mostly from EU citizens, but also from trade unions, public authorities and academic and research institutions from six Member States and one third country.⁷ The Commission also consulted EU level social partners at an informal meeting on 20 June 2023. The Commission will continue to interact with local and regional governments and EU social partners in implementation of ComPact.

⁵ [Supporting public administrations in EU Member States to deliver reforms and prepare for the future \(europa.eu\).](#)

⁶ [PACE – Public Administration Cooperation Exchange - European Commission \(europa.eu\).](#)

⁷ [Enhancing the European Administrative Space \(ComPact\) \(europa.eu\).](#)

N°4 Towards a Global Green Deal: harmonising global frameworks for climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development
Own-initiative
COR-2023-05586 – ENVE-VII/048
161st plenary session – June 2024
Rapporteur: Rafał Kazimierz TRZASKOWSKI (PL/EPP)
Co-rapporteur: Kata TÜTTŐ (HU/PES)
DG CLIMA – Commissioner HOEKSTRA

European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered as essential

The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.

N°5 Soil Monitoring and Resilience (Soil Monitoring Law)
Mandatory
COM(2023) 416 final
COR-2023-03680 – ENVE-VII-042
161st plenary session – June 2024
Rapporteur: Frida NILSSON (SE/RE)
DG ENV – Executive Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ

European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered as essential

The Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee and its support on the Soil Monitoring Law proposal, which will contribute to the Green Deal objectives. Healthy soil is indeed an essential basis for the European economy, for achieving climate neutrality and zero pollution, halting and reversing biodiversity loss, achieving food and water security and preserving public health. This legislative proposal is now under co-decision and suggestions from the Committee may be considered in that context, without prejudice to the outcome of the interinstitutional negotiation. The Commission takes in particular note of the amendment proposed by the Committee regarding the possible classification of soils that do not meet the criteria for healthy soils.

The Commission welcomes that the Committee puts emphasis on the high costs of inaction on soil degradation. These costs that have been assessed by the Commission in the Impact Assessment accompanying the proposal¹ are currently borne by landowners, land managers and the society as a whole. The Soil Monitoring Law proposal² is designed to create the conditions for action to manage soils sustainably and to tackle this high cost of soil degradation.

The Commission agrees with the Committee that soil policies have a strong local and territorial dimension and that this diversity must be taken into account when implementing the Soil Monitoring Law. In that respect, the Commission stresses that the legal instrument chosen for the Soil Monitoring Law is a directive that leaves much flexibility to the Member States to identify the best measures for them and to adapt the approach to local conditions. This is crucial to take account of the regional and local specificities as regards soil variability, land use, climatological conditions and socio-economic aspects. The proposal also leaves a lot of flexibility to Member States to adapt the governance approach for the implementation of the directive (district, competent authorities).

The Commission further highlights that the proposal provides for an early evaluation of its implementation which should assess the need to adapt the definition of healthy soils to scientific and technical progress. This could be done by adding or adjusting descriptors or criteria based on new scientific evidence relating to the protection of soils, or on the grounds of a problem specific to a Member State arising from new environmental or climatic circumstances. This evaluation fits with the recommendation of the Committee regarding the examination and revision of the effect of the

¹ SWD(2023) 423 final.

² COM(2023) 416 final.

proposed descriptors, criteria and methodologies on different soil types. The main findings of the evaluation will be transmitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions.

The Commission welcomes the views of the Committee regarding the timeline and stresses that the timeframe envisaged in the proposal represents an ambitious but realistic approach that takes into account the urgency to act on soils in view of the challenges to be addressed.

The Commission considers that the successful implementation of the proposal and of sustainable soil management requires tapping into various sources of funding at European, national, regional and local level. Therefore, alongside the legislative proposal, the Commission published a Staff Working Document (SWD) providing an overview of funding opportunities available (including those under the current Cohesion Policy) under the EU's 2021-2027 multiannual budget for the protection, sustainable management, and regeneration of soils. Local and regional authorities (LRAs) may benefit from these funding opportunities in accordance with the rules and procedures of the respective financial programmes. Possible enhanced funding would need to be considered within the upcoming discussions on the next multiannual financial framework (MFF). The Commission also agrees with the Committee that the Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' is a key instrument for the implementation of the Soil Monitoring Law and that the cooperation of LRAs with the living labs could be beneficial.

The Commission takes note of the encouragement vis à vis Member States to make better use of the possibilities provided by the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as regards support for sustainable soil management. Some contributions are already in place based on existing national CAP Strategic Plans. As planned by Member States, nearly 50 % of the total agricultural area is benefitting of interventions dedicated to soil management to improve soil health and biota. The Commission will continue to investigate the potential impact of these interventions on soil regeneration and preservation.

The Commission shares the views of the Committee that the costs associated to soil decontamination should be covered, as far as possible, by applying the polluter pays principle. At the same time, it is crucial to ensure that all contaminated sites are adequately identified, investigated, assessed and managed in a way that ensures that they do not pose unacceptable risk for the human health or the environment.

The Commission agrees with the Committee on the necessity to capture interest of the public on soils. In the EU Soil Strategy for 2030³, the Commission acknowledged that soil is probably the most undervalued element of nature and highlighted the need to increase public awareness and societal engagement. Several actions under the Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' aim to increase soil literacy through wide engagement with citizens and actors involved along the entire food production chain, including farmers, food companies and retailers. The Commission welcomes the support of the Committee to the European Network of Soil Awareness.

Lastly, the Commission considers that delegated acts are the correct legal instrument to amend several annexes of the proposal in accordance with Article 290 of the Treaty on the functioning of the

³ COM(2021) 699 final.

European Union. Furthermore, the Commission considers that the power to issue guidelines is a prerogative of the Commission stemming from the Treaties and cannot be imposed by the co-legislator. The Commission also stresses that the use of non-binding instruments may lead to an uneven implementation and application of EU law between Member States.

N°6 The role of local and regional authorities in the transition towards a circular economy
Council Presidency referral
COR-2024-00709 – ENVE-VII/049
161st plenary session – June 2024
Rapporteur: Loredana CAPONE (IT/PES)
DG ENV – Commissioner SINKEVIČIUS

**European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion
considered as essential**

The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.

**N°7 Towards a resilient water management to fight climate crisis within an EU Blue Deal
Own-initiative
COR-2023-05587 – ENVE-VII/047
161st plenary session – June 2024
Rapporteur: André VIOLA (FR/PES),
Member of Departmental Council of Aude
DG ENV – Executive Vice President ŠEFČOVIČ**

**European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion
considered as essential**

The Commission welcomes the opinion of the Committee and takes note of the call **for a holistic European Water Strategy**. On 18 July 2024, President-elect Ursula von der Leyen presented to the European Parliament the political guidelines 2025-2029. She announced the development by the next Commission of a new European Water Resilience Strategy to ensure sources are properly managed, scarcity is addressed, a circular economy approach is taken and the competitive innovative edge of water industry is enhanced.

The Commission is currently finalizing the assessment of Member States' river basin management plans and floods risk management plans. This assessment will contribute to map comprehensively water issues in the EU and inform potential action by the next Commission. In this respect, the Commission acknowledges the central role of local and regional authorities in water management and takes note of their specific challenges as highlighted by the Committee.

The Commission recalls a number of actions taken under the current mandate (2020-2024), including legislative proposals for (i) an updated list of priority substances for surface and groundwaters¹, (ii) the revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive² and (iii) revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive³ (expanding its scope inter alia to reduce water pollution and increase water efficiency).

The Commission agrees on the importance of water savings, efficiency and reuse in various sectors.

The revised Drinking Water Directive (DWD)⁴ will help save water by requiring Member States to do more for reducing leaks from water supply pipelines. The revised Industrial Emissions Directive requiring industrial installations to have Environmental Management Systems including environmental objectives and benchmarks on metrics such as water efficiency. The Directive also provides for binding environmental performance limit values regarding water in the permits of the installations. These benchmarks and limit values will be associated with Best Available Techniques

¹ COM(2022) 540 final ([EUR-Lex - 52022PC0540 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

² COM(2022) 541 final ([EUR-Lex - 52022PC0541 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

³ COM(2022) 156 final/3 ([EUR-Lex - 52022PC0156R\(02\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁴ Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast) (<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2020/2184/oj>).

for water use and water reuse, promoting integrated water management.

The Ecodesign for sustainable products regulation (ESPR)⁵ identifies ‘water use and water efficiency’ among product aspects to be improved through ecodesign requirements. Whilst potential measures could take the form of water or environmental footprints for products, such requirements would be developed – for products forming part of the ESPR working plan – after thorough assessments of product life-cycle impacts and improvement potential, and would follow the criteria provided in the ESPR.

The Commission agrees on the **central importance of water availability for agriculture and food security**. The Commission highlights that the Common Agricultural Policy is already supporting a transition to a more water-smart and resilient agriculture, particularly through payments to support compliance with the Water Framework Directive (WFD)⁶ and through financial support to farmers for sustainable water use practices, including upgrading irrigation systems to reduce their water consumption. The Water Reuse Regulation⁷ has recently entered into force and will facilitate the reuse of treated wastewater for irrigation in agriculture.

The Commission agrees on the **importance to tackle pollution at source**, as highlighted for instance in the Zero Pollution Action Plan⁸, and has taken a range of measures under the European Green Deal that will contribute to significantly reduce pollution pressure on EU waters. Nevertheless, much remains to be done by Member States in order to better implement the existing EU acquis, particularly the WFD, in order to identify sources of pollution and adopt all appropriate measures to achieve the objectives of the WFD.

Article 9 of the WFD requires that Member States take account of the principle of recovery of the costs of water services, including environmental and resource costs, having regard to the economic analysis conducted according to Annex III, and particularly in accordance with the polluter pays principle. However, the law allows for a considerable discretion in implementing these provisions and this also applies to water pricing policies. As in other areas, this means that there is scope to improve the implementation of the polluter pays principle. The Commission is currently finalising a fitness check on how the polluter pays principle is applied across EU policies.

The revision of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive⁹ establishes new rules for the application of the polluter pays principle, with regards to the removal of micropollutants from wastewater by means of quaternary treatment. Under this revision, an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system is required to cover costs of this additional treatment step.

⁵ Consolidated text: Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial and livestock rearing emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control) (Recast) (<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2010/75/2024-08-04>).

⁶ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/60/2014-11-20>).

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2020/741 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 2020 on minimum requirements for water reuse (<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/741/oj>).

⁸ COM(2021) 400 final ([EUR-Lex - 52021DC0400 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/lexUri/com-2021-400-final)).

⁹ COM(2022) 541 final ([EUR-Lex - 52022PC0541 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/lexUri/com-2022-541-final)).

The Commission agrees that protecting and **restoring the water cycle is a key priority to improve water resilience. Sustainable soil management** practices are essential to protect and restore soil health and consequently to ensure the provision of key ecosystem services such as clean water, increased soil water retention capacity in ecosystems and reduced vulnerability to water-related risks. To this end, the Commission has proposed a Soil Monitoring and Resilience Directive¹⁰ and is looking forward to its adoption by the co-legislators. The Horizon Europe Mission ‘A Soil Deal for Europe’ is funding research and innovation to improve soil health and the soil-water nexus, also in collaboration with the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters’. The Missions put particular emphasis on developing innovative solutions through regional engagement and cooperation.

The Commission agrees that the **decarbonisation strategy**, economic growth and strategic autonomy depend on the **availability for sufficient clean freshwater, as do aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems which are also of direct relevance to welfare and wellbeing of society.**

The Commission takes note of the call by the Committee and agrees on the importance to close the significant **investment** gap to achieve the objectives of the water acquis which is estimated at around EUR 25 billion/year at EU level.

In the current financial period, EU support to co-fund investments in water-related infrastructures has increased significantly. Between 2021 and 2027, some EUR 13 billion of Cohesion Policy funds will be invested in water services, water reuse, and wastewater collection and treatment. One result of that will be clean water supplies to 16.4 million people. In addition to that, in their national recovery and resilience plans, Member States allocated EUR 12 billion for water.

However, closing the investments gaps requires a higher mobilisation of both private and public funding particularly in areas such as:

- reducing leakages in the water distribution network (in line with Drinking Water Directive’s obligations);
- water treatment, supply and wastewater collection and treatment;
- modernisation of irrigation systems and for precision farming, if increased efficiency leads to lower water consumption;
- green and blue infrastructure, including green water storage /nature-based solutions.

Digitalisation of the water sector through technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), digital twins, digital data spaces, and instrumentation and circular economy digital water innovations can result in significant environmental, social and economic benefits.

The Commission agrees that digital means should be used to their fullest extent inter alia to improve management of drinking water sources, treatment and supply and, integrated urban wastewater management plans as required under the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive. Digital solutions can be used to increase water efficiency (e.g.: detection of water leakages through sensors), to improve monitoring of water quality (e.g. enhanced capabilities for real-time, in situ water quality

¹⁰ COM(2023) 416 final ([EUR-Lex - 52023PC0416 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

monitoring; better control of emissions from wastewater collecting systems and treatment plants) or to simulate climate change (e.g. probability of major droughts and floods, reduce energy demand for water supply and wastewater services), including the use of digital twins, for example those of Destination Earth, for simulating water related incidents and a system's responsiveness.

Cohesion Policy funding (in particular, from the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund) is available to incentivise investments in the digitalisation of the water sector under the Specific Objective on 'Promoting access to water and sustainable water management', with a focus on less developed EU regions. Cohesion Policy also supports research and innovation linked to water, based on Member States' and regions' smart specialisation strategies (S3).

To support capacity building of Managing Authorities and other Cohesion Policy stakeholders in order to facilitate implementation of EU funded investments, technical assistance is available, for instance through the 'Cohesion for Transitions Community of Practice' and JASPERS (Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions).

The Commission agrees with the Committee on the **importance of a holistic and integrated approach to water management**, involving all water using sectors including also non-consumptive users of water. Inclusive governance is at the heart of the WFD which requires Member States to ensure broad public consultation and the active involvement of all interested parties in the implementation of the Directive, in particular in the production, review and updating of the river basin management plans.

The Commission would also point out to the importance of transboundary cooperation through the joint development of transboundary river basin management plans by the various river commissions.

N°8 The Future of the Common Agricultural Policy
Own-initiative opinion
COR-2023-05512 – NAT-VII/042
161st plenary session – June 2024
Rapporteurs: Isilda Maria PRAZERES GOMES (PT/PES) and
Piotr CALBECKI (PL/EPP)
DG AGRI – Commissioner WOJCIECHOWSKI

European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered as essential

The Commission welcomes and takes note of the opinion of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and its support to the agricultural sector and rural areas.

[Objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2027]

The Commission thanks the Committee for its proposals, suggestions and recommendations on the objectives of the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The views of the Committee are a valuable contribution to policy making and will be considered in the preparation of proposals for the CAP after 2027. Those proposals will be based on an analysis of the current problems, future challenges, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the available tools, as well as the political guidance of the next College of Commissioners.

The Commission welcomes the emphasis the Committee puts on the CAP objectives mentioned in Article 39 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). These objectives must be achieved in a wider context reconciling and seeking synergies between production aspects and environmental, economic and social dimensions. Such sustainability assessment on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge and evidence is at the basis of the formulation of proposals for the CAP after 2027.

The Commission appreciates the reference to the compliance with the rules in force on the rights of workers but would like to clarify that social conditionality is not a mechanism ‘to enforce compliance with the rules in force on rights of workers.’ The mechanism designed for that purpose is the relevant legislation set out in the various Directives enacted under the social pillar of the Treaty. Social conditionality merely penalises CAP beneficiaries when the aforementioned enforcement procedures have identified a breach of the rules. The Commission will ‘monitor by the end of 2027 the impact of the mechanism on workers conditions and the functioning of the system of penalties and, where appropriate, come forward with proposals to enhance the social dimension of the CAP,’ following a Joint Statement by the European Parliament and the Council¹.

The Commission welcomes the reference to the contribution of the CAP to making rural areas strong, attractive and resilient. It is important that the CAP, and other relevant EU funds, programmes and policies, including Cohesion Policy, contribute to that effort, in line with the Long-Term Vision for

¹ 2021/C 488/01 ([Publications Office \(europa.eu\)](https://publications.europa.eu))

Rural Areas.

[Ensuring food security and market stability]

The Commission recognizes the role that the CAP plays in contributing to food security and market stability in the EU and worldwide and underlines the importance of the CAP post 2027 continuing to support these objectives. EU policies, such as the CAP and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), play an important role in ensuring that 450 million EU consumers have access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food. In the next legislature, the Commission aims to further progress in these fields, through a revision of the CAP, as well as initiatives in the area of climate adaptation and water security, which is essential to guarantee our food, energy and economic security.

The Commission would like to underline two points. On the one hand, depopulation of rural areas is not only related to farming. Many of the factors influencing depopulation of rural areas have their origin outside of agriculture (i.e. access to services, lack of job opportunities, etc.). On the other, the Commission would also like to underline that generational renewal is already a priority of the current CAP and it is one of its specific objectives. A number of interventions are contributing to this goal. While the Commission welcomes the emphasis on generational renewal, it is important to highlight that a number of elements relevant for this goal (such as access to land or public services), fall under the competence of Member States.

[Simplifying the CAP and ensuring a fair distribution of resources to support future farming]

The Commission acknowledges the need to ease the administrative burden on farmers and to simplify procedures, while maintaining the CAP's role in supporting a fair transition to more sustainable farming.

The Commission welcomes the emphasis the Committee puts on the simplification of the CAP. In February 2024, the Commission already presented a simplification package, which translated in targeted changes to CAP legislation. It provides farmers with greater flexibility for complying with certain environmental conditionality rules, and national administrations to apply certain standards. The Commission has also advanced on other simplification actions such as to further facilitate the process of amending the CAP Strategic Plans, to reduce the information and control burden on farmers or to make greater use of good quality and targeted advice for farmers. Likewise, the Commission launched a study on simplification and administrative burden for farmers under the CAP, which includes a farmers' survey with 27 000 replies. This will feed into a dedicated study on simplification and administrative burden to be published by the end of 2024.

The Commission agrees with the Committee on the importance to ensure a fair distribution of revenues within the agricultural sector and across the food chain. The Commission defends an EU income policy for Europe's farmers and will ensure that the EU budget adequately funds a targeted CAP. A fair and targeted distribution of public support between farmers should be ensured to facilitate the transition, strengthen its resilience and support the future of the sector. Moreover, a fair distribution of resources is key to ensure a fair and sufficient income for farmers, to increase their competitiveness, to improve their position in the food chain and to support generational renewal.

[Developing rural areas]

The Commission agrees on the importance of strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas to ensure a fair standard of living for their inhabitants and maintain vibrant local communities. The EU keeps working with national, regional, and local administrations to ensure career opportunities, better mobility, access to better education, health, leisure and culture services, and broader digital connectivity. This is a pre-condition for generational renewal in agriculture and other rural businesses. As part of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas by 2040, a number of actions are being implemented thanks to the CAP, Cohesion Policy and other relevant policies to support harmonious development of rural communities.

The Commission agrees that the CAP, along with Cohesion Policy, plays an important role in helping rural areas in addressing their main challenges, including generational renewal, depopulation, access to and improvement of basic services and connectivity, opportunities for employment, growth, gender equality, social inclusion and local development. It is essential that both policies continue to act in line with the partnership principle that require the active involvement of public authorities at national, regional and local levels, as well as economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society. More specifically, the CAP 2023-2027 is investing around EUR 25 billion for the development of rural areas and communities; 65% of the rural population will benefit from targeted actions with partnerships of local actors (LEADER); close to 377 000 young farmers will receive assistance to start agricultural activities thanks to CAP funding. In addition, more than EUR 2 billion are being invested in interventions supporting knowledge, exchange and information.

[Accelerating the transition to sustainable agriculture]

The Commission agrees on the need of encouraging practices supporting the transition to sustainable farming. The Commission shares the vision that the CAP should support interventions for climate, environmental, and animal welfare. The Commission recognizes the need for proper funding to achieve these objectives and to ensure food security and is committed to working together to develop a competitive, resilient and sustainable agriculture.

The Commission acknowledges the call for an end to cage rearing to improve animal welfare, the suggestion for the creation of national funds to encourage sustainable pest management, the emphasis on the necessity of supporting the transition to agroecological farming approaches and the need for investments in sustainable water management and the development of local renewable energy sources.

[Creating a food system for healthy people and a healthy planet]

The Commission agrees on the importance of fostering a food system that benefits both human health and environment. It recognizes the necessity of supporting the production of healthy and sustainably produced food, including organic and circular farming practices. The Commission takes note and welcomes the recommendations on creating a health-promoting taxation on food, local food procurement guidelines or the promotion of locally produced food.

The Commission emphasizes the pivotal role of research, innovation, and the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in developing a resilient and sustainable food system. The Commission agrees that it is crucial to continually invest in these areas to ensure that food production remains at the forefront of innovation and supporting farmers through training and knowledge

exchange to enhance their skills in sustainable agricultural practices.

[Strengthening the role of the regions in the governance of the CAP]

The Commission recognizes that regions play a critical role in the success of the CAP, through their ability to drive and create local engagement, which is crucial for effective implementation. The Commission recognizes that while the 2023-2027 CAP framework was designed with the intent to give member states, and by extension their regions, increased autonomy in customizing agricultural and rural development strategies and fit them to local conditions, there have been concerns on the administrative burden, flexibility, and implementation timelines. The Commission is open to dialogue and is keen on collaborating with regions to assess the effectiveness of the current delivery model and how to better tailor actions to local needs.

On the other hand, launched by President von der Leyen, the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture brought together 29 major stakeholders from the European agri-food sectors, civil society, rural communities and academia to reach a common understanding for the future of EU's farming and food systems. In the framework of the Dialogue, the Chair engaged with the institutions and bodies of the European Union, including the Committee of the Regions. The final report of the Dialogue² was published on 4 September and, building on its recommendations, the Commission will publish a Vision on Agriculture and Food within the first 100 days of the new mandate. Thus, the Commission looks forward to engaging with the Committee on the outcome of the Dialogue and on its forthcoming Vision on Agriculture and Food.

² https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/main-initiatives-strategic-dialogue-future-eu-agriculture_en.

N°9 Creating an EU Blue Deal from an agriculture and rural development perspective across EU regions
Own-initiative
COR-2023-05513 – NAT-VII/041
161st plenary session – June 2024
Rapporteur: Karl VANLOUWE (BE/EA)
DG AGRI – Commissioner WOJCIECHOWSKI

European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered as essential

The Commission takes note of the opinion of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) on creating an EU Blue Deal from an agriculture and rural development perspective across EU regions.

The Commission underlines that it cannot pre-empt the priorities set by the new Commission, however it can indicate how elements of the opinion are considered under the current mandate.

The Commission takes note of the call for a long-term water resilience strategy. President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has announced in the political guidelines 2024-2029, which she has presented to the European Parliament on 18 July 2024, that the next Commission will develop a new European Water Resilience Strategy to ensure sources are properly managed, water scarcity is addressed, and that we enhance the competitive innovative edge of our water industry and take a circular economy approach.

The Commission is currently finalizing the assessments of Member States' River basin and floods risk management plans. These will contribute to map water issues in the EU and inform potential action by the next Commission. In this respect, the Commission acknowledges that local and regional conditions and characteristics should be taken into account and that local and regional authorities should be engaged in water management. Besides, these elements are also incorporated in the EU Water Framework Directive¹ and the Flood Directive².

The Commission would like to recall a number of actions taken under the current mandate, including legislative proposals for (i) an updated list of priority substances for surface and groundwaters³ (ii) the revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive⁴, (iii) revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive⁵ (expanding its scope a.o. to reduce water pollution and increase water efficiency) and (iv) the commitments made by the EU under the UN 2023 Water Conference (Water Action Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.

The issue of a need for policy coherence across sectors on water management, climate change adaptation, restoration of natural water cycles and reducing the risk of (water-related) disasters

¹ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/60/oj>).

² Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks ([Directive - 2007/60 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2007/60/oj)).

³ COM(2022) 540 final.

⁴ COM(2022) 541 final.

⁵ COM(2022) 156 final.

(par. 8).

The Commission shares the objective of policy coherence across sectors on water management, climate change adaptation, restoration of natural water cycles and reducing the risk of disasters. As also indicated in the Communication on Managing Climate Risks⁶ and the European Climate Risk Assessment, water-related climate change risks cut across all the major sectors considered, and protecting and restoring the water cycle, promoting a water-smart EU economy and safeguarding good quality, affordable and accessible freshwater supplies to all is crucial to ensure a water-resilient Europe.

Call for the European water monitoring system to be developed through the European Drought Impact Database and the European Drought Risk Atlas: (par. 20):

The Commission recalls that there is already a system for monitoring in the field of water, including droughts.

The Commission agrees on the importance of water savings, efficiency and reuse in various sectors.

The revised Drinking Water Directive (WFD) will help save water by obliging Member States to do more for reducing leaks in drinking water pipelines. The revised Industrial Emissions Directive requiring industrial installations to have Environmental Management Systems, including environmental objectives and benchmarks on metrics, such as water efficiency. The Directive provides as well for binding environmental performance limit values about water in the permits of the installations. These benchmarks and limit values will be associated with Best Available Techniques for water use and water reuse, promoting integrated water management.

[Call for the CAP budgets to continue to allocate funds for water infrastructure and management to provide adequate compensation for farmers who actively support the development of green-blue infrastructure and to support a transition to more water-efficient farming techniques (par. 28)]:

The Commission agrees on the central importance of water availability for agriculture and food security and highlights that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is already supporting a transition to a more water-smart and resilient agriculture, particularly payments to support compliance with the WFD and through financial support to farmers for sustainable water use practices, including the upgrading irrigation systems and precision farming to reduce their water consumption. This includes support for the modernisation of existing irrigation installations on farm and infrastructure to increase efficiency and reduce losses, as well as investments in new irrigation and water storage. Several CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) also provide support for rainwater harvesting and the use of recycled water for irrigation. It should also be mentioned that for investments in irrigation, the link to the WFD has been strengthened compared to the previous rural development programming period (2014-2022).

Furthermore, area-related provisions for such a transition to more water resilient agriculture are included in the CAP, by enhanced conditionality standards, including a number of obligations of the WFD under the scope of conditionality, strengthened soil management requirements (crop rotation, buffer strips), a new standard for good agricultural and environmental condition of land (GAEC) on

⁶ COM(2024) 91 final.

the protection of wetlands and peatlands, and the new Small Modular Reactor (SMR1) covering controls on abstraction and diffuse sources of pollution from phosphates. In addition, under the current CAP Strategic Plans, support is programmed in many Member States for the diversification of production, less water intensive/ more climate resilient crops or for climate/water resilient landscape approaches (e.g. agro-forestry).

It is worth noting that the Strategic Guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture⁷ promote types of aquaculture offering environmental and climate services (for example, extensive aquaculture in ponds and wetlands can help in water retention and flood management).

The Water Reuse Regulation⁸ has recently entered into force and will facilitate the reuse of treated wastewater for irrigation in agriculture.

Calls for the full implementation of the polluter-pays-principle (par. 56):

The Commission agrees on the importance to tackle pollution at source, as highlighted for instance in the Zero Pollution Action Plan⁹ and has taken a range of measures under the European Green Deal¹⁰ that will contribute to significantly reduce pollution pressure on EU waters. Nevertheless, some action remains to be taken by Member States to better implement the existing EU acquis, particularly the Water Framework Directive (WFD), identify sources of pollution, and adopt all appropriate measures to achieve the objectives of the WFD. Also in this field, the CAP Strategic Plans support a significant number of actions to improve crops nutrient efficiency, soil fertility, and reduce nitrogen losses as well as the use of pesticides, both significant sources of water pollution. Support for investments have also an important role to play, including for precision farming, as well as farmers' advice and training for more sustainable farming practices.

The Commission agrees that protecting and restoring the water cycle is a key priority to improve water resilience. Sustainable soil management practices are essential to protect and restore soil health and consequently to ensure the provision of key ecosystem services such as clean water, increased soil water retention capacity in ecosystems and reduced vulnerability to water-related risks. To this end, the Commission has proposed a Soil Monitoring and Resilience Directive¹¹ and is looking forward to its adoption by the co-legislators.

Call for a dedicated Horizon Mission for a Water-Smart Europe in conjunction with the EU Water Resilience Initiative (par. 21):

The Horizon Europe Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' is funding research and innovation to improve soil health and the soil-water nexus, also in collaboration with the Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters'. In addition, the Water4All Partnership and the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), both co-funded within the Horizon Europe programme, aim to build research and innovation capacities and develop knowledge in the areas of climate change, water

⁷ COM(2021) 236 final.

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2020/741 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 2020 on minimum requirements for water reuse ([Regulation - 2020/741 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁹ COM(2021) 400 final.

¹⁰ COM(2019) 640 final.

¹¹ COM(2023) 416 final.

management, farming systems and food value chain in order to help achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and boost the EU's competitiveness and growth.

Call for increasing financial support to LRAs (par. 18)

The Commission takes note of the call by the Committee and agrees on the importance to close the significant investment gap to achieve the objectives of the water acquis which is estimated at around EUR 25 billion/year at EU level. In the current financial period, EU support to co-fund investments in water-related infrastructures has increased significantly. Between 2021 and 2027, some EUR 13 billion of Cohesion Policy funds are invested in water services, water reuse, and wastewater collection and treatment. One result of that will be clean water supplies to 16.4 million people. In addition to that, in their national recovery and resilience plans, Member States allocated EUR 12 billion for water.

However, closing the investments gaps requires a higher mobilisation of both private and public funding particularly in areas such as:

- fighting leakages and unwanted losses in water distribution network (in line with DWD's obligations);
- water treatment, supply and sanitation;
- modernisation of irrigation systems and for precision farming if increased efficiency leads to lower water consumption;
- green and blue infrastructure, including green water storage /nature-based solutions.

Digitalisation of the water sector through technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), digital twins, digital data spaces, disruptive technologies and instrumentation and circular economy digital water innovations can result in significant environmental, social and economic benefits.

The Commission agrees that digital means should be used to their fullest extent inter alia to improve management of drinking water sources, treatment and supply. Digital solutions can be used to increase water efficiency (e.g.: detection of water leakages through sensors), to improve monitoring of water quality (e.g.: enhanced capabilities for real-time, in situ water quality monitoring; better control of emissions from wastewater treatment plants) or to simulate climate change (e.g.: probability of major droughts and floods, reduce energy demand for water supply and sanitation services), including the use of digital twins, for example those of Destination Earth, for simulating water related incidents and a system's responsiveness. The latter is of particular relevance where civil protection is concerned; investments in resilience to water-related challenges should contribute to mitigating and minimising the extreme effects of droughts and floods.

Cohesion Policy funding (in particular, from the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund) is available to incentivise investments in the digitalisation of the water sector under the Specific Objective on 'Promoting access to water and sustainable water management', with a focus on less developed EU regions. Cohesion Policy also supports research and innovation linked to water, based on Member States' and regions' smart specialisation strategies (S3).

Furthermore, the EU sea basin and macro-regional strategies play an important role for fostering cooperation and coordinated action on water policy across Europe, addressing both local and

transnational challenges in order to promote sustainable use of water resources, balancing economic, social, energy and environmental needs.

To support capacity building of Managing Authorities and other Cohesion Policy stakeholders in order to facilitate implementation of EU funded investments, technical assistance is available, for instance through Cohesion for Transitions Community of Practice and JASPERS (Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions).

The Commission agrees with the CoR on the importance of a holistic and integrated approach to water management involving all water using sectors including also non-consumptive user of water. Inclusive governance is at the heart of the Water Framework Directive which requires Member States to ensure broad public consultation and the active involvement of all interested parties in the implementation of the Directive, in particular in the production, review and updating of the river basin management plans.

The Commission would also point out the importance of transboundary cooperation through a joint development of transboundary river basin management plans by the various river commissions (e.g. Danube river).

Call to include flood plains in flagship initiatives for resilient areas (par. 44):

The Commission agrees that to make areas more resilient to present and future water-related climate threats like fluvial and pluvial floods and prolonged droughts, it is important to restore lost flood plains adjacent to streams and rivers.

N°10 Addressing medicine shortages
Own-initiative
COM(2023) 672 final
COR-2023-05498– NAT-VII/040
161st plenary session – June 2024
Rapporteur: Erika VON KALBEN (DE/GREENS)
DG HERA – Commissioner KYRIAKIDES

**European Commission position on points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion
considered as essential**

The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.

N°11 Enlargement Package 2023 – Western Balkans and Türkiye
COM(2023) 690 final
COM(2023) 691 final
COR-2023-05623 – CIVEX-VII/027
160th plenary session – April 2024
Rapporteur: Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ (HR/EPP)
DG NEAR – Commissioner VARHELYI

Points of the Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>2. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) emphasises the geostrategic significance of EU enlargement – which has historically been the most effective EU foreign policy instrument - to all Western Balkans countries and supports it as a merit-based process and an investment in long-term peace, stability, security and prosperity across the continent;</p>	<p>EU enlargement is a driving force for long-term stability, peace and prosperity across the continent. The Western Balkans, Türkiye, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia have a historic window of opportunity to strongly bind their future to the European Union. Accession is, and will remain, a merit-based process fully dependent on the objective progress achieved by each enlargement partner. Therefore, the enlargement countries will have to act with determination to implement the necessary reforms and make tangible and irreversible progress, starting with the fundamentals of the EU accession process. The rule of law - in particular the independence and functioning of the judiciary and the fight against corruption - fundamental rights, the economy, the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reform continue to be the cornerstones of the enlargement policy.</p>
<p>3. The CoR considers it essential for the EU to keep revitalising its enlargement strategy by providing significant incentives to encourage reforms, and to keep supporting gradual integration in sectors such as the single market and in the energy, digital and green transitions. In return, it is expected that candidate countries and the potential candidate actively demonstrate their commitment and political will by</p>	<p>The Commission fully shares the view that a gradual, predictable, merit-based and reversible approach to acquiring the benefits during the EU accession process is the best way to proceed towards enlargement of the Union. This has also been underlined in the Commission’s communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews.²</p> <p>The Reform and Growth Facility and Instrument</p>

² https://commission.europa.eu/publications/communication-pre-enlargement-reforms-and-policy-reviews_en.

<p>implementing the reforms necessary for meeting all the criteria for accession and taking ownership of their EU integration journey; in this regard takes note of the European Commission's communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews of 20 March 2024¹; notes that, while in this document the Commission supports the approach of gradual integration, it fails to recognise the role to be played by the sub-national level in this respect;</p>	<p>for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III will assist beneficiaries in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner. In this vein, IPA III will support with technical assistance to implement the reforms foreseen in the Facility and to continue the crucial legislative alignment work with the EU acquis.</p> <p>The Commission also concurs with the assessment of the Committee (CoR) that gradual integration needs to be underpinned by strong commitment to implementing the necessary reforms, in particular fundamental reforms including the rule of law.</p>
<p>5. The CoR notes the essential role of the EU's financial and policy support in successfully addressing the developments in and challenges faced by the region, and welcomes the proposed EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans as an important step in unleashing the Western Balkans' full potential in terms of economic and social development, and bringing forward some of the advantages and further reform incentives of EU membership before accession;</p> <p>6. The CoR calls for a swift roll-out of the growth plan and prompt adoption of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, while ensuring the inclusive and transparent programming and implementation of the future facility in all countries in the region, with open</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the assessment of the CoR regarding the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. The main consideration behind the Plan, adopted by the Commission on 8 November 2023³, was indeed to increase the region's socio-economic convergence with the EU through an unprecedented offer. The Growth Plan responds to two pressing challenges: the need to boost socio-economic convergence of the Western Balkans with the EU and to accelerate the accession process. Based on four pillars, it aims to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU Single Market and thus to bring some the benefits of full membership ahead of accession; will deepen the regional economic integration, further accelerate fundamental reforms and increase funding through the EUR 6 billion Reform and Growth Facility, with the respective Regulation that entered into force on 25 May 2024.⁴</p> <p>The Reform Agendas are currently in the adoption process. Each Reform Agenda has been assessed by DG NEAR along a set of standard criteria in line with the requirements of the Regulation. This assessment is elaborated in a Staff Working Document for each beneficiary that will be part of</p>

³ COM(2023) 691 final (https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2023-communication-new-growth-plan-western-balkans_en).

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans ([Regulation - EU - 2024/1449 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1449/oj)).

<p>monitoring of performance indicators and fulfilling the conditionality criteria for the use of available funds;</p>	<p>the Commission Implementing Decision through which the Reform Agendas will be adopted.</p> <p>This ensures comparability among beneficiaries, while ensuring a level playing field during the implementation of the Reform Agendas. In line with Article 26 of the Regulation, the Commission shall establish a publicly available facility scoreboard, which shall display the progress of the implementation of the Reform Agendas of the beneficiaries.</p>
<p>7. The CoR highlights and is committed to continue its ongoing and increased involvement of the CoR in the enlargement process via its joint consultative committees, working groups, and the organisation of the annual Enlargement Day conference; underlines the importance of ensuring political plurality in these bodies as well as active participation from both sides in the exchanges, which are an integral part of the accession process;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the CoR's commitment to foster engagement with the enlargement countries, including by setting up, where appropriate, Joint Consultative Committees and organising the annual Enlargement Day conferences.</p>
<p>9. The CoR underscores the critical importance that enlargement countries align with the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP), as this reflects a deep commitment to EU values, reinforcing these countries' dedication to the shared principles and strategic objectives that underpin the EU's external actions and security agenda;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the assessment of the CoR. EU membership is a strategic choice. Partners must embrace and promote EU values firmly and unequivocally. Alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) is a significant signal of shared values and strategic orientation in the new geopolitical context.</p>
<p>10. The CoR emphasises the importance of promoting regional cooperation among Western Balkans countries and constructive and peaceful approaches to resolving open bilateral issues, including by city diplomacy and cross-border cooperation, while warning against the dangerous and unacceptable ideas of redrawing the borders in the region;</p>	<p>The Commission emphasises that a credible, merit-based prospect of EU membership is the key driver of transformation and thus enhances the collective security and socio-economic prosperity. It is essential for fostering reconciliation and stability on the European continent.</p>

<p>Albania</p> <p>11. The CoR recognises Albania's continued efforts towards EU integration and commends its strong commitment to completing the screening process at the start of the EU accession negotiations;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes that the screening process with Albania was successfully completed in November 2023. The Commission has already sent the screening reports on the Fundamentals cluster and on the Internal Market cluster to the Council and is in the process of preparing the remaining screening reports. The Commission has assessed positively Albania's fulfilment of the opening benchmarks necessary to open negotiations on the Fundamental cluster. Hence, the Commission looks forward to opening the Fundamentals cluster with Albania as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Bosnia and Herzegovina</p> <p>26. The CoR welcomes the decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, acknowledging the important progress achieved after candidate status was granted in December 2022;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes that following its recommendation, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Upon the invitation of the European Council, the Commission has started to prepare the negotiating framework with a view to its adoption by the Council when all relevant steps set out in the Commission's recommendation of 12 October 2022 are taken.</p>
<p>Kosovo</p> <p>36. The CoR welcomes the start of the long-awaited EU visa liberalisation scheme allowing Kosovo nationals to travel to Europe's borderless zone;</p> <p>39. The CoR calls on the Commission to persevere in finding solutions regarding the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo (with the European Committee of the Regions offering concrete support and cooperation based on its role and expertise); with a view to fully implementing the 2013 Brussels Agreement between Serbia and Kosovo;</p> <p>40. The CoR acknowledges progress towards normalising relations with Serbia, and urges the government to implement the signed agreements effectively to advance on the</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the entry into force of visa liberalisation for Kosovo on 1 January 2024.</p> <p>The Commission underlines that both Kosovo and Serbia are expected to engage more constructively in the EU-facilitated Dialogue, uphold their Dialogue commitments and commit to the full implementation of all past Dialogue agreements, including the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex.</p>

European path;	
<p>Montenegro</p> <p>44. The CoR recognises Montenegro's commitment to EU integration and the new government's commitment to move swiftly towards the conclusion of the negotiations;</p> <p>52. The CoR calls on the European Commission to support Montenegro in ensuring transparent and inclusive policy-making and enhancing the quality of public stakeholder consultations;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the country's renewed dynamic on EU integration. It similarly welcomes the holding of the intergovernmental conference with Montenegro on 26 June 2024, following the implementation of the rule of law interim benchmarks under the two rule of law chapters. This now opens the way to provisionally closing further chapters in the accession process.</p>
<p>North Macedonia</p> <p>54. The CoR recognises the smooth progress of the EU accession screening process, underscoring North Macedonia's commitment to EU integration;</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the successful completion of the screening process with North Macedonia in December 2023. The Commission submitted the screening reports on the Fundamentals cluster and on the Internal Market cluster to the Council and is in the process of preparing the remaining screening reports. The Commission's objective is to open accession negotiations on the Fundamentals cluster as soon as possible, once North Macedonia has met the relevant conditions.</p>
<p>Serbia</p> <p>64. The CoR highlights the need for further efforts in reforms for accession to the EU, especially in the rule of law, media freedoms and in normalising relations with Kosovo;</p> <p>74. The CoR welcomes that Serbia has remained engaged in the EU-facilitated Dialogue on normalisation of relations with Kosovo, and agrees that it needs to demonstrate more serious commitment, invest more efforts and make compromises to take the process of normalisation of relations with Kosovo forward;</p>	<p>Progress on the Dialogue and rule of law continue to determine the overall pace of the accession negotiations with Serbia. The key issue of CFSP alignment also remains. The Commission considers that cluster 3 (Competitiveness and inclusive growth) is technically ready for opening. In the current geopolitical context, it is essential that Serbia reassures the Commission of its strategic direction.</p>
<p>Türkiye</p> <p>76. The CoR expresses serious concerns about the deterioration of the democratic standards, the rule of law and the fundamental rights and</p>	<p>The Commission recalls that accession negotiations with Türkiye are at a standstill since 2018, in line with the decision of the Council. Türkiye remains a key partner for the European</p>

<p>values enshrined in the EU Treaties;</p> <p>77. The CoR reaffirms that it is in the EU's strategic interest to develop a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Türkiye in essential areas of joint interest.</p>	<p>Union and a candidate country, and highlights the EU accession as its strategic goal. Nevertheless, Türkiye has continued to move away from the EU, mainly on account of continuing backsliding in the areas of fundamental rights and rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary, and the lack of reforms in some sectoral issues.</p> <p>On 29 November 2023, the Commission and the High Representative adopted a joint communication on EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations⁵, which includes a number of recommendations for developing the bilateral relations. The December 2023 European Council took note of the joint report. The April 2024 European Council tasked Coreper, respecting the competences of the relevant institutions, to advance work on the recommendations of the Joint Communication in line with previous European Council conclusions and in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner, subject to additional guidance from the European Council. Türkiye's own constructive engagement will be instrumental in advancing the various areas of cooperation identified in the Joint Communication.</p>
<p>90. The CoR highlights the essential role of LRAs in implementing the EU-acquis-related reforms, and emphasises the need for effective cooperation and involvement in enlargement-related matters;</p>	<p>Cities and regions are key players in European integration. In particular, local and regional governments play an important role as an anchor of stability, by promoting socio-economic development and facilitating cross-border cooperation, and local and regional authorities implement a substantial part of all EU-related reforms.</p>
<p>94. The CoR calls on the European Commission to refine indicators for measuring progress in public administration reforms, including more precise performance indicators concerning the role of LRAs, such as fiscal decentralisation,</p>	<p>The new version of the assessment framework 'Principles of Public Administration', developed jointly by the Commission and SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Government and Management Administration) and adopted in November 2023⁶,</p>

⁵ JOIN(2023) 50 final (https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/joint-communication-european-council-state-play-eu-turkiye-political-economic-and-trade-relations-0_en).

⁶ <https://www.sigmaxweb.org/publications/Principles-of-Public-Administration-2023.pdf>

<p>administrative cooperation and multi-level governance, the empowerment of local and regional authorities to develop and provide quality services to the general public and businesses, and the promotion of inclusive and evidence-based policy-making at local and regional levels;</p>	<p>incorporated the dimensions of multi-level and sub-national governance across the indicators, both in the principles looking into evidence-based policy-making, as well as those linked to accountability, service delivery and public finance management. SIGMA is currently conducting new assessments in the six Western Balkan partners based on this new methodology. These should be finalised before the end of 2024 and serve as a basis for further reforms and support measures towards empowering the local and regional administrations (LRAs) within their respective administrations.</p>
<p>96. The CoR recommends that the European Commission establish direct communication and cooperation with LRAs through existing regional networks, such as NALAS.</p>	<p>The Commission cooperates with LRAs in the Western Balkans through existing regional structures, notably NALAS (Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe). Under the Covenant of Mayors project, supported by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Commission cooperates with NALAS on building network and capacities of local authorities that commit themselves to taking concrete actions to combat climate change and promote sustainable energy in order to strive for a better, more sustainable future for their citizens. Representatives of NALAS are invited to participate in events organised in the framework of the project to improve knowledge and strengthen internal capacities. A helpdesk for cities and municipalities in the Western Balkans and Türkiye is being set up, and NALAS has been chosen to take on this task.</p>

N°12 Enlargement package 2023 – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia

Own-initiative

COM(2023) 690final

SWD(2023) 697 final

SWD(2023) 698 final

SWD(2023) 699 final

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160th plenary session – April 2024

Rapporteur: Antje GROTHEER (DE/PES)

DG NEAR – Commissioner VÁRHELYI

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>2. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) stresses that the enlargement process involving these three countries, which are each in their own way exposed to Russian aggression, is an expression of their right to self-determination and is in the geopolitical interest of the European Union and part of rebuilding a wider European peace order. Enlargement should be understood as an investment in the Union's security and credibility, the prospect of a more cohesive European continent, progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at a larger scale, and in the shared benefits of an extended single market;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion that enlargement is, and remains, a geo-strategic investment in the long-term peace, security, stability and prosperity of the whole of our continent.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes the adoption of the negotiating framework and the first Intergovernmental conferences held in Luxembourg on 25 June 2024, which opened accession negotiations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter 'Moldova'). It will continue to work closely with both countries on their European path to ensure that the reform process is sustained. The Commission is seriously concerned regarding recent developments in Georgia, in particular the law adopted on transparency of foreign influence, which represents backsliding on the steps set out in the Commission's recommendation for candidate status.</p>
<p>3. The CoR welcomes that this investment is substantiated by the EU institutions' agreement on the establishment of the Ukraine Facility, which has to be deployed as soon as possible, and should enable Ukraine to anticipate the application of the principles of EU regional policy.</p>	<p>The EU has committed to play a strong role in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, which must be linked to the implementation of reforms consistent with Ukraine's European path.</p> <p>After entry into force on 1 March 2024, the Ukraine Facility is now moving into the implementation phase. It will provide predictable</p>

<p>[...] The CoR also considers that the threats by Russia to which Moldova and Georgia are exposed call for increased financial support from the European Union</p>	<p>and flexible support to Ukraine of up to EUR 50 billion in grants and loans for the period 2024-2027.</p> <p>Since 2021, the EU has been the largest provider of financial assistance to Moldova, mobilizing EUR 2.2 billion through various channels including macro-financial assistance, budget support, bilateral assistance, humanitarian aid, crisis response support, and projects with international financial institutions.</p> <p>Following the Commission proposal for a mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)¹, the Commission indicated that EUR 600 million under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-GE) could be redeployed to increase support for other neighbourhood countries, including Moldova.</p> <p>Financial assistance to Georgia under NDICI-GE has remained stable, with annually EUR 85 million being allocated for bilateral programmes since 2021 and until 2023. Additional funds are leveraged through the Economic and Investment Plan from banks and the private sector to further support Georgia. However, in view of the concerning developments in Georgia, the Commission is considering pausing disbursement of funds directly benefiting Georgian authorities and reviewing the EU financial assistance portfolio. Assistance will continue to support civil society organisations, independent media, and Georgian citizens overall.</p>
<p>5. The CoR stresses that an inclusive enlargement process should build on the involvement of local and regional authorities in the candidate countries and in the European Union, given their fundamental role in implementing EU policies and legislation and in maximising the impact of EU funding programmes. Moreover, the enlargement</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p> <p>In Ukraine, the flagship EU project on decentralisation: Ukraine Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme(U-LEAD) with Europe provides a wide range of technical assistance to Ukrainian local authorities</p>

¹ COM(2023) 337 final.

<p>process would strongly benefit from peer-to-peer cooperation at regional and local level, notably on technical assistance and capacity building for public administrations, on support for access to EU funding programmes and setting up investment schemes, and on approximation with the <i>acquis communautaire</i> and citizen exchanges. In this context, the CoR highlights the role of macro-regional strategies, such as the EU strategy for the Danube Region or a future dedicated strategy for the Carpathians, as drivers for European integration and territorial cohesion.</p>	<p>and will continue to do so in an expanded format upon the commencement of the project’s Phase III in January 2025. Regarding peer-to-peer cooperation, the Ukraine Facility regulation² specifically calls for its inclusion in the support provided through Pillar III in Article 34 (2).</p> <p>In Moldova, with EU support and technical assistance, significant progress has been achieved in establishing two critical management systems: i) an information system specifically designed for managing regional and local projects, and ii) a Register of Capital Investment Projects, already operational and mandatory for all large-scale investment projects. More assistance will be provided to strengthen oversight of EU funds management.</p> <p>In Georgia, the EU has been supporting decentralisation strategies and balanced territorial development since 2019. Two important programmes: ‘budget support EU 4 Integrated Territorial Development’ and ‘Mayors for Economic Growth’ provide capacity building for approximation with the EU <i>acquis</i>. In addition, projects aim at increasing competitiveness and attractiveness of more vulnerable regions of Georgia. The EU notably supported the successful implementation of the Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme 2020-2022 (extended to 2023) which will serve as basis for the next strategy on integrated territorial development. It will focus on Energy Efficiency, Human Capital Development and Social Policy in line with the goals of the European Social Fund+.</p>
<p>10. The CoR reiterates the need for more efficient communication, including at local and regional levels, in order to counter disinformation and highlight the benefits of a future EU enlargement and subsequent EU</p>	<p>In Ukraine, the EU provides support to both Ukrainian Civil Society and Ukrainian state agencies dedicated to countering disinformation. This support includes capacity-building, mentoring and support to production of media formats for</p>

² Regulation (EU) 2024/792 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Ukraine Facility (<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/792/oj>).

integration, notably by highlighting the tangible benefits of previous enlargements.

debunking and pre-bunking disinformation and hostile propaganda, aired on television, internet and social media channels.

EU support is also aimed at the regions of Ukraine (and particularly in the south and in the east of the country), where several local media receive EU funding for increasing their reporting capacities and for setting up mechanisms to do fact checking. Public administrations at the regional level have benefitted by an EU capacity-building action aimed at reinforcing strategic communication of local authorities.

EU support also enabled Ukraine to enhance its strategic communication with various audiences across the world and combat hostile disinformation. This also included building networks and cooperation between Ukrainian and European journalists.

The EU runs a project called ‘Communicating the European Union for Ukrainians’ (CEU4U) which aims to contribute to the improvement of public perception of the EU in Ukraine, by raising awareness of EU policies and of EU-Ukraine cooperation and their impact on daily lives of Ukrainians.

In Moldova, the EU's ongoing Regional Communication Programme (‘EU NEIGHBOURS EAST’ 2020-2024) enhances strategic communication, builds societal resilience to disinformation, and supports media independence. The Commission is also providing support to the Moldovan Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation.

Additionally, the EU Delegation to Moldova implements a project focusing on strategic communication and support to mass media to increase citizens' access to EU-related information.

Media literacy and independence is supported through several EU-funded projects including ‘EU Support for Local Media Outlets in Moldova’; the ‘Resilient Civil Society and Media respond to the

	<p>Ukraine War’ and the ‘EU4 Independent Media programme’ which aim to build the resilience of civil society and independent media and empower citizens.</p> <p>In its Conclusions of 27 June 2024³, the European Council called on the authorities to reverse their course of action, which jeopardises Georgia’s EU path. In addition, there was broad consensus on the need to step up EU Strategic Communication⁴ efforts in the next 6 months, especially in light of the upcoming elections in Georgia. An important element of the strategy will be to debunk fake news (for instance by increasing support to independent media and fact-checking organisations) and ensure Georgian citizens understand the scale and benefits of EU assistance. The Commission has one ongoing project ‘Quality media and conscious media consumption for resilient society’ and plans to increase such assistance in its new programming for 2024.</p>
<i>Ukraine</i>	
<p>13. The CoR encourages Ukraine, together with its partners from the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, to pursue decentralisation reforms and capacity building for local and regional authorities.</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee’s opinion as it also reflects recommendations made by the Commission in the 2023 enlargement report. Ukraine has also committed to deliver on several related steps as a part of the Ukraine Plan under the Ukraine Facility.</p>
<p>14. With regard to the reconstruction process, in order to prepare the approximation of Ukraine with EU regional policy Ukraine should apply a number of principles recognised by the EU.</p> <p>The CoR also requests that a territorial component be included in the Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform, with the</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with points made by the Committee.</p> <p>It continues to raise these points in the political dialogue with Ukraine. The flagship EU project on decentralisation U-LEAD with Europe provides technical assistance on a number of these elements.</p> <p>At its launch, the Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform brought together Ukraine, the EU, G7 countries, as well as financial institutions. In 2024,</p>

³ [euco-conclusions-27062024-en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁴ [Strategic communication and tackling disinformation \(europa.eu\)](#).

<p>European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine playing a coordinating role in this component.</p>	<p>the Steering Committee Members agreed by consensus to enlarge the participation to 4 new Members and 9 new Observers. Any change in Platform participation is subject to agreement by consensus of the Steering Committee. The mandate of the Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform, and its Steering Committee, was set by the G7. It comprises the coordination on economic support for Ukraine's immediate financing needs and future economic recovery and reconstruction across different sources and established instruments for financing. Membership to the Platform is determined with the view to facilitating the achievement of these objectives.</p>
<p>17. In relation to the fight against corruption, considers the adoption of a law regulating lobbying (in line with European standards) and the consistent continuation of the reforms of the judiciary and state procurement to be the highest priorities</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with points made by the Committee as they also reflect recommendations made by the Commission in the 2023 enlargement report and a subsequent communication⁵. On 23 February 2024, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Lobbying Law with the aim of establishing a framework in line with European and international practices and standards. In addition, on 21 March 2024, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a corresponding law regulating administrative sanctions for violations of lobbying obligations.</p>
<p><i>Moldova</i></p>	
<p>25. The CoR expects Moldova to ensure that anti-corruption institutions function within a clear organisational structure and with adequate resources. Moldova should continue updating and implementing the "de-oligarchisation" action plan, notably in the light of the Commission's conclusion that independent and regulatory agencies in Moldova are still prone to be influenced by private interests and by the bodies or industries they are supposed to regulate.</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p> <p>Following the adoption of the organisational structure and budget of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office by the Parliament of Moldova in February 2024, the institution has been significantly reinforced in terms of resources and budget.</p>

⁵ COM(2023) 690 final.

<p>26. The CoR stresses that while a significant number of new positions were created to strengthen the capacity of the public administration to prepare for EU accession, and while salaries increased for certain categories of public servants, Moldova's public administration still suffers from a chronic shortage of qualified human resources and a dysfunctional system for the professional development of local civil servants. Investing in further reforms and addressing issues with gender equality in the public administration must therefore be priorities in Moldova's accession process.</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p> <p>In Moldova, the EU supports the Government with a team of high-level advisers (HLA) on several key reform issues in the domain of public governance and local administration reform.</p>
<p><i>Georgia</i></p>	
<p>30. The CoR identifies the deep political polarisation, the lack of effective cross-party cooperation and widespread disinformation regarding the EU as the main stumbling blocks on Georgia's path to European integration. The CoR therefore calls on Georgia to address all shortcomings identified by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Venice Commission, and notably to further improve the electoral framework;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p>
<p>31. The CoR considers that Georgia must prioritise inclusive policymaking and bolster participatory democracy measures at the local level. Direct citizen involvement in local decision-making process is crucial to effectively minimise political influence. This can be achieved by significantly strengthening the competencies of local councils and granting them greater authority, particularly related to local budget management, in order to rebalance power dynamics. It is essential for mitigating political polarisation and preventing direct interference of the central government in mayors' decisions. Moreover, the CoR shares</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p> <p>Extensive support has been provided since 2020 to strengthen the role of civil society in decision making at local level and bolster participation in the economic and political life.</p> <p>At the local level, the EU has been supporting decentralisation efforts through the dedicated 'Support to Integrated Territorial Development in Georgia' programme (2019). It includes a substantial budget support component (EUR 40,5 million) that supports the implementation of the Decentralisation strategy</p>

<p>most serious concerns about the possible resubmission of a draft law on the "Transparency of Foreign Influence", inspired by the Russian law on foreign agents. Such a law would put at risk media freedom and the autonomy of civil society organisations, which are prerequisites for a functional democracy and for Georgia's EU accession process.</p>	<p>2020-2025 of Georgia.</p> <p>The Commission will continue to support local authorities through two additional programmes: i) EU 4 Sustainable Governance and Resilience (EUR 24 million) adopted in 2022; and ii) socio economic growth and regional development (indicative amount of EUR 28 million) under the planned annual action plan 2024.</p> <p>Following the adoption of the law on the 'Transparency of Foreign Influence', the High Representative with the European Commission issued a statement⁶ stressing that the law goes against EU core principles and values. The law goes against at least three of the nine steps. In its 27-28 June 2024 conclusions, the European Council reiterated its serious concerns regarding the adoption of the law and called on Georgia's authorities to clarify their intentions by reversing the current course of action which jeopardises Georgia's EU path, de facto leading to a halt of the accession process.</p>
<p>32. The CoR highlights the fact that Georgia to still needs to pursue a holistic and effective reform of the judicial system, addressing some of the Venice Commission key recommendations, in order to ensure effective independence, accountability and impartiality;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p>
<p>33. The CoR expresses concern about Georgia's withdrawal from the OECD anti-corruption network, but welcomes the adoption of an amended action plan on "de-oligarchisation", building on prior Venice Commission recommendations, and of the 2023-2024 action plan for the fight against organised crime;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p>
<p>34. The CoR underlines that Georgia's public administration suffers from fragmentation and limited standardisation, and would need to</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p>

⁶ [Georgia: Statement by the High Representative with the European Commission on the final adoption of the law on transparency of foreign influence | EEAS \(europa.eu\).](#)

<p>undergo a significant digital transformation. However, the CoR welcomes the fact that provisions strengthening local governance and municipal services were included in the 2020-2025 decentralisation strategy, the public administration reform strategy and action plan, and the 2030 national development strategy-vision;</p>	<p>Digital transformation is a key priority for the Commission’s financial assistance to Georgia. The Economic and Investment Plan has two Flagships dedicated to foster digitalisation, with a focus on rural areas. In addition, the ‘EU 4 Smart Economic Development’ (2021 – EUR 24 million) and the regional ‘EU4 Digital’ programmes seek to support Georgia’s digital growth (including digitalisation of public service delivery), alignment with the EU <i>acquis</i> and reducing the digital divide.</p>
<p>35. The CoR highlights that despite the well-designed decentralisation strategy in Georgia, the ongoing implementation process requires additional tools for effective monitoring. The current implementation, led solely by the national government, must be diversified with more tools. A parallel and independent monitoring process is imperative to track the implementation and measure the results of decentralisation and public administration reforms;</p>	<p>see recital 31.</p>
<p>36. The CoR emphasises that public procurement procedures need to be aligned with the EU legislation in order to effectively implement EU programmes providing funding for different objectives related to local and regional development. This is especially crucial due to evident skills gap regarding project management at local level;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee’s opinion.</p> <p>The EU co-finances a project by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA) that supports Georgian authorities in aligning legislation related to public procurement. According to information from the government of Georgia, secondary legislation is under preparation.</p>
<p>37. The CoR believes that anti-discrimination legislation should be strengthened and more decisive measures taken to address and prevent hate speech and hate crimes. A national strategy to fight all forms of hatred and discrimination and to protect ethnic and religious minorities is needed;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee’s opinion.</p>

<p>38. The CoR welcomes the fact that Georgia has addressed the European Union's recommendations on the need to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women, but remains concerned that despite the introduction of gender quotas, women remain under-represented in public office;</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion.</p> <p>The recent abolishment of mandatory gender quotas for electoral lists and outstanding matters regarding, for instance, the definition of rape, remain a concern.</p>
<p>39. The CoR stresses the need to further strengthen structured dialogue mechanisms with CSOs, notably by putting in place a mechanism for public online consultations or contributions for draft laws or policy documents. The CoR regrets that the European Commission report seems to amalgamate CSOs with local and regional authorities.</p>	<p>The Commission concurs with the Committee's opinion on the need to strengthen dialogue mechanisms with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). However, the adoption of the law on the 'Transparency of Foreign Influence' will have negative consequences undermining the work of civil society organisations. An impact assessment will be carried out through our regional funds to better understand how CSOs activities will be impacted and how the EU can provide swift support.</p>

<p>N°13 Skills and talent mobility Referral of the Belgian Council Presidency on education COM(2023) 719 final COM(2023) 715 final 160th plenary session,– April 2024 Rapporteur: François DECOSTER (FR/renew E) DG EAC – Commissioner IVANOVA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) asks, in this context, the Member States and the European Commission to build on the network of European Councillors (<i>ie. European Network of regional and local Councillors</i>) as a useful community to increase the awareness of learning mobility opportunities on the ground;</p>	<p>The Council Recommendation ‘Europe on the Move’, adopted on 13 May 2024¹, invites Member States to put in place, where appropriate, learning mobility promoters at national, regional and local level, and to offer targeted information on learning mobility opportunities throughout the lifelong learning cycle through networks such as Euroguidance, Eurodesk and EURES. Building on other existing networks, such as that of European Councillors, would further benefit the promotion of learning mobility.</p>
<p>6. The CoR calls the EP, European Commission and the Member States to launch a pilot project on Erasmus Green Cities through the networks of the 100 Green Cities and the 100 Climate-Neutral Cities Mission, following the example of the US Climate Corps programmes, offering young people Erasmus+ funded traineeships to empower them with the skills needed for the green transition and to concretely engage them in local community green projects;</p>	<p>The environment and the fight against global warming are horizontal priorities of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) programmes. The Erasmus+ programme already makes it possible to finance cooperation projects which promote the networking of organisations involved in sustainable development and the development of green skills for young people to enable them to engage in their community but also to improve employability in the labour market. The <i>Youth Participation for Developing Sustainable Green Cities</i> project is just one example of this².</p> <p>The European Solidarity Corps programme funds volunteering opportunities and solidarity projects with young people preparing the green transition in</p>

¹ C/2024/3364: [Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 ‘Europe on the Move’ — learning mobility opportunities for everyone \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32024R0364).

² <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2022-1-DE04-KA220-YOU-000085135>

	<p>a variety of ways. The cities participating in the Climate-Neutral Cities Mission are encouraged to take part as host organisations in the ESC projects.</p>
<p>11. The CoR calls on the European Commission and Member States to invest more in promoting multilingualism and the provision of accessible and digital resources, particularly for lesser-used languages and also advocates for teaching at least two languages in addition to the main language(s) and mandatory language learning in VET programmes;</p>	<p>Multilingualism is one of the cornerstones of the European Education Area, as it facilitates more learning mobility, and it is a powerful symbol of the EU’s aspiration to be united in diversity. The promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity is one of the specific objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme, also in vocational education and training (VET) projects. The Erasmus+ participants can learn the 24 EU official languages (plus languages from other countries participating in the programme and some regional official languages) through the Online Linguistic Support, an online platform supported by Erasmus+³. Erasmus+ has also been funding numerous projects which promote learning and the visibility of regional and minority languages in Europe. In April 2024, the Commission published a brochure⁴ compiling and summarising many of such projects in order to inspire, raise awareness and present different approaches to policymakers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools, and cultural and creative organisations. Horizon Europe also supports linguistic diversity. A project on ‘safeguarding endangered languages in Europe’ is currently ongoing. Also, a new project on ‘Strategies to strengthen the European linguistic capital in a globalised world’ is planned to start end of 2024. Under Horizon Europe, the Commission is also financing projects on how to ensure multilingualism in the digital world.</p> <p>The 2019 Council Recommendation on</p>

³ [Home - Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu).

⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Linguistic diversity in the European Union – Examples of projects supporting regional and minority languages – Compilation of projects co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and Creative Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/409467>

	<p>a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages⁵ states all young people should acquire – in addition to the languages of schooling – a competence level in two other languages, before the end of upper secondary education and training. Multilingual competences enable persons to benefit more from learning mobility experiences abroad and more broadly from the opportunities the internal market offers, such as free movement of workers.</p> <p>To advance towards this objective, the Commission is cooperating with the European Centre for modern languages of the Council of Europe, in particular on the learning of a second foreign language, multilingual classrooms, regional and minority languages and digital resources.</p>
<p>12. The CoR urges Member States and the European Commission to support local projects for multilingualism including as part of life-long learning for all EU citizens, in particular young people. Although many language acquisition programmes exist at local level, they are mainly project-based and are often targeting newcomers in the community;</p>	<p>Through the Erasmus+ programme, the EU offers many opportunities for people to improve their language skills by participating in education, training, youth and sport activities in another European country. Language competences are at the heart of building the European Education Area and are indispensable for mobility, cooperation and mutual understanding across borders. The programme supports cross-border partnerships of different sizes and formats, while also offering targeted language learning support for mobility – the Online Language Support (OLS) and quality recognition of projects (European Language Label).</p>
<p>18. (on education staff) The CoR calls on the European Commission and Member States to identify soft skills for the different categories of educational staff, favour cross-border partnerships between education institutions and ensure the recognition of skills and qualifications obtained through mobility;</p>	<p>Favouring cross-border partnerships between education institutions and ensuring the recognition of skills and qualifications obtained through mobility, is at the heart of the Erasmus+ programme. The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, which is the quality framework and entry ticket to Erasmus+ for higher education institutions, states that institutions must ensure that</p>

⁵ 2019/C 189/03: [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019R0003).

	<p>staff is given recognition for their Erasmus+ teaching and training activities. This was identified as one of the pressure points that the Erasmus+ National Agencies should focus their support and monitoring on in this programming period.</p> <p>For mobile staff, certain soft skills that are relevant for the work of higher education staff are identified in the Erasmus+ programme participant reports, such as organisational, management and leadership skills, language skills, and cultural skills. The results of the participant reports show that the majority of staff agrees that the mobility improved their social, linguistic, and/or cultural competences and that they feel more confident in an intercultural setting. More than half of the respondents claim that they have enhanced their employment and career opportunities and that they have improved their organisational, management and/or leadership skills.</p>
<p>19. The CoR calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that the common European classification standards for skills and qualifications are implemented rapidly and well.</p>	<p>In 2017, the Commission launched the European classification of Occupations and Skills (ESCO)⁶, which includes 3,007 occupations and 14,295 skills and knowledge concepts. ESCO is used by close to 150 public organisations, private companies and projects that provide services to end-users in the labour market and the area of education and training. ESCO is periodically updated with new occupations and skills-knowledge concepts following consultations with the Member States and market experts.</p> <p>The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) serves as a translation tool between different national qualifications frameworks. The EQF helps to improve transparency, comparability and portability of people's qualifications within Europe and beyond. By May 2024, 36 out of 41 EQF countries have completed initial referencing and linked their national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF. This includes 26 out of 27 EU</p>

⁶ <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/classification>

	<p>Member States. Spain, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the three countries that joined the EQF process in 2022 (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova) still need to reference their national qualifications framework to the EQF. Spain is expected to finalise its referencing to the EQF in 2024, the other countries as from 2025.</p> <p>Since the adoption of the revised 2017 EQF Recommendation⁷, 9 EQF signatory countries (France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Latvia, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Malta, Lithuania) have updated their referencing to the EQF. Croatia and Türkiye will do so in 2024.</p>
<p>Amendment 1, Preamble, Recital 24</p> <p>To respond to the calls for a more ambitious target than the current 8% target for learning mobility abroad for VET students, this Recommendation proposes increasing the participation target for VET learners, including apprentices, to 20% by 2030, while at the same time increasing the mobility of apprentices to 40% of VET learners (from today's 19%).</p>	<p>The May 2024, the Council Recommendation on Europe on the Move⁸ includes a target of 12% of VET learners who should benefit from learning mobility abroad.</p> <p>With respect to the mobility of apprentices, it must be noted that the Commission currently lacks reliable statistical data on the total number of apprentices in Europe, which would be necessary to measure their share in learning mobility.</p>
<p>13. The CoR points out that the recent CoR opinion on Legal Migration⁹ reflects the position of LRAs on attracting skills and talent from third countries. Updates its position by calling on Member States to involve LRAs in providing data to the EU Talent Pool about living conditions in their communities. Additionally, urges Member States to include LRAs in national adjustments to the list of EU-wide shortage occupations, recognising their valuable insights into skills and talent supply and demand;</p>	<p>The EU Talent Pool proposal¹⁰ specifically envisages the provision of easily accessible online information on living and working conditions in the Member States. According to this proposal, the National Contact Points are responsible for providing relevant information to the EU Talent Pool Secretariat for its publication on the platform. The Commission acknowledges that the possibility to also involve the local and regional authorities (LRAs) in providing data on living conditions could ensure more comprehensive information to support jobseekers from third countries. It will be for the Member States to involve LRAs, where</p>

⁷ 2017/C 189/03 ([EUR-Lex - 32017H0615\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁸ C/2024/3364: [Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' — learning mobility opportunities for everyone \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁹ CIVEX-VII/017, *Legal migration. Attracting skills and talent to the EU*.

¹⁰ COM(2023) 716 final.

	<p>appropriate.</p> <p>The Commission also notes the possibility for the Member States to involve, where appropriate, the LRAs in identifying the national adjustments required to the list of EU-wide list shortages occupations. In that respect, the Commission recalls that to ensure the success of the tool the specific labour market needs of the participating Member States should be taken into account.</p>
<p>22. The CoR demands to be included in the adoption of the new declaration on vocation education and training (VET) planned for 2025;</p>	<p>The 2002 Copenhagen Declaration, which kicked off the Process on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, states that the cooperation should be inclusive and involve Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries, and the social partners. Those are the parties that have agreed on the ensuing Communiqués and Declarations.</p> <p>Keeping with that practice, the Osnabrück Declaration was agreed by the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training of the Member States, the EU Candidate Countries and the EEA countries, the European social partners and the European Commission. It was supported by the European level VET providers' associations (VET4EU2) and the learners' representatives (OBESSU, European Apprentices Network), both issuing a position paper in support of the Declaration.</p> <p>The support of the CoR to the new Declaration would be highly valued, as it could reinforce the messages contained therein and contribute to the implementation of the proposed actions at national and regional level. As was done by the VET providers' associations and the learners' representatives in the case of the Osnabrück Declaration, the CoR could express its support to the new Declaration by issuing a supportive position paper.</p>

<p>N°14 Localising energy production: the role of geothermal energy Own-initiative COR-2023-04406 – ENVE-VII/043 160th plenary session – April 2024 Rapporteur: József RIBÁNYI (HU/ECR) DG ENER – Commissioner SIMSON</p>	
<p>Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>3. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) points out that this opinion draws attention to geothermal energy, which is an energy source that can provide benefits as well as meet the requirements for localising energy production in Europe;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the need to unlock the potential of all domestic sources of renewable energy to achieve the EU’s ambitious new renewable energy target of at least 42.5% by 2030 adopted in 2023 under the revised Renewable Energy Directive¹.</p>
<p>6. The CoR supports mechanisms for developing municipally-owned renewable heating and cooling and other energy generation systems based on locally available renewable energy sources;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees. The participation of citizens and authorities at local level in renewable energy projects through renewable energy communities as promoted by the Renewable Energy Directive² has resulted in substantial added value in terms of local acceptance of renewable energy and improved access to additional private capital resulting in local investments, more choices for consumers and greater participation by citizens in the energy transition. The revised Energy Efficiency Directive³ includes a new requirement for the development of local heating and cooling plans (Article 25(6)), which encourages municipalities to look more actively at such options and plan the use of local renewable energy sources.</p>

¹ Directive (EU) 2023/2413 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023 amending Directive (EU) 2018/2001, Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 and Directive 98/70/EC as regards the promotion of energy from renewable sources, and repealing Council Directive (EU) 2015/652 ([Directive - EU - 2023/2413 - EN - Renewable Energy Directive - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

² Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources (recast) ([Directive - 2018/2001 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

³ Directive (EU) 2023/1791 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2023 on energy efficiency and amending Regulation (EU) 2023/955 (recast) ([Directive - 2023/1791 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

<p>7. The CoR notes that despite using mature technologies to explore it, geothermal energy is still relatively expensive in many cases, and requires measures to increase capacity, public support and transparency. These include speeding up the permitting and licencing process of local energy generation to scale up and be price-competitive;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees and has identified permitting procedures as an obstacle for the acceleration of deployment of renewable energy Sources. The revised Renewable Energy Directive introduced accelerated and simplified permitting rules including for ground-source heat pumps.</p>
<p>8. The CoR highlights that policy intervention is especially relevant for large-scale geothermal energy investments, which can be of considerable cost, and which can have a significant environmental footprint if not handled properly;</p>	<p>The Commission included geothermal among the list of strategic technologies in its proposed Net-Zero Industry Act⁴, which allows this technology to benefit from measures on investments, permitting and one-stop shops for manufacturing and critical energy infrastructure (including district heating and cooling). At the same time, the European Critical Raw Materials Act⁵ targets specifically lithium and contains provisions that should indirectly benefit the whole geothermal sector, from the recognition of the strategic character of projects to administrative simplification, coordination and facilitation of financing, national exploration programmes (including mineral mapping, geophysical surveys) and data sharing obligations.</p> <p>As regards the environmental impact, geothermal projects involving drilling fall under Annex II of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive⁶, which means that while they are not subject systematically to an EIA, they are subject to screening, i.e. a determination of whether such a project would have significant effects on the</p>

⁴ COM(2023) 161 final ([EUR-Lex - 52023PC0161 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2024/1252 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020 ([Regulation - EU - 2024/1252 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

⁶ Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment ([Directive - 2014/52 - EN - EIA - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

	<p>environment.</p> <p>The Commission issued guidance documents for the various stages/steps under the EIA Directive⁷.</p>
<p>10. The CoR insists that best practices and research findings at European, national and regional levels in the field of local and regional energy production need to be disseminated, stressing the social and economic benefits of localised energy production;</p>	<p>European funding sources for research, innovation and deployment in the geothermal sector include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modernisation Fund (MF) to support investments in modernising energy systems and improving energy efficiency in certain lower-income Member States. The MF operates under the responsibility of the beneficiary Member States, who work in close cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Investment Committee set up for the fund and the European Commission; - Innovation Fund, one of the world’s largest funding programmes for demonstration of innovative low-carbon technologies; - Structural and Investment funds related to the Cohesion policy with the objective of reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions. of interest for the geothermal sector: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The Cohesion Fund; o The European Regional Development Fund; o The European Social Fund Plus; o The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. - Horizon Europe, the current EU’s framework programme for research and innovation, especially under: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Cluster 5 - Climate, Energy and Mobility, which supports research and innovation (R&I) in net-zero technology; o The European Innovation Council, which

⁷ [Environmental Impact Assessment - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eia/).

	<p>supports disruptive innovations early-stage research, to proof of concept, technology transfer, and the financing and scale up of startups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clean Energy Transition Partnership, co-funded by the European Union, which brings together public and private stakeholders in the research and innovation ecosystems, from European and non-European countries and regions to foster transnational innovation ecosystems and overcome a fragmented research and innovation landscape. - The Research Fund for Coal and Steel co-finances research and innovation projects to decarbonise steel making and assist the just transition of coal mines, including their conversion to geothermal infrastructures; - The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Energy, the funding programme to implement the Trans-European Network for Energy (TEM-E) to support investments on existing and new cross-border energy infrastructure in Europe; - The EIB owned by the Member States, which focuses on specific priorities including climate action and strategic infrastructure and can provide loans, technical assistance, guarantees and venture capitals.
<p>23. The CoR highlights that the lack of data is a significant challenge for municipalities that should have access to different types of geological and subsurface data to be able to evaluate applications and issue building permits for geothermal facilities. A lack of data hinders efforts to reduce local emissions, decarbonise the energy system and ensure</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that data availability is a challenge to the acceleration of geothermal energy deployment. It has taken steps to facilitate data sharing. The European Raw Materials Act⁸ includes provisions on subsurface data availability and sharing. This is relevant in particular given the link between lithium extraction and geothermal energy production (the two activities</p>

⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02024R1252-20240503>.

<p>affordable renewable energy for all. Access to geothermal data also facilitates the preparation of local building regulations and spatial plans of municipalities. Therefore, local geothermal endowments can be more strongly considered when granting construction permits in a given area;</p>	<p>are closely linked and lithium is a byproduct of geothermal). The Commission is also in close contact with the industry to understand what exactly the main bottlenecks to sufficient data availability are. Moreover, regarding the consideration of geothermal data for the preparation of local building regulations and spatial plans of municipalities, the Commission notes that this obligation already exists in article 15(3) of RED II⁹, under which ‘Member States shall ensure that their competent authorities at national, regional and local level include provisions for the integration and deployment of renewable energy, including for renewables self-consumption and renewable energy communities, and the use of unavoidable waste heat and cold when planning, including early spatial planning, designing, building and renovating urban infrastructure, industrial, commercial or residential areas and energy infrastructure, including electricity, district heating and cooling, natural gas and alternative fuel networks.’</p>
<p>25. The CoR notes that the contribution of geothermal energy to local jobs should not be underestimated. Staffing of local geothermal power plants, including geothermal engineers and experts to support planning, delivery and maintenance of geothermal infrastructures provide for good employment opportunities, especially in rural areas. Where necessary, re-skilling programmes for workers should facilitate local geothermal energy production. It is also noteworthy that the expertise needed for geothermal energy exploration could be drawn from oil and gas production. It is therefore an ideal transition for this type of highly-skilled workforce;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with this point.</p> <p>Article 18 of the revised Renewable Energy Directive introduces requirements on Member States to ensure that their certification schemes or equivalent qualification schemes are available for installers and designers of all forms of renewable heating and cooling systems in buildings, industry and agriculture, to ensure sufficient training programmes and promote participation. These add to already existing provisions on information and training.</p>

⁹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2018.328.01.0082.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2018:328:TOC.

<p>32. The CoR underlines that delivering concrete recommendations for ensuring the smooth implementation of REPowerEU is necessary. Such advice can also help speed up the energy transition, with a view to accelerating the transition of LRAs to renewable, secure and affordable energy by wider uptake of the use of geothermal energy;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with this assessment. It already adopted in May 2024 a Recommendation on the speeding up permit-granting procedures¹⁰ and an accompanying guidance on good practices to speed up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy and related infrastructure projects and a guidance document on designating renewables acceleration areas, and is planning to adopt three additional guidance documents on the implementation of the Renewable Energy Directive, one of which will focus on heating and cooling. In addition, the Commission is considering options for a technical support to Member States in implementing the new requirement for adopting local heating and cooling plans, required by Article 25(6) of the Energy Efficiency Directive.</p>
<p>35. The CoR encourages the establishment of geothermal energy-based heating, cooling and electricity generation as part of renewable energy communities. This would also contribute to the wider uptake of smart metering locally. Similarly, it would create public awareness about LRAs as producers and consumers (prosumers) of locally available energy;</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that renewable energy communities can be a potential model for the establishment of geothermal energy-based heating, cooling and electricity generation. Renewable energy communities are currently less developed in the heating and cooling sector than in the electricity sector due to certain barriers, including lack of national legal and regulatory frameworks, challenging business cases and technical complexity. The Commission supports community energy initiatives outside the electricity sector through various projects, such as the ongoing ConnectHeat project¹¹ co-funded from the LIFE programme.</p>

¹⁰ SWD(2024)124 final ([ad850f73-ab84-4ce1-9e66-7430f8f0c7e5 en \(europa.eu\)](https://ad850f73-ab84-4ce1-9e66-7430f8f0c7e5.europa.eu)).

¹¹ [Home ConnectHeat PRE - ConnectHeat \(ambienteitalia.it\)](https://www.ambienteitalia.it).

N°15 Smart, sustainable and affordable housing as a tool for local authorities to face multiple challenges
Own-initiative opinion
COR-2023-04562 – COTER-VII/034
160th plenary session – April 2024
Rapporteur: Andres JAADLA (EE/renew E.)
DG GROW – Commissioner BRETON

Points of the European Committee of the Regions opinion considered essential	European Commission position
<p>11. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) calls for a renewed focus on the ongoing initiatives related to cooperative, public and social housing, housing based on public-private partnerships, non-profit housing, as well as affordable, non-speculative private housing initiatives and for a financial boost to their implementation, which could equip LRAs with the tools to face the ongoing crises; calls for the ERDF to be used to build new social housing and to upgrade and regenerate residential buildings in all European regions. Increased investment in housing would in effect improve housing accessibility and affordability, boost the local economic base, help reverse demographic trends, meet climate objectives and improve local climate resilience, while also addressing the integration efforts of both refugees and migrants;</p>	<p>Various legal, policy and funding instruments contribute to addressing housing challenges. The mapping of the major EU housing related policy areas, initiatives and funding instruments was provided in the publication¹ recently released by the Commission: ‘Social housing and beyond. Operational toolkit on the use of EU funds for investments in social housing and associated services’.</p> <p>Cohesion policy already provides important support for housing. Over the 2021-2027 period, EUR 1 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is allocated to investments in housing for social inclusion. Furthermore, the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund contribute to the promotion of energy efficiency renovations of public and private buildings with a combined allocation of EUR 18 billion. About EUR 6.5 billion is dedicated to energy efficiency renovation of the existing housing stock, with a particular focus on social housing and support to the most vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Support to access to housing for migrants and refugees can also be provided under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The Commission has published a Toolkit on the use of EU funds for</p>

¹ [Social housing and beyond - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\).](https://publications.ec.europa.eu/publication-detail/-/publication/11111111-1111-1111-1111-111111111111)

	<p>the integration of people with a migrant background²: 2021–2027 programming period, which also covers access to housing.</p> <p>In the political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029³, President-elect von der Leyen highlights the need to address the ongoing housing crisis. As an immediate first step, the Commission will propose to inject liquidity into the market by allowing Member States to double the planned cohesion policy investments in affordable housing.</p>
<p>12. The CoR calls for better coordination between EU policies and the policies of the Member States, their regions and local authorities and for the launching of a Housing Agenda for the European Union, similar to the Urban Agenda for the EU, that works towards a joint and multi-level, multi-stakeholder institutional response to housing challenges with more coordinated policies, more coordinated funding and more coordinated housing models in Europe;</p>	<p>The above-mentioned political guidelines announced that the Commission will put forward the first-ever European Affordable Housing Plan. This new Plan will ‘address structural drivers, develop a strategy for housing construction, offer technical assistance to cities and Member States and focus on investment.’</p>
<p>14. The CoR with regard to market regulation, the European Committee of the Regions calls on the European Commission to address the issue of speculation and money laundering in the property market at European level by means of a European property transparency register that includes the names of the owners of the various properties, thus ensuring that each tenant is aware of the real identity of their landlord. This register could help prevent the predatory tendencies of a wide range of large property</p>	<p>The recently agreed Directive on systems to be put in place by Member States for the prevention of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering and terrorist financing⁴ mandates the creation of a single access point at Member State level, through which competent authorities can access a wide range of financial information on real estate, including the identity of their owners. This new measure is complemented by an obligation for EU companies and trusts, and for foreign companies and trusts that own real estate</p>

² [Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background - 2021–2027 programming period \(europa.eu\).](https://europa.eu/press-portal/content/12112)

³ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf.

⁴ Directive (EU) 2024/1640 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 May 2024 on the mechanisms to be put in place by Member States for the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937, and amending and repealing Directive (EU) 2015/849 (Directive - EU - 2024/1640 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)).

<p>companies and individuals owning numerous properties, and help prevent the phenomenon of empty, unused buildings;</p>	<p>in the Union, to declare their beneficial owners (i.e. the natural persons who ultimately own or control them) to the beneficial ownership registers set up in each Member State. Citizens who can demonstrate a legitimate interest in connection with the prevention and combating of money laundering, its predicate offences, and terrorist financing will be able to access that information.</p>
<p>18. The CoR reiterates the call to the European Commission to review Decision 2012/21/EU on State aid in the form of public service compensation, and to consider enabling wider investments in housing under State aid rules and widening the definition of social housing in the Decision beyond ‘disadvantaged citizens or socially less advantaged groups’ in order to reflect Member States’ discretion in planning, delivering, financing and organising the construction of social housing, guarantee the democratic right to choose and provide access to adequate and affordable accommodation because of the inability of the current housing markets in some locations to meet accommodation needs, not just for people who have no access to housing at all, but also the occupants of housing that is hazardous to health, inadequate or overcrowded, as well as people who are paying most of their income on rent or their monthly mortgage payments;</p>	<p>The political guidelines 2024-2029 announce that State aid rules will also be revised to enable housing support measures. The Commission has met with Member States and stakeholders on 26 June 2024 to take stock and discuss State aid rules for housing support measures. The Commission will duly take into account the Committee’s proposals during the ongoing reflections.</p>
<p>19. The CoR calls for the European Semester to take better account of urban issues: economic and social policy coordination in the EU must cover affordable housing, inequality and long-term investments;</p>	<p>Monitoring of the national policies related to housing is part of the European Semester. Recommendations were already provided in this regard to some Member States.</p>
<p>24. The CoR recognises that the EU has successful models for social housing and calls</p>	<p>In April 2024, the Commission published ‘Social housing and beyond. Operational toolkit on the</p>

for more publicity of EU good practices for providing social and tenure security for households with low and middle incomes, and for striving for social integration of the most vulnerable homeless people, with a particular focus on EU youth who are experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of becoming homeless;

use of EU funds for investments in social housing and associated services’⁵. It provides information on an important number of successful projects and operations supported by the EU funds such as ESF+, ERDF, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and InvestEU in the area of social and affordable housing and associated services. The publication contains relevant information on the design, lessons learnt and potential of replicability of the presented case studies.

Furthermore, the identification of successful existing models and the dissemination of good practices for combatting homelessness, including youth homelessness, is one of the main goals of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness⁶, launched by the Lisbon Declaration in 2021.

Under the mutual learning workstream of the Platform⁷, the Commission has so far organised six Mutual Learning events facilitating exchanges between experts, policy makers and practitioners, with a view to identify and promote evidence-based good practices and solutions in the areas of homelessness and housing exclusion.

Additionally, the exchange of good practices on financing models and investments on projects addressing homelessness, is one of the main components of the working group on access to finance which has been set up under the Platform’s workstream on access to finance and is co-chaired by the Commission and the Council of Europe Development Bank.⁸ The working group brings together policy makers and practitioners at national and local level as well as Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO’s), and aims at

⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Social housing and beyond – Operational toolkit on the use of EU funds for investments in social housing and associated services*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, (<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/924036>).

⁶ [Homelessness - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/homelessness).

⁷ [Mutual Learning activities of the platform - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/mutual-learning).

⁸ [Access to finance - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/access-to-finance).

	mapping funding options, enhancing capacity building and supporting the development of projects to combat homelessness.
<p>27. The CoR welcomes, in this respect, the political agreement reached in November 2023 between the European Parliament and the Council on improving transparency and exchange of information in the short-term rental sector and sees it as an important step towards allowing LRAs to appropriately control this market. The European Committee of the Regions calls for this new European framework to be fully and swiftly implemented to regulate the impact of digital platforms on property markets, particularly as regards platforms' obligations to comply with local and regional regulations and to inform local and regional authorities about housing units used for short-term rentals;</p>	<p>The Commission has started the implementation work of the Short-Term Rentals Regulation⁹. A working group has been set up where Member States and platforms dialogue to find the most useful and functional solutions for the implementation of the Regulation. A contractor has also been hired to help the Commission with the most technical issues. The final prototype for the functioning of the system for the exchange of data should be ready by the end of the year, well ahead of the enter into application of the Regulation which is set at 20 May 2026.</p>
<p>30. The CoR points out that, despite a higher than 2% annual weighted energy renovation rate for residential buildings in some Member States, it remains 1.0% overall, and that residential deep renovation is lagging behind with rates lower than for non-residential deep renovation; calls for more incentives and financial support, in addition to favourable taxation that does not tax the amounts received from any administration as a subsidy or grant to carry out accessibility, conservation, energy efficiency and health measures, such as asbestos removal. The aim is residential deep renovation in the EU, while maintaining social measures to prevent eviction of tenants and owners, with a focus on vulnerable persons and disadvantaged groups. Another factor influencing energy</p>	<p>The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD)¹⁰ recast, include key criteria and principles to ensure that appropriate finance is made available at national level to address market barriers preventing a higher rate of energy renovations and particularly deep renovations, and to ensure that applications and procedures for public financing are simplified. The EPBD also includes provisions to ensure that public support to building renovations is targeted to vulnerable households. It is also foreseen that one-stop-shop and technical assistance facilities should specifically target the needs and offer dedicated services for vulnerable households, people affected by energy poverty and people in low-income households. Furthermore, funding for Member States for building renovations targeting</p>

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2024/1028 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on data collection and sharing relating to short-term accommodation rental services and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1028>).

¹⁰ Directive (EU) 2024/1275 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024 on the energy performance of buildings (recast) (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024L1275>).

<p>renovation using European grants is the complex application process to obtain these grants, especially for the most disadvantaged section of the population;</p>	<p>people in situation of energy poverty will be available under the Social Climate Fund Regulation¹¹ as of 2026.</p>
<p>32. The CoR recognises sustainable architecture as the model of the future that can improve energy efficiency of buildings, minimise waste and chemically toxic materials, create healthy and productive environments for the occupants, while interweaving the architecture within a much broader cultural framework of the human interrelationship with nature; thus notes that the New European Bauhaus, EU Urban Innovation Actions and EU Affordable Housing Initiative may be useful instruments to address the multiple challenges that local authorities face;</p>	<p>With the Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI), the Commission supports facilitating knowledge and best practices sharing in housing affordability and so fostering dialogue and collaboration among key stakeholders (such as housing associations, construction companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and city networks).</p> <p>Moreover, in 2020 the Commission launched the framework of indicators called ‘Level(s)’, which provides a common language for building professionals to assess and report on the sustainability of their building project from conception to occupancy and renovation. The framework consists in sixteen indicators covering various sustainability aspects, and is underpinned by a methodology developed by the Commission’s Joint Research Center in partnership with the industry.</p> <p>Furthermore, exploring innovative methodologies and technologies for renovating housing districts is being supported through developing ‘lighthouse demonstrator projects’ running under Horizon Europe Projects for AHI.</p>
<p>40. The CoR calls on the Commission to encourage local and regional authorities to showcase integrated renovation packages of heating, ventilation and cooling upgrades for buildings and to support the training of the renovation workforce within the programmes funded by the European Social Fund+ and under REPowerEU, as the transition to a systematic circular approach to building renovation</p>	<p>The Council Recommendation on a fair transition towards climate neutrality¹² of 16 June 2022 encourages Member States, in close cooperation with social partners, to introduce or strengthen measures related to education, training and life-long learning. Such measures notably include support schemes for apprenticeships in sectors facing particular skill shortages, including construction.</p>

¹¹ Regulation (EU) 2023/955 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 establishing a Social Climate Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023R0955>).

¹² [Council takes action to ensure green transition is fair and inclusive - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/16-council-recommendation-on-a-fair-transition-towards-climate-neutrality/).

<p>requires significant efforts in terms of reskilling and support for local competences, both in the public and in the private sector. These integrated packages obviously make sense if they are accompanied by passive improvements to dwellings;</p>	<p>The Working Group Vocational Education and Training and the Green Transition enables technical exchanges on greening vocational education and training. Inspiring practices¹³ put forward by Member States and stakeholders include numerous examples from the construction sector and renovation.</p> <p>In the 2021-2027 programming period, the European Social Fund+ can be used to co-fund projects supporting up- and reskilling in different fields, including in the renovation sector.</p>
<p>42. The CoR recognises the need to target the worst performing buildings and buildings with a large potential for energy savings; stresses the need for skilled labour and entrepreneurs and recognises the effect on building values and property markets, which should not lead to any increased costs for tenants; therefore, calls for the legal possibility for Member States to request an extension of the stated deadlines if justified by exceptional conditions;</p>	<p>Based on the Erasmus+ Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills for construction (Home – Construction Blueprint¹⁴) the European social partners for construction – the European Builders Confederation, the European Federation of Building & Woodworkers and the European Construction Industry Federation – have joined the Pact for Skills as a large-scale partnership (LSP) for skills development in the construction sector (Construction (europa.eu)¹⁵).</p> <p>Together with 42 other partners, the European social partners for construction have committed to upskill and reskill the EU construction workforce, including by building strong partnerships, monitoring occupational supply/demand chains, and anticipating knowledge and skills needs. They also aim at attracting more young people and women to the construction sector and promoting a culture of lifelong learning for all. Through its activities, the Construction LSP aims to promote upskilling and reskilling of 30% of the workforce each year by 2030 across the industry.</p> <p>The recast EPBD entered into force in May 2024 and supports the EU's efforts to decarbonise buildings across the whole Union by 2050. It sets</p>

¹³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Vocational education and training and the green transition – A compendium of inspiring practices*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9ffbca44-0e5d-11ee-b12e-01aa75ed71a1>).

¹⁴ <https://constructionblueprint.eu/>

¹⁵ https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/about/industrial-ecosystems-and-partnerships/construction_en

	<p>targets for the reduction of energy consumption in the residential building stock and for the renovation of the worst-performing non-residential buildings.</p> <p>Under the recast EPBD, as regards residential buildings, each Member State will adopt its own national trajectory to reduce their average primary energy use. Member States are free to choose which buildings to target and which measures to take. As regards non-residential buildings, Member States will have the possibility to exempt certain categories of non-residential buildings from the renovation obligations.</p>
<p>46. The CoR further acknowledges the start of the affordable housing initiative in the Commission’s Renovation Wave strategy for Europe, piloting 100 lighthouse renovation and construction districts with an aim to double renovation rates by 2030. Many municipalities are already implementing housing projects with smart solutions for energy efficiency of municipal buildings;</p>	<p>The Commission has launched the Affordable Housing Initiative as a flagship of the Renovation Wave and the New European Bauhaus. This Initiative¹⁶ fosters partnerships in social and affordable housing by piloting 100 ‘lighthouse’ renovation and constructions districts by 2030 with a smart neighbourhood approach, emphasizing energy efficiency, liveability, and innovation. Through technical assistance and capacity building, the initiative mobilizes cross-sectoral project partnerships and connects them with local actors such as social economy entities, SMEs in construction or renewable ecosystems, local authorities, housing associations, investors, and civil society. Additionally, it provides blueprints for replication to support similar projects across Europe.</p>
<p>47. The CoR reiterates that the Renovation Wave should contribute to the implementation availability of the right to affordable, accessible and healthy housing, and considers that action on energy efficiency is a structural way of tackling energy poverty;</p>	<p>Tackling energy poverty is one of the main objectives of the Renovation Wave, in particular by achieving an improvement in the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people while reducing their energy bills.</p>

¹⁶ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en#:~:text=The%20New%20European%20Bauhaus%20is%20a%20creative%20and,is%20beautiful%20for%20our%20eyes%2C%20minds%2C%20and%20souls.

<p>48. The CoR propose to use the revenues of the EU emissions trading system (ETS) and the Social Climate Fund to finance grants to help vulnerable EU citizens renovate their homes and to finance climate housing allowances for those in need – jointly managing this scheme with regions – and establish a comprehensive policy to overcome energy poverty and to ensure that the Renovation Wave and the Affordable Housing Initiative make housing more affordable across the EU;</p>	<p>Several EU-level initiatives address energy poverty and housing affordability. These include the Renovation Wave and the New European Bauhaus, and the Affordable Housing Initiative.</p>
<p>50. The CoR reiterates, as set out in the opinion Proposal for a Directive on energy performance of buildings, that stepping up renovation of buildings is an opportunity to tackle energy poverty and make buildings housing vulnerable households energy positive; regrets, however, the increased renovation costs that the directive causes to many, especially low-income, households, who are already challenged by the increased cost of living, energy and inflation; to this end, urges the establishment of a comprehensive policy on energy poverty to avoid worsening the issues of energy poverty across the EU with a special focus on gender equality; for this reason, calls on the Commission to put in place a comprehensive strategy to eradicate energy poverty and reiterates that the CoR stands ready to cooperate with the newly established Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Coordination Group with a view to designing a strategy that is fit for implementation at local and regional level;</p>	<p>The revised EPBD lays down that a significant proportion of the renovation efforts should target the worst performing residential buildings, which are often inhabited by the most vulnerable consumers. The Directive also sets the principle that Member States’ technical assistance and financial support measures should focus on vulnerable households. In particular, Article 17 (18) states that ‘Financial incentives shall target, as a priority, vulnerable households, people affected by energy poverty and people living in social housing.’</p> <p>Concerning the call to establish a comprehensive policy strategy to address energy poverty, the Commission has taken a cross-sector and multidisciplinary approach to tackle energy poverty through the publication of the 2023 Recommendation on energy poverty and other recent legislative and non-legislative instruments, including the revised Energy Efficiency Directive¹⁷, which includes a new definition of energy poverty.</p> <p>This approach includes structural measures, ensuring affordability, improving access to energy, including renewables, an enhanced governance with a holistic approach to tackle energy poverty, skills development to address energy poverty, and</p>

¹⁷ Directive (EU) 2023/1791 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2023 on energy efficiency and amending Regulation (EU) 2023/955 (recast) ([Directive - 2023/1791 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

	<p>financial support schemes to improve energy efficiency. The European Pillar of Social Rights, with its principle 20 on access to essential services, also provides a high-level policy framework focusing on access to energy and support for people in need. The Commission has adopted various initiatives to support access to essential energy services for vulnerable groups as part of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, such as the proposals leading to the Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality and the Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion.</p>
<p>51. The CoR in this context, calls on the European Commission i) to reflect on the possibility of using revenue from the European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and the Social Climate Fund (SCF) to finance subsidies for the most vulnerable Europeans, so that programmes managed by the Structural Funds authorities can be used to help vulnerable people to renovate their homes and ii) to establish a comprehensive policy to combat energy poverty and thus ensure that the Renovation Wave improves access to affordable housing in Europe and that the application process for accessing this support is kept as simple as possible;</p>	<p>The Social Climate Fund is designed to contribute to (a) energy efficiency; (b) building renovation; (c) zero- and low-emission mobility and transport; (d) greenhouse gas emission reductions; (e) reductions in the number of vulnerable households, in particular households in energy poverty, of vulnerable microenterprises and of vulnerable transport users.</p> <p>[also see response to paragraph 50, concerning the call to establish a comprehensive policy strategy to address energy poverty]</p>
<p>53. The CoR supports the decentralised renewable systems and local energy communities linked to residential developments; calls for further analysis and removal of relevant legislative obstacles that prevent wider energy sharing in order to exploit their full potential; in particular, in order to make the measures in the heating and cooling plans under the Energy</p>	<p>The recently adopted Electricity Market design reform¹⁸ strengthens the legal framework for energy sharing, by defining energy sharing and the roles, rights and responsibilities of the players involved, as well as widening its application to active customers operating within the same bidding zone or a more limited geographical area. The revised EPBD establishes renewable energy</p>

¹⁸ Directive (EU) 2024/1711 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directives (EU) 2018/2001 and (EU) 2019/944 as regards improving the Union's electricity market design (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202401711).COM(2023) 147 final ([EUR-Lex - 52023PC0147 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eur-lex.do?uri=OJ:L_20230147)).

<p>Efficiency Directive more effective, the Committee calls for European regulation of heating and cooling networks to address the problems of developing and managing them, such as users' rights, in both new and established urban areas;</p>	<p>from an energy community as a possible energy source for zero-emission buildings. Member States are invited to report on the role of renewable energy communities and citizen energy communities in district and neighborhood approaches in their National Building Renovation Plans. Obligations under the Energy Efficiency Directive recast include planning on a national or local level. Local heating and cooling plans should assess the role of energy communities and other consumer-led initiatives that can actively contribute to the implementation of local heating and cooling projects. Measures linked with regulation of the heating and cooling markets could be envisaged in the plans.</p>
<p>56. The CoR calls for targeted financial support for cities and regions to enable them to address the challenges of receiving refugees, considering that adequate housing is the first step towards integration. In this context, the European Committee of the Regions expresses its support for the European Citizens' Initiative entitled 'Ensuring a dignified reception of migrants in Europe'¹⁹;</p>	<p>Cohesion policy provides investment support for the long-term integration and inclusion of people with a migrant background, both in cities and in regions. For example, during the 2021-2027 period, cities are directly responsible for designing and implementing investments for over EUR 24 billion under Cohesion policy programmes. These investments are based on multisectoral strategies that include a broad range of priorities, including housing and social inclusion. Furthermore, the European Urban Initiative was launched in 2022 with an initial budget of EUR 450 million to support innovation, and knowledge and capacity building in cities.</p> <p>Migration policy, throughout the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) supports, among others, integration measures for the social and economic inclusion of third country nationals. The AMIF may support local and regional authorities (LRAs) in facilitating access to housing for migrants. AMIF-funded project Include-EU is a platform where LRAs can share experiences on key integration aspects such as access to housing, healthcare, the labour market, education and how</p>

¹⁹ <https://eci.ec.europa.eu/030/public/#/screen/home>.

	<p>to foster participation and encounters with host societies. In the past years, the Commission has selected multiple transnational projects focusing specifically on integration at the local level and the role local and regional authorities. At the 2021 call for proposals, seven projects on local integration strategies were selected, and five projects at the 2023 call. A minimum of 5% of the initial allocation to the Thematic Facility under AMIF should target the implementation of integration measures by local and regional authorities.</p> <p>In addition, the principle of partnership is a key feature in the implementation of the Funds governed by the Common Provisions Regulations²⁰, building on the multi-level governance approach and ensuring the involvement of regional, local, urban and other public authorities, civil society, economic and social partners and, where appropriate, research organisations and universities in the programme planning and implementation.</p>
<p>59. The CoR Requests that the European Commission, in partnership with the CoR, organises an annual EU summit on social and affordable housing, bringing together all the stakeholders involved in coordinating the Member States' actions on social and affordable housing, based on a multi-level approach and respect for the principle of subsidiarity.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of this request which was also raised in the context of the 'Liège Declaration: Towards affordable, decent, and sustainable housing for all' issued in March 2024 under the framework of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union²¹.</p>

²⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy ([Regulation - 2021/1060 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)).

²¹ [Liège Declaration: Towards affordable, decent, and sustainable housing for all \(europa.eu\)](#).