



# Helsinki-Uusimaa Region's non-paper on the future of EU cohesion policy in the next programming period

The Helsinki-Uusimaa Region (FI) is the second most innovative region in the EU (EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2023). It is a capital city region. Cohesion funds are used for supporting competitiveness and growth, innovations are furthered to speed up green transition and digital transition. As one of the fastest growing regions in Europe, Helsinki-Uusimaa has specific needs as to the Cohesion Policy.

The European Commission prepares its legislative framework for the Cohesion Policy after 2027, expected in the summer 2025. The Helsinki-Uusimaa Region (FI) wants to participate actively in the discussions on the guiding principles of the future cohesion policy and the next multiannual financial framework.

## **The region Helsinki-Uusimaa offers the following recommendations to maximise the success and impact of the Cohesion Policy:**

- 1. Helsinki-Uusimaa supports the Council's conclusion (16230/23) of features that are to be kept and developed in the future. The Cohesion Policy must remain a key pillar of the EU and strengthen the union's economic, social and territorial cohesion.**
- 2. The various new geopolitical, technological and environmental challenges have emphasised the need to renew the Cohesion Policy, and to improve its effectiveness and impact, as well.**
- 3. We call for a strong role for all regions, including more developed regions and cities.**
- 4. The role of cities in cohesion should be emphasized with earmarked funding.**
- 5. We encourage efforts to further simplify the management of the Cohesion Policy, while guaranteeing high standards and a high level of trust.**
- 6. We call for the importance of multilevel-governance for the Cohesion Policy, as well as ensuring a place-based approach in its design and programming.**
- 7. We stress that INTERREG is a flagship of the Cohesion Policy and a fundamental instrument for cooperation for all regions across Europe and its Neighbourhood.**
- 8. The Cohesion Policy funds should not be viewed as reserves for crises.**
- 9. Improved synergies with several funding sources should be assessed.**
- 10. The EU cohesion policy should continue to support regions in becoming more innovative, climate-neutral and socially inclusive.**

1. In general, Helsinki-Uusimaa supports the Council's conclusion (16230/23) of features that are to be kept and developed in the future and that the Cohesion Policy must remain a key pillar of the EU and strengthen the union's economic, social and territorial cohesion and the reduction of regional disparities, as well.
2. Yet, the various new geopolitical, technological and environmental challenges have emphasised the need to renew the Cohesion Policy and to improve its effectiveness and impact. The cohesion funding channels a significant amount of funding in the EU, and therefore, it should also participate in creating a robust economic impact and other results.

3. We call for stronger EU support for more developed regions. While cohesion policy needs to be a policy for all EU regions, a more targeted and adaptable support should be ensured for specific needs of the different territories. The Cohesion Policy should remain a policy for all regions of the union. The strongest, most innovative regions create mostly the growth that the union needs to do better. We agree with the Political Guidelines by the President of the Commission, Ms Ursula von der Leyen, that a strengthened cohesion and growth policy needs to be designed, combining the two. The regions who create the growth deliver cohesion for the citizens by doing so. Therefore, we call for a cohesion policy, which is flexible enough, to target the specific issues of these regions, too.
4. Cities should have a specific 10 % earmarked funding in the next programming period. They have a major role in creating cohesion and growth in urban areas. They create new solutions as service providers, coordinate local innovation business ecosystems and generate new jobs and opportunities. At the same time, specific challenges such as segregation has to be met with cohesion policy tools in order to create wellbeing to citizens within all, especially fast-growing capital city regions.
5. We encourage efforts to further simplify the management of the Cohesion Policy, while guaranteeing high standards and a high level of trust. In some cases, the limitations in the programme model hinder the wanted activities of projects. We call for simple and reliable rules that fully respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Necessary flexibility should be designed in the programme, and a too rigid programme format should not hinder the successful completion of projects - if they need to make reasonable adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances.
6. We call for the importance of multilevel-governance for the Cohesion Policy, as well as ensuring a place-based approach in its design and programming. Regions are the best experts when it comes to understanding the areas that need to be developed. The regional approach to development must be maintained in the next programming period. Likewise, all regions must have access to the tools they require in order to develop themselves, as they all have unique development needs, which need to meet each other better than before. More flexibility is needed in terms of a thematic concentration in individual funds, and a more place-based approach can assure that the Policy's objective is aligned with the local and regional needs.
7. The cooperation between the Member States and their regions adds significant value to cohesion policy. We therefore stress that INTERREG is a flagship of the Cohesion Policy and a fundamental instrument for cooperation for all regions across Europe and its Neighbourhood. Consequently, there is a demand for greater funding and flexibility to effectively address the needs on

the ground and tackle unexpected circumstances or emerging challenges. We call for the Council to improve the INTERREG programmes building on the current, existing areas and experience.

8. The Cohesion Policy funds should not be viewed upon as reserves for crises. However, if such a crisis instrument should be considered, we call for a separate crisis reserve to be established under shared management within the Cohesion Policy framework to be used for exceptional and unforeseen challenges while preserving its long-term transformational nature and structural objectives.
9. The EU should avoid duplicated efforts across various funding programmes and instead strategically coordinate to leverage synergies and amplify the impact. Regional and municipal funding is crucial for fostering collaborative initiatives and nurturing ecosystem development. By enhancing synergies with other programmes, such as the EU's R&D funds (mainly FP10), Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds and national funding streams, it is possible to effectively address complex challenges and drive holistic progress towards the EU's objectives.
10. The EU cohesion policy should continue to support regions in becoming more innovative, climate-neutral, and socially inclusive. The Cohesion Policy needs to strengthen innovation and accelerate the path towards climate neutrality. It is crucial in fostering forward-looking collaboration between regional ecosystems and stakeholders, including cities, businesses, universities of applied sciences, and SMEs. The Cohesion Policy can greatly boost the competitiveness and growth of Europe to innovate, uptake new technologies and to upgrade the skills of the local workforce based on regional needs.